

# Hot topic

After the Brexit referendum, it has been revealed that while most young voters chose to stay, many in the older generations voted to leave, highlighting a considerable generational gap in politics. Is this an issue when managing multiple generations in the workforce?

**“An age breakdown of EU referendum polling shows young voters overwhelmingly supported remain while older people backed Brexit.”**  
*Huffington Post, 24 June*

**“It has been estimated that only 36% of people in the 18 – 24 year old category voted in the EU referendum.”**  
*Independent, 27 June*



**Jon Hull, group head of resourcing, Carillion**

While there was a split in the way older and younger generations voted, I think the analysis shows a much more sophisticated picture of a divided Britain. How this plays out in the workplace I think is irrelevant. There has been much heat and light talked about Generation Z and how different they are. The reality is, they have very similar needs and desires to other generations.

Myths abound that Gen Z want more flexible working and want to change jobs every five years. The research suggests this is not the case. Like all generations they want to gain skills and knowledge and progress.

For this generation, a stable income is economic rationality when faced with student debt and high property prices.



**Anna Shields, director and co-founder, Consensio**

The most common post-referendum comments I hear from those in the older generation who voted to leave is: “I’m doing it for your future.” Yet the child or grandchild responds: “But I voted to remain.” Here lies the conundrum that I often see in my job as a workplace mediator; each party feels passionately that they are making the right decision not just for themselves, but also for their team, the department, or the organisation. However, difficult conversations at work often arise because of different

perceptions, intentions, expectations and experiences.

Is this exacerbated when mediating conflicts between different generations? I see the age dynamic at play, but I am not convinced that it is the root cause of the issue. Yes, there are differences, but far more important is the need to be listened to, to be heard, and to be understood. These needs are ageless.



**Angus Hanton, co-founder, Intergenerational Foundation**

Organisations must be mindful of stoking intergenerational workplace conflict as they navigate their way through Brexit. Intergenerational tensions are likely to increase if younger generations are affected disproportionately.

Due to market shocks following the result, private pension schemes deficits have hit an unprecedented £118 billion. This may oblige employers to put more money aside, thereby reducing monies available to expand, invest, promote, increase pay, or recruit new, principally younger, staff.

If sales contracts are pulled, younger staff members could fall victim to a ‘last in, first out’ redundancy policy. A moratorium on recruitment is also more likely to affect younger workers.

Lack of business confidence may see organisations preferring to outsource roles rather than take on full-time workers. This could lock younger workers out of those in-work employment perks and protections – such as sick pay, travel pass schemes and pension contributions – already enjoyed by full-time older workers.

Since many younger workers who voted ‘in’ may feel that older colleagues have pulled the rug from under them, the role of HR departments will be crucial in ensuring that the generations are treated equitably if or when hard decisions have to be made.



**Jean Pralong, associate professor of human resources management and new careers chair, NEOMA Business School, Paris**

The idea of generation has invaded many analyses: in management, HR and political science, the differences in behaviour are explained on the basis of differences in generations.

But what do the members of a generation have in common? What do a business school graduate and a craftsman share, apart from their age? What does the child of a top executive and the child of an employee have in common? Are their behaviours equally crafted by technology? Do they really have the same access to information? Obviously, no.

The generational variable is less explanatory than social class, education or territories. Trying to explain differences in behaviour by differences of generations is attempting to hide these other differences – and demonstrates the existence of a stereotype of youth in Western Europe.

Youth represents deviance, but also creativity, renewal and progress. Young people are perceived as embodying the vanguard of these new behaviours. But this is just a stereotype. So, who cares? **HR**