

DR. AART BONTEKONING

THE POWER OF GENERATIONS

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HOW TO KEEP AGING ORGANIZATIONS UP TO DATE

THE DUTCH CASE

DR. AART BONTEKONING

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Preface

About 85 % of Dutch and other European organizations are aging. Over the next two decades, the number of people in the oldest Dutch working generations will exceed those in the youngest ones. Many other European countries are facing the same effects, risks and opportunities of an aging working population. In the Netherlands, aging will hit its peak at most companies around 2035.

Aging organizations are at risk of falling behind in keeping their organizational culture up to date. This insidious process of getting out of date is creeping in and undermining organizations' ability to survive in a changing world. From a generational perspective, surprising new ways can be found to keep an aging organization (culture and processes) in good social, economic and ecological health.

I do not deny the importance of looking at individuals; that perspective allows us to identify unique talents and find ways to support these talents in order to stimulate individual development. The development of a vital and healthy culture depends on the evolutionary power of successive generations. The intensity and quality of interaction between generations generate the speed of the evolution of the culture of which they are a part.

Working with the generation approach in an organization or another social system asks for a willingness to change the culture from the inside out, from within the professional heart of an organization. This evolutionary process is driven by a coaching leadership style.

The generation approach is also connected to sustainability. The focus is on stimulating every generation to do what creates most energy (at work). When people work in a way that energizes them, they learn to recharge their 'human battery' all the time. This will extend the durability of their 'human battery' and of their working life.

This book is based on more than twenty years of ongoing scientific generational research at many Dutch companies in all kind of industries, and on some research in other European countries and in Brazil.

I owe many thanks to all those companies in many different industries where I was allowed to implement my generational approach. I thank all the participants in generation projects, master classes and workshops for their feedback and support.

I would also like to thank Lotte Visser for her support in translation, Audry Bron for her supervision, and Jessica Mills, Robbert van Kempen, David Ward and Suzanne Merritt for reading the final versions of this book and for their feedback.

Haaren, November 11th, 2017.

Aart Bontekoning

1 Down to the heart of the matter

People who live or work together consciously and unconsciously create their own unique culture. They interactively select social patterns such as ways to communicate, collaborate, lead, learn, think, deal with emotions, diversity and so on, which ultimately become distinguishing features of their community. To keep their culture in good health, these patterns need to be updated from time to time. Like food, social patterns that people create and repeat have an expiration date. In order to keep their culture in good social, economic and ecological health, outdated social patterns need to be replaced by up-to-date ones. The longer you leave a social pattern unchanged after its expiration date, the more human vitality and human energy will drain away, and the more life threatening it will become for the working community. Aging organizations are at high risk at this point. Successive generations and the interaction between older and younger generations play a key role in these evolutionary culture-updating processes. The motor of culture redesign processes is the survival instinct of every working

generation. Many aging organizations and institutions in the Netherlands and across Europe need the evolutionary power of new generations more than ever to stay up to date in a fast-changing world. Note that I used the word 'new' instead of 'young!' The demographic reality in today's aging Europe is that our economic, social and ecological future depends on the youthfulness of all (working) generations. Generations are made up of peers who were born within a time span of fifteen years, and generations succeed each other in the various life phases (fig. 1). The potential 'culture-updating power' lies in the differences between one generation and the next in a life phase. Each new generation, from the oldest to the youngest, has the potential power to contribute to the culture's updating processes. Each generation is by nature, consciously or unconsciously, focused on renewing/regenerating another part of their surrounding culture. This power can be found in the area that generates most of their energy (at work). You have to look for it to see it; you have to DO it to experience the real effects at work.

New generations in next phase of life > their energizers are updates in own culture

Generation = cluster born within a 15-year time span



Life phases at work = clusters of 15 years of age.

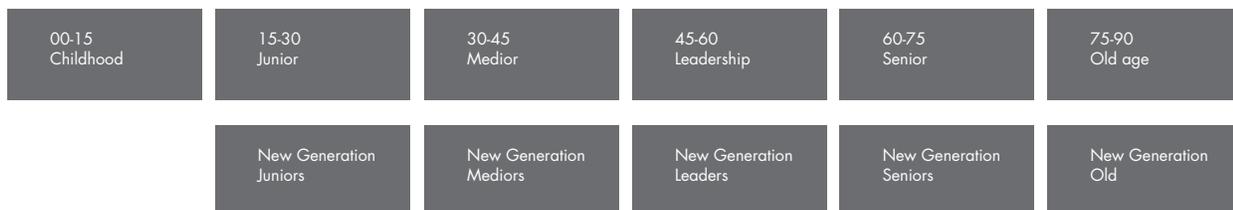


Fig. 1 Dutch generations entering (2015) their next life phase

From the Silent Generation (1925-1940) arose the Connecting Generation X (1955-1970) in the Netherlands. The Silent Generation had a rather closed attitude, was not open in dealing with their emotions and was oriented towards authority when it came to questions such as what is good or what is bad. The X parents have very open communication with their Y children, and they encourage their children to be authentic. When Dutch Y children ask questions about what is good or bad, their parents say things like: "What do you think yourself. I have some suggestions but you have to figure it out for yourself." These are just some examples of fundamental changes in the area of social behavior that bring forward new social patterns, which are created in the early interaction between parents and their children.

Fig. 2 A new generation of parents

Be ready for a surprise. My generation research in the Netherlands shows that new social patterns spring from the contemporary interaction between parents and their children. The seeds for the updates brought by a new generation are sown in young families; the new culture patterns are born there. The source of new patterns that are an important part of the foundation of a new generation is found in differences between the parenting style of a new generation of parents and the way these parents were raised by their parents (fig.2). The foundation of a new young generation is solidified at the end of their first life stage (see fig. 1).

Moreover, children seem to provoke a contemporary way of upbringing, because of their hypersensitivity towards outdated patterns. Many parents reported resistance by their children when they accidentally acted in an old-fashioned way, i.e. when some of their parenting patterns were out of date.

Fresh patterns form the characteristics of a generation and are at the same time potential updates for the surrounding culture. After childhood, a generation becomes aware of their characteristics that differ from the older generations. Their power to update the surrounding culture that was built by former generations increases with every life stage, up until the phase of leadership. During the phase of seniorhood, the impact on the surrounding culture decreases.

Life experience and professional expertise make seniors very suitable to support juniors in their development and in their updating efforts.

The number of vital Dutch seniors who want to keep working beyond their retirement age is growing. To be better able to work together with younger generations, seniors have to let go of and update some of their deep-rooted routines that are past their expiration date. I will go into this process in Chapter 4.

Successive generations form continually moving horizontal layers in every (organizational) culture. This is visualized in fig. 3. Each new generation, from the oldest in their life stage to the youngest one in their life stage, has the potency to replace outdated patterns by new ones. These culture-updating processes can be supported, slowed down or blocked, unconsciously or consciously, willingly or unwillingly. With awareness, more care and supporting actions, these processes can be improved.

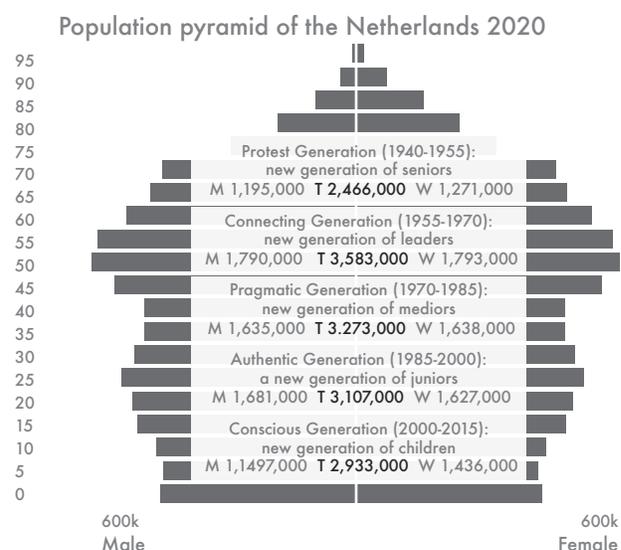


Fig. 3 The successive generations as layers in their (Dutch) culture

Members of all generations suffer from energy loss when they repeat outdated social patterns. The younger generation is most sensitive to these outdated routines.

Older generations have the tendency to repeat outdated patterns, despite the fact that this drains their energy. Not because they want to, but because it is autopilot behavior. To get an idea of what I mean here, think about how you are used to driving on the right or left side of the road. For instance, when you are used to driving on the right side of the road in your country – which is a deep-rooted habit – and you go to England, you know that you have to drive on the left, to survive in traffic. The tendency to drive on the right can be strong, even when you know that this is dangerous. The more complex the traffic situation is, the sooner this deep-rooted tendency might come forward automatically. In social and economic life, repetition of outdated patterns is dangerous for the same reason. It will lead, sooner or later, quickly or slowly, to the social and economic death of your (working) community.

When juniors are overrun by outdated patterns, their reaction can be intense. In the worst case, members of the youngest generation develop apathy or aggression. When tension between the younger and the older generation is high, the aggression of the youngsters is often expressed towards leaders or institutions that are seen as symbols of the old culture. This can lead to social explosions. When their trust in any change is low, youngsters might leave their group and community, or their aggression and frustration might turn inward and lead to depression and destructive behavior, such as alcohol or drug abuse.

The youngest working generation at companies and other institutions can be compared to what the canary birds did for miners. Miners took canaries into the mines with them, because canaries are very sensitive to air pollution. Whenever pollution levels came close to the point of being life threatening for the miners, the canaries would fall

off their branches and the miners would run away to find healthy air. These canaries saved many lives in the mines, thanks to their sensitivity to air pollution and thanks to the attention of the miners themselves. Canary birds' response to polluted air can be compared to the youngest generations' energy response at their organizations, as warning signs of the organization's social, economic and ecological health.

Around 1993, I noticed in the Netherlands for the first time that many young professionals at the beginning of their professional life, which at that time were juniors from the Pragmatic Generation (1970-1985), were losing their freshness and their work energy – often within a couple of minutes – after they got involved in projects with many outdated patterns. These observations formed the foundation for my generation research. Through these juniors, I discovered what caused the loss of energy and freshness, and which interventions were effective in countering this.

Aging Dutch and other European companies

Most Dutch and other European companies and institutions are aging. In fig. 4, you can find more details about population aging in Europe. The major risk of an aging workforce for organizations is the repetition of social patterns that are outdated. This repetition is not only a major drain on employees' energy, it is also economically life threatening for those (work) communities. Nevertheless, aging can offer great possibilities as well. The oldest generations are the largest. There have never been so many seniors with so much work experience across Dutch and other European organizations. Making the most of the rich expertise and life experience of older generations, combined with support for the freshness and evolutionary value of the smaller younger generations, is becoming one of the biggest challenges for old economies in surviving in the decades to come.

Never before were so many experienced seniors participating in the (work) community in the Netherlands and other European aging countries as today. The contribution of seniors to society will keep on rising over the coming decades and their labor participation will increase. At the same time, smaller generations of young people will enter the labor market. These facts combined will lead to aging workforces at organizations and other institutions, all over Europe. It is expected that this phenomenon will peak around 2035 and that it will slowly fade away from that time onwards.

Worldwide, average life expectancy has increased from 48 to 68 years over the past 55 years. This is a rise of about four months per year, two and a half days per week and eight hours per day. This spectacular rise is likely to continue in the future. In Europe and many other developed parts of the world, increasing life expectancy is accompanied by declining birth rates. The average European woman gives birth to one and a half child, which is rather less than the replacement level. These two developments are the reason why Europe is the continent that suffers most from the phenomenon of population aging. The speed of population aging will decrease gradually. Germany, Italy, Greece and Sweden belong to the fastest aging countries in Europe. While the population in the Netherlands is relatively young at this point, population aging will substantially increase over the coming twenty-five years. Average life expectancy in the Netherlands has increased to 80.5 (in 1860, this was 37 years). The average number of children per woman was approximately 1.6 in 2013 (around 1900, this was 4.5). As a matter of fact, there are many regional differences when it comes to the degree to which organizations are aging in the Netherlands. In (expensive) commuter towns and in regions where the population is shrinking (the province of Zeeland, the southern part of the province of Limburg, and parts of the north and east of the Netherlands), the population is relatively old. In the west of the country, in the large cities and the first overspill towns, the population is aging far less swiftly.

Source: the Dutch Interdisciplinary demographic institute (Nederlands Interdisciplinair Demografisch Instituut), "Bevolkingsvraagstukken in Nederland anno 2012"

Fig. 4 Aging in the Netherlands and Europe

For several reasons, many employees and managers seem to overlook the fact that within their organization, autonomous natural forces are at work. A strong focus on top-level managers and on rational reasoning when it comes to organizational change might be one of the reasons. A strong focus on making money in the short run might be another one. As early as in the 1980s, management guru Henry Mintzberg warned managers at bigger companies about the negative effect of the dominance of rational management: 'It seemed that managers lost their intuition skills ...' The evolutionary powers of successive generations are not seen at most companies. 'If you cannot see it, you cannot use it,' is a saying coined by the best Dutch football player in history, Johan Cruyff. Cruyff and Mintzberg might be on to something.

My research – based on scientific work by Marías Aguilera, Ortega y Gasset, Mannheim, Strauss and Howe and Becker – provides evidence of the overlooked natural and evolutionary change potency of successive generations. Each generation is geared by birth to update the social system to which they belong. Let us call it the destiny or instincts of a generation, through which a generation tries to increase the chance of survival of their own social system, group and community.

At most (aging) organizations in the Netherlands, these natural forces are, involuntarily and subconsciously, more often inhibited than supported. Is this a bad thing? Yes, this is a very bad thing. It allows a social, economic and ecological disaster to slowly creep in. Talent and vital survival power drains away or even disappears, the culture becomes outdated, all livelihood slowly disappears, followed by economic death. Some people call it creative destruction, but I call it a mistake in our culture or a missed opportunity.

Strong tendency to repeat outdated patterns

The tendency to subconsciously repeat outdated social

patterns can be very strong. For the moment, I would like to point out six causes of this tendency, which I found at many Dutch organizations:

- 1 Many organizations grew strong during the second half of the last century, under the leadership of the Protest Generation (1940-1955). Within these organizations, many social patterns persist that were developed by the Protest Generation and their focus on democratizing, such as ways of gathering and decision making, ways of communication and organizing. However, 01/01/2000 was the expiration date of many of these patterns that created the social economic success at the end of the last century. From that day onwards, these outdated patterns started to drain away work energy.
- 2 Members of older generations have a strong tendency to subconsciously repeat these quite deep-rooted outdated patterns, despite the fact that these patterns drain away their own work energy as well. Energy loss slowly creeps in and is hard to notice. These seniors are like fish in the water who are unaware of the pollution that is creeping in.
- 3 More than 80 % of Dutch organizations will keep aging as time passes, until 2035. Over the next decades, the older working generation will be the biggest and the younger the smallest. That means that an increasing number of people will be people who tend to repeat outdated patterns.
- 4 Within many organizations, the Connecting Generation X (1955-1970) and the Pragmatic Generation (1970-1985) have failed to renew a number of outdated patterns. Instead, they have adapted to these patterns involuntarily and mostly subconsciously. Therefore, these patterns have started to become a deeper-rooted part of the culture. This makes it even more difficult to change these habits.
- 5 The ability of the youngest working generation to update their culture is often overrated. To really do their updating work, these juniors need the assistance and active support of experienced colleagues from the bigger and older gene-

rations. This support is only scarcely offered or not offered at all, and juniors generally do not ask for it either. This is not because seniors refuse to ask for it, but rather because they are often not aware of the meaning of energy loss at work – stagnation in social evolution – or do not see it or do not know what to do, when they see it.

- 6 The ability of the youngest working generation to scan outdated patterns is not estimated at its true value and remains, in this way, unutilized. A ‘culture MRI scan’ performed by the smallest and youngest working generation is usually crystal clear. It shows the outdated patterns and the updates by the youngest working generation while also providing insight into the speed of the actual culture evolution. However, many professionals are still looking to the top of the hierarchy when it comes to what needs to be done. Many top-level managers are more focused on analyses by consultancy firms.

This book answers the question of how generations that succeed each other in life stages, from the oldest to the youngest generation, can exert or rediscover their power to stimulate the social evolution from within the professional heart of ‘their’ organization (culture).

To understand the evolutionary potency of successive generations, it is important to understand the essence of the generation perspective. In the next chapter, I will show how I developed a generation theory, building on work by other scientists. I have done my best to write it in an accessible way, but if you do not like theories, you could decide to just read the last two pages of the next chapter. This will improve your understanding of the phenomenon of generations and of what I wrote about the culture updates of the Dutch working generations.

On reflexes, free will and responsibility

Victor Lamme (2010) uses many examples to show us that we are often controlled by habits that have left deep traces in our mind. Based on this hypothesis, he wonders whether human beings even possess free will at all. Lamme: "Everything we go through, consciously or subconsciously, leaves traces in the neural pathways of our brain that run between stimulus and response. These traces strengthen certain neural pathways and weaken others. In the end, our history determines what we decide when we have to choose from multiple alternatives. These stimulus-outcome couplings exist from the day on which we are born and they strengthen or weaken the neural pathways in our brain. At a given moment, our brain, that -until this point- had only been armed with preferences that were mostly determined genetically and by upbringing style, makes its own 'decision'. A child takes its first steps and 'chooses' to go either left or right. The child falls down on its nose or down the staircase. Most choices involve either positive or negative consequences. Reward or punishment; pleasure or pain. In this way, couplings between stimulus and behavior are being trained in a Pavlovian way. Every decision inevitably leads to a history that is unique for every individual, until the next dilemma presents itself.

"Intelligent reflexes such as top sport performances require long-term training. For most sports, athletes need to train the coordination between their eyes and their hand or foot. These couplings need to be drilled into the neural pathways of our brain that

need to convert sensorial information into behavior. It is a type of sensorial-motoric learning, which requires much repetition. Everything you repeat gets drilled into your brain. For some reason - that remains unclear to this day - this process requires a good night's rest. Patterns seem to repeat themselves during the night and will not be truly drilled into your brain until the next morning."

"Every member of society is exposed to more or less the same experiences via the existing culture, which means that every brain contains a standard repertoire of automatisms and reflexes, such as driving a car, eating, learning and reading. Individual automatisms exist as well, like the way in which someone holds a pen, walks or smiles. During the day, we effortlessly switch from one automatism to the other. The perception of the existence of an 'I' that decides what we do, is more than just an illusion. It is a complete misconception. Many people feel uncomfortable with the idea that they do not control their behavior with their ratio and thoughts, but only commentate on it. Are we not responsible for our own deeds? Yes, of course we are. We determine our own unique history by deciding what we should (not) do. Not by what we say. That brain history is impossible to reconstruct. What we do see is the result of this history in the present."

Fig. 5 Victor Lamme on free will and autopilot behavior

2 Towards a generational theory

Early thinking about generations

Over the course of the past two centuries, several famous historians, sociologists and philosophers have provided different components that have helped me develop a generational theory.

In 1803, French historian Jean-Louis Giraud-Soulavie (1753-1813) described generations as groups that succeed each other 'in power and control' every fifteen years. He based this description on detailed studies of influential people and important events in the eighteenth century. In 1839, French philosopher and founder of sociology Auguste Comte wrote that social progress depends on a continuing shift of changers. One certain generation makes way for the following generation. The evolutionary pace springs from 'the struggle' between the 'instincts' of preservation, which is typically seen in older people, and the 'instincts' of innovation, which is typ-

ically seen in young people. In 1893, French sociologist Émile Durkheim noted that social change is restricted whenever a particular generation is strongly influenced by the older generation. Social change gains speed as soon as the generational group is larger and dissolute. This happens, for example, in big cities with a young population. These cities attract many young people from elsewhere. These juniors have succeeded to withdraw themselves from the traditions according to which they were brought up. Around 1875, German historian, sociologist and philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey wrote that

- 1 One generation covers a certain period of time, which starts at birth and ends when a new generation appears.
- 2 Members of the same generation feel related to each other because they grow up with each other and they are all subject to the same guiding influences during their formative years.

Fig. 6 An overview of what European scientists wrote about generations in the 19th century

Year	Source	Essence
1809	Jean-Louis Giraud-Soulavie, <i>Pièces inédites sur les règnes de Louis XIV, Louis XV et Louis XVI</i>	Generations are human groupings that succeed each other in power and control every fifteen years.
1824	Leopold von Ranke, <i>Geschichte der Romanischen und Germanischen Völker im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert</i>	It would perhaps be a worthy task to present generations one after the other, as they are bound to each other and as they separate on the stage of universal history. One might describe a series of illustrious figures, those men who in every generation maintain close relationships and whose antagonisms advance the world's evolution. Events correspond to the nature of such men.
1839	Auguste Comte, <i>Cours de philosophie positive</i>	Our social progress is essentially dependent on the continual and sufficiently rapid renewal of the agents of general change, if one generation gives way to the following. But our social evolution is incompatible with either an excessively slow or an overly rapid renovation of human generations.
1843	John Stuart Mill: <i>A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive</i>	The proximate cause of every state of society is the state immediately preceding it. Society is understood as a series of successive situations. The periods which most distinctly mark these successive changes being intervals of one generation, during which a new set of human beings have been educated, have grown up from childhood and taken possession of society.

1854	Leopold von Ranke, Über die Epochen der neueren Geschichte. Vorträge dem Könige Maximilian II von Bayern gehalten, Weltgeschichte IV (1910)	Progress consists in the fact that in each successive period human life potential increases, and hence that each generation completely outstrips those preceding it, and that the last would always be the most privileged, while those preceding would be merely the foundation of those following... But this I affirm: every period is immediate to God, and its worth springs from its very existence... I believe that in any generation real moral greatness is the same as in any other... there is no superior power.
1861	Justin Dromel, La loi des révolutions.	There are two fully active groups engaged in a great political debate, those who struggle to gain power (from age > 25, those who have power but are gradually losing it (age < 65). The individual and his entire generation have certain inflexibility, in the sense that they remain faithful to their own principles.
1872	Antoine Cournot, Considérations sur la marche des idées et des événements dans les temps modernes.	Each generation transmits to the one immediately following a certain wealth of ideas through education; the educating generation is still influenced by all the survivors of a previous generation. The observation of historical facts can accurately show us how the gradual renovation of ideas results from the imperceptible replacement of older generations by the younger, and how much time is necessary for change.
1874	Giuseppe Ferrari, Teoria dei periodi politici.	The political generation is composed of men who are born, who live and die in the same years, and who, whether friends or enemies, belong to the same society. These generations assume different historical roles in a larger drama that lasts 125 years. Each principle needs four generations or acts to complete its total evolution and bring its circle to a close. The first generation of a period is preliminary or preparatory, the second revolutionary or explosive, the third is reactionary, and the fourth is harmonizing.
1875	Gustav Rümelin, Reden und Aufsätze; über den Begriff und die Dauer einer Generation.	It is not violent revolutions that transform human life in periodic thrusts; rather the small difference between parents and children in customs and ways of looking at things are generalized to a point of mass effect, shaping cultural history of mankind.
1875	Wilhelm Dilthey, Über das Studium der Geschichte der Wissenschaften vom Menschen, der Gesellschaft und dem Staat, in Philosophische Monatshefte.	An inner measure of psychic time corresponds to the seconds and minutes of a clock; 'human life' and the progression of its 'ages' correspond to the decades and centuries of historical movement. A generation is a span of time, an inner metrical notion of human life. A generation is also a term applied to a relationship of contemporaneity between individuals, between those who grew up together, who had a common childhood, a common adolescence, whose years of greatest manly vigor partially overlap. A generation is composed of a tightly bound circle of individuals who are linked as to form a unit made homogeneous by dependence on the same great events and variations that appeared in their formative age, whatever the diversity of other additional factors.
1881	Louis Benloew, Les Lois de l'histoire.	France, from 1515-1700, had twelve evolutions with a mean of fifteen years and five months; England, from 1625-1760, had nine evolutions, with a mean of fifteen years; Greece, from 510- 301 BC, had nineteen evolutions with a mean of fifteen years.
1886	Ottokar Lorenz, Die Geschichtswissenschaft in Hauptrichtungen und Aufgaben kritisch erörtert.	In the course of a century, there are three generations linked in a true relationship, transmitting their experiences directly to each other, and thus constituting a spiritual, historical unity. Historical evolution is based then on the real succession of generations.
1893	Émile Durkheim, De la division du travail social.	Social change is limited and slow when a generation is strongly subjected to the influence of tradition and the old, and accelerated when groupings are larger and men less bound.

The Hungarian-German sociologist Karl Mannheim (1893-1947) is widely considered the founder of generational thinking. This is not completely true. José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955), a Spanish philosopher and a contemporary of Mannheim's, had some interesting thoughts about generations and the masses, but hesitated to publish his ideas. His younger colleague Julián Marías Aguilera (1914-2005) collected Ortega's ideas about generations, as well as those of other early thinkers (fig. 6) and was the first to try to develop a generational theory. Julián Marías was a student of Ortega's and later became a friend and colleague. In 1928, Mannheim published a number of comprehensive basic principles. One of these principles implied the idea that generations form social layers within a culture, which are based on time of birth and biological rhythm. People who are born in the same period and share the same perception of a surrounding 'zeitgeist' develop a connection with their peers. These peers also share a similar physical, mental and psychological development and a certain destiny in life. This is what he calls the 'entelechy' of a generation: the unique combination of one's own nature, a shared collective development and a shared reaction to outdated patterns in the dominating spirit of the age. Thanks to the constant introduction of new generations that carry their unique 'entelechy', the culture is undergoing a continual transformation. On the interface of childhood and adolescence, a generation becomes aware of what they wish to change in their culture. All aspects of a surrounding culture that members of a young generation do not experience as problematic are automatically and subconsciously assimilated by them.

According to Julián Marías, around 1923 his colleague and friend José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955) was the first to formulate a theory that could be labeled as a beginning of a generational theory. It originated from Ortega's theory on

social and historical reality, which was more general. Ortega's thoughts on social and historical reality can be summarized as follows:

- 1 About people as individuals:
 - Reality is neither 'I', nor 'things'. Reality is life itself. My life is a sum of what I do with my own possibilities and limitations and the possibilities and limitations of the given circumstances.
 - Life has been given to me as an inevitable task. It is not perfect. It is up to me to make life perfect, to decide what to do and not to do in order to achieve this. That is why I need an image or a notion of the direction in which I need to go.
 - Man is inevitably free. The only freedom of which man does not dispose is the freedom to stop being free.
- 2 About people in their social environment:
 - Every one of us lives in a world full of systems with stubborn habits and conventions with shared interpretations of reality.
 - The world is not perfect; it copes with many gaps and problems. People are continually (re)forming the world. They turn the world into their own 'home'.
 - The most important sources for change in the social world consist of primary feelings (vital sensitivity) towards the existing life. Some feelings and changes are superficial and others are more profound.
 - We can distinguish two types of changes: changes *in* the existing world and changes *of* the existing world.
 - The mass is susceptible to influence exercised by outstandingly energetic people.
- 3 About the individual and his or her generation.
 - Changes that are brought about by vital sensitivity that changes the world itself appear in the shape of generations. A generation itself is a radical social change. Individuals are able to bring about changes in the world. Generations are able to bring about changes of the world and this

is how they form the pivot of our historical evolution.

- Every generation has a small group of energetic people with a well-developed vital sensitivity who form characterizing figures in their own generation. They form the vanguard of their generation. This group influences its environment strongly.
- Without new generations emerging, history would suddenly stop evolving. It would no longer be possible to prime any form of radical social innovation whatsoever.
- Every generation has a two-dimensional task in life: receiving as well as taking over everything the previous generation left them and expressing its own spontaneous impulses of renewal.
- At a certain historical moment, two different generations are most actively participating in society. The generation that has members between the ages of 30 to 45 years old, and the generation that has members between the ages of 45 to 60 years old.

Julián Marías Aguilera was the first to thoroughly study early written works on generations. He also clarified the brainwork of Ortega y Gasset. In 1967, his work *El método histórico de las generaciones* was published, which was translated into English in 1970. Marías developed a method to localize generations. According to him, this requires knowledge of the system of dominating habits. This system adds structure to life at a certain moment in history and it surpasses individual life. It thrusts itself on life and conditions it. According to Marías, the act of localizing generations requires knowledge about the surrounding culture and about the beginning of historical innovations. After every generational shift, a new system of new dominating conventions arises. Marías interpreted this new system as a new lifestyle, which is clearly different from the old one, a new way of living. Just like democracy in the nineteenth century or rationalism in the seventeenth century. Such an innova-

tion takes place within the entire society. Historical innovation concerns every generation; some historical innovations require that more generations than just one make an effort to contribute to it. The bounds between generations can be found in portraying the vanguard of a generation and their dominating habits and in analyzing the variation that exists within those habits.

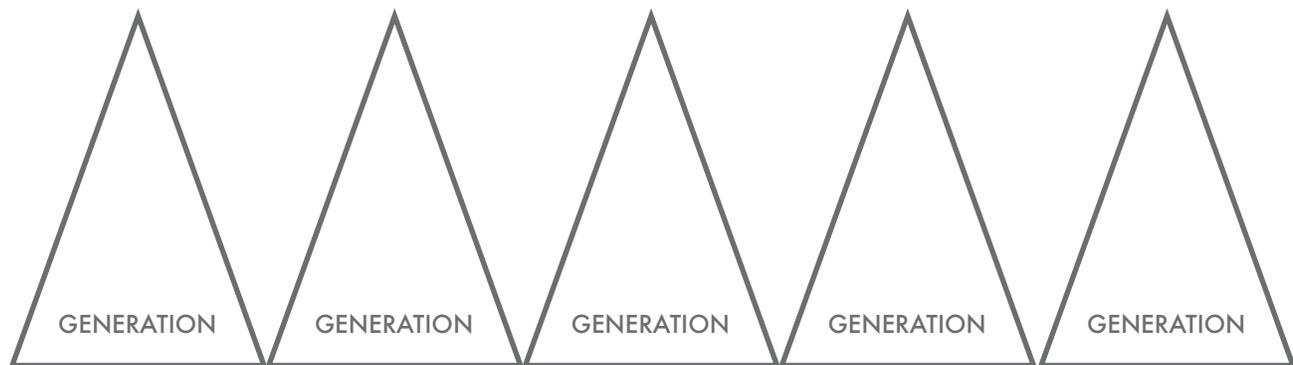
Marías pictured generations as mountain chains in a landscape (fig. 7). The area between the mountain chains forms the borderline. The mountain slopes represent years of birth. It is possible for two spots on a slope that are far away from each other to still lie on the same mountain. Whereas two spots that are close to each other can lie on two separate mountains. Every person finds himself in a certain spot in his or her own generation: at the beginning, in the middle or at the end.

Ortega y Gasset and Marías mentioned energetic people that are the vanguard of a generation. Generation research in the Netherlands (Diepstraten et al. 1999; SCP, 2010) showed that about 15 % of the people in a generation said that they do not experience a (close) connection to their generation. This has led us to believe that there might be a group of informal leaders in every generation of about 15 %, a group of followers of about 70 % and a group of unconnected members of about 15 % (fig. 7).

Marías also worked out the idea of life stages (fig. 2 and fig. 9): every life consists of five stages of fifteen years each, starting with childhood and ending with old age. With every life stage a person goes through, the amount of influence their generation has on society increases. In the fourth stage, between the 45th and 60th year of life, a generation has the biggest influence on the surrounding culture. After a generation has reached this age, its influence decreases. The influence that remains from the senior life phase will consist of passing (working) life experience on to younger

Informal leaders within generations

the most energetic people ($\pm 15\%$) form the vanguard of a generation and characterize their generation; they have the most influence on the surrounding (organizational) culture.



Followers within generations ($\pm 70\%$):

are less energetic and expressive and do not show clearly the characteristics of their generation. By doing so they have lesser influence on their (working) environment. They might influence it indirectly, namely by supporting the informal leaders of their generation.

Not connected to their own generation ($\pm 15\%$)

About 15% of the population feels less (or not at all) connected to their own generation and does not experience to be of any influence on the surrounding (organizational) culture.

Fig 7 Generations, with leaders and followers, displayed as mountain chains in a landscape

generations and to coach juniors to find their own way in (working) life.

The founders of generational thinking are from France, Spain and Germany. However, the lion's share of research that has been done on generations was published in the United States and the Netherlands in the second half of the twentieth century. Many – more recent – publications are about the youngest generation. Authors have used many different dates of birth and names for this generation: Generation Y, Millennials, Screenagers, the Internet Generation, the Boundless Generation, the Authentic Generation Y.

Only a few publications are about all generations. It is very hard to find well-founded scientific research on generations. In the U.S., Strauss and Howe tried to come to a generation

classification in a more or less scientific way.

Marías philosophized profoundly and developed a method enabling the localization of generations, but he did not apply his method himself. American researchers William Strauss and Neil Howe did employ this method in a way. In 1991, they localized generations in American history in their study called *Generations, The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*. This large-scale study of American history builds on the substantial method of Marías. For unclear reasons, they used life stages that spanned 22 years in 1991, and 20 years in 1998. By using these time spans, Strauss and Howe deviate from one of Marías' substantial principles: the biological rhythm of generations, which states that a generational shift takes place

every fifteen years. There is a good chance that Strauss and Howe's generational classification is incorrect. Their most important contribution to the development of a generational theory consists of their elaboration of the insight that generations succeed each other in life stages. They studied this more thoroughly than Mariás had. The time span of a generation – a cluster of years of birth – equals the time span of a life stage – a cluster of years of age. In every stage of life, a generation has a different function in society. The function of members of a generation during their years of youth differs from their function in the leadership stage or the senior stage. Every generation has its 'peer personality' with strengths and weaknesses that characterize that particular generation. That is why every successive generation shapes life in a certain stage of life differently from its predecessor, according to Strauss and Howe. They also introduced the concept of a 'generational constellation': all present generations combined form a certain constellation; an interactive and unique combination, which characterizes the spirit of the age. Every time a generation succeeds the previous one, this does not only mean that every generation enters the next life stage, it also means that the constellation changes. This generation shift produces two types of consequences:

- 1 The effect of the new generation in the (next) life stage. The successive generation lives its life in this stage differently from the previous one.
- 2 The effect of the new generational constellation, where the influence of the oldest generation ebbs away, and where the youngest generation's influence on their surrounding community and its institutions increases. This changes the interaction between generations and the spirit of the age in that community substantially.

These changes in society (and its social systems) surface a couple of years after a generational shift took place. Only in

a 'free' society, the impact of a generation on the surrounding culture can be fully established. In a society where people do not experience freedom to express themselves openly, for example in societies in which leaders from the oldest generation impose their beliefs on the younger generations, it is very difficult to accomplish this, if not downright impossible. Open interaction between generations speeds up the evolutionary process. Minimized interaction or a closed relationship between generations or the domination of one generation will slow down or even block social-evolutionary processes.

In 2000, Zemke, Raines and Filipczak came up with a description of 'generations at work'. They addressed the question of how to prevent generational conflicts and how to optimize collaboration between generations. The gist of their findings is the following: it is important for generations to become aware of the differences between their own generation and generations above and below them, and to keep these differences in mind during the process of developing a suited HR policy and in collaboration processes. The three scientists based their findings on case studies of five companies in which generations work together in harmony, as well as on interviews they held with experts. Although they did employ the generational classifications of Strauss and Howe, they did not go into the evolutionary function of generations.

In the early 1990s, Dutch professor and sociologist Henk Becker of Utrecht University was the first to carry out a sociological study of generations in the Netherlands. He based his study on Mannheim's work and he used trend breaks – for instance wars and economic crises – as a basic principle for the localization of generations. His focus was on the impact of the actual spirit of the age on (young) generations in society. In his work *Generaties en hun kansen* (Generations and their opportunities) (1992), Becker identi-

fied the emergence of five generations, until the Pragmatic Generation. According to him, this classification counts for Western Europe.

In 1999, Diepstraten, Esther and Vinken profoundly studied the validity of Becker's generational classification. Well over three-quarters of the Dutch population recognized themselves as members of a generation that conformed to Becker's classification. We could take this to mean that the remaining quarter of the Dutch population does not display any generation-characterizing behavior. I did find two variations: some people do not feel any connection with their generation and some people feel connected with all generations. According to the study by Diepstraten et al., this quarter does not experience being of any influence on their environment. The remaining three-quarters of Dutch citizens do feel like they influence their environment. The researchers concluded that the Dutch population has a rather large generational consciousness.

In 1991, Van Berkel, Van Schaik and Snippenburg studied Henk Becker's generational classification. Van den Broek studied this classification in 2001. They were able to conclude that generational differences do not occur in 'all areas' and that perhaps a generation is formed in a different way than Becker stated.

My research of two generations of parents and of the generation of their children showed that it is highly probable that the foundation of a new generation (of children) can be found in changes in upbringing. Changes are caused by differences between the ways the parents were brought up by their parents, for instance with no sharing of emotions and a focus on authority, and the way they bring up their children, for instance openly sharing emotions and a focus on authenticity. Trend breaks in society and historical events, such as wars or crises, might influence the way parents bring up their children. The seeds of new culture patterns in the Netherlands are probably sown by young

Dutch families. The new social patterns are shaped in the interaction between children and their parents and become a characteristic part of children's lives around the age of twelve. These pre-research findings might be an interesting field for future research.

Every two years, the Netherlands Institute for Social Research publishes a socio-cultural report. In 2010, this report was entitled '*Wisseling van de wacht: generaties in Nederland*' (Changing of the guard: generations in the Netherlands). It remains a mystery why the institute chose this title. Perhaps, they chose it because there was (and still is) much public attention for this phenomenon. The report, which numbers 563 pages, is – unfortunately enough – not about generations. The report mentions an analytical knot that made it impossible to carry out good generation research. This knot can be explained in three questions. First: are differences between generations the effect of being born in the same period of time (is it a cohort effect)? Second: are characteristics of a generation the effect of being in a certain life phase (effect of their age)? Third: are differences between generations the effect of differences in the spirit of the age in their formative years? This knot remains untied in their report.

I did unravel the knot by focusing my research on the following questions:

- A What are the differences between the former and the successive generation in the same life stage (in the same age group)?
- B What is the reaction of a generation in their life phase to the surrounding culture (to the actual spirit of the age) in terms of updates in the culture that was built by former generations?

The outcomes of A and B are the same. The differences between the former and the new generation in a life phase are the updates by a new generation. These updates by a generation can be found in the area that generates most of