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THE CHALLENGES OF GENERATIONAL CHANGE

DEMIDOV Cătălin Ciprian

Ministry of National Defence, Romania

Abstract:

Generations are identified by looking for cohort groups of this length that share three criteria. In the Romanian army this field of research is an interdisciplinary one and includes aspects from sociology, psychology, anthropology and economics. Uncertainty and volatility have since become the key words in the security field. The recruitment approach, career opportunities and people management, among other things, need to be adjusted.

Key words: *generations, cohorts, change, challenges, Strauss–Howe, Generation X, Millennials.*

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to initiate a field of research in human resource management. The reason for doing this is given by the changes in society, as well as in the Romanian army.

I will start in this approach beginning with the theoretical aspects, continuing with approaches from the western world and then with aspects specific to the Romanian society and the Romanian army.

2. The Strauss–Howe generational theory

The Strauss–Howe generational theory, also known as the Fourth Turning theory, describes a theorized recurring generation cycle in American history and global history. It was devised by William Strauss and Neil Howe. According to the theory, historical events are associated with recurring generational personas (archetypes). Each generational persona unleashes a new era (called a turning) lasting around 20–25 years, in which a new social, political, and economic climate exists. They are part of a larger cyclical saeculum (a long human life, which usually spans between 80 and 100 years, although some saecula have lasted longer). The theory states that a crisis recurs in history after every saeculum, which is followed by a recovery (high). During this recovery, institutions and communitarian values are strong. Ultimately, succeeding generational archetypes attack and weaken institutions in the name of autonomy and individualism, which eventually creates a tumultuous political environment that ripens conditions for another crisis.

Strauss and Howe define a social generation as the aggregate of all people born over a span of roughly twenty years or about the length of one phase of life: childhood, young adulthood, midlife, and old age. Generations are identified (from first birthyear to last) by looking for cohort groups of this length that share three criteria. First, members of a generation share what the authors call an age location in history: they encounter key historical events and social trends while occupying the same phase of life. In this view, members of a generation are shaped in lasting ways by the eras they encounter as children and young adults and they share certain common beliefs and behaviors. Aware of the experiences and traits that they share with their peers, members of a generation would also share a sense of common perceived membership in that generation.



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Strauss and Howe describe a four-stage cycle of social eras which they call turnings. The turnings include: The High, The Awakening, The Unraveling and The Crisis.

High. According to Strauss and Howe, the First Turning is a High, which occurs after a Crisis. During The High, institutions are strong and individualism is weak. Society is confident about where it wants to go collectively, though those outside the majoritarian center often feel stifled by the conformity.

Awakening. According to the theory, the Second Turning is an Awakening. This is an era when institutions are attacked in the name of personal and spiritual autonomy. Just when society is reaching its high tide of public progress, people suddenly tire of social discipline and want to recapture a sense of self-awareness, spirituality and personal authenticity. Young activists look back at the previous High as an era of cultural and spiritual poverty.

Unraveling. According to Strauss and Howe, the Third Turning is an Unraveling. The mood of this era they say is in many ways the opposite of a High: institutions are weak and distrusted, while individualism is strong and flourishing. The authors say Highs come after Crises, when society wants to coalesce and build and avoid the death and destruction of the previous crisis. Unravelings come after Awakenings, when society wants to atomize and enjoy.

Crisis. According to the authors, the Fourth Turning is a Crisis. This is an era of destruction, often involving war or revolution, in which institutional life is destroyed and rebuilt in response to a perceived threat to the nation's survival. After the crisis, civic authority revives, cultural expression redirects towards community purpose, and people begin to locate themselves as members of a larger group. [3]

The authors describe each turning as lasting about 20–22 years. Four turnings make up a full cycle of about 80 to 90 years, which the authors term a saeculum, after the Latin word meaning both „a long human life” and „a natural century”.

Each of the four turnings has a distinct mood that recurs every saeculum. Strauss and Howe describe these turnings as the seasons of history. At one extreme is the Awakening, which is analogous to summer, and at the other extreme is the Crisis, which is analogous to winter. The turnings in between are transitional seasons, the High and the Unraveling are similar to spring and autumn, respectively. Strauss and Howe have discussed 26 theorized turnings over 7 saecula in Anglo-American history, from the year 1435 through today, as you see in figure 1.



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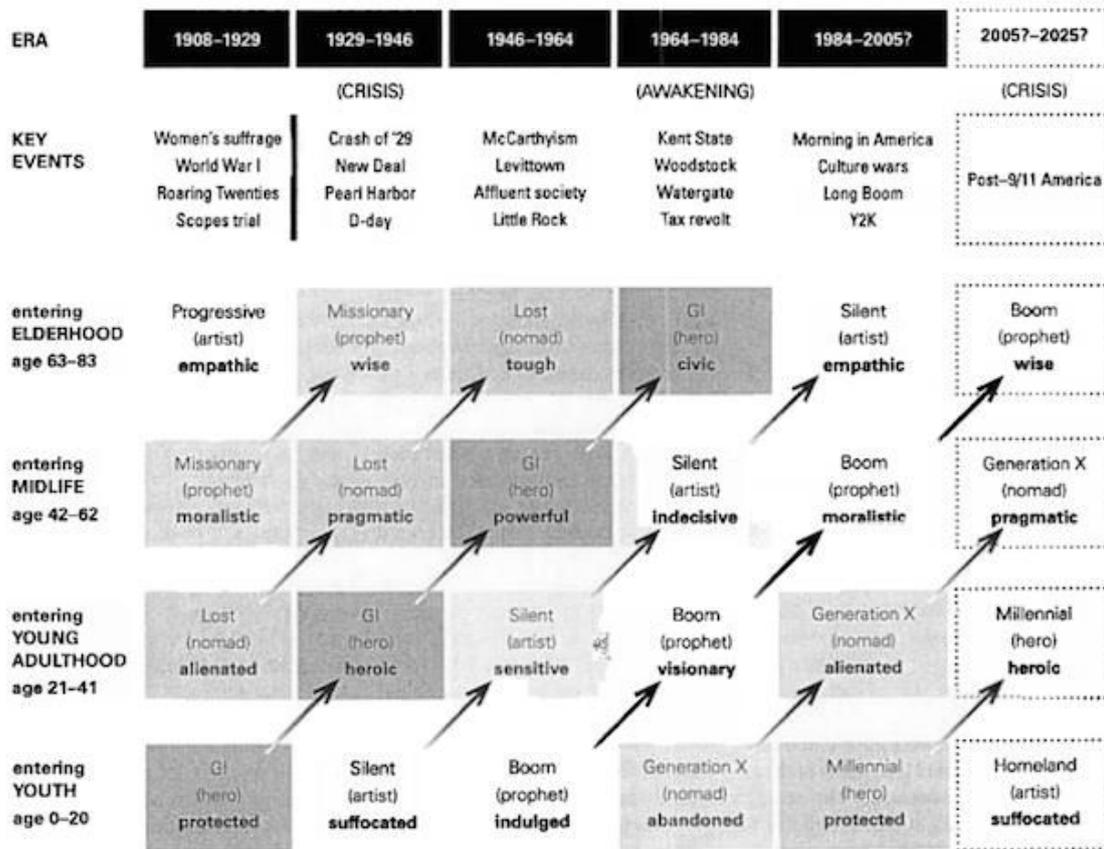


Fig.1

During Crises, great peril provokes a societal consensus, an ethic of personal sacrifice, and strong institutional order. During Awakenings, an ethic of individualism emerges, and the institutional order is attacked by new social ideals and spiritual agendas. According to the authors, about every eighty to ninety years—the length of a long human life—a national Crisis occurs in American society. Roughly halfway to the next Crisis, a cultural Awakening occurs.

The authors say two different types of eras and two formative age locations associated with them (childhood and young adulthood) produce four generational archetypes that repeat sequentially, in rhythm with the cycle of Crises and Awakenings. They refer to these four archetypes as Idealist, Reactive, Civic, and Adaptive. In *The Fourth Turning* (1997) they change this terminology to Prophet, Nomad, Hero, and Artist. They say the generations in each archetype not only share a similar age-location in history, they also share some basic attitudes towards family, risk, culture and values, and civic engagement. In essence, generations shaped by similar early-life experiences develop similar collective personas and follow similar life-trajectories. [4]

To date, Strauss and Howe have described 25 generations in Anglo-American history, each with a corresponding archetype. In figure 2, you can see the illustration of this idea.



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Howe/Strauss Generational Archetypes and Generations

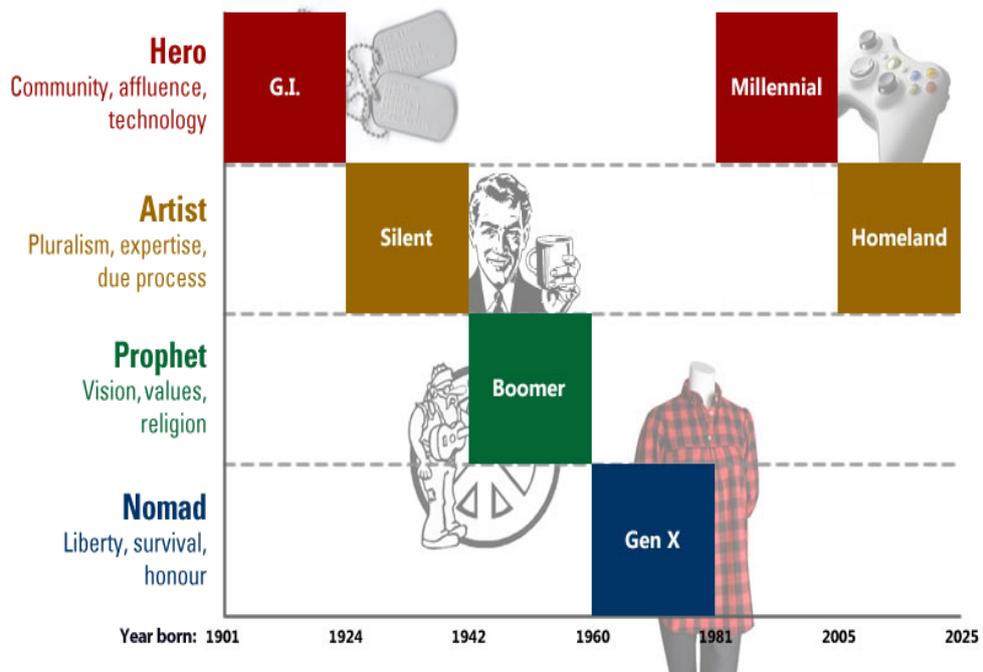


Fig.2

Prophet (Idealist) generations enter childhood during a High, a time of rejuvenated community life and consensus around a new societal order. Prophets grow up as the increasingly indulged children of this post-Crisis era, come of age as self-absorbed young crusaders of an Awakening, focus on morals and principles in midlife, and emerge as elders guiding another Crisis. Examples: Baby Boomers.

Nomad (Reactive) generations enter childhood during an Awakening, a time of social ideals and spiritual agendas, when young adults are passionately attacking the established institutional order. Nomads grow up as under-protected children during this Awakening, come of age as alienated, post-Awakening young adults, become pragmatic midlife leaders during a Crisis, and age into resilient post-Crisis elders. Examples: Generation X

Hero (Civic) generations enter childhood during an Unraveling, a time of individual pragmatism, self-reliance, and laissez-faire. Heroes grow up as increasingly protected post-Awakening children, come of age as team-oriented young optimists during a Crisis, emerge as energetic, overly-confident midlifers, and age into politically powerful elders attacked by another Awakening. Examples: G.I. Generation, Millennials

Artist (Adaptive) generations enter childhood during a Crisis, a time when great dangers cut down social and political complexity in favor of public consensus, aggressive institutions, and an ethic of personal sacrifice. Artists grow up overprotected by adults preoccupied with the Crisis, come of age as the socialized and conformist young adults of a post-Crisis world, break out as process-oriented midlife leaders during an Awakening, and age into thoughtful post-Awakening elders. Examples: Silent Generation, Zoomer Generation.

Summarizing these notions, the following can be stated:



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- An average life is 80 years, and consists of four periods of ~20–22 years
 - Childhood → Young adult → Midlife → Elderhood
- A generation is an aggregate of people born every ~20–22 years
 - Baby Boomers → Gen X → Millennials → Homelanders
- Each generation experiences four turnings every ~80–90 years
 - High → Awakening → Unraveling → Crisis
- A generation is considered dominant or recessive according to the turning experienced as young adults. But as a youth generation comes of age and defines its collective persona an opposing generational archetype is in its midlife peak of power.
 - Dominant: independent behavior and attitudes in defining an era;
 - Recessive: dependent role in defining an era.
- Dominant Generations
 - Prophet: Awakening as young adults. Institutions are attacked in the name of personal and spiritual autonomy;
 - Hero: Crisis as young adults. Institutional life is destroyed and rebuilt in response to a perceived threat to the nation's survival.
- Recessive Generations
 - Nomad: Unraveling as young adults. Institutions are weak and distrusted, individualism is strong and flourishing;
 - Artist: High, when they become young adults. Institutions are strong and individualism is weak.

3. Generational aspects in the U.S. military

There are currently four different generations of officers within the Army and these generations arrange themselves across the Army's hierarchical rank structure because of „time-in-grade” requirements for promotions.

Baby Boomers: current 3 and 4 Star Generals (tail end of the generation). The Baby Boomer officers were born from 1943 to 1960. These officers were company grade officers during the Vietnam Conflict, field grade officers during the Cold War and Desert Storm, and generals during Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. As children, Boomers received the windfall of economic growth in America. While the radio and television brought the horrors of the Korean Conflict to their living room, their parents shielded them from the reality of this war. As Boomers became teenagers, the nation emerged into an age of optimism. They watched as their parents placed men on the moon and witnessed women and African Americans fight for equality. Early-stage Boomer lieutenants left to fight a war in Vietnam and came back disgruntled and unappreciated. They returned to a nation that cursed their service and devalued their participation in an unpopular war. As field grades in the post-Vietnam era, they witnessed their Army bottom out on readiness and give way to the arrival of zero defects, careerism, and new heights of micromanagement into the military. However, with the election of President Reagan, this same army rapidly grew and modernized. Vowing to learn from the failures of Vietnam, early Boomer colonels and brigadier generals helped write Air Land Battle Doctrine. At the start of Operation Enduring Freedom, senior Boomer officers had the ability to see the fight unfold and talk to the tactical officer on the ground. Often their



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tendency to micromanage proved too great, and junior Generation X officers rebuked their tinkering at the tactical level.

Generation X: LTC-2 Star General. Generation X officers were born between 1961 and 1980. While some of these officers served in Operation Desert Storm, most were company grade officers during Bosnia. As children, Generation X felt the impact of a divided Boomer household. Due to an increase in divorce rates and dual working parents, they were generally independent and self-supporting early in life, also known as latchkey kids. As teenagers, they experienced social failure on multiple fronts between Presidential resignation, economic crisis, and the Challenger Explosion. When Generation X officers entered the Army, a majority of them did not share the same work ethic as their Boomer field grade officers. These junior officers often failed to adapt to the 24/7 work attitude of their leaders, as many felt the Army was simply a way to make a living and not a lifestyle. In the mid-1990's, their perspective was reinforced when a downsizing Army laid off many Boomer and Generation X officers. As the Army entered direct combat engagements in Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Iraq, their experience and commitment to the organization grew. Their independent personality thrived as they controlled large sections of the battlefield and even served as interim mayors of towns. However, as Generation X officers occupy the senior ranks, they struggle with how to connect to the Millennial junior field grade and senior company grade officers that work for them.

Millennial: CPT- LTC. Millennial officers were born between 1981 and 1993. These officers were lieutenants and captains in Iraq and Afghanistan and sustained a bulk of their leadership development during these conflicts. As children, Millennials experienced a resurgent focus on family values and a rebuking of the divorce culture their parents endured. A key moment of their cultural development was the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center Towers, as many were teenagers during this attack. They watched the terror live on television and then witnessed America and the World band together to take action. While in high school and college, Millennials experienced the rapid growth of the internet, instant reporting, and the birth of social media. When they entered the military, these officers found an Army that was fighting two protracted wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. As currently serving company commanders and junior field grades, Millennials have a direct impact on the newest generation of officers.

iGeneration: Cadets-1LT. A typical iGeneration officer was born after 1993 and started to arrive at U.S. Army units in 2015. When these officers were born, home-based internet became mainstream and connected people through email, chat rooms, and websites. This invention influenced the way they learned, processed information, and even interacted. As an adolescent, they watched the 9/11 attacks unfold live on television and struggled to understand the fear and uncertainty that gripped the nation in the aftermath. As teenagers, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sites were mainstay hangouts among their friends. Due to witnessing a terror attack, financial ruin, and world power plays, they are naturally guarded and more pessimistic about America and the future. With the invention of smartphones, information was instantly available and they had the ability to answer any question, interact online with any number of their social circles, and enjoy constant streaming access to world news and current events. With this capability also emerged an environment where companies were marketing to them around the clock. Technology is second hand to these officers and through social networking or data mining, they possess an innate ability to find or crowdsource information.

Leaders should understand that these generational differences impact those around them. Over the last seven generations of officers, these differences often perpetuated a cycle of



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misunderstanding. Recognizing how these misunderstandings can occur, officers should be aware of personality traits and how leaders and subordinates will interpret these traits. Leaders should also recognize that a new generation of lieutenants is arriving in the Army. These officers are technology-based and have a vast social network that can span various nations and cultures, granting them a unique perspective into the strategic environment. They possess an unparalleled ability to virtually mine the internet but lack the critical analysis to understand it. With proper self-awareness within the officer corps, leaders can effectively develop programs for this emerging generation of lieutenants. Senior officers should develop more programs that develop the critical thinking and analytical abilities of these officers while leveraging their strength and understanding of technology and social networking. By better understanding the Army's generational divides, officers can ensure that the Army remains on the leading edge of technology, leadership and war-fighting capability. [2]

4. The generations in Romanian society

In Romania there is a gap between the western generations and the moment of their appearance in our country. This is caused by the time and economic-political differences specific to our area.

The baby boomers. Is the generation of those born between 1945 and 1960's. They are now the oldest generation in the workforce. This generation did not have access to social networks until they managed to become parents or even grandparents and build their own careers. There is still a reluctance of the Boomers generation to fully embrace online platforms just like the younger generations. This is especially true when it comes to mixing their personal and professional lives. 82% of Boomers who use the internet have at least one account on a social network. Their main platform is Facebook, where they perfectly share their work and personal life.

They use social media for communication and research and have stopped at this point. In the case of Baby Boomers, they are the least likely to access social media from a smartphone or make a purchase through an application.

Generation X. Years of birth: 1966-1976. Maturity: 1988-1994. Generation X in Romania appeared later than in the West, starting in the late 1960's, and lasted until the early eighties. The upper limit of the interval indicates the last promotions of students who integrated into socialist mass organizations (at least the Homeland Falcons, in the case of preschoolers, followed by the National Council of Pioneers of Romania and the Communist Youth Union - finally entered the born earlier than 1976). It is said that they are the lost generation, exposed to divorces and extended kindergartens, children who did not have very healthy relationships with their parents. The generation with the lowest turnout became the most passive in relation to current events. It is characterized by skepticism, increased selfishness and questionable tastes (caused by mass passivity). Relationships between their parents and their relationships have greatly influenced their own families.

Generation X has most of the previous intellectuals and this has led to the formation of families with more responsibility, with attention to the relationship with the spouse, so that children do not repeat their own painful experiences, but also to better financial planning.

In Romania, the generation is better known as the „decree” of children born since the summer of 1967, when the fertility rate in Romania exploded from 1.9 to 3.7 children/ woman,



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following the policy of banning abortions. This generation filled kindergartens, general schools a few years later and then fought for high school and college places. There are young people from the Revolution and those who grew up in communism, transition and worry about capitalism. This generation has faced the biggest changes in mentality and habits. The American version also applies: being many, it is difficult to take care of everyone, always in competition, always in resource planning.

Generation Y, Echo Boomers or Millennials. Years of birth: 1977-1995. Maturity: 1998-2006. They are sophisticated, technology-oriented, immune to most marketing and sales techniques because they were exposed to them from an early age and evolved with them, of the most educated generations, with increased self-confidence, goal-oriented, creative. They grew up under the care of their parents, in social groups accessible in number and had hobbies.

They are more segmented in terms of audience by TV, radio or the Internet. They are not very loyal to brands and the Internet has made them very flexible in terms of fashion, the way they communicate and the choices they make. Few things surprise them and they quickly adapt to the changes around them, whether they are mental or contextual. They are a challenge for marketers and the most desired segment of the population. They are more united as a generation and more willing to make their voices heard (see elections, protests, etc.). The main things to highlight about these three generations in Romania are expressed in table 1.

	Baby boomers	Generation X	Generation Y
Values	personal development, teamwork, personal gratification	self-confidence, autonomy, independence, entrepreneurship, diversity	honesty, diversity, integrity, responsibility
Characteristics	individualistic, competitive, materialistic, focused on relationships, respect for superior positions	comfortable with change, cynical, pragmatic, flexible, multifunctional, creative, resourceful, autonomous	sociable, confident, optimistic, cooperative, educated, technological, multifunctional, practical
Workplace preferences	focused at work, living at work, safety, strength, career progress	focused on career, work-life balance, informal approach	flexible job, career focused, mentoring

Table 1

Generation Z. Years of birth: 1995-2012. Maturity: 2013-2020. Not much is known about this generation yet, but for sure they are very diverse. The high level of technology to which they are exposed will generate more and more personalized education and more interesting opportunities. Generation Z teenagers grow up in a diverse, highly technological environment and will be much more flexible even than Generation Y, being the first to be born in a digital environment and grew up online. They do not believe in ideals and reject the promises of a perfect life, but prefer realistic communication that comes to their aid. Look for



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personalization and independence, unlike Generation Y which sought impeccable mentoring and services. The brands that want to address them must go from digital adaptation to digital native and are the ones who will prefer an indie brand to a traditional/experienced brand.

5. Romanian army generations

From the beginning it must be specified that in the Romanian army this field of research is an interdisciplinary one and includes aspects from sociology, psychology, anthropology and economics.

At this moment the personnel structure by categories, sex and generational cohorts is the one included in figure 3.

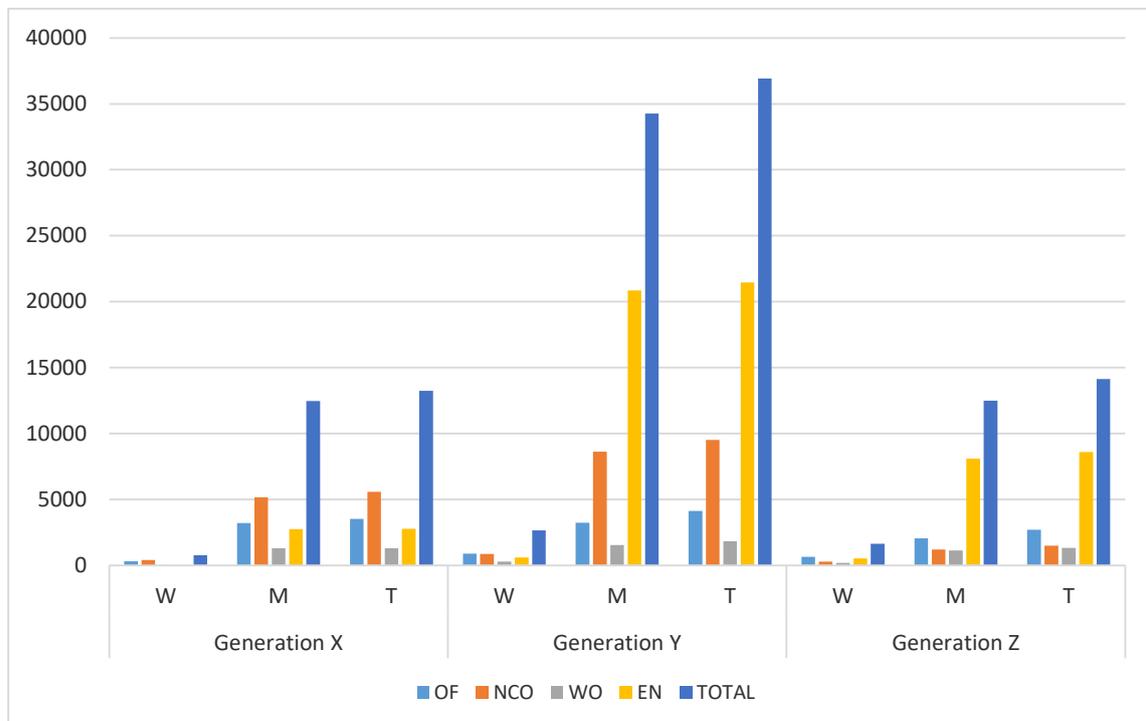


Fig.3

It is observed that generation Y represents the most numerous component (57,5%), and generation Z (21,9%) begins to equal generation X (20.6%). Also the enlisted from generations X are the fewest, which is caused by the late introduction of this category.

At the same time, although those from generation X were outnumbered by the others, they represent the category with the most important functions, the one that can create a certain inertia in adapting the system to the new challenges.

The recruitment approach, career opportunities and people management, among other things, need to be adjusted. Here are some ideas:



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- We will need to modernize our talent management systems – creating an Office of People Analytics, resuming exit surveys, and launching LinkedIn-style pilot programs to help match service members with their next assignments;
- We will need to focus more on family retention for military personnel – promoting that critical objective by helping them balance their commitments to the force and their families by expanding maternity and paternity leave, extending childcare hours on bases, and giving families the possibility of some geographic flexibility in return for additional service commitments;
- We will need to adapt communication approaches to the opportunities offered by technology and the resources used by the millennials and generation Z;
- We will need a more demand-driven talent management system rather than supply-driven personnel management; this requires more flexibility and a permanent scanning of the possible needs;
- We will need to give more geographical stability in exchange for additional service commitments;
- We will need to create the possibility for granting study credits in order to allow our service people to steer additional education and training more independently;
- We will need to strengthen the organizational culture of our units;
- We will need to strengthen the physical and mental resilience of our service people. [5]
- The application of modern educational methods, such as reversed teaching [6], is crucial for motivating the young generation to learn.

6. Conclusion

In order to be effective and to provide meaningful change, any proposed mechanism for revealing and recording junior officer talents would have to have a series of specific outputs leading to desired outcomes. First, in an effort to better understand generational and cultural perceptions of subordinate leaders, the Army ought to provide educational opportunities to officers at the battalion and brigade levels on leadership theory and transformational leadership practices. Second, the Army should implement flexible developmental programs at the battalion and brigade levels, with specific identified outputs, that require senior officers to counsel, coach, and professionally develop junior officers. Third and simultaneous to the implementation of flexible development programs, the Army should require each responsible senior officer to compile and report specific talent data gleaned throughout the development process to the Army's HRC. [7]

The young men and women who recently joined the armed forces or who are coming into the military today all share two common characteristics: (1) they know that they are going to be sent to a foreign conflict and (2) they are part of the so-called generation Z, the boys and girls born between 1990 and 2000.

Unlike their predecessors, the members of this generational cohort have not consciously been confronted in their lives with the Cold War: a period of latent threat, but mainly a stable and predictable security situation. Uncertainty and volatility have since become the key words in the security field. Hence the quasi-certainty that almost every one of the youngest generation of soldiers will participate in foreign missions.



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Our armed forces were and continue to stay instruments of conflict prevention in peacetime and controlled violence in war. Their culture must reflect the unique demands these places on their members. Few businesses call on their employees to give up their lives if required to get the job done. Partly as a result, military service is often viewed as a calling, not simply as a job or even a career. Only a select few can be expected to answer that call for a career or a lifetime. But they need to be the right few. And we need to do everything to attract those people, to retain them and to provide them the right level of well-being. [8]

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