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## The Ensuring Knowledge Continuity for Support of Sustainable Business

Hana URBANCOVÁ\* – Roman ZUZÁK\*\*

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### Abstract

*Changes in approach of management of organizations to human resource management in generations Y and Z are also a very significant trend. An organization must use all possible stimulation tools to ensure knowledge continuity and to help with effective knowledge sharing between generations and support sustainable business. The goal of this article is to identify the benefits that an organization derives from ensuring knowledge continuity, and to identify the strategic documents of an organization that support it and support sustainable business. Data were obtained using quantitative research within selected Czech companies (n = 207) and qualitative research (8 interviews and one focus group). The results showed that 69.6% of the surveyed organizations ensure the knowledge continuity between generations of employees to some (varying) degree, which is influenced by the existence of a human resources management strategy (56.0%) and of an appropriately set organizational culture strategy (52.7%).*

**Keywords:** age management, innovation, process approach, strategic documents, strategic goals, sustainability, survey

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### Introduction

In current entrepreneurial world, successful organizations attempt to achieve a long-term competitive advantage that translates into above-average economic effect and support sustainable business. In order to do that, organizations need to

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identify resources that allow for it and at the same time are unachievable by other organizations (Walsh and Lannon, 2020; Hartono et al., 2022; Akcigit et al., 2021; Mahoev and Qian, 2013; Oberholzer-Gee and Yao, 2018). It turned out that these resources mainly include intangible assets, as created by people and their knowledge, skills, and competences, and are crucial for achieving strategic goals (Montresor et al., 2014; Tzempelikos and Gounaris, 2015; Tsai et al., 2016; Peters and Taylor, 2017; Nemlioglu and Mallick, 2017; Guesalaga et al., 2018; Glova, et al., 2018; Vrabcová et al., 2021; Bourke et al., 2020). Intangible assets are a broad category that includes everything that is of non-physical nature and thus not touchable, and can be identified via survey (Montresor et al., 2014).

There is a wide variety of intangible assets, all linked to the human factor, with different influence on performance and success of organizations (Felin and Zenger, 2014; Montresor et al., 2014; Aguilar et al., 2019; Palos-Sanchez et al., 2019; Souza et al., 2020). Out of these assets, knowledge that is at the disposal of people and that is used in order to achieve the goals of the organization has a significant position in several areas (Hervas-Oliver et al., 2021; Luca et al., 2016). Knowledge is an important resource for achieving competitive advantage and performance of the organization, and at the same time allow for long-term sustainability (Arbelo-Pérez et al., 2022; Schäfer, 2021; Pichlak and Szromek, 2021; Wang et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2016; Bolisani and Bratianu, 2017; Battisti and Deakin, 2017; Aydin and Dube, 2018; Kubová et al., 2018; Mahdi et al., 2019; Pacana et al., 2020). Knowledge management (sharing knowledge among contemporary employees) and knowledge continuity management (sharing knowledge between generations of employees as part of knowledge management) have become critical aspects of present-day business and of achieving success of organizations (Lee and Trimi, 2021; Manzoor et al., 2019; Urbancová, 2019). The results show that level of ensuring knowledge continuity has a large gap between research and the application sphere (Vrabcová et al., 2021; Chen and Nonaka, 2022; Maliszewska, 2022).

Knowledge is especially significant in high technology industries that feature high dynamics of innovations, and as for long-term competitiveness and achieving the competitive advantage, knowledge is their pre-condition (Shabahat and Ermine, 2021; Ma et al., 2021; Hervas-Oliver et al., 2021; Espelt et al., 2019; Cuervo-Cazura and Rui, 2017; Cozzolino and Rothaermal, 2018). Knowledge management and knowledge continuity management are necessary not only in order to achieve a competitive advantage, but also in order to avoid problems and sometimes to provide for survival of the organization as such in a highly competitive environment (Wang et al., 2015; Stacho et al., 2022; Swanson, 2022). They can become effective tools for coping with vagueness and turbulence and hence with states of crisis in organizations (Bolisani and Bratianu, 2017), as well as effective tools for their high performance (Battisti and Deakin, 2017). It appears that, over time,

asymmetry grows between organizations that use knowledge and knowledge strategy and those that do not (Buenechea, et al., 2018; Sinkovicz et al., 2018). Knowledge in general is expressed in response to a new situation, and subsequently, additional, new knowledge is created, which is often subsequently codified (Ning and Zwikael, 2022; Pereira et al., 2019; Vrabcová et al., 2021) and supports innovations in organizations (Shujahat et al., 2019), and is also a prerequisite for the sustainable business (Vrabcová et al., 2021; Walsh and O'Brien, 2021).

In order to achieve the long-term goals of the organization, top managers create systems of stimulation for middle-level management (Henry et al., 2018). The stimulating tools include strategic written documents and codes containing goals of the organization, rules and guidelines that harmonize and standardize the behavior of both managers and workers in order to minimize failure (Stevens and Buechler, 2013; David et al., 2014; Baral and Pokharel, 2016; Blok, 2017; Džupina, 2017; Margaret et al., 2020; Walsh and Lannon, 2020). The main and basic strategic documents include a mission that can also contain the values of the company, and also a vision. The mission and vision are located at the top of the pyramid and aim to mobilize and motivate employees to achieve the goals of the organization (Sengupta and Sahay, 2017; Džupina, 2017) and its basic orientation (Aguilar-Barrientos et al., 2015). They are followed up by other strategic documents that are specific and focused on individual areas of the organization (David et al., 2014; Zakayo, 2018; Janicot et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2021).

In addition to strategic documents, codes are of importance, especially ethical codes that are based on missions, visions, and strategic documents, and determine the rules of employee behavior and of their harmonization and standardization (Stevens and Buechler, 2013; Blok, 2017). Strategic documents and codes contain a codified set of explicit knowledge with the possibility of further storage, use, and transfer (Manab and Aziz, 2019). They correspond in nature to the requirements placed on knowledge management subsystems, which enable their organization to transfer and use them while also stimulating workers (Igielski, 2017; Swanson, 2022).

However, given the current interactions of all employee age groups in terms of working life, caused by demographic trends and low unemployment not only in the Czech Republic, the issue of ensuring knowledge continuity is accompanied by the application of age management, which includes attitudes of organizations towards employees with respect to their age. Organizations lack key employees, organizations tend to be reluctant to transfer knowledge, and these age groups need to be targeted and working conditions must be created for them (Cuervo-Cazura and Rui, 2017; Stacho et al., 2021). For example, an ACCA research (2014) notes that with the inclusion of the Y Generation (that will account for 75% of workforce

worldwide (Ernst and Young, 2017) into work process the fluctuation rate will increase and organizations will be pressed hard to contain it – moreover, the key employees will retire. It is, therefore, necessary to create an appropriate organizational environment for different age categories of employees. Ensuring knowledge continuity is one of the prerequisites for achieving sustainable competitive advantage. To do this, certain preconditions must be created and ensuring knowledge continuity must be part of the strategy of the organization.

To implement the whole issue of ensuring knowledge continuity into the managerial approach in organizations, it is also important to understand the behaving of different organizations (based on the size of the organization, sector, market, part of a larger group of organizations or existence of an HR department). Those comparative analyses are missing especially in the several past years. Therefore, it is important for our survey to not just identify the benefits from ensuring knowledge continuity, but also to compare the different approach in the different type of organization or organization. Only a few studies compare the situation across the more organization (Camuffo, 2014) or the different sectors (Sharif et al., 2011). Moreover, no studies are focusing on a wide range of organizations in the small exporting economy, such as the Czech Republic economy. Based on the information above, we can identify the knowledge gap in the sense of missing comparison across sectors and different organizations together. The theory does not answer the question about differences in the knowledge continuity benefits through different organizations in the past several years. Therefore, the study will also focus on this part of the issue. The second issue that was not clearly described is the problem of existence of strategic documents which influencing the ensuring knowledge continuity in organizations and should help to understand the important of ensuring knowledge continuity in general. Therefore, this study will answer the question about the main benefits from ensuring knowledge continuity in different types of organizations and strategic documents which support it. Therefore, four statistical hypotheses were established, which were verified by quantitative research, and the results obtained were then the subject of a focus group. The hypotheses verified whether the difference of organizations (based on the size of the organization, sector, market, part of a larger group of organizations or existence of an HR department) has an effect on achieving benefits from ensuring knowledge continuity supporting sustainable business.

The main goal of this article is to identify the benefits that an organization derives from ensuring knowledge continuity, and to identify the strategic documents of an organization that support it and sustainable business.

The article consists of five main parts – Introduction (introducing the topic, its topical nature, and deduction of the goal), Theoretical Background, where the

opinions of mostly foreign authors on the issue examined are compared, Results (presenting the results of the research conducted) and the final chapter Discussion and Conclusion that only compares the results achieved by foreign researches with the results of the research presented, including recommendations for organizations.

## **1. Theoretical Background**

One of the problems of knowledge management is the long-term sustainability of knowledge. This is, above all, made possible by explicit knowledge that can be stored in databases and written documents, which also includes strategic documents (Pichlak and Szromek, 2021; Aziz, 2019). There are some risks associated with knowledge management that have been identified in the human, technological, and operational fields (Durst and Bruns, 2016; Durst and Zieba, 2019). Human risks are associated with personal, social, cultural, and psychological factors of individuals and with the links to human resource management (Durst and Zieba, 2019). Risks relate to the ability of the organization to maintain its performance through knowledge while at the same time planning the succession of its employees and maintaining knowledge continuity (Durst and Bruns, 2016; Igielski, 2017) as well as internal flexibility and external adaptability (Tsai et al., 2016).

The top-level strategic documents of organizations are their missions and visions. The studies that have been carried out have shown that in many organizations, especially in medium and small ones, no strategic documents exist and that only a few organizations use strategic documents (Baral and Pokharel, 2016; Džupina, 2017). From this, the absence of other strategic documents could be deduced. If there are no strategic documents in organizations, then there is also a lack of explicit knowledge retention, and consequently also a lack of their usage, which affects the behavior of employees and the achievement of performance and target behavior of companies (Vukmirovic et al., 2017). However, the authors of the pre-cited studies focused only on the existence of top strategic documents and did not deal with the existence of downstream strategic documents.

In particular, ensuring knowledge continuity is essential for long-term competitive advantage and sustainability business (Lee et al, 2016; Raguž et al., 2017; Aydin and Dube, 2018). Knowledge is one of the most valuable sources of assets (possesses) of the organization and if they are managed and effectively used in strategic management, they lead to prosperity and survival of the organization (Souza et al., 2020; Aguilar et al., 2019; Palos-Sanchez et al., 2019).

In addition to the knowledge management system, in order to achieve knowledge continuity there is also a need for a link to age management, which is predominantly understood in relation to the use of older workers' capabilities in

organizations (Witkowski and Bartosz, 2017), but via their involvement in vertical knowledge transfer (Bieling et al., 2015), which is a synonym of knowledge continuity. It is precisely the tacit knowledge and its retention and vertical transfer, that is, the transfer to the next generation, that has a significant impact on the long-term sustainability of the performance of organizations (Muthuveloo et al., 2017; Urbancová, 2019). However, the characteristics of individual age generations of employees are diverse and therefore different organizational management approaches are needed to employ them and create a suitable environment supportive of sharing knowledge both among current employees and between generations of employees (Tripathi et al., 2018).

It is currently difficult for employers to adapt to the demands of generations of employees. However, it is positive that they begin to apply age management and the management of organizations is becoming interested in the mental and physical health of their employees by applying age management that promotes the extension of their working age (Urbancová, 2019; Ciutiene and Railaite, 2015). Considering the results of research conducted by Collien et al. (2016) or Principi and Fabbietti (2015) it can be accentuated that if the employer accommodates all ages of employees, he/she gets loyal, flexible employees who are deeply interested in developing and gaining new experience, and are also willing to share knowledge and pass it on.

Given the diverse characteristics and attitudes of generations of employees with respect to work, Muthuveloo et al. (2017); Tripathi et al. (2018) and Principi and Fabbietti (2015) make an appeal on the leadership of organizations which, based on the knowledge of differences and needs of individual generations of employees, should adapt established practices in human resources management, primarily the practices in organization of work and work environment and in stimulation that lead to support for ensuring knowledge continuity. At the same time, they emphasize the role of managers who have to accept that, given the demographic development, their teams will consist of people with attitudes and values different from their own, but that with the right attitude they can form a balanced and strong team. Concessions and a sober attitude should, however, always come from both sides – from the employee as well as from the employer (Tripathi et al., 2018).

Age management tools include flexible working modes and work organization for individual generations of employees that affect the willingness of employees to share and transfer knowledge between current colleagues and to their successors. Age management primarily emphasizes flexibility, while Tripathi et al. (2018) add that it is about finding the right balance of work and personal life. Above all, it is important for every employee to feel comfortable with the obligations arising from both work and personal life and not to feel stressed by their fulfilment. Arenofsky (2017) states that the importance of a balance of personal and professional life is

growing with modern human resource management and management trends that influence this factor, and stresses the need to establish organizational strategies in line with modern trends.

It follows from the above that strategic documents are important carriers of explicit knowledge that significantly influence the behavior of employees of organizations, and at the same time that their processing and implementation is influenced by tacit knowledge. Knowledge thus influences the long-term success and performance of organizations. In order to achieve long-term continuity, knowledge management in relation to these documents must simultaneously address vertical knowledge transfer and be linked to age management. It can be summarized that knowledge management is important at the scientific and practical level nowadays. Managers must focus on setting organizational factors and documents that will increase the quality of the ensuring knowledge continuity process and support the achievement for long-term competitive advantage and sustainable business.

## **2. Research Methodology**

For the theoretical part of the article, theoretical methods of analysis were used – analysis of primary and secondary sources by synthesis, induction, deduction and comparison. The quantitative data were obtained by questionnaire survey in Czech organizations ( $n = 207$ , quota-based selection). The results can be generalized only for the given control sample. Totally 860 e-mails to owners or management of organizations were sent out, 207 returned, so the e-mail return rate can be stated as 24.06%. The sample was based on the Albertina database of organizations. Albertina is a unique database that contains important data of more than 2,700,000 organizations registered in the Czech Republic.

The questionnaire was completed by middle or higher management of the addressed organizations, in case of smaller organization by the owner itself (thus the responses reflected the point view of their heads/owners/managers). The respondents confirmed that by participating in the survey they agree to the use of their answers for the purposes of evaluating the survey. The questionnaire respected the ethical aspect and anonymity of respondents. The questionnaire survey was also created in accordance with ethical codes of research in the Czech Republic (Ethical framework for research, Resolution of the Government of the Czech Republic dated August 17, 2005 No. 1005, as amended).

The questionnaire was designed to comply with ethical rules and the requirement for anonymity and contained 18 questions: 13 serving for identification and 5 for research. The questions were both close-ended (allowing only one option for response) and open-ended (allowing more options for response). The structure of organizations participating in the research ( $n = 207$ ) was as follows.



Table 1  
Structure of Organizations (in %)

Characteristic	Categories			
Sector	Private		Public	
	81.6		18.4	
Market	Global	Local	National	Regional
	45.4	12.6	27.5	14.5
Part of a larger group of organizations	Yes		No	
	44.9		55.1	
Size of the organization	1 – 9 employees	10 – 49 employees	50 – 249 employees	250 and more employees
	21.3	26.1	23.2	29.5
Existence of a HR department	Yes		No	
	54.6		45.4	

Source: Own survey.

The following null hypotheses were tested in the research (the results of the testing can be found in the chapter Results, Table 3):

- $H_01$ : There is no statistical dependence between ensuring knowledge continuity and selected qualitative characteristics (sector, market, part of larger group of organizations, size of the organization, HR department).
- $H_02$ : There is no statistical dependence between using knowledge databases and selected qualitative characteristics (sector, market, part of larger group of organizations, size of the organization, HR department).
- $H_03$ : There is no statistical dependence between departure of key employee with critical knowledge and selected qualitative characteristics (sector, market, part of larger group of organizations, size of the organization, HR department).
- $H_04$ : There is no statistical dependence between providing for age management and selected qualitative characteristics (sector, market, part of larger group of organizations, size of the organization, HR department).

The results were analyzed using statistical tools – the dependence test ( $\chi^2$ ) and the power of dependence test (Cramer's V). In cases where the determined p-value was below the significance threshold of  $\alpha = 0.05$ , the null hypothesis was rejected because the research demonstrated statistical dependence between the qualitative variables. In such cases, the strength of the dependence was determined using Cramer's V coefficient. The results of the strength of the correlation were interpreted in accordance with the categories in De Vaus (2014). For the purposes of the dependence test, the responses in the questionnaire were merged into a simplified “yes – neutral – no” structure.

To identify the mutual relationships between variables, we followed up on the results of descriptive statistics with factor analysis (multivariate statistics). In the factor analysis (after correlation analysis and principal component analysis), we used

the Varimax method and the Kaiser-Guttman rule for the selection of substantial factors according to Anderson (2013). Data was processed only if the value of substantial factors was greater than 1; values exceeding 0.3 were considered significant. The statistical software used to evaluate the data was IBM SPSS Statistics 24.

The results of the questionnaire survey were further discussed at a focus group, so-called mixed research took place, where the conclusions of the quantitative research were verified and complemented by qualitative research.

Data from qualitative survey comes from the focus group method, where 6 human resources managers ( $n = 6$ ) from organizations met on the set date (2 from large organisations, 2 from a medium, 2 from small according to the number of employees. The authors of the research moderated the focus group and the discussion lasted 2.5 hours. According to Anderson (2013) focus group is often mentioned as one of the most progressive qualitative data acquisition methods. It is a research tool for obtaining information on a chosen topic from groups that are characterized by shared characteristics or interests. Focus group focuses on insight into attitudes and beliefs that are the source of behaviour. The focus group method is a suitable method of supplementing quantitative research in the field of social sciences, HR and management, sustainable business in this area and it is very often used. From the results of the focus group, practical recommendations for organizations in defining the ensuring knowledge continuity were defined.

This was followed by individual interviews ( $n = 8$ ; second half of 2020) with selected representatives from the ranks of human resources managers from organizations which focus on knowledge continuity and sustainable business (1 from primary sector, 3 from secondary and 4 from tertiary sector of organisations). The results of qualitative research help to specify quantitative research (data triangulation).

### **3. Results**

For each organization it is important, for the sake of its development, to have assembled strategic documents that can be used to inform processes in the organization. It is because strategic documents are a very effective supplementing tool for fulfilling the visions and goals of the area under review. It is therefore necessary to realize the nature of planning and creating documents and to perceive them as a contribution to the possibility of development of each organization.

The existence of strategic documents linked to employees in the surveyed organizations was investigated by the research carried out, and the representatives of the organizations could give multiple responses, i.e., identify all the documents that are at the disposal of the organizations. The detailed representation of the existence of strategic documents in the surveyed organizations is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

**Existence of Strategic Documents in the Surveyed Organizations**

Existence of a strategic document	Absolute frequency $n_i$	Relative frequency $p_i$
Mission statement	143	69.1
Organizational strategy	147	71.0
HR management strategy	116	56.0
Code of ethics	136	65.7
Quality strategy	129	62.3
Environmental strategy	83	40.1
Ergonomics strategy	45	21.7
Code of social responsibility	94	45.4
Organizational culture strategy	109	52.7
Innovation strategy	80	38.6

Source: Own survey.

It can be summarized that the existence of strategic documents is the first step in performing individual activities in the organization. For the area studied, the most important are the human resources management strategy, organizational strategy, and organizational culture strategy as the strategic documents that have the greatest influence on the topic studied, i.e., knowledge sharing and knowledge continuity.

About strategic documents supporting knowledge continuity, the so-called Conservative strategies (traditional organizations, e.g., in agriculture) and Competence development strategies (based on innovation, which more organizations currently support) can be identified on the basis of existing research. Competence development strategies focuses on competencies, i.e., knowledge, skills, experience, personality characteristics which are crucial for knowledge continuity (trust, willingness to share).

The ambition of the model is to link the job description with organization values effectively and it allows for improving the quality of personnel work in the organization, contributes to the consolidation and promotion of company values, and facilitates the work of managers and HR staff.

The results show that a total of 76% of private sector organizations and 82% of public sector organizations retain knowledge in the organization. Organizations most involved in knowledge retention are those operating on national markets (83%) and local markets (81%), followed by those operating of international markets (77%) and regional markets (63%). In total, 48% of organizations that record knowledge are part of a larger organization, 52% are not part of a larger organization. 31% of them were large organizations (over 250 employees), 27% organizations with 10 to 49 employees, followed by medium organizations (50 to 249 employees) – 24%, and finally small organizations 18% (1 to 9 employees). A total of 54% of organizations focusing on knowledge retention have an HR department, the rest (47%) do not have one.

Knowledge databases (systems for collecting explicit knowledge to be shared within the organization) are used by 80% of private sector organizations, by 51% of organizations operating on international markets, by 55% of organizations that are operating within a larger group, by 36% of large organizations (followed by 27% of medium-sized organizations) and by 53% of organizations with HR departments.

A total of 87% of private sector organizations were found to be threatened in their operation by departure of an employee with critical knowledge, stating that they were mostly threatened by the possibility of the ex-employee using the critical knowledge when working for their competitors (69%) and by the retirement of the employee (20%). The threat to the organization caused by the retirement of an employee is mostly perceived by organizations on international markets (52%), sharing knowledge with competitors is also seen as most threatening by organizations on international market (49%) followed by those on national market (30%), while 51% of them are not part of a larger group of organizations. It can be stated that organizations see as a greater threat the possibility that the employee will use knowledge when working for their competitors than the possibility of his/her retirement. The most at risk are large organizations (37%) and subsequently organizations with 10 – 49 employees (22.5%), and in most of these organizations (59%) there is an HR department.

Age management is mostly (74%) applied by organizations in the private sector, on international markets (48%), 56% in total are part of a larger group of organizations while being large organizations in terms of number of employees (48%) and 67% of them have HR departments. In accordance with the methods applied in this article, the dependencies between the selected qualitative characteristics were tested. The results of hypothesis testing are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3**

**Dependencies between Selected Qualitative Characteristics**

Question	$n_i$	$p_i$	Sector	Market	Part of large organization	Size of organization	HR Department
			Relationship ( $p$ -value/Cramer's $V$ )				
H <sub>01</sub> : Ensuring knowledge continuity	159	76.8	(0.167)	(0.230)	(0.065)	(0.290)	(0.522)
H <sub>02</sub> : Using knowledge databases	107	51.7	(0.626)	(0.231)	(0.002/0.208)	(0.029/0.204)	(0.019/0.161)
H <sub>03</sub> : Threat caused by departure of an employee with critical knowledge	106	51.2	(0.198)	(0.146)	(0.699)	(0.299)	(0.036/0.199)
H <sub>04</sub> : Application of age management	27	13.0	(0.276)	(0.169)	(0.234)	(0.012/0.225)	(0.017/0.167)

Source: Own survey.

With regards to testing of the null hypotheses at the level of significance 0.05 it can be summarized that:

- $H_01$  can not be rejected at the level of significance 0.05, ensuring continuity of knowledge is independent of organizational characteristics. It can thus be stated that it is necessary to ensure knowledge continuity in all types of organizations.

- $H_02$  related to characteristics: part of large organization, size of organization, existence of HR Department is rejected at the level of significance 0.05. Sophisticated knowledge retention tools are used more by large international organizations that already have extensive HR departments, i.e., specialists in human resources management who come up with new trends in employing all generations of employees and creating the right working environment.

- $H_03$  is rejected at the level of significance 0.05 in the context of existence HR department.  $H_03$  can not be rejected at the level of significance 0.05 in the context of characteristics: sector, market, part of large organization, size of organization.

- $H_04$  can not be rejected at the level of significance 0.05 in the context of characteristics: sector, market, part of large organization.  $H_04$  is rejected in the context of characteristics: size of organization and existence of HR Department. For proper application, management of organizations must prepare conditions and codify process settings in strategic documents.

The research results also show that 77% of the surveyed organizations recorded employee knowledge within the organization in order to facilitate gaining of this knowledge by others, with 52% using knowledge databases. Research has also found that when employees pass on knowledge to someone else in an organization, it is most often because they have a good feeling about extending knowledge to the entire organization (52%), because they expect that when they provide their knowledge, in the future (when they need it) they will get another knowledge in return (23%), and for example 8% of them provides knowledge to improve their image and reputation, while 6% is not willing to pass knowledge on at all.

If there is an employee with critical knowledge in the organization, 9% of organizations continually survey and write down their knowledge and experience, 24% of organizations continually identify and write down selected knowledge, and 46% of organizations provide the person with a potential successor who takes over knowledge and experience. Only 30% of organizations have no knowledge discovery and retention.

When there are employees leaving the organization, only 22% of organizations stimulate employees to share and pass on their experience and knowledge, so that these stay in the organization. Most organizations (34%) said that departures of employees with critical knowledge would be a threat to the organization due to the fact that the employee would apply the knowledge when working for the

competitors, while retirements (10%) are seen as smaller threats. The benefits of knowledge sharing and of ensuring knowledge continuity are identified in Table 4.

Table 4

**Benefits from the Ensuring Knowledge Continuity**

Area	Benefits in sharing knowledge	Absolute frequency $n_i$	Relative frequency $p_i$
Procedural	Company processes	126	60.90
	Innovations	74	35.70
	Customers	94	45.40
	Employees	71	34.30
	Company results	40	19.30
	No benefit	20	9.70
Organizational	Increases performance of the organization	114	55.10
	Increased profits	68	32.90
	Maximized revenue	35	16.90
	Lowered costs	77	37.20
	New ways of work introduced	107	51.70
	New market possibilities created	44	21.30

Source: Own survey.

In accordance with the methods used in this article, multivariate statistics were applied for deeper analysis, namely factor analysis. Within its application, four significant factors were identified that describe the variables examined. An overview of the factors is provided in Table 5.

Table 5

**Variance Explained by Factors**

Factor	Total Variance	Total % of Variance	Cumulative % of Variance
1	2.519	22.899	22.899
2	1.420	12.905	35.804
3	1.101	10.010	45.814
4	1.001	9.096	54.911

Source: Own survey.

The factor analysis identified 4 significant factors combining the analyzed variables. The first factor has a strength of approximately 23%, the second 13%, the third 10% and the fourth 9%. Table 6 shows the results of the factor analysis in detail. The areas studied were those that were subject to survey of benefits in terms of maintaining knowledge continuity.

According to the results shown in Table 6, the respondents in the sample can be divided into four groups. The first set of variables encompasses variables dealing that focus on customers (0.670), creating new market opportunities (0.673), and maximizing revenues (0.553). The first factor explains nearly 23% of the behavior of the sample and the coefficient values range from 0.501 to 0.673, which is

a strong dependency. The first factor can be called “Strategic Goals of the Organization.” The second factor explains nearly 13% of the behavior of the sample and is composed of innovation variables (improving quality of projects and innovation, 0.459), financial results (0.458), and as strong coefficients it includes the increase in performance of the organization (0.809) and increased profits (0.601). This factor can therefore be called “Innovation Strategy”. The third factor includes variables such as business processes (0.654), cost reductions (0.364), and new ways of work (0.826). From the results we can conclude that in case of support for ensuring knowledge continuity it is possible to optimize organizational processes using this knowledge, reduce costs, and introduce new ways of work, which will lead to reductions in terms of time demands, financial demands, and work capacity of employees. The third factor is called “Process approach Optimization of Processes in the Organizational Strategy”. The fourth factor, labelled “Human Resources Management Strategy,” describes the variable “Employees” (0.807) – there is a strong dependency and this one variable alone explains 9% of behavior of the sample, proving that for an organization, the employee, as a knowledge bearer, is a valuable and irreplaceable element for achieving the goals of the organization.

Table 6

**Resultant Factors Determined by the Varimax Method**

Variable – benefits	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Company processes: improvement of knowledge sharing and cooperation between employees of the organization, dissemination of best practices in the organization, improvement of learning and integration of new employees, elimination of loss of know-how, etc.	–0.121	0.321	<b>0.654</b>	–0.264
Innovations: improvement of quality of projects and innovation	0.303	<b>0.459</b>	0.296	–0.220
Customers: improvement of relations with external environment (ex. with customers, competitors, etc.) and endeavor to prepare for their developments, readiness to react to unexpected events and ability to manage urgent and crisis situations, etc.	<b>0.670</b>	0.073	–0.112	–0.136
Employees	–0.143	–0.093	–0.043	<b>0.807</b>
Financial results	0.251	<b>0.458</b>	–0.034	0.442
Improved performance of the organization	–0.122	<b>0.809</b>	0.132	–0.038
Increased profits	0.501	<b>0.601</b>	–0.106	0.211
Maximized revenues	<b>0.553</b>	0.218	0.156	0.292
Lowered costs	0.224	0.229	<b>0.364</b>	0.325
New ways of work introduced	0.104	–0.093	<b>0.826</b>	0.091
New market possibilities created	<b>0.673</b>	–0.057	0.158	–0.021
<b>Total % of Variance</b>	<b>22.899</b>	<b>12.905</b>	<b>10.010</b>	<b>9.096</b>
<b>Name of factor</b>	<b>Strategic Goals of the Organization</b>	<b>Innovation Strategy</b>	<b>Process approach in the Organizational Strategy</b>	<b>HR Management Strategy</b>

Source: Own survey.

The results of the research also showed that a total of 13% of the organizations contacted apply age management. The remaining 87% explained the fact that they do not by the fact that, for 43% of them, this activity is not perceived as important, for 12% it is finance- and time-consuming, 30% of organizations do not have appropriate specialists in this area and in 19% cases this area is not supported by the organizational culture of the owner.

In total, 16% of surveyed organizations plan to apply age management in the coming years. The results showed that organizations mostly apply age management just to ensure knowledge continuity in case of staff changes (37.0% when switching to a competitor and 7% because of retirement). Also, no statistical dependence was demonstrated between existence of HR department and application of age management (p-value 0.084).

#### **4. Discussion**

The existence of strategic documents is the first prerequisite for the successful implementation of individual activities in the organization, leading to a competitive advantage and sustainable business, which is in line with the conclusions of Shabahat and Ermine (2021), Vrabcová et al. (2021), Manab and Aziz (2019) and David et al. (2014). In order to ensure continuity of knowledge between generations of employees, the most important is the existence of a human resource management strategy, organizational strategy, and organizational culture strategy that are the most influential for the surveyed organizations and the issue at hand, i.e., knowledge sharing and ensuring knowledge continuity. The results of the research confirmed that strategic documents are an effective tool for meeting the vision and goals of an organization, but it is necessary to plan organizational processes efficiently and to create strategic documents in line with their settings. Confirming the results of research performed by Baral and Pokharel (2016), Džupina (2017), and Vukmirovic et al. (2017), strategic documents support development and achieving competitive advantage and sustainable business by organizations.

The authors of these researches focused mainly on their role in achieving goals and planning procedures to achieve them. Their role in the field of knowledge for their fulfillment is completely neglected, as well as the area of the non-profit sphere. With the exception of one research (Džupina, 2017), the influence of the size of the organization is also neglected.

The neglect of the non-profit area is noted by research (Al Anahabi et al., 2019; Arbelo-Pérez et al., 2022), which focused on identifying complex relationships between the processes of knowledge management of organizations and performance in the public sector in terms of operational, qualitative and innovative. The



authors considered the research as an introductory analysis in this area, which found that knowledge management processes have the strongest impact on innovation performance, followed by quality performance and operational performance. The results of our research show that knowledge management has the same effect and influence on the results, regardless of whether they are private or non-profit organizations and whether the organizations are large or small. It can be assumed that in small organizations the absence of HR departments and the application of age management depends on the owner.

Three sources of knowledge have been identified as a result of congenital, experiential and interorganizational learning (Hitka et al., 2021; Stacho et al., 2022; Yli-Renko et al., 2020; Bruneel et al., 2010; Clarysse et al., 2009). If they are used effectively and the conditions are created for them, they can lead to strategic success. Sharing the key knowledge of those who carry it and their successors, as well as all current employees, meet the criteria of all these resources and become an important factor in the success of organizations. The research has identified the importance for both for-profit and non-profit organizations, which completely neglect the research. The literature analysis showed that research, which dealt with sources and databases of knowledge, focused mainly on external sources from external and their usability for market and financial effect and the achievement of strategic goals.

It can be summarized that the organizational climate in the workplace, friendly relations with colleagues in all generations of employees, the use of modern technologies, work in a team that is diverse in terms of age, as well as the image of the employer – those are currently the factors that have a positive impact on work motivation of employees and that influence the willingness to share knowledge between employees and to ensure knowledge continuity.

However, it is the task of managers to identify which factors are key to their team and can motivate employees positively to work. In view of the results of research, it is appropriate to use age management tools and to promote the use of flexible working arrangements and work organization always in line with the age group of employees, which is in line with Stacho et al. (2022), Chen and Nonaka (2022), Urbancová (2019), Ciutiene and Railaite (2015), Principi and Fabbietti (2015).

Research conducted in the field of knowledge databases focused mainly on the availability and usability of external scientific databases for the management of organizations and the achievement of their goals. Internal knowledge databases, the involvement of age knowledge for their creation and use, are completely neglected. The presented research in this area is initial research, its implementation will be continued.

If the management of organizations is interested in continual improvement of the working environment, this has a threefold effect – it will be reflected in the increased work motivation of all employees, regardless of their age, in improving their work performance, and in improving the relationship of the employee with the organization. Vrabcová et al. (2021), Urbancová (2019), Hitka et al. (2018) and Ciutiene and Railaite (2015) agree with this statement, but it should be added that lack of interest of the employer in the working environment and unfavorable working conditions always cause dissatisfaction among employees of all ages and act as disincentives.

In view of the results achieved, it can also be concluded that the benefits of knowledge sharing and ensuring knowledge continuity were identified primarily in enhancing the performance of the entire organization, in setting up processes within the organization including staff processes, and in introducing new ways of work that take account of age management. The focus of the strategic documents on areas of work with employees is primary in the current labor market and demographic developments, and the conclusions of the research conducted follow up to the conclusions of Ma et al. (2021), Tripathi et al. (2018), Kijek et al. (2020), Urbancová and Vrabcová (2021), Vrabcová et al. (2021), Stacho et al. (2022). The results showed that the organizations contacted apply age management mostly for the sake of ensuring knowledge continuity in case of staff changes, but for this reason it is necessary to set working conditions with the emphasis on flexibility. The trend in applying age management is positive because the organizations surveyed are planning to apply flexible working arrangements and organization of work, in line with recommendations of Tsai et al. (2016).

Findings of the present article are in accordance with Stacho et al. (2021) and Urbancová and Vrabcová (2021) which state that most organizations do not have an implemented ergonomic strategy as an internal strategic document setting out procedures and responsibilities for identifying ergonomic risks and for designing and implementing measures to prevent, reduce, or eliminate them. This article these results expand about area of influence the strategic documents on knowledge sharing and ensuring knowledge continuity.

The following can be recommended to the surveyed organizations:

- to conduct regular, individual interviews with all employees, aimed at identifying the current life situation of employees and possible changes in motivation for work, age-related issues, their willingness to share and pass on knowledge and experience; it can also be recommended that the person responsible for these interviews should be the team manager with whom these interviews are to be held;
- to pay the utmost attention to the motivational factor of the content and meaning of work that is important for generations of employees (primarily for the

upcoming generation of employees Y, Z); in particular, it is advisable to stimulate the younger generation by possibility of rotation or enrichment of work, despite higher financial costs invested primarily in employee education;

- to stimulate all age groups of employees with possibilities of flexible working time arrangements, which are currently crucial in particular in relation to reconciliation of work and personal life; as a result of this step to measure the efficiency of work that should increase due to increased motivation to work.

It can therefore be summarized that there is currently an increasingly growing belief that human resources management should focus on improving the quality of working life and development of workers, but also on increasing productivity, worker satisfaction, and readiness for change with an emphasis on presenting the organization as a good employer within the organization itself, but also outwardly, because organizations can only achieve pre-defined goals and visions on the basis of appropriately chosen staff strategies that will be supported by appropriate, continually analyzed organizational culture and by building a good employer brand via application of current trends in human resources management.

Influence organizational characteristics (sector, market, existence HR department etc.) on existing strategic documents and its application, the support on ensuring knowledge continuity was confirmed by results from realized quantitative research and qualitative research by focus group and all realized interviews.

We can summarize that the article fills the identified knowledge gaps summarized in theoretical background, i.e., presented new results in comparison across sectors and different organizations together. Only on primarily survey in organizations can answer the question about differences in the ensuring knowledge continuity through different organizations in the past several years and setup ensuring knowledge continuity by existing the strategic document in organizations. Therefore, were identified benefits from ensuring knowledge continuity in different types of organizations that help to the setup of the knowledge continuity management transfer in general. These results make theory wider and were added by qualitative research by the focus group method which confirmed correct results and they directed researchers to the future research.

## **Conclusions**

At present, it is necessary that the area of human resources management becomes an integral part of the strategic orientation of the organization and that individual staffing activities are performed not only on a partial managerial level, but with a comprehensive view of the development of the entire organization in the coming years. One of the areas of crucial importance for strategic management

of organizations and correct setting of all organizational processes (financial, staffing, procedural, or social processes, including ensuring the continuity of the activities of the organization) is the need to reflect changes in human resources management, and to apply trends in this area via creating or completing such internal conditions that make the application of staffing processes more efficient. However, in each organization, the vision, the mission of the organization, and the organization-wide strategy including the human resources management strategy, must be set up first. The research results revealed four basic documents that help ensure knowledge continuity across all age groups of employees: Strategic Goals, Innovation Strategy, Process Approach in the Organizational Strategy, and Human Resources Management Strategy. Thanks to the existence of these strategic documents, it is possible to assume a successful implementation of individual activities in the organization and achievement of competitive advantage and sustainable business.

The theoretical contribution of this article is the introduction of areas of strategic documents aimed at positive benefits in the organization. The practical contribution of this article is the presentation of results of ensuring knowledge continuity and age management in selected Czech organizations, and the recommendation to codify strategic documents that can lead to a competitive advantage and sustainable business.

This study has several limitations. In particular, it focuses only on the organizations in the Czech Republic and the results cannot be generalized to the entire population; nevertheless, it is an important sample of organizations across sectors and sizes. The results are also very valuable for managers looking for the sources of information to enhance an organization's recommendations for effective knowledge continuity. This emphasizes the managerial role of being aware of the high value of internal knowledge and being able to keep and use it appropriately.

Future research will focus on generations X, Y, Z and their motivation to work and share knowledge between generations, and should be carried out on a representative set of respondents from individual age categories.

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