

A Work Project, presented as part of the requirements for the Award of a Masters Degree in
Management from the Faculdade de Economia da Universidade Nova de Lisboa.

SPEED AND RHYTHM IN ORGANIZATIONS:

HOW DO DIFFERENT GENERATIONS COPE WITH SPEED AND RHYTHM AT WORK?

ANDRÉ DOS REIS ALMEIDA CORREIA

NUMBER 290

A Project carried out on the Organizational Sciences course, under the supervision of:

Prof. Miguel Pina e Cunha

June 12, 2009

Contents

1. Abstract	3
2. Introduction	4
3. Literature Review	6
4. Methodology	9
5. Research Findings	10
5.1. Speed and Rhythm in life vs. at work	10
5.2. How do people cope with Speed and Rhythm at work?	12
5.3. Multitasking	15
5.4. Escape from Speed and Rhythm	16
5.5. Coping with stress at work.....	18
5.6. Feedback	19
5.7. Evolution of Speed and Rhythm in the last 20/30 years	20
5.8. Generational differences in Speed and Rhythm	22
5.9. The influence of new technologies on Speed and Rhythm.....	23
5.10. New technologies, communication and generations	25
5.11. Slow Movements.....	27
6. Conclusion.....	29
7. References	32
Appendices	34

1. Abstract

Speed and rhythm in organizations can be examined from different perspectives and disciplines. The purpose of this work project is to investigate a theme that has been gaining relevance over the last few decades in Organizational Sciences: how people cope with speed and rhythm at work. Twenty-four employees, from two generations, of various hierarchical levels from a wide range of organizations were interviewed. Net Generation and Baby Boom Generation, the two generations in question, were analysed in equal proportions to find reliable differences in their perceptions. Significant findings were attained after analysing the results: a) Different generations have similar perceptions about speed and rhythm at work; b) Technology encourages networks producing a lack of boundaries and it challenges traditional ways of work management. At first, this difference appears to be a generational perception but it is not; c) Net Generation is used to perform multitasking, as a method to deal with high speed and rhythm, while Boom Generation, in general, do not feel capable of doing it; d) Although most people agree with the Slow Movements philosophy, which stands for a reduction of speed and rhythm in life, they generally believe it is very hard to practice it as a standard way of living.

Keywords: Rhythm; Speed; New Technologies; Net Generation; Slow Movements

2. Introduction

Different generations experience different events during their lives. The link between generations and the way people carry out their work has been studied recently. However, it is difficult to find literature concerning the attitude that different generations have when dealing with speed and rhythm within their organizations. The evolution of new technologies and the way they improved speed and rhythm at work is accomplished by individuals in a distinctive way.

The major motivation of this project is to increase knowledge and empirical evidence in order to deepen this subject on Organizational Sciences. The research will focus on how people cope with speed and rhythm at work. The hypothesis that originated this study is the following: the youngest generation in the workforce – Generation Y, ‘Millennials’ or Net Generation – can easily cope with higher speed and rhythm, by easily using new technologies, when compared with older generations – Generation X and Baby Boom Generation. Despite the importance of Generation X, the focus of this study will be on individuals from Net Generation and Baby Boom Generation because the contrast between them is most striking. Gen Xers (people from Generation X) can play a key role in building and maintaining an effective workplace by acting as a fundamental bridge in communication between Baby Boomers and ‘Millennials’.

The research question on this study will be: Do Net Generation and Baby Boom Generation cope differently with speed and rhythm at work? The objectives of this work project are: 1) to test the formulated hypothesis and find out its consistency; 2) to conduct interviews to people working in real organizations and answer accurately to the research question; 3) to improve the empirical knowledge on the topic.

To test the validity of this study, a number of interviews will be conducted using a specific technique: in-depth interviews. Through this method interviewees will have the opportunity to expand their opinions and perceptions concerning this subject. The interview guide is to be used as a rough guide, enabling the interviewer to react to individual situations whilst following a general outline of research questions. After the interviews' transcription the data collected will be analysed so as to understand how organizational speed and rhythm is realized and experienced by people working in different organizations and what patterns related to perceptions are possible to identify.

The report structure is the following: firstly a brief literature review will expose what researchers have concluded on previous studies about this theme. Then, the interviews' methodology and findings will focus on the research process and analysis. After the research findings – divided by sections – main conclusions will be addressed and challenges to the organizations will be specified. The annexes can be found in the end of the report, including the interview guide and the interviewees' profiles.

3. Literature Review

Both speed and rhythm in organizations have not been the focus for researchers and the literature on this theme is scarce, particularly when one calls for generational perceptions. Some authors mention the increasingly high speed of people's lives over the last decades, with society enticing them to do everything faster. As Gleick (2000) noted, "We are in a rush. We are making haste. A compression of time characterizes our lives." Huy and Mintzberg (2003) added that people perceive "environment to be in constant flux" because they only notice the things that actually change.

It is important not to misunderstand the time-related concepts. Speed is commonly characterized as the rate of motion. Barker & Payne (2006) applied speed concept to time and workplace: speed can be addressed as rapid transformation and the way people interpret it in the workplace. Eisenhardt and Brown (1998) defined rhythm as "the pace at which the companies change". As one can see, both concepts are intimately connected. A different definition is given by Whipp, Adam & Sabelis (2002) as rhythm being the creator of time and space, at least for the individual. "Space and time do not enter lived experience until they are materialized within a rhythmic frame", the authors assured. Eisenhardt and Brown (1998) in their research also concluded that "time pacing creates a relentless sense of urgency around meeting deadlines and concentrates individual and team energy around common goals. For most organizations, getting in step with the market means moving faster. But for some, finding the right rhythm means slowing down."

Another important concept embedded in this work project and studied in the literature is related with generations. Generation is defined as an identifiable group which shares years of birth, hence significant life events at critical stages of development. In general, while researchers differ slightly in the exact years of birth that

define the different generations, most agrees that there are four broad generations of employees: Veterans (1925-1944), Baby Boom Generation (1945-1964), Generation X (1965-1981), and Net Generation, Generation Y or “Millennials” (1982-2000). “A generational group shares historical and social life experiences which affect the way people in that generation develop and distinguish one generational group from another”. (Wong, Gardiner, Lang & Coulon, 2008)

Some authors, such as Jorgensen (2003), consider the differences between the Net Generation and older generations in the workforce as life-stage and not generational. Bauerlein (2008) mentions that “The technology that was supposed to make young adults more astute, diversify their tastes and improve their minds had the opposite effect”. Tapscott (2009) in his most recent study refutes this information: “There are many reasons to believe that what we are seeing is the first case of a generation that is growing up with brains that are wired differently from those of the previous generation. Evidence is mounting that Net Geners – people who are part of Net Generation – process information and behave differently because they have indeed developed brains that are functionally different from those of their parents.” The author believes that media multitasking is a quintessential characteristic of the Net Generation. Some researches, though, found that multitasking can result in wasted time due to human context switching and apparently causing more errors due to insufficient attention.

Jim Quigley, CEO of Deloitte, says that Net Geners “come to the workforce with skills that some of those with no hair or gray hair didn’t come with. Integrating them effectively into a team is challenging a little bit, because they think differently. They like to communicate. They like to collaborate in a different kind of way.”

Tapscott (2009) defends the idea that Net Geners need speed: “They’re used to instant responses, so if colleague A is not available, the Net Generer will ask colleague B instead of waiting. They quickly become frustrated if they have to wait for managers or deal with a mountain of red tape. Warp speed is their preferred speed.” However, Baby Boomers often believe that younger generations do not work as hard or as long as they do, because they are not “punching the clock” from 8 am to 6 pm every day. “Working from remote locations, telecommuting or having a virtual office are all viewed as odd by Boomers and also as non-productive work environments.” (Glass, 2007)

Finally, there is the concept of slow and the imperative to create a highly effective form of balance that can enhance personal and business performance. In the last decades, movements claiming for a slower pace in society and consequently at work began to emerge. Barker & Payne (2006) call attention to the slow movement that started in Italy in 1989. Since its origin in food, the slow movement has been spread throughout the world: slow cities, slow environment, slow business, slow schools, slow travel, slow labs, to name but a few as Carl Honoré (2004) mentions in his book ‘In Praise of Slow’. In a worldwide scale, social entrepreneurs are “taking slow to the market” in many different ways – slow villages, slow retreats, slow pods and chill-out zones, slow travel, slow schools and education. There has also been a rising interest in balance-training programs in organizations and many places are being revitalised by turning themselves into slow urban centres where people are drawn to experience a better quality of life.

4. Methodology

The in-depth interview was the chosen method to address the study of this topic. An interview guide has been developed to begin the process. Afterwards, a preliminary interview was made to verify the relevance of questions and topic, and to adapt the structure of the interview. This pilot interview was not considered in the final results and analysis since its main purpose was only to create an accurate guide. The final interview guide is presented in Appendix I and consists on interviewees' filters, guiding principles and the main topics to be developed. The guide was used as a rough support, allowing the interviewer to react to each individual experience while following a general outline of research questions. Before the beginning of the interview, a warm-up conversation was undertaken to align the objectives and clarify any definition interviewees might need. Twenty-four people were interviewed (more details in Appendix II). Their nationality was Portuguese, twelve belonging to Baby Boom Generation (1945-1964) and twelve Net Geners (1982-2000). As mentioned, the focus of this research is on Baby Boomers and Net Generation – not because Generation X (1965-1981) is irrelevant, but the contrast between the Boomers and Millennials is most prominent. The interviewees' average age was 38.4 years old. The Boomer Generation average age was 52.1 years old and Net Generation was 24.6 years old, which created an almost 30-year gap between them. Interviewees were employed in a wide range of organizations in Lisbon, from different Industries, either in private or state-owned companies. Data gathering was made by the researcher during the period between March 2nd and April 18th and the interviews were recorded with a digital mp3 recorder. Throughout the study, interviews were transcribed to *MS Word* with the software *Express Scribe* support. The qualitative analysis was made after interviews' transcription and print. The findings of this analysis are presented next.

5. Research Findings

The final interview guide was applied to all selected interviewees. People were first asked to present themselves and to briefly describe their main activity. After clarifying any possible doubts the interview could begin. As the interviews were agreed to be anonymous the interviewees' name will not be disclosed. Although the investigator created a guide, it was not a rigid one. This means questions and topics could be considered in a different order depending on interviewee's answers and whenever necessary, people were asked to further explain and explore their responses. The research findings were organized by relevant topics.

5.1. Speed and Rhythm in life vs. at work

Once the warm-up conversation was concluded, the initial question was asked: "How do you perceive speed and rhythm in your life and at work?" Interviewees were encouraged to talk about their perceptions in general. Most people declared that speed is the time people took to execute their daily tasks and that the rhythm in organizations is influenced by workload. Many found it difficult to establish a barrier between speed and rhythm at work and in their personal life. They feel it involves both dimensions. A Net Generation interviewee noted that "the rhythm in life goes side by side with rhythm at work. When rhythm is higher at workplace it is replicated in my personal life and the same happens to slow rhythm". Occasionally the interviewees assumed speed and rhythm were the same concept and made no distinction between them. A small number of interviewees suggested that these concepts were difficult to measure and one of them even asked if there were levels to quantify speed and rhythm at work.

Interviewees' answers did not differ significantly between generations. Many people noted that often they are so absorbed and enthusiastic with their daily tasks they do not even have time to stop. Younger people (Net Generation) mentioned the shock

they found at the workplace in their first jobs. The major difference some Net Geners found was the schedule obligation, from 9 am to 6 pm or later. Because of this new stipulation, Net Geners learned to manage their speed and rhythm and to value their time, something they did not even think about before. As a 24 year-old Chief Communications Officer stated “Managing my work, teaching and having master’s classes, plus everything ordinary people of my age want to do beyond work, forces me to deal with a fast rhythm, at a high speed”.

Most interviewees from both generations said they did not have enough time to do their work at the office. This was one of the reasons to do extra hours at workplace or to take homework. The study revealed that interviewees try to manage time at their workplace. Individuals do not like to extend their work to personal life and try not to influence it, no matter the generation they belong to. Sometimes it is not possible and younger generations deal with it more naturally since they believe that at the beginning of their careers they have to work hard and to be 24/7 available to the organization.

A 24 year-old Net Gener also mentioned that rhythm and speed at work was caused by organization’s ineffectiveness: “The rhythm is influenced by organization’s inefficiency. Projects are always done at last minute and decision power is centralized in one person. Sometimes that is frustrating”. Some employees from Law and Health sectors feel their rhythm and speed at work are mostly influenced by external factors. Lawyers’ rhythm is influenced by external organizations like law courts: “Even if I want to control my time, sometimes it is hard, because our work depends on court’s decisions”. In the Health industry people made reference to patients’ flow as a primary speed and rhythm factor. A Net Gener stated “My rhythm at work is directly related with the number of appointments I have and the patients’ flow”.

A disadvantage of fast rhythm was also pointed out: when employees have no time to stop and think over what was done in past projects “you can’t correct what you have done wrong”, said a Net Gener. During the day life Boomers feel their rhythm and execution speed varies. The first part of the day was always mentioned as the most productive period. This was not mentioned by Net Geners. Differences concerning speed and rhythm at work were credited to people’s own personality and to individuals who are present in their working area, not necessarily a manager or someone hierarchically above you. The organization culture influence was not mentioned, as expected by the investigator.

5.2. How do people cope with Speed and Rhythm at work?

The next topic on the interview guide was essential to find out how people cope with both speed and rhythm at work. The generational gap was not always clear in the responses. The majority of interviewees mentioned once again that it was impossible to have a regular timesheet of 8 hours a day because people feel these hours are not enough to perform the whole activities with rigour and celerity. “It is almost compulsory to give up leisure time in order to accomplish work and this is felt in an invisible way”, said a 50 year-old Boomer. Doing some breaks during the day is valued by both generations as a way to better surviving speed and rhythm inside their organizations. This point will be discussed later.

Boomers said that whenever possible, they try to impose their own rhythm and not to go along with the flow and speed of the projects. Ideally some Boomers would do one thing at a time, taking part in one project, and not 3 or 4 simultaneously. They were aware of the organization’s own rhythm throughout the year as well. They claimed this was important, because they could easily predict when there would be an increased volume of work, letting them serenely organize their tasks. “I have the perception of

rhythm peaks during the year. I am ready for them and organize my work based on that experience”, a Boomer said. In some jobs, however, people said it was impossible and worthless to plan the whole day because workload was unpredictable.

Defining “priority tasks”, “organizing”, “planning”, “establishing goals”, “personal efforts”, “rigour”, were the key concepts presented by Boomers to deal with organization’s speed and rhythm. Surviving speed and rhythm at work was considered to be a matter of character, always seen as an individual characteristic and handled differently by each person. Some relevant testimonials were given:

I can only defeat this high rhythm at work with a strong organization of work hours. I am rigorous and obsessive with time; this is a question of honour. By doing this, people I work with feel obligated to maintain the same rhythm. If I am not rigorous I am no example for anyone. – 57 year-old Boomer

I have two kids and the reason I am still here is because I defined clear rules since the first moment. The first thing concerns the family: there are 2 days a week that I have my schedule blocked in a period of time to take and to pick up my children at school. Then I was able to create my rhythm. My career could not be the fastest nor the slowest, because I had never been fighting for the podium. But I must confess that I have already felt my professional life was penalizing my personal life. – 45 year-old Boomer

People often ask me how I have time for everything. I answer with two words: organization and determination. I arrive early in the office; normally I don’t go out for lunch, because you lose lots of time and I leave at 7.30 pm almost every day. I like to work, to be informed and to be up to date. I also don’t lose time with “corridor’s gossip”. – 48 year-old Boomer

On the other hand, Net Generation interviewees gave relevance to the condition of their careers. Since most of them had just entered their first job they felt a huge difference between university and the world of work. Some admitted they were still learning to cope with rhythm and speed of organizations. “I think I am learning to cope with this accelerated rhythm. Eventually you learn to organize your time, managing everything you have to do in each place and coming up with strategies to be able to do

all that”, said a Net Gener. They feel now is the right time to deal with fast rhythm in their lives since most of them were getting their careers started and there is the need to show their competences. There was also the perspective of living faster today so as to give priority to other life dimensions later on. As a Net Gener stated, “I feel that now is the right time to be in all these projects because in the future I may be interested in dedicating myself to other projects beyond my career, though I think I have a *dog’s life* right now.” In addition they prefer and give relevance to corridor’s conversations to know people from their own organization, from different departments, because they feel it is a way to have a better integration, to stop the work rhythm and to solve problems rapidly.

Health sector interviewees would like to have more time to deal with their patients. They feel they could have a better performance and the higher speed in these environments can be prejudicial. In contrast, Net Geners in other areas, such as Consulting or Auditing, said they prefer to work with short deadlines because it forces people to work under a certain rhythm. “I don’t like to have plenty of time to do things; you start to get lost on what you’re doing. I would rather have those short deadlines than managing long periods of time”, said a 23 year-old Corporate Consultant. Flexibility was mentioned in two different contexts. First, Net Geners privilege freedom in their schedule. Second, they claimed they could be flexible under different rhythms, with an easy adaptation to the organization. However, “If I notice the rhythm and speed are not adequate I try to impose my standard to the organization and explain why it should be that way”, a Net Gener stated.

Creativity at work was mentioned occasionally. Net Geners try to be more efficient by using available tools inside the organization. “I build my own work tools by using Excel and other applications, creating automated routines to facilitate my work.

When I am assigned to do periodic tasks, first I try to spend the maximum time I have to establish a more efficient way to execute them”, assumed a Net Gener. The role of a tutor at the workplace was invoked because people from Net Generation appreciate to have a role model and someone to guide them.

A number of interviewees affirmed that in the perspective of high rhythms and fast organizations they felt tired and would like to turn off their computers and mobile phones to relax. They do not disconnect because there is the possibility of occurring something important or there is the risk of being demoted at work.

Though, the intense rhythm is compensated with a good work environment. We are in an open space which helps the relationships' informality. On Friday's afternoons the atmosphere is always more relaxing and we created a good practice of ending the day in a bar near the office. – 24 year-old Net Gener

5.3. Multitasking

Multitasking was also analysed in this context. Human multi-tasking or multitasking is commonly defined as an individual's performance that seems to handle more than one task at the same time. An example of multitasking is listening to a radio interview while typing an email or writing a report.

Interviews revealed a tendency for Net Generation to execute more than one task simultaneously, differing from Boomers. Boomers generally prefer performing a single task than doing many tasks at same time. Nevertheless, there were three Boomers (25% of interviewed Boomers) who affirmed they were perfectly capable of dealing with multitasking: answering the telephone while sending an e-mail or talking and listening to colleagues, all at once. “I believe it is part of my character but at the same time I needed to develop it here inside the organization”, said a 45 year-old manager of a Human Resources Consulting Company. On the other hand they realize that doing diverse tasks at the same time can be dangerous, particularly when dealing with critical

tasks or important clients. Although the majority of Boomers do not currently execute different activities at the same time at their workplace, some confessed that they were previously able to do more than one thing, all together. “But today I don’t have the courage to do it. We begin to lose some capabilities, thus preventing us from doing multitasking with confidence”, said a 57 year-old entrepreneur.

When analysing the Net Generation interviews it was possible to authenticate what had already been done in previous researches. All the interviewees from Net Generation perform multitasking as if it was their routine: “I can easily do lots of activities at the same time: working on the computer, talking with someone on MSN or Skype, doing research in the Internet and so on. Most of these things are involuntary by now”, said a Net Gener. They also referred that it is usual to have more than 10 open windows on their computers something unthinkable to Boomers. Managing personal projects simultaneously and paying their bills online while executing their jobs was something considered typical. Yet, they recognized that when working in a critical task they cannot have Messenger or other applications open to talk with friends or colleagues. They cannot concentrate: “When the task I am doing requires a great deal of attention I can’t perform multitasking. I have to put my headphones and ignore the environment (open space or a room) that surrounds me.”

5.4. Escape from Speed and Rhythm

The following topic was developed to find out if people usually have escape routes to speed and rhythm at work as well as to confirm if individuals have or have not leisure habits, moments to slow down and how they do it during the day, week, month or year. Most people from both generations do not give up their lunch time and feel this is a unique moment of the day to relax and to talk about any subject but work. Lunch

time, they said, “helps to increase your attention and concentration levels during the afternoon”. Coffee breaks were also mentioned as a common escape at work.

Baby Boom Generation stated that escapes from speed and rhythm could occur when people were travelling. Travelling in duty to meeting a meeting abroad or “simply driving to court”, as a Boomer lawyer said, are moments to relax, to listen to the radio news, to ‘switch off’. Most of Boomers confessed to take two usual breaks during the day: lunch time and afternoon tea. “Lunch time is great to relax and talk about extra work things. In this organization we privilege these moments for socializing as well”, held a Boomer. Some referred that their only real escape was to spend some quality time with their family, usually on weekends. “During the week we have no time! This applies to me and to my family: it is an overall problem”, stated a Boomer. “I realize that family sometimes comes in second place. We call home warning a last minute meeting will keep us until late in the office. It shouldn’t be like this”, he kept on. However, people said that they tried not to lose some habits such as reading a few pages of a book, watching TV or going for a short walk after dinner. Boomers with management responsibilities mentioned that they could not switch off from work easily. “I feel difficult to switch off from work; it is something that comes with me since childhood. Also the responsibility here is too much and the institution growth doesn’t cease”, said a Boomer. “I take no breaks. Sometimes I am at the cafeteria solving institutional issues while having lunch. Even there I am working”, he continued.

The Net Generation had a different approach to this subject. They claimed sometimes they work seven days a week and they start to sacrifice certain activities they carried out before employment. They suggested some activities such as going to the cinema, watching TV or playing videogames as the best to switch off from organizational speed because these activities keep your mind busy. There were some

who suggested that breaks are not needed. In their opinion they are able to work long hours in a row and pauses are useful to check personal e-mail and enjoy themselves for a couple of minutes. When it is truly necessary they do not mind eating in front of a computer, whereas Boomers cannot deal with. Developing personal projects as entrepreneurs simultaneously with their job was mentioned by a few Net Geners as a way to escape from organizational speed and rhythm. Nevertheless, they like to be in touch with their organization even on holiday: “In order to relax from the speed and rhythm of my work I go to the cinema and on holiday I don’t give up travelling. But I must confess I don’t resist taking my Blackberry with me to check my e-mails”.

5.5. Coping with stress at work

This topic was added after testing the interview guide. The researcher found it was appropriate to explore a topic related with stress perceptions. Most of interviewees talked about stress situations and made a weak association with the rhythm and speed of the organization. However, stress condition is mostly linked to personal relationships inside the organizations and not to the workload. The investigator tried to determine if these moments were frequent and how did individuals cope with them.

In Boomers’ opinion, people get used to demanding environments and in the end, stress is part of work. However, the majority of older interviewees said in truth they had never felt a stress condition and even if they had, it would have been an exception. Depending on the job, the stress vision differed: Net Geners from marketing and communication departments are used to deal with stressful situations only when there are events and tend to prepare themselves to those easily predictable occasions. “I feel stressed quite often when I don’t know the people I’m working with; I am afraid the others can’t keep deadlines and I can’t control everything”, said one of them.

In Information Technologies (IT) industry the perspective was given by a Net Gener who had been in Angola market for a long period: “I feel stress when I am doing an IT application and it must really work. You have to answer all requests, adjust some elements. It is stressful! Mainly when the projects are time limited.” Nevertheless, there were positive points mentioned by Net Geners. In private companies where “you feel higher levels of stress”, those levels can help one to deal better with him/herself and also to learn how to cope with other people’s anxiety. Those are learning moments too.

5.6. Feedback

This was another topic added after the pilot interview was made. In the literature is often mentioned that there are differences between generations concerning expectations for feedback. Boomers require little feedback to perform correctly their jobs, whereas Net Geners like – and expect – a constant feedback. They feel more comfortable and able to work in a better way under very detail-oriented instructions. Both generations noted that feedback at work was very important; however, Net Geners had actually given more relevance to the topic. A Boomer interviewee revealed that it was more important to be praised by the customer than by the top management. Some said they would not feel comfortable if there was a person giving instructions and feedback of every movement they do.

On the other hand, many Net Geners would like their careers to progress at the same fast pace as the rest of their lives do. They said during the interviews they appreciate continual performance feedback from employers. “I prefer to ask for feedback regularly before conclusions. Corrections can be made and I don’t like carrying out useless work”, a Net Gener noted. After an initial period of integration and adaptation to the company, Net Geners feel they have earned their own space and the need for feedback might decline. When dealing with short projects they prefer to have

feedback in the end in order to keep the work rhythm. However, “when projects have defined stages it is good to have feedback between project stages”, a 24 year-old interviewee said. Net Geners mentioned they like to know that their superior would be rigorous when they present some work. “I also like to know that he trusts me and the quality of my work; and he expresses it giving you more work”, said a Net Gener.

As Glass (2007) noted, these differences in feedback expectations and perceptions “can cause conflict when a younger person manages a Boomer. The older worker may feel insulted by specific instructions, while the Net Gener would feel uneasy or lost without enough guidance. The solution to this scenario is to ask the employer or the employee what his or her expectation is regarding feedback and instructions, and then learn to adapt one’s own approach to the answer”.

5.7. Evolution of Speed and Rhythm in the last 20/30 years

This topic only made sense to people from Baby Boom Generation since most of them started to work 20 years ago or more and they are involved in organizations for a long time. Net Generation has been entering in companies recently, and therefore the researcher decided to apply the study only to older people. The subject was related to the interviewees’ perception of the evolution of speed and rhythm in organizations in the last 20/30 years and the major differences they found.

Many individuals had the perception of a continuous increase of speed and rhythm in organizations on a daily basis. Their perception was the following: nowadays one can execute a task in a second, while it took 4 or 5 hours to do it in the 70s or the 80s. This situation should mean there was no need for people to boost the speed and rhythm at work, because the technology evolution had taken care of it by increasing the speed of task accomplishment. But the opposite happened, they said: speed and rhythm increased exponentially. A 57 year-old Boomer recalled “At the bank we had 2 hours to

lunch in the 80s. A bus would take us to the bank canteen where we had lunch and still had time to play cards or domino before returning to work”.

Other interviewees talked about their experiences in the past. Sub-dimensioned teams were one reason to support that the rhythm had always been high inside organizations. Working and studying at the same time was common in the past to Boomer interviewees and in their opinion it was not easy. They needed high levels of organization and rigour to cope with the rhythm of work and studies. In the 70s and 80s, managers in Portugal started to worry about the performance of their employees and the speed of task performance. A complete example was given by a 55 year-old Boomer: “Thirty years ago I was working in a textile organization and studying at the same time. There was this period when our movements were being timed with a chronometer by a person during all day because the organization was interested to find how the employees made use of their time at work. Of course I felt under pressure at the time and everyone tried to do their best, to be more efficient. Nowadays it is completely different; the rhythm is imposed by me.” The technology cycles were also mentioned as being a catalyst of higher speed. As technology cycles are considered shorter at the present time “this means today we installed last generation equipment here but it already takes a 6 months gap with the USA”, a 57 year-old Boomer consented.

Another difference noted by Boomers was the technology dependence. When machines or computers broke down the problem could take some days or even weeks to be solved because it was a long process and organizations were not dependent on them to survive. “Today, when a machine stops working, the whole organization stops”, a Boomer in the IT sector concluded.

5.8. Generational differences in Speed and Rhythm

People were invited to talk about their perceptions concerning generational differences in speed and rhythm in organizations and to give some examples of their own experience. Few individuals from the older generation testified the higher speed and rhythm of Net Generation at work. They believe young generations are capable of dealing with five or more activities simultaneously and that they bring some positive pressure, enticing older generations to go along with their rhythm. “However, the inexperience can be a problem to them and sometimes it reflects on the quality of work”, stated a Boomer.

It was also mentioned that organizations should explore even more the synergies between young people and older people. Boomers considered that Net Geners bring a whole new method of working without paper, adding speed and high value to the organization. But “we are here to ensure that technical knowledge is taught to them”, assured a Boomer. However, they believed that no one who is naturally passive or only responds to stimuli could suddenly become speedy. In the end it all depends on people’s own personality. A small number of Boomers noted that their perception was that younger people have a trouble-free perspective of work and that they have a wrong fantasy of thinking that everything is easy and smooth. They also considered that younger people are often high-fliers. “I believe this happens because they didn’t go through changes in the organizations like we did. For example, the IT introduction in companies”, concluded a Boomer.

The majority of older interviewees feel that speed and rhythm are related with the person and not with generations. They believe that some people possess a predisposition to higher speed levels and faster rhythm paces whereas others need more time to process the information. When they have a strong connection to the company

Boomers said that people devote themselves to the organization and feel it as part of them. Thus, rhythm easily goes up. A 48 year-old Boomer who was linked to an IT organization stated: “There are people who continuously look forward during their career, always searching for new technologies, working hard to be on top. The problem is when people accommodate and stop the evolution. In organizations like this it is crucial to be always aware of the latest developments. But I believe this is related to people’s personality, not their age. There are young people here that have no career prospects because they don’t run after the organization’s rhythm.”

Surprisingly, and against the formulated hypothesis, Net Generation in general, considered that speed and rhythm differences between people were not directly related with their age. These differences were related with their personality and experience. Still some mentioned that their perception was that older people did their work in a slower, more relaxed way because they did not need to show results as much as younger people had. “We have to show our skills, our ability to do things properly in order to gain some respect inside the organization”, a Net Gener declared.

5.9. The influence of new technologies on Speed and Rhythm

To meet the challenges of a faster world, existing technologies are being improved to enable “warp speed” communications. Speed and rhythm at work go along with them. In general, both generations agree with these statements and believe that new technologies have an essential role in the evolution of speed and rhythm of organizations. Therefore, they believe that a 24/7 connectivity removes the traditional constraints of office hours and location. This topic intended to look for perceptions on how new technologies influenced the speed and rhythm in organizations.

Most people mentioned e-mailing as their primary means of communication at work and believe that organizations became more efficient with e-mail utilization.

However, a few Boomers think people abuse of the e-mail tool. They believe there is no good judgment in users; most of them cannot understand the message's urgency, how and when to reply it. "The first thing I do in the morning is open my e-mail box because that's how most companies work today. I would rather do things in another way. Whenever I can I still present some business presentations in paper. E-mail is very impersonal; I receive dozens of mails during the day and I don't read half of them", confessed a Boomer. Concerning telephone, they referred that its main disadvantage, in contrast with e-mailing, is the need to answer it immediately, even if one has an urgent task between hands. Nevertheless, mobile phone continues to be an essential device to communicate with customers or colleagues in a faster way. A Boomer recalled once again the importance of technology's good utilization: "Nowadays, new technologies are excellent, essential when well used! The mobile phone is a perfect example of how terrible IT can be if used excessively and without restrictions. I can't understand how it was possible to live without them 15-20 years ago!"

Many interviewees said that new technologies such as Internet and online applications smoothed the progress of their work, since they are faster and cheaper than the old methods which required plenty of paper. The answer of a Boomer in the IT sector was quite interesting: "Computers are slow. I only use them as a backup but they are slow, break down very often and you lose lots of time dealing with them. Today's biggest problem is to handle the amount of information you get which was unthinkable some years ago. There are lots of dispersed, non-catalogued and messy information requiring hours to look for. In this type of organizations this is a huge problem".

Net Generation's perceptions were very similar. However, they usually did not focus on technology's weaknesses because they trust it. At work, most of Net Geners take advantage of "mobile phone, e-mail, text messaging, Intranet, Internet, Facebook

and other applications”. They find advantageous its use and believe that in worldwide organizations technology utilization can help to speed up the information stream. “The rhythm is doubtlessly superior, with a faster information flow. People will naturally require more from you and speed will increase”, said a 26 year-old Net Gener. “As one can do things in a faster way and technology leaps some gaps, the deadlines become shorter year after year”, he added. At work, most Net Geners try to optimize and speed up their time by using applications’ shortcuts and avoid using computer’s mouse. They mentioned that in some applications such as Excel, it is very important not to lose time and do things faster. Boomers felt uncomfortable when confronted with this situation.

5.10. New technologies, communication and generations

New technologies and communication modalities can cause problems between generations. Baby Boomers give greater importance to face-to-face communication and easily get up and walk to another office location in order to ask a colleague a question. The younger individuals, however, favour instant messaging, text messaging and e-mails, as mentioned before. Some of them feel more comfortable when sending a quick e-mail or another digital message, than when having a face-to-face conversation or picking up the telephone. They grew up with an abundance of technologies and expect new developments. During this topic conversation, Boomers mentioned their adaptation to a whole new way of working after computers’ introduction. Some were obliged to work with computers to accomplish their tasks; others were defiant and tried until now not to work directly with computers. “The propensity to change walks in the opposite direction of people’s age. And nowadays I have someone to do those computer tasks for me”, was the explanation raised by one Boomer. Nevertheless, a few said they distrusted technology and always tested the same task manually.

They declared that sometimes they needed younger generations to solve simple problems with their computers, from simple warning messages to complicated applications. They feel secure with a Net Gener near them, even though Net Geners referred that “the know-how and help we offer them in this field is undervalued by managers”. Boomers’ perception was that younger generations have a natural ability to deal with new technologies because they were exposed to all this since they were children. However, during the interviews it was possible to find Baby Boomers who had the perception that technology usage was not related with age or generations. They claimed to feel comfortable with IT utilization and to be eager to learn more, because they “don’t use IT as a toy”, as a Boomer said.

Net Geners perception was that people from their generation are e-mail dependent. The first item in daily agenda is to open their e-mail boxes – professional and personal one. The association between new technologies and age was often referred by younger interviewees. However, some said that older people did not need to deal perfectly with new applications because they were in upper positions, with other functions: “The younger generations have a vast technological knowledge that managers do not even imagine. This attribute is not a part of their competences”. A Net Gener referred: “I feel that there are people in my organization who want to learn but lack capabilities and others who simply don’t want to learn. But I consider this situation happens with young and old people”.

Net Geners from Health sector mentioned their difficulties with advanced enhancements regarding new technologies. Their perception was that they could not learn more because in their daily routine there was no need for computers or any other type of technology, or just because the technology was too complicated to everyone. “There are technologies that are user-friendly and people from every generation like to

use them because they are easy to operate and more efficient (e.g.: digital RX). However, there are applications of great value that are difficult to use and people resist to them. It does not matter if you are a young or old person. You have to learn how to use it”, said a 24 year-old Dentist. In the end, the majority of interviewees referred that technology utilization differences seem to be generational, but in some situations it is not. In general terms, some people use technology only for fun and others profit from their know-how to support work and interact with the whole organization.

5.11. Slow Movements

The slow movements’ discussion topic was very successful and interviewees found it very helpful and elucidating. Half of the interviewees were not aware of this philosophy but explanations and examples were given when necessary to align people responses. Slow Food movement and Associação Portuguesa dos Amigos da Sesta were the examples people were better able to identify.

Most people agree with the objective of these movements and maybe in the future they would be available to join such associations. However, and according to the society model we have today, these movements seem to move in the opposite direction and there is no time to live according to their principles. “I believe contemporary speed and rhythm are contrary to human being. However, I would never take a nap after lunch for example”, said a Boomer. It was interesting to find out that most people already practiced the slow food philosophy, even if they were not part of the movement. People have difficulties in slowing down nowadays. As a Boomer said, “When I visit my village, only by the second or third day I start to slow down and relax because it is hard to feel free from society’s speed one is used to”. The perspective of an IT organization employee Boomer was very different: “I don’t think those movements make any sense.

You become dispensable if you do not have speed, velocity. The slow movements' philosophy could never be applied into organizations, it would be disastrous".

The Net Generation opinion did not differ from the Baby Boom Generation. Although the majority of interviewees identified themselves with this slow philosophy, they were not available to join such movement. The important issues to some Net Geners, more than stop and follow that slow concept, are the ideas behind those associations. There were many doubts related to the *siesta* benefits at work and most of Net Geners did not agree with its practice at workplace. The slow food philosophy was once again mentioned as a part of interviewees' life. Net Geners sometimes mentioned that the slow concept is logic when people could not cope with speed and rhythm. Moreover, belong to these associations is a motivation to slow down. "I understand those movements, they fight for something reasonable. However, their adepts are definitely seen as lazy people in our hard working, accomplishment-oriented culture. I believe I already try to do a little bit of a slow life, at least concerning food", said a Net Gener, pharmacist and entrepreneur.

"The human being has the right to leisure time, to enjoy the good things of life and not only to seek a high-quality job. Even that is incoherent: what is a good job today?", a 47 year-old Boomer raised the question.

6. Conclusion

During the course of this work project it was possible to build additional research on speed and rhythm inside organizations. Interviewees' perceptions were fundamental to gather empirical evidence on an understudied topic. Since they were part of various organizations, with diverse functions and from different generations, their opinions were most valuable. Through the interviews it was possible to observe what people actually understood about this subject. Their experience proved to be important to confront the hypothesis that initiated this study: Net Generation, the youngest generation in the workforce, can cope easier with higher speed and rhythm in the organizations, by using new technologies with enthusiasm, when compared with older generations. The research question on this study was: Do Net Generation and Baby Boom Generation cope differently with speed and rhythm at work?

Some findings from the interviews proved to be familiar or even common sense. However, there were some results that could expand the knowledge on this area and be further explored in the future. The first important finding from this investigation was that both generations have similar perceptions about speed and rhythm at their work. No strongly opposite perceptions about this topic were observed. In general, people could think that older generations would be aware of a slower speed and rhythm at work and in life because of their age, knowledge and experience in managing time. This was not true. Baby Boom Generation concluded that currently speed and rhythm in their organizations were high and they had to learn how to keep up with it. Concerning Net Generation the results were more plausible according to the investigator expectations. Most Net Geners mentioned the high speed and rhythm not only at work but also in all the other dimensions of their lives. It would be significant to analyse a vast number of

employees belonging to the same Industry, such as IT or Health sector – the results could show other strong patterns.

Secondly, the intensity and extent of exposure to technology has had a major impact on how people perceive work as well as when, where and how it can be done. It allows a 24/7 connection to others but especially to work. This full-time connectivity eliminates the traditional constraints of office hours and place. Technology encourages networks and the absence of boundaries makes operating in hierarchies problematic and challenges traditional ways of doing and managing work. Initially, this difference appears to be generational. But it is not. It is the difference between those who face technology as a tool or a toy and those who consider it as the way to create know-how and interact with the world.

The third finding was that Net Generation is used to do multitasking as a way to cope with high speed and rhythm, while Boom Generation, in general, cannot deal with it. This conclusion confirms previous researches. Net Geners are the first workplace generation to be digital natives and they are used to manage several tasks at the same time. However, when there are priority jobs most Net Geners realize they have to stop doing other tasks and focus their attention.

Although most people agree with Slow Movements' philosophy, they generally believe it is very hard to put it into practice as a standard of living. This was the fourth conclusion. Several individuals from both generations mentioned they already practiced some slow food concept by scheduling meals. However, the slow concept aims are much wider and people do not have the time or the possibility to follow a slow life.

From these four conclusions it was possible to reject the hypothesis that Net Generation can cope easier with faster speed and rhythm in organizations than Baby Boom Generation. It was not possible to create a pattern within each generation, at least

concerning their perceptions. They both have the perception of high speed and rhythm inside their organizations and the way to cope with it is personal, not generational. Therefore, the Net Generation cannot deal smoothly with high speed and rhythm at work when compared with older generations.

Despite the effort put into this study, its main limitations were related to the availability of people to be interviewed and the time on hand to perform the investigation. Twenty-four people were interviewed, but for higher accuracy in results it would be recommended to extend the sample and bring Generation X into the study. It would also be important to extend the scope of the research. Interviewing people from different cities or even different countries would definitely bring more value and strength to the results. The type and industry of organizations could also be diversified.

As a final review, Net Geners welcome the chance to cooperate with older, more experienced colleagues combining the technological know-how of their generation with the experience and perspective of the older generations. Baby Boomers feel they can contribute to the development of young professionals by mentoring their careers. This intergenerational teamwork will give the organizations the possibility to leverage the best qualities of each generation and team member to speed up on their technological skills. The challenge to most organizations is to create new incentives to employees and to exploit these opportunities.

7. References

- Bauerlein, Mark.** 2008. *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future*. New York: Penguin Group.
- Barker, Carolyn and Alexandra Payne.** 2006. *Speed@Work: How Velocity, Turbulence, Fast Growth, Rapid Change and Strategic Agility Affect Business and the Workplace*. Australia: John Wiley & Sons.
- Cennamo, Lucy and Dianne Gardner.** 2008. "Generational differences in work values, outcomes and person-organisation values fit", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 23(8): 891-906.
- Cunha, Miguel P., Carlos C. Cardoso, Rita C. Cunha, Arménio Rego.** 2004. *Manual de Comportamento Organizacional e Gestão*. Lisbon: RH Editora.
- Eisenhardt, Kathleen M.** 1992. "Speed and strategic choices: accelerating decision-making", *Strategy and Leadership*, 20(5): 30-32.
- Eisenhardt, Kathleen M.** 1989. "Making Fast Strategic Decisions in High-Velocity Environments", *Academy of Management Journal*, 32(3): 543-576.
- Eisenhardt, Kathleen M.** 1990. "Speed and Strategic Choice: How managers accelerate decision making", *Academy of Management Journal*, 32: 543-576.
- Eisenhardt, Kathleen M. and Shona L. Brown.** 1998. "Time Pacing: Competing in markets that won't stand still", *Harvard Business Review*, March-April: 59-69.
- Glass, Amy.** 2007. "Understanding generational differences for competitive success", *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 39(2): 98-103.
- Gleick, James.** 2000. *Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything*. London: Abacus.
- Honoré, Carl.** 2004. *In Praise of Slow: How a Worldwide Movement is Challenging the Cult of Speed*. London: Orion Books.
- Huy, Quy N.** 2001. "Time, Temporal Capability and Planned Change", *Academy of Management Review*, 26(4): 601-623.
- Huy, Quy N. and Henry Mintzberg.** 2003. "The Rhythm of Change", *MIT Sloan Management Review*, Summer 2003: 79-84.
- Jorgensen, Bradley.** 2003. "Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y", *Foresight*, 5(4): 41-49.

Malhotra, Naresh K. and David F. Birks. 2007. *Marketing Research: An Applied Approach*. Essex: Pearson Education Limited.

Martin, Carolyn A. 2005. "From high maintenance to high productivity: What managers need to know about Generation Y", *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 37(1): 39-44.

Perlow, Leslie A., Gerardo A. Okhuysen and Nelson P. Repenning. 2002. "The Speed Trap: Exploring the Relationship between Decision Making and Temporal Context", *Academy of Management Journal*, 45(5): 931-955.

Prentice, Steve. 2007. *Cool Down: Getting Further by Going Slower*. Canada: John Wiley & Sons.

Slow Food International. 2009. <http://www.slowfood.com/> (accessed January 22, 2009).

The Slow Movement: Making a Connection. 2009. <http://www.slowmovement.com/> (accessed January 22, 2009).

Tapscott, Don. 2009. *Grown Up Digital: How the Net Generation is Changing your World*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Whipp, Richard, Barbara Adam and Ida Sabelis. 2002. *Making Time: Time and Management in Modern Organizations*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Wong, Melissa, Elliroma Gardiner, Whitney Lang and Leah Coulon. 2008. "Generational differences in personality and motivation: Do they exist and what are the implications for the workplace?", *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 23(8): 878-890.

Appendices

Appendix I – Interview Guide

Filters

- a) People born between 1945 and 1964 (Baby Boom Generation) or between 1982 and 2000 (Net Generation);
- b) Interviewee must be integrated in the labour market;
- c) Quotas: Baby Boom Generation – 50%; Net Generation – 50%;

Introduction (Warm-up and initial question)

Good morning/afternoon. My name is André Correia and I am a student of the Masters in Management at Faculdade de Economia da Universidade Nova de Lisboa. I am conducting a research study in Portugal to my final work project on Organizational Sciences. The topic under discussion is “Speed and Rhythm in Organizations: How do different generations cope with speed and rhythm at work?” For this research I am using a particular technique: the non-directive method; it means that I will not ask you specific questions about the subject as in a standard questionnaire. After the first question that I will introduce now, you will be free to tell me whatever comes to your mind on the subject... If you don’t mind, I will record the interview. This interview will last approximately 1 hour. Thus my question is the following:
How do you perceive the speed and rhythm in your life and at work?

Main topics to be developed

- Personal experience:
 - How do you cope with speed and rhythm at work?
 - Multitasking at work;
 - Escapes to the speed and rhythm of your work/life;
 - Stress at work: How do you cope with those moments? (Added after testing the interview);
 - Feedback: constant or not? (Added after testing the interview);
- Perceptions:
 - Evolution of speed and rhythm in organizations in the last 20/30 years (Boomers only);
 - Generational differences concerning speed and rhythm in organization;
- New Technologies:
 - Influence on the speed and rhythm of organizations;
 - How do different generations use it?
 - Communication in organization;
- Slow Movements:
 - Perceptions and opinion (explain the concept if necessary);

Interviewee’s information:

- Age; Gender; Main activity and Organization sector.

Appendix II – Interviewees’ Profile & Sample Summary

#	Main Activity	Organization Sector	Gender	Age	Generation
1	Publisher promoter	Private	F	56	Boomer
2	Chief Communications Officer	Public	F	24	Net Gen
3	Bank employee (back-office)	Private	M	57	Boomer
4	Director in the State Company	Public	M	47	Boomer
5	Medicine intern	Public	F	23	Net Gen
6	Lawyer in a law firm	Private	M	50	Boomer
7	Manager in a Human Resources Consulting Company	Private	F	45	Boomer
8	Manager in a Health Institution/ University Professor	Private	F	55	Boomer
9	Corporate Consultant	Private	M	23	Net Gen
10	Entrepreneur	Private	M	57	Boomer
11	Marketing Division in a IT Company	Private	F	26	Net Gen
12	Administrative in a Consulting Company	Private	F	45	Boomer
13	Nutritionist	Private	F	26	Net Gen
14	University Dean	Public	M	57	Boomer
15	Economist in a State Company	Public	F	27	Net Gen
16	Lawyer in a law firm	Private	F	24	Net Gen
17	Dentist	Private	F	24	Net Gen
18	Pharmacist and Entrepreneur	Private	M	27	Net Gen
19	IT Consultant	Private	M	23	Net Gen
20	Customer Support in a IT Company	Private	M	48	Boomer
21	Audit Analyst	Private	M	23	Net Gen
22	Marketeer in Advertising Company	Private	M	25	Net Gen
23	Sub-director in a State Company	Public	M	54	Boomer
24	Magazine Manager	Private	F	55	Boomer

Sample Summary:

