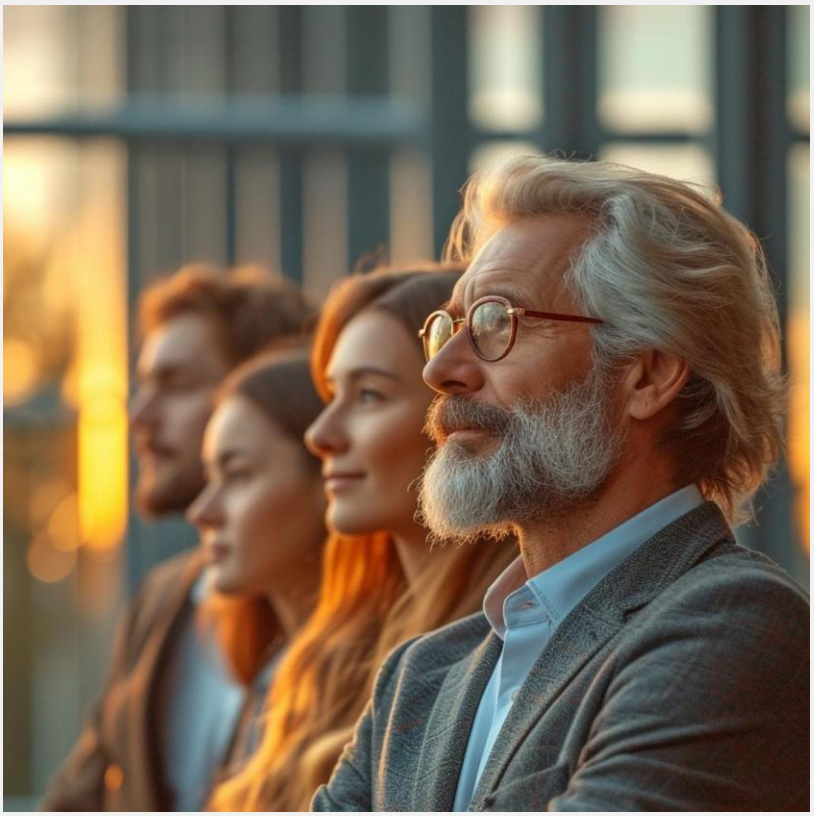
Erasmus+



GENSKILLS E-GUIDE: BRIDGES BETWEEN GENERATIONS

How can we turn generational differences into a competitive advantage? – lessons from the GENSKILLS project's training sessions, workshops and study visits

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INTRODUCTION

The GENSKILLS project, an Erasmus+ KA210-ADU small-scale partnership project, was implemented under the leadership of the Somogy Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SKIK), in partnership with the Békés County Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BVKIK) and the Italian organisation Marco Polo G.E.I.E. The initiative was a direct response to the economic challenge posed by generational change and intergenerational cooperation in the workplace for the sustainability of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The programme was based on the recognition that the simultaneous presence of four age groups (from Baby Boomers to Generation Z) brings to the surface new conflicts, such as communication gaps arising from the use of digital tools, differing views on work-life balance, and a crisis in traditional managerial authority.

The primary aim of the project was to provide theoretical and practical training for professionals – including HR consultants, business development mentors, company directors and staff at professional bodies – who support businesses on a day-to-day basis during generational transitions. The project's key conclusion is that generational differences should be viewed not as an insurmountable problem, but as an untapped resource. The programme sought to build a methodological bridge that enables the decades of strategic experience and organisational wisdom of older generations to be organically combined with the digital native status and agility of younger generations, thereby transforming internal tensions into a sustainable economic advantage.

This final report (e-Guide) is a comprehensive, professionally written summary of the results achieved during the GENSKILLS project, combining academic rigour with a practical focus. The structure of the report is based on the following three main sections:

1. **Situation Analysis:** Drawing on the results of a questionnaire-based survey conducted in the SME sector of Somogy and Békés counties, involving nearly one hundred companies, this section provides a detailed diagnosis of the generational challenges faced by Hungarian firms, with particular regard to communication and value-based rifts, as well as crises arising from changes in ownership.
2. **Methodological best practices:** It systematises the international experiences gained from programmes successfully implemented during the project – the professional workshop focusing on business succession, the two-day intergenerational training course, and the study trip to Italy (organised in the Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, Trentino and Veneto regions).
3. **Management recommendations:** It offers companies practical solutions that can be implemented immediately, along with specific management tools, tailored to the company's size, scope of activities and the number of generations present within the organisation.

1 SITUATION ANALYSIS

1.1 The concept of a generation

The word ‘generation’ is of Latin origin *(generatio),* meaning: generation, procreation; *genero, geno*: to beget, to give birth. We often use it as a synonym for ‘age group’. In a biological sense*, ‘we are referring to the period of life of successive generations’* (Akadémiai Kiadó, 1972).

A generation (or cohort) is a group of people born roughly within the same period, who have grown up in a similar historical, economic and technological environment. As their experiences in their early years shape their world view, members of a generation share similar values, customs and communication styles.

1.2 The impact of social change on generations

Research into generational differences is now not merely a theoretical HR issue, but a factor that directly influences the operation of businesses. Underlying this are radical changes in the technological environment, as well as those macrosocial and cultural processes which, in different ways, have a significant impact on the thinking and behaviour of all generations. In recent years, the following processes in particular have contributed to this shift in perspective:

- *Demographic factors:* due to falling birth rates and the raising of the retirement age, four generations are now working side by side in the labour market. Such a wide age gap is unprecedented in modern economic history.
- *Rapid advances in information technology*: previously, the older generation passed on professional skills to the younger generation. Today, in the age of digitalisation and artificial intelligence, the flow of technological knowledge has reversed – young people often adopt new tools more quickly and with greater proficiency than their superiors.
- *Globalisation and mobility:* accession to the European Union, the opening of the Schengen borders, the rise of low-cost flights and educational programmes such as Erasmus have made travel a part of everyday life and a fundamental experience, particularly for the younger generations. Through travel and study or work experience abroad, people have become more open to other cultures, languages and ways of life.
- *The multicultural environment* has also become an everyday reality in the physical world, thanks to the emergence of large corporations and the presence of international students, and has contributed to the strengthening of liberal values and legal awareness.
- *Expectations regarding work have changed*: while respect for hierarchy, conformism and the prioritisation of collective interests were characteristic of earlier generations, these have now been replaced by individualism, equality and the establishment of strict personal boundaries. The demand for flexible working arrangements (working from home, hybrid models) has grown particularly strong in the wake of the Covid pandemic. What older managers perceive as a lack of loyalty is, for young people, a fundamental prerequisite for mental wellbeing.

If a modern company – be it a multinational or a family-run SME – fails to take this shift in mindset into account, it will inevitably lose its competitiveness in the labour market.

1.3 Characteristics of the generations

According to accepted theories in sociology, modern society is currently made up of five active generational cohorts. Below, I provide a structured summary, at university-level, of the different generations, their time periods and their most important distinguishing features.

1.3.1 The Veteran / Builder Generation (those born before 1945)

The oldest group in today's society, with the greatest life experience, is referred to as the Veterans or Builders. They were born into a turbulent world where, due to the war, anything could happen and everyday life had become unpredictable. Their lives were typically shaped by *external circumstances*; consequently, their fundamental experiences were characterised by uncertainty, vulnerability, loss and deprivation. Their socialisation and social life took place primarily within *the* immediate *family*, as well as in local and religious communities, governed by strict sets of norms.

To this day, a fundamental value for members of this generation is *the unconditional respect for* and observance of *traditions*, which, at the level of business, is often manifested in the classical passing down of a trade from father to son.

Their economic behaviour is characterised by the systematic *building up of reserves* and the accumulation of wealth. This thrifty mindset is also radically evident in their financial affairs: they are able to set money aside even from the most meagre resources, practically from nothing, and they devote their savings primarily to providing financial support and start-up capital for their grandchildren.

They are currently the oldest executives in the corporate sector and *the founders of* family *businesses*. They are characterised by strong organisational *loyalty* and tend to spend their entire working lives at a single workplace. They respect formal positions and hard-earned status.

1.3.2 Baby Boomers (1946–1964)

In the period following the Second World War, birth rates rose suddenly and dramatically, due in part to systemic political interventions and in part to a voluntary effort to replace war casualties. In Hungary, the symbolic figure embodying the demographic expectations of the era was Anna Ratkó, Minister of Health; during the 'Ratkó era', named after her, the number of births in the country soared. It was during this period that women began entering the labour market *en masse*, which, alongside their traditional roles as mothers and wives, resulted in a completely new kind of social burden.

Members of this generation also experienced a sense of threat and uncertainty, though only indirectly: radio and television brought the atmosphere *of the Cold War* into everyday life.

It was this generation that first articulated the desire to truly live, rather than merely survive. Although they were not yet able to bring about a complete revolution in individualism, they bequeathed the importance of self-realisation as an intellectual legacy to subsequent generations.

The loosening of family norms was evident in their efforts to place love at the centre of child-rearing, though they struggled to express their emotions. They therefore expressed their love primarily through constant concern for their children and attentive 'nurturing'.

At the same time, as previous taboos were broken down, the first serious social movements demanding gender equality also began to emerge. The student uprisings of the 1960s, the hippie movement and the culture of the Beat Generation grew out of this generation's cultural rebellion.

Despite all this, institutional systems, acquired *knowledge* and *respect for authority* remained fundamental values for them. Their mindset is characterised by long-term *planning*, *measured in years and decades*, and an exceptional *focus on tasks*. They are characterised by *loyalty*, *hard work*, *respect for authority* and a *sense of community*.

They have spent much of their lives in the analogue world, but *have adapted to the digital revolution*.

In their consumer habits, a tendency towards *hoarding and stockpiling* can also be observed, though for them this behaviour manifests itself in the hunt for special offers and bargain prices, where considerations of quantity and the opportunity to save money often take precedence over quality. They strive for financial security and conspicuous status symbols (such as their own home and car). They are optimistic, but find it difficult to tolerate uncertainty and structural changes.

1.3.3 Generation X (1965–1979)

The 'lost' or independent generation. *Work-life* balance, independence and pragmatism are very important to them. As children, they were independent 'latchkey kids' with parents who worked long hours.

The lives of Generation X have been increasingly shaped by technology. This includes both domestic appliances (washing machines, spin dryers, vacuum cleaners) and consumer electronics (record players, cassette recorders). They are the first wave *of 'digital immigrants*': having learnt to use technology as adults, they apply it at a practical level but remain attached to traditional values.

This is also linked to a drive for *perfection*, which can be realised in their work. It is also associated with *resilience* and *long working hours*.

Those born into Generation X are already questioning the authority and impeccable knowledge of Veterans and Baby Boomers. Their peers and friends are the most credible sources for them; even as parents and adults, they prefer to seek recommendations from their circle of friends for any professional or service.

Their perfectionism extends to their parenting; they go to great lengths to ensure they do everything perfectly in this area too, and they are overprotective of their children. Because they do everything perfectly, and deep down they still harbour a respect for hierarchy and age, they find it difficult to cope with the demands of Generations Z and Y in the world of work.

They are characterised by *pragmatism*, *scepticism* towards institutions and a high degree of *problem-solving ability*. They form the backbone of the current middle and senior management.

1.3.4 Generation Y / Millennials (1980–1994)

The turn-of-the-millennium generation. The first truly *self-centred* generation. It is precisely this that provokes the anger of earlier generations.

They are the last generation to have been born into an offline world, only to grow up in the online, digital world. Friendships are important here too, but much more so in virtual reality. This generation *is* increasingly *experience-oriented*.

The direction of knowledge and knowledge transfer is often reversed, leading to revolutionary change and *a questioning of traditional values*. Most have received *higher education*, making this the best-educated generation.

In their attitude towards the world of work, one half of the generation holds 'Generation X' attitudes: resilience, loyalty and humility; the other half is exactly the opposite. They are, above all, loyal to themselves and keep their own interests in mind. The future is becoming increasingly unpredictable for them too; there are no truths set in stone, whether in relation to work, professionally, or in their immediate environment. They are increasingly thinking in the short term in all areas of life, a trend fuelled by the rapid development of digitalisation.

They have brought the concepts of *work-life* balance and the need for a higher purpose in work into the public consciousness. They expect *flexibility,* flat organisational structures and partnership-based leadership. They are characterised by a global outlook and openness, but also by a tendency to postpone starting a family due to an uncertain existential backdrop.

1.3.5 Generation Z (1995–2009)

The parents of this generation strive to sort everything out for them – so-called 'helicopter parents'. In doing so, they are essentially trying to make up for their own shortcomings, which does not make things any easier for young people. It is a common experience that they do not make mistakes: on the one hand because their parents do not allow it, and on the other, if they do, they *shift the blame onto* someone or something else. They are the first true generation of digital natives, for whom virtual and physical reality are completely

intertwined. They are currently the youngest employees and university students. They are globally minded; for them, the virtual world and reality are fused together. They are no longer experience-seekers, but are growing up *in an 'experience society*'. With a slight exaggeration, they are given everything, from specially prepared meals to a wealth of bespoke toys. They are the ones whom their predecessors never allowed to get bored; silence is unknown to them, and they live *in a state of constant stimulation*. Their cognitive schemas have been shaped by smartphones and algorithms. With smart devices in their pockets and unlimited internet access, all the knowledge in the world is available at the touch of a button. Consequently, the traditional top-down transfer of knowledge effectively no longer exists for them.

They are realistic, even cautious. Psychological safety and mental health are of paramount importance to them. They are strongly inclusive and supportive of diversity, and reject formal authority and bureaucracy.

They view work strictly as a means of earning a living; it does not define their identity. They expect the option of hybrid or remote working, *instant feedback* and complete transparency. If the working environment is toxic, they will resign immediately. They find it difficult to maintain personal contact and participate in workplace meetings. They much prefer communication via text or voice messages, as this involves less risk and does not require an immediate response. Whether in consumption or at work, it is important to them that everything is just right, and if they do not like something, they should be able to move on.

1.3.6 Generation Alpha (born from 2010 onwards)

The term *'Alpha'* refers to the fact that an era ended with Generation Z, and a new one begins with them. They were born into a fully digital world, in the age of touchscreens and artificial intelligence. They are expected to be the most highly educated and most technology-driven generation.

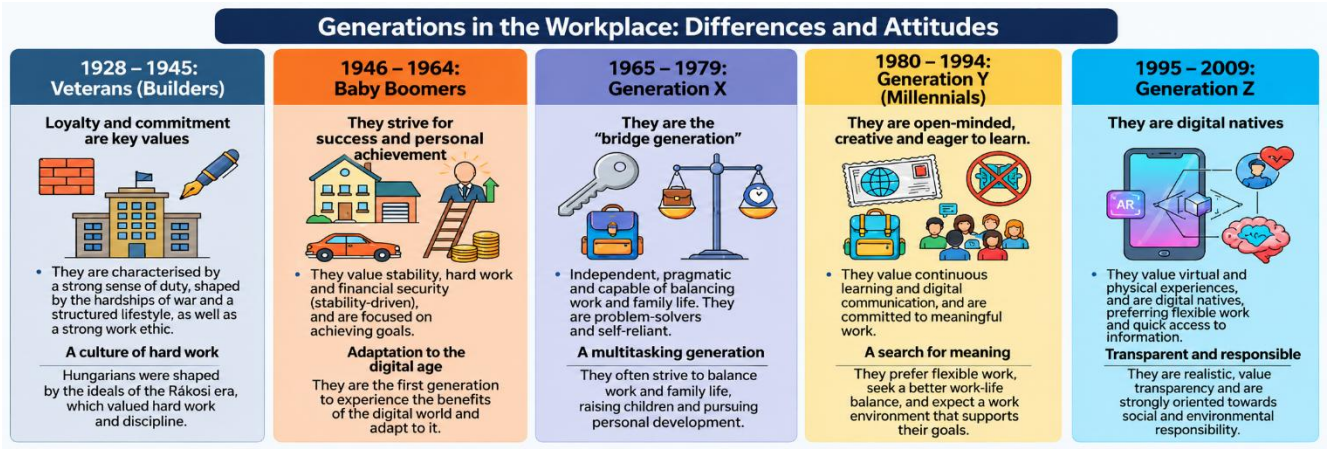


Figure 1: Generational overview (AI-generated)

1.4 Generational diversity as a challenge for the modern economy

One of the most complex challenges facing 21st-century corporate management is the social and cultural divide between the generations coexisting in the labour market. This is not simply a matter of natural differences arising from age, but rather a fundamental transformation in economic backgrounds, technological capabilities and attitudes towards work. While in the second half of the 20th century, workplace structures were held together by experience accumulated over many years and the authority derived from one's position, in today's diverse organisational environment, different age groups participate in day-to-day tasks with completely different mindsets and expectations. From a business perspective, this phenomenon causes operational and management problems in two critical areas: day-to-day organisational cooperation, and the processes involved in the transfer of company management and ownership.

At the level of day-to-day work organisation, the problems stem primarily *from differences in communication* and differing interpretations of *the concept of work*. Members of the older generations regard face-to-face meetings, telephone calls and formal, detailed emails as the basis of business communication, while young people who have grown up in the digital world prefer quick, instant messaging and chat platforms. This discrepancy leads to constant internal tension: older managers often perceive the younger generation's style as superficial or disrespectful, while the youngest employees view traditional corporate processes as unnecessarily slow and bureaucratic.

This divide is further exacerbated by perceptions of *performance* and *loyalty*. For the older generation, physical presence and commitment beyond working hours are the hallmarks of reliability; in contrast, younger people draw strict boundaries to protect their private lives and regard flexible, results-oriented, hybrid working as a prerequisite for fundamental intellectual and mental wellbeing.

Even more serious than day-to-day disputes within an organisation, and often posing a threat to the very existence of the company, are the issues surrounding *generational succession* and *changes in ownership*, which pose a particular risk to family-owned small and medium-sized enterprises. In such situations, business rationality often clashes with family emotions and internal tensions.

For company founders, personal identity and the business have become completely intertwined over the decades; consequently, the transfer of decision-making powers or the actual relinquishment of control is accompanied by a fear of losing their life's work.

The next generation, by contrast, brings with them a modern, systematic and digitalised approach to management, which seeks to break away from the paternalistic style of the founder, built on personal relationships and intuition.

If the business is unable to consciously manage this transition – for example, through a formal Family Constitution that strictly separates ownership, management and family roles – the generational handover becomes a protracted internal stalemate. According to statistics, this rigidity causes a significant proportion of family businesses to fail during the critical phase of ownership transfer.

1.5 Characteristics of family businesses in Italy

Generational conflicts and the difficulties involved in handing over the reins of a business can be understood even more clearly by examining the situation in Italy, which *is regarded as a model for European family businesses*. To this day, the backbone and strength of the Italian economy lie in family-owned businesses, which span almost every sector, from small shops to global luxury brands. In this context, generational succession is not merely an isolated corporate problem, but an issue at the level of the national economy, which exhibits unique patterns due to the country's specific cultural and social structure.

The most distinctive feature of Italian corporate culture is its deeply rooted gerontocracy – that is, a system in which power and strategic decision-making are concentrated in the hands of the older generation. According to European statistics, the average age of Italian company directors is among the highest on the continent. The

founders step down from their leadership roles extremely late, often only in their seventies or eighties. This often poses a serious obstacle to modernisation: while the global market demands rapid digital transformation and agile operations, older leaders tend to insist on methods that guaranteed their past successes but are now outdated.

This situation is further complicated by the specific social position of young Italians, which sociology often describes using the terms *'mammoni'* (closely attached to their parents) or *'bamboccioni'* (overgrown children). Due to high youth unemployment and precarious labour market conditions, young Italians in their twenties and thirties leave the family home extremely late by European standards. This prolonged financial and emotional dependence within the family is directly reflected in the way family businesses operate. Despite holding management degrees from prestigious foreign universities or elite domestic institutions, the next generation – Generations Y and Z – are often sidelined within the company for decades. Without any real responsibility, they work under the strict supervision of the founding parent, which stifles their innovative initiatives and leads to deep internal frustration.

The Italian example thus clearly illustrates that the technological and theoretical expertise of young people is not enough to bridge the generation gap. As long as the family hierarchy and the unquestionable authority of the older generation override business rationality, companies will be unable to renew themselves. The success of succession in Italy, too, depends on whether the older generation is able to set aside emotional ties and ingrained habits and consciously and promptly embrace the younger generation – with its global outlook – as partners.

Perspective	Hungary	Italy
The *Boomer* core experience	The political transition, an economy of scarcity, followed by the shock of unbridled capitalism in the 1990s.	The *'Boom economico'* (the prosperity of the 1960s), the establishment of a stable welfare state, strong trade unions.
Housing for young people	The pressure to become independent at an early age (often through taking out a loan), or being forced to remain in the parental home out of necessity.	The *'Mammoni'* phenomenon: young people in their thirties are culturally happy to live with their parents for the sake of convenience.
Family businesses	Young, fragile structures (the first or second generational handover is currently taking place).	Centuries-old traditions; family dynasties spanning up to four or five generations that have grown into global brands.
Labour market mobility	High propensity to migrate to Western Europe in search of better wages.	Strong internal migration (from south to north), structural youth unemployment.

1.6 Generational issues within businesses

Generational tensions in the workplace do not merely stem from 'what sort of music people listen to', but paralyse fundamental aspects of day-to-day operations.

Communication and collaboration gaps

The main point of friction lies in the channels through which information flows. While older managers prefer face-to-face meetings, structured emails or telephone calls, the youngest members of staff communicate asynchronously: via chat apps, bullet points and voice messages. This leads to the older generation viewing younger staff as disrespectful or superficial, while younger staff suffer from hierarchical and slow approval processes.

Motivation and career path management

Traditional incentive schemes (e.g. 'if you work hard for ten years, we'll promote you') have become completely ineffective for Generation Z. They expect *instant feedback* and rapid progression. If they do not receive this, they will change jobs without a second thought. This staff turnover represents a huge cost to companies.

The situation facing large corporations: structural rigidity and cultural transformation

Most large corporations still operate according to the highly hierarchical, slow-moving systems established by Generation X and the late Baby Boomers. Young talent (Generations Y and Z) finds this stifling; they are looking for agile, project-based and flexible ways of working.

'*Quiet* Quitting' and staff turnover: The most significant phenomenon to emerge in the corporate sector is when young employees do not resign but simply do the bare minimum because they feel no emotional attachment to the brand.

The crisis of credibility surrounding corporate values: Large corporations are keen to promote sustainability and diversity (green and DEI policies). However, if a Generation Z employee perceives this to be merely 'greenwashing' (cosmetic measures), they lose their motivation and become cynical towards management.

The specific tragedy of family businesses: the crisis of *succession*

While tensions in large corporations can be mitigated through HR tools and training, in family businesses generational succession often turns into an emotional and existential drama. This segment forms the backbone of the European SME sector, which is why the problem has national economic implications.

The founder (usually a Boomer or early Gen Xer) regards the company as their 'child', which they built up during the turbulent and tough times of the 1980s and 1990s at the cost of enormous sacrifices. They are unable to relinquish control because they feel that the successor is not sufficiently committed and does not respect the traditions.

A clash of values is often seen in day-to-day operations, for example when the successor (Generation Y or Z), having graduated from university, wants to digitise the business and introduce reporting systems and professional management practices. The founder often views this as a bureaucratic waste of money and prefers to 'gut feelings' and personal connections.

One of the major pitfalls of family businesses is that the company is the topic of conversation even at Sunday lunch. Conflicts between father and son or mother and daughter spill directly into the boardroom, paralysing decision-making. Statistics show that only 30 per cent of family businesses survive the transition to the second generation, and a mere 10–12 per cent make it to the third.

1.7 The main types of generational challenges in business operations

Generational differences represent not only an HR challenge for modern businesses, but also a direct strategic and operational risk. This set of issues can be divided into two main areas of focus:

a) Generational transition in management and/or ownership

This issue particularly affects the family-run SME sector, where the value systems of the founder (usually a Boomer or early Gen X) and the successor (Gen Y or Gen Z) clash. Founders often exhibit 'Founder's syndrome': the company is part of their identity, so they are unable to hand over real control because they consider the successor to be too young or inexperienced.

The root of the conflict lies in leadership style. Whereas the founder's model is paternalistic, relying on informal relationships and intuition, the better-educated successor wishes to introduce data-driven, systematic and digitalised operations. If family and business roles are not formally separated (for example, through a Family Constitution), personal tensions can paralyse decision-making. Statistically, barely a third of family businesses survive this first change of ownership.

b) Intergenerational cooperation in day-to-day work organisation

According to labour market analyses, one of the barriers to cooperation in the workplace today is the generation gap. For the first time in the history of the labour market, as many as four or five generations are working side by side in the same workplace. Members of the Baby Boomer, Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z cohorts bring different experiences, communication styles and career expectations to organisations. While different age groups hold differing perspectives, an increasing number of people are recognising that generational diversity is not a challenge, but can also be a significant business advantage. Successful organisations develop leadership and HR practices that foster collaboration, knowledge-sharing and mutual understanding.

2 Questionnaire survey: Generational transition in businesses and intergenerational collaboration

Aggregated statistical analysis based on data from 120 respondents (Békés and Somogy counties)

As part of the GENSKILLS project, two consortium partners – the Békés County Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Somogy County Chamber of Commerce and Industry – drew up a questionnaire-based survey (Appendix). In accordance with the project proposal, the content of the questionnaire was reviewed by Italian experts through the Marco Polo programme. The aim of the study was to assess the preparedness of Hungarian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) for generational succession, to identify points of communication friction in multi-generational workplaces, and to examine the current use of tools supporting the handover process.

The analysis is based on the consolidation of data from two previous separate (county-level) questionnaires, resulting in a total of 120 complete company responses being processed. The sample comprises an equal proportion of businesses from Békés and Somogy counties.

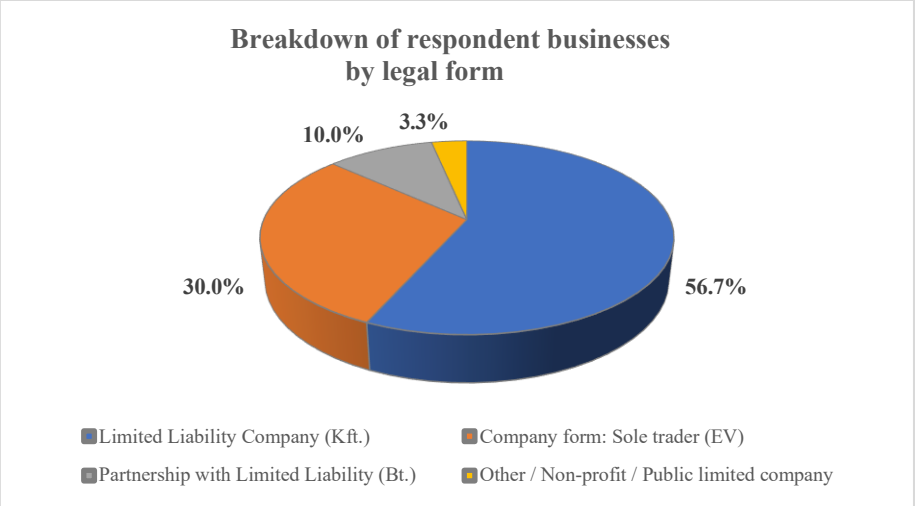
The main findings highlight that more than two-thirds of businesses will be actively affected by the issue of generational succession over the next decade; however, the prevalence of formal, written strategic plans remains low. In terms of intergenerational communication, the greatest challenge lies in differences in work pace and flexibility, while respondents identified clear, open communication and targeted management training for successors as absolutely key to a successful transition.

2.1. Demographic and corporate background data

Geographical and organisational distribution

Businesses in the two counties contributed to the completion of the questionnaire in a 50-50 per cent ratio. The sample is therefore perfectly balanced between the two counties under study (60-60 responses). In terms of business forms, limited liability companies (Kft.), which represent a more capital-intensive and structured form of operation, dominate (56.7 per cent), followed by sole traders, which are more flexible but more vulnerable in terms of generational succession (30 per cent). This suggests that, for a significant proportion of respondents, business succession involves not only family matters but also complex legal and company registry procedures.

County / Legal form	Number of cases (persons)	Percentage (%)	Visual breakdown (Diagram)
Békés County	60	50.0%	50%
Somogy County	60	50.0%	50%



Company size based on number of employees

Number of employees	Number of companies	Proportion (%)	Distribution chart
1–9 people (micro-enterprise)	54	45.0%	45%
10–49 employees (small enterprise)	48	40.0%	40%
50–249 employees (medium-sized enterprise)	16	13.3%	13%
250+ employees (large company)	2	1.7%	2%

Micro and small enterprises, which form the backbone of the SME sector, constitute the basis of the survey (85 per cent). In these companies, the roles of owner and day-to-day operational manager often coincide entirely, making generational succession a more personal and emotionally charged process than in medium-sized or large enterprises operated by professional management.

2.2. Generational diversity and workplace communication

Communication challenges and perceptions of generational differences

Perceived situation in internal communication	Number of cases	Proportion (%)	Distribution chart
Have not experienced such problems	38	31.7%	32%
There are communication problems, but not due to generational differences	32	26.7%	27%
The generational differences have been successfully managed/resolved	44	36.7%	37%
Generational issues are a source of serious tension	6	5.0%	5%

Although overt, paralysing tension is rare (only 5 per cent), a relative majority of companies (36.7 per cent) have actively tackled or are tackling misunderstandings arising from generational differences, which they have, however, managed to keep under control through conscious management.

Specific areas of friction between multigenerational colleagues (based on multiple responses)

Point of friction / Nature of the discrepancy	Number of mentions (units)	Frequency range
Work pace (different rhythms, sense of urgency)	68	
Flexibility (attitude towards working hours and rules)	62	
Digital skills (acceptance of new software and tools)	58	
Meeting deadlines and accuracy	46	
Quality of work and attention to detail	42	
The issue of authoritarianism versus partnership	22	

The pattern emerging from the figures shows that members of the older generations (Baby Boomers and Generation X) often perceive younger people (Generations Y and Z) as superficial or overly rushed, while younger people feel there is a lack of flexibility and transparency in digital systems. Managing the differing work pace (68 mentions) and the digital divide (58 mentions) has become a key HR task at the companies surveyed.

2.3. The timing and strategic planning of generational change

Will generational succession affect the business over the next 5–10 years?

Status of impact	Number of cases	Proportion (%)	Distribution range
Currently in the planning phase	46	38.3%	38%
Yes, the changeover is currently underway	32	26.7%	27%
Yes, the process has now been successfully completed	14	11.7%	12%
No, because the company director is from the younger generation	16	13.3%	13%
No, it has never been an issue	12	10.0%	10%

The most significant finding of the survey is that **76.7 per cent of** businesses (comprising those in the planning stage, those currently undergoing the process and those that have completed it) are directly affected by the challenge of generational succession. This confirms the relevance of the GENSKILLS project: for the overwhelming majority of companies, this is not a theoretical issue, but an imminent practical problem.

Does the owner/manager have a structured plan for succession?

Level of planning	Number of cases	Proportion (%)	Distribution range
Yes, but only at a conceptual level (not set out in writing)	52	43.3%	43%
Not regulated; ad hoc in nature	38	31.7%	32%
Yes, with clear milestones and a written plan	18	15.0%	15%
I don't know / unsure	12	10.0%	10%

There is a huge discrepancy between the need for generational succession (76.7 per cent) and structured preparedness: **only 15 per cent of companies have a written, formalised plan**. While 43.3 per cent of companies have an intention or a 'verbal agreement' in place, the lack of precise deadlines, legal frameworks and financial scenarios poses a serious operational risk for the future.

2.4. Preparation tools and external support

Proportion of companies involving external experts (consultants, coaches)

Use of expert support	Number of cases	Proportion (%)	Range
No, we have never involved an external party	54	45.0%	45%
Yes, we have sought support on occasion	44	36.7%	37%
Yes, we regularly involve experts	12	10.0%	10%
I don't know	10	8.3%	8%

Nearly half of companies (45%) are completely opposed to or unable to access external support, and so are attempting to manage generational succession using internal resources. At the same time, the combined positive responses (regular + ad hoc = 46.7%) indicate that there is a marked openness to professional support (organisational development, mediation) in the market.

What is the most important factor for a successful generational transition? (Total mentions)

Clear communication, which ranks first by a wide margin (94 mentions out of 120), highlights the fact that generational succession is primarily a psychological and relational issue, not merely a legal formality. If the parties are unable to speak openly about their expectations and fears, even the best financial arrangement is doomed to failure.

Identification of success factor	Number of mentions (count)	Weighted importance
Clear, honest communication between the parties	94	
Technical and managerial training for the new generation	82	
Maintaining a balance between family and business	48	
External consultant or chamber mentor support	36	

2.5. Qualitative findings and professional recommendations

Main specific challenges (analysis of text-based responses): Based on the text-based feedback, the most significant obstacle is *'the difficulty in getting the founder/current owner to let go, and their attachment to the company they have built*'. The older generation often finds it difficult to trust the decisions of younger people, while for young people, *'retaining clients/customers and business partners and the market standing achieved'* following the handover is seen as a significant burden. A further prominent problem is the lack of interest or management experience on the part of the successors.

The role of chambers of commerce and professional advice: Respondents would find it particularly useful (with an average score of 4.2 on the scale) if regional chambers of commerce and industry were to support the process through targeted management courses, methodological training programmes, and by facilitating access to independent generational experts. The most important practical advice from experienced companies was: *"Start in good time! It is important to involve the new leader in day-to-day tasks at an early stage so that colleagues and partners recognise them even before the handover."*

3 Best practices for fostering intergenerational cooperation

Intergenerational cooperation is no longer merely a matter of generational succession in family businesses. Several generations are present in the labour market at the same time, each with different experiences, value systems, working styles and communication habits. In many cases, these differences lead to misunderstandings, conflicts or differing expectations; however, with the right organisational culture and deliberate managerial tools, they can also represent a significant competitive advantage.

The GENSKILLS project's workshop, entrepreneurship training and study visits to Italy all served a common purpose: to explore the challenges of intergenerational cooperation and to identify practical solutions that facilitate knowledge transfer, generational transition and effective cooperation. However, the workshop's theme differed from that of the training session: while the training session focused primarily on intergenerational cooperation in the workplace, the workshop centred on the strategic process of generational transition, the role of coaching and mentoring, and a practical methodology (the 'FaRe' model). During the **workshop,** the project partners jointly identified the most significant problems and possible solutions. Participants in **the** entrepreneurship **training** addressed typical situations involving generational conflicts through their own experiences. The **study visits** to Italy provided an insight into the operations of businesses where intergenerational cooperation and conscious succession planning are part of day-to-day operations.

The experiences gained from the three project activities yielded a number of common lessons. It became clear that the most common challenges arise in communication, differing perceptions of the work-life balance, managerial feedback, knowledge transfer, and the planning of generational succession. At the same time, it has also been demonstrated that there are effective solutions to these challenges which can be applied regardless of the size or sector of the business.

This chapter builds on these experiences. It does not aim to provide a theoretical summary, but rather to present best practices, managerial approaches and practical recommendations that have emerged from the professional work of the workshop, the shared experiences of the training participants and the corporate case studies encountered during the study visits to Italy. This chapter can also be used as a stand-alone practical guide. The best practices presented here can assist micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, family businesses, and any organisation where several generations work together or where a generational handover is expected in the near future. The aim is not to present a single solution applicable to everyone, but to provide a framework and a toolkit that every organisation can adapt to its own operations and challenges.

3.1 Workshop: The challenges of generational transition

As part of the GENSKILLS project, a professional workshop focusing on the topic of generational transition was held on 18 November 2025 in Békéscsaba, organised by the Békés County Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The event addressed a timely issue: the founders of businesses established after the political transition have now reached a stage in their lives where handing over the reins of their companies has become unavoidable.

3.1.1 Generational succession as a conscious strategic process

One of the workshop's key messages was that **generational succession is not a single event or a management decision, but a long-term, consciously planned process**. A successful transition does not depend on when the change of leadership takes place, but on how well the business prepares for it and to what extent it is able to ensure the gradual transfer of knowledge, responsibility and values.

The examples presented have highlighted that generational succession is not an issue exclusive to family businesses. It is of strategic importance for any organisation where leadership roles, key competencies or organisational knowledge are to be handed over. The success of the process largely

determines the business's long-term viability, competitiveness and adaptability.

The presentation emphasised that **generational succession is not merely about the handover of positions.** It is at least as important to pass on the company's mission, values, organisational culture and vision. A company's true legacy lies not only in its business results, but also in the guiding principles and experiences that have shaped the organisation over time. Therefore, the first step in generational succession is always to think collectively: what is worth preserving, and in which areas are it necessary to adapt to the changing environment.

One of the workshop's most thought-provoking questions was: **'What do we actually want to leave behind?'** This question goes beyond the handover of ownership or management roles and encourages business leaders to consciously articulate the values, mindset and vision they wish to pass on to the next generation.

It became clear to the participants that the foundation of a successful generational transition lies in early planning, open dialogue and the gradual handover of responsibility. Those businesses are able to operate successfully in the long term which treat generational succession not as a risk but as an opportunity for development, and which consciously build continuity by balancing the preservation of traditions with the promotion of innovation.

3.1.2 The 'FaRe' Consulting methodology – Action and responsibility

The workshop was based on the 'FaRe' Consulting methodology developed by Renato Fava, which approaches generational succession not merely as an organisational or ownership issue, but as a leadership mindset. The name of the method derives from the Italian words 'fare' (to act) and 'essere' (to be), expressing the idea that a business's future depends not only on day-to-day operations but also on conscious value creation and long-term thinking. According to this methodology, a business is not merely an economic organisation, but a living community whose identity, culture and values are shaped across generations. Generational succession therefore does not merely involve the handover of leadership roles, but also ensuring that the business's core values and vision for the future are preserved, while enabling it to adapt to a changing economic and social environment.



Figure 2: The 'FaRe' methodology (presentation by Renato Fava)

One of the most thought-provoking questions raised during the workshop was:

"What do we actually want to leave behind?"

This question encourages business leaders not to think solely in terms of material or financial legacies.
It is at least as important to define the values, operating principles and leadership philosophy that they wish to preserve for the next generation. In this sense, the legacy consists of three complementary elements:

- values that define the way the business operates.
- a vision that provides direction for the next generation.
- a sense of responsibility that ensures continuity and sustainable development.

One of the key messages of the 'FaRe' Consulting methodology is that generational transition is not about letting go of the past, but about carrying the values of the past into the future. Successful leaders do not

simply hand over their businesses, but create an environment in which the next generation can realise their own visions while respecting the foundations of the business.

It also became clear during the workshop that the future does not take shape of its own accord: it requires conscious decisions, consistent action and ongoing dialogue. It is therefore good practice for businesses to regularly reflect together on which values they hold dear under all circumstances, which traditions are worth carrying forward, and in which areas they need to be open to new solutions.

The 'FaRe' methodology highlights that the true aim of generational succession is not merely the survival of the business, but the creation of a legacy upon which the next generation can confidently build. From this perspective, action and responsibility are inseparable: every decision taken today also shapes the future of the business.

3.1.3 Learning from history and the examples of successful businesses

Generational succession is not an isolated, modern-day economic challenge, but a universal human and organisational process that has run through the history of humanity. Through historical, mythological and global, as well as local corporate examples, the workshop highlighted that the success or failure of generational succession always hinges on one central question: are we able to strike and maintain a balance between preserving traditions and renewal (innovation)? The great narratives of the past and present serve as a compass for today's family businesses and shed light on the hidden dynamics that drive succession processes.

Inspiration from myths and history: recognising patterns

In his presentation, Renato Fava demonstrated how classical mythology and history model generational transitions, drawing attention to the pitfalls to be avoided and the best practices to be followed:

- **The pattern of destructive conflict (Cronus and Zeus):** In Greek mythology, Cronus – fearing for his power – devours his own children, which ultimately leads to a war waged by the Titans under Zeus's leadership and the emergence of a violent new order. This story perfectly symbolises the trap where the founder is unable to relinquish control, stifles the initiatives of their successors, and thereby generates inevitable, destructive conflict within the organisation.
- **The model of shared leadership (King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table):** The story of King Arthur illustrates the importance of shared *leadership* and the delegation of power. The Round Table symbolises equal dialogue between generations and the sharing of decision-making responsibility.
- **The balance of strength and wisdom (Thor and Odin):** Norse mythology is built on the symbiosis between youthful, dynamic strength (Thor) and the wisdom of old age (Odin), highlighting that the two generations should not work against one another but complement one another.
- **Legacy as a mission (Thorin Oakenshield):** This story, built upon mythological elements, illustrates that the legacy of one's ancestors is not a burden, but a mission which the new generation must fill with meaning and a vision for the future.
- **Planning and institutionalised continuity (the House of Habsburg and the Rothschilds):** Among the examples of historic extended families, the House of Habsburg exemplifies conscious, long-term strategic planning and the safeguarding of continuity, while the Rothschild family exemplifies strict trust spanning generations and the strength of a global family network. In contrast, the Ming Dynasty exemplified a balance between strict discipline and merit, while the Republic of Venice set an example of continuous economic exchange and the maintenance of structural stability.

- **The continuity of the chain of knowledge (Socrates, Plato and Aristotle):** This classic trio in the history of philosophy is a perfect example of mentoring, where the disciple does not merely copy the master, but builds upon the master's foundations to create something new and original.

Learning from successful international and Italian business examples

The workshop examined those global and well-known Italian family businesses in modern business life that have successfully overcome the obstacles of generational succession, proving that tradition and innovation are not mutually exclusive but mutually reinforcing factors.

Ford and *Walmart*: While preserving their family roots and continuously developing the founders' vision (*Ford*), they were able to evolve from single-person leadership into global corporate structures (*Walmart*).

Samsung: An excellent example of how deeply rooted Far Eastern family traditions can be combined with the most modern, radical technological innovation.

Large Italian family-owned companies (*Ferrero*, *Barilla*, *Olivetti*, *Luxottica*): These iconic Italian brands have remained at the forefront of the global market because, during generational transitions, the founding family members passed on not just positions, but the corporate identity and core values. They gave the next generation the freedom to innovate, while family cohesion and a commitment to quality served as a solid foundation.

Key lessons for businesses

Drawing on the historical and entrepreneurial analogies presented, the workshop identified three fundamental strategic lessons that any domestic SME facing a generational transition can incorporate into its own practices:

- *Conflict is a natural part of development*

The mythological tension between Zeus and Cronus – or arguments around the family dinner table – are not harbingers of failure, but natural accompaniments to development. During a generational transition, it is inevitable that the perspectives of the founder (who represents stability and past successes) and the successor (who advocates for change and the challenges of the future) will clash. The lesson is that conflict should not be suppressed, as this leads to an internal explosion, but rather reframed. With effective communication, generational differences can be forged into a driving force that respects the values of the past while paving the way for innovation.

- *Trust is more important than control*

The greatest challenge for outgoing leaders is letting go. One of the workshop's strongest messages was that the leadership role and the baton cannot simply be 'handed over' mechanically; they can only be relinquished through trust. If the founder seeks to constantly control their successor from behind the scenes and overrules every decision, they will paralyse the organisation. The successor must be given the opportunity to make their own decisions, to gain experience, and even to make mistakes.

- *Continuity requires deliberate preparation*

Successful succession is never a single, ad hoc event (such as a sudden signing or appointment), but a deliberate strategic process lasting several years. Just as the Habsburgs or large corporations deliberately planned the succession of generations, so too must SMEs prepare for the transition in a structured manner. This continuity requires the prior clarification of a shared vision (*vision board*), the identification of values to be passed on, and the systematic application of coaching and mentoring tools. If preparations are deliberate and begin in good time, the generational transition will take place not as a crisis, but as the next successful step in the company's organic development.

3.1.4 Coaching and mentoring as tools for generational transition

Generational succession is not merely a legal, financial or administrative transaction, but a deeply human and psychological process. The workshop highlighted in particular that purely technical or structural management alone rarely guarantees long-term success. The real challenge lies in managing the shift in roles between the founder and the successor, as well as in transferring the business's accumulated knowledge capital.

The formal transfer of managerial knowledge is not sufficient on its own: a successful generational transition is built on two complementary, interactive development methods: **mentoring** and **coaching**.

The symbiosis of the two methods: mentoring and coaching

During the transition period in family businesses, the two approaches take on different, yet closely complementary, focuses:

- **Mentoring (the transfer of experience and organisational knowledge):** Mentoring is an experience- and knowledge-based process. In this context, the founder (or the outgoing leader) acts as a mentor, introducing the successor to the company's internal operations in a structured manner. They pass on the established network of market and supplier relationships, share the intricacies of the industry, the strategic outlook, as well as the company's unwritten rules and organisational culture. Mentoring ensures continuity and guarantees that the intellectual capital accumulated over the years is not lost during the handover.
- **Coaching (Supporting the successor in becoming an independent leader):** While mentoring is about integrating external knowledge, coaching is an internally focused, reflective process. Its purpose is not to provide ready-made answers, but to support the successor in becoming capable of making independent, confident decisions. Coaching helps the successor to overcome the anxieties arising from the pressure to conform, to manage internal conflicts, and to build their own authentic leadership identity – without having to operate constantly in the founder's shadow. At the same time, it supports the person handing over the business through the psychologically challenging process of gradually letting go of micromanagement and control.

3.1.5 Best practices in business operations

Based on the principles presented at the workshop, the following practical steps and tools can provide direct support to domestic SMEs in successfully integrating these methods:

- *Regular mentoring sessions*

  Instead of ad hoc, informal discussions in the corridor or around the family dinner table, the transfer of knowledge should be channelled into a formal framework.

  In practice: A dedicated slot should be set aside at fixed intervals (for example, once a week or fortnightly) during which the founder and the successor review strategic matters according to a structured agenda. These discussions should not focus on day-to-day operational firefighting, but rather on long-term business experience, deepening partnerships and discussing the dynamics inherent in key positions.

- *Coaching-based leadership*

  Corporate culture must be able to treat mistakes not as grounds for punishment, but as learning opportunities. Introducing a coaching approach requires a new attitude from both generations.

  In practice: Instead of giving direct instructions and exercising strict control, the founder guides the successor towards solutions by asking questions (e.g. 'How would you resolve this situation?', 'What

risks do you see in taking this approach?"). This approach gives the successor scope to make their own decisions and gain experience, and radically accelerates the development of leadership skills.

- *Supporting mutual learning (cross-mentoring)*

  Generational transition is not a one-way street. The workshop highlighted the importance of *reverse mentoring*, where traditional roles are swapped or balanced out.

  In practice: While the older generation passes on market knowledge and business wisdom, the younger generation actively mentors the founder in the areas of new technologies, digitalisation, modern marketing tools, sustainability requirements (ESG) and changing employee needs. This two-way, equal partnership fosters mutual respect and ensures that, within the organisation, tradition and innovation become factors that reinforce rather than undermine one another.

3.1.6 The four steps of generational transition

The workshop's practical methodology presented a structured, four-step process that treats generational transition not as an isolated, one-off event, but as a consciously structured and managed strategic journey. This methodology helps businesses successfully strike a delicate balance between preserving traditions and organisational renewal. According to this approach, three main dimensions must be coordinated during generational succession: the *handover* as a process, the *phases* as a method, and the
'crew', that is, the people involved. The backbone of this methodological journey consists of the following four interlinked steps:

1. Step 1: Concentration (Focus and vision-building)

The first phase of the process involves setting the strategic direction and clarifying a common starting point. According to the theoretical basis of this phase, achieving long-term continuity requires a clear and comprehensive vision of the future, as well as the identification of the core values that underpin the company's identity.

- **Developing a shared vision:** The generations jointly determine how they envisage the organisation's future and exactly where they wish to go.
- **Defining the values to be passed on:** They identify those aspects of the legacy that form the cornerstones of the company and which must not be subject to compromise during the transition.
- **Creating a shared *vision board*:** A visual and strategic forum that helps the generations make the goals tangible and launch a shared exercise in which participants, for example, visualise their business in concrete terms 10 years from now.
- **Applying practical tools:** A key part of this step is drawing up an 'inheritable value map', as well as answering targeted questions such as
  'What do we want to preserve and carry forward?' and 'What do we want to transform?'.

2. Step: Analysis and listening

The second phase focuses on deep understanding and on bringing intergenerational expectations and needs to the surface. According to the theoretical approach, listening is the true key to the transition and, at the same time, the purest expression of intergenerational respect.

- **Active listening:** The parties not only express their own views, but also accept the other generation's perspective with an open mind and without judgement.
- **Exploring generational expectations:** Clarifying hidden motivations, individual needs and internal expectations within family and corporate roles.

- **Applying the 3A model:** A structured framework for communication and action based on the triad of *Listening (Ascolto)*, *Alignment (Allineamento)* and *Action (Azione)*.
- **Use of practical tools:** The 'Wheel of Generational Relationships' (the circle of relationships) serves to accurately map out the dynamics, while building bridges between generations is supported by *reverse mentoring*, where roles are balanced: the younger generation passes on knowledge and a new technological perspective to the older generation.

3. Step: Solution

The aim of the third stage is to acknowledge conflicts and reframe them as opportunities for creative development, shifting the focus from tension towards collaborative building.

- **Reframing conflicts:** Disagreements are viewed not as obstacles hindering the process, but as a natural and necessary part of renewal.
- **Developing a win–win approach:** Devising solutions and roles in which both the founder's and the successor's positions are strengthened, and the renegotiation of roles brings satisfaction to both parties.
- **Recognising limiting beliefs:** Identifying and overcoming, through a coaching approach, those inner convictions that hinder progress (for example, the typical belief on the part of the founder that 'Only I can do it').
- **Practical reflections:** In this phase, participants must openly confront their deepest inner dilemmas, such as: 'To let go or to hold on: which frightens us the most?', and 'What is our greatest fear when we hand over or take over the baton?'.

4. Step: Implementation

The final step in the process is the practical implementation of the agreements and the shared vision into day-to-day operations, moving from a theoretical plan to consistent action. This phase is built entirely on shared responsibility and the continuous deepening of trust.

- **Drawing up a generational action plan:** Developing an operational timetable setting out specific milestones, tasks and deadlines, which provides a clear framework and structure for the handover process.
- **Cross-mentoring:** Maintaining structured and regular mentoring sessions between the older and younger generations, ensuring a continuous, two-way flow of market knowledge, business wisdom and new approaches.
- **Regular monitoring:** Continuously monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the action plan. In doing so, it is essential to ensure that the successor is given a genuine opportunity to make their own decisions, gain experience and even make mistakes, while the outgoing leader acts as a supportive and guiding figure in the background rather than maintaining strict control.

3.1.7 The role of trust in generational transition

One of the most critical and challenging cornerstones of the generational transition process is the establishment and maintenance of mutual trust between the generations. One of the strongest and most important messages to emerge from the workshop was that a leadership role cannot simply be 'handed over' through a single formal or administrative step. Leadership is not an object or position that can be mechanically transferred. The successor must build genuine leadership authority and competence within the organisation themselves, which is inconceivable without the deep and pre-emptive trust shown by the founder.

Giving the successor space: The three degrees of freedom in development

In order for the successor to mature into a leader capable of making genuine, responsible and autonomous decisions, they must be given concrete opportunities and scope for manoeuvre in the following areas throughout the process:

- **Making** their **own decisions:** The successor must be granted the authority and freedom to make independent decisions regarding the company's operational and strategic functioning. This scope for action is essential for the organisation's staff and external business partners to recognise them as an independent, legitimate leader.
- **Room for error:** One of the greatest cultural barriers to successful succession is the expectation of perfection and the fear of making mistakes. The workshop highlighted that corporate culture must be able to treat mistakes not as grounds for sanctions or a loss of trust, but as a natural and useful part of the learning process. Successors must be allowed to make mistakes, as it is the lessons learnt from mistakes and their correction that most effectively shape managerial wisdom.
- **Gaining experience:** Leadership competencies and self-confidence are honed not through theory, but in day-to-day practice, while managing real-life crises and strategic challenges. The successor must gain direct and personal experience in day-to-day operations in order to lead the company with confidence in the long term.

The outgoing leader's new role: guidance rather than control

For the founding generation, the practical manifestation of trust does not mean passivity, but rather the adoption of a radically new leadership role. The outgoing leader's task is no longer to maintain operational control or exercise strict oversight, but rather to provide continuous support from behind the scenes and offer wise guidance. This transition demands a completely new attitude from both generations.

In practice, this means introducing a **coaching-based leadership** methodology. Instead of direct instructions, ready-made solutions and micromanagement, the founder guides the successor towards the right answers through open, supportive questions. Rather than telling them what to do, they encourage the successor to think for themselves by asking questions such as:

'How would you resolve this situation?'

'What risks do you see in taking this approach?'

This mentoring and coaching-based approach allows the successor to develop professionally, while also providing them with a stable safety net from behind the scenes. This method radically accelerates the development of leadership competencies and ensures that generational succession is not a conflict-ridden, traumatic rupture, but rather an organic and sustainable process of development for the business, built on trust.

3.1.8 What can businesses take away from this?

At the close of the professional workshop held in Békéscsaba, at the headquarters of the BVKIK, the most important strategic and people-centred messages – which the participating Hungarian businesses can immediately incorporate into their day-to-day operations – crystallised under the guidance of Italian speaker and coach Renato Fava. The presentation, entitled *'Generational Transition: From Conflict to Development'*, highlighted that the successful handover of the baton is not merely an administrative or legal act, but the genuine, conscious art of *Action*, *Existence* and *Handover*.

Below, we summarise the workshop's key insights and practical lessons:

1. Generational transition must be started in good time

Generational transition is not a sudden, forced decision, but a long-term journey that requires thorough methodological preparation. It is not worth waiting for a crisis or for the founders to become exhausted; clarifying a shared vision for the future and establishing a clear focus must begin while the current management is still active and stable. Successful companies are able to envisage and plan their operations even over a 10-year timeframe.

2. The company's values must be consciously passed on

Alongside the transfer of material assets, infrastructure and positions, the most profound task of generational succession is the preservation of the company's intellectual and cultural heritage. One of the most important practical tools for this is the deliberate development of **an 'inheritable value map**'. The handover must be built on core values such as *continuity*, *identity* and *development*. At the outset of the process, key questions must be clarified: *'What do we wish to preserve and carry forward?'* and *'What do we wish to transform?*'.

3. Trust is the foundation of a successful handover

The cornerstone of every successful generational strategy and action plan is shared responsibility and sincere, deep trust between the parties. As was stated during the workshop:

"*Every generational transition is a journey for people – not for roles*."

Without trust, even the best leadership models remain ineffective. The founder must trust in the successor's competence and decision-making ability, while the successor must respect the founder's experience and life's work.



Figure 3: Renato Fava during his presentation

4. Coaching and mentoring accelerate leadership development

During a generational transition, the development of leadership competencies and the transfer of experience can be drastically accelerated through the coordinated use of coaching and mentoring.

- **Mentoring** and structured knowledge transfer help to ensure the transparent management of phases and methods.
- **Coaching** supports the resolution of personal bottlenecks, the bringing to the surface of internal motivations, and the coordination of the people involved (the 'team') to work in harmony.
- In practice, intergenerational **cross-mentoring sessions** have proven to be a particularly effective tool, as they facilitate direct, two-way learning between the older and younger generations.

5. Conflict is not an obstacle, but an opportunity for growth

Intergenerational tension and differences of opinion are a natural phenomenon that runs through human history, mythology and corporate cultures alike (one need only think of the conflict between Cronus and Zeus, or the intellectual legacy of the great philosophers).

We should not be daunted by conflicts, but rather transform them into a driving force for collective development and renewal. To achieve this, we must break down limiting beliefs (such as the *'Only I know how to do it properly'* attitude) and consistently apply **'win–win' based renegotiations of roles**.

6. Tradition and innovation are not opposites, but mutually reinforcing factors

The most successful, globally renowned examples of Italian family businesses (such as *Ferrero*, *Barilla*, *Olivetti* and *Luxottica*) all demonstrate that respect for the values of the past and forward-looking innovation can coexist perfectly. This is the true

essence of the *'FaRe' Consulting methodology*: the balance between a conscious, value-preserving existence ('Essere') and a dynamic, action-oriented drive to act ('Fare'). Tradition ensures stability and identity, while innovation guarantees market survival and the leap from 'business activity' to becoming a genuine 'enterprise'.

7. Every business can take the first step as early as tomorrow

Successfully managing generational succession is not a distant, unattainable theory, nor does it require immediate, radical and unworkable changes. Every business leader and prospective successor can take the very first, tangible step on this path as early as tomorrow. All it takes is to incorporate the first step of **the 3A model** into everyday life: genuine, attentive listening (*Ascolto*), after which intergenerational alignment (*Allineamento*) and joint action (*Azione*) can be achieved much more smoothly.

A final word of inspiration for readers of the e-Guide:

"We do not inherit the company from our fathers; we borrow it from our children."

A practical question for self-reflection:

1. ***Trust vs. micromanagement:*** *Do I grant members of the other generation the necessary trust and autonomy in day-to-day decision-making, or do I hinder the two-way transfer of knowledge through excessive control?*
2. ***Harnessing synergies:*** *Do I ensure a supportive and open environment within the organisation where the wisdom, agility and digital perspective of different generations can reinforce one another exponentially?*
3. ***Mistakes as learning opportunities:*** *Am I able to treat mistakes not as problems to be penalised, but as natural, coaching-oriented steps towards gaining experience and professional development?*

3.1.9 Workshop facilitation and programme plan

Date and venue: 18 November 2025, Békéscsaba, BVKIK headquarters
Prior to the presentation: institutional welcome addresses (SKIK, BVKIK, Marco Polo G.E.I.E.)
Italian speaker: Renato Fava, coach
Title of the workshop presentation: *'Generational Change: From Conflict to Development – The Art of Action, Being and Transmission'*
Total duration: 45 minutes

Introduction – 5 minutes

- Welcome and personal introduction
- Outline of the presentation's topic and aim
- Outline of the presentation's structure

I. The 'FaRe' Consulting methodology – 5 minutes

- The meaning of 'FaRe': a combination of 'Fare' (to do) and 'Essere' (to be)
- The 'FaRe' approach as a conscious and action-oriented methodology
- Link to generational change: from 'entrepreneurial activity' to 'becoming an entrepreneur'
- A brief thought-provoking question: 'What do we actually want to leave behind?'

II. A historical, mythological and corporate analysis of generational transition– 7 minutes

- In mythology: Cronus and Zeus – the conflict between generations
- In history: the legacy of the masters – Socrates, Plato, Aristotle
- In business: real-life examples (Ferrero, Barilla, Olivetti, Luxottica)
- Guided reflection

III. The art of coaching and mentoring as a catalyst for development – 5 minutes

- The difference between coaching and mentoring and their complementary roles
- The concept of generational transition as a journey
- The three dimensions to be aligned: The handover (the process), the phases (the method) and the team (the people)
- Presentation of the Mentoring & Coaching Matrix (visually or with a diagram)
- *"Every generational transition is a journey for people – not for roles."*

IV. Focus – 5 minutes

- Theory: clarifying the shared vision
- Practical tools: The 'inheritable value map'
- Focus questions (e.g. 'What do we want to keep and carry forward?', 'What do we want to change?')
- Short group exercise: 'Imagine your business in 10 years' time…'

V. Analysis / Listening – 5 minutes

- Theory: listening as the key to transition
- Practical tools: The 3A model:
- Ascolto (listening) – Allineamento (alignment) – Azione (action)
- The Wheel of Generational Relationships (for mapping dynamics)
- A brief corporate example/story

VI. Solution – 5 minutes

- Theory: from conflict to joint construction
- Practical tools: the 'win–win' method and renegotiating roles
- Coaching on limiting beliefs (e.g. 'Only I can do it')
- Practical question for the audience: "What is our greatest fear when we hand over or take over the baton?"

VII. Implementation – 5 minutes

- Theory: from plan to consistent action
- Practical tools: The Generational Action Plan
- Cross-generational mentoring sessions (between older and younger generations)
- Focus on shared responsibility and trust

VIII. Summary – 3 minutes

- Summary: ‘FaRe’ Consulting methodology → History → Method → Action
- Highlighting core values: continuity, identity, development
- Closing inspirational thought: “We do not inherit the company from our fathers; we borrow it from our children.”
- Joint reflection and practical exercise: “Starting tomorrow, what could you do as a first step on your own journey towards generational transition?”



Figure 4: Photo from the workshop in Békéscsaba

3.2 Two-day training course: Developing intergenerational cooperation

3.2.1 Introduction to the training

The Somogy Chamber of Commerce and Industry organised a two-day training course for consortium members and the businesses they had involved on 12–13 March 2026 in Kardosfa, Somogy County.

The aim of the two-day interactive training course, entitled *'Intergenerational* Cooperation', was to support entrepreneurs, managers and HR professionals in managing multi-generational workplaces more effectively, as well as in understanding and addressing the challenges associated with generational transition. The programme was based on the recognition that **workplaces today may now be home to as many as four generations simultaneously,** each with different experiences, values, working styles and expectations. While these differences can be sources of conflict, they can also be transformed into a significant competitive advantage with the right managerial and organisational tools.

Participants learnt **about the workplace characteristics of the Baby Boomer, Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z**, as well as the social, economic and technological influences that have shaped their ways of thinking and their attitudes towards work. The programme emphasised that generations are not homogeneous groups; however, shared experiences can shape similar attitudes amongst them.

The training methodology was based on active participation and experiential learning. The topics were explored through interactive exercises, group work, role-plays, facilitated discussions and self-reflection exercises. The programme paid particular attention to helping participants recognise the strengths and areas for improvement in intergenerational cooperation within their own organisational contexts. On the second day, the practical application of what had been learnt was supported by the sharing of corporate best practices, managerial experiences and the development of concrete action plans.

One of the **key messages of the training** was that generational differences are not problems in themselves. Successful organisations do not try to eliminate these differences, but rather create an environment in which the strengths of different generations complement one another.

3.2.2 The key challenges

Based on the exercises, group work and role-plays, the participants identified a number of situations that regularly arise in the day-to-day running of businesses when different generations work together.

One of the most frequently mentioned challenges was **the differing interpretations of the work-life balance**. For older generations, work is often associated with a sense of duty, perseverance and long-term commitment, while younger employees place greater emphasis on flexibility, mental wellbeing and the quality of their personal lives. This difference is particularly evident in situations involving overtime, holiday leave or unexpected additional tasks.

Another common issue is the differing perceptions **of flexibility and stability**. While long-term job security and loyalty to the organisation are key values for older generations, younger generations tend to seek opportunities for development, professional challenges and self-fulfilment. This often leads to misunderstandings between managers and younger employees.

Feedback and managerial communication also emerged as recurring sources of conflict. Several participants reported that younger staff expect more regular feedback, quicker responses and greater involvement from managers, while in traditional organisational cultures, feedback is often provided less frequently and within a more formal framework. These differing expectations often result in dissatisfaction on both sides.

There are also significant differences **in the use of communication channels**. Older generations typically prefer communication via email or in person, while for younger employees, rapid, digital and informal communication comes naturally. In many cases, these differing communication habits lead not to technological problems, but to collaboration issues.

Workplace situations explored through role-play – project delays, holiday requests, error handling and restrictions on working from home – clearly demonstrated that generational conflicts are usually not driven by ill will, but by **differing values, experiences and assumptions**. An important conclusion drawn was that different generations can interpret the same situation **from** completely **different perspectives**.

3.2.3 Key takeaways from the training

- **Understanding individual motivations rather than stereotypes**

  The first exercise of the training was deliberately designed to explore stereotypes relating to generations. Commonly heard statements such as 'young people do not respect their elders' or 'older generations are not open to new ideas' were examined. During the group discussion, it became clear that these oversimplified statements rarely accurately describe reality. Behind the differences between generations lie, in fact, differing life circumstances, experiences and motivations. **The basis for effective cooperation is not labelling generations, but understanding the other party's motivations and perspectives.**

- **The differing value systems underlying conflicts**

  During the role-play exercises, participants were able to experience how the same workplace situation can elicit completely different reactions from representatives of different generations. Conflicts typically stem not from ill will or a lack of willingness to cooperate, but from differing perceptions of work, responsibility, loyalty or flexibility. **Managers and teams should not seek to eliminate these differences, but rather to manage and reconcile them consciously.**

- **Communication, trust and clear expectations are the key to success**

  The research findings and practical examples covered during the training highlighted that a significant proportion of generational conflicts actually stem from miscommunication. Clearly articulated expectations, regular feedback, consistent leadership and mutual trust are fundamental conditions that create a safe and predictable working environment for every generation. **Taking into account the differing communication preferences of different generations can also help to improve collaboration.**

- **Knowledge transfer is a two-way process**

  One of the key findings from the session on generational transition and mentoring was that knowledge does not flow exclusively from older generations to younger ones. In addition to experience, professional expertise and organisational knowledge, younger generations can bring new technological skills, a digital mindset and innovative solutions to the organisation. Both mentoring and reverse mentoring can be effective tools for supporting intergenerational knowledge sharing. **The participants agreed that one of the fundamental resources of successful multigenerational organisations is the capacity for mutual learning.**

3.2.4 Good practices identified during the training

Those present not only identified the challenges arising from intergenerational collaboration but also jointly compiled practical solutions that can be applied in day-to-day organisational operations. The group work, role-plays and facilitated discussions clearly demonstrated that a significant proportion of generational conflicts can be prevented or managed through conscious leadership techniques.

The best practices outlined below present simple yet effective methods that can help to build trust, reduce misunderstandings and enable multigenerational teams to operate more effectively.

- **Feedback should be regular, specific and based on dialogue**

  One of the key takeaways from the training was that different generations have been socialised into distinct feedback cultures. While less frequent, formal assessments come more naturally to older generations, members of Generations Y and Z expect more continuous, development-oriented feedback.

  A common view has emerged that regular, brief and specific feedback makes work more predictable for all generations and significantly reduces uncertainty.

  Recommended practices:

  - brief, regular feedback from managers;
  - during feedback, clearly articulating expectations, observed behaviour, its impact and the next steps;
  - using feedback based on questions and involving the employee, rather than a one-sided assessment.

  Expected outcomes:

  - greater commitment;
  - faster development;
  - fewer misunderstandings;
  - stronger manager–staff relationships.

- **Consciously building trust**

  It was emphasised on several occasions during the training that the basis for intergenerational cooperation is not primarily age, but trust.

  The development of trust is supported, above all, by consistent leadership, predictability and open communication. According to the participants, it is particularly important that staff feel confident enough to ask for help, raise issues or discuss their mistakes without fear of negative consequences.

  Recommended practices:

  - the manager should consistently honour agreements;
  - encouraging the early reporting of problems;
  - creating a psychologically safe working environment;
  - openly discussing mistakes rather than assigning blame.

  Expected outcomes:

  - faster problem-solving;
  - fewer hidden conflicts;
  - greater willingness to cooperate;
  - greater organisational trust.

- **Clear clarification of expectations**

  One recurring lesson from the role-plays was that different generations often interpret the same task differently. Many conflicts arise because the manager believes the instruction was clear, while the employee expects a completely different outcome.

  It was agreed that clearly defined objectives, deadlines and areas of responsibility significantly reduce the number of misunderstandings.

  Recommended practices:

  - clarifying the criteria for successful completion in advance;
  - using follow-up questions to check that everyone has understood the same thing;
  - clearly defining decision-making powers and responsibilities.

  Expected outcomes:

  - fewer misunderstandings;
  - greater autonomy;
  - faster task completion;
  - decreasing intergenerational tensions.

- **Conscious communication between different generations**

  The communication gap between generations is evident in almost every scenario: more experienced colleagues prefer more direct or formalised forms of communication (face-to-face meetings, email), while younger colleagues favour fast-paced digital platforms. During the training, participants concluded that there is no single form of communication suitable for every situation. It is far more important for the organisation to jointly establish its own rules of communication.

  The fact that this topic came up repeatedly confirms that this is not merely a matter of technological differences, but a factor that fundamentally influences the effectiveness of collaboration: without the conscious coordination of communication channels, the transfer of knowledge between generations may be hindered.

  Recommended practices:

  - jointly defining communication channels;
  - selecting a form of communication suited to the nature of the message;
  - developing mutually agreed communication standards.

  Expected outcomes:

  - a faster flow of information;
  - fewer misunderstandings;
  - more transparent collaboration.

- **Developing an organisational culture that learns from mistakes**

  One of the role-plays explored the consequences of an incorrect quotation. The participants noted that different generations have different attitudes towards mistakes: some primarily look for someone to blame, while others tend to focus on finding a solution.

  A common view emerged that organisations which are successful in the long-term treat mistakes as learning opportunities.

  Recommended practices:

  - joint analysis of mistakes without making it personal;
  - documenting the lessons learnt;
  - developing processes to prevent errors from recurring.

Expected outcomes:

- a more open organisational culture;
- greater capacity for innovation;
- continuous development.

- **Consciously combining the strengths of different generations**

  In the final stage of the training, the task was to design an ideal multi-generational workplace. During the collaborative work, it became clear that each generation contributes to the organisation's success with its own specific strengths.

  The experience, systematic approach and stability of older colleagues can complement the digital skills, creativity and adaptability of younger generations.

  Recommended practices:

  - launching mentoring programmes;
  - *reverse mentoring*;
  - forming multi-generational project teams;
  - developing structured knowledge-transfer processes;
  - gradual handover of responsibilities during generational transition.

  Expected outcomes:

  - more effective knowledge sharing;
  - faster innovation;
  - a more successful generational transition;
  - more stable organisational functioning in the long term.

3.2.5 Training topics

Day 1: 12 March 2026: Understanding and consciously managing generational differences

Block 1 – Generational ways of thinking and motivations

- Common stereotypes (where does each generation stand on a scale of 1–10?)
  - *"The youngest don't respect their elders and want everything straight away."*
  - *"Generational differences are more of an opportunity than a problem."*
  - *"Older generations aren't open to new ideas and can't work as a team."*
  - *"Younger generations adapt more easily to change."*
  - *"Generation Y (aged 30–45) is much more conscious of the need to keep work and private life separate."*
  - *"Generation X (aged 45–60) is too attached to the rules."*
- How do the workplace attitudes of Generations X, Y and Z differ?
- What do loyalty, stability and freedom mean to them?
- What actually motivates them?

Method: Interactive exercise, shared interpretation, presentation.

Block 2 – Typical workplace conflicts

- ‘Not committed enough’ vs. ‘Not flexible enough’
- Differences in time management, responsibility and decision-making
- Generational dynamics (storyboard):

  Groups: each team is given a workplace scenario (e.g. project delivery delay, stricter holiday policy, lost order due to a flawed proposal, taking on overtime).

  The task: how do characters from different generations (BB, X, Y, Z) react to this situation?

  Come up with the reactions, then act them out in a role-play. We will then discuss the points of conflict and possible ways to bridge them.

Block 3 – Collaboration and communication strategies

- How do we give feedback to another generation?
- What builds trust between generations?
- How do we clarify expectations?

Method: Role-play + facilitated analysis.

Block 4 – Consciously managing generational differences – at a strategic level

- Generational transition in businesses
- Knowledge transfer and mentoring
- How can differences be turned into a resource?
- Closing session: Assessing one’s own organisational situation.

<u>Day 2: 13 March 2026: Best practices and application</u>

Block 1 – KOMETA 99 Zrt. – leadership experience

Guest lecture: ‘Trust, responsibility, the future – what does a family owner pass on?’

Focus:

- Intergenerational cooperation in day-to-day decision-making
- Managing multicultural teams and generational differences
- Specific dilemmas and lessons learnt
- Sharing experiences and a Q&A session.

Block 2 – What do we take away from this?

- Which conflict situations are familiar to us?
- What can we do differently?
- 2–3 specific areas for change per organisation.

Block 3 – Action plan and networking

- Quick organisational action plan
- Communication commitments
- Integrated networking session

Closing: summary, key messages.



Figure 5: Participants in the two-day training course

3.2.6 Summary

Managing generational differences is not a separate HR task, but part of the organisational culture. Businesses that recognise that the differing experiences and perspectives of different generations are not an obstacle but a valuable resource are the ones that can remain successful in the long term. Conscious communication, regular feedback, trust-building, clear expectations and mutual learning are management tools that can contribute to more effective collaboration and the successful management of generational change in organisations of any size.

What can businesses take away from this?

One of the training's key objectives was for participants to return home not only with new knowledge, but also with solutions they could apply within their own organisations. At the end of the two-day programme, each participant drew up an action plan setting out the specific steps they intend to implement in their own business or organisation in the coming period. This approach also reinforced the view that developing intergenerational cooperation is not a one-off project, but an ongoing management task.

Based on the insights gained during the training, the following messages may provide the most valuable guidance for businesses.

- **Generational differences are an asset:** the differing mindsets, working styles and experiences of different generations do not weaken but enrich the organisation. A significant proportion of conflicts arise because colleagues interpret the same situation from different perspectives. If these differences receive conscious support from management, the organisation's adaptability, creativity and problem-solving ability will also be strengthened.

- **The manager's role is to bring these differences together:** It was repeatedly emphasised during the training that a manager's task is not to ensure that every employee thinks or works in exactly the same way. Rather, it is to foster an organisational culture in which different perspectives complement one another.

  Clear communication, the articulation of unambiguous expectations, regular feedback and cooperation based on trust are essential for this. Leaders who recognise the strengths of each generation and create opportunities for them to flourish are able to manage multigenerational teams successfully.

- **Generational transition is a long-term process:** One of the key messages of the training was that generational transition is not a single decision or a change of leadership, but a carefully structured process spanning several years. This involves the transfer of knowledge, the gradual sharing of responsibility, and the development of new leadership roles.

  Successful organisations begin this process in good time and provide opportunities for the new generation to gradually gain experience, while former leaders continue to support the organisation's operations in a mentoring capacity.

- **Lessons from the management presentation by KOMETA 99 Zrt.:** The management presentation delivered on the second day of the training highlighted that intergenerational cooperation is not merely an HR issue, but one of the key strategic factors for long-term business success.

  Using the example of a family business, the speaker demonstrated that cooperation between multiple generations forms the basis for development. He emphasised that the organisation's sustained success is ensured by the combination of the older generations' professional experience and the fresh approaches of younger staff.

  Giacomo Pedranzini stressed that the knowledge, wisdom and perseverance of experienced colleagues provide a stable foundation, as they have a deep understanding of how the business works, recognise the risks and contribute to the organisation's safe operation. At the same time, younger generations bring a fresh perspective, creativity, digital skills and an openness to change.

  According to Pedranzini's key insight, young staff must be given the space to take independent initiatives and try out new ideas, even if these seem unusual or risky at first. It is inherent in innovation that not every attempt leads to immediate success; mistakes are therefore part of the learning process. Meanwhile, the role of more experienced colleagues remains crucial: through mentoring, guidance and support, they help ensure that, while embracing new solutions, the company preserves its values, professional standards and stability.

  This approach sums up one of the fundamental lessons of the training: successful businesses do not choose between tradition and innovation, but consciously combine the two.

- **Change begins with small steps:** While drawing up their action plans, it became clear to the participants that improving intergenerational cooperation does not require immediate, large-scale organisational changes. Even a few deliberate changes – such as more regular feedback, common rules of communication, launching a mentoring programme, or clarifying tasks and expectations more precisely – can lead to a noticeable improvement in day-to-day collaboration.

Final thoughts

Intergenerational collaboration is not primarily a question of age, but rather a matter of leadership and organisational culture. Those organisations will be successful in the long term that are able to harness the knowledge, experience and perspectives of different generations in the service of common goals. Experience provides security, while new ideas bring progress – and together they create an organisational culture that is stable, adaptable and forward-looking.

A word of inspiration for readers of this e-Guide:

Effective collaboration between generations in the workplace is not about erasing differences, but about consciously harmonising the unique values and perspectives inherent in each. As the renowned Hungarian generational researcher, **Krisztián Steigervald,** highlights the importance of understanding:

"...without it, we only see that things are not as they used to be – and this leads to tension. Knowledge, on the other hand, leads to understanding and acceptance."

In day-to-day communication, a culture of open feedback and collaborative work, the greatest step we can take is to choose attentive understanding over stereotypes. **Lindsey Pollak**, a recognised international expert on multigenerational workplaces, encourages us to change our mindset:

"Let's decide not to view generational diversity as a problem to be solved or a challenge to be overcome, but as an opportunity worth embracing. Let's combine the best practices of each generation – the classic and the new – to create a more successful and inclusive workplace."

Practical questions for self-reflection:

Please take a few minutes to reflect on how your own organisation operates and answer the following questions:

1. **The intention to understand:** When I encounter a conflict or difference of opinion with a colleague from a different generation (whether they are significantly younger or older than me) during my day-to-day work, am I able to consciously set aside generational stereotypes and examine what differing expectations or values lie behind their reaction?
2. **The communication bridge:** When assigning tasks or holding someone to account, do I phrase things in the way that is most comfortable for me, or do I endeavour to tailor the message to my counterpart's generational communication characteristics (e.g. Generation Z's need for immediate feedback or older colleagues' preference for face-to-face discussions)?
3. **Trust and responsibility:** Do I grant members of the other generation the necessary trust and autonomy in day-to-day decision-making, or do I attempt to control processes through micromanagement, thereby hindering the two-way transfer of knowledge?
4. **The first step:** What is the one tangible change I can make to my communication or feedback practices as early as tomorrow to improve intergenerational cooperation within my team?

3.3 Study visits to Italy

3.3.1 The aim and professional background of the study trip

As part of the GENSKILLS project, the study trip to Italy organised by Marco Polo G.E.I.E. from 19 to 23 April 2026 took place as a follow-up to the workshop and the entrepreneurship training.

While the training focused primarily on developing cooperation between different generations, and the workshop on the methodology of generational transition as well as the role of coaching and mentoring, **the study trip provided participants with the opportunity to observe the practical implementation of these concepts in functioning businesses.** Throughout the programme, examples from family businesses, social enterprises and craft workshops made it clear that generational succession is not a one-off event, but a consciously structured, long-term development process. The main criterion for selecting the organisations visited during the study trip was that they should have experience in the fields of preserving traditions, innovation and sustainable development.

Gaining first-hand experience on site is of paramount importance, as the factors determining the success of generational succession – trust, the gradual handover of leadership roles, the preservation of family values or, indeed, the introduction of innovation – can be understood in a much more nuanced way in practice than during theoretical lectures. Participants had the opportunity to meet entrepreneurs face-to-face, who drew on their own experiences to illustrate the challenges, decision-making situations and outcomes of generational succession. Personal discussions, site visits and gaining an insight into how businesses operate provided an opportunity for participants not only to gather examples of good practice, but also to understand their background and adaptability. The venue for the study trip, the Friuli–Venezia Giulia region of Italy, was particularly well-suited to this purpose. The region's economy is largely made up of small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as family businesses that have been in operation for several generations. These businesses are not merely economic actors, but also key pillars of local identity, cultural heritage and community cooperation. For many businesses, the very foundation of their competitiveness lies in combining family traditions with modern technologies, an international market outlook and sustainable operating models. The businesses visited during the study tour clearly demonstrated that generational succession does not mean abandoning the past, but rather building on it.

The programme **was also closely linked to the 'FaRe' Consulting methodology and the four-step model of generational transition presented during the workshop in Békéscsaba**. Participants were able to observe in practice how the development of a shared vision, intergenerational dialogue, the gradual handover of responsibility, and the balance between innovation and tradition manifest themselves in successfully operating family businesses. The study visits thus reinforced one of the project's key messages: generational succession is, first and foremost, a process of cooperation between people, based on trust, shared values and conscious preparation.

The professional approach of the study tour was based on **the '*learning by* seeing'** method. This approach is based on the premise that best practices cannot simply be described, but can only be truly understood through personal experience. Rather than analysing pre-prepared case studies, the participants gained an insight into the day-to-day operations of functioning businesses, were able to ask the owners and managers questions directly, and learnt about the reasoning behind their decisions. This form of learning enables theoretical models to be linked to real-world entrepreneurial experiences, facilitating the subsequent practical application of the knowledge gained within their own organisations or in their consultancy work.

The study visits can thus be seen not as a standalone programme component, but **as the third pillar of the GENSKILLS project's learning process**. Building on the skills acquired during the training and the methodology presented in the workshop, participants were able to gain confirmation, through real-life examples, that the key to a successful generational handover lies in conscious preparation, the gradual transfer of responsibility and the establishment of a partnership between the generations.

3.3.2 What can we learn from successful family businesses?

The businesses visited operated in a variety of sectors – ranging from winemaking and the food industry, through artisan workshops, to the social economy – yet they shared a number of common characteristics. Although their size, history and market environment differ, each organisation embodies the same fundamental principle: generational succession is not a single decision or legal act, but a long-term organisational development process. Successful businesses do not simply change leaders; rather, they consciously prepare the next generation to carry forward and further develop the values established by the family.

Generational succession is a long, deliberate process

One of the most important lessons we have learnt is that generational succession is a process lasting years, and often decades. The successors are gradually integrated into the running of the business: first as observers, then as those responsible for specific areas, and finally as strategic decision-makers involved in the management of the company. This transitional period provides an opportunity for the new generation to gain experience, while the previous generation continues to support their development in a mentoring role. The handover of leadership thus represents continuity rather than a break.

Passing on values is more important than transferring ownership

For family businesses, the greatest legacy is not the company itself or its assets, but the mindset, knowledge and values on which the business is built. The managers of the companies visited regularly emphasised that the next generation must not only take over the management of the business, but also its mission, quality principles, customer relationships and social responsibility. This idea is closely linked to the 'FaRe' Consulting methodology presented during the workshop, which holds that true legacy is formed by the combination of values, vision and responsibility.

Innovation and tradition are not mutually exclusive

Preserving tradition and introducing innovation are not mutually exclusive processes, but rather mutually reinforcing ones. For example, Alimentari Tomadin has transformed a traditional family business into a shop selling internationally renowned gastronomic specialities. Antica Ricetta has turned a multi-generational recipe into a premium brand; Friul Mosaic has complemented traditional hand-crafted mosaic-making with state-of-the-art digital design; while Cantina Pitars has increased its competitiveness through precision viticulture and digital marketing. This clearly demonstrates that innovation does not mean abandoning the past, but rather developing it in a modern way.

Family identity can be a competitive advantage

The businesses visited do not merely sell products or services, but also a story, tradition and authenticity. Family heritage, local ties and knowledge accumulated over several generations represent a distinctive value that is increasingly appreciated by the international market. For consumers, family businesses convey reliability, personal accountability and high quality. The examples from the study tour demonstrated that family identity is not an obstacle to development but, with the right strategy, can be one of the business's strongest competitive advantages.

The gradual handover of leadership roles builds trust

In every business visited, a successful generational handover was built on the conscious and gradual sharing of responsibility. The older generation did not step down overnight, but took on mentoring and advisory roles, while the successors were given increasing autonomy in decision-making. This approach enabled the new leaders to gain their own experience, learn from their mistakes, while still being able to count on the support of the previous generation. The experiences gained during the study trip thus reinforced one of the workshop's key messages: the leadership role cannot simply be handed over; it must be built up gradually, based on trust, cooperation and shared responsibility.

Overall, it became clear that the common feature of successful family businesses is not a single business model or management technique, but a distinctive mindset. At the heart of this are a long-term perspective, continuous learning, intergenerational partnership, and the conviction that the true value of a business lies not only in the products or services it produces, but also in the knowledge, culture and human relationships it passes on.

3.3.3 Best practices from various businesses

One of the greatest benefits of the study tour was that participants were able to learn about the operations of family businesses of varying sizes and with different scopes of activity. Although the organisations visited operate in different sectors, what they have in common is that they successfully combine family traditions with innovation, while consciously preparing for generational succession. The examples below clearly illustrate that there is no single formula for generational succession; however, a number of best practices can be identified that can be adapted by other businesses.

1.) Fondazione Russiz – Combining social responsibility and economic sustainability

Fondazione Russiz occupies a special place amongst the stops on the study tour, as it operates simultaneously as a social institution and a successful commercial organisation. The foundation's original mission was to support disadvantaged children, a mission it has retained to this day; at the same time, the sustainability of its operations is ensured by its own agricultural and winemaking activities. This model clearly illustrates that social responsibility and economic success are not mutually exclusive goals.

The organisation's management has consciously created an environment in which young people can develop not as residents of an institution, but as active members of the community. Agricultural work, vocational training and community life all serve to foster personal development and social integration. People are at the heart of the organisation's operations: management decisions are not guided solely by economic considerations, but also serve the long-term development of the community.

Adaptable best practices:

- aligning social objectives with business activities;
- economic self-sustainability alongside a social mission;
- community building as an organisational value;
- a people-centred leadership approach.

2.) Alimentari Tomadin – Rethinking tradition

Alimentari Tomadin is a good example of how a generational handover does not necessarily mean a change of direction, but rather brings a new perspective to an existing business. Leila Cipolloni, a representative of the second generation, has not broken with family traditions, but has enriched them with a new business approach and international experience. She has transformed the traditional grocery shop into a shop selling premium gastronomic specialities, showcasing the high-quality products of local producers.

The business's success is based on deliberate brand-building, a commitment to exceptional quality, and the belief that local values can be competitive on the international market. The manager is constantly on the lookout for new producers and learning opportunities, while preserving the original values of the family business.

Adaptable best practices:

- the deliberate shaping of a new role for the second generation;
- brand development based on tradition;
- uncompromising, quality-focused operations;
- an international outlook built on local values.

3.) Antica Ricetta – A premium brand born from family heritage

The story of Antica Ricetta proves that even a family recipe can become an international success story when combined with the right innovation and deliberate business development. The business is founded on a gubana recipe that has been passed down through several generations, which the younger generation has taken to a new level through modern technology, high-quality standards and sophisticated brand-building.

One of the keys to this success is intergenerational collaboration. The older members of the family pass on their professional expertise, while the younger generation seeks out modern business solutions and new market opportunities. The business also pays particular attention to the guest experience: alongside the product itself, the visit, the café's atmosphere and the personal welcome have all become part of the brand.

Adaptable best practices:

- repositioning a family tradition to make it marketable;
- generations creating shared value;
- striking a balance between artisanal quality and innovation;
- building experience-based customer relationships.

4.) Friul Mosaic – Innovation in the third generation

The example of Friul Mosaic clearly demonstrates that traditional craft trades are also capable of adapting to the challenges of the 21st century. The company continues to preserve the manual techniques of mosaic-making, while utilising digital design software and state-of-the-art project management in some of the world's most significant architectural projects.

The arrival of the third generation has not only led to technological advancement but has also brought a new business approach. The company now participates in international projects not merely as a contractor but also as a design partner, while incorporating sustainability and the principles of the circular economy into its operations.

Adaptable best practices:

- digitalisation of traditional crafts;
- developing international collaborations;
- application of sustainable design;
- continuous renewal of family roles.

5.) Cantina Pitars – Generational transition with a strategic approach

Cantina Pitars presented one of the most comprehensive examples of a consciously structured generational transition. Throughout the company's development, each generation took on its own specific role: the founders established the business, the second generation consolidated its market position, while the third generation opened up new avenues in the areas of digitalisation, export development and sustainability.

The division of roles amongst family members has resulted in a well-structured organisational framework, which enables rapid decision-making and long-term development. Precision viticulture,

the digital technologies and international marketing all serve to enhance the business's competitiveness and sustainability.

Best practices that can be adapted:

- a conscious division of roles and responsibilities;
- strategic use of digitalisation;
- precision farming;
- the deliberate development of export markets;
- development of a sustainable growth model.

6.) Pagura Grappa Distillery – A story spanning five generations

The history of the Pagura Grappa Distillery, spanning nearly one and a half centuries, clearly illustrates that the success of generational succession depends on the continuous transfer of knowledge and family cooperation. The business, which has endured for five generations, has preserved its traditional distilling technology, while each new generation has contributed to its development with its own ideas.

What makes the business unique is that it combines its economic activities with a cultural mission. The Grappa distillery regularly hosts art exhibitions, cultural events and community programmes, thereby becoming a key player in shaping local identity. The older generation has passed on their professional expertise, while younger family members have further developed digital communication and modern hospitality.

Adaptable best practices:

- conscious and continuous transfer of knowledge;
- intergenerational cooperation;
- creating cultural value through business tools;
- active community engagement;
- the conscious preservation of local identity and tradition.

The businesses profiled have demonstrated that there are numerous ways to achieve a successful generational transition, but what they all have in common is value-based leadership, long-term thinking, continuous learning and trust between generations. These best practices are not merely examples to be followed, but inspiring models which, when adapted to their own contexts, can serve as a useful starting point for other family businesses.

3.3.4 Common patterns in the businesses visited

The businesses differed significantly in terms of their size, scope of activities and market environment. The participants visited a social foundation, a winery, a food industry business, a craft workshop and a family business that has been operating for several generations. However, the comparative analysis showed that behind every successful generational handover lie a number of common organisational and leadership characteristics. These patterns are independent of sector or business size, and can therefore provide useful lessons for other family businesses.

Value-based leadership

One of the most important common characteristics is that the operation of these businesses is not based solely on economic objectives. In every case, the leaders clearly articulated the values they wished to pass on to the next generation. These included a commitment to quality, professional rigour, responsibility towards the local community, respect for family traditions and a

people-centred approach. The business thus emerged not merely as a profit-generating organisation, but as a community with its own identity and mission.

Gradual handover of responsibility

In all the businesses, it was observed that the handover of leadership roles took place not as a one-off event, but as a gradual process of development. The successors first took on responsibility for smaller projects or organisational units, and were then entrusted with increasingly complex managerial tasks. At the same time, the older generation gradually stepped back, while continuing to support the new leaders in an advisory and mentoring capacity. This approach reduced risks and provided opportunities for the successors to gain their own experience.

Trust as the foundation of generational succession

One of the strongest messages is that the success of generational succession is, first and foremost, a matter of trust. In the businesses visited, the previous generation consciously created the conditions for the successors to make independent decisions and develop their own leadership styles. At the same time, this trust was mutual: the younger generation respected their predecessors' experience and the company's traditions, while introducing new solutions. It was this partnership that enabled generational succession to be a process of shared development rather than a source of conflict.

Continuous learning and openness

The leaders of successful businesses did not regard their own development as complete. During the study tour, it was evident on several occasions that the younger generation regularly undertakes training, gains international experience, builds professional networks and constantly monitors market changes. At the same time, the older generation also remained open to embracing new technologies and management methods. This mutual learning ensured that businesses were able to adapt to the changing economic environment.

Innovation as a means of preserving tradition

Innovation does not mean abandoning traditions. The new generation has introduced digital technologies, modern marketing solutions, sustainable production methods and new business models, while preserving the business's original values and identity. Innovation has thus emerged not as an end in itself, but as a strategic tool for long-term survival.

Consciously building family identity

Successful family businesses do not merely inherit their identity; they consciously build and communicate it. The family's history, local traditions, knowledge accumulated over several generations and a sense of personal responsibility form an integral part of the brand. This not only strengthens consumer trust but also fosters staff commitment and supports the shared goals of family members. The business's identity thus becomes a genuine competitive advantage.

Sustainability in economic and social terms

Sustainability featured prominently in the operations of all the businesses visited, extending far beyond the issue of environmental protection. Economic sustainability is ensured by long-term strategic thinking, informed investment and innovation, while social sustainability is reflected in community engagement, the preservation of local values, staff development and preparing the next generation. The companies' approach reflects the view that long-term success depends not only on financial performance, but also on the value they create for society and the local community.

3.3.5 Key factors for a successful generational transition

Despite their differing sizes, activities and histories, the businesses visited during the study tour share a number of common characteristics. The on-site visits and discussions with business leaders made it clear that a successful generational transition is not the result of chance, but

a deliberately structured managerial and organisational process. Based on these experiences, six key factors can be identified which were defining elements of every successful generational transition.

1.) Strategic planning

In none of the businesses did the generational transition take place spontaneously. The leaders began planning the transition many years in advance, prepared their successors for leadership roles, and gradually restructured the organisation's operations. Strategic planning involved not only the handover of ownership or managerial powers, but also a conscious rethinking of the business's future. The successful businesses recognised that generational succession is an investment whose results only become apparent in the longer term.

2.) Open communication

Without honest dialogue between the generations, even the best-thought-out strategy cannot succeed. In the businesses we visited, family members regularly discussed the future of the business, roles, expectations and new ideas. Open communication ensured that differences of opinion were treated not as conflicts but as opportunities for joint reflection. This ongoing dialogue contributed significantly to the smooth transition between generations.

3.) The role of coaching and mentoring

These experiences reinforced one of the workshop's key messages: a leadership role cannot simply be handed over; successors must be prepared for it. In the businesses visited, the older generation was present not only as leaders but also as mentors, providing ongoing support to younger family members. Mentoring enabled the transfer of professional experience, while coaching helped the successors to develop into leaders through their own decisions and experiences. The combined application of these two approaches significantly increased the chances of a successful generational transition.

4.) Developing a shared vision

In each of the businesses, it was evident that the generational transition did not take place solely according to the previous generation's vision. Family members jointly developed a vision for the future that both built on the business's traditions and responded to the challenges of the changing market environment. This shared strategic thinking ensured that every generation felt a sense of ownership over the business's future, while preserving its core values and identity.

5.) Gradual handover of leadership

We did not come across a single business where a change of leadership had taken place overnight. In every case, a successful transition was preceded by a gradual handover of responsibilities. The successors were first given smaller tasks, then granted increasing freedom to make decisions, and finally assumed full managerial responsibility. Meanwhile, the older generation took a back seat but remained available as advisers. This model ensured continuity while providing opportunities for the new leaders to develop independently.

6.) Trust and the sharing of responsibility

Mutual trust forms the basis of generational succession. The older generation must trust that their successors are capable of carrying the business forward, while the younger generation must respect the knowledge and experience of their predecessors. This trust was also reflected in the conscious sharing of responsibility: managerial tasks were not assigned exclusively to a single person, but were distributed according to the competencies and areas of interest of family members. This approach simultaneously increased the organisation's flexibility and reduced the risks arising from the generational transition.

3.3.6 The key message from the exchange of experiences

The three interlinked professional components of the GENSKILLS project – the entrepreneurship training, the workshop on generational succession and the study visits to Italy – approached the topic from different perspectives, yet all reached the same conclusion.

A successful generational handover is not primarily a legal, financial or organisational issue. Above all, it is a human process. A process in which experience meets new ways of thinking. Tradition meets innovation. The founder's trust meets the successor's sense of responsibility.

Perhaps this was also the most important insight of the study tour. Not a single business we visited was successful simply because it had a ready-made answer to every problem. They were successful because they were able to learn, adapt and develop together.

The ultimate message of the GENSKILLS project cannot, therefore, be summarised in a methodological guide, but rather in a mindset:

Generational succession is not about drawing a line under the past, but about jointly shaping the future.

And perhaps this is the idea that every family business – regardless of its size, sector or history – can take with it on the journey towards the next generation.

3.3.7 Summary

Experience has clearly shown that a successful generational transition is not the result of a single good decision, but rather the consequence of the conscious application of several mutually reinforcing factors. Strategic planning, open communication, a coaching and mentoring approach, a jointly developed vision for the future, a gradual handover of leadership, and the sharing of responsibilities based on trust together create the organisational environment in which generational succession represents not a loss, but an opportunity for development.

Although the GENSKILLS project's workshop, entrepreneurship training and study trip to Italy approached the issue of generational transition using different methods, they all reached the same conclusion: the future of a business is determined not primarily by when the leadership transition takes place, but by whether the generations are able to build a shared future together. This approach can also provide guidance for those family businesses that are preparing to face the challenges of generational succession in the coming years.

Lessons for Hungarian businesses

One of the most important lessons learnt from the GENSKILLS project is that there is no universal formula for a successful generational transition. There is no model that can be transferred from one business to another without adaptation. The Italian businesses visited during the study tour serve as examples to follow not because they can be copied exactly, but because they embody principles that can provide guidance for any family business.

For Hungarian businesses, this is perhaps the most important message of all: **it is not the solutions that should be adopted, but the mindset.**

Adapt, rather than copy

Examples from Italian businesses have shown that the key to a successful generational handover does not lie in the size of the business, the sector it operates in, or the resources available. Rather, it lies in whether leaders are able to consciously prepare for change.

Elements that can be directly adapted by Hungarian businesses include:

- planning the generational transition well in advance;
- establishing regular dialogue between family members and management;

- the gradual involvement of the younger generation in decision-making;
- adopting a mentoring approach to knowledge transfer;
- supporting innovation while preserving traditions;
- consciously communicating the business's values and history.

These solutions do not require significant investment, but primarily a commitment from management.

The greatest change is not organisational, but one of mindset

The most striking difference was that the managers of the businesses visited did not speak of generational succession as a problem. Rather, they viewed it as a natural process of development.

This mindset could also prove to be of decisive importance in Hungary. Generational succession is often still viewed as a single event: a specific point in time when the founder hands over the business to their successor. In reality, however, the leadership transition begins much earlier. It begins with every decision that gives the younger generation the opportunity to learn, to take on responsibility and to develop their own leadership identity.

Equally important is the shift in mindset that comes from recognising that the successor does not need to become a carbon copy of their predecessor. The aim is not to preserve the past unchanged, but to build on it. As the businesses we visited during the study tour demonstrated, every generation can add new value to the company's history.

Generational transition as a continuous process of organisational development

One of the project's most important insights is that generational succession is, in fact, organisational development. It is not merely about who sits in the director's chair, but also about how the business itself evolves. During a leadership transition, new ways of working emerge, areas of responsibility are reshaped, communication improves, new technologies are introduced, and often the corporate culture itself is revitalised. Those businesses that treat this as a conscious opportunity for development not only achieve a successful generational transition but also become more competitive in the long term. Generational transition is therefore not a project with a definitive end. Rather, it is a learning process in which every generation learns, teaches and develops simultaneously.



Figure 6: Participants in the study trip to Italy

4 Recommendations and practical tools for developing generational transition and intergenerational cooperation

The aim of the following section is to provide practical assistance to businesses that wish to consciously address the challenges arising from intergenerational cooperation and prepare for generational transition. While the first part of the study presented the current state of intergenerational cooperation and its key issues, and the second part summarised the good practices identified during the GENSKILLS project's workshops, training sessions and study visits to Italy, this chapter builds on these findings to formulate specific recommendations that can be applied in day-to-day business operations.

The tools presented are not intended exclusively for family businesses. They may also be useful for any micro, small or medium-sized enterprise where several generations work together, where a leadership transition is anticipated, or where more conscious cooperation, more effective communication and a more organised transfer of knowledge are required for the organisation's long-term development.

The guiding principle behind the recommendations is that intergenerational differences do not in themselves pose a problem. With the right managerial approach, these different experiences, skills, working methods and ways of thinking can become one of the organisation's most important competitive advantages. However, this requires the creation of an organisational environment that supports open communication, learning from one another, mutual trust and the development of a shared vision.

The recommendations set out in this chapter build upon one another. The first section deals with improving communication, followed by sections on knowledge transfer and mentoring tools, then chapters covering the conscious planning of generational transition, the development of organisational culture, and practical methods applicable to managers. The aim of the e-Guide is not to present a single, mandatory methodology for every business, but to provide a flexible toolkit from which every organisation can select the solutions best suited to its own operations.

4.1 Improving communication between generations

All the professional programmes within the GENSKILLS project reached the same conclusion**:** effective communication is the most important factor in successful intergenerational cooperation. The results of the questionnaire survey showed that, in a significant proportion of organisations, the primary cause of conflict is not differences in age or values, but misunderstandings, differing communication styles and a lack of clarity regarding mutual expectations. The experiences gained from the workshop and training further reinforced this: cooperation works effectively in organisations where managers consciously shape the communication culture and foster regular dialogue between different generations.

Improving communication does not primarily mean introducing new IT systems or formal policies. Rather, it involves developing a leadership approach in which active listening, regular feedback and mutual respect become part of day-to-day operations. Different generations interpret speed, feedback, the leadership role and even workplace courtesy in different ways. These differences do not in themselves cause problems, provided the organisation is able to establish a common framework for communication.

4.1.1 Establishing intergenerational communication guidelines

One of the simplest, yet least utilised, tools for effective collaboration is a jointly established set of communication rules. This need not be a complicated set of regulations, but rather a few basic principles accepted by everyone, which clarify how communication takes place within the organisation.

It is worth agreeing on the following, for example:

- which channels the organisation uses for specific tasks (email, telephone, chat, face-to-face meetings);
- how long it should take to respond to an enquiry;
- how feedback is provided and issues are reported;
- in which forums joint decisions are made.

It is advisable to involve representatives from all generations in drawing up the rules. On the one hand, this increases acceptance; on the other, it helps to understand the differing communication needs of different age groups. Jointly established norms significantly reduce misunderstandings and make day-to-day cooperation more predictable.

4.1.2 The use of active listening

The basis for successful generational transition and collaboration is not speaking, but listening. Renato Fava's methodology places particular emphasis on the 3A model (Ascolto – Allineamento – Azione), according to which joint action can only be effective if it is preceded by genuine listening and the alignment of viewpoints.

For organisations, active listening means that managers do not merely gather information, but show a genuine interest in their colleagues' opinions, experiences and motivations. This is particularly important when different generations work together, as they often interpret the same situation from completely different perspectives.

In day-to-day management practice, this can be supported by asking simple questions:

- How do you see this situation?
- What solution would you suggest?
- What do you find most difficult?
- How can I help?

Questions like these not only provide the manager with more information, but also convey that the employee's opinion is valued.

4.1.3 Establishing a structured feedback system

One of the most common shortcomings in intergenerational collaboration is feedback that is either irregular or only provided when problems arise. In many organisations, management discussions only take place when a mistake has been made, whereas effective collaboration requires ongoing communication.

It is considered good practice to introduce short, regular one-to-one meetings, where, alongside day-to-day operational issues, progress, expectations and future goals are also discussed. These discussions are not performance reviews, but forums designed to encourage joint reflection.

Alongside traditional appraisal, the so-called *'feedforward'* approach can be particularly useful; rather than analysing past mistakes, it focuses on future opportunities for development. The question in this case is not 'What did we get wrong?', but 'What could we do even more effectively next time?'.

Regular feedback builds trust, reduces uncertainty and helps ensure that members of different generations view one another as partners rather than competitors. This creates the organisational culture upon which knowledge transfer, mentoring and a successful generational transition can be securely built in the long term.

4.2 Knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing

One of the greatest benefits of intergenerational collaboration is the convergence of different types of knowledge. The professional experience, network of business contacts and strategic thinking accumulated by older generations over several decades represent organisational capital, the loss of which could result in a significant competitive disadvantage for a business. At the same time, younger generations bring up-to-date digital skills, experience in applying new technologies, and an innovative mindset to the organisation. These two forms of knowledge do not replace but complement one another.

Successful businesses build a structured system for knowledge transfer. Knowledge transfer does not consist of random conversations, but is an organised process that ensures the experience and skills necessary for the business's operation are preserved in the long term. Knowledge sharing is particularly important during generational change, when not only managerial responsibilities but also *networks of relationships*, *decision-making patterns* and *organisational culture* are passed on.

4.2.1 Developing a mentoring programme

Mentoring is one of the most effective tools for generational transition. The mentor's role is not merely to pass on knowledge, but also to help younger colleagues understand how the business operates, master their leadership role and integrate into the organisational culture. During mentoring, the emphasis is on sharing experiences, collaborative thinking and supporting the gradual development of independence.

A well-functioning mentoring programme does not require a complex organisational structure. Simply identifying the key areas where knowledge transfer is needed and then organising regular mentoring sessions can already yield significant results. It is worth defining in advance the programme's objectives, duration and the specific skills the mentee wishes to develop.

During mentoring, it is particularly important that the mentor does not merely provide ready-made solutions, but helps the mentee to develop their own thinking through their own experiences. The aim is not to replicate the mentor, but to support the development of an independent professional and leadership identity.

a) *Reverse mentoring* – mutual learning across generations

The transfer of knowledge has long since ceased to be a one-way process. With the advent of digitalisation, artificial intelligence and new communication platforms, younger generations possess knowledge that has become indispensable even to older leaders. The workshop therefore placed particular emphasis on the method of reverse mentoring.

In this model, younger staff mentor their more experienced colleagues in areas such as:

- the use of digital tools;
- the use of artificial intelligence;
- social media and online marketing;
- new collaboration platforms;
- understanding the expectations of young employees.

Reverse mentoring does not diminish the professional authority of the older generation; on the contrary, it fosters a culture of collaboration in which every generation contributes valuable knowledge to the organisation's development. This significantly strengthens mutual respect and breaks down the stereotypes that often hinder collaboration.

b) Documenting critical knowledge

There are numerous elements of knowledge within a business's operations that are not written down. The founder or an experienced employee knows exactly how to deal with a key client, how to resolve a recurring problem, or what factors to weigh up before making an important decision. This so-called tacit knowledge often exists solely as personal experience.

One of the greatest risks of generational change is precisely the loss of this knowledge. It is therefore advisable to consciously identify the areas where documentation is required.

These may include, for example:

- the most important work processes;
- the specific requirements for managing key customers and suppliers;
- decision-making criteria and managerial experience;
- lessons learnt from successful projects;
- the organisation's history and core values.

Documentation is not merely about producing manuals. In many cases, a short video, audio recording or jointly prepared flowchart preserves the organisation's knowledge more effectively. The aim is to ensure that the company's operations do not depend on the memory of a single person, but remain accessible to the next generation in the long term.

4.2.2 Conscious planning for generational succession

A successful generational transition is not a single event, but a strategic process spanning many years. Both the presentations at the workshop and the experiences of Italian businesses have confirmed that those companies are able to successfully maintain their competitiveness which begin planning the transition in good time, rather than waiting until the moment when a change of leadership becomes a matter of necessity.

Conscious planning involves more than just the handover of ownership or managerial powers. It is at least as important to define which values, operating principles and organisational culture the business wishes to carry forward, as well as what role the outgoing leader will play during the transition period.

4.2.2.1 Drawing up a generational transition roadmap

One of the most important practical lessons from the four-step methodology presented during the workshop is that generational succession requires a clear roadmap. A well-structured *roadmap* not only provides reassurance for managers but also makes the process of change predictable for the entire organisation.

The roadmap should ideally include:

- the key milestones;
- the tasks and areas of responsibility to be handed over;
- the roles of each stakeholder;
- the necessary training and mentoring periods;
- the assessment criteria.

The *roadmap* is a flexible document that must be reviewed regularly as the business develops.

4.2.2.2 The gradual handover of responsibility

One of the most common mistakes is that the manager either withholds decision-making authority from the successor for too long, or transfers all responsibility to them overnight. In contrast, the best practices highlighted in the workshop emphasised the principle of gradual handover.

In this process, the successor is given increasingly complex tasks:

- first, leading smaller projects;
- later, managing client relationships independently;
- subsequently, preparing strategic decisions;
- and finally, full managerial responsibility.

This gradual approach provides an opportunity to gain experience, while the founder can still support the process if necessary. This significantly reduces the uncertainty associated with a change in leadership.

4.2.2.3 Applying a coaching approach during the transition

The role of the leader gradually changes during the generational transition. The leader shifts from being a directive manager to a supportive mentor and coach, who no longer makes every decision themselves but helps their successor find their own solutions.

The coaching-oriented leader:

- encourages critical thinking through questions;
- allows scope for independent decision-making;
- accepts that making mistakes is part of learning;
- provides regular feedback;
- builds trust rather than exercising control.

This approach not only accelerates the successor's development, but also makes one of the most difficult leadership tasks easier for the founder: letting go. A common feature of the Italian businesses presented during the project was that the success of the handover was not determined by how quickly the leadership change took place, but by how consciously they had built a transitional period based on trust and cooperation.

4.2.3 Developing a collaborative organisational culture

The long-term success of intergenerational collaboration is not determined solely by management decisions or the methods employed. Equally important is the organisational culture in which different generations work together on a day-to-day basis. All the professional programmes of the GENSKILLS project have highlighted that those organisations are able to adapt successfully to a changing economic environment which foster a workplace atmosphere where differing experiences, perspectives and working styles are seen not as sources of conflict, but as opportunities for development.

Organisational culture is not a standalone project, but rather the sum total of the day-to-day behaviour of managers and staff. It determines how colleagues communicate with one another, how decisions are made, how mistakes are handled, and the extent to which they are able to learn from one another. A generational transition can only be truly successful if not only the leader changes, but the organisation also becomes open to shared learning and collaboration.

4.2.3.1 Defining shared values

One recurring question during the workshop was: **'What do we actually want to leave behind?'** This idea goes beyond the handover of ownership or leadership roles and encourages businesses to consciously define their own identity. According to the 'FaRe' methodology, a business's most important legacy is not merely its assets or market position, but the values that have defined its operations over the long term.

It is worth reviewing questions such as the following together from time to time:

- Which values do we uphold under all circumstances?
- What traditions do we wish to preserve?
- In which areas is change needed?
- What sort of business do we want to pass on to the next generation?

A set of values developed collectively aids decision-making, strengthens staff commitment and ensures that the organisation's development does not come at the cost of losing its identity.

4.2.3.2 Developing a shared vision

Just as important as values is ensuring that the organisation's members share a common vision of the future. The *vision board* method introduced in the first phase of the workshop is designed to ensure that different generations do not merely discuss current problems, but work together to define what sort of business they would like to build in five or ten years' time.

When developing this shared vision, it is worth discussing, for example:

- what market position the business would like to achieve;
- what new technologies it intends to adopt;
- how it intends to develop its staff;
- what sort of organisational culture you intend to foster;
- what values you wish to uphold in relation to your partners and clients.

A jointly developed vision reduces uncertainty between generations, as it makes it clear to everyone what purpose the changes serve.

4.2.3.3 Building trust

One of the project's most important lessons is that trust forms the basis of successful collaboration. This is particularly true during a generational transition, when the founder must gradually relinquish their former control, while the successor must build their own leadership credibility. The workshop repeatedly emphasised that the baton cannot simply be handed over – it can only be relinquished through trust.

Several simple leadership practices can help to foster trust:

- encouraging open and honest communication;
- treating mistakes as learning opportunities;
- supporting independent decision-making;
- jointly recognising successes;
- consistently keeping promises.

Organisations that create a safe environment for expressing opinions and trying out new ideas adapt more quickly to a changing economic environment and find it easier to manage generational differences.

4.3 A practical toolkit for managers

The previous chapters of this e-Guide have outlined the key challenges of intergenerational collaboration, the best practices identified during the GENSKILLS project, and the recommendations that can contribute to more informed organisational development. For managers, however, the biggest question is often **where to start** making changes.

This chapter presents easy-to-use self-assessment and planning tools that do not require an external consultant or significant financial investment. With their help, organisations can assess their current situation, identify areas for improvement, and then select the methods best suited to their needs.

4.3.1 Quick self-assessment

As a first step, managers should ask themselves the following questions:

Communication

- Do we regularly discuss the future with our staff?
- Do we have an established culture of feedback?
- Are the views of different generations equally taken into account in decision-making?

Knowledge transfer

- Have we documented the key knowledge required for the business to operate?
- Is there a designated mentor or a mentoring process in place?
- Do different generations consciously learn from one another?

Generational transition

- Is there a written succession or leadership transition plan?
- Is the successor gradually being given more and more responsibility?
- Is the founder's role clear during the transition period?

Organisational culture

- Do staff members understand and accept the company's core values?
- Do we create a safe environment for new ideas to be put forward?
- Do we learn from our mistakes, or do we primarily seek to blame those responsible?

Honest answers provide a quick overview of which areas require improvement as a matter of priority.

4.3.2 Setting development priorities

The next step is to decide which areas pose the greatest risk to the business, or conversely, offer the greatest potential for growth. To do this, it is advisable to assess each area on a five-point scale.

Area	Rating (1–5)
Communication	
Knowledge transfer	
Trust	
Planning for generational change	
Digital readiness	
Succession planning	

Areas that receive lower ratings may be given priority when drawing up the development plan.

4.3.3 Recommended tools for tackling the most common challenges

Based on the experience of the GENSKILLS project, the following practical solutions can be applied to tackle the most common problems.

If this challenge arises…	It is worth using this tool
Frequent communication misunderstandings	Regular one-to-one meetings, active listening, the 3A model
Knowledge is concentrated in the hands of a single person	Mentoring programme, knowledge documentation
Digital divide between generations	*Reverse mentoring*
The founder finds it difficult to relinquish leadership	A coaching approach, gradual handover of responsibility
The successor is uncertain in their leadership role	Coaching, mentoring and project management opportunities
Differing visions for the future of the business	*Vision board* workshop, joint strategic planning
Lack of trust between generations	Cross-mentoring, regular feedback, joint development projects

One of the project's most important lessons is that there is no one-size-fits-all solution for every business. The most successful organisations do not rely on a single method, but instead build a toolkit tailored to their own situation that simultaneously supports communication, knowledge transfer, leadership development and the conscious implementation of generational succession. This approach ensures that intergenerational differences are not seen as an obstacle, but rather as one of the most important resources for the organisation's long-term development.

4.3.4 90-day action plan

Developing intergenerational cooperation and consciously preparing for generational transition does not happen overnight. At the same time, for most businesses, even a few well-chosen, consistently implemented steps can lead to significant progress. A common feature of the good practices presented during the GENSKILLS project was that they were not based on one-off measures, but were implemented as a gradual, deliberate development process.

The 90-day action plan below is a practical guide that can help kick-start this process. Naturally, every business starts from a different position, so the individual steps can be adapted flexibly to the organisation's size, operations and current challenges.

4.3.4.1 The first 30 days – Assessing the current situation

The first step in this process is to take an objective look at how the business currently operates. It is important to understand in which areas intergenerational collaboration works well and where difficulties regularly arise.

During this period, it is advisable to:

- carry out a management self-assessment;
- map out the roles and collaboration of the different generations working within the organisation;
- identify the organisation's core competencies and key players;
- assess whether a generational transition or succession plan is in place;
- initiate a joint discussion on the future of the business.

The aim is not to look for problems, but to gain a realistic understanding of the current situation. This lays the foundation for improvements.

4.3.4.2 The next 30 days – Launching improvements

Once the areas for improvement have been identified, the implementation of specific measures can begin.

At this stage, it is worth:

- introduce regular meetings between management and staff;
- launch a mentoring or *reverse mentoring* programme;
- identify those tasks that can be gradually handed over to a successor or younger staff members;
- begin documenting key processes;
- jointly define the business's core values and long-term goals.

At this stage, the focus is not yet on a complete organisational overhaul, but on gaining initial positive experiences. Small successes boost staff confidence and motivation.

4.3.4.3 The third 30 days – Evaluation and further development

At the end of the first three months of the development process, it is worth reviewing the results achieved together. It is advisable to examine:

- whether communication between the generations has improved;
- whether feedback discussions have become a regular feature;
- whether mentoring is working;
- whether new tasks and areas of responsibility have been successfully delegated;
- in which areas further development is required.

Based on these findings, a detailed development plan for the next six or twelve months can be drawn up.

According to the project's findings, the most important outcome is not that the generational transition process be completed within three months, but that the organisation establishes a culture of continuous development. Successful businesses do not view generational transition as a one-off project, but treat it as part of the organisation's natural development cycle.

5 Final thoughts

The shared experiences from the GENSKILLS project's workshop, entrepreneurial training and study trip to Italy clearly demonstrated that intergenerational cooperation has become one of the most important strategic issues for today's businesses. Changes in the labour market, technological progress, digitalisation and the emergence of new leadership approaches are all encouraging businesses to address knowledge transfer, leadership succession and the development of organisational culture in a more conscious manner.

During the project, it became clear that generational change is not primarily a legal or economic process. Rather, it is a process of human cooperation centred on trust, open communication, shared learning and the gradual handover of responsibility. Businesses that prepare for this process in good time not only ensure a more successful leadership transition but also become more competitive and adaptable in the long term.

Intergenerational collaboration as a competitive advantage

Different generations possess different experiences, skills and ways of thinking. While more experienced leaders bring stability, business relationships and a strategic outlook to the organisation, younger employees contribute to development by applying new technologies, innovative solutions and fresh perspectives.

The real competitive advantage lies not in one generation or the other on its own, but in the ability of these differing strengths to complement one another. A culture of collaboration fosters the knowledge and flexibility that can ensure the organisation's success in the long term.

Generational transition as an ongoing management task

One of the project's most important insights was that generational transition is not a single management decision or a one-off event. It begins right from the day-to-day running of the business: in every situation where a manager passes on knowledge, involves staff in decision-making, provides opportunities for independent development, or places trust in the next generation.

This approach is also consistent with the 'FaRe' Consulting methodology presented during the workshop, according to which the essence of leadership lies not merely in action, but in consciously shaping the legacy we leave behind. The future of a business is not simply an asset to be passed on, but a shared value whose preservation and development is the joint responsibility of all generations.

The key message of the GENSKILLS project

The findings of the GENSKILLS project can be summarised in a single message:

- differences between generations are not an obstacle, but an opportunity;
- the deliberate organisation of knowledge transfer is one of a business's most important investments;
- coaching, mentoring and open communication help to build trust;
- a successful generational transition requires long-term planning and gradual implementation;
- the future of the business depends on its ability to preserve its core values while remaining open to change.

The best practices identified during the project demonstrate that there is no single universal formula for a successful generational transition. However, there are certain guiding principles – trust, cooperation, conscious preparation and continuous learning – which can provide direction for any business.

In the future, the most successful businesses will not be those that rely solely on past experience or new technologies. **The key to long-term development will lie with those organisations that are able to combine the best values of both worlds and forge genuine partnerships across generations.** This represents the most important legacy of the GENSKILLS project and, at the same time, its most important message for the businesses of the future.

GENSKILLS Questionnaire for analysing generational succession in businesses

The programme is implemented under the ERASMUS+ programme with funding from the European Union.
Project number: 2024-2-HU01-KA210-ADU-000280761

Dear Partner,

The ***GENSKILLS* project** was launched on 1 June 2025 with the aim of preparing professionals in small and medium-sized enterprises for one of the most pressing business challenges: managing generational succession. Funded by Erasmus+ (KA210-ADU) and running until 30 November 2026, the project is being carried out in collaboration with three partners: the Somogy Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Békés County Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Italian MARCO POLO G.E.I.E. who are working together to strengthen intergenerational cooperation and enhance the resilience of businesses.

The aim of GENSKILLS is to develop the competencies of professionals working in adult education and business development – including HR consultants, business advisers and chamber staff – and to equip them with the tools to effectively manage the conflicts and challenges associated with generational transition.

The need for the project is clearly demonstrated by the fact that nearly 41 per cent of businesses in the counties concerned expect a generational transition within the next 5–10 years. Managing the communication and motivation challenges that arise in multi-generational work environments is crucial, particularly for ensuring the long-term viability of small businesses.

The project also responds to a longer-term socio-economic trend: many of the SMEs established after the political transition are now reaching the point where a handover of management or ownership is due. If this is not managed consciously, there is a risk of business disruption, loss of organisational knowledge and a decline in market competitiveness.

Please help ensure the success of our project, which examines the current situation and challenges surrounding generational succession in family businesses, by completing this questionnaire. Your responses will be treated anonymously and used solely for the purposes of analysis and the development of professional solutions.

Part I: Multiple-choice questions (multiple options)

1.1 Is your company already facing a generational transition?

- ☐ Yes, the process has been completed
- ☐ Yes, it is currently in progress
- ☐ It is currently in the planning stage
- ☐ No, this has never been raised as an issue

1.2 Who is currently primarily responsible for managing the business?

- ☐ Founder/current generation
- ☐ Child or direct heir
- ☐ External manager
- ☐ Other (please specify) …….

1.3 Do the business's managers/owners have a formal plan for generational succession?

- ☐ Yes, with specific dates and methods
- ☐ Yes, but it has not yet been put in writing
- ☐ Not regulated
- ☐ I don't know

1.4 What is the main difficulty the business faces during the generational transition?

- ☐ Resistance from the current generation
- ☐ Lack of interest or preparation on the part of the heirs
- ☐ Financial or asset-related problems
- ☐ Family conflicts
- ☐ Other (please specify) …….....

1.5 What is the level of the new generation's preparedness and training in business management?

- ☐ High (specialised training and experience)
- ☐ Medium (general qualifications, little experience)
- ☐ Low (little or no preparation)
- ☐ Not applicable

1.6 Has the business engaged external consultants, coaches or mentors to support the generational transition?

- ☐ Yes, regularly
- ☐ Yes, occasionally
- ☐ No, never
- ☐ I don't know

1.7 How is the generational transition perceived within the business?

- ☐ Opportunities for growth and innovation
- ☐ Risk and uncertainty
- ☐ A necessary task
- ☐ Indifferently

1.8 Has the company put in place any legal or corporate arrangements to facilitate the transition (e.g. trust, family pact)?

- ☐ Yes, already implemented
- ☐ Yes, currently under review
- ☐ No, but expected
- ☐ No, not planned

1.9 How far in advance did the business start planning for the generational handover?

- ☐ More than 5 years ago
- ☐ Between 3 and 5 years
- ☐ Less than 3 years
- ☐ Not planned

1.10 What do you think is the most important factor for a successful generational handover?

- ☐ Transparent communication
- ☐ Preparing the new generation in terms of technical skills and leadership
- ☐ External consultancy support
- ☐ A balance between family and business
- ☐ Other (please specify)
  ……..

1.11 How is the business's current manager preparing to hand over the reins?

- ☐ They are attending specialist training courses on delegation and leadership
- ☐ Coaching or external support
- ☐ No specific preparation
- ☐ Other (please specify) ……..

1.12 How is the next generation preparing to take over the business?

- ☐ In-house training and progressive coaching
- ☐ External training (universities, courses, master's programmes)
- ☐ Gaining experience outside the company
- ☐ No special preparation required
- ☐ Other (please specify) ……

1.13 How will you deal with the situation if the next generation does not take an active role in the company?

- ☐ We will try to motivate them and gradually involve them
- ☐ They are considering appointing management and stepping back as owners
- ☐ A sale or change of ownership will take place
- ☐ It has not yet been decided how to handle the situation

1.14 What solution are you considering in the event of a lack of interest from the next generation?

- ☐ Involving and appointing management
- ☐ Selling the business
- ☐ Involving other family members or external partners/employees
- ☐ Other (please specify) …….

1.15 In your opinion, how important is it to involve the next generation in the early stages of business development?

- ☐ Very important
- ☐ Quite important
- ☐ Not very important
- ☐ Not at all important

Part II: Additional questions – answers are optional

2.1 What are the main specific challenges that the business faces or fears during the generational transition?

2.2 How do you assess the role of the family in the business succession process?

2.3 What tools or support measures do you think could facilitate the generational transition in your business?

2.4 Please describe an experience relating to a generational transition that has taken place at your business.

2.5 What advice would you give to other businesses facing a generational handover?

2.6 Company name, respondent's name, contact details (optional)

2.7 In which sector does the company operate, and what is its main activity?

2.8 Number of employees

2.9 How many generations are currently working together?

2.10 What problems and differences arise between multi-generational staff?

Part III: Chamber services

To what extent would you find it useful if chambers of commerce and industry helped to identify and resolve problems arising from generational differences through the provision of services or recommendations from experts?

(on a scale of 1–5)

Thank you for your cooperation!

If you have any questions or require further information, please contact us at the following address:
[email or telephone]

RECOMMENDED READING AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

to support the theoretical basis of the chapter entitled 'PART I: Situation Analysis' in the GENSKILLS project

This bibliography serves to reinforce the theoretical background of the situation analysis carried out as part of the 'GENSKILLS' project. The selection specifically covers the main areas of focus identified in the study: the sustainability of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), the critical issues surrounding generational transition and succession in family businesses, the communication and value-system divides arising in multi-generational workplace environments (Baby Boomers, Generations X, Y, Z), and the adaptation of international best practices to the domestic context.

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