

## **How do people from different generations approach work? Implications for workspace design**

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### **Abstract**

Economic performance is a concept that extends beyond the profit figure of a company. The knowledge society needs, not in spite but because of technology, a broader and integrated view of people in an array defined by technology, culture and space.

The present paper makes a connection between the macro level - the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) defined by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, officially approved document by the United Nations in 2015 and the micro level – that represents the meaning of work for the motivational theory. The authors performed a field study, “Generations@Work”, started in early 2019 until April 2020, intended to find solutions for the multi-generational environments of workers, with focus on the integration of new generations in the workforce, such as the digital natives.

The methodology involved a project in two stages, with 44 participants involved, from different generations and backgrounds. Divided into 7 multi-generational teams at first, they were directed into several common tasks, activities and questionnaires to find solutions for cooperation and identification of motivational differences. In the second stage, two teams elaborated work solutions and spatial strategies for multiple generations before and during the pandemic time. General results emphasized that generational integration is based on the importance of skill and experience sharing and different cultural identities, finally leading us to observe changes in motivational patterns. Based on Generations at Work research conclusions the article has a chapter about a possible sustainable development model.

**Keywords:** Workplace Management, wellbeing, community, meaning of work, questionnaire, workplace design

## **1. Introduction**

During the last decades, the workforce has witnessed changes as never before, regarding the nature of work, work-related behaviors and consequently, the perception of knowledge workers as multi-dimensional entities. The action of work can no longer be separated from the people who perform it, nor from technology, individual and company culture or the workplace. In addition, the meaning of work becomes the real motivator for employees, engaging creativity, commitment and a sense of belonging to a purpose and community.

The paper follows essential guidelines established by the United Nations in 2015, regarding the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) defined by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development), where one can find the principles of "Good Health and Wellbeing" in third position, respectively, "Decent Work and Economic Growth" in the eight position. Wellbeing is the experience of health, happiness, and prosperity, it involves a state of optimal mental health, elevated life satisfaction and a sense of meaning. These aspects are reflected differently along generations in the knowledge society, but considering the diversity of a workplace where different generations cohabitate, wellbeing becomes a complex matter for companies, researchers and designers alike. Studies have shown tendencies in the average digital natives' generations towards lower levels of work motivation, changes regarding the meaning of work, increased percentage of single-person households, lower level of happiness, although younger people benefit from higher psychological and physical comfort than older generations (Lan, 2019). These contemporary symptoms have recently been accentuated by the Coronavirus sanitary, economic and social crisis, as alienation has forced rapid shifts in everyday life, with obvious psychological implications world-wide. The meaning of work becomes questionable, following the economic and social lockdown in the context of individual and planetary health, as the already sensitive limit between personal and professional life has faded.

Companies are currently in an urgency to seek resiliency in order to mitigate the impact on business and people. As stated in the recent report undergone by the strategy firm "Board of innovation", a so-called "low touch economy" (De Ridder and De Mey, 2020) is a possible solution for crossing this period of uncertainty, involving substantial investment in research and innovation.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is among the key elements of this strategy, whose accelerated development will replace routine jobs, as well as some direct interaction jobs in light of the coronavirus pandemic, the above-stated situation will worsen if new strategies of work adaptation are not taken into account. Traditional jobs were not sufficiently fulfilling to the knowledge society, but in this new context, knowledge fields seem to thrive due to the constant need for resilience and innovation, thus, organizations are to develop meaningful ways to retain valuable employees, foster a sense of belonging to a community and a greater purpose, eloquent to the individual and the group.

## **2. Towards a new model of sustainable development**

### **2.1. The pandemic, lockdown effects and sustainable development**

The global economic setback is an obvious vicious cycle: customers stop buying, companies reduce selling, producers stop production, workers are left jobless and with limited funds. The negative effects are witnessed at all levels except for several fields such as medical or information technology. Among the positive effects that have become obvious for companies around the world during the lockdown are those related to pollution and cost reduction due to an abrupt interruption of air and personal automobile transportation. Companies show a tendency to reduce rented office surfaces together with infrastructure costs, while hiring remote workers when possible. This allows an important virtual expansion of the workforce worldwide.

Even more obvious and decisive are the effects on employees who have gone from office to home office in a matter of weeks: the absence of long commutes, apparently more personal time, no disturbance from colleagues, deceptive freedom without administrative control (although activity tracking systems were put in place in applications like Zoom, WebEx).

Negative effects are also to be highlighted, for, in the long term, the burnout effect is inevitable since the limit between personal and professional life fades, due to the overlap of work and relaxation periods (Giurge and Bohns, 2020). Household distractions such as children, pets, other activities have proven to reduce productivity and focus massively. Remote work involves greater responsibility from employees, especially from younger generations that do not yet own enough practice in work management and need the guidance of their older peers. While office spaces invest massively on technological infrastructure for impeccable connections throughout the headquarters, suddenly this had to be replicated at smaller scales in many homes, whether the space and setting allowed it or not.

## **2.2. The future of work and sustainable development**

Looking at the United Nations Sustainable Goals, the pandemic crisis considered the potential COVID-19 health threat as a primary concern, focusing all global actions towards a solution. Several immediate consequences were detrimental to the first sustainable goals (No Poverty and Zero Hunger), as these social categories are struggling to survive economically during the restrictions. Wellbeing, a criteria of equal importance to health, has been affected in the short and medium interval of time. Goals as Climate Actions, Life on Land and Bellow Water are better recovering following the pandemic global lockdown measures.

In the first stage, the middle class was protected through a debatable experiment, but in a short time, the solution might be the Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI). Many authors consider that GMI is a suitable tool to reduce the global negative impact of humans, with a more Responsible Production and Consumption process. This might lead to a positive effect on certain social and professional categories, as they might find another meaning of life that was lost in the turmoil of a busy lifestyle. Unfortunately, this will not be a solution on a large scale, as, many people will need a sufficiently paid job, that is appreciated and rewarded by the community.

The pandemic situation led to an acceleration of technological progress of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and with a lot of debates about the “Future of Work” as a consequence. Juval Harari has argued even before the pandemic that "the technological revolution could soon take billions out of the labour market and create a new and huge useless class, generating social and political transformations that no existing ideology knows how to manage"(Harari, 2018). History shows that past industrial or technological revolutions have always seemed to threaten certain occupations, but never as pronounced as the present situation, when AI is a powerful competitor against human cognitive potential. "People have two types of abilities - physical and cognitive. In the past, machines competed with people only in terms of physical abilities, while people kept an enormous advantage over machines - knowledge.” (Harari, 2018) But Artificial Intelligence has now the potential to surpass man in terms of cognitive abilities, so the possibility of completely replacing man in many fields is situated on a horizon of only a few decades. "We do not know of a third field of activity - beyond the physical and the cognitive - in which people will always keep a secure advantage."(Harari, 2018)

The COVID-19 lockdown has brought sudden transformations that were expected in the far future. One can say that human nature is extremely well rooted in a clear set of coordinates that

allows a natural sense of resilience, although we are currently witnessing major changes on individual and collective levels. Community involvement will be a solution to what many motivational authors already call "living / working" for a purpose higher/beyond oneself. The cultural identity within the office has given shape to a common purpose and voice to protect peoples` interests. Moreover, human beings are social by nature, as history shows that communities have gathered for the human kind to thrive for millennia.

The authors` opinion leans towards a potential sustainable model that involves GMI plus a revalue of Sports Competitions, Arts and Cultural Programs, Social - Community Programs, Environment and Biodiversity actions, Gardening and other activities, combined with a social recognition plan. Employment might drastically shift towards a decreased working schedule per week and per year, allowing the mix of activities rather than a single occupational lifestyle.

Regarding the described perspective, new native digital generations are more prepared, showing relaxed approach towards traditional work models. They have already established personal and common work strategies while using many digital tools along the way. They are already used to switching between remote offices and regular workplaces, so the transition is easier, as they prefer independence and development of personal schedules. An important challenge in the future is a balance between Reduced Inequality and shared prosperity.

### **2.3. New ways of work. The viability of the “Screen New Deal”**

The trends that are currently imposed are not new; the novelty is actually the speed, depth and impact these have on economy, culture and society. The global crisis of COVID-19 has suddenly transformed the way tens of millions of people work, forcing them to work from home.

A Gallup study (Brenan, 2020) conducted in early April 2020 shows a strong tendency toward expanding remote work, with 62% of American employees declaring they worked from home during the period March 30 – April 2, up from 31% between March 13-15. Domains that preferred remote work are technology, insurance, media and professional services, while at the opposite pole are education and retail.

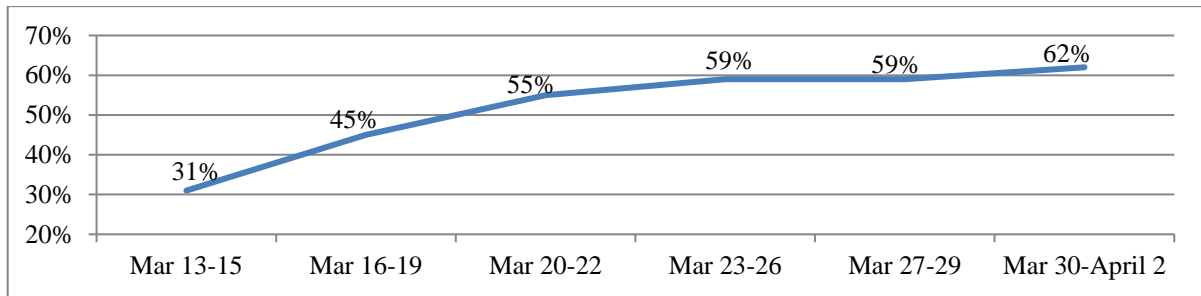


Fig. 1: Percentage of US workers who have worked remotely

Of the respondents, 59% would prefer to continue working remotely after the end of the restrictions, while 41% would prefer to return to the office in pre-crisis conditions. However, an interesting phenomenon is worth mentioning: the percentage of those who would prefer to continue working from home has dropped after almost a month of experimentation. Thus, after reaching 62% at the end of March, it decreased after only 3 weeks to just over 50% (Harter, 2020).

In a study undergone in 2018 in a Romanian branch of an Austrian Insurance Company with the results presented during of 2018 IFM Vienna Congress, we observed that from 35 interviews with middle management people from different departments, 24 considered 2 days / week work from home as a positive measure and 3 of them 1 day / week as a positive measure. All respondents have considered that only remote work is not suitable, affirming that the majority had personal experiences with working from home (Capotescu, 2018). At the same IFM Congress the results of “Office Flexibility” have been presented, based on a survey of 94 interviews with office workers from different companies. Results were in the same direction, 95% considering that working from home part time is possible, but working exclusively from home was considered suitable only by 17%, while 45% considered it entirely unsuitable (Capotescu, 2018)

The comparative analysis of office work versus remote work shows that each of the two options has advantages and disadvantages. However, the situation in the business environment shows that employees have a preference for remote work. A study conducted in 2017 tried to quantify this preference and concluded that on average an employee is willing to accept a salary 8% lower for the opportunity to work from home (Mas and Pallais, 2017).

There are already many presumptions regarding “the end” of office work. Office work will transform - as duration, continuity, flexibility - being defined by a combination of physical and virtual meetings, but direct human contact will remain. Man has, as an individual, clear

psychological needs for communication, relationships and belonging to the community, a fact recognized by most theories of motivation. Organizations are, in turn, defined by their organizational culture. Peter Thiel, founder of PayPal, writes in the book *Zero to one*, “no company has a culture; every company is a culture” (Thiel, 2014). It cannot survive only by remote electronic interaction. Direct interaction is indispensable. Technology will help regain the workplace. On one side, the use of digital and collaborative tools allows business continuity. On the other side, the use of contactless devices such as electronic access, automatic door opening or infrared sensor gel dispenser, provides security in the work environment. Reduction of the occupancy capacity of workplaces to guarantee employees distance, coworking spaces or flex offices are going to play an essential role in delocalization of employees as one of the benefits they offer is short commuting from workers home to the office.

Work styles will be in many cases the choice of the employer rather than the employee, establishing unique strategies for entire teams or companies (Choudhury et.al., 2019). Based on company dynamics, economical and infrastructure capacities, remuneration will be configured depending on more factors than before: individual or group strategies of home office, on site or mixed, depending on a general strategy with some degree of controlled flexibility. Too much freedom leads to lack of coordination between team members, especially in the case of younger generations who are in need of a structured schedule at the beginning of their careers.

### **3. “Generations at Work” research**

#### **3.1 The purpose**

The research was developed between February 2019 - April 2020 and was structured in two sections, firstly focusing on soft tools identification for a better intergenerational cooperation and secondly with focus on suitable workspace definition for a better collaboration between generations.

The aim of the “Generations at Work” research stands in the identification of challenges and solutions for multi-generational work environments, focusing on the digital natives` integration, even more eloquent in the light of current changes that were also reflected in participants` collaboration patterns, as the results will show. The ultimate goal was to figure out ways to use the insights from technology, culture and space to improve both efficiency and the meaning of work. “Generations at Work” is an initiative, managed by the Ergonomics and Workplace Management (ErgoWork) Society from Romania, a multigenerational and multidisciplinary

platform, focused on finding relevant meaning for humans, in general, aiming to develop better workplace concepts, in particular.

### **3.2. First stage: soft tools**

#### **3.2.1 Methodology**

The first stage of the research (Capotescu et.al, 2019), took place between 22<sup>nd</sup> February- 28<sup>th</sup> June 2019 and aimed to identify work (or learning) motivation and group dynamics during the research process. There were 7 multi-generational teams of 6-7 members who were to engage in interviews with people outside the research using a set of surveys. A final number of 111 participants answered the research with the following levels of experience: 20 high school students, 44 university students, 9 employees with up to 3 years of professional experience, 15 employees with 3-15 years professional experience and 23 employees with over 15 years of professional experience.

During the evaluation and team building process, we used three soft tools:

- First, there was a Self-Reflection Questionnaire, based on the subject's thinking about different aspects from their own life. It was not used for statistical analysis.
- The second one was a questionnaire used to make a quantitative analysis of the different motivators and also a tool to build a personality map, or group map function by task: <https://forms.gle/gwWSnh7vhDEzvYdC8> . With this tool, the communication was guided in one direction and the introspective and extrospective behavior in another direction according to the answers gathered from the questionnaire. This tool was used to build both a personal behavioral map and a team behavioral map.
- The last tool used, was the "5 Whys Analysis", applied for two topics: Why we should work and Why we shouldn't work. The 5 Whys technique involves reflecting on essential causes of problems, by asking "Why?" five times in order to find potential solutions. That tool was also applied individually and as a debate topic for the team.

#### **3.2.2 Research results and discussions**

After the statistical data processing, the results were structured by criteria to highlight work motivation (Table 1).



Tab 1: Motivation Topics General Top 10 Hierarchy and Each Working Experience Hierarchy (HS. – high school group, US. – university student group, EL3 – employees less of 3 years group, E3-15 – employees 3-15 years' experience group, EM15.V. – employees more of 15 years' experience group)

General Hierarchy			Each Category Hierarchy				
No	Code	Topic description	HS	US	EL3	E3-15	EM15
1	M10	To live by practicing personal passions	2	1	5	3	8
2	M3	The opportunity to be among people with whom I feel good, have fun, that are my friends	1	2	9	4	5
3	M16	An organization and / or workplace position in which I feel I can reach my professional vocation and which makes me feel useful.	4	8	1	5	2
4	M4	The opportunity to be among people from whom I can broaden my horizon of knowledge, skills, and abilities.	5	3	6	1	1
5	M1	Reward money or school grades	3	4	4	7	4
6	M2	Comfort and physical work environment (the building and spaces of the company / faculty / school with the facilities that include cleanliness, security, food facilities, socializing and relaxing spaces, fitness, gaming, ergonomics workstations, training spaces, interior design, natural and artificial lighting, green spaces, etc.).	6	5	10	8	3
7	M15	An organization, workplace that gives me the opportunity to learn and do diverse things that I feel are allowing me to grow.	8	11	2	2	11
8	M13	A psychosocial work / study environment that facilitates and encourages the fulfillment of my personal work / learning tasks.	14	18	3	6	12
9	M18	An organization / school where to have a life balance between personal time and work time.	12	6	8	9	15
10	M8	Opportunity to be in a team / organization where I feel appreciated and feel that my worth and contributions are recognized	9	12	7	11	6

Looking in both top 5 and top 10 general hierarchies and each category hierarchy, we have surprisingly found more similarities than differences. However, in a more detailed analysis we can identify several differences. For High School (HS) and University Students (US), the main priorities involve diversity and flexibility, such as M9 and M12 topics, and also a relaxed behavior, as M5 topic shows. For experienced employees, the organization and team capacity become important, as it helps them to implement their ideas / projects – the M7 item, and also a job that avoids a sedentary life – the M11 topic. A remarkable issue is the topic M1 – “Reward money or school grades” that is seen only in 5<sup>th</sup> position (general hierarchy), a rather unexpected result coming from all age groups.

The general behavior map for the entire respondents group is presented in Figure 2 as a comparison, with a reference system based on equal values between “tasks behavior orientation” and “relaxed behavior orientation” on one side, and equal values between introverted behavior and extroverted behavior on the other side.

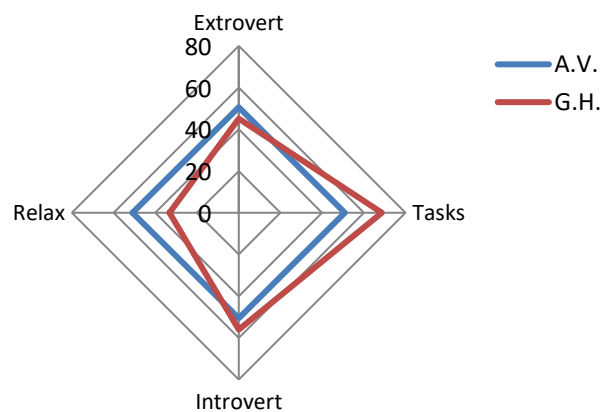


Fig. 2: General Map Behavior of the Respondents Group (A.V. - average values, equals values between tasks and relax behavior and between introvert and extrovert values; G.H. –general values obtained for the entire group of respondents)

The predominance of task behavior orientation is a result of two major influence factors: all survey participants have high work performance behavior, regardless of work experience, while people with less work orientation found it difficult to remain engaged in the research process. Due to this argument, we assume the “money or school grades reward” becomes less important than freedom and meaning of work. „The social desirability bias” is mostly associated with answers regarding task orientation and personal development, than with answers regarding relaxed orientation and „socio-economical recognition“. Predominance of introverted behavior is associated with task completion and increased focus. A higher tendency towards relaxation was observed in the younger age groups like high school (107%) and University Students

(124%), similar to extroverted behavior for High School Students (107%) and University Students (101%).<sup>1</sup>

The first stage of the project “Generations at Work” shows that work motivators are not very different across generations but some empirical observations revealed higher orientation for a relaxed behavior in the students groups. At the same time, the research proves the possibility of gathering multiple generations to pursue a certain goal, even without a material reward motivation.

### **3.3. Second stage: Multigenerational workspace definition and the working process**

#### **3.3.1 Methodology**

The aim for the second stage of the “Generations at Work” research consisted in a practical exercise of designing an Innovation Hub for 49 researchers (7 teams of 7 members), as an alibi for monitoring the entire design process, interaction between team members and the end results. The second stage of the research was conducted between November 17, 2019 - April 02, 2020. Two multi-generational teams of 5 and 7 members composed of at least one student, one person with less than 15 years of work experience, and one person with higher experience. Each team included at least one architect or interior designer. An additional topic was to analyze the internal dynamic of the group and to identify future soft solutions for a better intergenerational cooperation.

The design process consisted in a number of meetings (8) - online and offline – at a distance in time of 1 to 2 weeks and independent work of each member between them. The most interesting insights came from the design exercises done for different types of office spaces by the sub-teams with homogeneous age category. The differences were quite striking. The final say on the design decision was made by consensus trying to include elements that were required by both “Young age group” and “Experienced employees”. Regarding age group preferences in workspace design, the team made a qualitative criteria analysis on three aspects: (1) a general overview of the space design, (2) accent/focus (given by area size and positioning) and (3) organizational culture (reflected/ induced).

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<sup>1</sup>The percentages reflect the ratio between the value for the age group and the average for the total number of respondents (n.a.)

### 3.3.2 Research results and discussions

There were significant differences in the two teams` approach towards the theme, in terms of time management, interaction, task distribution, even though the end results (actual projects) didn`t show many differences in general, but rather at smaller scales. These differences and similarities will be further described for each team.

#### First team (AHMRA)

The first team was characterized by an average age of 33 years, with more members representing the Generation Z and without Baby Boomer Generation. The team participated at 9 meetings, of which 5 face-to-face and 4 online, that led to a strong connection between the members in a short period of time. A common language, regarding basic design concepts, was defined at first, an important step due to significant differences in age and experience in the field of office design.

For each space design proposal by the team members, 3 elements were described/analyzed: overview, accent (given by area size and positioning) and organizational culture (reflected/induced), as seen in Table 2.

Tab 2: Criteria analysis regarding age group preferences in the design of the workspace

	Young age group	Experienced employees
<b>Overview</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- space is less structured</li> <li>- there are 2 important areas: work area and informal/ relaxation/ social area</li> <li>- the work area is located in the center of the space and it is multifunctional (it allows both individual and team work)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- space is more structured</li> <li>- there are 4 areas: individual work area, team work area, informal/ social area, dedicated team coordinator area</li> <li>- there is no main work area, but an even distribution throughout the space</li> <li>- individual work space and the teamwork space are distinct</li> </ul>
<b>Accent (given by area size and positioning):</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- on teamwork: the common space is located in the center</li> <li>- on relaxation / socialization / informal work (large size of this space)</li> <li>- on personal needs (there is a relatively large space for assigned storage for documents and belongings)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- on the classic workspaces (individual offices for concentrated work and "meetings" table for presentations / training and teamwork)</li> <li>- reduced on socialization / informal work (small size of this space, was finally introduced in a hurry)</li> <li>- there is no significant differentiation between the types of workspaces (they are positioned on the sides of the space)</li> <li>- reduced on personal needs (small space for the cabinet for personal documents/ things)</li> <li>- on the coordinator - the coordinator space is generous (as size and endowments)</li> </ul>

<b>Organizational Culture (reflected/induced)</b>	– egalitarian - equality between all the team members (there is no special sitting place different from the others)	– hierarchy - there is a special area dedicated to the team coordinator (there is an inclination towards the hierarchy)
	– relationship oriented	– task oriented
	– simplicity and flexibility (in arrangement)	– organization and efficiency (in arrangement)
	– more informal atmosphere/ work	– more formal atmosphere / work

Among the applied methodologies inside the team was that each person defined his or her own specific space preferences, allowing a clear analysis of age group differences and similarities. We could thus identify some age-related predilections, many being practical confirmations of the theoretical study results. As seen in Figure 3 (right image), a teamwork studio has resulted differently when designed by students (upper room), compared to a solution designed by experienced employees (lower room). The integration of exercises for each type of workspace conducted finally to the entire space design plan (Figure 3).

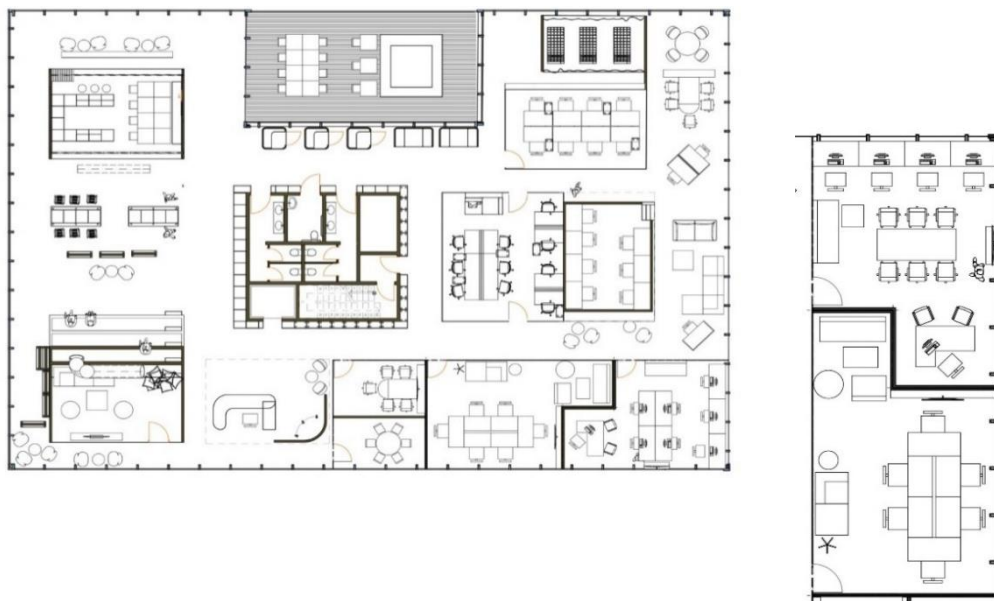


Fig. 3. Left: final design imagined by the team; Right: studio dedicated to a team – upper space (designed by young age group), lower space (designed by older age groups)

### Second team (VIFARI)

The second team was characterized by an average age of approximately 38 years, with more members representing the Millennial Generation and Baby Boomer Generation. Consequently, the group structure led to different decisions in collaborations strategies and methodologies

comparing to the first team. A strong participation was noticed from the 20-30 years old age group, as they were more numerous and are clearly influenced by contemporary design trends. The team meetings were dynamic and creative, based on spontaneous decisions and activities. Thus, a step-by-step way of thinking and collaboration was adopted, in order to firstly define what the team needs in terms of functionality and potential activities. Each team member expressed his/her opinions and desires regarding the project, in brainstorming type meetings that were concluded with valuable information, further transposed into sketches and the final floorplan (Figure 4).

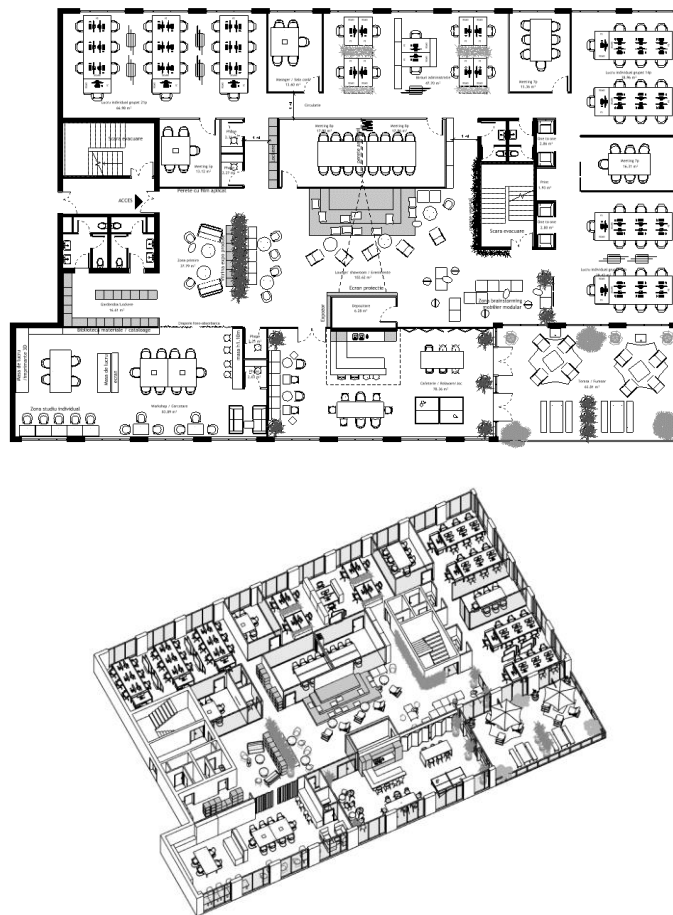


Fig. 4. Final design imagined by the team: plan and axonometry

The design strategy defined as “from inside to outside” allows a simple and exact way of defining well-proportioned surfaces, without expanding or downsizing any space. The functional scheme permitted multiple modifications and alterations, in a dynamic manner, before establishing a final blueprint of the proposed floor plan.

Comparing to the first sketches to the end result, the team members opted for more interleaved closed spaces such as meeting areas of various capacities and also the enclosure of the kitchen/common area, that was an important aspect from acoustical and olfactory reasons. The core of the layout is the presentation and showroom space, in the scope of creating an attractive point to gather all occupants. Individual and administrative desks are organized on the perimeter, far from the noisy activities and close to natural light. The teams are separated by enclosed meeting rooms and phone booths, allowing quick gatherings, project work and discussions without altering the general concentration atmosphere.

The second team showed a greater inclination towards design tendencies such as biophilia, greenery and comfort, due to the presence of the Millennial generation in a higher proportion. Flexibility was promoted and agreed upon by all team members and certain technical details (furniture, economical strategies and acoustics) were expressed by the more experienced members.

### **3.4. Third stage: Survey on intergenerational cooperation during the “Generations at work” research**

#### **3.4.1 Methodology**

Apart from the actual projects, the authors conducted an online questionnaire to understand the teamwork in an intergenerational context during the development of the projects. Although the survey does not hold statistical relevance, being answered only by the two teams-members, it offers important qualitative insights into the work process from an intergenerational point of view. Each respondent could choose more than one response (usually 3 or 4) and each response counted as unit in the graphic. The questions were elaborated during the space design period, as an ongoing process based on the behavioral observation regarding differences in the communication and work approach.

The information collected and analyzed included:

- favorite remote communication channels;
- differences in task approaching and completion;
- methods of activity planning and organizing;
- positive and negative aspects identified in the collaboration with other generations;
- proposals to improve future intergenerational cooperations;
- suggestions of spatial design that resulted from intergenerational collaboration.

### 3.4.2 Research results and discussions

The results, that are mainly qualitative are presented as follows. As seen in Figure 4, the survey shows that there are significant differences in the means of remote communication: young people use mainly WhatsApp and Hangouts, employees with less than 15 years of working experience use e-mail, WhatsApp and Google drive, and employees over 15 years of working experience use e-mail and Skype.

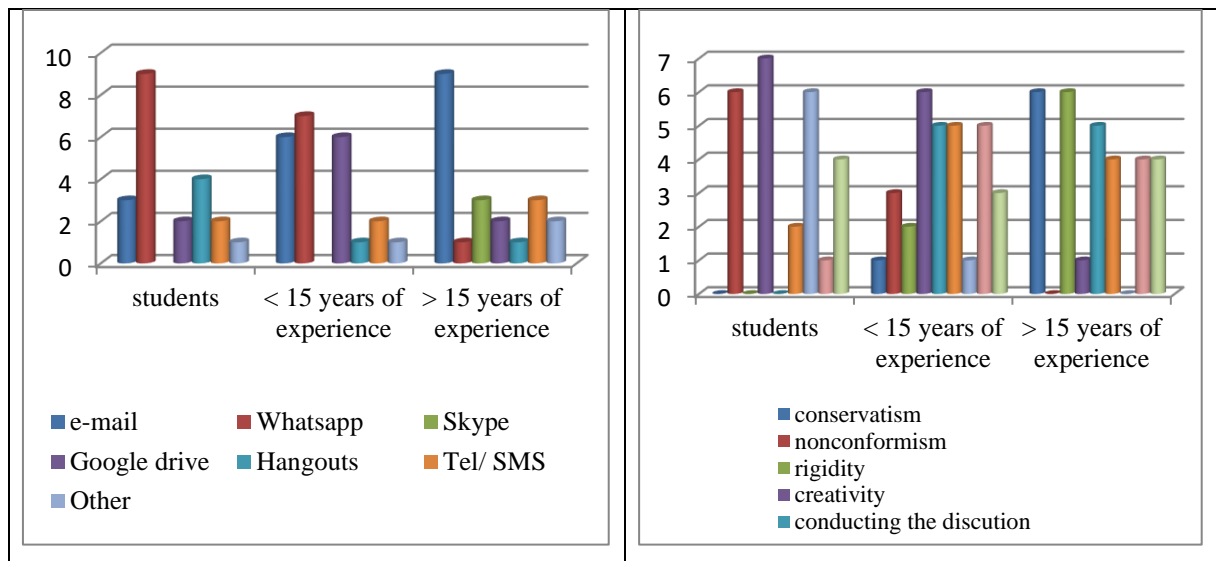


Fig. 5: The favorite means of remote communication | The style of tasks approach

Several differences have been observed concerning task fulfillment (Figure 5): students' style is characterized by nonconformism, creativity and fun, employees with less than 15 years of experience are seen as creative, flexible but with a tendency to conduct the discussion and impose their own point of view, and employees with over 15 years of experience are seen as conservative, rigid and also with a tendency to conduct the discussion.

The analysis shows consistent differences between the way people from different generations plan and organize their activities. Thus, the young generation (students) is characterized by relaxation and unstructured thinking, while employees with less than 15 years of experience and over 15 years of experience are seen to plan and organize in a responsible, consistent and focused way.

Work in intergenerational teams was also investigated in this survey, regarding the perceived positive and negative aspects of such collaboration typologies both before and during the lockdown. Broader work experience has helped implement certain behavioral habits such as structured schedules, motivation and involvement.



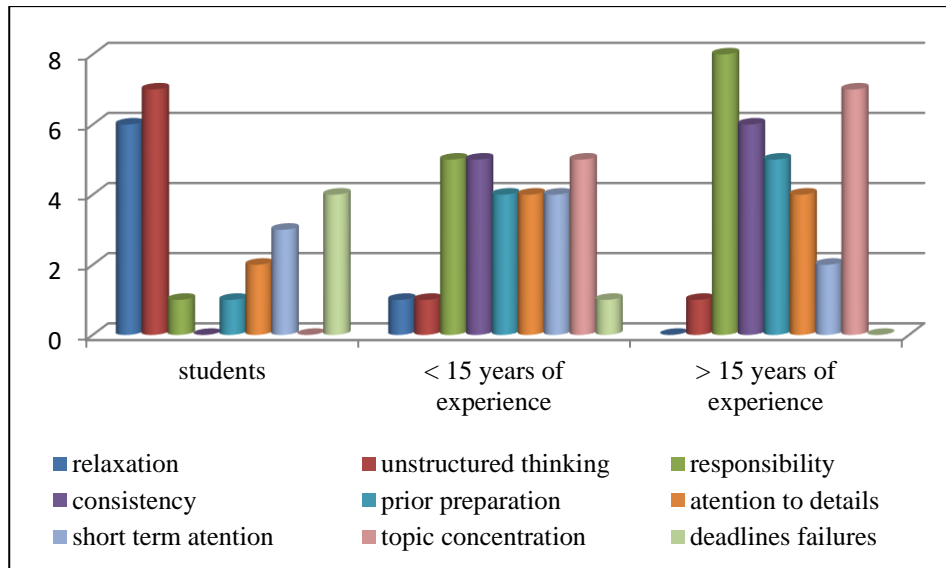


Fig. 6: The modalities of planning and organizing the activities/ tasks

Focused work and concentration on longer tasks are important assets of these generations, comparing to younger ones that tend to get distracted easily. Experienced workers are used to clear spatial and temporal differentiations between home and work and are not as well acclimatized to fast technological changes. Decisions regarding work-life balance, establishing a new work routine and keeping connections alive by online methods were aspects that took longer to implement in older generations than other active generations, but were mandatory for belonging to a community. Thus, they were able to discover new, more simple means and tools of communication while exchanging with other generations.

As far as the Millennial generation, they have already established personal and common work strategies while using many digital tools along the way. They were already used to switching between home office and regular workplace, so the transition was easier, as they prefer independence and development of personal hobbies. The high advantage of Generation Z and Y is the good manipulation and quick adaptation to technological changes, but intergenerational collaboration is key for all generations to thrive, exchanging skills and habits.

Digital Natives needed a more structured schedule, as they come from the academic environment with strict predefined schedules and do not yet have the discipline to focus and engage in activities on their own. They seemed to lack short-term attention and were last to take the initiative or commit to certain ideas. Although they are not as attached to habits and space, sudden freedom and uncertainty of the pandemic context, were felt as negatives in younger generations, although remote work seems modern and interesting at first.

Resulting from the research, there are several directions to be considered for intergenerational collaboration improvement: fostering collaboration relationships helps exercising communication skills, both online and face-to-face, well-scheduled meetings are important for the success of any project, task assignment planned by members of more than one generation is relevant for diversity and strengthens the collaboration. Taking time to clarify misunderstandings and different points of view is inherent in any cooperation, especially intergenerational where there are differences that need to be considered. Encouraging and supporting young people to take initiative can lead to interesting results, but in the same time the presence of one or more people to assign clear tasks, motivate and organize is important. Flexibility is oftentimes beneficial to creativity, an asset that older generations can experiment.

### **3.5. Generations at Work research and the COVID-19 pandemic**

An important part of the second stage of Generations at Work research was developed during the pandemic lockdown. The positive outcome of the research resides in its initiation during normal conditions of face-to-face collaboration, thus leaving the final part of the project, presentations, evaluations and awards to take place in a virtual context. Collaboration strategies shifted from face-to-face interaction to digital means of communication, showing clear differences of adaptation depending on generation. This meant use of technology to get the work done, but in conditions of common knowledge developed before, during face-to-face meetings, when the research participants shared time, explored their habits together, emotions and thoughts creating thus a common thinking framework.

Regarding the first stage results of the Generations at Work research, we observed that almost all the important work motivations are social, as people need a sense of belonging to the group to share feelings and recognize a personal and group evolution when being part of the team. An important factor to build this culture and social life is the physical space and direct human interaction. All those aspects are also reflected on the workspaces proposals from the second stage of Generations at Work research.

## **4. Conclusions**

The socio-economic environment is rapidly changing and so is the way people relate to work. Nature of work changes so economic and management theories need to adapt towards the worker. As we enter more into the knowledge society the worker needs to be seen as a multi-dimensional entity, understanding his level of technology mastering, his cultural and educational background, the space where he works and last but not least what the meaning of

work represents to him. Work cannot be viewed as separated from the people who perform it, for, nowadays, attitudes as initiative, creativity and engagement demand more than a pay check, as the meaning of work becomes the main and real motivator.

The development of Facility Management in the direction of the workplace management is a consequence of the organizations needs to develop all necessary tools, as “New Ways of Working” and the entire support facilities, to enhance the organization’s sense of community and culture, but also to increase innovation, creativity and initiative.

On the other hand, for human beings, having a meaning of life and work is also essential. In the context of AI development this question is a central philosophic question, but also a key question in the “Future of Work” field of thinking. What seems a certainty in the future is that, for the humankind, the need of the community feeling and meaning of life will be found on the long term in the professional work organizations.

The intergenerational cooperation and work will increase in importance and an appropriate approach is indispensable. Our findings suggest that there are significant differences on the design people with different age and work experience prefer.

Thus, young people proposed a more unstructured/ informal/ egalitarian space, teamwork/ relaxation/ socialization oriented, defined by simplicity and flexibility while experienced employees proposed a more structured/ formal/ hierarchical space, oriented toward individual work/ organized teamwork, defined by organization and efficiency.

These qualitative findings were reinforced by the responses of the team members to the questionnaire. Thus, it is obvious, regarding the means of remote communication, the increasing use of email and a decreasing use of WhatsApp the older the respondents and a tendency toward conservatism, rigidity and the desire to conduct the discussion of the older comparing to nonconformism, creativity and fun of the younger (students). About the modalities of planning and organizing the activities/ tasks we conclude that young people are relaxed, unstructured, and often fail to meet a deadline while the experienced employees are more responsible, consistent and topic focused.

The main idea of the conclusion is not to put the generations on opposite positions but to try to benefit from the strengths of each generation by allocating tasks and structure the work process, and as a consequence the office design, in a way that facilitate an effective interaction and cooperation between them.

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