



**Four generations
on the shop floor**



Four generations on the shop floor.

We live in an ageing society. The age pyramid used to be shaped like a pyramid: a wide base and a narrow top. It now seems to be evolving to an upside-down pyramid: a narrow base with a widening top.

The number of people in their fifties is the biggest group. The number of people in their twenties is at a historic low. This demographic development is the result of the combined effect of different factors. First of all, birth rates are dropping year after year. Secondly, increasing life expectancy means a rising population of older people.

The shrinking group of people in their twenties and thirties results in a shortage on the labour market. We're at a tipping point. For the first time we will have 4 generations working side by side, we need everyone. Each generation with its own background, its own worldview, its own expectations. Today's situation is unique.

A first step in making generations work together successfully is getting to know them.

- Babyboomers: born between 1946 and 1960.
- Generation X: born between 1961 and 1980.
- Generation Y: born between 1981 and 1995.
- Generation Z: born after 1995.

Babyboomers.

The generation that emancipated society.

This generation grew up in safer conditions than their parents who lived through the war. They lived in a more prosperous period and had a much higher standard of living. Dire poverty and mass unemployment were a thing of the past. Surviving turned into living.

Jobs were relatively easy to find after school. There was space and time for self-development. Civil protest, hallucinogenic drugs, sexual revolution: babyboomers were at the cradle of emancipation and a new lifestyle.

Their competitiveness is typical and they dislike laziness on the shop floor. Generally speaking, this generation is seen as loyal, idealistic, optimistic and motivated. They want to keep their private and professional lives separate. For example, they don't like it when someone asks about their private life, and have relatively less need for new friendships.



Generation X.

The biggest group in our society.

The golden sixties were followed by a period of decline. The oil crises of 1973 and 1979 put the global economy under pressure. The young people who graduated, increasingly from university, found it harder than their parents to find a job. Companies and organisations were more rational in their approach to recruitment and applied a more economical payroll policy. This is why they are also referred to as the Lost Generation. We prefer a more positive alternative name: the Pragmatic Generation.

Their parents, who grew up in times of emancipation, gave them equal opportunities, ample opportunities, freedom, choices and a lot of encouragement. They were told that self-development has a key role in their lives. Work is important, but happiness is even more important.

This generation is often seen as being cynical and sceptical in relation to authority. They prefer a less formal working environment and have a weaker work ethic than previous generations. Generation X seeks more autonomy and independence and avoids unnecessary meetings and prefers technological interactions. They like an optimistic, experienced leader who encourages them and gives feedback.



Generation Y.

Born in a digital world, grew up with internet and social media.

This is the first generation to grow up with computers and mobiles. This is why they are also referred to as the Digital Generation. At a very young age, Generation Y was already using text messages and online social media such as Facebook and similar, now defunct, applications. The need to be constantly connected was taught to them from a very young age.

They are also sometimes referred to as Millennials. Unlike their parents they grew up in prosperous times. In a period also when people deliberately chose to have less children. Families became smaller. As a result, they received a lot of attention from their parents, everything was done for them, with the result that they like to test authority.

Because they grew up in times of major technological progress, authenticity is important to them. They want to work flexibly in attractive environments where they can be themselves and actively develop. They want to participate immediately and provide added value, for example through the use of social media.



Generation Z.

Grown up with a smartphone in one hand and a tablet in the other.

The first members of this generation have hit the shop floor today. These Digital Natives were born and grew up in a society where people have learned to use digital technologies to a greater or lesser extent.

Generation Z has grown up in a world of abundant information and the unlimited possibilities of the web. They are real citizens of the world who are constantly in connection through blogs, vlogs and all kinds of social media. Facebook, twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.: no platform can claim a monopoly position. It is sometimes said that it is a generation with a short attention span. Because they zap through life and get bored quickly. They are masters at navigating the Internet, filtering the relevant information in no time at all. The disadvantage may be that the information is processed superficially.

Generally, Generation Z comprises hard workers with a great sense of responsibility and environmental awareness. Sustainability is very important for this generation. This goes deeper than the urge for pure authenticity. If something is not good for the world, it quickly loses its meaning. It is in this conscious and responsible attitude that their upbringing comes through. After all, their parents belong to the Pragmatic Generation. They raise their children very consciously and want to do everything right.



We need everyone.

The Office of the Future

Generations often have other expectations of their workplace. This may result in miscommunication, lower productivity and conflicts. This is why a good understanding between generations is very important.

To make this possible, we have to think differently. We need to eliminate any prejudices we might have of younger and older generations working together. For the 4 generations to work together successfully, a change is needed that ensures that we see each other's strengths instead of the shortcomings, that we learn from each other.

HP outlined this change in the Office of the Future, which focuses on creating a hybrid working environment zooming in on the employees. An environment where every employee – of any generation – feels at home and can work safely and productively anywhere. The hybrid working environment therefore encompasses different workplaces: the office, the home office and anywhere.

The office

The office is conceived differently in the hybrid working environment, with modular spaces supporting Activity Based Working. It also serves as a meeting place. We no longer go to the office every day, but as a function of our tasks. We go to the office to deliberate, for example, or to do some brainstorming...

The home office

Experience has taught us that we can be just as productive at home. Precisely because we can concentrate well at home, the home office is the ideal place for focus tasks. The benefits of working from home, such as no more being stuck in traffic jams or a better work-life balance, are a bonus and make for happier employees.

Anywhere

Employees have no time to lose these days. They want to make the most of it, wherever they are. Thus, they benefit from having the best technologies at their disposal: they can set up their assignments on the train, at a customer's or even at the sports club while waiting for their offspring.

In this sense, the hybrid working environment is a place that resonates with every generation's rhythm and work ethics, a place where four generations can work together side by side, anywhere, safely and productively, with the most appropriate technologies.