Report
IO1 - Building Bridges - Potentials & Tools

1/ Information about your organisation

How it is structured (local and/or, regional and/or national, and/or European)?
Who from which level is involved in the project?

The IB is a "national" organisation with about 700 centres nationwide, which are structured in 8 regional organisations. In addition, there is a head quarter at the national level, which is responsible for all regional organisations. The BRIDGE project is managed at the head quarter by the Department of International cooperation. The professional youth workers involved in this project work at the local level in the regional organisation IB Südwest gGmbH. Various fields of activity and centres are represented in this project:

- International voluntary services (two colleagues from Kassel)
- Open child and youth work (three colleagues from Pirmasens)
- Political education/prevention of radicalisation in schools and social work and vocational training (two colleagues from Mainz).

Independent of BRIDGE, the individual colleagues work together in the respective centres. They form the so-called "tandems": junior and senior.

The person who is leader of BRIDGE led the IB working group.

2/ In which situations have you observed some difficulties in the cooperation or communication between Juniors and Seniors?

Level of work with young people (1)
Level of youth workers (2)
Level of organisation (3)

The IB working group identified some difficulties which can be generalised for all three levels of work. The level of working with the target group (youth), the level within a heterogeneous team of youth workers with junior and senior workers and the level of the organisation (employers). Some topics are linked to one or two levels. It is indicated with which levels the respective topic is connected.

Digitalisation and technical progress have caused challenges to all levels. But senior workers are often more challenged by the velocity of changes and progress especially in the digitalisation. Sometimes the target group as well as the junior workers adapt faster to these changes. On the organisational level it needs trainings and coaching for all employees. (1, 2, 3)

Data security concerns all participants involved in social work. It´s observed that junior workers and also the target group, who sometimes are also named as digital natives have

less problems with this issue. It seems easier to them to share their personal data. Senior workers often tend to scrutinize the reasons for the collection of data. (1, 2)

Regarding the **ways and tools of communication** we observed different approaches. While senior workers tend to use the telephone and talk to others as a short and direct way of communication, the juniors and the youth prefer the digital communication via e-mail and messenger apps. This topic offers also a perspective towards the perception of courtesy within communication and is related to a cultural change. (1, 2)

The question of **identification with employer**, as well as the topics, **knowledge within the organisation** and **implicit structural knowledge** concerning level two and three. These topics are dependent on the job tenure. There is a significant correlation between job tenure and e.g. identification with the organisation of employment. It´s observed that junior workers more often socialized with a culture of criticism of power and hierarchy. (2, 3)

In contrast is the **critical attitude** towards the employer not necessarily related to the job tenure or the professional experience in general. This approach depends on several different conditions, like an education towards critical thinking, or towards adaption into the organisation.

Work experience: exchange between junior and senior worker necessary – 2
The different levels of work experience between junior and senior might be one of the most obvious areas of conflict, especially on the level of youth workers. While lots of work experience (senior) leads to self-confident problem solving, one might easily be overwhelmed, when new in a work place (junior). To be able to continue offering services on the same level of quality it's absolutely necessary for junior and senior to communicate. As this is only one example of outcomes of differences in work experience, the matter definitely needs to be watched closely.

Dynamics: attitude towards change, new ideas, flexibility - 1,2,3
On all three levels it occurs that juniors and seniors meet each within their own dynamics which can lead to confrontation. The tendency is that juniors bring less experience but great motivation and ambition: *I want to change the world* – literally *change* here can be seen as the only way to make it better. At the same time *change* might be hard to accept for someone who has learned through experience (senior) that change doesn't necessarily make things better and fixed structures are there to help and give you a feeling of security. Not one or the other attitude has to be valued as better or worse – the challenge is to find a way together using both dynamics as valuable resources.

Environment (economic, ecologic and political) and its influence on work life balance – 1,2,3
As looking at junior and senior workers we can most of the time talk about a generational conflict, the matter of (economic, ecologic and political) environment needs to be discussed. Starting at a new work place in 2020 comes with a different setting than gaining your first work experiences in the 1990s or 2000s. One might have difficulties to understand the other side. The sentence *when I was young…* often enough is used in bitter arguments. The environmental setting has a huge impact on our work and life. Inflation, climate change and the Corona pandemic will be named here as only some of many examples.

Education - 1,2
Talking about generational conflict, education should be mentioned as it influences our lives – private and professional. Of course education is also a matter of differences between each and every one of us. Nevertheless, we can talk about generational differences in education which were led and influenced by political decisions, social notion and religion. Coming from very strict educational styles our society changed more and more towards so called anti-authoritarian educational styles. The outcome appears mostly as a conflict on the level of

youth workers as well as on the level of working with the target group. While discussing the difficulties we should try to keep in mind that the one generation is responsible for the education of the next.

3/ Potential map of Juniors and Seniors

In preparation for the potential maps, the differences between the generations were highlighted. Here is the detailed result.

Potentials			
Juniors		**Seniors**	
Self-perception	**Perception about Seniors**	**Self-perception**	**Perception about Juniors**
Relationship with the employer			
Distance to employer and work	Identification with employer	Identification with employer	Distance and critic
Work level			
No work routine		Knowledge about the organisation, structure...	
Work processes are questioned	Knowledge about work process	Work process well known	Work process not well known
Digital communication	Oral communication	Oral communication	Informal and written communication
Decision are easily made, can be revised		Decisions are made after an overview of the consequences	
Easy access to digital tools	Experience with Word, Excel	Knowledge about Word and Excel	Easy access to digital tools
		Experience in interdisciplinary work	
		Network, many contacts	
Dealing with hierarchy			

Informal approach to hierarchy		Formal handling to the hierarchy	
Work with target group			
Proximity to the target group	Distance to target group	Distance to the target group	Proximity to the target group
Work life balance			
Private life is important in life		Professional life is important in the life	
		Know his or her own limits	
Current topics of the society			
Easy handling of personal data		Careful handling of personal data	
Diversity (gender) is one of the topics of the junior generations		Difficulty in dealing with social changes	
Other			
Critical attitude of Generation Y		Holistic approach	

These results show that the self-perception and the perception about the other generation are consistent.

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Learn from each other			
Juniors		Seniors	
Learn from Seniors	Share to seniors	Learn from Juniors	Share to Juniors
Relationship with employer			
Create opportunities for identification with the employer	Understanding the criticism of the juniors	Allow more distance to the employer	Allow meaning of identification with employer
Learning to trust the relationship between employee and employer (reliability)	Healthy relationship, my employer is not my friend	Employer is not necessarily my friend, more distance to the employer	Understand, appreciate the reasons for this relationship
Work level			
Recognise the benefit and sense of the processes, structures	Allow changes of processes	Allow and accept questions and criticism	Security through existing processes and structures
Learn work processes and workflow -> Fewer errors	Understand why the work processes and workflow are like that	Work processes and workflow process useful but perhaps can be improved, for this a neutral view is important.	Learn about the organisation (structure, process, overarching knowledge)
Oral communication	Informal expression is not impolite	Informal expression is not impolite	Try the oral communication
Work with target group			
Reflect on my own role as a professional youth worker, allow distance to the target group	Recognise and allow closeness despite distance	Impartiality in dealing with the target group	Act as a role model

These results clearly show that both generations want to learn from each other.

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If we look at the results according to knowledge, attitude and practice it looks as follows, exemplary and without claim to completeness. Explicit knowledge is green and tacit knowledge is yellow.

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SENIORS
- Knowledge
  - Work with young people
  - Work with colleagues
- Practice
  - Works with young people
  - Work with colleagues
- Attitude
  - Work with young people
  - Work with colleagues

Experience in knowledge, handling

Knowledge about the organisation, work process, structrure…

Role models

Holsitic approach

Network

Overview consequences

Holistic approach

Big identification with employer

Supporting role

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4/ Optimisation of communication and cooperation between the Juniors and Seniors

How could you optimise the communication and cooperation between the Juniors & Seniors? Which methods are useful?

In general, you can distinguish between informal and formal methods, which can be useful to optimise the communication and cooperation between the Juniors and Seniors.

To begin with the **informal methods** to combine junior and senior skills, it should be given an atmosphere in the organisation where the staff is encouraged to exchange knowhow and methods. For that purpose, it could be helpful to strengthen soft skills of employees (like empathy, communication skills and critical thinking) so that an attitude can develop of wanting to understand the perspective of others (either junior or senior). Hence there has to be enough space and time for self-reflection, additionally group reflections can be used. Added to that, role plays can be used for switching your perspective. Furthermore, you can create a team spirit through team building activities (e.g. cooking and eating together, playing team or group games like "exit games" etc.). Another possibility would be something like a job shadowing. Similar to that a shared working place can be helpful (or at least a workplace closer to a senior/junior) so you can job shadowing.

Besides that there are **formal methods**. The formal and informal methods should exist in addition to each other (to complement). Thereby it is more likely to optimise the communication.

To ensure the atmosphere of sharing knowledge and switching perspectives you can implement a system with balance of power instead of a strict hierarchical structure in the organisation. This could mean seniors and juniors are working on project or cases together, because if you are working closer together, you automatically ensure an exchange of knowledge and perspectives. Another way can be a mentoring program, where you assign a mentor to a junior for the initial working months. Or you assign tandems of junior and senior working on projects together in general. Beyond that you can establish a Quality Management System where regular evaluation and feedback is set. In that feedback you can encourage the staff to share their mistakes (instead of sanction mistakes) so that they can learn from mistakes of others as well. Moreover, you can record "lessons learned" in a system accessible to all so you can identify good practices. Thereby you store good practices and examples and pass them on to following employees. This can ensure that knowledge can be stored (before employees (seniors and juniors) leave the organisation) and allow following employees to build on that instead of making the same mistakes over and over again. In that Quality Management could also be a system of introduction for new employees with the organizational structure be explained but also the way of working within the organisation. Of course you can also offer advanced trainings with seniors sharing their knowledge with juniors. Another formal method would be periodic staff meetings with supervision, which can ensure the communication. On a higher level the organisation can share reports of good practice examples.

5/ Impact and Recommendation

Which impact have you observed and which recommendations could you make?

Since the youth workers have been involved in the project and meet and exchange ideas regularly as part of the IB working group, they have noticed many small effects.

With themselves

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First, they have been able to observe a number of things with themselves. Their attention to the issue of generations has been increased, both in general in the context of their lives and in the context of their work, either with colleagues or with young participants. They have become more attentive to the other perspective - that of juniors or seniors - and are more open to accepting this new perspective. It is helpful to pause and reflect. Sensitization and awareness of what "each other" means was increased. Important here was the extensive exchange within the tandems and the IB working group about their imprints, experiences, skills, abilities and learning objectives. This exchange was not only job-related but also very personal.

With colleagues

Second, their relationship with the other generation has changed. They listen to their younger or older colleagues more attentively and are less biased than before the project. The concrete effect for one colleague (senior) is to rethink the distribution of tasks and to hand over more tasks to other younger colleagues. Another colleague (junior) specifically searched for contact with a colleague who is about to retire. She wanted to learn the colleague's knowledge so that this knowledge is not lost but remains in the organisation. This is also a good way to show appreciation and recognition to the experienced colleagues.

Other

Finally, they have become aware of the importance of soft skills in youth social and educational work.

It is surprising that so far there is no difference between countries in this process, the "conflict line" is between juniors and seniors, regardless of their origin or work experience.

Interestingly, we can observe many parallels with International Work. In the international cooperation, two organisations from different countries, languages, working methods etc. work together, develop projects together. The challenge in international cooperation is, on the one hand, to understand the communication, attitude and actions of the partner, to communicate with each other in a foreign language. On the other hand, intercultural competences are of great importance: understanding differences, accepting differences and reflecting on one's own identity or culture. In this project it is very similar, but instead of working with another country, we work with different generations, it means different work experience, competences, dynamics, environment, different knowledge, attitude or posture. We can extend it even further, it is like two systems (according to the systemic approach) interacting with each other.

Recommendations

The regular exchange of colleagues on the topic, both within the tandems and within the IB working group, has achieved a lot. See also the recommendations under "4/ Optimisation of communication and cooperation between the Juniors and Seniors".

6/ Process during the IO 1 (working group of the partner)

What was your approach, how did you proceed to achieve this result?

The project management specifically looked for 3 tandems. Various criteria played a role:

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- Interest in the topic
- Cooperation of the tandems (Junior & Senior) independent of BRIDGE.
- Willingness to be involved for the whole duration of the project: both in the IB working group and in the European workshops.

Several meetings were held with a total of 6 interested centres, with detailed information about BRIDGE. The difficulty was not the lack of interest in the topic but mainly the lack of human resources due to the pandemic and the lack of professionals.

The working group met regularly, about 5 digital meetings until the end of 2021 with different focuses.

- 1st meeting: Feedback and evaluation of the results of the first European workshop (digital) and first grid for the knowledge map.
- 2nd meeting: Input from Prof. Andreas Thimmel (FH Cologne) on the topic of knowledge in social work.
- Development of a matrix for the knowledge map with the focus on Imprinting, experiences, skills, abilities and learning objectives.
- 3rd meeting: Presentation of the results of a knowledge map of the tandems, which they prepared together.
- Development of a matrix to highlight the differences of both generations. The matrix had two parameters: 1/ what are my strength, what are the strength of the other generation, what do I want to learn from the other generation, what seems important to share with the other generation. 2/ Strength sorted by focus, like organisation level and practice level.
- 4th meeting: Presentation of results about the differences of both generations from both perspectives, which they prepared together.
- 5th meeting: Feedback and evaluation of the results of the second European workshop (in Bologna).
- Development of a matrix for the knowledge map (focus: knowledge, practice and attitude) and a grid for the report of all partners, as preparation of the outcome of the IO1 framework concept "Building Bridges".

Which interesting tools or templates have you used?

Knowledge of Juniors & Seniors

Imprinting		Skills (acquirable and learnable)		Abilities (that we have)		Experiences		Learning objectives	
Junior	Senior	Junior	Senior	Junior	Senior	Junior	Senior	Junior	Senior

Differences between the generations

Junior perspective				Senior perspective			
Potentials of my generation	Potential of Senior	What would I like to learn from the seniors	What seems important to share to seniors	Potentials of my generation	Potential of juniors	What would I like to learn from the juniors	What seems important to share to junior

You can add additional parameters, such as relationship to the employer, work with colleagues, work with the target group...

Knowledge map matrix
Different clustering options are possible, like
1/ Knowledge, praxis, posture
2/ organisational level (identification with employer, Knowledge about organisation, working methods, communication, networking, decision making…), level of work with target group

Would you like to make some other recommendations?

For organisations dealing with this issue, our experience so far is that we can recommend the following:

Finding interested tandems:
The juniors and seniors preferably already work together independently of the project or process. On this way they already have some experience in communication or cooperation and can try out, test and implement the learning results in their daily work.

Regular meetings of the tandems
Through regular exchange, the youth workers can take the time to familiarise themselves with the topic, get their own experiences, observe and reflect. This leads to a deep exploration with the topic.

Content-related exploration
It was very helpful to illuminate the topic with scientific input (knowledge in social work). In order to create mutual trust and recognition of the other perspective, the exchange of knowledge with a focus on imprinting, experiences, skills, abilities and learning objectives in two steps (first within the tandems and then with the other tandems) proved to be very useful.

After this basis is established, we can work more concretely on the differences between the juniors and seniors. Useful questions were:

- In which situation did you experience differences between the generations?
- Have you already experienced misunderstandings due to generation?
- What are the strengths of my generation? What are the strengths of the other generation?
- What would I like to learn from the other generation?
- What do I think is important to share on to the other generation?

Methodological approach

In order to look at the topic from many perspectives, it is helpful to use different methods:

- Different categorisations:
  - knowledge, practice, posture
  - Level of work with young people, colleagues and organisational level
  - life skills
- Open answers versus given possible answers
- Potentials map versus online questionary (in preparation)

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