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WHAT HR ISSUES AND CHALLENGES ARE ADDRESSED BY CONTEMPORARY HR PROFESSIONALS AND LINE MANAGERS? A SURVEY EVIDENCE FROM THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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Abstract

Research purpose. Succeeding in a changing business world means being familiar with emerging business trends, including issues and challenges related to human resources (HR). The paper investigates HR issues and challenges addressed by HR professionals and line managers of businesses in the Czech Republic. The investigation aims to uncover which HR issues are faced most often and which HR challenges are expected in the coming years to identify existing and potential HR issues and challenges that businesses should deal with to meet their needs.

Design / Methodology / Approach. The investigation is founded on the reanalysis of data from the 2023 HR survey carried out by the Grafton Recruitment Czech Republic staffing agency at the end of 2022. The original data were provided by the co-author representing the staffing agency. The reanalysis was used to utilize the original data, to evaluate responses depending on the business type (manufacturing, non-manufacturing) and size (small, medium-sized, large), and to verify hypotheses concerning realized and planned changes in the number of employees. The original online survey addressed roughly a thousand clients of the staffing agency. The responses were obtained from 478 businesses across the Czech Republic that responded to thirty questions about their HR policies and plans. The reanalysis covers eight questions about their HR roles, issues, and challenges. The original data were not modified. To verify hypotheses, a non-parametric chi-square test of independence for a contingency table was used. To evaluate the degree of dependence between variables, a contingency coefficient was used.

Findings. The surveyed businesses most often face HR issues of employee resourcing. The HR challenges they expect in the coming years concern the development of the employer brand, the introduction of digital and AI technologies, or the introduction of innovative organizational arrangements to hire suitable employees or replace the missing employees. The findings revealed a dependence between realized and planned changes in the number of employees. The realized increase and decrease in the number of employees referred to the planned increase and decrease in the number of employees. The findings revealed no significant differences in responses depending on the type (manufacturing and non-manufacturing) and size (small, medium-sized, and large) of businesses.

Originality / Value / Practical implications. The findings bring original perspectives on existing and potential HR issues and challenges addressed by surveyed businesses in the Czech Republic. The findings contribute to the present theory and practice of employee resourcing by confirming the value of HR professionals and line managers in addressing staffing issues. The findings can be applied in the design of HR service delivery systems in different businesses by highlighting HR issues and challenges that businesses should focus on.

Keywords: human resource management, HR professionals, line managers, employee resourcing, Czech Republic.

JEL codes: M10, M14.

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Introduction

Research concerning issues and challenges addressed by HR (human resources) professionals has been quite extensive worldwide in recent years. Researchers mainly focus on the roles of HR professionals, their cooperation with line managers, and their contribution to business success (Cayrat & Boxall, 2023). Current findings confirm that HR professionals enable businesses to succeed by helping them ensure quality employees to meet business needs (Morris, 2018). HR professionals organized in HR departments usually operate in medium and large businesses employing hundreds and thousands of employees (Nguyen et al., 2019). In such businesses, HR professionals are involved in such HR activities as planning, recruiting, hiring, onboarding, rewarding, training, and offboarding (Ferm et al., 2023). HR professionals ensure these HR activities mainly administratively and methodically while cooperating with line managers responsible for their day-to-day performance (Bainbridge, 2015).

The current human resource management concepts assign HR professionals the role of HR business partners, where HR professionals provide services to line managers who are responsible for the day-to-day management of employees (Nadiv et al., 2017). In other words, line managers have the main responsibility for implementing HR policies and practices delivered by HR professionals, including employee planning, organizing, staffing, leading, and controlling (Townsend & Hutchinson, 2017). Line managers supported by HR professionals are then accountable to higher-level managers for the productive use of the employees the business employs (Yang & Arthur, 2021). HR professionals also ensure the development of leadership skills of line managers (Maheshwari & Yadav, 2019). HR professionals contribute to more effective human resource management in the business by providing line managers with efficient solutions to everyday issues related to people and their performance (Trullen et al., 2016). To meet their role, HR professionals should have both HR and business know-how to be able to provide line managers with effective solutions for the productive use of employees (Lo et al., 2015). However, the evidence shows that the role of HR professionals in many businesses is more administrative than supportive (Wallo & Coetzer, 2023). Moreover, the partnership between HR professionals and line managers in managing employees can be negatively affected by various disagreements and conflicts arising from different views on the productive use of employees (Op de Beeck et al., 2016).

The greatest issue and challenge for HR professionals and line managers in many businesses around the world today is to staff the business with suitable employees to meet business needs (Tucker, 2022). There is an increasing shortage of quality people in the current labour markets, and therefore HR professionals and line managers must look for innovative ways to recruit suitable people or replace missing people (Verma et al., 2021). A big challenge of the near future is the introduction of innovative information technologies, mainly based on artificial intelligence (AI), which would enable to flexibly respond to shortages or surpluses of people (Malin et al., 2023). The main purpose of using information technology in human resource management is the analysis of the workforce and the prediction of the future development of labour supply and demand (Kryscynski et al., 2017). HR professionals and line managers must effectively predict how many and what kind of people they will need and from what sources they will recruit the people needed (Zoller, 2018). For this purpose, they need efficient tools for analysing big data regarding the situation and development in the labour markets (Zhou et al., 2023).

Current findings on the roles of HR professionals and their contribution to line managers demonstrate that the roles of HR professionals are about enabling line managers to succeed through quality employees whose know-how represents a competitive advantage (Ulrich, 2020). The issues and challenges that HR professionals and line managers will face in the coming years will be mostly associated with the attraction and retention of quality people meeting the business needs concerning the advancement of innovative digital technologies (see e.g., Corrocher et al., 2024; Luo & Yang, 2023; Roos et al., 2024, Wang et al., 2023; etc.). These HR issues and challenges are particularly topical in the Czech Republic, where low unemployment persists and where employers experience a serious shortage of quality people across industries (Mala & Cabla, 2022). Within the businesses operating in the Czech Republic, the shortage of quality people is increasingly addressed by labour migration or process automation (Posta, 2023), which brings new HR issues and challenges for HR professionals and line managers.

Following the mentioned findings on the partnership between HR professionals and line managers in staffing the business with suitable employees (see e.g. Al-Harazneh & Sila, 2021; Hewett et al., 2024, Trullen et al., 2016; Vuorenmaa et al., 2023; Wach et al., 2021; etc.), this paper investigates HR issues and challenges addressed by contemporary HR professionals and line managers of surveyed businesses in the Czech Republic. The investigation aims to respond to two research questions:

RQ1: Which HR issues do HR professionals and line managers of surveyed businesses face most often?

RQ2: Which HR challenges do HR professionals and line managers of surveyed businesses expect in the coming years?

The investigated HR issues represent problems that HR professionals and line managers routinely deal with, such as hiring suitable employees. HR challenges represent matters related to emerging changes in the business environment and which require great effort to be managed successfully, such as the HR digital transformation. The responses to research questions should result in an overview of existing and potential HR issues and challenges that businesses should deal with to meet their business needs.

The investigation is founded on the idea of reanalysing data from the 2023 HR survey carried out by the Grafton Recruitment Czech Republic staffing agency at the end of 2022. The original data were provided by the co-author representing Grafton Recruitment Czech Republic staffing agency in the position of Project Manager HR services. The reanalysis of the data taken was found to be more beneficial than the performance of a new survey, mainly due to the number of responses available. The reanalysis also enabled fully utilizing the potential of the original data, including statistical analysis. The original data were not modified. The original survey included responses from 478 businesses in the Czech Republic. The respondents originally responded to thirty multiple-choice questions incorporated in an online questionnaire and investigated the HR policies and plans of surveyed businesses. The reanalysis targets responses to eight questions concerning HR roles, issues, and challenges. The reanalysis also covers the verification of hypotheses concerning realized and planned changes in the number of employees and HR professionals in surveyed businesses:

H1: There is a dependence between realized changes in the number of employees and HR professionals in surveyed businesses.

H2: There is a dependence between realized and planned changes in the number of employees in surveyed businesses.

The findings contribute to the present theory and practice of employee resourcing by analysing various HR issues and challenges in businesses of different types (manufacturing, and non-manufacturing) and sizes (small, medium-sized, and large). The findings revealed that HR professionals and line managers of surveyed businesses most often face HR issues of staffing the business with suitable employees. The HR challenges they expect in the coming years concern innovative organizational arrangements and digital technologies to hire suitable employees or replace the missing employees.

Literature Review

The literature review provides recent findings of selected research studies on the roles, issues, and challenges of HR professionals and line managers in managing human resources across the world and in the Czech Republic. Applicable research studies published in the Web of Science and Scopus databases in the last ten years were selected.

From the world perspective, the contribution of HR professionals to business success was analysed, for example, by Jørgensen and Becker (2015) who investigated how HR services delivered by HR professionals contribute to business performance in three financial investment businesses in Denmark. They revealed that HR services concerning professional and organizational commitment had the greatest impact on business performance. The delivery of quality HR services meeting business needs depends on the quality skills of HR professionals, which was confirmed by Kryscynski et al. (2017). They surveyed the association between analytical skills and job performance of HR professionals using a sample of 1,117 HR professionals from 449 organizations across the United States. They revealed

a positive association between analytical skills and the job performance of HR professionals. They confirmed that HR professionals need efficient analytical and other problem-solving skills to be effective business partners. The specific roles of HR professionals in businesses were examined by Ferm et al. (2023) who interviewed 34 HR professionals from large private and public organizations in Sweden. The most common roles of interviewed HR professionals were related to the support of activities of line managers, the promotion of interests of employees, and the enhancement of organizational performance. The partnership between HR professionals and line managers who applied HR practices was examined by Wach et al. (2021) who used a sample of 102 businesses in Germany. They concluded that the application of HR practices is most effective and efficient when there is consensus between HR professionals and line managers who introduce HR strategies and policies.

The relationship between HR practices and job performance was examined, for example, by Khoreva and Wechtler (2018) who analysed the effect of HR practices on job performance using a sample of 300 employees and 34 managers working in a professional service business in Finland. They revealed that the effect of HR practices on job performance was mediated by employee well-being associated with the perceived ability and motivation to participate. The suggestion for HR professionals and line managers has been to provide employees with meaningful and autonomous job opportunities to be motivated by the job itself and fully use their potential. Similarly, Zirar et al. (2021) analysed the introduction of lean HR practices to enhance business performance by interviewing 27 HR professionals from five service businesses in England. They revealed that the lean HR practices introduced to enhance business performance were related to hiring, training, leading, and rewarding people. These are the HR practices that allow the business to recruit and retain quality people. First, suitable people must be hired for suitable jobs in the business. Second, people need to be trained systematically to learn the skills needed to perform well in their jobs. Third, people need to be led effectively to achieve desired business objectives. Finally, people need to be rewarded fairly for achieving performance. All of these issues should be the focus of HR professionals and line managers in any business. Trivedi and Srivastava (2023) examined HR practices introduced to enhance knowledge sharing by surveying 387 employees from the top twenty IT and consulting businesses in India. They confirmed that HR professionals can positively affect knowledge sharing across the business by introducing HR practices oriented toward developing a communicative and cooperative environment. Such an environment is founded on natural teamwork supported by effective training and rewarding practices that enhance employee engagement and performance.

The effective application of HR practices to efficiently improve job performance depends on the abilities of HR professionals and line managers, which was confirmed by Cuellar-Molina et al. (2019). They examined the effect of emotional intelligence on the decision-making of HR professionals and line managers in small- and medium-sized businesses using a sample of 157 HR professionals and line managers who made HR-related decisions in their small- and medium-sized businesses in Gran Canaria. They confirmed that the ability to manage one's own emotions as well as the emotions of other people associated with emotional intelligence has a significant effect on the decision-making of HR professionals and line managers in surveyed small- and medium-sized businesses. These findings demonstrate that HR professionals and line managers involved in HR issues and decisions need to develop their soft skills related to communication, collaboration, and coordination. A sign of HR professionalism is also adherence to an ethical approach to people, which was confirmed by Simoes et al. (2019). They analysed the ethical practices of HR professionals by surveying 134 HR professionals from various businesses in Portugal. They revealed that most of the surveyed HR professionals tend to avoid unethical practices, mainly those concerning discriminatory behaviour. These tendencies were more evident in businesses advocating socially responsible behaviour.

Within the ongoing technological advancement, the future of HR belongs to digital technologies and their application seems to be a big challenge for HR professionals and line managers. It was confirmed by Isari et al. (2019) who investigated the perceptions and expectations of HR professionals regarding the HR digital transformation. They surveyed 53 HR professionals from a branch of one international consulting business in Italy. They confirmed that the HR digital transformation is a challenging issue for most HR professionals and they suggested that the change of the digital mindset of HR professionals requires to development of fundamental digital skills as digital technologies are going to play an

increasingly important role in HR. Talukdar and Ganguly (2022) investigated the positive and negative effects of the introduction of innovative information technologies in HR surveying representatives of 276 industrial businesses in India. They concluded that the introduction of innovative information technologies in surveyed industrial businesses increased the efficiency of HR services delivered to line managers. On the other hand, the frequent use of innovative information technologies in meeting common HR issues harmed the quality of communication and cooperation, where most issues were addressed online without direct interaction. These findings demonstrate that the purpose of introducing innovative information technologies in HR must be to support the communication and cooperation of people across the business. Mantzaris and Myloni (2023) explored perceptions of HR professionals concerning the introduction of innovative HR technologies to deal efficiently with upcoming HR challenges by surveying 251 HR professionals from eleven countries. They concluded that most of the surveyed HR professionals believed in the introduction of innovative HR technologies to deal with upcoming HR challenges. However, the technologies cannot meet all the human-related issues.

From the perspective of the Czech Republic, specific research studies on the roles, issues, and challenges of HR professionals and line managers are relatively rare. Most research studies deal with specific HR practices. For example, Fajcikova et al. (2018) analysed talent management practices in businesses operating in the Czech Republic using three samples of businesses surveyed in 2014/2015 (389), 2015/2016 (402), and 2016/2017 (207). They revealed that talent management practices in surveyed businesses were related to employee recruitment and selection, training and development, and evaluation and compensation. These talent management practices were mostly applied in medium-sized and large businesses with an HR department. Horvathova et al. (2020) examined differences in HR practices between non-family and family businesses surveying a sample of 572 non-family (288) and family (284) businesses operating in the Czech Republic. They revealed no significant differences in HR practices between non-family and family businesses. However, the non-family businesses showed a more strategic approach to HR practices than family businesses. Mikova et al. (2021) investigated the effectiveness of on-the-job training practices delivered by HR professionals using a sample of 611 employees from the millennial generation working in businesses operating in the Czech Republic. They revealed that businesses still mostly use traditional on-the-job training practices that are not very attractive to employees who had perceived them as ineffective. They confirmed the necessity to deliver HR practices effectively for both employees and employers. Vrabcova and Urbancova (2021) surveyed the use of HR information systems in 70 agricultural businesses in the Czech Republic to evaluate the effect of HR information systems on the effectiveness of HR processes. They confirmed that most of the surveyed agricultural businesses use HR information systems to support administrative rather than innovative HR processes related to the development of human resources. However, agricultural businesses demonstrated a solid IT infrastructure for the future HR digital transformation.

The provided findings of selected research studies on the roles, issues, and challenges of HR professionals and line managers in managing human resources demonstrate that HR professionals and line managers across the world and in the Czech Republic mostly deal with HR issues and challenges related to employee resourcing to staff the business with suitable employees meeting the business needs. Following these findings, this paper deals with the HR issues and challenges addressed by contemporary HR professionals and line managers of surveyed businesses in the Czech Republic.

Research Methodology

The investigation of HR issues and challenges addressed by contemporary HR professionals and line managers of surveyed businesses in the Czech Republic results from the research cooperation between co-authors representing various universities in the Czech Republic and Grafton Recruitment Czech Republic staffing agency. The investigation itself is founded on the idea of reanalysing data from the 2023 HR survey carried out by the Grafton Recruitment Czech Republic staffing agency at the end of 2022. The original data were provided by the co-author representing Grafton Recruitment Czech Republic staffing agency in the position of Project Manager HR services. The reanalysis of the data taken was found to be more beneficial than the performance of a new survey, mainly due to the number of responses available. The reanalysis also enabled fully utilizing the potential of the original data, including statistical analysis.

The original survey used an online questionnaire addressing business clients of the staffing agency. The core database used contained roughly a thousand contacts. The responses were obtained from 478 businesses and their HR professionals and line managers in the Czech Republic. The respondents originally responded to thirty multiple-choice questions with single and multiple options investigating HR policies and plans of surveyed businesses. This paper reanalyses responses to eight questions concerning HR roles, issues, and challenges. The original data were not modified. The survey questions reanalysed are characterized in Table 1.

Table 1. The Reanalysed Survey Questions (Source: Author processing based on Grafton Recruitment Czech Republic 2023 HR survey, May 2024)

Questions	Single-answer options
1. How did the number of HR professionals in your business change in 2022?	– Increased – Decreased – Unchanged
2. How did you deal with the increase in HR issues during 2022?	– Automation of some HR processes – Outsourcing of some HR processes – Overtime of existing HR professionals – Temporary part-time contracts with needed HR professionals – Involvement of employees of other departments – We did not need to deal with it – Other actions
3. How do you perceive the HR challenges you expect in 2023 compared to 2022?	– Harder – Easier – Comparable
4. Which HR challenges do you expect in 2023?	– HR data analysis – Improvement of HR processes – Employer brand development – Introduction of online HR tools – Introduction of AI and automation in HR – Nothing important – Other challenges
5. How did the number of employees in your business change in 2022?	– Increased – Decreased – Unchanged
6. Do you plan to change the number of employees in 2023?	– Yes, increase – Yes, decrease – No
7. Do you hire foreign employees?	– Yes, through our recruitment – Yes, through staffing agencies – No
8. Do you plan to hire employees from third countries (outside the EU) in 2023?	– Yes, more – Yes, alike – Yes, less – No

Table 2 provides characteristics of surveyed businesses by type (manufacturing and non-manufacturing businesses) and size (small, medium-sized, and large businesses). Regarding the type, there were more manufacturing than non-manufacturing businesses. The Czech Republic is a more industrialized economy than most EU countries, where most people are employed in services. In the Czech Republic, the industry sector represents less than forty per cent of the economy, while the service sector represents about sixty per cent of the economy (Holy, 2020). Within the industry sector, manufacturing businesses account for almost a quarter of gross value added (GVA) and employ more than thirty per cent of all employees in the business sector. The most important are automotive businesses (Novotny, 2022). By the end of 2023, there were over three hundred thousand registered manufacturing economic entities in the Czech Republic (Czech Statistical Office, 2024). The main issues of manufacturing businesses in

the Czech Republic are the low added value of production and a lack of qualified labour (Zabojnikova, 2020). The potential solution to these issues is the advancement of process automation or labour migration (Posta, 2023). Regarding the size, there were the most medium-sized businesses (101-500 employees) followed by large businesses (501 or more employees) and small businesses (100 or less employees). Among medium-sized and large businesses, manufacturing businesses predominated, while among small businesses, non-manufacturing businesses predominated. In the Czech Republic, small and medium-sized businesses represent more than ninety per cent of all businesses and employ almost sixty per cent of all employees in the business sector (Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic, 2021). By the end of 2023, there were almost two hundred and eighty thousand registered economic entities in the Czech Republic having from one to two hundred and forty-nine employees belonging to the category of small and medium-sized businesses (Czech Statistical Office, 2024). The sample of surveyed businesses is not representative. However, the structure of the sample in terms of the type and size of the surveyed businesses is close to the real state within the economy of the Czech Republic, where manufacturing medium-sized and large businesses play an important role.

Table 2. The Characteristics of Surveyed Businesses (Source: Author processing based on Grafton Recruitment Czech Republic 2023 HR survey, May 2024)

Categories	**Surveyed businesses**	**N = 478**
Type	Manufacturing	61%
	Non-manufacturing	39%
Size	Small	27%
	Medium-sized	44%
	Large	29%

Responses were reanalysed using Microsoft Excel. The reanalysis involved the evaluation of relative frequencies of responses depending on the type and size of surveyed businesses. The verification of defined hypotheses concerning realized and planned changes in the number of employees and HR professionals in surveyed businesses was performed using a non-parametric chi-square test of independence for a contingency table (χ^2) suitable for nominal variables with a non-normal distribution. The test was performed according to Formula 1 with a significance level of 0.05. The realized changes in the number of employees and HR professionals in surveyed businesses were rated on a scale of "increased", "decreased", and "unchanged". The planned changes in the number of employees in surveyed businesses were rated on a scale of "yes, increase", "yes, decrease", and "no".

$$\chi^2 = \sum_{i=1}^{k} \frac{(O_i - E_i)^2}{E_i} \quad (1)$$

Where:

χ^2 is the computed value of the chi-square statistic;
O_i is the observed frequency determined for each of the cells of the contingency table;
E_i is the expected frequency computed for each of the cells of the contingency table.

To evaluate the degree of dependence between realized and planned changes in the number of employees and HR professionals in surveyed businesses, a contingency coefficient (C) computed according to Formula 2 was used. The computation of the contingency coefficient proceeds from the computed value of the chi-square statistic (χ^2). The contingency coefficient itself varies from 0 to 1. The higher the contingency coefficient, the higher the degree of dependence.

$$C = \sqrt{\frac{\chi^2}{n + \chi^2}} \quad (2)$$

Where:

C is the computed value of the contingency coefficient;
χ^2 is the computed value of the chi-square statistic;
n is the total frequency in the contingency table.

Results

The HR issues addressed by HR professionals and line managers of surveyed businesses in the Czech Republic were investigated to reveal which HR issues HR professionals and line managers face most often (RQ1) at present and are expected to encounter in the coming years (RQ2).

Question (1) investigated how the number of HR professionals in surveyed businesses changed in 2022. In 71% of businesses, the number of HR professionals remained unchanged, in 20% of businesses it increased, and in 9% of businesses it decreased. Regarding the type, the most common changes were in manufacturing businesses, where the number of HR professionals both increased and decreased. Regarding the size, the most common changes were in large businesses, where the number of HR professionals both increased and decreased (Table 3).

Table 3. Change in the Number of HR Professionals in Surveyed Businesses in 2022 (Source: Author processing based on Grafton Recruitment Czech Republic 2023 HR survey, May 2024)

1. How did the number of HR professionals in your business change in 2022 (N = 478)?			
Businesses	**Increased (20%)**	**Decreased (9%)**	**Unchanged (71%)**
Manufacturing	21%	11%	68%
Non-manufacturing	19%	5%	76%
Small	15%	2%	83%
Medium-sized	19%	8%	73%
Large	26%	16%	58%

Question (2) investigated how HR professionals and line managers in surveyed businesses dealt with the increase in HR issues during 2022. In 47% of businesses, they did not need to deal with any increase in HR issues. In other businesses, they used overtime of existing HR professionals (32%), automation of some HR processes (8%), involvement of employees of other departments (5%), outsourcing of some HR processes (4%), and temporary part-time contracts with needed HR professionals (4%). Regarding the type, in both manufacturing and non-manufacturing businesses, overtime of existing HR professionals and automation of some HR processes were used more often. Regarding the size, in small, medium-sized, large businesses, overtime of existing HR professionals was used most often (Table 4).

Table 4. Addressing the Increase in HR Issues in 2022 (Source: Author processing based on Grafton Recruitment Czech Republic 2023 HR survey, May 2024)

2. How did you deal with the increase in HR issues during 2022 (N = 478)?							
Businesses	**A (8%)**	**B (4%)**	**C (32%)**	**D (5%)**	**E (4%)**	**F (47%)**	**G (0%)**
Manufacturing	8%	3%	38%	5%	4%	42%	0%
Non-manufacturing	7%	5%	24%	4%	3%	56%	0%
Small	4%	5%	25%	5%	2%	59%	0%
Medium-sized	9%	3%	34%	6%	4%	43%	0%
Large	8%	4%	36%	2%	5%	45%	0%
A. Automation of some HR processes B. Outsourcing of some HR processes		C. Overtime of existing HR professionals D. Involvement of employees of other departments			A. Temporary part-time contracts with needed HR professionals B. We did not need to deal with it C. Other actions		

Question (3) investigated how HR challenges in 2023 compared to 2022 were perceived in surveyed businesses. In 52% of businesses, the HR challenges were perceived as comparable, in 46% of businesses as harder, and only in 2% of businesses as easier. Regarding the type, in manufacturing businesses, the HR challenges were perceived as harder than in non-manufacturing businesses. Regarding the size, in medium-sized businesses, the HR challenges were perceived as harder than in small businesses and large businesses (Table 5).

Table 5. The perception of HR challenges expected in 2023 compared to 2022 (Source: author processing based on Grafton Recruitment Czech Republic 2023 HR survey, May 2024)

3. How do you perceive the HR challenges you expect in 2023 compared to 2022? (N = 478)?			
Businesses	**Harder (46%)**	**Easier (2%)**	**Comparable (52%)**
Manufacturing	47%	1%	52%
Non-manufacturing	44%	2%	54%
Small	42%	3%	55%
Medium-sized	49%	1%	50%
Large	45%	1%	55%

Question (4) investigated which HR challenges HR professionals and line managers in surveyed businesses expected in 2023. In 37% of businesses, they expected nothing important. In other businesses, they expected employer brand development (21%), introduction of online HR tools (17%), introduction of AI and automation in HR (13%), HR data analysis (8%), and improvement of HR processes (4%). Regarding the type, in manufacturing businesses, employer brand development and introduction of online HR tools were expected more often while in non-manufacturing businesses, brand development, introduction of online HR tools, and introduction of AI and automation in HR were expected more often. Regarding the size, in small, medium-sized, and large businesses, employer brand development and introduction of online HR tools were expected most often (Table 6).

Table 6. HR Challenges Expected in 2023 (Source: Author processing based on Grafton Recruitment Czech Republic 2023 HR survey, May 2024)

4. Which HR challenges do you expect in 2023 (N = 478)?							
Businesses	**A (8%)**	**B (4%)**	**C (21%)**	**D (17%)**	**E (13%)**	**F (37%)**	**G (0%)**
Manufacturing	8%	5%	23%	19%	11%	33%	0%
Non-manufacturing	7%	3%	19%	14%	14%	43%	0%
Small	5%	6%	21%	16%	9%	44%	0%
Medium-sized	9%	4%	23%	15%	14%	34%	0%
Large	7%	2%	20%	21%	15%	35%	0%
A. HR data analysis B. Improvement of HR processes	C. Employer brand development D. Introduction of online HR tools			E. Introduction of AI and automation in HR F. Nothing important G. Other challenges			

Question (5) investigated how the number of employees in surveyed businesses changed in 2022. In 38% of businesses, the number of employees remained unchanged, in 43% of businesses it increased, and in 19% of businesses it decreased. Regarding the type, the number of employees increased in both manufacturing and non-manufacturing businesses, although it was more common in non-manufacturing businesses. Regarding the size, the number of employees increased in small, medium-sized, and large businesses, although it was the most common in small businesses (Table 7).

Table 7. Change in the Number of Employees in Surveyed Business in 2022 (Source: Author processing based on Grafton Recruitment Czech Republic 2023 HR survey, May 2024)

5. How did the number of employees in your business change in 2022 (N = 478)?			
Businesses	**Increased (43%)**	**Decreased (19%)**	**Unchanged (38%)**
Manufacturing	40%	24%	36%
Non-manufacturing	47%	13%	40%

Small	46%	9%	45%
Medium-sized	43%	22%	35%
Large	39%	26%	35%

Withing question (5), hypothesis H1 was verified that there is a dependence between realized changes in the number of employees and HR professionals in surveyed businesses (see Table 8). To perform the chi-square test of independence for a contingency table (χ^2), The null hypothesis was defined that there is no dependence between realized changes in the number of employees and HR professionals in surveyed businesses ($H_0$1). Then a chi-square statistic (χ^2) was computed and a critical chi-square value for the significance level of 0.05 ($\chi^2_{0,05}$) was determined. Since the chi-square statistic (χ^2) was higher than the critical chi-square value ($\chi^2_{0,05}$), the null hypothesis was rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis (H_A1). The dependence between realized changes in the number of employees and HR professionals in surveyed businesses was proved. The value of the contingency coefficient (C) indicated a moderate dependence between realized changes in the number of employees and HR professionals in surveyed businesses.

Table 8. Dependence between Realized Changes in Number of Employees and HR Professionals in Surveyed Businesses (Source: Author processing based on Grafton Recruitment Czech Republic 2023 HR survey, May 2024)

H_A1. There is a dependence between realized changes in the number of employees and HR professionals in surveyed businesses				
	The number of HR professionals in surveyed businesses in 2022			
The number of employees in surveyed business in 2022	Increased	Decreased	Unchanged	∑
Increased	59	9	137	**205**
Decreased	12	17	64	**93**
Unchanged	25	15	140	**180**
∑	**96**	**41**	**341**	**478**
Chi square statistic $\chi^2 = 29.669$				
Critical chi-square value $\chi^2_{0,05}(4) = 9.488$				
H_0 was not rejected. There is a dependence between realized changes in the number of employees and HR professionals in surveyed businesses. Contingency coefficient C = 0.242. The value of C indicated a moderate dependence between realized changes in the number of employees and HR professionals in surveyed businesses.				

Question (6) investigated whether HR professionals and line managers in surveyed businesses planned to change the number of employees in 2023. In 46% of businesses, they planned no changes in the number of employees in 2023. In other businesses, they planned to increase (39%) or decrease (15%) the number of employees in 2023. Regarding the type, they more often planned to increase the number of employees in 2023 in both manufacturing and non-manufacturing businesses, although it was more common in non-manufacturing businesses. Similarly, regarding the size, they more often planned to increase the number of employees in 2023 in small, medium-sized, and large businesses, although it was more common in small businesses (Table 9).

Table 9. Plan to Change the Number of Employees in 2023 (Source: Author processing based on Grafton Recruitment Czech Republic 2023 HR survey, May 2024)

6. Do you plan to change the number of employees in 2023 (N = 478)?			
Businesses	**Yes, increased (39%)**	**Yes, decreased (15%)**	**No (46%)**
Manufacturing	37%	18%	45%
Non-manufacturing	42%	10%	48%
Small	46%	10%	44%
Medium-sized	37%	15%	48%
Large	36%	18%	45%

Withing question (6), hypothesis H2 was verified that there is a dependence between realized and planned changes in the number of employees in surveyed businesses (see Table 10). To perform the chi-square test of independence for a contingency table (χ^2), The null hypothesis was defined that there is no dependence between realized and planned changes in the number of employees in surveyed businesses ($H_0$2). Then a chi-square statistic (χ^2) was computed and a critical chi-square value for the significance level of 0.05 ($\chi^2_{0,05}$) was determined. Since the chi-square statistic (χ^2) was higher than the critical chi-square value ($\chi^2_{0,05}$), the null hypothesis was rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis (H_A2). The dependence between realized and planned changes in the number of employees in surveyed businesses was proved. The value of the contingency coefficient (C) indicated a medium dependence between realized and planned changes in the number of employees in surveyed businesses.

Table 10. Dependence between Realized and Planned Changes in the Number of Employees in Surveyed Businesses (Source: Author processing based on Grafton Recruitment Czech Republic 2023 HR survey, May 2024)

H_A2. There is a dependence between realized and planned changes in the number of employees in surveyed businesses				
	The number of employees in surveyed businesses in 2023			
The number of employees in surveyed business in 2022	Increase planned	Decrease planned	No changes planned	∑
Increased	139	14	52	**205**
Decreased	16	35	42	**93**
Unchanged	32	21	127	**180**
∑	**187**	**70**	**221**	**478**
Chi square statistic $\chi^2 = 161.059$				
Critical chi-square value $\chi^2_{0,05}(4) = 9.488$				
H_0 was not rejected. There is a dependence between realized changes in the number of employees and HR professionals in surveyed businesses. Contingency coefficient C = 0.502. The value of C indicated a medium dependence between realized and planned changes in the number of employees in surveyed businesses.				

Question (7) investigated whether HR professionals and line managers in surveyed businesses hire foreign employees. In 31% of businesses, they hire no foreign employees. In other businesses, they hire foreign employees through their recruitment (45%) or staffing agencies (24%). Regarding the type, in manufacturing businesses, foreign employees are hired through their recruitment or staffing agencies while in non-manufacturing businesses, foreign employees are hired mostly through their recruitment. Regarding the size, foreign employees are more often hired in medium-sized and large businesses than small businesses, whereas in medium-sized businesses, they more often use their recruitment than staffing agencies while in large businesses, they more often use staffing agencies than their recruitment (Table 11).

Table 11. Hiring of Foreign Employees (Source: Author processing based on Grafton Recruitment Czech Republic 2023 HR survey, May 2024)

7. Do you hire foreign employees (N = 478)?			
Businesses	**Yes, through our recruitment (45%)**	**Yes, through staffing agencies (24%)**	**No (31%)**
Manufacturing	39%	35%	27%
Non-manufacturing	54%	8%	38%
Small	45%	10%	45%
Medium-sized	51%	24%	25%
Large	36%	38%	26%

Question (8) investigated whether HR professionals and line managers in surveyed businesses planned to hire employees from third countries (outside the EU) in 2023. In 56% of businesses, they did not plan to recruit employees from third countries in 2023. In other businesses, they planned to hire the same number (32%), fewer (7%), or more (5%) employees from third countries in 2023. Regarding the type, in manufacturing businesses, the hire of employees from third countries in 2023 was planned more often than in non-manufacturing businesses. Regarding the size, in medium-sized and large businesses, the hire of employees from third countries in 2023 was planned more often than in small businesses (Table 12).

Table 12. Plan to Recruit Employees from Third Countries (outside the EU) in 2023 (Source: Author processing based on Grafton Recruitment Czech Republic 2023 HR survey, May 2024)

8. Do you plan to hire employees from third countries (outside the EU) in 2023 (N = 478)?				
Businesses	**Yes, more (5%)**	**Yes, alike (32%)**	**Yes, less (7%)**	**No (56%)**
Manufacturing	5%	38%	9%	48%
Non-manufacturing	5%	22%	5%	68%
Small	2%	16%	5%	77%
Medium-sized	7%	35%	7%	51%
Large	5%	42%	11%	42%

The investigation of HR issues and challenges addressed by contemporary HR professionals and line managers of surveyed businesses in the Czech Republic revealed the following results:

- The number of employees, including the number of HR professionals, in surveyed businesses remained mostly unchanged or increased in 2022. The dependence between realized changes in the number of employees and HR professionals was proved.
- In most of the surveyed businesses, they planned no changes in the number of employees in 2023. The dependence between realized and planned changes in the number of employees in surveyed businesses was proved.
- HR professionals and line managers in surveyed businesses mostly did not need to deal with any increase in HR issues during 2022. If so, they used overtime of existing HR professionals, automation of some HR processes, involvement of employees of other departments, outsourcing of some HR processes, and temporary part-time contracts with needed HR professionals.
- In most of the surveyed businesses, the HR challenges in 2023 compared to 2022 were perceived as comparable. The HR challenges faced in 2023 included employer brand development, introduction of online HR tools, introduction of AI and automation in HR, HR data analysis, and improvement of HR processes.
- In most of the surveyed businesses, HR professionals and line managers hire foreign employees through their recruitment or staffing agencies. At the same time, they planned to hire no employees from third countries (outside the EU) in 2023.
- The results revealed no significant differences in responses depending on the type (manufacturing and non-manufacturing businesses) and size (small, medium-sized, and large businesses) of surveyed businesses.

Discussion

The investigation of HR issues and challenges addressed by contemporary HR professionals and line managers of surveyed businesses in the Czech Republic revealed that the HR issues faced by HR professionals and line managers most often (RQ1) are related to staffing the business with suitable employees in terms of numbers (quantity) and kinds (quality). Staffing is the most important HR issue that affects the quality of human resources of the business (Prochazka et al., 2023). The quality of human resources affects the productivity of the business as a whole (Gallego & Gutierrez Ramírez, 2023). Therefore, it is important to hire people who meet the business needs (Padilla-Vega et al., 2020). To successfully meet this objective, staffing needs to be carried out following the effective arrangement of other HR issues, such as the HR data analysis (Ekka & Singh, 2022), the employer brand development (Bharadwaj, 2023), and the introduction of online HR tools (Al-Harazneh & Sila, 2021). All these were revealed as other issues that HR professionals and line managers face very often.

Hypothesis H1 that there is a dependence between realized changes in the number of employees and HR professionals in surveyed businesses was confirmed. Within 43% of businesses where the number of employees increased in 2022, there were 29% of businesses where the number of HR professionals increased as well in 2022. In the rest of the businesses, the number of HR professionals remained unchanged (67%) or decreased (4%). On the other hand, within 19% of businesses where the number of employees decreased in 2022, there were 18% of businesses where the number of HR professionals decreased as well in 2022. In the rest of the businesses, the number of HR professionals remained unchanged (69%) or increased (13%). These findings indicate that the increase and decrease in the number of employees also refers to the increase and decrease in the number of HR professionals in businesses. HR professionals contribute by ensuring suitable human resources for the business (Amarakoon et al., 2019). However, their contribution to business success must be reflected in the business performance (Syrigou & Williams, 2023). If business performance decreases, the number of HR professionals can also decrease, as well as the number of other employees (Pandey, 2018).

Similarly, hypothesis H2 that there is a dependence between realized and planned changes in the number of employees in surveyed businesses was confirmed. Within 43% of businesses where the number of employees increased in 2022, there were 68% of businesses where the increase of employees was planned in 2023. In the rest of the businesses, no changes in the number of employees were planned (25%) or the decrease of employees was planned (7%). On the other hand, within 19% of businesses where the number of employees decreased in 2022, there were 38% of businesses where the decrease of employees was planned in 2023. In the rest of the businesses, no changes in the number of employees were planned (45%) or the increase of employees was planned (17%). These findings indicate that the realized increase and decrease in the number of employees refers to the planned increase and decrease in the number of employees in businesses (Kremer, 2023). The tendency to increase or decrease the number of employees depends primarily on the demand for goods and services. Growth in this demand means growth in demand for employees to ensure production and distribution, and vice versa (Sayekti et al., 2020). Businesses must learn to respond flexibly to fluctuations in the demand for goods and services by adjusting the demand for employees (Colombo & Marcato, 2023). In practice, this means learning how to flexibly deal with a shortage or surplus of employees. In present days, characterised by a prevailing shortage of qualified people in the labour markets (Morosan & Bowen, 2022), it is necessary to look for solutions other than employee recruitment, such as innovative organizational arrangements (Ho, 2016) or innovative technologies (Ratnam & Devi, 2024) to replace the missing workforce.

The HR challenges HR professionals and line managers of surveyed businesses expect in the coming years (RQ2) include the improvement of HR processes or the introduction of AI and automation in HR. These HR challenges correspond to the big HR issue of staffing the business with suitable employees or finding effective ways of replacing the missing employees (Kwok, 2022). As was mentioned above, the future of HR belongs to innovative organizational arrangements and digital technologies that will enable businesses to achieve high performance (Isari et al., 2019). This will be the greatest challenge for HR professionals and line managers to discover and apply such ways concerning business needs (Mantzaris & Myloni, 2023).

The comparison of the obtained findings with the findings of other research studies on the roles, issues, and challenges of HR professionals and line managers in managing human resources shows that the contribution of HR professionals and line managers to business success consists in staffing the business with suitable employees (Horvathova et al., 2020), which is the most important HR issue of any business (Fajcikova et al., 2018). Only suitable employees meeting the business needs can achieve the required job performance (Khoreva & Wechtler, 2018) and thus the expected business performance (Zirar et al., 2021). Meeting this HR issue successfully, requires both the effective partnership between HR professionals and line managers (Wach et al., 2021)) as well as the efficient application of professional and personal skills related to human resource management (Simoes et al., 2019). The main HR issue of manufacturing and non-manufacturing businesses in the Czech Republic is a lack of qualified labour (Zabojnikova, 2020), which can be met by the advancement of process automation or labour migration (Posta, 2023).

In the context of the obtained findings and the findings of other research studies, the existing and potential HR issues, and challenges that businesses should deal with to meet the business needs consist of staffing the business with suitable employees or finding ways of replacing the missing employees, which may include:

- The development of the employer brand to market job opportunities and employer reputation and attract the attention of potential employees in the domestic and foreign labour markets.
- The introduction of digital and AI technologies to improve and automate HR processes from recruitment and selection through training and development to evaluation and compensation.
- The introduction of innovative organizational arrangements to provide employees with more autonomy and flexibility and improve their engagement and productivity.

Conclusions

The HR issues and challenges addressed by HR professionals and line managers of surveyed businesses in the Czech Republic were investigated to reveal which HR issues HR professionals and line managers face most often and which HR challenges they expect in the coming years.

The HR challenges that HR professionals and line managers in surveyed businesses expect most often include employer brand development, introduction of online HR tools, introduction of AI and automation in HR, HR data analysis, or improvement of HR processes. All these HR challenges are associated with the HR issue of staffing the business with suitable employees representing the most important HR issue of any business. The results revealed a dependence between realized and planned changes in the number of employees in surveyed businesses, including the number of HR professionals. This indicates that the realized and planned increase and decrease in the number of employees refers to the increase and decrease in the demand for goods and services of the business. The results revealed no significant differences in responses depending on the type (manufacturing and non-manufacturing businesses) and size (small, medium-sized, and large businesses) of surveyed businesses. To maintain high business performance, HR professionals and line managers need to concentrate on staffing the business with suitable employees or finding ways of replacing the missing employees, which may include the development of the employer brand, the introduction of digital and AI technologies, or the introduction of innovative organizational arrangements.

The findings and conclusions are limited by the small scope of the survey in terms of the territory of the Czech Republic and the sample of businesses included. However, the findings and conclusions contribute to the present theory and practice of human resource management by confirming the value of HR professionals and line managers in dealing with employee resourcing and meeting business needs. Originality can be seen in revealing different perspectives on existing and potential HR issues and challenges addressed by HR professionals and line managers in businesses of different types (manufacturing and non-manufacturing) and sizes (small, medium-sized, and large), although only within the Czech Republic. The findings and conclusions can be applied in the design of services delivered by HR professionals and line managers in different businesses. Further research following the findings and conclusions could be oriented on arrangements and technologies helping businesses to recruit suitable employees or replace missing employees.

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