ABSTRACT
This study is focused on the analysis of the professional qualities that characterize the so-called millennials or “Y” Generation and how they compare to the competencies demanded from extension agents according to the contemporary paradigm that is currently applied at the National Institute of Agricultural Technology (INTA) in Argentina. It is well documented that during the period of emergence of millennials, many of the factors that impact on personality development were totally opposed to those experienced by the previous generations, and have thus shaped their particular idiosyncrasy. Also, the qualities required to be a successful extensionist in the current paradigm have been clearly identified. The coexistence of diverse age groups within extension teams requires creating specific tools to achieve a better leverage of the various capacities, supplementing each other, profiting from the assets that characterize each generation and thus boosting their strengths. This essay is based on case studies and the author’s work experience as well as on the analysis of publications about the topics at issue.

Key words: Generation gap, Roles, Competencies, Human Resources

INTRODUCTION
The term 'generation' is used to describe a group of people who share social and cultural influences, having been born in similar time frames and having received comparable education. A generation is therefore defined by its shared values, as well as by its perceptions and ways of observing reality; in other words, by the factors that conform its socio-historical experience (Gargiullo 2009). The generational category termed 'Y' is used to describe the demographical group born at the beginning of the 80s and the end
of the 20th century. There are four major categories mentioned by different authors: (i) the Silent Generation, born before 1945, (ii) the Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1959, (iii) the X Generation, born between 1960 and 1979, and (iv) the Y Generation, also known as Why or Millennials, Google Generation, Internet Generation or Diversity Generation.

The Y reached its peak as the technological era developed, the latter shaped by the instantaneity of information transmission, internet and social networks, communication media transformation, the massive adoption of cell phones, products influenced by Information and Communications Technology (ICT), LAN, and by the evolution of the techno-sciences in all the areas of knowledge. These factors strongly impinged on the manner of relating to others and on the conformation of social bonds, replacing face-to-face encounters by the mediation of devices and technological innovation.

Life circumstances experienced by the Y were diametrically opposed to those undergone by former generations, therefore fashioning their personalities in a different way. At a sociopolitical level, in Argentine Republic the events that left a mark on the development of these youths are situated within the framework of political democracy, diversity of cultural elements and gender tolerance, a greater freedom of expression and active citizen participation. Since they are children of another era, the Y also behaves differently with respect to their parents, and several authors (Mascó 2012; Franichevich y Marchiori 2010, Ensink 2011; San Martín 2010; Lehmann 2010; Sanchez 2011; Esquivel 2011; Pintos 2003; Gargiulo 2009; Carrasco 2012) have underlined their main traits. Below is a brief description:

Personal: Youths between 18 and 32 years of age, of heterogeneous cultural beliefs, adopting defying and questioning attitudes. Emotional factors strongly determine their conducts, while these youths tend to prolong their adolescence, they feel free and want to take control of their own time, seeking pleasure in all domains, acting rather than asking for permission. As they are autonomous, independent and individualistic, self-realization is considered the pinnacle of success.
Work: The Y are not motivated to work their whole life at the same place, as they do not value work stability, periodically questioning the benefit of their jobs. Moreover, they do not keep to the schedule, and prefer professional projects instead of business-oriented promotions. Talented but informal, they question the dogmas established in their organizations, shunning authority and verticality and requesting better schedules and payment. Time is one of their most valuable assets, as well as comfortable work environment. They expect a harmonious balance between work and personal issues, valuing challenges, seeking flexibility, pleasant jobs and excellent equipment. In sum, work is justified if it allows them to reach their goals: personal freedom and pleasure.

Relations and interests: They possess creative and artistic inclinations, and have the capacity to simultaneous exploration and multitask. Impatient, they are naturally open to diversity, appreciating immediacy and enjoying the present more than the future. Their circle of friends is predominantly virtual and their intimate relationships are functional: they prioritize independent personal enjoyment, and technology represents to them mobile entertainment and communication. In general, they are motivated by questions of gender, environment and solidarity issues.

Given the above mentioned characteristics, a typology can emerge with regard to the Y professionals. Because of their age they are part of the majority of the new resources recently incorporated in the institutions of Science and Technology of Argentina, who attempt to recompose their technical staff after a reduction caused by neoliberal policies and privatization intents applied by the State during the 90’s. In Argentina, Generation Y represents 22 percent of the total population, with women only slightly exceeding men in number (52% vs 48%). However, given the fact that Argentine societal fabric displays great class differences, the characteristics that describe Y Generation apply only to middle and upper middle classes. Youths born into these classes are able to change jobs freely, travel abroad and delay leaving the family home until they finish their post-graduate studies (San Martin 2012).

1. The strengthening of Extension considered the following dimensions: human resources, investments, extension regional management and social participation (INTA 2007). One of the main actions was the incorporation of new human resources to the System of Rural Extension, admitting 100 interns younger than 28 years of age between 2007 and 2008. Rivera (2009) also reported about the move in favor of AIS—Agricultural Innovation Systems— in the international rural development agenda.
EXTENSION IN ARGENTINA: THE INTA CASE

Argentina is one of the leading food producers in the world, able to feed 400 million people. The National Institute of Agricultural Technology (INTA), Argentine state agency depending of Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, plays a key role in this scenario. Since 1956 develops research and extension activities for technological innovation in value chains, regions and territories in order to improve competitiveness and sustainable rural development in the country. Their efforts are focused on innovation as the engine of development, throughout the strong presence of 350 Extension Agencies, 22 Investigation Centers and 45 Experimental Stations (INTA 2012).

This essay attempts to analyze generational particularities, focusing on the INTA case, the strengthening of its Extension System and the restructuration of strategies towards a perspective of support concerning Territorial Development.

The admission of new professionals into the circle of staff belonging to the organization, displaying specific behavior originating from different values and habits, as well as personalities fashioned at other points in time with respect to the receiving groups, demands knowledge of generational disparities, identifying both their weaknesses and their strengths. It is on the basis of such generational differences that one has to look for symmetry between the two worlds in order to promote an effective complementation of abilities.

Attributes required from the contemporary extensionists INTA institutional strategies for the 2005-2015 period were structured into four components: Research and Development, Transfer and Extension, Technological Links and Institutional Relations (INTA 2005). The guidelines for transfer and extension roles were redefined and focused on technological and institutional innovation, pushing up the value of territory and outlining their basic functions in the following areas: technological transfer, non-formal education, institutional change and management. The first two are traditional in the domain of extension practice, while the other two need the reinforcement of skills. In order to promote institutional innovations, there are certain abilities required that contribute to the cooperation between players, network
articulation, and relating to the social environment. Management is a process of intervention, a tool to make things happen - planning effective actions - in a particular way and on the basis of proposals previously defined.

The extensionist is therefore required to possess complex planning capacities, the ability to coordinate teams, administer and evaluate effects. The agents of contemporary extension must also be competent in matters related to the support of strengthening social capital, interaction through interpersonal ties and empathy in order to mediate in conflictive situations. Similar shifting roles of extension services were described by Wielinga (2012) for European farmer knowledge systems. With regard to their undergraduate preparation, weaknesses exist in the formal education of extension themes for the Argentinean professionals, requiring subsequent talent instruction as they face their practice, experiential learning and social interaction.

However, the results obtained after analyzing the representative traits of the Y generation (see Table 1) demonstrate that they are not compatible with the desired attributes needed for the new extensionists profile (Varela 2012). In light of the case studies conducted by the author, and considering the high turnover and particular behavior of the new extensionists, it is evident that the young employees at INTA already exhibit Y generation traits. As a result of job dissatisfaction and lack of compatibility with regard to prior expectations, almost a 40 percent of young extensionists resigned or changed their specialty in less than three years after having been incorporated.

These high turnover rates demand appropriate strategies in order to minimize job hopping; paradoxically, these young employees were precisely hired in order to reinforce the volume of human resources devoted to extension at INTA’s offices. It seems that traditional INTA career values, considered as best choice by previous generations, no longer satisfy younger professionals, who are not gratified with their job or wish to continue working at the institution (Varela 2013). The new relationship styles and behavior rules that have emerged, as well as the particular way in which both benefits and expectations are being viewed, have generated discomfort and poor commitment on the part of Y recruits. It would therefore be
crucial to examine the factors behind Y generation job motivation in order to better understand their philosophy.

**Table 1** : Comparative table of extensionist typologies, based upon several aspects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typology</th>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Senior extensionist</th>
<th>“Y” Generation extensionist</th>
<th>Contemporary “ideal” extensionist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of extension</td>
<td></td>
<td>Technological transfer, technical advisor, non-formal education</td>
<td>Mediated by ICT, diverse, varied, undefined</td>
<td>For Development, -technological and organizational innovations-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td>40 to 55 years old</td>
<td>22 to 32 years old</td>
<td>Intellectual and emotional mature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs to be trained in:</td>
<td>Production and competitiveness, Technical knowledge, Communication skills</td>
<td>Community development, Climate change, Family agriculture, Innovation process</td>
<td>Networks, Conflict Mediation, Institutional development, Empowerment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political contexts while in University</td>
<td>Dictatorial, Institutional crisis</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>Democratic and Participative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work style</td>
<td>Formal: they accept and follow established routines</td>
<td>Informal, but creative and talented</td>
<td>Flexible and adaptable personalities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude when faced to authority</td>
<td>Acceptance of norms and institutional procedures. They ask their superiors for permission</td>
<td>Defiant, questioning. They do not ask for permission: rather, they inform their superiors</td>
<td>Skilled in negotiations and articulation of interests</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As a result, novel strategies to retain these young professionals should be properly designed and implemented within the organization culture of the institution hiring them.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on literature, on personal experience and on the study of individual real cases, the author suggests discussing the institutional implications of the incorporation of Y extensionists to INTA(Figure 1).
It is also recommended:

- To reflect about the need to define precise competence and follow-up plans with regard to the Y Generation admitted to the agencies, the necessity to design proposals of institutional value to retain them and the implementation of conciliation strategies between the current staff and the new professionals.

- To address the generational issue creating mechanisms of knowledge management that will allow maximizing the potential of the institutional resources accumulated by extensionists possessing vast experience, as well as the abilities inherent to the new generation. Strategies should be implemented in order to bridge the gaps between the different generations that shape the pool of human resources, avoiding the imposition of established dominant cultures. It is also recommended to correctly appoint supervisors and leaders for the appropriate guidance of the newcomers.

- To promote change towards a shared management of innovations that overcomes the frontiers between research and extension and allows the articulation of various abilities that complement vocations.
• To create teams with a sense of continuity and permanence, integrated to the environment, and showing commitment when attempting to solve community problems, as well as a profound willingness to articulate actions with the rest of the players in pursuit of territorial development.

• To reassess the ways the new Y generation extensionists are recruited, selected and retained, taking into consideration the areas where they will perform their jobs. To this end, it would be necessary to promote acceptance of diversity while facilitating the expression of positive features among the teams. In short, the synergy of talents and the strengthening of social capital are responsibilities of those institutions which are in the process of incorporating Y professionals into their workforce.

References


