

Generational Conflicts in Organizations – Obstacle or Opportunity?

“I have no hope at all for the future of our country once our youth become the men of tomorrow. Our youth are intolerable, irresponsible, and appalling to look at.”

When do you think this was said – and who was being described this way?

The long-haired young people of the hippie generation?

The “smombies” that can be observed today, the absent-minded young people of our time who are fixated on their smartphones?



Manuel Hunold
Trainer, Consultant

While the quote sounds like descriptions we hear in the media these days about the Millennials and the GenZ generation, it is actually attributed to Aristotle, who lived from 384-322 BC. It can serve as food for thought on the topic of “generational conflicts” – all the more so since never before in the history of humanity have more generations met at the same time: The Silents, born 1925-1945, the Baby Boomers, born 1946-1964, Generation X, born 1965-1979, the Millennials, born 1980-1994, Gen Z, born 1995-2012, and the yet-to-be-named cohort born after 2012.

Managers are faced with the three challenges in getting younger generations on board:

- 1. Recruiting them**
- 2. Integrating them into the existing teams or re-forming teams with them**
- 3. Binding them to the company over the long term**

In this article we would like to give you approaches on how you meet these challenges.

It can help to recognize that, from a historical perspective, generational conflicts are completely normal and unavoidable. Generations are formed through shared formative events and, above all, through shared technological change.



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New generation cycles begin approximately every 20-25 years, but due to the rapid changes in generation-driving technology, these cycles are becoming shorter.

It is easy to lose touch with the topics, views, challenges and needs of other generations. Who among us does not remember hearing critical messages like the above quote from older people when they were young? Who among us might find ourselves adopting an attitude in which we criticize young people in a similar way?

Are we prepared to pay the price, however, that comes from treating other generations with a negative attitude?

The challenges mentioned above – recruiting, integrating, retaining – will not get any easier so long as such attitudes exist. We may well create the so-called Pygmalion Effect, the self-fulfilling prophecy: Younger people are regularly told in the media that there are a lot of challenges in the world but that they cannot solve them because they are not competent enough, not committed enough and not resilient enough. If these messages predominate, the danger is great that they ultimately become reality.

We would like to offer you some ideas that steer in a different direction and help you get the younger generation on board.

The be-all and end-all is the **basic attitude** already discussed. Only if we have fundamental trust in the abilities, potential and views of other people - despite all the mistakes and misunderstandings that arise - can we communicate with them on an equal footing.

It helps to take a moment to reflect and ask yourself: "What is my attitude towards different generations? What beliefs do I have?" You can actively question and differentiate between them: Where do these impressions come from? When and how often have you experienced them? What were the specific circumstances? Are there other, opposite experiences? Under what conditions have there been positive experiences?

In this way, you will develop a nuanced attitude that recognizes particularities but also possibilities and ways of dealing with these generations. Integrating young people, forming new teams with them and retaining them over the long run can only work on the basis of this attitude.

In addition to developing a mindset of this kind, it is helpful to internalize the **needs and interests** of the different generations. It is not always possible to satisfy these needs, but considering them helps develop a prudent approach when the effects of an unsatisfactory situation are clear. We would like to single out two driving needs of the younger generations:

- There is a strong need among young people for meaningful activity, an activity that provides benefit in some context that one can identify with. Companies which have a clearly formulated purpose and values that are congruent with that purpose, and which live these in a understandable way, and that consequently make a positive contribution to society as a whole, are very attractive for young people.
- A second need is the desire for future career perspectives and individual development opportunities. Even if "self-optimization" may be worth discussing, companies can start with this: What career paths are there? Is there an opportunity to realize your own ideas and development desires? Where can I support development, even if it is not immediately applicable for business purposes? Are there enough opportunities to openly give and receive feedback in order to grow together?

If we consider employer branding, a clear purpose and individual development perspectives make **recruiting** easier; lived values and honest creation of learning opportunities support **long-term loyalty**.

At this point we would like to share with you a creative method that kills several birds with one stone: **mutual mentoring**:

Based on common interests, two people in the company are paired together, one person with more experience, while the other is newer on board - a "match" between old and young, so to speak.

In contrast to classic, one-sided mentoring, both people learn from each other, and the role of the mentor changes. For example, the experienced over-50 manager can pass on a lot of experience to the young, 22-year-old talent. At the same time, the younger person can, for example, share their knowledge of using technology, since as a "digital native" they have no problems with it.

This type of cooperation offers the chance for a win/win situation for both and softens stereotypes. **Integration** can begin!

There are many other techniques and models we have already written about here or offer in our programs which support cooperation skills when dealing with younger generations. Getting away from stereotypical views and frustrating misunderstandings and using such techniques means working on our own attitudes and considering the impact on the value landscape of the younger generations.

Take on the challenge and seize the opportunity to attract, integrate and retain young talent in a turbulent job market!

The ARGOnauts will be happy to help you overcome the final hurdles!

ARGO has been working climate-neutral since 2022 – and we are proud of that!

In our work, we ARGOnauts know about the power of small but consistent, pragmatic steps, and this is how we approach this topic: We have developed a sustainability strategy based on three pillars:

1. Avoid CO2 emissions
2. Reduce CO2 emissions
3. Compensate CO2 emissions:

More on www.argo.at/en/category/co2-strategie/

STRATEGY
CO₂

This summer was a summer of celebrations: After the pandemic thwarted our plans in 2021 to celebrate our 25th anniversary, we made up for it twice this year:

First there was our celebration for all ARGOnauts and their families - and especially our jubilarians **Christa Slowak**, **Bea Kubalek** and **Carina Graf**! It was a lively get-together until late into the night. Insider tip: Never bet with **Dieter Bernold** about his walking speed...



On September 7th we celebrated with our companions in the Saturn Tower with the event title, **"An eventful journey into the future".**



It was a nice moment to pause together in these challenging times. The expansive view from the tower helped us to look at topics from a distance and with perspective.

Thanks to everyone who celebrated with us!

As our three speakers at the event, **Univ. Prof Thomas Bauer, SIZE founder Fritz Zehetner** and **Cord Prinzhorn MBA**, formulated it together: Drawing from one's own depth through self-reflection in order to design authentically and empathetically - this is how we understand the statement of the German philosopher Odo Marquard "The future needs origins"!

The ARGOnauts are looking forward to what we can achieve together in this spirit!

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