

GENERATIONAL THEORIES AS A WAY OF UNDERSTANDING THE STRUCTURE OF WORK POTENTIAL

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Abstract: *The subject of workplace generations is to attract the interest in academic and management sectors. In a context of renewal of populations of working age, the study of the behavior and relationship to work of different generations becomes particularly interesting, sometimes raising the question of ways of organizing work. International competition, globalization, the financing of companies and technological changes have led to unprecedented social change and the emergence of new types of workplace behavior. Indeed, the cohabitation of generations at work places new difficulties for the management of human resources for several reasons: divergent values and expectations, intergenerational cohabitation is longer, organizational management methods are increasingly unpredictable and the professional trajectory of individuals is no longer as linear as before.*

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1. Introduction

Today, the theory of generations has gained great popularity in the field of marketing and organizational management. At numerous lectures, trainings and publications, we are encouraged to consider the particularities of "millennials" when working with staff and clients, when planning the educational process at universities and schools, when advertising and promoting goods. Sometimes the impression is made that the theory of generations today claims the status of a new management paradigm, in fact, under the banner of sociological knowledge.

Before proceeding to the verification of generational theories, it is necessary to consider more precisely the boundaries and the content of the very concept of "generation". First, it is important to separate his sociological interpretation from his biological and genetic counterpart, that is, from understanding generations as genealogical tribes within the same family. In addition, the concepts of generation and age should be clearly distinguished, especially when conducting field research and management practices. In this article, a simple generalization is made, from the position of most representatives of the theory of generations, age is a concept rather psychological and biological, reflecting the characteristics of the human psyche and physiology at different stages of his life, while the generation is a social concept. This is an important distinction, which shows that generational traits are always unique, while age traits are repeated in the lives of people of different generations.

K. Mannheim in his essay "The Problem of Generations" proposed a sociological approach to understanding generations, which served as the foundation for all further research on this topic. And although K. Mannheim's work was purely theoretical (it did not describe certain generations and did not analyze the conditions of their socialization), this approach was further developed by other authors.

The main source of the version of the theory of generations that is circulating in the modern scientific and quasi-scientific literature is the work of the Americans W. Strauss and N. Howe. It should be noted that the authors are not academic scientists. Thus, W. Strauss is known as one of the founders of the American satirical group "Capitol Steps", as well as the head of the international program of exchange of educational experience for teenagers passionate about theater and journalism. N. Howe is a Demographic Manager at Hedge Investment Company, President of Sakilium and Lifecourse. However, the lack of

authorship of academic circles did not prevent their creation from becoming one of the most cited versions of the theory of generations of our time.

2. Generation theories

Generational differences have been studied since the 1950s and have their early origins in sociology, especially in the work of Karl Mannheim (1893–1947). Mannheim (1970) emphasized the importance of generations as a guide for understanding the structure of social and intellectual movements. Mannheim identifies the main features of our generational society: the appearance and disappearance of cultural agents, the continuity of change, the importance of transmission and memory, etc., and calls for the study of each of his features. It also specifies how social groups contribute to defining generations; because it is often a concrete sub-group which, by formulating the issues facing their generation, strives to make it exist as such. The generation does not need the mutual knowledge of their members, nor a common will. We do not adhere to these formations: we come under them, and we cannot leave them, except when the situations they designate lose their relevance.

What appears in Mannheim is above all the genesis of generations: he insists on the "factors of socialization", the "structuring principles", these "founding events" capable of making a "generational whole" a form of "community of destiny".

It is a question of questioning both the limits and the perspectives opened up by "the problem of generations". Thus Mannheim insists more on the founding moment of a generation than on its mode of being - the *bahitus?* - and on the interaction of the generations in the social domain. In addition, beyond the "generational set", to push the analogy with class further, the "generational conflict" can be revisited in the light of the differentiated founding moments from which the generations are socialized.

Howe and Strauss's theory is based on the assertion that the key element in determining the time frame of any generation is the category of values.

The allocation of generational groups in this concept is due not only to the date of birth, but also to a set of similar core values formed under the influence of certain social, economic and political conditions in which a person grows up to about 12 years family education, characteristic of that period. Common value attitudes are those that explain the identity of the way of thinking, motives and behaviors of groups of people, representatives of the middle class belonging to the specific generation.

In general, the theory is based on the cyclical nature of the development of society, taking into account the regular alternation of the stages of ascension and crisis. At the same time, each generation is considered during the average life span of a human being (80-90 years), during which time, at one age or another, it goes through four different stages, alternating with a frequency of 20-25 years) - awakening, ascension (flowering), destruction and crisis. And with the same frequency, a new generation appears in the world, which is raised in a situation corresponding to a certain stage of the social environment, which means that it has a different set of value characteristics, different from the attitudes of previous generations. Moreover, it is these differences in values that make the next generation the driving force of society in the next stage of its development.

These four stages of the cycle, which determine the current type of social relations, are designated by analogy with the seasons - spring, summer, autumn and winter. In turn, generations are also divided into four value archetypes, corresponding to a certain stage and also being replaced successively throughout the historical development of society, they are:

- prophets (idealists) - optimists who aim to create a brighter future; they appear during the awakening period, ie in the "spring" stage;

- nomads (wanderers) - cynical reactionaries, disappointed by the realities of the existing system; increased during ascension (flowering) - "summer";
- heroes - self-confident and active fighters, who defend existing values; increased during the stage of destruction - "autumn";
- artists who are insecure and prefer to adapt to the existing system; children of the crisis period - the "winter" stage.

That is, depending on the basic scenery of the scene, these archetypes in their social orientation can be dominant (raised during the awakening and destruction - prophets and heroes) or recessive (raised during ups and downs and crises - nomads and artists).

Initially, the viability of this generational concept was confirmed by the authors on the example of American history. However, its validity in its original form for other regions has been shown to be questionable, despite the general universality of many key aspects of the theory. Of course, the process of forming the value characteristics of generations in the national context would be appropriate to consider only on the basis of specific historical characteristics and the regional socio-economic and political situation. In this sense, I adapted the theory of generations to the realities of the development of the Romanian society. Thus, based on the analysis of the main events in the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic space, five generations have been identified and characterized, currently living in Romania. (see table 1)

Table 1. Adapting the theory of Howe and Strauss generations to the Romanian context

Generation	Type/ Archetype	Impact of social events	Main collective characteristics
Silent generation (broken, lost) 1928–1945 77-94 years	Winter / artists	The bourgeoisie dominates society, economy, politics; period called La Belle Epoque; The onset of the Great Depression of 1929: declining production, mass unemployment (especially the United States; Germany), the triumph of Nazism; World War II (1939-1945), Soviet occupation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina on June 23, 1940.	Loyalty, obedience to rules, laws and orders, respect for position and status, obedience and sacrifice, honor, patience, temperance.
Baby boomers (1946-1964) 58 - 76 years	Spring / prophecies (idealists)	Beginning of the Cold War (1947); Communization of Romania; Nationalization of enterprises; Collectivization of agriculture (1949-1962); Anti-communist resistance.	Idealism, optimism, collectivism and team spirit, involvement, focus on results, interest in personal growth, reward and status, the cult of youth and health, emphasizing image and

			attractiveness, nostalgia and religiosity.
Generation X (13th generation, "permissive" generation, "latchkey generation") 1965-1980 42 – 57 years	Summer / nomads (wanderers)	The Western Sexual Revolution (changing family life and media, removing taboos on sex, drugs, and rock music); The Anti-Abortion Decree of 1966; The Prague Spring of 1968; 1972 Helsinki Conference; Total deficit; Energy crisis.	Preparing for change, individualism, choice, global awareness, technical literacy, lifelong learning, information, emotion seeking, pragmatism, survival and self-confidence, gender equality.
Generation Y (Millennials, Next, Zero) 1981-1996 26 - 41 years old	Autumn / heroes	The collapse of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, the collapse of the USSR; Reunification of Germany; The transition to a market economy Biotechnology, New epidemics, Military conflicts.	Preparation for change, civic duty and morality, responsibility, optimism, sociability and self-confidence, desire for diversity, flexible thinking, naivety and obedience, focus on achievement and immediate reward, devotion to fashion and brand awareness, high level of technical competence.
Generation Z (Alpha, Digital Generation, Generation XD) 1997-2012 10-25 years	Winter / painters	Globalization, Business Consolidation, World Economic Crisis, Information Society, Terrorist Attacks); Romania 's accession to the EU in 2007.	Rapid maturation, a high level of digital competence, communication in the virtual space.

For a broad comparative assessment of the main characteristics of the generations considered, one can use the parametric model of "Cultural Dimensions" by G. Hofstede, which aims to identify the socio-cultural characteristics of the representatives of different social groups. Although the Hofstede approach has been developed to understand the characteristics of people in different countries to build effective relationships when working together in international activities, this model is also applicable to the study of generational groups, as it is based on identifying differences in value attitudes. It allows you to understand and compare the main "standards" of human behavior by describing the following six parameters (Hofstede, 2011):

- Power distance - based on different attitudes towards the issue of inequality, which may be more or less acceptable in the eyes of representatives of a certain generation;

- Individualism / collectivism - means the level of relationship between the individual and the team, including the preparation of people for teamwork and the degree of integration in groups;
- Masculinity / femininity - describes the inclinations of the gender group associated with the emphasis on emotional roles: for example, “masculine” values correspond to a competitive-aggressive orientation (including confidence, ambition, desire for competitiveness and gains), and “feminine” values are characterized by moderation (importance of relationships, personal priorities and quality of life);
- Avoidance of uncertainty - indicates the level of tension in a situation of uncertainty, including the willingness of group members to take risks;
- Long-term / short-term orientation - determines the focus of people's attention on past, present or future events;
- Indulgence / restraint - shows the degree of self-control compared to focusing on meeting basic pleasure-related needs.

Table 2. Comparison of the value parameters of generations X, Y and Z

Generation	X	Y	Z
Parameters			
Power distance	Significant distance	Average distance	Short distance
Individualism / collectivism	Individualism	Collectivism	Individualism
Masculinity / femininity	More masculinity	Intermediate	More femininity
Avoidance of uncertainty	Low level	Intermediate	High level
Long-term / short-term orientation	Short-term orientation	Medium-term orientation	Long-term orientation
Indulgence / restraint	Restraint	Indulgence	Intermediate

The qualities listed above are recognized and used in the periodization of generational theory. It is easy to see that the features listed above are distinctive for each generation. However, some researchers have set out to identify the cyclicality of the repetition of generational features. Indeed, the contradictions between "parents and children", ie the first and second generation, mean the opposition of the priorities of the second with the priorities of the first. But the next (third) generation, rejecting the experience and qualities of the second generation, must inevitably regain the features of the first generation. Even the fact that the first generation is opposed to the second, as well as the third to the second, is their common feature. Therefore, generations must have common qualities.

In order to demonstrate the repeatability of the character traits of individuals of different generations as a regularity and as a result of social impact, Minakov (2014) compared the data curve on population dynamics by age groups in different years. It is important to note that the environment itself and, consequently, its impact on humans, also has repetitive properties and similarities. This applies to periods of crisis, stagnation, recession, followed by periods of global economic growth. The same is true for the time intervals between economic and political systems.

Consequently, the legitimacy of the periodization of generations is demonstrated on the basis of the frequency with which the dominant features appear. It is this periodization

that reflects, for example, the dominance of one's own interest over the community's interest in the modern world at the beginning of the 21st century, as it manifested itself at the beginning of the 20th century. This domination was followed by the global crises of 1929 and beyond (the Great Depression), as well as the global crisis of 2008. Such periods were followed by the domination of social priorities, integration and the creation of global integration unions.

Thus, the reappearance of dominant character traits displayed by generations has the same repetitiveness as the appearance of their unique traits. Among the recurring qualities and priorities: the pragmatism of the millennial generation and, on the contrary, the romance of baby boomers, personal and public interests. Among the unique ones is the use of innovative technologies of the time to achieve success.

3. Conclusion

It is very important to actively implement and introduce the knowledge we have gained from studying the theory of generations, then we can bring to a qualitatively new level of communication and relationships between managers and subordinates, between companies and customers, as well as to predict people's behavior more efficiently and effectively. In fact, there is nothing complicated about it, so this study and theory shows that we are still connected with previous generations, but it is possible that our conscience today does not accept this.

Even though theories of generation is clearly not enough to explain the age differences in people's axiological systems, however, the application of generational theory developments in the tasks of developing job potential is a good tool to consider, which corresponds to the main purpose - to provide the country with a workforce that has a set of such qualities and job opportunities necessary for the effective development of the national economy.

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