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Bridging collaborative gaps: appreciating intergenerational strengths

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BRIDGING COLLABORATIVE GAPS: APPRECIATING

INTERGENERATIONAL STRENGTHS

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by

Juliet Irwin

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Abstract

Organizations have an immense opportunity to raise employee awareness regarding the best values, skills, and attitudes that each generation offers. This study was an appreciative inquiry with an intact multigenerational corporate team located in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, studying the strengths that each generation brings to intergenerational collaboration. Perceptions about collaborative strengths were gathered in a workshop and via pre- and post-workshop surveys. Through analysis and interpretation of the study findings, unique strengths for each generation were revealed; discoveries were made around foundations for intergenerational collaboration and the role of the individual contribution to multigenerational collaborative behavior was acknowledged. Recommendations emerged, including: to build generational competence, lay the foundation for intergenerational collaboration, bridge collaborative gaps, and apply knowledge to organizational policy and program development. Developing an appreciation for what strengths each generation brings to collaboration provides an opportunity for organizations to enable diverse teams and ultimately improve business performance.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The Challenge

In a globalized business world, an unprecedented pace of change has created a

need for businesses to stay competitive, innovative and achieve continued growth. There

are new requirements for North American companies to remain competitive with

significant changes in workforce demographics, a rising average age of retirement, and a

growing new generation in the workforce (Statistics Canada, 2013; United States

Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Today, the labor force includes

four generations and more disparity between the youngest and oldest workers, as people

remain in the workforce longer than in previous decades (Murphy, 2007). Widespread

change in the composition and shape of organizational workforces has placed increasing

emphasis on understanding and managing the expectations of different generational

groups (McGuire, Todnem By, & Hutchings, 2007). A multigenerational labor force has

important implications for organizations concerning diverse perspectives, priorities, and

work styles (Murphy, 2007).

Due to these changes, all generations in the workforce are going through a

learning curve to acquire skills on how to better collaborate with each other (Wen, Jaska,

Brown, & Dalby, 2010). Businesses must devise strategies that inspire four generations

of people with "different value systems as well as different life experiences" (D'Aprix,

2010, p. 13). Members of these generational cohorts have different attitudes, behaviors,

knowledge, and skills. For example, according to Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (2000),

Traditionalists' view of the world is deemed as "practical," Baby Boomers' outlook is

"optimistic," Gen Xers' is "skeptical," and finally Millennials' outlook is reviewed as "hopeful." Another example is in regards to the different generations preferences with respect to leadership. The Traditionalists view leadership by "hierarchy," the Baby Boomers view it by "consensus," the Gen Xers view it by "competence," and the Millennials view leadership by "pulling together" (Zemke et al., 2000). In the last decade, research has proliferated on investigating generational differences (Bennett, Pitt, & Price, 2012; Emelo, 2011; Gilburg, 2008; Giancola, 2006; Lyons, Duxbury, & Higgins, 2007; Murphy, 2007; Schullery, 2013; Schwartz, 2006; Srinivasan, 2012; Zemke et al., 2000). This research went beyond stereotyping about differences, as suggested in popular media, and leveraged empirical data that supported generational diversity.

Generational differences can lead to frustration, conflict, and poor morale (Murphy, 2007). Some authors have noted that issues arising from differences in multigenerational issues will rise without investment in building awareness around the differences in attitudes, values, and communication preferences (Ashraf, 2012; Srinivasan, 2012; Wen et al., 2010). Although these differences present issues when working together, multigenerational characteristics can also be seen as an opportunity if diversity is valued. For businesses to continue to perform, organizations and their employees need an increased level of awareness around generational differences and the value that each brings towards effective intergenerational collaboration.

The Opportunity

An understanding of the values, technical skills, soft skills, and attitudes behind each generation can begin a change process in which employees are more engaged and synergistic in their approach to working together. People need to celebrate and leverage

diversity through collaboration initiatives, in order to positively affect the bottom line (Ashraf, 2012). Organizations have an immense opportunity to raise employee awareness regarding the best values, skills, and attitudes that each generation offers; leaders can then share those characteristics across generations to aid in improving business performance. A multigenerational workforce is able to assist an organization in reaching its goals by transferring knowledge around key foundational soft skills and by using new collaborative tools (Ashraf, 2012; Reinhardt, Schmidt, Sloep, & Drachsler, 2011). Collaboration is a critical competency for achieving and sustaining high performance. In a world in which everyone must do more with less, strategies that promote collaboration win out over those that are competitive (Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Lawler, Worley, & Creelman, 2011).

Research Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify and raise awareness of the strengths from each generation. Through that enlightenment, the goal was to focus on ways to improve collaboration across a multigenerational workforce while helping organizations improve business performance. This was achieved by examining strengths in collaboration within a multigenerational organizational team in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. The research question was: What are the strengths of each generation that contribute towards effective intergenerational collaboration?

Importance of Research

Improved team performance through effective intergenerational collaboration assists organizations in retaining their human capital assets while also achieving their financial and sustainability goals. A common vision is important for fostering

collaboration; people must start with a common vision or goal to be able to work together and bring that vision to life (Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Senge, 2006). To build a foundation for people to effectively work together, team members must develop an understanding of each other's values, skills, and attitudes. Developing a transparent and authentic understanding of each other offers people an opportunity to achieve synergy and reach those shared goals. Appreciating and being sensitive to the strengths of each generation gives rise to opportunities to transfer that knowledge across generations and develop an optimal level of intergenerational collaboration.

The global consulting firm, Frost and Sullivan (2006), conducted a study involving 946 top executives from all over the world and found that collaboration has a significant impact on profitability, profit growth, and sales growth: "The most significant impact of collaboration on a single measure of performance [was] in the attainment of customer satisfaction" (p. 8), with collaboration "accounting for 41% of the forces driving customer satisfaction" (p. 8). Frost and Sullivan suggested companies need to have a "solid collaborative capability . . . [and leverage it] across many aspects of an organization" (p. 18), as each business function studied performed better due to collaborative skills.

A literature review has shown that more research is needed to understand the strengths of generational cohorts. Following on from the research to date, the data collected in this study will help leaders and researchers understand some of the unique strengths of each generation, which can enable a multigenerational collaborative workplace. This action research added to the growing foundation of data in this field. The results from the analysis of this study may help businesses develop strategies to enable

"multi-generational knowledge transfer" (D'Aprix, 2010, p. 13). Evidence from the study revealed observations about intergenerational collaboration strengths and recommendations for improving business performance in generationally diverse organizations.

Research Setting

This empirical study investigated a sample of 12 Canadian workers within Calgary, Alberta, Canada. The participants work within the private industry for an international energy company. The sample represented three out of the four generational cohorts in the Canadian marketplace today. The generations discussed in this report included Millennials, born 1980–2000; Generation Xers, born 1965–1979; Baby Boomers, born 1946–1964; and Traditionalists, born 1909–1945 (Catalyst, 2012; Chen & Choi, 2008; Parry & Urwin, 2011; Statistics Canada, 2014; Steelcase WorkSpace Futures, 2010; Triple Creek, as cited in Emelo, 2011; Twenge, 2010; Wen et al., 2010). The participants regularly work together within a multigenerational team and had prior experience working with other multigenerational teams outside of their current employment.

A workshop was conducted, which provided an opportunity for the participants to explore questions on collaboration. Rich dialogue and interaction through an appreciative inquiry approach provided opportunities for the participants to gain insights into important factors for intergenerational collaboration and determine key strengths from each generation. Two surveys were also conducted with the participants, one prior to and one following the workshop. Collectively the surveys measured individual perspectives on generational strengths, challenges, attitudes, diversity, expectations, and best

experiences when collaborating on a multigenerational team. Additionally, a reflection question was asked in the postsession survey related to whether the experience of participating in the study had improved the participant's ability to collaborate with multigenerational teams, and what, if anything, had changed for them. The data were compiled from these three interventions, analyzed, and summarized into several key themes.

Study Outline

This chapter reviewed the challenge, the opportunity, the research purpose, the importance of research, and the research setting. Chapter 2 provides a review of relevant literature. Chapter 3 presents the methods used in the study, specifically, the research methodology, the research approach, the research design, and the considerations given to protect human subjects. Chapter 4 presents the research results. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the results, including conclusions, recommendations, limitations of the research, suggestions for future research, and a report summary.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

This study addressed the strengths of each generation in a multigenerational corporate team. It provided a unique perspective and understanding of what strengths each generation brings to effective intergenerational collaboration. The results and conclusions provided a means for leaders to improve business performance. The focus was on an individual and group perspective on the generational values, skills, and attitudes contributing to effective intergenerational collaboration. The value of the research was to focus on ways to help corporate workers improve collaboration across a multigenerational workforce while helping organizations remain competitive. The study addressed the question: What are the strengths of each generation that contribute towards effective intergenerational collaboration? A review of existing literature addressing this question was conducted and revealed that while attributes of each generation have been investigated, limited research has been conducted that specifically addresses collaboration across generations. The research that is available focuses on components of the broader picture but not the specifics of researching intergenerational collaboration.

The following section provides more background on the approach taken to review the literature. Subsequent sections discuss the definitions of key terms, characteristics of generations, collaboration foundations, and a perspective on generational strengths.

Approach

A strengths-based approach was utilized to review the literature, taking into consideration all the differences between generations. Although the approach was intended to evaluate the strengths of the contributors to intergenerational collaboration,

the less than favorable descriptions of generations were also considered as part of the gaps in collaboration capacity. Additionally, differences in generational approaches to collaboration were considered as strengths and evaluated against similarities across generations.

Definitions

      Generational cohorts. Economists, anthropologists, and sociologists have studied generational cohorts for decades in an effort to understand generational differences and how segregation of groups improves insight into potential future social and economic change (Statistics Canada, 2014). A vast amount of material exists on generational theory and the history of segregating populations by age groups for research purposes. These collective groups comprised of "all people born together in a particular year or group of years . . . are sometimes called cohort generations" (Carlson, 2009, p. 2; see also Lyons et al., 2007; Marshall, 2011). Generations can be defined as "an identifiable group that shares birth years, age location, and significant life events at critical developmental stages" (Kupperschmidt, 2000, p. 66). Generations include "people born during a similar economic and cultural time period, which helps shape attitudes and behaviors" (Marshall, 2011, p. 14). Srinivasan (2012) stated, "Generational studies have a long and distinguished place in the social sciences, and scholars have attempted to search for the unique and distinctive characteristics of generations for several decades now" (p. 49).

      However, not everyone agrees that a generational cohort has valid data to support the theory. Some authors, such as Noble and Schewe (2003), could not demonstrate through their research that certain value dimensions could predict a specific generational

cohort. Another author, Jennifer Deal (2007), concluded, "All generations have similar values" (p. 213). Additionally, Giancola (2006) found a lack of published research in academic journals on the issue; his research discovered that the generations had more similarities that motivated them rather than differences. Another challenge in generational research is that some of the characteristics of generations are, in fact, more dependent on experience and life stage than on generational issues (Rothe, Lindholm, Hyvönen, & Nenonen, 2012).

      Generational cohorts framework. Review of literature indicated that when comparing generation cohorts one must consider the socioeconomic and cultural context and must take into account the demographic and economic variations across the country (Srinivasan, 2012). For the purposes of this project, generational cohorts are considered within the context of North America (i.e., both Canadian and American references were reviewed).

      Category names for generational cohorts and decisive age ranges vary slightly across literature. For the purposes of this research project, the following widely accepted practitioner definitions of generations comprising four groups were used: (a) Traditionalists, (b) Baby Boomers, (c) Gen Xers, and (d) Millennials (Catalyst, 2012; Chen & Choi, 2008; Parry & Urwin, 2011; Statistics Canada, 2014; Steelcase WorkSpace Futures, 2010; Triple Creek, as cited in Emelo, 2011; Twenge, 2010; Wen et al., 2010). There is often a slight discrepancy of years assigned to each cohort, and admittedly generational cohort analysis is not an "exact science" (Pew Research Centre, 2010). Table 1 depicts the generational cohort names by age range that was used for this research project.

Table 1

Generational Cohorts by Birth Years

Generational Cohort	Birth Years
Traditionalists	1909–1945
Baby Boomers	1946–1964
Gen Xers	1965–1979
Millennials	1980–2000

Collaboration. Collaboration is critical for innovation that involves doing more with less, and is increasingly used as a buzzword in the corporate world. Definitions for the term collaboration vary depending on the perspective of the author. Some people look at collaboration through a single rich media lens while others view collaboration through multiple lenses with different generational perspectives (Wen et al., 2010). The *Collins English Dictionary* has defined collaboration as "the act of working with another or others on a joint project . . . something created by working jointly with another or others" ("Collaboration," 2014, Definitions section, para. 2–3). An expanded definition might include a scale of how complex the collaboration is (Cohen, Mankin, & Fitzgerald, 2004), how people are collaborating, whether they are meeting face to face, and it might also take into consideration cultural and organizational diversity, amongst other elements. Exploring how collaboration is defined in the knowledge age (Drucker, 2000) may not only provide a new viewpoint about collaboration, but it may also reveal crucial factors that influence the ability for organizations to enable sustainable collaboration.

As stated earlier, scholars offer many differing definitions for the term collaboration. One Millennial author described collaboration as "working with someone

(or multiple people) to create something or achieve a goal" (Morgan, 2012, p. 11). Peter Senge (2006), a Baby Boomer, described collaboration as "how people work together to create value and to create new sources of value" (p. 270). Morten Hansen (2009), another Baby Boomer, indicated that collaboration takes place "when people work on a common task or provide significant help to each other" (p. 15). Other authors described collaboration as a means of connecting people, ideas, and resources that would normally not join forces with one another (de Sousa, Pellissier, & Monteiro, 2012). Frost and Sullivan (2006), a global consulting firm, defined the concept of collaboration as an interaction between technology and culture. In light of the many ways of expressing what collaboration is, this research project used the following definition for this term: Effective collaboration occurs when people work together, understand strengths, value diversity, create synergy, and achieve a common goal regardless of location or the time or distance between them.

Descriptions of Generations

For the first time ever, four generations of employees are working side by side in the same organizations. Members of these cohorts hold different values, morals, dreams, desires, ambitions, and styles of working (Bennett et al., 2012). Leaders can leverage generational differences by becoming attuned to the emerging generation of workers and challenging the traditional processes that leaders have used to make business decisions affecting their people (Deloitte, 2006). A review of research on generational differences and similarities follows.

Millennials. Members of the Millennial cohort are depicted as being confident, independent, individualist, self-reliant, and entrepreneurial (Martin, 2005). They are seen

by some authors as socially active, collaborative, team oriented, and accustomed to having structure in their lives (Glass, 2007; Shih & Allen, 2007). Millennials are also optimistic multitaskers who are technologically savvy (Catalyst, 2012; Murphy, 2007). Millennials are found to be independent, enjoy challenging work, and want immediate feedback; they value freedom, flexibility, ongoing education, socializing and creativity in an organization (Martin, 2005). The cohort values work environments that support team working and socializing (Rothe et al., 2012). They have a need for structure and supervision, prefer informal interaction, are inexperienced, are job hoppers, and work is not everything to them (Steelcase WorkSpace Futures, 2010). Millennials are described as high maintenance, need clear directions, require daily feedback from managers to stay on track, and demand a sense of accomplishment hourly (Martin, 2005). They prefer experiential training, rely heavily on technology to communicate, and need to know the communication expectations of the workplace and which medium is most appropriate for a given situation (Gilburg, 2008). Members of this cohort are generally characterized as highly comfortable with continuous, rapid change (Smola & Sutton, 2002; Tapscott, 1998). Millennials are depicted as highly innovative, independent, and technologically savvy (Tapscott, 1998). They are also seen to be self-absorbed, highly achievement-oriented, skeptical of corporate loyalty, expect rapid promotion and development, are demanding, question authority, and have been sheltered (Armour, 2005; Zemke et al., 2000). Millennials are considered to be more globally educated, assertive, and entitled; view themselves with confidence; and are highly optimistic, goal oriented, and idealistic (Catalyst, 2012; Chen & Choi, 2008). Members of this cohort voice their opinions and are work oriented. Millennials are highly available, adept, and active users of technology,

such as social networking sites (Srinivasan, 2012). They are perceived to be healthier, economically secure, have high expectations of themselves and their employers (Armour, 2005), and believe in work–life balance (Srinivasan, 2012). Millennials are comfortable embracing emerging technologies and appreciate meaningful work (Catalyst, 2012).

      Gen Xers. Individuals classified as Gen Xers are depicted as being adaptable, techno-literate, independent, creative, and willing to buck the system (Murphy, 2007). They have not been good about tapping into Baby Boomers' knowledge and experience. Gen Xers are considered a transient workforce (free agents), technologically savvy, pragmatic, competent, adaptive, and value flextime, part-time work, and telecommuting (Gilburg, 2008). Members of this generation are characterized as highly skeptical, perhaps to the point of outright cynicism (Smola & Sutton, 2002; Zemke et al., 2000). They are described as fiercely independent and entrepreneurial (Zemke et al., 2000). Gen Xers are seen to be more comfortable with change than with stability (Howe & Strauss, 1993). They scored higher on openness to change values and lower on conservation values than either the Baby Boomers or Traditionalists (Lyons et al., 2007). This cohort is realistic, self-reliant, entrepreneurial, independent, market savvy, fun loving, techno-literate, and seek work-life balance (Chen & Choi, 2008). Gen Xers embrace diversity and entrepreneurship (Catalyst, 2012). At work, Gen Xers value balance, fun, new employment, and bargaining, and they have a disdain for hierarchy, refuse to pay their dues, demand rewards and recognition, prefer leadership that is competent and shared responsibility, are realists, cynical, entrepreneurial, and self-reliant (Kupperschmidt, 2000). Gen Xers view work as a job and a learning opportunity to enhance marketability (Kupperschmidt, 2000). Gen Xers and Millennials rate work as less central to their lives,

value leisure more, and express a weaker work ethic than Baby Boomers and

Traditionalists (Twenge, 2010). Extrinsic values (i.e., rewards and recognition) are a

higher priority for Millennials than for Gen Xers (Twenge, 2010). This generation, along

with the Millennial generation, consistently ranks higher on individualistic

characteristics.

Baby boomers. People who are in the Baby Boomer cohort are service oriented,

dedicated, and have a team perspective, experience, and knowledge (Murphy, 2007).

They are driven, aim to please, and are team players, relationship focused, and service

oriented (Steelcase WorkSpace Futures, 2010). Members of this generation are known for

a competitive and self-actualization mindset. Baby Boomers typically have failed to

recognize their responsibility to mentor and prepare their successors; they have been seen

as being unsupportive of those in younger generations (Gilburg, 2008). They are said to

be indulgent, hedonistic, and pleasure seeking (Zemke et al., 2000) and are often

described as nonconformists who grew to be highly distrustful of authority figures

(Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). Primary motivators for the employees of this generation

are money, a corner office, and self-realization (Schaming, 2010). Baby Boomers possess

a strong work ethic and desire for recognition (Catalyst, 2012). They view work as a

challenge with an opportunity for advancement and see it as meaningful, purposeful, and

self-fulfilling; they view authority as untrustworthy and see themselves as the authority,

believe rewards and recognition are deserved, prefer leadership by consensus or

participation, and in general are idealists, optimistic, self-absorbed, self-directed, and

consensus builders (Kupperschmidt, 2000). In their study on work values, Chen and Choi

(2008) discovered that Baby Boomers scored higher on personal growth and altruism than younger generations.

Traditionalists. The Traditionalists possess the following traits: experience, enhanced knowledge, dedication, focus, stability, loyalty, emotional maturity, and perseverance (Murphy, 2007). They are generally portrayed as devoted and hard working with a willingness to defer personal gratification and to forego pleasure for later rewards (Adams, 1998; Smith & Clurman, 1997).

Traditionalists view education as a dream and leisure as a reward for hard work. They desire stability in life, a predicted career ladder, and are loyal and consistent. Members of this cohort also place a high value on integrity (Kim, 2008) and are dedicated (Schaming, 2010), hardworking, and respect authority (Rood, 2011). The primary motivators for this generation are security and status (Schaming, 2010). Traditionalists hold a wealth of valuable knowledge and experience. Many believe this generation views work as an obligation; they respect authority, take rational approaches, and produce quality work (Catalyst, 2012). Traditionalists are loyal to organizations and managers, prefer command-and-control management and hierarchy, view work as inherently valuable, and believe rewards and recognition are to be earned. In general, they are realists, team players, and practical (Kupperschmidt, 2000).

Similarities across generational cohorts. In addition to the discussion on differences, many similarities exist across the generations. Some of the areas of commonalities include preferences for privacy, learning, and change, which are very similar for all age groups (Deal, 2007; Rothe et al., 2012). Additionally, preferences concerning the use of virtual environments did not differ remarkably between older and

younger people (Rothe et al., 2012). In a study on Gen Xers and Millennials and their preferences for communication media, Wen et al.'s (2010) results showed similarities between individuals' choices of media based on task and perceived ease of use. In another study, Millennials and Generation Xers both scored higher on self-enhancement values than did the Baby Boomers and Traditionalists, showing that there are similarities at least between two closest generations (Lyons et al., 2007). Lyons et al. (2007) measured human values using the Schwartz value survey and found that the Millennials did not differ significantly from the Baby Boomers or Traditionalists on the values of openness to change and conservation. In another values study, leveraging Super's (1970) Work Values Inventory, Chen and Choi (2008) made observations across three generations relating to 15 work values; they found that "way of life" (p. 598) and "achievement" (p. 598) ranked as the most important work values by all generations. Additionally, there were no generational differences in altruistic values, such as wanting to help others (Twenge, 2010). Twenge (2010) also indicated that there were conflicting results related to the desire for job stability, intrinsic values, and social or affiliative values (e.g., making friends).

Differences across generational cohorts. The subtle differences and expressions of values in different ways are known to cause conflict at work. For example, the literature outlined that older and younger people have different ways of speaking that may affect communication between generations (Coupland, 2004; Deal, 2007; Harwood, Giles, & Ryan, 1995). Some differences in level of engagement are another potential source of conflict if expectations are not managed. One study found that Baby Boomers were the most engaged at 39%, followed by Gen Xers at 35%, Millennials at 16%, and

the Traditionalists at only 10% (BlessingWhite Inc., 2011). The differences appear to be the predominant focus in the literature; researchers debate whether there are enough longitudinal studies to validate these differences (Twenge, 2010). This calls into question if variables such as life stage and career stage should be removed from data comparisons (Twenge, 2010). Much of the literature discussed the tensions that arise in the workplace because of the lack of understanding the differences. As stated earlier, when employees interact in multigenerational teams, some differences can be a source of conflict (Bennett et al., 2012; Deal, 2007; Gilburg, 2008; Grenier, 2007; Murphy, 2007; Srinivasan, 2012; Wen et al., 2010). Conflict impacts retention, engagement, collaboration, performance, and ultimately the bottom line in organizations.

Continuing to build on the profile of generational characteristics, figures of the Canadian workforce demographics in 2010 indicated an age profile of 6.6% Traditionalists, 40.0% Baby Boomers, 32.7% Gen Xers, and 23.7% Millennials (Statistics Canada, 2014). In 2010, the United States labor profile by generation was 5% Traditionalists, 38% Baby Boomers, 32% Gen Xers, and 25% Millennials (Catalyst, 2012; United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Both Canada and the United States have similar representations of each generation. It is important to remember the evolution of these generations moving through their careers and the impact of vacancies left by Traditionalists and Baby Boomers on the younger generations. These shifts impact corporate culture since priorities, attitudes, and work styles differ with each generation (Murphy, 2007).

The following four categories of variables emerged through the literature review demonstrating differences across generations: skills and knowledge, views on rewards

and recognition, work values, and life values. Figure 1 provides a summary of the

differences for each generation compared against the workforce demographic, as well as

each generation's views of rewards and recognition, work values, and life values.

Generational Cohort	Years of Age in 2014	Workforce % in 2010	Skills & Knowledge	View of Rewards & Recognition	Work Values	Life Values
Traditionalists (1909–1945)	69–105	6.6% (CDN) 5.0% (USA)	• Wealth of valuable knowledge and experience	• Education seen as a reward • Motivated by status • Defer personal gratification	• Work viewed as obligation • Dedicated • Focused • Consistent • Emotional maturity • Perseverance • Devoted • Hard working • Respects authority • Produces quality work • Desires a predicted career ladder • Rational	• Stability • High integrity • Security • Tradition • Loyalty
Baby Boomers (1946–1964)	50–68	40.0% (CDN) 38.0% (USA)	• Knowledge able and experienced • Not been good about sharing their knowledge and experience	• Strong desire for recognition • Motivated by money and a corner office	• Strong work ethic • Service oriented • Dedicated • Team perspective • Competitive • Lacks discipline to see transitions through • Nonconformists • Highly distrustful of authority figures • Strong work ethic • Altruism	• Tradition • Entitlement • Indulgence • Hedonism • Self-realization • Self-actualization • Consensus • Personal growth
Gen Xers (1965–1979)	35–49	32.7% (CDN) 32.0% (USA)	• Not good about tapping into Boomers knowledge • Market savvy • Techno-literate/savvy • Competent	• Desire flex time/part time/ telecommuting • Seek balance between work and leisure	• Adaptable • Entrepreneurial • Independent • Creative • Pragmatic • Adaptive • Skeptical • Realistic • Self-reliant • Fun Loving	• Less traditional • Diversity • Freedom (transient/ free agents) • Open to change

Generational Cohort	Years of Age in 2014	Workforce % in 2010	Skills & Knowledge	View of Rewards & Recognition	Work Values	Life Values
Millennials (1980–2000)	14–34	23.7% (CDN) 25.0% (USA)	• Lack skills in knowing which communication medium is most appropriate for a given situation • Tech savvy • Active users of social media • Globally educated	• Appreciate meaningful work • Desire ongoing education • Believe in work life balance • Enjoy challenging work • Want immediate feedback	• Collaborative • Team oriented • Multitaskers • Entrepreneurial • Flexible • Prefer informal interaction (on demand) • Prefer experiential training • Rely heavily on technology for communication • Highly innovative • Achievement oriented • Work oriented • Optimistic • Confident • Independent • Individualist • Self-reliant • Socially active • Confident • Assertive • Sense of entitlement • Idealistic • Vocal about opinions • Highly available • High expectations of self and employers	• Nontraditional • Open to continuous change

Figure 1. Generational characteristics overview.

Note. CDN = Canadian; USA = United States of America.

Collaboration Foundations

Multiple critical elements are required to achieve collaborative capability as an individual and to effectively collaborate as a team. Scholarly review indicated the following foundations of collaboration: (a) values, beliefs, and attitudes; (b) trust; (c) interpersonal skills; and (d) communication skills.

Values, beliefs, and attitudes. An individual's value system (including work

values) is an important factor that impacts individual work-related behaviors (Chen &

Choi, 2008). Individuals' values influence their attitudes and behaviors (Chen & Choi,

2008). A collaborative relationship is seen when the motivating force of those involved is

a value of mutual concern for the good of the whole (Hattori & Lapidus, 2004). One

researcher explained, "All generations have similar values, they just express them

differently" (Deal, 2007, p. 21). Although it is clear that values are important for

collaboration, the research is not specific as to which values relate to collaboration. The

literature revealed discussion of the human values and work values but no specific

connection to intergenerational collaboration.

Trust. The literature on collaboration established the essential ingredient of trust.

It is important for leaders to provide an environment of trust in which all employees feel

free and interested to contribute to the organization's success (de Sousa et al., 2012). The

first and most important step in building a cohesive and functional team is the

establishment of trust, but not just any kind of trust. Teamwork must be built upon a solid

foundation of vulnerability-based trust (Lencioni, 2003). As Covey, Merrill, and Merrill

(1994) stated, "Trust is the glue of life. It's the most essential ingredient in effective

communication. It's the foundational principle that holds all relationships . . . together"

(p. 243). Without trust, assumptions generate conflict and inhibit cooperation between

generations (Gilburg, 2008). In one article, two case studies are presented that exemplify

how building trust lays the foundation for collaborative practices to produce exceptional

results (Hattori & Lapidus, 2004). Research makes it clear that trust is a pivotal value that

can significantly improve a company's performance in the global market. It is clear that

higher levels of trust are linked to cooperation, collaboration, and achieving engagement and retention of staff (Stetson-Rodriguez & Oliveira, 2012).

Interpersonal skills. Collaboration enables employees to form bonds and connections with one another, in effect building relationships. These relationships encourage employees to be engaged, which increases innovation, the creation of ideas and discoveries, within organizations. The more employees can share, communicate, collaborate, and engage with one another, the greater the flow of ideas is (Morgan, 2012). In the context of interpersonal relationships, success is defined as the ability to understand and respond to the perception of what another person needs or wants (Bushe, 2001; Canevello & Crocker, 2010). It's important to ask these questions when attempting to improve collaboration: What does the other person need? What are their preferences? Each generation views relationship building through their respective generation cohort lens. That lens has some commonalities and differences when it comes to building relationships. Some authors called attention to the need for employees to be able to work with a diverse group of people and highlighted the demand for people with good lateral skills, interpersonal skills, and the ability to work effectively with individuals who are very different them (Cohen et al., 2004). Substantial research indicated that relationships improve efficiency and reduce duplication, fragmentation, and waste through collaboration, coordination, communication, and leadership (Atwal & Caldwell, 2006; Covey & Merrill, 2006).

Communication skills. One key component to collaboration is communication. Both verbal and nonverbal communication skills, along with different media to support that communication, are vital to effective collaboration. Today, many nontraditional

communication tools exist, such as social networking tools, but not everyone has a good grasp on when to use which communication tool when (Gilburg, 2008). Literature revealed that learning when and how to use the media and when and how to supplement media with face-to-face interaction is key (Cohen et al., 2004; Wen et al., 2010).

The foundations of collaboration are some key building blocks for all generations. The literature review did not reveal research specific to connecting intergenerational collaboration to these elements. The research did, however, review enablers within a context of diversity. If diversity includes people from different generation cohorts, then values, beliefs, and attitudes; trust; interpersonal skills; and communication skills have an impact on multigenerational collaboration.

Generational Strengths

The literature review explored some differences and similarities across a multigenerational workforce. If differences are considered strengths, then there is a substantive amount of research indicating strengths from each generation in the following areas: skills and knowledge, views on rewards and recognition, work values, and life values. However, the research failed to provide substantive evidence indicating strengths from each generation that contribute towards effective intergenerational collaboration. Studies and reviews that focused on basic human values (Deal, 2007; Lyons et al., 2007; Schwartz, 2006) and work values (Chen & Choi, 2008; Parry & Urwin, 2011; Super, 1970) of a multigenerational workforce showed a strong potential for further exploration of strengths connected to intergenerational collaboration. For example, Chen and Choi (2008) suggested that further research be conducted "to identify the causal relationships between work values and other correlated variables, such as demographic and social

variables, cultural variables, motivation, work ethics, and organizational commitment"
(p. 18). Another area to seek intergenerational strengths is by researching senior
professionals that possess a number of skills and accumulated experience, as suggested
by Camarinha-Matos and Afsarmanesh (2012). One commonality across much of the
research indicated the significance of raising awareness of generational differences in
itself as a method to improve intergenerational relationships. The strengths are visible if
the lens through which they are viewed is changed.

Summary

The literature review suggested that the question posed by this study was worthy of
serious research and analysis. Abundant writings made clear the importance of
researching generational differences and the value of reducing tensions across the
generations. Scholars stressed the importance of collaboration contributing to the
performance of organizations and remaining competitive in a global economy.
Additionally, a number of the authors indicated benefits from the studies related to
improving human resource practices, such as recruiting, retention, and engagement.
Many opportunities exist to expand on the research conducted to date and to further
explore generational strengths that contribute to collaboration. Gaps in knowledge have
been highlighted, and the need for them to be examined further is evident. In conclusion,
in order to observe the relationship between values, skills, attitudes, and effective
intergenerational collaboration, more research is needed.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

This chapter details the action research approach and how appreciative inquiry was used within the methodology to support the study. It provides a description of the research design including how participants were selected, the research instruments used, the data analysis procedures and the considerations given to protect human subjects.

This study explored strengths of each generation that contribute to effective intergenerational collaboration. The research project sought to bring awareness to differences between the generations and being able to view them as strengths. Developing an appreciation for what strengths each generation brings to collaboration, provides an opportunity for organizations to enable diverse teams and ultimately improved business performance. The value of the research was to focus on ways to help corporate workers improve collaboration across a multigenerational workforce while helping organizations remain competitive. The study attempted to answer the question: What are the strengths of each generation that contribute towards effective intergenerational collaboration?

Research Approach

Action research is described as inquiry through collaborative action to identify, understand and plan resolution of problems (Glesne, 2011; Stringer, 2007). Coghlan and Brannick (2010) asserted that the goal is to make action research more effective while simultaneously building up a body of scientific knowledge. The literature is extensive and indicated that the diversity of action research is used in a variety of organizational contexts (Stringer, 2007, p. 15). Action research leads to an understanding of how

stakeholders "perceive, interpret, and respond to events related to the issue investigated" (Stringer, 2007, p. 19). The activities in action research are non-linear allowing for the interactions between observation, reflection, and action to become a complex process (Stringer, 2007, p. 9). Action research is used as a community-based process that aims to enhance the "lives of the participants" and utilize collaborative communication styles to build on the existing relationships (Stringer, 2007, p. 20). The focus of the action research stresses harmonious and collaborative methods to achieve goals and seeks "to build positive working relationships and productive communication styles" (Stringer, 2007, p. 20). This closeness leads to incorporating the understandings into the analysis without relying on the theoretical categories to build from them (Stringer 2007, p. 10).

The inquiry method chosen for this project was to follow in the footsteps of thought leaders David Cooperrider and Diana Whitney (2005) and focus on the positive and generative approach also known as "appreciative inquiry". Appreciative Inquiry (AI) takes the stance that the organization already possesses what is desired. AI is "a collaborative and highly participative, system wide approach to seeking, identifying and enhancing the "life-giving forces" that are present when a system is performing optimally in human, economic and organizational terms" (Watkins, Mohr, & Kelly, 2011, p. 22). Cooperrider (2012) has demonstrated through his research that "individuals and groups are always stronger when they have their successes and strengths in focus and will excel only by amplifying strengths, never by fixing weakness" (p. 1). By framing the inquiry questions in this study through the lens of AI, the emphasis is on discovering strengths and reaping greater value from the approach (Bushe, 2012; Watkins et al., 2011).

Research Design

Sampling. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) stated that the participation by the people in the action and inquiry process is an important qualitative element. The human-centered approach of qualitative research seeks to understand human behavior (Palys & Atchison, 2007). The strategy utilized within this study to select participants was through a combination of convenience and criterion sampling (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 111). Convenience sampling is used when the researcher relies on his or her own contacts to identify study participants. Criterion sampling means defining certain characteristics that the participants must have to take part in the study. In this case the criterion for the sample was individuals who collaborated with at least 2 other generations in a business environment.

Participants. The participants were selected from a single company that had representation from several generation cohorts. The population of this study consisted of participants from three out of the four generational cohorts working in business today. A total of 12 participants consented to participate in the research with representation of three from Baby Boomers, six from Generation Xers, and three from the Millennials as depicted in Table 2. The professional disciplines that these individuals represented were: business analysts and knowledge management advisors in the field of knowledge management and collaboration. The team leader and manager also participated in the research.

Table 2

Listing of Participant Demographics

Generational Cohorts	Age (at December 2013)	No. of Participants
Traditionalists born 1909–1945	68 and older	$n = 0$
Baby Boomers born 1946–1964	49–67	$n = 3$
Gen Xers born 1965–1979	34–48	$n = 6$
Millennials born 1980–2000	33 or younger	$n = 3$
Total Participants		$N = 12$

The research inquiry team that conducted the action research consisted of the principal researcher and one associate in the role of "observer".

Setting. The researcher leveraged existing relationships with an intact team working at an international energy company in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. The company had approximately 18,000 staff and contractors at the time of the study. The knowledge management and collaboration team fit the criterion for the sample population and was invited to participate in both the surveys and the workshop. The team was part of the chief process information office, under information management and had existing working relationships across multiple generations within the department and across multiple business units.

Instrumentation. Grounded in qualitative and quantitative research, this action research project investigated and exposed the strengths in generational approaches to

collaboration. Two research instruments were chosen for the inquiry in order to obtain the necessary data. The methods used were online surveys and a workshop. The survey questionnaires were designed to include a mixture of qualitative and quantitative questions. The preworkshop survey and postworkshop survey were conducted using Qualtrics (2014), a third party research tool. Using an electronic version of the survey "enhanced[d] usability in three major ways: design, control, and accessibility" (Palys & Atchison, 2007, p. 183). Research questions were developed with careful consideration and required "creativity and insight" (Maxwell, as cited in Glesne, 2011, p. 104). Question development is a critical element, since how the questions are worded makes a significant difference in the views, ideas, and stories elicited from the participants. The AI focused questions directed the research toward appreciation and steered the attention of the participants toward the inquiry rather than pathology (Coghlan & Brannick, 2010).

Preworkshop survey. The preworkshop survey was designed to prompt participants to warm up to the research topic and start preparing for the workshop. The presession survey questions were constructed to collect data from each prospective research participant and to receive their consent to participate. The questions were constructed based on collecting some basic demographic information (generation cohort), and an appreciative approach to identifying three strengths of each generation for effective intergenerational collaboration. The option to provide a purely qualitative response was available or a choice was available from a selection of work values, life values, and skills. The participant's name was requested in order to link presession survey results with postsession survey results. As per best practices in research, the survey questions were piloted to assist in clarifying the questions and to increase

readiness and preparedness of data gathering (Glesne, 2011, pp. 56–57). The questions

were piloted by 10 people who were chosen by the researcher to ensure instructions were

clear, questions were relevant, and responses were usable. Questions and formatting were

refined to improve the quality of the questionnaire and final survey questions can be

viewed in Appendix A. In conjunction with the presession survey, an AI communication

overview was provided to introduce participants to the approach of the inquiry.

   Postworkshop survey. The postworkshop survey questions were constructed to

collect data from each workshop participant (see Appendix B). The survey was designed

to repeat many of the same questions as the preworkshop survey, plus three additional

questions. The design was set up to observe whether a change in responses had occurred

after the workshop intervention. The questions in the postsession survey included a

request for their name (in order to link presession survey results with postsession survey

results) and generation cohort. The next three questions were identifying 3 strengths of

each generation for effective intergenerational collaboration with only qualitative

responses allowed. A reflection question was asked related to whether the experience of

participating in the study had improved their ability to collaborate with multi-

generational teams and what had changed for them. The last question was to determine if

they would like a copy of the final research paper.

   Workshop. A workshop was conducted using a qualitative approach to gather data

on the research question. A detailed framework of the AI workshop can be viewed in

Appendix C. The overall flow for the workshop began with an introduction to the

research topic and AI. Potential benefits that the participants might gain form study were

discussed before breaking up the team members into 3 cohorts.

Discover phase. Each generation cohort worked together at respective stations on the "discover" phase of the inquiry. The stories shared were about appreciating and valuing the best of generational strengths contributing to collaboration. Each person was interviewed by another group member and answered a series of questions relating to; their best experience that they had collaborating with other generations, what they valued about the collaborative experience, what they believed was the core value for their generation, what core strengths their generation brings to collaboration and what their wishes were for making their company the best, most exciting and collaborative environment.

Dream phase. After the "discover" phase was completed, three groups were formed with a mixture of generations (two groups had representation from all three cohorts and one group had only a mixture of Gen Xers and a Boomer) to visualize what could be present in the future of collaboration at ABC company. They discussed important themes that were key to them during the Discover phase and that they agreed were most important to be present in the future state. They were to Dream about the possibilities of the future where these themes were fully present and fully expressed with respect to multigenerations collaborating.

Design phase. After the Dream phase, the entire group gathered in a circle to dialogue briefly about how they might "design" moving forward with what should be. Each person spoke to a commitment that they would take forward from this day.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data were collected from the presession survey, the workshop, and the postsession survey. The workshop data were collected through using voice recorders at

each station, content written on each flip chart (at each station), plus observation notes from the researcher and the dedicated observer. The data generated from the inquiry went through a process that included both organization and interpretation (Stringer, 2007). Transcription of all handwritten data collected was completed as an initial step to the analysis. The surveys provided both quantitative and qualitative data, which were analyzed first using Qualtrics survey tool analytic capabilities to generate results. The results were then added to the overall pool of data, which were first organized, then analyzed, and finally compiled into common themes. The next step was to validate the data through triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 221). Increased trustworthiness of the data and the research was achieved through rigor in the data analysis procedures.

Triangulation enhances the credibility of the study "when multiple sources of information are incorporated" (Stringer, 2007, p. 58). The data collected from both methods were reviewed by the researcher followed by a compare-and-contrast exercise against the current literature related to the findings. This process enhanced the results and validated the themes derived from the data collected. By including diverse perspectives elicited by more than one research method, meaning could be clarified and the perception of the data identified (Stringer, 2007, p. 58). Triangulation was a pivotal part of the action research inquiry, as it aided in ensuring trustworthiness by addressing credibility (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

The analysis "is the process of distilling large quantities of information to uncover significant features and elements that are embedded in the data" (Stringer, 2007, p. 95). The analysis was based in grounded theory where patterns and themes were discovered

(Glesne, 2011, p. 187). The three activities necessary in all qualitative data analysis are data reduction, data display, and conclusions drawn (Punch, 2005, p. 198). To code the data, the researcher reviewed, selected, interpreted, and summarized the findings. The data were finally summarized into key findings and consolidated as conclusions about the research.

Protection of human subjects. This section describes the approval process, the selection of participants, processes to maintain confidentiality, and the storage of data. Each process is discussed in turn.

Approval process. Prior to the data gathering, a verbal discussion on the project background took place with both the manager and team leader of the targeted participant team. This was done in order to explain the project and generate interest in their participation in the study. After verbal agreement had been obtained, an Informed Letter of Consent was signed by the team manager, providing approval on behalf of the energy company (see Appendix D). Approval to conduct the proposed research study was obtained from Professor Ann Feyerherm. It was noted that the principal researcher also completed the training course, "Protecting Human Research Participants," offered by the National Institutes of Health Office of Extramural Research (n.d.).

Participation. After formal approval of the project was received, a meeting invite was then sent out from the team leader to the entire Knowledge and Collaboration team, inviting them to participate in the study. A subsequent communication requesting the participants to provide their consent through completing the prerequisite presession survey was sent out two weeks prior to the workshop. Each participant was asked to review and complete the prerequisite survey, ask any questions to the principal researcher

prior to completing the survey and then consent to participate. Only participants that responded to the survey, and provided consent were permitted to attend the workshop. There was no cost to the participants to participate in this study nor was any financial incentive given for doing so. The only inconvenience was a break in their productivity on the job.

Confidentiality. Any risk to participants' confidentiality was further mitigated by conducting the workshop in a private meeting room. All participant responses were kept confidential. Only aggregate data were reported in the research. The data were maintained securely during the data collection by remaining in the possession of the researcher at all times.

Storage of data. Once the collection of data was completed, the data were stored in a locked file cabinet at a secured facility and within a password protected laptop belonging to the researcher. It will be kept in this location for five years following the study and then destroyed. A copy of the final report was provided to individual participants upon request.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the research method of action research and explained the rational for incorporating Appreciative Inquiry into the approach for conducting the workshop and surveys. The research design, the data analysis process and a description of steps taken for the protection of human subjects was also reviewed. Chapter 4 provides the detailed action research findings, and the resulting conclusions.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter details the findings of the action research and describes the data collection results. The first section presents the qualitative data gathered during a workshop. The second section presents the quantitative and qualitative data gathered during the preworkshop and postworkshop surveys with the same research participants. The third section discusses cross-generational team dynamics and diversity, followed by the final section, which presents reflections.

Qualitative Data – Workshop

The workshop revealed some key themes through Watkins et al.'s (2011) discover, dream, and design phases of the AI workshop. There were a total of 11 participants in the workshop (two Millennials, six Gen Xers, and three Baby Boomers).

Discover phase. Four subgroups were formed, segregated by generational cohort, the first group included a pair of Millennials, groups two and three each had three Gen Xers, and the fourth group included the trio of Baby Boomers. Each group explored a series of questions to appreciate the best of generational strengths contributing to collaboration. Each person was interviewed by another group member and answered a series of questions relating to their best experience that they had collaborating with other generations, what they valued about the collaborative experience, what they believed was the core value for their generation, what core strengths their generation brings to collaboration, and what their wishes were for making their company the best, most exciting and collaborative environment.

The outcome from the Millennials paired interviews revealed Millennials have the following key strengths that their generation brings to effective intergenerational collaboration: a mindset of being "open to change," "innovation," are very capable with "relationship and networking "skills (with particular focus on use of social media as a medium), have highly adapted "technology skills," and a sense of "immediacy" (they dig in and get the work done). Generation X trios reported that they contributed to collaboration through being sensitive to asking others to be "involved," having "respect" for others, through working "autonomously," bringing "adaptability," needing to feel "appreciated and valued," through a "pragmatic" approach, by collaborating only when there is a clear "purpose and reason," and by being "generation brokers." These attributes were all seen as important contributions that their generation brings to collaboration. The Baby Boomer trio noted that they bring a sense of "tolerance and respect" for others with less labeling and judging, they also bring "resilience and flexibility" (good with change because they have had lots of it) and "wisdom and experience" (through years of living). The top strengths that the participants found to be particularly important for their generation, related to intergenerational collaboration, are depicted in Table 3.

Table 3

Generational Strengths Towards Effective Intergenerational Collaboration

Generational Cohort	Generational Strengths
Millennials	- Change - Innovation - Relationships and networking - Technology - Immediacy
Gen X – Group A	- Sense of Involvement – being asked to be involved - Respect - Adaptability - Pragmatic - Generation Brokers – mix of skills applied between generations, transfer wisdom gained from before to lower generations
Gen X – Group B	- Involvement - Autonomy - Appreciated/valued - Purpose/reason
Baby Boomers	- Tolerance & Respect – less labeling and less judging - Resilience & Flexibility – good with change, had lots of it - Wisdom & Experience – years of living

Important factors for intergenerational collaboration. As part of the workshop, participants were asked to review the collection of generational strengths and indicate which three were most important to them; the following trends appeared. All generations agreed that "relationships and networking," "innovation," and "adaptability" are the most important factors for intergenerational collaboration. There was some agreement amongst subgroups on leading themes including Gen Xers and Baby Boomers in agreement that to be "appreciated and valued," and to have "tolerance and respect" for others are the most

important elements. Additionally, the Millennials and Gen Xers agreed that having a "purpose and reason" to collaborate is key, as is having a sense of "involvement." Finally, both Gen X groups cited "involvement" as a key factor in intergenerational collaboration.

Dream phase. Three groups were formed with a mixture of generations (two groups had representation from all three cohorts and one group had only a mixture of Gen Xers and a Boomer) to visualize what could be present in the future of collaboration at the sponsoring company. The groups discussed important themes that were key to them during the discover phase and that they agreed were most important to be present in the future state. They were to dream about the possibilities of the future where these themes were fully present and fully expressed with respect to multigenerations collaborating.

One group revealed that their future included an organization in which "three generations lift the current generation. The older generation is passing the batons." Their possibility statement was as follows:

> The company is an organization that is driven forward through continuous strategic alignment and line of sight to goals. Our open-table approach enables, supports and reinforces collaboration to achieve business outcomes and to transform and evolve our knowledge of the past to realize our goals.

A second group discussed some of the top themes. "Innovation" was believed to be an important theme, as the Millennial explained, "Innovation is about getting enjoyment out of finding creative solutions to problems." Doing the same old thing did not resonate with Millennials or Baby Boomers. When discussing what Gen Xers meant by the terms "appreciated and value" as a top theme, one Gen Xer explained, "We just want to feel that our contribution is valued. We want to make a difference. This aligns with respect too. It's about having respectful conversations across the generations and

personalities." This group presented their possibility statement as follows: "Imagine the possibilities working together so we all win!"

The third group discussed the importance of having a more fluid or free relationship building and networking opportunity. They wanted an organization in which there was little fear of people reaching out to connect with others across hierarchal boundaries. They spoke of an ideal state in which people could draw on different sources of information (older people, networks, documents, and other data sources in computers). Their possibility statement was as follows: "The company is a place where . . . everyone is open to new ideas, people connect without discrimination (work level, age, etc.), and it is easy to connect to people, networks and information."

Design phase. During the design phase, participants took a first step towards "co-constructing the future" (Watkins et al., 2011, p. 86). Participants declared commitments during the final phase of the workshop. All participants expressed something they would do to bring their image of the future to life. Table 4 summarizes participants' commitments.

Themes of having heightened awareness of "diversity," being "open to change," having more "tolerance and respect" and enabling "innovation" emerged as key components for an improved future of collaborating with multigenerations.

Table 4

Participants' Commitments to Bringing the Future Image to Life

Generation	Commitment	Theme
Millennial	We were able to break down different values in each generation. I commit to considering those values when collaborating.	Diversity
Gen X	Learn from the younger generation, not just the older generations. Members of the younger generation have a lot to offer and a different perspective.	Diversity
Gen X	Understand people's differences.	Diversity
Gen X	I commit to stay curious about the possibilities.	Open to Change
Gen X	I commit to more tolerance and respect for all the people I work with.	Tolerance and Respect
Gen X	To remain unbiased when presented with ideas.	Respect
Baby Boomer	Avoid labeling and discrimination.	Tolerance and Respect
Baby Boomer	Looking for new fresh ideas in every corner wherever I am, no matter who I'm around.	Innovation

Quantitative and Qualitative Data – Preworkshop and Postworkshop Surveys

Each research participant in the study completed a preworkshop and postworkshop survey. There were a total of 12 participants in the preworkshop survey, including three Millennials, six Gen Xers, and three Baby Boomers. There was one less Millennial in the postworkshop survey (i.e., a total of 11 participants). The surveys measured individual perspectives on generational strengths, challenges, attitudes,

diversity, expectations, and best experience collaborating on a multigenerational team. Additionally, a reflection question was asked in the postsession survey related to whether the experience of participating in the study had improved their ability to collaborate with multigenerational teams, and what, if anything, had changed for them. The following subsections discuss the topics covered by questions asked in the preworkshop and postworkshop surveys and provide a summary of participants' responses.

Strengths that Millennials bring to effective intergenerational collaboration. The number one strength for Millennials is "active use of collaborative tools." Other top strengths include "readily shares knowledge," which 5/12 participants selected in the presession survey and 3/11 participants selected in the postsession survey, and "technically savvy," which 6/12 participants selected in the presession survey and only 3/11 participants selected in the postsession survey. "Highly innovative" had only 2/12 responses in the presession survey but increased to 4/11 responses in the postsession survey. Some interesting changes included "prefers informal interaction," which had 6/12 responses in the presession survey and zero responses in the postsession survey. In summary, the top strengths that Millennials bring to intergenerational collaboration are "active use of collaborative tools," "readily shares knowledge," "technically savvy," and "highly innovative."

Some support for the Millennial strengths shined through with a quote from a Gen Xer when she said,

> I work closely with a Millennial. We started using project management software to collaboratively share and comment on our work. This was a real shift away from email for me. It opened up new and more manageable ways to handle information, better sharing and put our ideas together in one place.

Strengths that Gen Xers bring to effective intergenerational collaboration.

There was a greater distribution of responses for Gen Xer strengths versus the other two generations. "Enjoys challenges" received 6/12 responses in the presession survey and 5/11 responses in the postsession survey. "Values achievement" received 4/12 responses in the presession survey and 3/11 responses in the postsession survey. Other strengths that had several responses that were relatively consistent across the surveys included "adaptable" and "open to continuous change." An outlier was "team oriented," which initially had no responses in the presession survey, and increased to 3/11 responses in the postsession survey. In summary, the top strengths for Gen Xers include "enjoys challenges," "values achievement," "adaptable," "open to continuous change," and "team oriented," as each of these strengths received the highest number of responses in both surveys. Some support for the Gen Xer strengths materialized through the eyes of the researcher and dedicated observer when they both witnessed a higher level of eagerness to contribute than with the other generations. This suggests a higher ambition of reaching the goals of the team.

Strengths that Baby Boomers bring to effective intergenerational collaboration. In both the presession and postsession surveys, "experience" received 9/12 and 7/11 responses, respectively. "Solid work ethic" appeared to be a more important strength in the presession survey with 7/12 responses, but it still appeared in the postsession survey as a strength with 3/11 responses. "Dedicated" responses increased from 3/12 responses to 4/11 responses in the postsession survey. According to the number of responses, "experience" is a top strength that Boomers bring to effective intergenerational collaboration, followed by "solid work ethic" and being "dedicated."

One Gen Xer shared the following comment that backed up the top strengths for Baby Boomers: "Different people bring a fresh perspective. There is something to be said about experience that older generations pass on."

Validation of strengths. Some of the top responses from the surveys were validated by some of the discovery phase themes. Millennials listed "change*,*" "technology," and "innovation" as three of their primary strengths. Gen Xers put forward "appreciated and valued" and "adaptability" as two of their leading strengths. Baby Boomers listed "wisdom and experience" as one of their fundamental themes. Some of these same themes also arose in the survey results, demonstrating consistency in the findings. Millennials and Gen Xers strength in "change" and "adaptability" surfaced in a number of conversations throughout the workshop. During the dream phase one Millennial reflected on an earlier conversation and said, "We talked about a key theme as willingness to embrace change. We want change, we want constant change and innovation is a part of that." A Gen-X participant confirmed, "It's important that there is always new and interesting work."

Further validation of the emerging strengths was found through observations from the researcher and the dedicated observer. For example, during the discovery interviews, the Millennials used iPads to capture notes, which shows their preference for "active use of collaborative tools" and "technically savvy skills." Additionally, during the dream phase, Gen Xers showcased a "pragmatic" approach, encouraging "involvement" from others and who put pen to paper first playing a "generation broker" role. In each group, a Gen Xer initiated the drawing of ideas from the group (whether on their own piece of

paper or the flip chart paper). In two of the groups a Gen Xer led the drawing on the flip chart paper, while in the third group a Millennial led the drawing on the flip chart paper.

Cross-Generational Team Dynamics and Diversity

Team dynamics play a critical role in collaboration and ultimately team performance. Some of the questions asked in the surveys gathered data on cross-generational perspectives that took into consideration the following: preferences for generational spread on teams, difficulties on teams, reflections on working in cross-generational teams, learning from different generations, and the expectations of different generations. The following are results from these questions and provide context around cross-generational team dynamics.

Preferences for generational spread on teams. The majority of the participants indicated their first-ranked answer as "the generational spread makes no difference to me" followed by "everyone from different generations" in the second ranked response. What followed was the third-ranked response, "at most 2 generations," and finally, "everyone from the same generation" in the fourth-ranked position. The outcome indicated that diversity in generations working together is believed to be important for intergenerational collaboration.

Difficulties on teams. Almost identical responses were received on the pre and postsurveys to the statement, "I noticed that difficulties on teams come from people of different generations." Only two participants agreed with the statement, two participants were neutral (only one person was neutral in the postsession survey), and eight participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Overall, as a group, participants agreed that difficulties on teams do not come from people of different

generations. In fact, this theme was backed up by one of the Baby Boomers themes from

the discover phase; this participant indicated that conflicts that arise are "less about

generation [differences] and more about personalities." Several participants explicitly

stated this theme, including a Baby Boomer who shared,

> I may be an anomaly for my generation as I have always felt able to work well
> with people of all ages, levels, perspectives. It's often personalities rather than
> generations that challenge collaborative effectiveness. [For example] Myer's
> Briggs and personalities are more important for collaboration than generational
> differences.

This sentiment was also echoed by a Gen Xer who indicated differences in personalities

as being a factor in collaboration, "[I was] made more aware of generational differences

and differences in personalities [outside of generations]." Additionally, a nonbiased

observer in the workshop indicated,

> In one instance of difficulty observed, I didn't observe this in the other two
> participants in the same generation. So I made the connection of the difficulty on
> teams to come from personality not generation.

Reflections on working in cross-generational teams. An overwhelming

majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed with the following survey statement:

"When I think about working in cross-generational teams, I have mostly positive

thoughts." This response, on both surveys, aligns with earlier results that indicate

diversity on teams is favorable.

Learning from different generations. The majority of respondents either

strongly agreed or agreed that they "learn more when I'm working with people of

different generations." A minority of the group was neutral on this subject, along with

one Millennial who indicated that he or she disagreed with the statement. In the

presession survey most respondents indicated they strongly agree versus in the

postsession survey participants' responses were more evenly split between strongly agree and agree. Once again, the results indicate that diversity in generations working together is believed to be important.

The expectations of different generations. There was a split amongst respondents with a slightly heavier weighting on the disagree or strongly disagree side of the following statement: "The expectations of different generations makes it hard to work together effectively." Four respondents were neutral, while only one person agreed with the statement. An observer in the workshop supported the majority of the respondents in that she too disagreed with the statement presented on the surveys. The observer indicated, "The team has a previous working relationship and is able to move through any expectation issues thus not affecting the effectiveness of completing the task." The data revealed that the expectations of different generations do not make it hard to work together. The results indicate that diversity in generations working together is not a hindrance.

Diversity. The theme of diversity is an important factor for collaboration and favorable for the participants given their responses to multiple survey questions. One such question, "When I think about working in cross generational teams, I have mostly positive thoughts," showed no disagreement and in fact the majority of participants indicated they agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. In another question, "I find that I learn more when I'm working with people of different generations," the majority of the group agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

Additionally, the diversity between the generations can be seen as strengths, as was noted by a Baby Boomer participant:

Our 8-person team included veterans, boomers and gen-Xers, which ultimately proved to be a key success factor in completing this work. The unique combination of people, generations, knowledge, energy and experience combined to beneficially influence the work as it was in progress, and the results. Each of us learned to value and appreciate each other's capabilities and attributes in our quest for balanced and pragmatic outcomes. Our approach, plans, activities, and recommendations benefited from multiple perspectives and healthy debate. Our team composition actually helped us reach, engage, and inspire other company employees because our audiences and stakeholders found someone on the team they could identify with. To this day, I believe that multigenerational teams are valuable, especially if they have informed and motivated leadership. Intergenerational collaboration done well can both expose and leverage the perceptions, bias and advantages that each age brings to the work/team.

A Gen-X participant also acknowledged the value of diversity in intergenerational collaboration and said,

I have commonly worked in multigenerational team environments throughout my career, and have found almost all of them to be significant learning experiences. [In one example,] we had a powerful mix of experience and new thinking at the table, which continuously helped to foster a practical sense of creative tension that successfully negotiated enthusiasm for developing new approaches with the wisdom of not simply charging ahead.

The value of diversity was also recognized by another Gen Xer when he shared his experience: "One thing we did is to focus on team building and working in small project teams with diverse people to spread the different skills and build appreciation for each other."

The data from the surveys suggest that diversity emerged as a somewhat implicitly stated important factor for intergenerational collaboration. Diversity was never explicitly stated in themes collected through the workshop, but this concept surfaced by the majority of the group as a key factor of success in collaborating with multigenerations.

Reflections

The following section provides data collected from the postsession survey that provided feedback on participants' reflections of the workshop. The feedback includes actions taken by participants and improvements on their ability to collaborate with multigenerational teams.

Actions taken by participants after the workshop. On the postsession survey participants were asked to reflect on the workshop and select one or more of the actions listed. In response to this question, the majority of participants selected, "acknowledged my own strengths that I bring to collaboration," and many selected the option, "acknowledged my own values that I bring to collaboration." Some Millennials and one Gen Xer chose the option "had better conversations with people of different generations." Several Gen Xers and one Millennial selected the option, "made a commitment to improve how I collaborate with other generations." Some Baby Boomers and one Gen Xer chose the option, "have done nothing different." None of the participants selected the response, "reached out to someone of a different generation to collaborate with (something that I might not normally have done)." The workshop intervention appears to have moved the majority of participants to acknowledge their own strengths that they bring to collaboration. A summary of these results is depicted in Table 5.

Table 5

Actions Taken by Participants after Reflection from the Workshop

Response	No. of Responses	Responses by Generation
Acknowledged my own values that I bring to collaboration	5	Baby Boomer (1) Gen X (2) Millennial (2)
Acknowledged my own strengths that I bring to collaboration	7	Baby Boomer (2) Gen X (3) Millennial (2)
Reached out to someone of a different generation to collaborate with (something that I might not normally have done)	0	None
Had better conversations with people of different generations	3	Gen X (1) Millennial (2)
Made a commitment to improve how I collaborate with other generations	4	Gen X (3) Millennial (1)
Have done nothing different	3	Gen X (1) Baby Boomer (2)

Improvements on ability to collaborate with multigenerational teams. The postsurvey asked respondents, "Through your entire experience of participating in the study, have you improved your ability to collaborate with multi-generational teams?" The group's responses to this question were split, with half of the participants selecting either "no improvement" and "very little improvement" and the other half selecting either "some improvement" or "significant improvement." Baby Boomers appeared to experience the least improvement, while the Millennials found the most improvement. A majority of Gen Xers recognized "some improvement" and some participants indicated

that they acquired a heightened awareness and additional insights from the workshop that were beneficial. A summary of the responses can be viewed in Table 6.

Table 6

Participants Perspective on Improvement After the Workshop

Responses	No. of Responses	Responses by Generation
No improvement	4	Baby Boomer (2) Gen X (2)
Very little improvement	1	Baby Boomer (1)
Some improvement	5	Gen X (4) Millennial (1)
Significant improvement	1	Millennial (1)
Outstanding improvement	0	None

One Millennial explained his improvement in the following way:

> I try to make a more conscious effort to see the different strengths of each generation and be more aware of the different values each generation may have and how it affects their work. This helps me understand where people are coming from a lot better, which results in better tolerance and more positive outlooks and outcomes. I recognize more deeply my own strengths and values, and it makes me think more about how I can contribute these strengths of mine to the team.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the action research. The first section described the results from the appreciative inquiry workshop. The workshop revealed generational strengths towards effective intergenerational collaboration, which is summarized in Table 3, and a summary of important factors for intergenerational collaboration, dreams for what could be present in the future of collaboration, and finally participants' commitments to bringing the future image to life are presented in Table 4.

The second section presented the findings of the preworkshop and postworkshop surveys on strengths that each generation brings to effective intergenerational collaboration. The third section discussed cross-generational team dynamics and diversity, highlighting preferences for a range of generations on teams, difficulties on teams are not derived from different generations working together, positive reflections on working in cross-generational teams, learning from different generations, the lack of generational expectations, and the importance of diversity in collaboration. The final section presented actions taken by participants after reflection from the workshop, and these are summarized in Table 5. Chapter 5 will draw conclusions from the intergenerational action research, make recommendations to organization development practitioners, discuss limitations of the study, and offer suggestions for further research.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to address the question: What are the strengths of each generation that contribute towards effective intergenerational collaboration? The value of the research was to focus on ways to improve collaboration across a multigenerational workforce while helping organizations improve business performance. This chapter details the conclusions from the intergenerational action research, offers recommendations to organization development practitioners who want to improve business performance, and discusses limitations of the study. Finally, this chapter provides suggestions for further research and a report summary.

Conclusions

This section outlines the key findings and conclusions that have emerged from the research. The key findings are as follows: foundations of intergenerational collaboration, generational cohort strengths, and the individual contribution to collaborative behavior.

Foundations of intergenerational collaboration. The study revealed that having a "purpose/reason" to collaborate, "respect" for others, being asked to be "involved," being "adaptable," building "relationships and networking," being "innovative," and being supportive of diversity are all foundational elements and strengths for intergenerational collaboration. The principal researcher concluded that these elements are key to building collaboration across multiple generations in organizations. These factors are subsequent building blocks on a more traditional view of key enablers of collaboration as discussed in the literature review, such as values, beliefs, and attitudes;

trust; interpersonal skills; and communication skills. Collectively these foundational

elements are depicted in Figure 2.
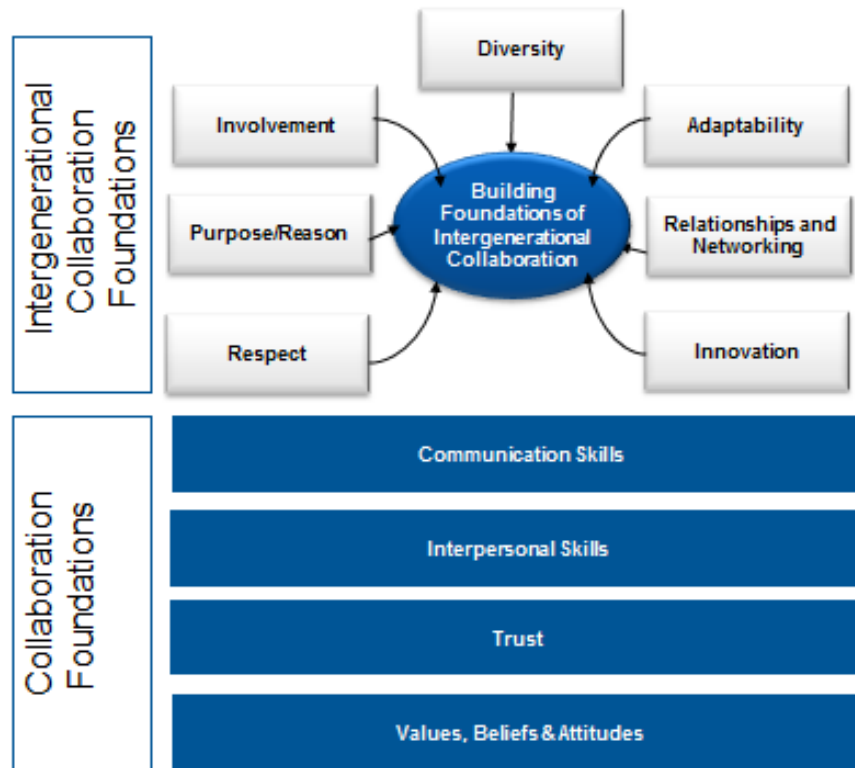
Figure 2. Foundations of intergenerational collaboration.

   The value added from the new data means that organizations that are interested in

improving business performance should give considerations to the key building blocks

required for working together in a multigenerational workforce. This aligns with some of

the work from Srinivasan (2012), who explained that IBM has consciously built skills

and perspectives between generations to improve collaboration. Additionally, it is

important to understand that the foundations may be expressed in different ways by

different generations as they communicate, build trust, and establish relationships. For

example, adaptability emerged as foundational for intergenerational collaboration but all

groups expressed this using slightly different language. The following words were used

to describe this key element: "change" (Millennials), "adaptability" (Gen Xers), and "flexibility" (Boomers). Understanding the language in the context was key to understanding the perspective and definition of a word. Each generation expressed themselves using different language and with a slightly different perspective on what that word means to them. Programs such as leadership development, knowledge retention, staff retention, and performance management are just a sample of areas that could potentially benefit by building collaborative competencies in the foundational elements. Teams that have the foundational elements of intergenerational collaboration are better set up for a higher functioning level and capability to innovate and solve organizational issues.

Generational cohort strengths. A review of the entire study led to the following findings relating to the strengths that each generation brings to intergenerational collaboration. These findings are depicted in Table 7.

The generational strengths identified provide new data and a fresh lens for a field that is analyzing generational differences related to skills and knowledge, work values, and life values. The strengths discovered in the study support some of the work values and life values that were listed for each generation in Table 3. The strengths are important elements of understanding a generation with unique attitudes, behaviors, and experiences that can contribute to creating a culture of collaboration. Individuals who are aware of their own strengths and the natural strengths of each generation may be able to understand others better, recognize how they are perceived, and realize how their strengths synthesize well with others.

Table 7

Strengths that Each Generation Contributes Towards Effective Intergenerational Collaboration

Generation	Strengths
Millennials	• Active use of collaborative tools • Technically savvy • Readily shares knowledge • Highly innovative • Open to continuous change
Gen Xers	• Enjoys challenges • Values achievement • Adaptable • Team oriented • Open to continuous change
Baby Boomers	• Experience • Solid work ethic • Dedicated

The outcomes from this research support the significance of raising awareness of generational strengths in itself as a method to improve intergenerational relationships. This research supports the increasing emphasis for organizations to understand and manage the expectations of different generations as a means to decrease discrimination, reduce generational conflicts, attract talent, and retain talent. Improved business performance can be achieved if individuals have an appreciation that people may express their strengths in diverse ways and that this contributes to improving team performance. There are also implications from the research concerning understanding diverse collaborative strengths when developing policies or programs that may tap into inherent strengths to improve the connection between the generations. Some applications of this may be in programs for knowledge management, continuous improvement, or mentoring.

The individual contribution. Outcomes from the research indicate that the individual values, beliefs, strengths, and personality are still the strongest factors contributing to collaborative behavior, regardless of people's age or generational cohort. A proposed model to describe the layers of influence on intergenerational collaborative behavior is depicted in Figure 3. The researcher proposes that there is a range of influencers contributing to intergenerational collaborative behavior that involve personality having the greatest influence. In descending order of influence on collaborative behavior are generational experience, life experience, and environment. The study revealed qualitative data to support that there are better predictors of collaborative behavior than just generational experience. This supports research that found that "some of the characteristics of generations are, in fact, more dependent on experience and life stage than on generational issues" (Rothe et al., 2012). Team members are not always aware of generational strengths because personality appears to be a more prevalent factor in contributing towards intergenerational collaborative behavior. Personality strengths can obscure generational strengths, yet generational strengths can be uncovered if attention is focused on it. When considering individuals on teams, the study revealed that the whole person is perhaps not taken into account when collaborating and many assumptions are made focusing on differences without seeking out strengths. By focusing on the positive rather than on the negative, the researcher believes that team performance can be improved by embracing the diversity and intentionally focusing on strengths in the early stages of team development.
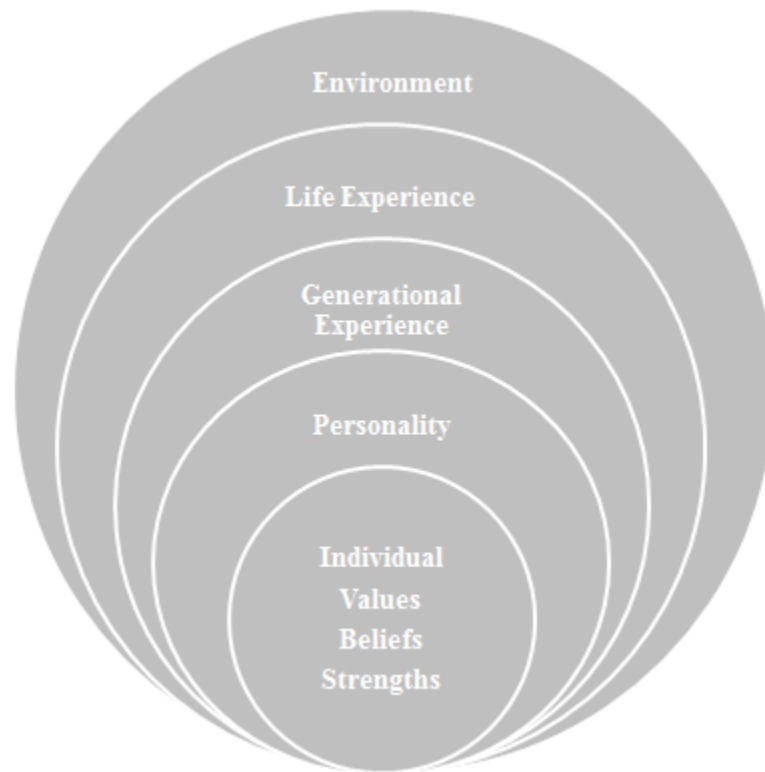
Figure 3. Impacts on collaborative behavior.

Appreciating that collaboration involves humans with many influencers on collaborative competency development may help inform leaders in developing policies and programs. This appreciative lens is part of closing the gap on organization issues related to diverse perspectives, priorities, and work styles.

Reflection on Literature Review

The results of the study have outcomes that both support and conflict with literature reviewed previously. The conclusions clearly supported the literature on unique differences for each generation, but conflicted with research that investigated conflict between generations as a result of differences as well as research that revealed no differences between the generations.

The study results confirmed that there are unique differences between the generations in their work and communication styles (Bennett et al., 2012; Coupland, 2004; Deal, 2007; Harwood et al., 1995; Murphy, 2007; Wen et al., 2010). In particular, Millennials were observed to be technologically savvy, active users of technology, team oriented, and highly innovative, which supported several authors (Catalyst, 2012; Glass, 2007; Martin, 2005; Shih & Allen, 2007; Smola & Sutton, 2002; Srinivasan, 2012; Tapscott, 1998). Gen Xers' adaptability, comfort with change, and value of achievement supported results from other researchers (Catalyst, 2012; Gilburg, 2008; Howe & Strauss, 1993; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Lyons et al., 2007; Murphy, 2007). The results with regards to Baby Boomers' strengths in experience, dedication, and strong work ethic supported the work of Catalyst (2012) and Murphy (2007). Finally, some of the foundations for intergenerational collaboration aligned with the work of Kouzes and Posner (2007) and Senge (2006) who indicated that a common vision or goal was needed, which aligned with the study results that indicated the need for purpose or reason to collaborate.

There were some notable conflicts with earlier research. One such area was a discussion on differences in multigenerational teams as being a source of conflict (Bennett et al., 2012; Deal, 2007; Gilburg, 2008; Grenier, 2007; Murphy, 2007; Srinivasan, 2012; Wen et al., 2010). The evidence provided in the preworkshop and postworkshop surveys indicated that difficulties on teams do not come from people of different generations, as people wanted to work with other generations, learned more from other generations, and diversity was embraced. Another area of conflict was with respect to the work of Deal (2007), Giancola (2006), Noble and Schewe (2003); these authors were unable to validate value differences between the generations, whereas the

results from this study showcase strengths, which are differences, between the generational cohorts.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations involved in the design of the study that influenced the interpretation of the results. The limitations involve both the method design and the researcher.

A primary limitation of this study is related to the number and representation of different generation cohorts. Due to the small sample size of 12 participants and the location in a single region, the study results cannot be generalized across a total population. Additionally, within the study Gen X participants were overrepresented, Millennials and Baby Boomers were underrepresented, and Traditionalists were not represented at all. The sample differences may have contributed to a misrepresentation of data. To increase transferability of findings, future studies should plan to recruit a larger sample of participants across different companies and industries that includes all generations in the workforce.

A second limitation of this study is related to issues with a potential restriction on free expression from participants. Some of the participants may not have been comfortable speaking authentically because both the team manager and team lead took part in the workshop. Some participants may have perceived that views disclosed within the study could negatively affect their relationship with the leader or their company-based performance measures. In future studies an improved design might examine participants' perspectives without managerial roles influencing outcomes.

The third limitation related to the researcher involving longitudinal effects. The study focused on a limited timeframe in the lives of the participants. Literature suggested participants' career stage and the "effects of [their] cohort, lifecycle and period" (Lyons et al., 2007, p. 351) could impact value differences. Researchers conducting future inquiries may wish to measure change or stability in participants' values, beliefs, and strengths over time in order to provide further insight into how intergenerational collaborative behavior presents given participants' life cycle stages.

The fourth limitation related to researcher bias. It is possible that the researcher was biased given personal association with one cohort. The inherent deeper knowledge with a particular cohort may have slanted the results of the research. It is recommended that future studies on this topic have a team of researchers, with a spread of generations, involved in the literature review, data collection, review of the results, and documentation of key findings. This may be a method to avoid researcher bias by having representation from each generation.

Recommendations to Organization Development Practitioners

The researcher recommends that organization development practitioners who seek to assist organizations in improving business performance take the following steps:

1. Generational competence – Organization development practitioners can educate themselves on the foundations for intergenerational collaboration, generational strengths, skills and knowledge, views of rewards and recognition, work values, life values, and their connection to intergenerational collaborative behavior.

2. Lay the foundation – Educate organization leaders on the need for foundations of intergenerational collaboration. Engage team members in developing a common understanding around the elements as part of improving collaboration and team performance.

3. Bridge collaborative gaps – Champion the importance for a team to understand the strengths that each team member brings to collaboration (as an individual and from a generational cohort perspective). This includes educating leaders and team members on understanding how generational strengths might be expressed differently and recognizing that the diversity fosters a high-functioning team.

4. Apply the knowledge to organizational policy and program development – Some of the business areas that may benefit from the research include mentoring programs, staff development, team performance, talent retention, product development and innovation teams, knowledge management programs on collaboration and knowledge retention and diversity management modules.

Suggestions for Further Research

The study has presented new findings to a growing field on understanding generational differences. This research focused on a unique approach to better understand generations and collaborative strengths. Additional research is needed to better understand the foundations of intergenerational collaboration, the strengths of each generation, and how the findings could be applied to improving business performance.

The first suggestion to researchers who wish to conduct further inquiries is to validate the foundations of intergenerational collaboration. The researcher recommends that an assessment across many organizations in a variety of industries with a higher representation from all generations in the workforce be conducted. Outcomes from this research may provide more clarity on what intergenerational collaboration foundations are needed to produce highly effective collaborative environments.

The second suggestion for future research is to validate the generational strengths discovered in this study. The researcher recommends that an assessment across many organizations in a variety of industries with a higher representation from all generations in the workforce be conducted. Variables such as career levels, tenure with an organization, and life cycle could also be considered in the study. Outcomes from this research may provide more clarity and predictability of what the collaborative strengths are for each generation and how it can be applied to improving team performance.

The third suggestion for research is to conduct a case study on high-functioning collaborative multigenerational teams. The research could inquire into the strengths that are prevalent across generations and the values, beliefs, and individual strengths that contribute to intergenerational collaboration. An understanding of what foundations are present and existing elements that support the high-functioning team could contribute to better clarity on the context in which effective intergenerational collaboration exists. The findings may contribute to organizational leaders being able to observe leading practices in improving team performance and engaging the best in others.

Summary

This study examined the strengths of each generation that contribute towards effective intergenerational collaboration. In addition to strengths, discoveries were made around foundations and the role of the individual contribution in intergenerational collaborative behavior. To achieve this, the researcher reviewed relevant literature in the field, designed a research method, conducted research with a corporate team, analyzed the data collected, and discussed key findings. Applications of the research and recommendations for further research were also considered.

The complexities in a 21st century workforce demand a greater understanding of the contributions that each generation shares. Bridging the intergenerational collaborative gap can be achieved through greater awareness and appreciation of collective strengths as a first step to improving intergenerational relationships. The strengths are visible if the lens that they are viewed upon is changed. With an open mindset that values each other's strengths, it is possible to connect generations together in more meaningful ways, close the collaborative gap, and work together to achieve positive change in organizations. By providing space for human potential to flourish, all generations can add tremendous value in working together for common goals in which improved business performance and sustainability are at stake.

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Appendix A

Presession Survey Questions

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY
Graziadio School of Business and Management

Purpose
The following survey is offered as part of a research project in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Science in Organization Development. My thesis research is based on the following question "what are the strengths of each generation that contribute towards effective inter-generational collaboration?". Having an appreciation for what strengths each generation brings to collaboration, provides a fresh lens to view successful collaboration in the workplace.

Procedure
As a participant, you will be asked to complete a 10 minute pre-session survey prior the focus group. I will provide you with a copy of your answers so that you may have this information available to you during the focus group. Additionally, you will be asked to complete a 10 minute post-session survey approximately 1 week after the focus group.

Confidentiality
You will be asked to provide your name so that your results pre- and post-session can be linked. Your name and any other personal information you provide will never be used to identify you publicly. Your information and responses will be kept completely confidential. Research will be used for academic purposes only. You and your organization will be disguised to protect the confidentiality of both. A copy of the research will be made available to you (upon your request) once the study is complete. Only the Principal Researcher, Juliet Irwin, will have access to any and all data collected.

Thank you very much for participating in this research!

Electronic Consent

Clicking on the "Agree" button below indicates that:

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are at least 18 years of age

◉ Agree

◉ Disagree

Question 1 - What is your name?

[   ]

Question 2 - What generational cohort do you belong to?

○ Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964)

○ Generation Xers (born 1965-1979)

○ Millennials (born 1980-2000)

When completing the following 3 questions, please think of a team you work with now or that you have previously worked with at a different company.

The definition being used for "effective inter-generational collaboration" is *people working together, understanding differences, valuing diversity, creating synergy and achieving a common goal regardless of place, time or distance between them*.

Question 3 - What 3 strengths do the Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) bring to effective inter-generational collaboration?

☐ Free text option [_____]	☐ Trust in working together	☐ Values achievement
☐ Free text option [_____]	☐ Enjoys challenges	☐ Solid work ethic
☐ Free text option [_____]	☐ Independent	☐ Dedicated
☐ Knowledge	☐ Protects the welfare of others	☐ Emotional maturity
☐ Technical savvyness	☐ Desires to serve others	☐ Perseverance
☐ Communication skills	☐ Respects tradition	☐ Respect for authority
☐ Interpersonal skills	☐ Conforms to norms	☐ Produce quality work
☐ Experience	☐ Values security	☐ Desire for job stability
☐ Education	☐ Values social status	☐ Desire for predictable career ladder

Question 4 - What 3 strengths do the Generation Xers (born 1965-1979) bring to effective inter-generational collaboration?

☐ Free text option [_____]	☐ Trust in working together	☐ Values achievement
☐ Free text option [_____]	☐ Enjoys challenges	☐ Solid work ethic
☐ Free text option [_____]	☐ Independent	☐ Dedicated
☐ Knowledge	☐ Protects the welfare of others	☐ Emotional maturity
☐ Technical savvyness	☐ Desires to serve others	☐ Perseverance
☐ Communication skills	☐ Respects tradition	☐ Respect for authority
☐ Interpersonal skills	☐ Conforms to norms	☐ Produce quality work
☐ Experience	☐ Values security	☐ Desire for job stability
☐ Education	☐ Values social status	☐ Desire for predictable career ladder

Question 5 - What 3 strengths do the Millennials (born 1980-2000) bring to effective inter-generational collaboration?

Free text option
☐ [   ]

Free text option
☐ [   ]

Free text option
☐ [   ]

☐ Knowledge

☐ Technical savvyness

☐ Communication skills

☐ Interpersonal skills

☐ Experience

☐ Education

☐ Trust in working together

☐ Enjoys challenges

☐ Independent

☐ Protects the welfare of others

☐ Desires to serve others

☐ Respects tradition

☐ Conforms to norms

☐ Values security

☐ Values social status

☐ Values achievement

☐ Solid work ethic

☐ Dedicated

☐ Emotional maturity

☐ Perseverance

☐ Respect for authority

☐ Produce quality work

☐ Desire for job stability

☐ Desire for predictable career ladder

The following 5 questions relate to your perspective on working with teams.

Question 6 - Please rank in order of your preference for generational spread on teams (rank 1 is your most preferred team).

- Everyone from the same generation

- Everyone from different generations

- At most 2 different generations

- The generational spread makes no difference to me

Question 7 - I notice that difficulties on teams come from people of different generations.

○ Strongly Agree

○ Agree

○ Neutral

○ Disagree

○ Strongly Disagree

Question 8 - When I think about working in cross-generational teams, I have mostly positive thoughts.

○ Strongly Agree

○ Agree

○ Neutral

○ Disagree

○ Strongly Disagree

Question 9 - I find that I learn more when I'm working with people of different generations.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Neutral
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

Question 10 - The expectations of different generations makes it hard to work together effectively.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Agree
- ○ Neutral
- ○ Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

Question 11 - Think about a time when you were really engaged and excited about collaborating with multi-generations.Tell me a story about one of your best experiences you have had working successfully with other generations (Juliet will provide you with a copy of your answer so that you may have this information available to you during the focus group).

Thank you very much for your time and contributing to my academic research, for Pepperdine University, as part of the Master of Science Organization Development program. I look forward to seeing you at the Bridging the Inter-generational Collaboration Gap (focus group) very soon.

Juliet

Appendix B

Postsession Survey Questions

The following 14 questions conclude the "Bridging the Inter-generational Collaborative Gap" data collection. Thank-you again for your support!

Question 1 - What is your name? (Please use the same name as you used in the pre-session survey)

[ ]

Question 2 - What generational cohort do you belong to?

- ○ Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964)
- ○ Generation Xers (born 1965-1979)
- ○ Millennials (born 1980-2000)

When completing the following 3 questions, please think of a team you work with now or that you have previously worked with at a different company.

The definition being used for "effective inter-generational collaboration" is *people working together, understanding differences, valuing diversity, creating synergy and achieving a common goal regardless of place, time or distance between them.*

Question 3 - What 3 strengths do the Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) bring to effective inter-generational collaboration?

☐ Free text option [ ]	☐ Emotional maturity	☐ Non traditional
☐ Free text option [ ]	☐ Enjoys challenges	☐ Open to continuous change
☐ Free text option [ ]	☐ Entrepreneurial	☐ Perseverance
☐ Active use of collaborative tools	☐ Experience	☐ Prefers informal interaction
☐ Adaptable	☐ High trust levels	☐ Readily shares knowledge
☐ Communication skills	☐ Highly innovative	☐ Respects tradition
☐ Dedicated	☐ Independent	☐ Solid work ethic
☐ Desires to serve others	☐ Interpersonal skills	☐ Team oriented
☐ Eagerness to contribute	☐ Loyality	☐ Technically savvy
☐ Education	☐ Market savvy	☐ Values achievement

Question 4 - What 3 strengths do the Generation Xers (born 1965-1979) bring to effective inter-generational collaboration?

- ☐ Free text option
  [   ]
- ☐ Free text option
  [   ]
- ☐ Free text option
  [   ]
- ☐ Active use of collaborative tools
- ☐ Adaptable
- ☐ Communication skills
- ☐ Dedicated
- ☐ Desires to serve others
- ☐ Eagerness to contribute
- ☐ Education

- ☐ Emotional maturity
- ☐ Enjoys challenges
- ☐ Entrepreneurial
- ☐ Experience
- ☐ High trust levels
- ☐ Highly innovative
- ☐ Independent
- ☐ Interpersonal skills
- ☐ Loyality
- ☐ Market savvy

- ☐ Non traditional
- ☐ Open to continuous change
- ☐ Perseverance
- ☐ Prefers informal interaction
- ☐ Readily shares knowledge
- ☐ Respects tradition
- ☐ Solid work ethic
- ☐ Team oriented
- ☐ Technically savvy
- ☐ Values achievement

Question 5 - What 3 strengths do the Millennials (born 1980-2000) bring to effective inter-generational collaboration?

- ☐ Free text option
  [   ]
- ☐ Free text option
  [   ]
- ☐ Free text option
  [   ]
- ☐ Active use of collaborative tools
- ☐ Adaptable
- ☐ Communication skills
- ☐ Dedicated
- ☐ Desires to serve others
- ☐ Eagerness to contribute
- ☐ Education

- ☐ Emotional maturity
- ☐ Enjoys challenges
- ☐ Entrepreneurial
- ☐ Experience
- ☐ High trust levels
- ☐ Highly innovative
- ☐ Independent
- ☐ Interpersonal skills
- ☐ Loyality
- ☐ Market savvy

- ☐ Non traditional
- ☐ Open to continuous change
- ☐ Perseverance
- ☐ Prefers informal interaction
- ☐ Readily shares knowledge
- ☐ Respects tradition
- ☐ Solid work ethic
- ☐ Team oriented
- ☐ Technically savvy
- ☐ Values achievement

Question 6 - Please rank in order of your preference for generational spread on teams (rank 1 is your most preferred team).

- Everyone from the same generation

- Everyone from different generations

- At most 2 different generations

- The generational spread makes no difference to me

Question 7 - I notice that difficulties on teams come from people of different generations.

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

Question 8 - When I think about working in cross-generational teams, I have mostly positive thoughts.

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

Question 9 - I find that I learn more when I'm working with people of different generations.

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

Question 10 - The expectations of different generations makes it hard to work together effectively.

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

Question 11 - On reflection from the workshop, I've done the following (choose all that apply):

☐ Acknowledged my own values that I bring to collaboration

☐ Acknowledged my own strengths that I bring to collaboration

☐ Reached out to someone of a different generation to collaborate with (something that I might not normally have done)

☐ Had better conversations with people of different generations

☐ Made a commitment to improve how I collaborate with other generations

☐ Have done nothing different

Question 12 - Through your entire experience of participating in the study, have you improved your ability to collaborate with multi-generational teams?

No Improvement	Very Little Improvement	Some Improvement	Significant Improvement	Outstanding Improvement
○	○	○	○	○

Question 13 - If your ability to collaborate with multi-generational teams has improved, what has changed for you?

Question 14 - Would you like a copy of the final research paper with the compiled research results?

○ Yes

○ No

Thank you very much for your time and contributing to my academic research, for Pepperdine University, as part of the Master of Science Organization Development program. I look forward to keeping in touch with you.

Juliet Irwin

Appendix C

Framework of AI Workshop

Topic	Details	Time	Notes
Introductions + Lunch	-Introductions and name tags -Safety Moment -Introduce why we are there (research) -Benefits (Team building, learning about another organizational change method, learning for you personally and perhaps contributions to your work) -Framework for the session (Discover, Dream, Design) -Appreciative Inquiry Intro (refer to AI brief) -What will happen with responses (anonymity) -Pre-session survey (handouts) -Plan for post session survey in 1 week -Logistics: Take breaks when you need, there is no scheduled break	11:45 - noon	15 mins
Define the question	-Review the main question on flip chart "what are the strengths of each generation that contribute towards effective inter-generational collaboration?" -Review definition being used for collaboration and generational cohort (on flip chart) -We are going to explore this question through appreciative interviews with our generational peers. -Take notes during the interview so that you can later identify themes from the stories	Noon-12:05pm	5 mins
Discover – appreciating "valuing the best of what is"	-Break into 4 trios by generation cohorts. Boomers, Gen X (group a), Gen X (group b), Millennials Interviews: 1. Best experience: Tell me a story about the best experience you have had collaborating with other generations– a time when you were involved in something really important and exciting. Describe that time in detail. What were you doing? Who was involved? What happened? What was the outcome? What made a difference for you? 2. Value: What did you value about that collaborative experience that you shared in your story? What did you value about your contribution to it? What do you value about yourself as a person in all	12:05pm - 12:45pm	40 mins

	aspects of your life? – family, as a friend, in your work, etc. ? 3. Core value: As you think about a collaborative experience, what do you think is the core value for your generation? What is it that makes it unique and special? What are some of the strengths that your generation brings to collaboration? 4. Core strengths: What are some of the strengths that your generation brings to collaboration? 5. Wishes: You have three wishes that will make the company the best, most exciting and collaborative environment with respect to multi-generational collaboration. What are your three wishes?		
Discovery Themes	-Each trio will document 3-5 themes on flip chart paper and post them for the whole group to see -Each person will then use 3 stickers to select themes (from ALL the themes posted) that call out to them as being important. These are personal highlights from the themes.	12:45pm -1pm	15 mins
Introduce Dream Phase	Watch video http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jU4oA3kkAW U	1pm-1:10pm	10 mins
Dream – envisioning what might be	3 groups will now form (quartets) with a mix of each generation -We want to experience the gifts that each generation has to offer (moving to using our right brains) -Each quartet will create a visual of the future and a possibility statement. -Ask yourselves what are the most exciting possibilities for effective inter-generational collaboration at this company? What is the vision of your organization's most desired future with respect to multi-generations collaborating? Write a provocative proposition (possibility statement) that describes the idealized future as if it were already happening. -Each quartet will speak to their visual and possibility statements	1:10pm-1:40pm	30 mins

Design – dialoguing what should be	-Declare commitments - What can they take away from session to integrate into their work? -Ask yourselves how you want to relate to each other and pursue your dreams. What are the implications of these provocative propositions for the operating style of your company?	1:40pm-1:50pm	10 mins
Wrap Up	-Debrief -Provide any clarity needed -Acknowledge that a full cycle of AI would include an implementation phase -Summarize results from session -Next steps –a post-session survey, write up of results -Checkout	1:50pm-2pm	10 mins
Total Time			2hrs and 15 mins

Appendix D

Informed Letter of Consent in Research Activities

Principal Investigator: Juliet Irwin
Title of Project: Bridging the Intergenerational Collaborative Gap

The following information is provided to help you decide whether you and your team wish to participate in a research study. Please take your time to read the information below and feel free to ask any questions before signing this document.

My name is Juliet Irwin, and I am a Master's student in the Master of Science in Organization Development program at Pepperdine University. The professor supervising my work is Dr. Ann Feyerherm. The title of my research study is *Bridging the Intergenerational Collaborative Gap* and is being done as partial requirement for my Master's degree.

Purpose of Research Study: It is an exploration of the strengths that each generation exemplifies as part of collaborating in business today. This study attempts to answer the question: *What are the strengths of each generation that contribute towards effective inter-generational collaboration?* Knowledge gained from this study will be useful to help determine if there is a link between characteristics of a generation and the enablers of effective intergenerational collaboration.

Procedures: If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Encourage your team members to respond to a pre-requisite 5-minute preworkshop survey and a 5-minute postworkshop survey.
- Complete the preworkshop survey, which includes the following questions: What is your name? What generational cohort do you belong to? What 3 strengths do the Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) bring to effective inter-generational collaboration? What 3 strengths do the Generation Xers (born 1965-1979) bring to effective inter-generational collaboration? What 3 strengths do the Millennials (born 1980-2000) bring to effective inter-generational collaboration?
- Attend and encourage your team members to attend, an Appreciative Inquiry workshop, on site at your place of employment. The workshop will be approximately 90 minutes and will be conducted with you and your team members who wish to participate.
- Complete the postworkshop survey, which will be conducted approximately 1 week after the workshop.
- Information collected will be recorded through a combination of hand-written notes, and audio recordings that will be transcribed where appropriate, and summarized in anonymous format in the final research paper.
- A third party will assist in making observations during the workshop.

Potential Risks: There is a small chance that participants may be bored during yet another meeting. Precautions will be taken to ensure that they are nourished over the lunch hour in which this workshop will take place. They will also have ample opportunity to stand up and move around the room with other participants in their small teams.

Potential Benefits:

- Team building opportunity where members can learn more about each other's strengths in working together.
- Learn more about how you can enable change in an organization by using an appreciative inquiry process.
- Leverage results from the study, which may be applied to your organization.

Voluntary/right to deny or withdraw from participation: Your participation in the research study is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time with no negative consequences to you.

Confidentiality: Data obtained for this research study, including your responses to the survey will be kept confidential. Only aggregate data will be reported in the thesis or in any subsequent analysis beyond the thesis and possible future publication of the results. The name of the company where the research takes place will be kept anonymous. Survey and workshop responses will be kept on a password protected computer, under lock and key or external hard drive and destroyed one year after the submission of the research paper to Pepperdine University. Any data/information that is identifiable to a specific individual who has withdrawn from the study at any time will not be retained.

Contact information for questions or concerns: If you have any questions regarding the study, survey or workshop, please contact me, the primary investigator, Juliet Irwin at [email address], [telephone number] or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Ann Feyerherm, Ph.D.: [telephone number], [email address], Chair of the Applied Behavior Science and Organization Theory and Management Department.

Consent to participate in research: I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

By signing this document, I consent to participate in this study.

Name of Research Participant

_____   _____
Research Participant's Signature   Date

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the subject has consented to participate. Having explained this and answered any questions, I am co-signing this form and accepting this person's consent.

Juliet Irwin

_____   _____
Principal Investigator Signature   Date