

**ORGANIZATIONAL SOCIALIZATION: A STUDY WITH GENERATION Z TRAINEES**

SOCIALIZAÇÃO ORGANIZACIONAL: UM ESTUDO COM TRAINEES DA GERAÇÃO Z

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<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0523-3976>**Abstract**

The article aims to understand whether the organizational culture transmitted through organizational socialization tactics adopted in trainee programs is congruent with Generation Z's attributes. The study adopts a qualitative approach, conducting a group interview with trainees and 13 semi-structured individual interviews with trainees, managers responsible for trainee programs, and specialized consultants. The results showed that organizational socialization tactics transmit and reinforce organizational culture and that newcomers need to adjust to an unfamiliar environment, take on new roles, and learn core cultural elements. Organizations should adapt socialization tactics to transmit organizational culture to Generation Z efficiently.

**Keywords:** Organizational Socialization. Organizational Socialization Tactics. Organizational Culture. Generation Z. Trainee Programs.

**Resumo**

O artigo objetiva compreender se a cultura organizacional transmitida por táticas de socialização organizacional adotadas nos programas de trainee é congruente com os atributos da Geração Z. Adotou-se uma abordagem qualitativa, baseada em entrevista em grupo e 13 entrevistas individuais com trainees, gestores de programas de trainees e consultores. Os resultados mostraram que as táticas de socialização organizacional transmitem e reforçam a cultura e que os trainees precisam se adaptar a um ambiente desconhecido, assumir novos papéis e aprender elementos culturais fundamentais. As organizações devem adaptar as táticas de socialização para transmitir eficazmente a cultura organizacional à Geração Z.

**Palavras-chave:** Socialização Organizacional. Táticas de Socialização Organizacional. Cultura Organizacional. Geração Z. Programas de Trainees.

## Introduction

Organizational culture is transmitted in organizational socialization processes through learning, adaptation, acculturation, and integration. Individuals who experience transitions among organizational boundaries encounter elements such as organizational values, behavioral norms, organizational policies, and procedures that contribute to assume new roles (Ashforth et al., 2007; Saks et al., 2007; Saks & Gruman, 2018). Although socialization could happen whenever a worker takes on new roles or moves to a new company, then crossing boundaries, the most visible and intense socialization process happens when a worker joins the organization, which is a moment marked by the need for agile learning and acculturation to assume a position (Ashford & Nurmohamed, 2012; Saks & Ashforth, 1997).

Organizational socialization research has been developed since the 1970s, encompassing studies with different populations. The literature presents studies considering age as a predictor of newcomer socialization behaviors (Finkelstein et al., 2003), the socialization processes of new employees from Generations X and Y (Dow, 2015), the socialization tactics used with Generation Y employees (Jeannerod-Dumouchel, 2016), and the identification of applied tactics with sales and marketing trainees (Commeiras et al., 2013). However, there is a gap in the literature on trainee programs, mostly designed for Generation Z. Therefore, the article aims to understand whether the organizational culture transmitted through organizational socialization tactics adopted in trainee programs is congruent with Generation Z's attributes.

## Organizational Socialization and Organizational Culture Transmission: A Process of Adaptation and Learning

When entering an organization, employees experience a distinct culture from their own, which influences how they think, feel, and act. The process of reproduction, transmission, and maintenance of organizational culture (Kondra & Hurst, 2009) occurs particularly through socialization among the diverse age profiles in an organization. There is a close relationship between culture and socialization in organizations: “[...] without culture, socialization is impossible, and without socialization there would be no one to ‘carry’ culture” (Alvesson, 2002, p. 57).

Organizational culture is a phenomenon produced in each organization by sharing beliefs, values, assumptions, thoughts, actions, practices, and experiences expressed in cultural manifestations (Martin, 2002). This complex process generates meaning, transforming sharing into a system of symbols and sensemaking. Culture has the power to establish organizational unity, building identity and identification among the organizational members, and differentiating organizations from each other (Giorgi et al., 2015). In the organizational environment, culture influences how members respond to organizational problems. Culture emerges and remains as a natural environmental response. The organization transmits culture to give meaning to emerging problems and to survive, and this culture permeates members' thoughts and behavior (Antonacopoulou & Pesqueux, 2010; Giorgi et al., 2015; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

A significant tension associated with socialization is the anxiety, stress, and uncertainty surrounding the entry process, including the impact newcomers cause in the workplace (Ellis et al., 2015; Saks & Gruman, 2018). Consequently, the process of organizational culture transmission does not occur smoothly, quickly, or without difficulties (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979): entering unfamiliar organizational settings is a stressful event and a shock of reality (Ellis et al., 2015; Nelson, 1987), a movement by which newcomers “[...] navigate the uncertain and uncharted waters of a new job [...]” (Ellis et al., 2015, p. 204), new tasks, roles or social relationships, and in which they “[...] expend considerable time and energy, and often experience anxiety, in their efforts to successfully transition into new roles and advance in their careers” (Allen et al., 2017, p. 324). Newcomers remain insecure and anxious about the novel work situation. They handle these feelings by learning the functional and social requirements of their new

position as soon as possible, seeking information and acquiring skills, bringing innovation, and potential changes. In addition, newcomers resist repetitive work and routine, and their values or goals may conflict with those of coworkers (Fetherston, 2017; Saks & Gruman, 2018; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Moreover, a newcomer is a novelty to the organization's environment, and the more experienced members find ways to maintain the work routine, demonstrating that the organizations' traditions are also forms of survival (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

Socialization studies originated in sociology and have been employed by organizational researchers to comprehend workers' lives inside companies. Sociology defines socialization as a process of identity construction and self-understanding (Dubar, 2015). It comes about throughout childhood and is reconstructed over a lifetime; socialization does not occur solely or in isolation but is carried out by individuals collectively and depends on judgments from others, despite personal orientations and definitions. Toward personal and social identity formation, the individual learns how to establish their world, internalizes a culture, becomes a social actor, and acquires knowledge, skills, and dispositions to become an effective member of groups and society (Dubar, 2015; Frønes, 2016). Identity constitutes the product of successive socializations.

Organizational socialization is the process by which organizational culture transmission occurs. The newcomer acquires social knowledge and necessary skills to assume a social role (learning experiences), and another member inside the organization provides a structure for the incomer to participate as a regular member (transmission of roles and rules) (Taormina, 2009; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Scholars have approached organizational socialization as the transmission of values, beliefs, abilities, skills, attitudes, expected behaviors, social knowledge, and other factors that contribute to the adaptation, engagement, and performance of newcomers for the new role and setting (Ashforth et al., 1997; Bauer et al., 2007; Chong et al., 2021), from being outsiders to organizational insiders. Newcomers learn the different organizational culture elements, such as formal and informal aspects, organizational knowledge, several ways of carrying out their activities, values endorsed by the organization, and leadership styles. The newcomer goes through cognitive and emotional learning: they must face the unfamiliar environment, adapt, and possibly change attitudes, dispositions, and mentalities to make sense of the new environment (Harris et al., 2020). In contrast, it is essential to develop beliefs, principles, and expertise in conducting organizational life, creating a work view (Ashforth et al., 2007). Socialization is a two-way stream (Malik & Manroop, 2017): it involves mutual adaptation between organizational efforts (welcoming new workers and employing appropriate tactics to help their learning) and individual disposition (adaptation to the new workplace and dispositions).

The literature classifies organizational socialization research into three focuses of analysis (Allen et al., 2017; Antonacopoulou & Pesqueux, 2010; Ashford & Nurmohamed, 2012; Bauer et al., 1998): organizational, individual, and integrative. The first focuses on the organization, emphasizing the practices to achieve the desired outcomes when a newcomer enters an organization and how organizations socialize them (organizational socialization tactics and socialization stages). A second research stream approaches individual experiences: how newcomers experience or go through the socialization process, their proactive roles in learning (individual or newcomer adjustment tactics), content-related cognitive process, and search for information by the individual. The third perspective integrates these approaches: both the organization and the individual are crucial to a successful process; integrated theories link multiple analysis levels (individual, group, organizational and societal) and how these levels relate to each other.

This study focuses on the organization, adopting the typology of organizational socialization tactics developed by Van Maanen and Schein (1979), a model that shows theoretical stability and validity. The model investigates the relationship between the tactics (originating from the organizational structure) and behavior responses or resulting outcomes (stimulated by the new role assumed). Tactical dimensions are organizational actions such as concrete socialization interventions and methods to support newcomers

in early entry experiences until they become effective organizational members. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) organized these dimensions in six bipolar continua of strategies: 1) collective vs. individual processes, 2) formal vs. informal processes, 3) sequential vs. random steps in the socialization process, 4) fixed vs. variable processes, 5) serial vs. disruptive processes, and 6) investiture vs. divestiture processes. Each tactic may influence the role orientation that the newcomer adopts and their organizational adjustment, causing the following responses: custodial or conforming orientation (conformity in the role as presented by experience members and traditionally practiced in the organization, assuming a conservative stance toward knowledge, strategies, and missions), content innovation (improvements or changes in the knowledge base or strategic practices of a particular role), and role innovation (actions aimed at promoting new role aspects, changing propositions or practices followed by most previous occupants).

Jones (1986) operationalizes Van Maanen and Schein (1979)'s model, indicating two types of socialization tactics: 1) institutionalized socialization tactics (collective, formal, sequential, fixed, serial, and investiture), which support newcomers to passively accept the organizational roles encumbered and maintain status quo, developing with a more formalized structure; and 2) individualized socialization tactics (individual, informal, random, variable, disjunctive, and divestiture), which encourages newcomers to question and challenge status quo, developing personal approaches to their roles and innovate, occurring with an absence of structure. Jones (1986) also distinguishes between foci tactics: context (collective/individual and formal/informal), regarding the information provided to newcomers; content (sequential/random and fixed/variable), dealing with the informational content transmitted via socialization; and social aspects of the interpersonal sphere (serial/disjunctive and investiture/divestiture), involving the interpretations offered by other organizational members that influence newcomers' perceptions of the context.

Besides Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) proposals, other researchers provided different tactics. Van Maanen (1978) proposed the tournament socialization strategies in the bipolar competition/contest tactics: through competition, each person acts solely and does not search group support for collective actions; and in a contest tactic, the organization promotes common actions, resulting in a cooperative and participative spirit among organizational members. Malik and Manroop (2017) proposed that traditional tactics, as presented in the literature, need the adaptation to the diverse talent that passes to integrate organizations, calling these new strategies customized socialization tactics: they combine several existing tactics (formal, random, variable, and serial), as well as proposing the dual tactic (a combination of individual and collective tactics) and the integrative (acculturation of newcomers).

Van Maanen and Schein (1979) and Jones (1986) conjecture that different tactics generate different outcomes of individuals going through the socialization process in an organization. Some have more positive outcomes than others because each tactic offers information in diverse forms. A common model for approaching socialization results is to consider the outcomes as indicators to guide adjustments. The outcomes are classified into proximal (closer in time) and distal outcomes (further away in time). Saks and Ashforth (1997) found role clarity, person-job/organizational fit, skill acquisition, social integration, social identification, motivation, personal change, and role orientation as proximal outcomes; and classified distal outcomes into organizational (stronger culture, higher morale, more stable membership, higher effectiveness, and reputation), group (stronger subculture, stronger cohesion, more stable membership, higher effectiveness, and reputation), and individual (lower stress, higher job satisfaction, higher organizational commitment, lower absenteeism and turnover, higher organizational citizenship behavior, higher performance, role conformity, and role innovation) resources. Bauer and Erdogan (2012) presented proximal outcomes as the degree to which newcomers are adjusted and integrated into the new position or organization. For the authors, these outcomes are acceptance by insiders, quality of role clarity, and performance self-efficacy. They also discuss distal outcomes as the degree to which socialization matters to organizational results, dividing them into job attitudes, behavior, person-job and person-organization fit, stress, and ethics. Ellis et al. (2015) presented a review from a newcomer-centric

perspective. They encountered the following outcomes' classification: proximal outcomes as an indication of building and acquisition of newcomer resources, divided into personal resources (such as self-efficacy, proactivity, locus of control), relational resources (such as positive integration and social acceptance), and structural resources (such as person-organization fit and role clarity); distal outcomes include health, well-being, job attitudes, job behaviors, job performance, talent retention, and understanding of organizational culture and values.

## Generations in the Workplace

Generational diversity in the workplace in organizational studies is a growing and challenging phenomenon for scholars and practitioners. Different generations have different personality traits, work values, work-related attitudes, motivations, expectations, leadership and teamwork preferences, leadership behaviors and professional experiences, priority on work-life balance, and career patterns (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015; Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Macky et al., 2008), despite presenting certain similarities (Lester et al., 2012; Mencl & Lester, 2014).

We can conceptualize generation as individual groups born within the same period, then sharing historical and social-cultural experiences and creating collective identities (Joshi et al., 2011). Such shared cultural traits form and sustain the way of life and worldview of generational groups because of similar formative experiences (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Each individual from their generation is an actor or protagonist of social changes, given the confrontation with previous generations and different social conditions that generate adaptation and new structures. The historical and social-cultural experiences during generational formative years shape an individual's behaviors throughout their lifetime.

Some authors have proposed generational cohorts to operationalize the concept of generations (Markert, 2004). Cohorts are groups of individuals based on age and birth years (Rosow, 1978), allowing intergenerational comparisons due to the analysis of common characteristics. In this study, we apply the cohorts presented by Twenge (2017) for active generations in the current labor market: Generation Baby Boomer (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1979), Generation Y (1980-1994), and Generation Z (1995-2012). It is essential to consider that the year of birth could extend to before or after the predefined dates (open generational cohort), as proposed by Twenge (2017).

We present some work-related characteristics of Gen-Z. These generational traits do not intend to stereotype individuals with formulaic approaches but are generalizations or broad characteristics that allow a deeper understanding of the individual behaviors (Macky et al., 2008). Gen-Z has been described as more realistic, practical, and active about career and working, particularly when constructing their careers and searching for a job (Twenge, 2017). Work occupies higher centrality in their lives than previous generations (Gen-X and Gen-Y) at the same age and recognizes that work is an important life activity (Twenge, 2017), although, if they do not find happiness with their activity, they have a strong propensity to leave the jobs (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015). Extrinsic rewards such as salary and benefits, as well as intrinsic rewards such as development and career advancement opportunities, flexibility, good social work environment, recognition, appreciation, and personal fulfillment, are strong motivators for them (Bencsik et al., 2016; Grow & Yang, 2018; Mahmoud et al., 2020; Twenge, 2017). Gen-Z has a higher work ethic than previous generations and searches for work-life balance; prefers environments that promote professional development, where they can express their capabilities and knowledge, be creative and challenging, and find diversity (Grow & Yang, 2018; Twenge, 2017). A strong characteristic is being digital natives: they appreciate technological environments and seek to be continually online or surrounded by devices (Bencsik et al., 2016).

## Method

We propose an exploratory study with a qualitative method, which is an appropriate approach given the lack of research on Gen-Z in the workplace and its organizational socialization process. The study used

semi-structured interviews (individual and group) to explore the content of the respondents' statements, which allows a better understanding of the trainees' socialization process and the appropriateness of the organizational socialization tactics.

## Procedures

Data have been collected via individual and group interviews in two streams. The saturation defined the sample size in both data saturation (written material) and theoretical saturation (the interviews had thematic exhaustion) (Saunders et al., 2018). We performed the first stream of data collection with individual interviews with various actors embroiled in the socialization process of trainees in a multi-stakeholder approach to understand better the roles of those involved and collect detailed observations (Commeiras et al., 2013). We interviewed Gen-Z individuals who were going (or have recently gone) through trainee programs at the time of interviewing, managers responsible for trainee programs, and members of specialized recruitment/selection consulting. The professional social media platform LinkedIn was used to contact the interviewees since it facilitates identifying the potential interviewees' profiles. Potential interviewees were approached by invitation, explaining the research objective, and requesting voluntary participation. Interviews were conducted via video calls or in person, recorded with the participants' permission. We conducted individual interviews lasting 35 minutes on average (ranging from 20 to 45 minutes) with seven trainees, three managers, and three specialized consultants.

The second stream of data collection occurred with nine trainees from the same organization in order to obtain a collective perspective on the issues studied. The first author scheduled the meeting, the person responsible for the trainee program agreed on a date with the trainees, and the group interview took place in the company. The person responsible for the organization's trainee program was present in the interview as an observer. The meeting lasted about 2 hours and 30 minutes and was conducted in two phases. First, the group was asked to discuss a first question proposed by the researcher, and the common perceptions were compiled and written on a flip chart. The next phase lasted 1 hour and was recorded with the participants' permission. The interviewees were asked to explain their common perceptions and answer the other questions of the semi-structured interview. The interview instrument was designed to collect sociodemographic data and the in-depth questions were elaborated according to the interviewees' profile (trainee, manager, or consultant). Therefore, the research counted on four interview scripts (one for the group interview and the other three based on interviewees' profiles). The interview scripts presented questions focused on trainee programs' recruitment and selection processes, the interviewees' experience in the program, the trainee's supervision, the content learned and expectations by companies and trainees, as well as other relevant issues that emerged throughout the interviews.

## Participants

The study collected data from trainees, managers, and specialized consultants working in organizations operating in Brazil. The research adopted standard procedures for studies involving human beings and Informed Consent was obtained from all participants.

Among the trainees, four women and three men took part in individual interviews, while eight women and one man participated in the group interview. The trainees' age ranged between 23 and 27 years old at the time of the interview, within a flexible generational cohort proposal. The time working in the companies varied from 5 months to 1 year and 6 months at the time of the interview. The trainees worked in various business areas: department store, education, food, pharmaceuticals, specialized consulting, and telecommunications. Among the managers responsible for trainee programs and specialized consultants, three women and three men participated. Their age ranged from 24 to 37 years at the time of the interview. The managers' time working in the companies ranged from 2 years to 4 years and 6 months, and consultants from 4 months to 10 years at the time of the interview. The business areas of managers were pharmaceutical, beauty, and education. Participants' profiles can be seen on tables 1 to 4.

Table 1

**Trainee individuals' interview**

Participant	Gender	Age	Company time	Expertise area	Business area
Trainee 1	Female	26	1 year and 6 months	Operations	Department store
Trainee 2	Female	27	10 months	Operations	Educational
Trainee 3	Male	26	8 months	Projects	Telecommunications
Trainee 4	Female	23	6 months	Operations	Pharmaceutical
Trainee 5	Female	23	6 months	Human Resources	Pharmaceutical
Trainee 6	Male	24	5 months	Finances	Food
Trainee 7	Female	24	1 year and 5 months	Human Resources	Consulting

Source: Research data.

Table 2

**Trainee groups' interview**

Participant	Gender	Age	Company time	Expertise area	Business area
Trainee 1	Female	23	6 months	Operations	Pharmaceutical
Trainee 2	Female	23	6 months	Human resources	Pharmaceutical
Trainee 3	Female	25	6 months	Human resources	Pharmaceutical
Trainee 4	Male	24	6 months	Operations	Pharmaceutical
Trainee 5	Female	23	6 months	Logistics	Pharmaceutical
Trainee 6	Female	23	6 months	Marketing	Pharmaceutical
Trainee 7	Female	25	6 months	Expansion	Pharmaceutical
Trainee 8	Female	24	6 months	Commercial	Pharmaceutical
Trainee 9	Female	23	6 months	Operations	Pharmaceutical

Source: Research data.

Table 3

**Managers' interview (individual interviewing)**

Participant	Gender	Age	Company time	Occupation	Business area
Manager 1	Female	30	3 years	Human resources analyst	Pharmaceutical
Manager 2	Male	28	2 years	Early talent acquisition	Beauty
Manager 3	Female	32	4 years and 6 months	Organizational development specialist	Educational

Source: Research data.

Table 4

**Consultants' interview (individual interviewing)**

Participant	Gender	Age	Time as consultant	Occupation	Company time
Consultant 1	Male	24	4 months	Commercial director	2 years
Consultant 2	Female	37	7 years and 8 months	Head senior	7 years
Consultant 3	Male	37	10 years	CEO	10 years

Source: Research data.

**Data Analysis**

We used content analysis as proposed by Bardin (2013) and data analysis to comprehend manifest and latent communication in the respondents' speech, comparing them to the organizational socialization

tactics. The content analysis follows the methodology steps as proposed by Bardin (2013): 1) pre-analysis: material organization through the transcription of interviews verbatim and organization in Excel spreadsheets to facilitate data manipulation, creation of a spreadsheet for idea synthesis, formulation of indicators, and objectives to support interpretation, and initial reading; 2) material exploration: identification of recording unit and content segments, as well as encoding and categorization in the predetermined categories (organizational socialization tactics) and generation of news categories; and 3) interpretation: information condensation for analysis, reflection based on the material, and inference presentation.

The coding procedures were conducted through a deductive-inductive process. The first step was a deductive method, with a theoretically driven approach based on a predetermined categorization: the typology of organizational socialization tactics of Van Maanen and Schein (1979). The analysis shows the bipolar tactics: collective/individual, formal/informal, sequential/random, fixed/variable, serial/disjunctive, and investiture/divestiture. The second step comprised an inductive approach by a data-driven categorization to investigate possible new tactics beyond those proposed by Van Maanen and Schein (1979), where challenging/traditional bipolar tactic appeared as a new categorization. We analyzed all the tactics concomitantly, considering that “[...] these tactical dimensions are associated with one another and that the actual impact of organizational socialization upon a recruit is a cumulative one” (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979, p. 68).

## Presentation and Analysis of Results

We present three elements inside each tactic, which contributed to the analysis: description of employed tactics by organizations (from the interviewees’ perspective), outcomes, and conformation with the Gen-Z characteristics (confrontation with the literature and tactics evaluation by trainees).

In collective tactics, the organizations’ Human Resources departments and managers responsible for socializing the trainees conducted several activities based on a common set of experiences. The first stream of activities referred to recruitment practices: group techniques to analyze participants, in which trainees’ traits are collectively observed in order to adapt to the organization and the role to be assumed after the program period. Once trainees are hired, the company offers an initial training called integration or immersion: participants had joint lectures, group dynamics, panels, presentations with former trainees, and activities outside the workplace. Other actions taken by socialization agents were collective training throughout the program period, periodic meetings, and company tours. A distinct tactic was working with trainee pairs or groups during job rotations through company areas, and human resources encourage teamwork among trainees and coworkers. Positive outcomes from initial collective socialization are group homogeneity creation, sharing similar information (facilitating knowledge transmission and sharing topics of the company’s interest), promoting a relaxed environment, learning interpersonal skills, and improving communication. According to the participants: “[...] the initial integration contributed to getting everyone to interact and facilitated our integration into the company” (Trainee 4 – Individual interview), “It was excellent because everyone took part and received the same information, so these differences were absorbed differently. Taking part in the group allowed us to discuss each other’s points of view, which was very good” (Trainee 7 – Individual interview).

After initial training, collective socialization tactics bring interpersonal learning and form a distinct group. From the view of a manager, alignment meetings help to reduce anxiety: “One thing that helps is alignment meetings: always before the stages [phases of a working project], we align everything they need to deliver, everything they need to see, [...] aligns expectations, how far they have to go in each stage... That helps to reduce anxiety” (Manager 2). Among negative outcomes, trainees recognize that segregation during socialization builds a closed group: “I have a lot of contact with the group of trainees: in the beginning, we were a closed group because we were in a strange place, in a strange city, so we already knew each other and ended up being a closed group” (Trainee 7–Individual interview). Another



impression is to force the grouping, especially those who have introspective traits that cause anxiety. Initial training does not allow individualized highlights and is a barrier to innovation. According to the perception of a manager: “This first moment is when it is harder to stand out because it is a period when they delivery very little. They are learning more than delivering” (Manager 2). Collective tactics have proved to be a reasonable way of socializing trainees, but it is essential to pay attention to the profile diversity, enabling the transmission of information and organizational culture to all newcomers. One way to improve group training and collective working within job rotation is activities in smaller groups, as pointed out by Consultant 3.

Individual tactics were rare since the programs aimed for more collective ones. Tactics presented in participants’ speech were technical knowledge learning in loco with more experienced members, leadership profile development by conducting teams, and abilities through trial-and-error. These strategies were commonplace after initial training, particularly in job rotation and project conduct. Between positive outcomes, trainees pointed out trial-and-error and practical learning with coworkers: “I sat next to my coworkers and started learning. So, from carrying boxes to doing stock inventory, opening boxes, closing boxes, carrying boxes of books, squatting, getting back pain, I did all those things, learned a lot, I do not regret it, and would do it all again” (Trainee 3 – Individual interview). Also, practical learning favors organizational innovation since daily demands contribute to trainee proactivity. As participants mentioned: “You must be quick, get used to daily situations quickly because you do not have time” (Trainee 5 – Individual interview); “I think it is more positive for trainees to act by themselves. They develop their independence” (Manager 2). Since they do not have the immediate support of other trainees, a single trainee needs to figure out on their own how to behave at the beginning of individual tactics (negative outcomes). Using energy in such situations has caused anxiety and insecurity: “I was scared at first, scared of how it works here: Do I send an invitation to the person? Do I go to their desk? Can I call them? As we had to speak with several areas, you don’t know how each area reacts. [...] So, I was very insecure about how to call people and how to do things” (Trainee 5 – Individual interview). Individual tactics were inefficient at the beginning of the program since they generated anxiety and insecurity. Thus, a continuous follow-up is better: “I think autonomy motivates me, but it also makes me very anxious because I am very self-critical” (Trainee 5 – Individual interview).

Van Maanen and Schein (1979) point out two regular socialization waves in the segregation bipolar tactic: formal and informal processes. We distinguish two broad formal tactic forms in the interviewees’ speech. The first form happened at the beginning of the program with training and continuous meetings in the first days, company presentations, knowledge of its areas, contact with mentors and superiors, and bureaucratic procedures. With specialized consultancy support, trainees learned about formal organizational culture, professional development, organizational functioning, and future organizational expectations in initial training. The second form took place throughout the program development with job rotation, training, meetings, and development activities. The main aim of the programs was to prepare future leaders for the organization. The job rotation tool was fundamental: changes in trainees’ functions and areas to achieve generalized organizational knowledge: “[...] it provides a strategic and integrated vision of the business” (Trainee 7 – Group interview). Positive outcomes are faster and effective integration, formal company (business area, inserted market, competitors, and challenges) and organizational culture knowledge, and general education. The knowledge about the company’s processes stands out since “I think before you see it working in practice, you must understand how the process works” (Trainee 1 – Individual interview). There is a tendency to develop strong organizational identification. While the formal process transmits the established organizational culture, trainees are surprised with informal practices, which they sometimes find conflicting. Job rotation proved to be a learning mechanism: they gain organizational knowledge about the company as a whole and its particularities, assimilate the organizational culture and institutional strategic vision, networking, and identify with the organization, creating “a feeling of belonging” (Trainee 1 – Individual interview). As pointed out by some participants, “[...] the networking that we have with other areas is great. Sometimes you have a problem and need to solve it, and you already know someone who can help you in another

area. It is also important to know every piece of the company” (Trainee 6 – Individual interview); “[...] I think the main gain in they have from job rotation is networking, since they have all this time devoted to getting to know people” (Manager 2). Negative outcomes are learning general content that require further study, learning useless content to perform the function; presentation of company characteristics based on convenience and not on real needs. There is a tendency to approach organizational culture only at the beginning of the program; however, these elements must be emphasized throughout the program: “I think it could be better, more organized work when transmitting the culture: I think companies only try to mention the culture once at the beginning of the program. But the culture I am learning here occurs throughout the year” (Consultant 3). As for job rotation, participants’ speech highlight insecurity and anxiety when stating rotations and lack of structured areas to receive trainees.

Informal tactics were employed after organizational entry when trainees started applying the knowledge acquired in the initial training. Tactics adopted were leading a work team, trial-and-error and practical learning, and informal learning with more experienced members. A distinct tool highlighted by trainees and managers was the projects’ conduction in the operation areas, which allowed action freedom and autonomy. Three positive outcome sets stand out. The first includes innovation production, allowing freedom and flexibility of action and decision-making to innovate in the role and develop creativity. Informal activities generate practical abilities and allow learning about processes, interpersonal relationships, team integration, leadership, and work team. The second comprises the knowledge about the organizational experience: understanding the different areas of the company allows building a broad knowledge about the business and helps understanding processes and the company’s industry. Informal practices enable subcultures comprehension: “We have a culture, but each manager has a way of leading their team” (Trainee 4 – Individual interview). The third refers to conducting projects: these obligations permit professional development and organizational innovation. On negative outcomes, informal tactics cause anguish and anxiety. Giving freedom to a newcomer who knows little about the company is threatening and leads to negative feelings. Moreover, trainees learn in practice the difference between the espoused culture and that experienced by organizational members: they identify existent incongruities and significant differences.

When focusing on context, various combinations of tactics emerged. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) pointed out that these combinations can vary because of boundary passages, orientation activities, or initial entry into the company. At the beginning of the programs, collective and formal processes are implemented through integration, training, or another established activity. When each trainee enters the work setting, individual and informal tactics are observed since the trainee must conduct the activities without help from other trainees or project managers, alone in a practical environment. Finally, the union of collective and informal tactics emerged when the trainees go through job rotation and learn practical activities with other trainees or teams and carry out informal activities in pairs or groups (with or without trainees). In all these combinations, dynamic structures imbued with meaning and attractiveness are adequate for Gen-Z characteristics. Concerning job rotation and conducting projects, it is necessary to evaluate the characteristics of trainees, areas necessities, and activities to be performed given person-organization fit and security (Batistič & Kenda, 2018).

The socialization process covers a task and experience series in an identifiable sequence of steps or in unknown, ambiguous, or continually changing ones. At one end, we identify some sequential tactics when the organization proposes identifiable steps during the entire program. Trainees pointed out initial training, knowledge about company areas, job rotation, regular projects, and meetings with managers and mentors as identifiable experiences. Moreover, other experiences proposed by programs are rites of passage in which the organization plans ceremonies during the program to reach the next steps (such as completing projects or changing areas in job rotation) or even completing the activities. On positive results, the step sequence’s clarity contributes to more collaborative and technical-practical learning. When the trainee knows the program stages, their anxiety reduces, and they feel safe carrying out their activities. For a trainee, the steps within the trainee program are essential for professional development:

“I think it is important to have these steps. You realize that they teach you something that you need. Then, you gain the maturity to hold a specific position” (Trainee 8 – Individual interview). Also, rites of passage stimulate trainee development: “I think it is fundamental to have these rituals because it is important to the person and their development” (Consultant 3). A negative result from this tactic is that knowing all developmental phases and the program steps may conduce to a custodial orientation because the trainees remain locked into the demands and do not lead to role innovation. Consultant 3 draws attention to this perspective: “It is just that this path, the development program, the step by step, this path hardens the person more than expanding them toward new possibilities.”

On the other end, although some programs had specified steps, they are ambiguous or continually changing (random tactics): in the beginning, there are well-structured processes as in recruitment and initial training, but the next steps are less ordered. It is significant to note that flexibility and suitability differ from variability. Information and decisions given at short notice, the program configuration changes structurally and quickly, changes of job rotation areas without structuration, mentor changing, and general ideas about the program’s major events are random tactics present in the interviews. Among positive results, trainees highlighted anxiety control because of constant modifications in the program steps and developing the ability to adapt to the unfamiliar environment due to program changes. Without rigid steps, random moments produce practical and behavioral learning, conducting an innovative orientation: “I think telling you that you will be responsible for something, but they leave you in the dark, with little idea of what lies ahead, I think it is also essential for our adaptation, for us to show the talent that they were looking for” (Trainee 4 – Individual interview). On the other side (negative results), continuous changes in stages cause anxiety at the beginning of the program, and the trainee gets confused with the change of mentors responsible for follow-up. The lack of logical sequence, the ambiguity, and the continuous changes, even if not considering trainees’ opinions and characteristics, caused team demotivation and disappointment: “[...] changes have been very constant, and sometimes that affected our motivation” (Trainee 1 – Individual interview). The uncertainty led some program members to abandon it.

Regarding the adaptation to Gen-Z’s characteristics, the programs rarely have a developmental sequence, which is unsuitable for Gen-Z. As they are insecure in work settings (Twenge, 2017), proposing sequential and identifiable tactics is relevant to personal development, taking certain steps at the right moments: “This is a gap, an enormous flaw in processes today because they do have an evolution path for self-knowledge and maturation” (Consultant 3). On the other hand, if the organization is interested in developing innovation, random tactics with sequential tactics and intentionally are more relevant.

The organization can offer a timetable with the steps needed to take on a leadership role until the end of the program. Then, the trainees know precisely or have an idea about their path throughout the program. In fixed tactics, the trainees are informed about the full program schedule: they knew the activities, such as training dates, job rotation areas, deadlines for project delivery, periodic meetings with managers or mentors. Positive outcomes resulting from fixed tactics were also delineated. Specific schedules contribute to learning technical skills if trainees know what to develop in each schedule. Well-structured calendars allow trainees to organize their personal life because the program is highly demanding: “It was important because we needed this schedule. Many trainees do not live in the city where we would be working. We needed to know if we would stay in Sao Paulo for six months, an entire year or just six months to find a place to stay” (Trainee 7 – Individual interview).

At the other continuum, in variable tactics, trainees have distinguished only a few clues, having little information on the schedules or activity programs for a few days. The lack of schedule allowed trainees to look for clues about their future based on fragile and fragmentary information. It negatively influenced trainees’ personal life: “When we are at the store, we work on Saturdays; when we are at the office, we don’t. So, you end up planning your life based on this: for example, to visit my parents, I had to book my ticket for when I was working at the office because I cannot go when I am at the store. I could never

book tickets because of these changes” (Trainee 2 – Individual interview). Concerning the periodicity tactics adequacy, fixed tactics brought more beneficial results than variable ones, reducing anxiety. As stressed by one trainee (Trainee 3 – Group interview), Human Resources carried out a value and skill assessment at the end of each broad period. As a periodical assessment, it is an interesting tool allowing internal preparation for the next period.

On the social aspects’ focus, a first bipolar tactic refers to the degree of e monitoring during the program, in which the trainees may have models to follow. In serial tactics, experienced members or superiors accompanied the trainees, at least nominally, varying in proximity, periodicity, and constancy. Mentoring occurred through personal feedback, formal meetings, informal meetings, and practice learning. One strategy was to present trainees from previous processes in the program recruitment and initial stages. Positive outcomes were the stimulus derived from constant feedback, anxiety reduction generated from mentoring, and higher learning practices due to close follow-up. Learning becomes fruitful with the diversity of experienced members in teaching and patience in this process. Besides, mentoring and follow-up from experienced members enables acculturation, teaching about the company, and presenting the organizational culture. Among negative outcomes, the lack of mentoring structuration planning, expressed by the mentors’ lack of time and inadequacy in this activity, and the continuous mentor’s substitution generated a deficit in follow-ups and caused trainee anxiety. Disinterested mentors, undue preparation, and the division of responsibility to accompany the trainees among several actors (such as between managers and the human resources department) provoke disorientation and insufficient guidance.

Disjunctive tactics arise when no predecessor models, experienced organizational members, and mentors are available for trainees. We also considered here a constant guide variation. Left alone, trainees create different views on daily organizational life, generating autonomy and opportunities to professionally stand out. Trainee 7 reported that being left alone to conduct her activities contributed to these elements: “It brought me autonomy and visibility within the company. Everybody started to know me, know who I was, people who didn’t even know my name knew about me and recognized my work” (Individual interview). On the other hand, participants recognize that the lack of a mentor or close follow-up leads to isolation and anxiety. Without a mentor, the trainee ended up working excessively. According to Consultant 3, with no proper mentoring, trainee development is slower: “A person will develop on their own at a slower speed than if they were mentored.”

It is more beneficial to use serial and isolated tactics intentionally. On the one hand, the adequate mentors’ choice, preparation, and assistance bring security, contributing to learning and understanding organizational situations. “Program evaluation is necessary. We evaluate to avoid having feedback only every three months, to build checkpoints, dialogue points, a thermometer for the manager to know how things are going in the area, so people can see whether they are contributing” (Consultant 3). On the other hand, the isolated tactic can allow the trainee to show their potential in the workplace and be creative, even if monitoring and decision-making support are essential.

The second bipolar tactic on social aspects shows the affirmation level of the newcomer’s identity and attributes, ranging from taking advantage of the individual’s characteristics to denying and removing certain personal aspects, then reconstructing self-image. Investiture tactics took place through the perceptions of allowing authenticity and personality expressiveness, superior incentives, action freedom, and projects’ development. A particular strategy was to evaluate the suitability of the trainee’s profile for an area that can benefit from their talents: “Human Resources placed each trainee in the area that needed the knowledge or skill we already have” (Trainee 5 – Individual interview). All these practices expressed the use of trainees’ previous life experiences, as expressed by Trainee 3: “The company wants us to grow, bring a fresh vision of the world, of the connectivity, of the digital transformation, to bring all of this inside the company in a new way that they don’t have yet” (Individual interview). Manager 2 also mentioned: “When we select the trainees, we pay attention to their existing profile: if they are proactive,

if they like to seek information, if they are a protagonist, and if they can show these in the activities done during life, everything they sought, what took them out of their comfort zone.”

Divestiture tactics portray actions aimed at trainees’ adaptation to organizational characteristics, such as lectures on organizational culture or rules, behavioral feedback, and trainees’ adaptation assessment. These tactics focus more on results than on personal development. One trainee’s speech indicates the required changes: “When you enter the corporate world, you have to leave certain things to one side to fit the expected standard” (Trainee 7 – Individual interview). A particular divestiture expression was the disregard for the trainees’ opinion because action and aims must emerge from organizational interest: “The company does not worry about what we want but worry about its needs” (Trainee 1 – Individual interview). The positive outcomes of these tactics stimulate personal changes and development according to the company’s expectations, allowing satisfactory personal results. Negative outcomes indicate the possibility of inadequacy to the final role after the program ends because there is no evaluation of the trainees’ characteristics for the role assumption. Disjunctive tactics demand using much energy, causing discouragement and anxiety. An extreme result is low person-organization fit and identification.

When organizational culture is more compatible with individual characteristics and values, investiture tactics are suitable. Trainees indicated these processes as more beneficial, bringing about trustiness to start in the organization and increase identification. Divestiture tactics caused greater anxiety due to professional shaping different from individual characteristics. A strong feature of Gen-Z is a novel conception of career and working, less central in their lives than previous generations (Grow & Yang, 2018; Twenge, 2017), which becomes essential in meaningfulness. Organizations with trainee programs must value every single trainee characteristic, bringing meaningful work and allowing role innovation, “seeking to give space to the young people, and allowing them to be themselves” (Consultant 1).

We identified challenging and traditional tactics as new bipolar tactics not observed in the literature. They are related to activities that challenge beginner skills and abilities, stimulating their growth, development, organizational environment adaptation, or maintaining a custodial orientation. Tang et al. (2022) found that challenge stressors have a positive impact on organizational socialization of newcomers, increasing autonomous action and space for self-expression. Then, as young workers are interested in challenging projects to carry out various work activities, opposing monotonous and repetitive ones, it is attractive for trainee programs to continuously create challenging work environments (Haas, 2006), composing methods that allow creativity and innovation, freedom of action and creation, flexibility and proactivity, and technology use. Challenging tactics are most probable to conduct an innovative orientation (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979): as individuals are disposed to assign meaning and make inferences from new experiences (Perrot et al., 2014), trainees can act with personal resources and in contingent environments; they might learn the strategies to produce resources and innovation not only with official organizational means and institutionalized tactics (Kowtha, 2018). For trainee programs, challenging tactics are essential to produce a leadership style and innovative role, contrary to traditional ways: “Newcomers going through a standardized, structured set of experiences learn quickly that the organization is expecting a predictable, routine set of actions and responses from them” (Perrot et al., 2014, p. 7). The interviewees indicate challenging tactics as unique moments in the program, including learning: “I imagined there we would be these challenges. I expected to assume something important and to have my prominence. I have been attended since the beginning like this” (Trainee 3 – Individual interview); “I think the challenge is related to increasing competences, to improve the personal and professional profile” (Trainee 7 – Individual interview). The interviews highlight the importance of a plan or strategy in a developmental process for implementing challenging tactics. The challenges should contribute to the growth and innovative actions; they should be implemented with a balance between anxiety and the discomfort inherent to daring tasks. The task should also be gradual in favor of motivation, learning, leadership, and stimulus so that trainees can contribute to the organization and grow. “I think a program in a more challenging line makes more sense, but it still requires direction” (Consultant 3). Thus, trainees can assume a certain leadership role after the program period.

## Discussion of results

Research on organizational socialization tactics with Brazilian trainees who are part of Gen-Z contributes to comprehending how this generation experiences the socialization process and how the individuals' and organizational' actions generate positive or negative impacts on newcomers. Understanding the profile and traits of Gen-Z facilitates an adequate socialization process and is beneficial to all professionals in an organization.

The different organizational socialization tactics maintain a crucial role in comprehending organizational culture transmission, assimilation, and maintenance. Organizational socialization is one of the primary manners of this process and is a facilitator and operates as a cultural enhancer (Bauer et al., 1998; Taormina, 2009). As Taormina (2008) shows, organizational socialization is associated with and is a predictor of organizational culture. Entering an organization entails the newcomer assuming a determining role and quickly learnings the constitutive elements of culture, such as the relationship modes, ways of conducting work activities, the organizational constitution, the differences between formal and informal culture, the subcultures' adaptation, the organization's core values and norms (Bauer et al., 1998). Then, the individual has crucial clues to comprehend the new scenario, make sense of the novel environment, and diminish uncertainty. Organizations apply different tactics to transmit and reinforce their culture, whether they implement these tactics consciously and intentionally or not. "[...] independently of the tactics used in the socialization programs, the main goal of these activities might be to reinforce the organizational culture or group climate and give newcomers a sense of purpose, in turn reflecting in higher newcomers' performance" (Batistič & Kenda, 2018, p. 697).

Each socialization tactic contributed to reinforce organizational culture determinedly so that the employee becomes part of the organization (Taormina, 2009). The tactics of contextual focus strengthen the learning of culturally distinct elements and contribute to successful acculturation. The content focus conveys the information regarding organizational culture and the temporal structuring of the organization. The social aspects focus brings the organizational culture as experienced and interpreted by other members of the company because that transmission contributes to group functioning and performance (Saks & Ashforth, 1997).

The organizational socialization tactics found in the interviewees' speech contribute to the organizational culture transmission, each tactic with determined features. Formal, collective, serial, and traditional tactics introduce newcomers to the formal culture attributes, contributing to a more homogeneous one. Individual, informal, random, and disjunctive tactics bring the informal practices to the individual varying depending on the workplace and subject themselves. Investiture, divestiture, challenging tactics contribute to shaping the individual according to organizational, and culture, incorporating and taking advantage of the personnel characteristics or molding them to the workplace and organizational features.

We discern that the tactics among the trainee' programs have certain homogeneity, i.e., the tactics are similar in the various settings and the consultant's views. Programs tend to employ similar tactics and there is no great variability; they are strongly structured with common characteristics. Organizations should constantly evaluate their tactics or efforts to socialize trainees, selecting adequate strategies to maintain formatting or flexibility according to institutional objectives, considering cultural particularities and trainee necessities. "[...] the focus of a socialization program may be unique to an organization's culture and strategy so the criteria should be related to the outcomes of interest to the organization" (Saks & Ashforth, 1997, p. 261). Formal assessments could contribute to distinguishing problems and best practices.

To better adapt to the different socialization tactics, organizations with trainee programs demand a greater sensitivity to Gen-Z members and their characteristics. This consideration may arise from the adoption of customized tactics (Malik & Manroop, 2017). Instead of making use of tactics believed to be more efficient and appropriate for any audience or setting, the organizations must customize the

socialization process to Gen-Z, a generational group that enters the work world with different attitudes, values, expectations, and characteristics (Bencsik et al., 2016; Mahmoud et al., 2020). Models designed for older generations will not always be suitable for recent generations. A strategic program is necessary, as pointed out by Oh (2018, p. 375): “[...] strategic use of the sets of socialization tactics leads to the effective alignment of newcomers’ adjustment processes with specific goals of socialization outcomes”. In the same sense, Tang et al. (2022, p. 10) signalize: “[...] organizational socialization strategies should be adapted to the characteristics of newcomers” (Tang et al., 2022, p. 10).

Trainee programs tend to be formatted and formalized, so active participation can be a positive form to improve programs’ suitability to Gen-Z. Research on socialization suggests that newcomers should actively engage and influence the organizations instead of being passive actors (Commeiras et al., 2013; Mornata & Cassar, 2018). Trainees act proactively for their socialization success and the organizations must understand the importance of including them in the process of structuring the programs. “Employers should evaluate how currently employed socialization tactics and entry experiences may satisfy or thwart newcomers’ psychological needs” (Chong et al., 2021, p. 14).

Aiming to transmit organizational culture in their multiple facets and for the success of socialization processes with young people (Evans et al., 2010; Oh, 2018), organizations must mix different tactics because they have consequent correlations and focuses. Concentrating just on institutionalized or individualized socialization tactics has limitations, including proposing programs with high formalization or flexibility. There are innumerable directions toward socializing actions to reach organizational learning and performing acculturation. Recent generations arrive in the work world with diverse features that affect socialization (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Trainee programs should consider diversity when formatting socialization processes, particularly employee needs and organizational culture facets (Taormina, 2009).

## Final considerations

The article aims to understand whether the organizational culture transmitted through organizational socialization tactics adopted in trainee programs is congruent with Generation Z's attributes, from the perspective of trainees, managers responsible for trainee programs, and specialized consultants. The results indicate that collective and individual, formal and informal tactics (context focus), sequential and random, fixed and variable tactics (content focus), serial and disjunctive, and investiture and divestiture socialization tactics (social aspects) appeared relevant and impactful from the interviewees’ speech, and confirmed the typology of organization socialization tactics proposed by Van Maanen and Schein (1979).

The tactics were used alone or in combination, and their application showed positive results at different stages of the trainees' socialization. At the beginning of the program, collective and formal tactics were more recurrent. On the other hand, after the integration phase, when the trainee starts in the work setting, individual and informal tactics are applied more often. A new bipolar tactics emerged from the data, the challenging/traditional, that consists in the development of challenging or conventional activities as a stimulus to individual growth and adaptation between subject and organizational environment.

The companies' trainee programs are similar regarding the organizational socialization tactics employed. However, the results showed the need to customize the programs to the characteristics of Gen-Z to retain these talents who are supposedly being prepared to be the future leaders of the organizations. The programs must be dynamic, increase the use of technologies, work on talent retention, and offer mentoring and constant feedback. In view of challenging stressors, Tang et al. (2022) highlight the need of newcomers’ participation encourage, respect of their opinion, supportive leadership style, and clear vision of self-development.

This article offers three main contributions. First, it examines the process of organizational socialization focusing on a specific generation. We discuss socialization within the theory of generations in organizations (Joshi et al., 2011), helping to comprehend the tactics adopted with Gen-Z trainees and

how organizations have dealt with this new generation in the labor market. Second, it provides relevant insights to organizational socialization theory, presenting a new bipolar tactic (Malik & Manroop, 2017; Van Maanen, 1978; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Our findings suggest that the new tactic found – “challenging/traditional” – stimulates growth and adaptation when a newcomer enters the workplace (Ashforth et al., 2007; Bauer et al., 2007), particularly for recent generations. The discovery of the new tactic may have implications for leadership development and newcomer acculturation. Third, organizational socialization tactics transmit the organizational culture, operating as a cultural enhancer and creating strong bonds between the individual and the organization (Bauer et al., 1998; Taormina, 2008, 2009).

With reference to practical contributions, we stress the significance of the trainees’ participation in developing and evaluating the programs: according to the programs’ advancement, they should avoid being too prescriptive and structured. Rather, the trainees’ participation is necessary so managers can understand their perceptions and choose the best projects according to the trainee’s profile.

Future research could adopt a longitudinal research strategy throughout the trainee programs, closely monitoring workers going through the socialization process or role transitions, particularly with Gen-Z members. Also, we stimulate future research to deepen the comprehension of the challenging and traditional bipolar tactic, as found in interviews, with different publics. This research did not encompass the competition and contest bipolar tactic as presented in Van Maanen (1978) or the customized tactics proposed by Malik and Manroop (2017). Then, future research could approach how the organizations develop these tactics, how newcomers experienced them, and the benefits and negative outcomes of employing such tactics in the individual on the organizational environment.

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