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## How do organizations create and sustain vitality in a multigenerational workforce

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Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

HOW DO ORGANIZATIONS CREATE AND SUSTAIN VITALITY IN A  
MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctorate of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Monique DeMarino Watts

October 2018

Farzin Madjidi, Ed.D. — Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

Monique DeMarino Watts

under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this research to my son Kristian – ma raison de vivre, who kept me afloat during this journey with his love, daily comedy and words of wisdom.

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I would like to take this special opportunity to thank the people who walked this journey with me and made certain I crossed the finish line.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine and identify the best practices and strategies for human resource managers and organizational leaders to utilize to decrease the generational gaps amongst the four generations currently employed in the labor force, and to create and sustain a vital, multigenerational workforce. The four generations currently working side-by-side in the United States are the Traditionalists, the Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y, better known as the Millennials. Each generational cohort brings unique variables to the workplace such as behaviors, expectations, personal values, communication styles, and motivational factors that create challenges for organizations. Learning how to overcome these challenges will assist in creating connectivity among the cohorts, benefiting organizations in numerous ways, including greater operating efficiency and retention of employees.

By understanding the different characteristics and needs of the four respective generations, as well as recognizing how to utilize the strengths of each generation, organizational leaders and human resource professionals can utilize the findings to advance generational management strategies for creating and managing a vital intergenerational workforce which is accomplished by staff from each of the four generations working together constructively to support the goals and purpose of the organization. Findings from this study may also contribute to the existing methods human resource managers and business leaders currently use to create workplaces of greater understanding, mutual respect, appreciation, acceptance and inclusiveness of the four different generations in the workforce, as well as facilitate new human resource

policies to address workplace differences and conflict amongst the four generations.

Further, the benefits from a vital intergenerational workforce may increase employee productivity, satisfaction, retention, loyalty, and the ability of employers to attract new talent from each of the four generations to its workforce.

## Chapter I: Background of the Problem

The current workforce in the United States is composed of members of four different generations—the Silent Generation or Traditionalists (born 1922–1945), Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964), Generation X (born 1965–1980), and Generation Y or Millennials (born 1980–2000). They range in age from 22 to 65 years and older (American Hospital Association, 2014; Eisner & O’Grady-Harvey, 2009; Magnuson & Alexander, 2008). Lyons, Schweitzer & Ng (2015) posited that for the first time in history, four distinctive generations, young and old, are working together in direct contact with each other.

According to a 2009 survey of 767 adults 45 and older, conducted by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), 22% of the survey participants aged 45–54 and 27% aged 55–64 have postponed their plans to retire (Johnson, 2008). Additionally, the United States Department of Labor (DOL) reported the participation rate of workers in the U.S. ages 65 and older, rose from 11.5% in 1992 to 18.5% in 2012. Nearly half of the DOL survey respondents indicated that they do not plan on retiring until the age of 66 or older (Toossi, 2006). Furthermore, the United States government projects that by 2050, 45% of working adults will be 55 years old or older, composing 23% of the United States labor force (Davis, Kraus, & Capobianco, 2009; Vincent & Velkoff, 2010).

Until recently, Baby Boomers were the prominent generational cohort in the workforce; however, Generation Y recently overtook the Boomers in the workplace. The swift and exceptional demographic shift in the workforce has left many businesses pondering how to acclimate to the changing workplace (Bursch & Kelly, 2014). The focus of management has been redirected from the aging workforce to the issues resulting from

a workforce of multiple generations (Cekada, 2012). The multigenerational workforce is a subject of dialogue not only in the United States, as ever-changing demographics present dynamic and novel workforce queries for businesses (Sabatini-Fraone, Hartmann, & McNally, 2009).

With each of these four generations comes differences. These distinctions, known as work-related variables, include personalities, work values and attitudes, priorities, distinctive expectations, approaches to communication and leadership styles, ways of engaging with peers, work-life balance strategies, career goals, as well as unique expectations and motivational needs (Alverson, 1999; American Hospital Association, 2014; Ferri-Reed, 2013; Hammill, 2005). As multiple generational cohorts are currently working together, organizations will need to increase their knowledge of generational variations, as the gaps in the generations have become more profound (McCready, 2011; Sabatini-Fraone, et al., 2009). In a 2013 study conducted by Ernst & Young, 75 of the executives surveyed reported that managing multigenerational teams is challenging, with 77% reporting that the diverse work expectations and preferences among generation cohorts are a principal challenge they face in the workplace (Flewelling, 2014). McGuire, Todnem-By and Hutchings (2007) noted that although employers have had to deal with changing diversity in the workplace, previous research has primarily focused on the issues employers face in the areas of gender, race, and religious differences; very little research exists on the topic of multiple generations working together.

In a recent study conducted by the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development, less than one-third of the organizations polled reported having an HR strategy in place for effectively managing the multigenerational workforce (Kirton, 2014). In a 2014 study by

the American Society of Training and Development (ASTD), only 20% of respondents indicated that their organizations had a strategy in place for managing intergenerational relationships (Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, & Switzler, 2012). Learning how to adapt to the differences and needs of the four generations in the current workplace will be a crucial element in an organization's ability to build a vital workplace and manage its work culture (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008; Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000).

Many Traditionalists and Baby Boomers are opting to work past the traditional retirement age of 65 for a myriad of reasons, including longer life expectancies, changes to Social Security eligibility, a desire to supplement their income, excessive personal debt, the economic recession of 2008, decreases in pension and retirement account values due to negative stock market activity, depleted savings, less physically demanding work, and a desire to continue working for their own personal satisfaction (Bursch & Kelly, 2014; Johnson, 2008; Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011; Van Dam, 2018). Alternatively, as opined by Volkswagen Human Resource Leader Steve Stephens, some "employees get a taste of what retirement is like and in some cases, they'll decide to keep working for a few years" (Mullich, 2003, p. 50). Van Dam (2018, p. 2) in July 2018 noted in a recent analysis in the Washington Post, that "255,000 Americans aged 85 years or older had worked over the past 12 months." As older workers remain in the workplace longer past the traditional retirement age or elect to reenter the workforce after retirement (referred to as *bridge employment*), workplace models change, and challenges arise for the generational cohorts and their employers (Ciutiene & Railaite, 2014; DeClerk, 2008).

Conversely, when Traditionalists and Baby Boomers choose to retire organizations will suffer from the loss of knowledge if succession plans are not designed to retain information and facilitate knowledge transfer (Durkin, 2010; Ibarra, 2016). The issue of knowledge transfer has become a serious issue for organizations, necessitating the passing of the intellectual capital of experienced tenured employees to those who will replace them. Accomplishing this transfer of knowledge will require employers to focus on communication, documentation of information and forging of relationships that will enable the conveyance of this vital knowledge (Sabatini-Fraone et al., 2009). Employers are desirous of retaining employees from these veteran generations because of their knowledge base and experience which can be tough to replace (Ibarra, 2016; Murphy, 2007). Inversely, when older generational members postpone retirement, organizations may incur other implications such as high occurrences of absenteeism and leaves of absence. Moreover, postponed retirements by Traditionalist and Baby Boomers contribute to a shortage of employment and promotional opportunities for Generation X and Millennial cohort members (American Society for Healthcare Human Resources Administration [ASHHRA], 2014).

Organizations will be required to sharpen their attitudes about generational differences, known as *generational competence*, to respond to the current four generations working together and to understand how the generations will impact their business (Sabatini-Fraone et al., 2009). A 2014 survey by the American Society for Training and Development (ATSD) revealed that conflict among generations in the workplace resulted in lost time and a decline in productivity. Ninety percent of the respondents agreed that generational conflict was a major cause of lost time and 12% of



the work week being wasted due to conflict among different generational cohort members (Asghar, 2014; Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, & Switzler, 2012). Almost 60% of the human resource managers from large companies which participated in a 2008 study conducted by the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) reported that office conflicts flowed from generational differences, with the highest tensions stemming from perceptions regarding respect and loyalty (Sabatini-Fraone et al., 2009) The conflict between the generations has always existed; indeed, conflict is part of everyday life and is a regular occurrence in the workforce (Wood, 2005). Shetach asserted conflict between human beings is normal and exists in various settings, with the workplace not being an exception (Shetach, 2012). Hillman (2014) emphasized that conflict at work can occur because of poor communication between employees, differences in technology use and issues stemming from workers achieving work-life balance.

Multigenerational differences are not always negative, and when managed correctly can be opportunities for growth (Weingarten, 2009). If organizations can find successful strategies for the four generations to coexist and learn how to utilize the strengths of each respective generation, positive outcomes such as team building, collaboration, and shared visions can result (Clare, 2009; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Weingarten, 2009). Durkin (2007) posited that the benefits of organizations creating and maintaining a high performing workforce include “increased employee satisfaction, reduced turnover, optimized productivity and organizational growth” (p. 31). Rajput, Marwah, Balli, & Gupta (2013) emphasized that by business leaders and human resource managers, as well as co-workers, appreciating the respective workstyles, specific traits, intentions and the skill sets of each generation, an energized multigenerational workforce

can be built. Further, the new ideas and business concepts resulting from positive, multigenerational learning and from tapping into the strengths found within the four generations, may posture organizations for serving their consumers more effectively and efficiently (Bennett, Pitt-Catsouphes, & Price, 2012; Iden, 2016).

Methodology and research on how to create and sustain a vital multigenerational workplace are limited. Much of the existing literature focuses on the incompatibilities between the generational cohorts: their inability to work well together, the perceived negative stereotypes associated with aging workers, and the challenges that multiple generations in the workplace present for managers (Gleeson, 2007). Additionally, scarce research has been conducted on motivational factors within the respective generational cohorts that can be utilized to unify the different age groups (Hill, 2004; Licata, 2007).

Managing and motivating employees of the various generational cohorts is the new norm in the workforce. With each generational cohort come differences that organizational leaders must understand to create vital and sustainable multigenerational workplaces (Clare, 2009; Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Although the literature on generational differences is plentiful, inadequate research has been conducted on by what means workplace leaders can successfully utilize the strengths and common motivations of each generation to create and sustain a vital intergenerational workplace. The challenges that organizational leaders face in implementing strategies and best practices for developing and successfully managing multigenerational workforces have received very little attention from authors and leadership professionals. Researching each generation and today's workforce provides a framework for pursuing practices that leverage both

personal and collective knowledge from organizational experts on best practices for managing multiple generations.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The workforce in the United States has transformed significantly over the past 50 years. The current workforce is composed of four different generations: Traditionalists (born 1922–1945), Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964), Generation X (born 1965–1980), and the Generation Y/Millennial Generation (born 1981-2000) (Zemke et al., 2000).

Societal trends, coupled with economic shifts increased the number of Traditionalists and Baby Boomers working in the job market or reentering the job market after an initial retirement, which Baker (2015) described as an “unprecedented phenomenon” (p. 3). Although Traditionalists still have a presence in today’s workplace, the most dominant generations currently in the workforce are the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y/Millennials (Glass, 2007; Pew Research Center, 2015).

Generation gaps between each of the four groups impact the workplace both positively and negatively. Each group has different workforce behaviors, personal values, motivational factors, and communication styles. The differences in generations have also created stereotyped images of each generation (Hastings, 2012; Singham, 2009). The lack of understanding of the generational characteristics can present challenges for businesses in meeting the needs of their multigenerational workforces. Ignoring the variances of the four generations can be detrimental for a company and could result in the loss of workplace morale, negative attitudes and desire to permanently leave the organization. (American Hospital Association, 2014; Noorani, 2014). An organization’s ability to survive in the swiftly changing workforce demographics depends on their ability

to anticipate and react to the changing demands of their labor force (Brown & Harvey, 2011). For organizations to thrive and sustain themselves, their leaders must first understand the various generational implications of their employees. Organizational leaders must understand the differences or gaps among the generations, create strategies and methods to harness each group's strengths and competencies, as well as learn to bridge commonalities to create and maintain a vital workforce (American Hospital Association, 2014; Govitvatana, 2001). Lastly, organizations may need to adjust their workplace procedures and policies to further support the multigenerational workforce (Noorani, 2014).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Accordingly, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to determine:

1. Challenges organizations face in implementing strategies and practices employed in creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce.
2. Strategies and practices organizations employ in creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce.
3. How organizations measure success of their action plans to create and sustain a vital intergenerational workforce.
4. Recommendations employees would make for the future implementation of creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce.

### **Research Questions**

This study investigated the following research questions:

RQ1. What challenges do organizations face in implementing strategies and practices employed in creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce?

RQ2. What strategies and practices do organizations employ in creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce?

RQ3. How do organizations measure the success of their action plans to create and sustain a vital intergenerational workforce?

RQ4. What recommendations workers would make for future implementation of creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study examined and identified best practices and strategies to enable organizational leaders to decrease the generation gaps among the four generations currently employed in the workforce and to create and sustain a vital workforce. By understanding the different characteristics and needs of the respective generations, organizational leaders can advance generational management strategies to create and manage a vital intergenerational staff that works together to support the purposes and goals of the organization. These goals include increased employee productivity, satisfaction, retention, loyalty and the ability to attract new talent to the workforce (Bowes, 2012; Kupperschmidt, 2000). Bober (2005) posited that “it is important for organizations to recognize the generational gaps that exist in the workplace and formulate a plan to narrow and possibly close the gaps” (p. 29). Bursch & Kelly (2014) asserted that organizations that do not possess a successful strategy to tackle intergenerational differences and the knowledge of how to attend to specific generation requisites may experience competitive disadvantages, be overwhelmed by workplace conflict, and miss

valuable business opportunities. Understanding the primary differences of the four generations is an essential part of managers and employees creating a workplace environment of cooperation, assistance, and support. Identifying generational issues could lead to greater leadership approaches aimed at lowering workplace tensions and conflict among the employees from the four generations, in addition to fostering enhanced loyalty among employees (Gursoy, Chi, & Karadag, 2013; Iden, 2016). Murphy, Gibson, and Greenwood (2009) asserted that “for an organization to be effective and productive, conflicts must be resolved, employees respected, and generational differences valued” (p. 40). Support of the four generations currently in the workforce will allow companies to leverage the best qualities and knowledge shared by the generations and take full benefit of all facets and dimensions of the cohort members. Age differences in the workforce will continue to grow due to population growth, with the United States expected to surpass 325 million people by the end of 2017 (McNichols, 2010; Murphy et al., 2009; Smith, as cited in Baker, 2015; United States Census Bureau, 2017).

Research on generational differences and practices for uniting the various cohort members together for an integrated workplace is limited, with very little evidence to support the recommendations found in the current literature. The existing literature, coupled with the research gained through this qualitative study, will provide a framework to increase an organization’s success by creating greater productivity and efficiency among its workforce, satisfying its clients, and providing a platform for addressing the changing aspects of the workforce (Baker, 2015). By addressing the gaps in the literature concerning generational differences and likenesses, this study will increase the business acumen of organizational leaders and human resource professionals, furthering their

efforts to manage the needs of a multigenerational workforce and better situating them to handle workforce sustainability according to Zemke et al., (2000); (Stanley, 2010; Starks, 2013). Most importantly, the findings from this study could positively impact social change by recognizing generational differences as well as strengths that may foster a greater comprehension and appreciation of the different generations in today's workforce, in addition to increasing the generational competence of organization leaders (Patterson, 2014).

### **Definition of Key Terms**

- **Ageism:** A positive or undesirable stance toward a cohort based centered on its age (Sullivan, Forret, Carraher, & Mainiero, 2009).
- **Baby Boomers:** The generation of individuals born between 1946 and 1964 who are often referred to as post-World War II babies (Zemke et al., 2000).
- **Brain drain:** A loss of highly trained personnel who leave an organization. (Wells-Lepley, Swanberg, Williams, Nakai, & Grosch, 2013).
- **Bridge employment:** The pattern of employment by which an employee delays retirement to continue working in some capacity normally after departing from his or her employment but before a complete exit from the workforce (Kim & Feldman, 2000).
- **Cross-Mentoring:** Partnering a person from one generation with a person from a different generational cohort with the goal of mutual learning and growth (Wloczewski, 2014).
- **Generation:** A group of people born within a close range of years who share significant life events (Smola & Sutton, 2002).

- Generation X: The generation of people born between 1965 and 1980 (Marston, 2007).
- Generation Y/Millennials: The generation of people born between 1981 and 2000 (Zemke et al., 2000).
- Generation Z: The generation of people with a birth year between 1995 and 2003 (Williams, 2015).
- Generational cohorts: Groups of people born in a span of consecutive years who are assumed to be alike because of shared communal experiences (Howe & Strauss, 1993; Parry & Urwin, 2011).
- Generational competence: The ability to comprehend and satisfy the precise needs of unique generations (Gleeson, 2007). The adaptations that organizations must make to meet the diverse needs of the four generations in the current workforce (Seitel, 2011).
- Generation gap: The experiences and beliefs that separate generations from others and hinder the understanding of other generations (McCready, 2011).
- Intergenerational conflict: Differences in values, points of view, and styles among generation members which can cause opposition between the members (Govitvatana, 2001).
- Organization: A group of people intentionally organized to accomplish a common goal or set of goals (Bedeian & Langford, 1983).
- Population: The set of individuals having similar qualities as designated by sampling criteria for a study (Burns & Grove, 2005).



- Senior in Professional Human Resources Certificate/SPHR: A professionally relevant credential for those who have mastered the strategic and policy-making aspects of HR management in the United States (H.R. Certification Institute, 2015).
- Traditionalists: The generation of people born between 1933 and 1945 who are associated with the Great Depression and World War II (Howe & Strauss, 1993).
- Work ethic: Personal accountability and responsibility for one's work performed, based on a belief that work has intrinsic value (Hill, 1997).
- Workplace vitality: A workforce comprised of team collaboration, engagement, and high productivity (Mars Drinks, 2015). An organization that is vibrant, thriving and alive with potential at the intersection of collaboration, productivity, and engagement (Brower, 2015).

### **Assumptions of the Study**

The study involved four generations in the workforce. Assumptions were made that all survey participants had at least 10 years of experience as a human resource senior level professional or had successfully obtained the Senior Profession in Human Resources (SPHR) Certification, along with possessing the experience of managing a workforce of at least 50 employees. It was assumed that the population sample was representative of the target population, fostering generalizability of the study's findings. It was also assumed during the interviews that each participant responded in a way that was influenced by his or her real life professional and personal experiences, in an accurate and honest manner. It was further assumed that all participants would answer

the survey questions truthfully and with integrity, and that the questions were designed to elicit sufficient information to ascertain trends and meaningful relationships from the responsive data. Additionally, while conducting the interviews, there was the possibility that the survey participants may have been unwilling to report facts witnessed accurately and objectively out of concern with remaining anonymous.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of a study are features of design or methodology which influence or impact the understanding of the findings from the research. Limitations are weaknesses or effects that cannot always be regulated by a researcher, which could cause constraints on methodology and deductions of the study. Limitations that could sway the outcomes of a study should be stated (Denicolo & Becker, 2012). Possible limitations include restraints on generalizing, and the technique utilized to establish validity, internally and externally. (Labaree, 2013). This qualitative research study utilized the phenomenological method to identify best practices and strategies for organizational leaders to decrease generational gaps in the current workforce for creating and sustaining a vital workforce. However, the possible disadvantages of the phenomenology approach include difficulty in detecting researcher prejudices and contaminated bracketing that could lead to inaccurate data interpretation; the subjectivity of the data may lead to difficulty in determining reliability and validity of the methods utilized and facts received. Additionally, the results of the study are highly qualitative in nature sometimes creating difficulty for the data to be usable by researchers (Offredy & Vickers, 2013).

This study was limited to the population of human resource senior level professionals in Los Angeles County with ten or more years of experience or possessing

the Senior in Professional Human Resources Certificate (SPHR), currently managing a staff of at least 50 people, and who were willing to divulge personal experiences. The research involved interviewing participants who volunteered and were accessible. Survey respondents could pose a participation concern due to their lack of availability to be interviewed because of the short time span that the survey was being administered by the researcher. Lastly, generalization of the data gathered was limited to the study population.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify the best practices and strategies to enable organizational leaders to decrease the generation gaps between the generations currently in the workforce, to create and sustain a vital workforce. As four generations, the Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y work side by side for the first time in the United States, the differences in the styles, values, and beliefs of the generations merit further examination. These generations, ranging in age from 22 to 65 years and over, come with unique differences (Eisner & O'Grady-Harvey, 2009; Hannay & Fretwell, 2011; Magnuson & Alexander, 2008). These distinctions, known as work-related variables, include personalities, work values, and attitudes, distinctive expectations, approaches to communication and leadership styles, work-life balance strategies, career goals, as well as unique expectations and motivational needs (Lyons & Kuron, 2014). Organization leaders, and human resource professionals have had to increase their knowledge of the generational variations, work expectations, barriers and preferences of the four generations to manage the challenges faced in the current workplace (Coulter & Faulkner, 2014). These practices and strategies

can be instrumental in helping other business leaders and managers successfully manage their multigenerational labor force and uncover the obstacles and challenges they faced in building and leading multiple generations in a work setting. As not all the strategies will be effective for each organization, business leaders must choose which to utilize in their workplace (Roodin & Mendelson, 2013).

The following chapter includes a detailed review of published literature that defines the values, beliefs, shaping events and work ethics of each respective generation. The literature review examines the unique characteristics, the current demographics of each of the four generations that are part of the current workforce, as well as the similarities and differences within the multigenerational workforce. Additionally, Chapter 2 examines the existing literature that attempts to close the gaps between the multiple generations, so cohorts can work effectively together in the workplace.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

Four generations comprise today's workforce in the United States. These generation cohorts—known as the Silent Generation or the Traditionalists, the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y also known as the Millennials—range in age from 22 to 65 years and older (Eisner & O'Grady-Harvey, 2009; Magnuson & Alexander, 2008). According to a report by the Pew Research Center (2015), the United States workforce in 2015 consisted of 34% Millennials, 34% Generation X, 29% Baby Boomers and 2% Traditionalists.

Different beginning and ending dates are utilized to define the time spans of the respective generations; however, their core values and characteristics are constant and can be identified (Murphy, Gibson, & Greenwood, 2009). Every generation possesses its unique set of characteristics and attitudes, personal motivators, priorities, values, goals, communication styles, and views of how they see colleagues of other generational cohorts (Lyons & Kuron, 2014; Zemke et al., 2000). In office environments where differences, miscommunications, and everyday frustrations occur, misunderstandings are more likely to occur in a workforce made up of multiple generations (Baker, 2015). Lencioni (2002) asserted "misunderstandings in the workplace are a consequence of the absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment and inattention to results" and are greatly exaggerated when multiple generations are within the same workplace (p. 114). Organizational leaders and human resource professionals need to understand the differences among the generational groups, as the presence of the various cohorts in the workforce with diverse values and goals have the possibility to cause tangible problems for businesses (Bolton, 2010; Bursch & Kelly, 2014). Senge, et al., (1999) declared that

businesses failing to reorganize and alter their strategies in response to the generational differences in the workplace would encounter turbulence and stress causing disconnect among its employees. Moreover, if organizations focus solely on operational issues within their businesses and ignore generational concerns which can be expressed through workplace conflict, multiple problems may occur (Zopiatis, Krambia-Kapardas, & Varnavas, 2012).

Managing generational differences is not a new phenomenon in the workplace, but it is becoming a major concern that can no longer be ignored. Four unique generations make up the current workforce. Sessa, Kabakoff, Deal, & Brown (2007) described generation differences as a clash of age-diverse work groups. Cennamo and Gardner (2008) asserted that the differences between the members of the multigenerational cohorts are primarily due to life and work experiences, education, and job training. Baker (2015) stated that the most common multigenerational differences are related to work ethic, communication, and technology.

Understanding the characteristics, strengths, and unique qualities of each generational cohort is the start of developing strategies and practices that allow various members to work together for the common goal of the business, and to overcome the dysfunction of multigenerational teams (Hillman, 2014; Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). The differences of the generational cohorts can be harnessed to increase an organization's increased creativity and productivity (Baker, 2015). Further, members of each generation "enhance the value of the organization through their ideas, innovation, and work" (Aldisert, 2002, p. 210).

Multiple problems will likely occur if organizations do not address the issue of generational differences in the workplace and if business leaders do not develop strategies and practices to create and sustain a vital intergenerational workforce. The problems may include miscommunications and misunderstandings among the cohort members, low staff morale, the inability to retain current staff members and difficulty in recruiting new talent to those organization (Fyock, 1990; Hillman, 2014; Ruch, 2000). Bennett, Pitt-Catsoupes, & Price (2012) postulated that gaining an understanding of how to effectively manage the multigeneration workforce is vital for a problem that is not a short-term problem. The future of organizations depends on their ability to foster an environment where members of diverse generations can work together harmoniously in the workplace. Organizations must invest the time and effort to establish trusting working relationships among the groups which will allow them to towards a common goal (Tolbize, 2008).

### **Generation Defined**

Mannheim (1952) designated a generation as a cohort of people of similar age groups influenced by similar social, cultural, political, or historical events that tie generational cohort members together. He further asserted that generations evolve from the social needs of the period in which the generation developed, are not defined simply by a range of birth years, but instead have a distinctive cultural identity because of having witnessed the same chronological events or shared experiences at roughly similar times during their lives. According to Eversole, Venneberg, & Crowder (2012), Mannheim suggested that generations eclipse every 40 to 45 years. Codrington (2004) stated, "a generation tends to be approximately 20 years in length, representing roughly the time

from the birth of a cohort (or group) of people to the time they come of age and start having their own children” (p. 2).

Strauss & Howe (1991) described a generation as “a cohort group whose length approximates the span of life and whose boundaries are fixed by peer personality” (p. 60). Bober (2005) asserted that each generation exists in its own point in time with viewpoints that make it unique from other cohorts. Diepstraten, Ester, & Vinken (2002) asserted “generations differ because they grew up in different social, cultural, political, and economic circumstances that distinctively influence their basic values, attitudes, beliefs and life changes” (p. 40). According to Alwin and McCammon (2007), “the notion of a generation is historically one of the most important concepts used to describe the nature of the relationship of an individual to society” (p. 25). Further, Kupperschmidt (2000) posited that generations develop shared behavior patterns based on their common experiences. Dixon, Mercado, and Knowles (2013) describe a generation as starting when a birth rate increased and concluding when the rate declined. Lastly, Murphy (2007) asserted that a generation is a cohort of persons who partook in similar experiences through musical genres, education, styles of parenting, news, and world events.

Characteristics of world-altering events that Mannheim (1952) believed were the foundation of generational change include a harrowing or major world event such as war, a major change in demographics that causes a change in the distribution of resources, and occasions that cause generations to succeed or fail, such as the Great Depression, the Vietnam War, and 9/11. Mannheim (1952) further asserted



that a generation is a social location that has a potential to influence an individual's consciousness in the same manner a class or culture does . . . and that individuals who belong to the same generation, who share the same year of birth, are endowed, to that extent, with a common location in the historical dimension of the social process. (p. 3)

Twenge and Campbell (2008) described generations as groups influenced by historical milestones, similar economic and cultural backgrounds, and work values.

Strauss & Howe (1991) posited that

generations revolve around social moments which are defined as an event that has a social or environmental impact on lives. Social moments can be outward changes or a secular crisis, such as a war, or inward change, such as a spiritual awakening or how people view society like as the shifts in consciousness in the 1960s. (p. 71)

Parry and Urwin (2011) asserted that events and cultural phenomena create generational cohorts. Table 1 provides a synopsis of the features and influencing events by which the four generations are identified (Aldisert, 2002; Howe & Strauss, 2007; Johnson & Johnson, 2010). By first looking at the generational members, the events that have influenced their lives, and how they view their work, one can begin to develop an understanding of why different styles and approaches are needed in the management of the generational cohorts (Bober, 2005). Table 2 presents the time frames and names for the four generations currently in the workforce. Figure 1 is an illustration created by American Century Investments Center in 2015 showing the expected population

projections categorized by the United States Generations from 2014 to 2050 per the Pew Research Center.

Table 1

*Current Generations in the Workplace*

Generation Name	Characteristics	Influencing Events
Traditionalists or Silent Generation	Practical, loyal, patient, patriotic, religious, disciplined, hard-working, self-sacrificing, team oriented, and dependable	The Roaring 20s, the Korean War, the Great Depression, World War II, and Sputnik in Orbit
Baby Boomers	Career and results driven, loyal, team-oriented, non-conforming, and well educated	The Cold War, the Vietnam War, Watergate, the Human Rights Movement, the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy, the Landing on the Moon, and the Cuban Missile Crisis
Generation X	Entrepreneurial, resourceful, adaptive to change, self-reliant, focused on family, intolerant of government, hard-working, judgmental, and socially responsible	The Energy Crisis, the Challenger Disaster, Single-Parent and Blended Family Relationships, Latch-Key Kids, MTV, Game Boy, PCs, Microwave Ovens
Millennials/ Generation Y	Technologically savvy, individualistic, flexible, informal, civic and socially minded, team oriented, loyal	The AIDS Crisis, the World Wide Web/Internet, the Los Angeles Riots, the Enron Scandal, September 11, 2001, Social Networking, Reality Television, Corporate Social Responsibility, and Diversity

*Note.* This chart is adapted from a combination of sources (Aldisert, 2002; Deyoe & Fox, 2012; Jurkiewicz, 2000; Strauss & Howe, 1991).

Table 2

*Generations Timeline and Generation Names*

1922–1945	1946–1964	1965–1980	1981–2000
Veterans, Silent Generation, Traditionalists	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Generation Y, Millennial, Echo Boomers

*Note:* Adapted from “The Multi-Generational Workforce: Workplace Flexibility and Engagement” by M. Pitt-Catsoupes & C. Matz-Costa, (2008), *Work and Family*, 11(2), 215-229.

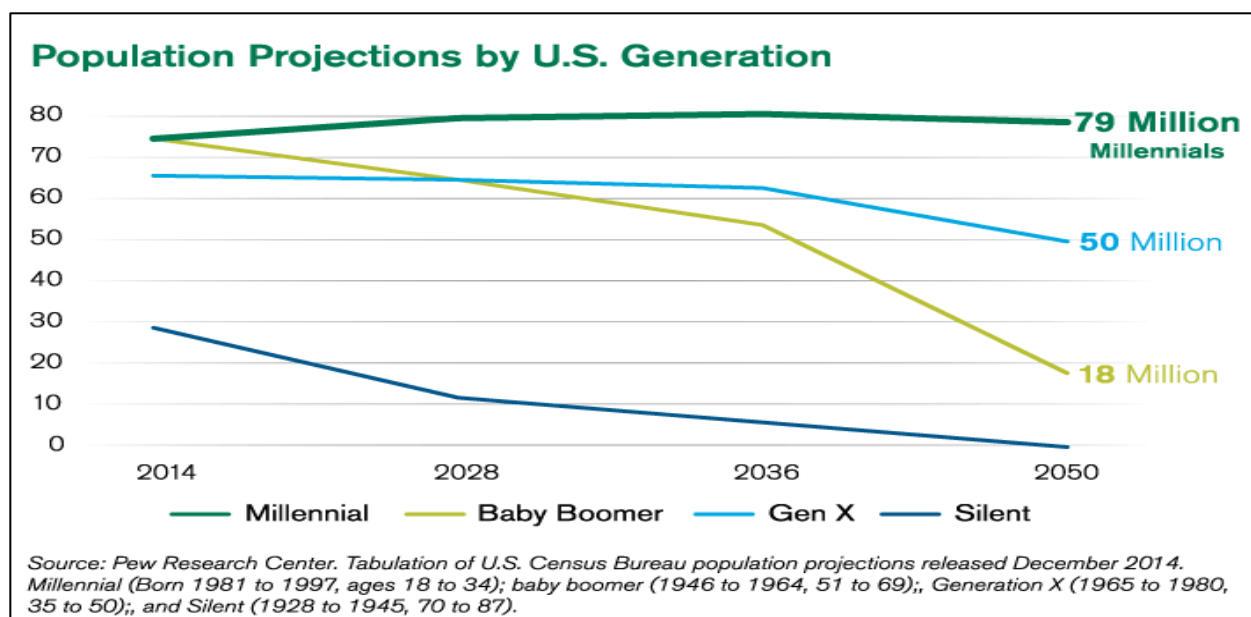


Figure 1. Population projections by U.S. generations from 2014 to 2050. Note: Reprinted from “Boomers Overwhelmed by Millennials” by American Century Investments (2015). Copyright by American Century Proprietary Holdings, Inc. Reprinted with permission.

## The Current Generations in the Workplace

To value the uniqueness of each generation, it is essential to understand the formative events each of the four generations experienced and how the events shaped who they are today and their expectations of their careers.

**The Silent Generation/Traditionalists.** Members of the Silent Generation, also known as Traditionalists and the Depression Babies, were born between 1922 and 1945 and experienced World War II and the Korean War, and the economic crisis of the Great Depression (Durkin, 2010; Magnuson & Alexander, 2008). Because of these events during their formative years, this generation is portrayed as self-sacrificing, hard workers with a great respect for authority. Further, these influencing events caused this generation to have a strong obligation to their families, country, and community (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Many of the Silent Generation members were raised by authoritarian parents who

utilized military models of discipline and as a result developed a highly refined sense of right and wrong.

As children, Traditionalists understood they were to be seen but not heard and today dislike being involved in conflict (Codrington, 2004; Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008). The members of the Silent Generation are characterized as deeply conservative, having a deep commitment to their country and their families, disciplined, socially conscious, frugal, hard-working, possessing a strong work ethic, preferring formal hierarchies and order, doing their jobs well as team players, and displaying respect for authority figures (Codrington, 2004; Lockwood, 2004). Being the children of the Great Depression generation, job security and providing for their families are primary goals for this group.

This generation believes that working is a privilege and that anything can be achieved through hard work. At the workplace, they prefer managers who are direct, yet respectful, specific, and clear in defining what they expect in their job performance as well as take a rational approach to workplace trials (Bursch & Kelly, 2014). As a result, members of this generation are generally restrained and prefer not to engage in conflict at the workplace (Murphy, 2007). Traditionalists continue to work hard even during their retirement years, with many choosing to remain in the workforce to supplement their incomes, or for the pure enjoyment they receive from working with others (Bursch & Kelly, 2014). Notable members of the Silent Generation include Dr. Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Cesar Chavez, and Sandra Day O'Connor (Bober, 2005).

**Baby Boomers.** The next generation is the Baby Boomers, also known as the Woodstock, Love, and Me generation (Dahlroth, 2008). Baby Boomers are members of

the generational cohort born between 1946 and 1964 born to parents who experienced World War II and the Korean War, as well as the Great Depression. Parents of Boomers vowed to create a better life for their children than the ones they experienced themselves (Sujansky, 2004). Members of this cohort were coddled by their parents, who encouraged them to strive for “anything they wanted” (Bober, 2005, p. 41). Boomers’ values were influenced by the Missile Crisis in Cuba, the Civil Rights movement, the first landing on the moon, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, the Kent State massacre, the Women’s Liberation movement, and the Vietnam and Cold Wars (Licata, 2007; Zemke et al., 2000).

Growing up during a period of economic growth, many Boomers feel a sense of entitlement in contrast to previous generations who weathered economically challenging times. Many Boomers were raised in middle-class settings where aspirations were encouraged, and people prospered (Baker, 2015; Smola & Sutton, 2002). Boomer children were raised using Dr. Spock’s childrearing guidelines, in which parents were encouraged to watch over and help their children, as well as continually teach them and support their early child development (Bober, 2005).

Like Traditionalists, Baby Boomers believe hard work and sacrifice are traits that will lead to the path of personal and professional success. The phrase *workaholic* was created to describe the work ethic and loyalty of this cohort (Tolbize, 2008). However, this group is motivated to work hard because they value rank, wealth, and prestige (Bursch & Kelly, 2014). Boomers were the first generation to challenge the concept of work hours being confined to a 40-hour week, spending long hours at the office including evenings and weekends (Lockwood, 2004). Strauss & Howe (1991) reported that Boomers were

the first generation to turn sections of their home into offices where their work could continue beyond the traditional work hours.

At work, Boomers demonstrate workplace values of dedication and pledge strong loyalty to their employers. They expect employers to reciprocate the same dedication and provide honest feedback. Boomers believe that the advancement of close individual relationships is the path to exceling in the workplace (Valcour, 2013). They prefer managers who take a democratic approach, clearly outline the team's objectives, are warm and kind to their direct reports (Bursch & Kelly, 2014). However, this generation is often considered the most stressed generation due to their focus on work and the need to succeed, often viewing themselves and their career as one in the same (Parry, 2017). Boomers demonstrate team spirit, prefer working face-to-face versus working virtually or solely via electronic technology, and place an emphasis on the development of personal relationships to move up the career ladder. (Durkin, 2010; Fogg, 2009; Murphy, 2007).

Baby Boomers are described as independent, well-educated, accepting of authority, non-conformists, results driven, loyal to the organizations for which they work, and thriving on adrenaline-charged assignments (Baker, 2015; Johnson & Johnson, 2010). Job meaningfulness and purpose carry more importance to Boomers than salary (Yang & Guy, 2006). As with the Traditionalist generation, as this generation prepares to exit the workforce, it is time for employers to capture their professional knowledge and transfer it members of the next generations: Generation X and the Millennials (Baker, 2015). Companies must create strategies to facilitate organizational knowledge transfers to ensure Boomers share their information and expertise with the following generations to help circumvent the looming *brain drain* (Bursch & Kelly, 2014).

A study prepared by the American Society for Healthcare Human Resources Administration (ASHHRA, 2014) pointed out that while Baby Boomers are known for their ethic of being hard workers, many never anticipated that they would have to continue working past the traditional retirement age of 65, and are still in the workforce purely because of their current financial predicaments due to the recession of 2008. Delaying retirement has caused many Boomers to become exhausted and bitter that they must continue to work. While these individuals may be present at work in a physical context, some Boomers are not fully present emotionally or mentally, a predicament known as being *retired in place* (Baird, 2013).

Strauss and Howe (1991) declared Boomers would “lay out blight-proof, smog free cities, enrich the underdeveloped world, and no doubt write the finish to poverty and war” (p. 301). Boomers also value their health, youthfulness, and material wealth (Tolbize, 2008). As young adults, Boomers were fixated on self and self-indulgence. In search of a higher existence, members of this generation experimented with illegal drugs, which eventually shifted to participation in religious movements (Bober, 2005).

**Generation X.** The next generation to be examined is Generation X, also known as Gen Xers, the Latchkey Generation, the Lost Generation and Thirteenth Generation (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Generation X members were born between 1965 and 1980 to parents who lived during the Cold War, experienced the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the witnessed launch of the Civil Rights movement. This generation, as children, lived during a period of a stagnant job market, downsizing of corporations, the United States’ energy crisis, and frozen employment wages (Licata, 2007). These factors caused Generation Xers to be cynical, mistrustful, and not always loyal to their employers. Additionally, this

generation does not believe their careers will be spent with a single lifetime employer, as members of previous generations have done (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

The influential experiences that shaped Generation X include the Vietnam War, the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Dr. King, the Moon Landing, AIDS, the Watergate Scandal, the Challenger Disaster, and the Iran Hostage Crisis (Baker, 2015). This generation is known as *latchkey* kids as many grew up in single-parent households and after school came home to an empty house, fostering resiliency (Tolbize, 2008). Because of the events that occurred during their youth, Generation X members believed that adults had very little control, leading this generation to grow up with a feeling of uncertainty and insecurity. As a result, members of this group value individualism over collectivism (Jurkiewicz, 2000; Strauss & Howe, 1991). These events included the increase of divorce rates in comparison to prior generations, alternatives to traditional marriage, and the new phenomenon of both parents working outside of the family home (Baker, 2015). Divorce rates soared to 40 per 1,000 women married in the 1970s, in comparison to 15 per 1,000 females during the 1950s (Shiono & Quinn, 1994). Because of the independence they experienced early in life, as adults this generation is known for being independent, family-focused, resilient, critical, adaptable, hardworking, and socially responsible, yet intolerant of bureaucracy (Dowd-Higgins, 2010; Johnson & Johnson, 2010; Murphy, 2007).

Generation X was the first generation to have personal computers in their households and be heavily influenced by the Internet, MTV, and computer games. The use of and access to technology helped this generation become very comfortable with multitasking as well as being competitive, both personally and in the workplace (Smola & Sutton, 2002). As employees, Gen Xers expect higher salaries, expect flexibility with their



work schedules, prefer informal work environments, dislike close supervision at work, strive to create a work-life balance, prefer high-quality end results over quantity, assert independence at their places of employment, and are comfortable with change. Gen Xers are at ease with authority figures in the workplace but are not captivated with job titles (Hill, 2004). Furthermore, they are also described as being quick learners who value learning and wish to obtain new knowledge and skills, desire work-life balance, are easy to work with, inclusive, and are the generation who began the movement of embracing diversity (Aldisert, 2002; Bursch & Kelly, 2014).

**Generation Y/Millennials.** The next generation to be examined is Generation Y also known as the Millennials, Gen Yers, Echo Boom, the Nexter Generation, and the Net Generation (Horovitz, 2012). Generation Y members were born between 1980 and the late 1990s, and as of 2014 were 80 million strong (Bursch & Kelly, 2014). Millennials made up 36% of the United States workforce in 2014, and by the year 2020, will represent 46% of the workforce (Bursch & Kelly, 2014; Kratz, 2013). Generation Y was born to parents influenced by the Watergate scandal, the AIDS crisis, and great advances in technology (Baker, 2015). Experiences that have shaped Generation Y include 24/7 unlimited access to the Internet, personal cell phones, and digital cameras. Historical events which shaped Generation Y include the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the Oklahoma City bombing, the Columbine shootings, Operation Desert Storm, school violence, Enron and other corporate scandals, Hurricane Katrina, reality television, and web-based social networks such as MySpace and Facebook (Deyoe & Fox, 2012; Fogg, 2009; Murphy, 2007).

This cohort is the generation that has been introduced to unprecedented diversity and new cultures from around the globe and is the most diverse generation in current history. According to a 2009 survey performed by the Pew Research Center, 18.5% of Millennials were Hispanics, 14.2% African-American, 4.3% Asian, 3.2% were mixed race or other and 59.8% Caucasian, which is considered a record low for the Caucasian category (Keeter & Taylor, 2009). Data provided by the United States Census Bureau (2015) reported the population of Millennials in the United States as of July 2014 is as follows: African-American – 45.7 million, Hispanics - 55.4 million, Asian – 20.3 million, American Indian and Alaskan Natives – 6.5 million, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders – 1.5 million and Caucasian – 197.9 million persons.

Generation Y, unlike its predecessor Generation X, was raised under close supervision, with their parents controlling their schedules down to the minute, putting their children's needs first and continuously advocating for their best interest (Bursch & Kelly, 2014). Members of Generation Y are often described as being opinionated and are known for working and playing hard, as well as being civic-minded. This generation possesses the need to be recognized for their accomplishments, as well as the need for instant gratification enabled through technology (Bolton, 2010; Bursch & Kelly, 2014). As with other generations, members of Generation Y value corporate and social responsibility and feel compelled to create a difference in the world (Bursch & Kelly, 2014).

At the workplace, members of Gen Y prefer flexibility in work hours and the way in which they dress at work, preferring comfortable clothing instead of business wear, as well as a relaxed work environment. Millennials crave meaningful work, want to be part of a company's mission, and appreciate significant work that benefits members in their

communities over a hefty paycheck (Dowd-Higgins, 2010). Alternatively, Millennials frequently change jobs as they seek new opportunities, are not afraid to tell employers what their values consist of, and if unhappy in their positions (Bursch & Kelly, 2014). Members of this cohort prefer managers who take the time to know them individually, taking an interest in their personal aspirations. Millennials appreciate supervisors and leaders who coach and motivate them, provide structure in the workforce, and are positive, collaborative, and achievement oriented (Murphy, 2007).

Generation Y is sometimes called the *next great generation* because of their dedication to public service, as well as their high-test scores, and because they are considered the most educated generation to date (Bursch & Kelly, 2014; Howe & Strauss, 2007; Smola & Sutton, 2002). Additionally, because Millennials are digital natives and have strong social networks, their strengths include resourcefulness in searching for information and the ability to solve problems (Valcour, 2013). However, Millennials expect information immediately and prefer communication be done through text messages. This expectation of a quick flow of information and technological fluency may be the source of a portion of the workplace conflict between Millennials and the older generations working beside them (Valcour, 2013).

### **Multigenerational Workforce**

Employees of multigenerational backgrounds possess an array of work characteristics, preferred communication styles, motivating factors, management style preferences, values, and outlooks on their careers that are often referred to as “generational clash points” (See Table 3). Martin and Tulgan (2006) opined organizations must learn how to captivate and lead each generation, corresponding to the preferred

motivational and leadership style for each respective cohort. Understanding what motivates each of the respective generations and building on the strengths of each, can help employers develop approaches to attract and retain employees which are appealing to each cohort, as well as address potential problems which may arise in the current workforce of four generations (American Hospital Association, 2014; Bennett et al., 2012). Moreover, Coulter and Faulkner (2014) suggested that by managers diligently working to understand the benefits and worth of a multigenerational workforce, greater employee potential and increased productivity can be gained.

Table 3

*Organizational Generational Clash Points*

Clash Point	Traditionalists	Boomers	Xers	Millennials
Work/Career goal	To build a legacy	To build a stellar career	To build a portable career	To build parallel careers
Reward system	Satisfaction of a job well done	Money, title, recognition	Freedom is the ultimate reward	Meaningful work
Feedback	No news is good news	Once a year is enough	"How am I doing?"	Comes with push of a button

(continued)

Clash Point	Traditionalists	Boomers	Xers	Millennials
Changing jobs	Carries a stigma	Puts your career behind	Is necessary	Is part of my daily routine
Retirement is . . .	A reward	Time to retool	Time off to renew	Recycling
Training	"I learned it the hard way, you can too."	"Train 'em too much and they'll take the new skills and leave."	"The more they learn, the more they stay."	"Continuous learning is a way of life."

*Note.* Descriptive Note. Adapted from (Generations at work: Managing the clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers, and Nexters in Your Workplace) by R. Zemke, C. Raines, & B. Filipczak (2000). Copyright by Amacom. Adapted with permission.

**Similarities and differences.** Employers are consistently reporting the negative qualities of the younger generations. The stereotypes sometimes used to describe the younger generations are dishonesty, laziness, low motivation levels, and disrespect for authority (Walker, 2006). Gen X and Gen Y have agreed that they are hesitant to question and hold older generations responsible, while members of Boomers and Traditionalists have confessed to losing their tempers more quickly during conversations, adding that they experienced anger and frustration during difficult conversations (Asghar, 2014). The generations which reported the greatest difficulty working together are the Baby Boomers and the Millennials, with both groups replying that the other generation dismissed their work and life experiences; lacked respect, discipline, and focus; and was resistant to change (Bursch & Kelly, 2014). Millennials and Generation X reported similar areas of difference encountered with the Boomer generation, including personal views on loyalty to an organization, multi-tasking versus a single focus, and relationships outside of the workplace (Zopiatis et al., 2012). A similarity that has been noted consistently among the

four generations is their preference for interacting and working with colleagues similar in age to themselves, which can be a cause of workplace strife and a challenge to businesses (Standifer, Lester, Schultz, & Windsor, 2013).

**Benefits and strengths.** Martin and Tulgan (2006) suggested that organizations use the variances among generations to their benefit by engaging older employees in knowledge transfer, challenging them to grow into coaches, working with the younger employees embracing their capabilities while treating them as professional colleagues. Aldisert (2002) asserted that employees who are aware of each other's perspectives work together more effectively, which leads to greater productivity within the organization. Appreciating the respective workstyles of the four generations, the specific traits, intentions and skill sets of each cohort can assist managers in creating an energized multigenerational workforce (Rajput et al., 2013). Further, new ideas and business concepts resulting from multigenerational learning and tapping into the strengths found within the four generations can posture organizations for better serving their consumers (Bennett, et al., 2012; Iden, 2016).

**Generational stereotypes.** Today's managers and business leaders are constantly encountering and documenting concerns regarding the negative qualities that the four generations in the workplace contribute to colleagues in other generational cohorts. Lankard Brown (1994) suggested that attitudes which arise from the negative characteristics assigned to other generations can negatively impact the organization's culture as well as its productivity. However, not all stereotypes are negative and some symbolize positive connotations about the generations. Examples of common stereotypes assigned to the respective generations are as follows:

- Traditionalists—Deeply committed to their country, families, are disciplined, frugal, socially-conscious, have a strong work ethic and have respect for authority figures (Codrington, 2004; Pitt-Catsoupes & Matz-Costa, 2008); Useless with technology and social media (Alsop, 2013).
- Baby Boomers—Achievement oriented, loyal and diligent (Bursch & Kelly, 2014). Millennials view Boomers as being resistant to change, dogmatic and defensive (Bursch & Kelly, 2014). Gen Xers see them as resistant to change, as well as defensive, sexist and arrogant (Bursch & Kelly, 2014).
- Generation X—Gen Xers' entrepreneurial, individualistic attitude is often mistaken for being rebellious, showing disrespect for authority, and lacking loyalty (Bursch & Kelly, 2014; Codrington, 2004). They are often accused of being slackers because of their need for work-life balance, as well as being thought of as cynical and distrustful (Alsop, 2013). Millennials view this generation as arrogant, having weak problem-solving abilities, and being slow on responding to challenges and problems. (Bursch & Kelly, 2014). Additionally, Baby Boomers see GenXers as lacking discipline and focus (Bursch & Kelly, 2014).
- Generation Y/Millennials—This generation is often thought of as valuing leisure over work (Bursch & Kelly, 2014). Baby Boomers often feel Millennials lack discipline and focus (Bursch & Kelly, 2014). Millennials are often viewed as being dishonest, lazy, undependable, unmotivated and disrespectful to authority (Lankard Brown, 1994). However, on the positive side, Millennials are known for being confident and street smart but are also seen by older

generations as lacking the skills and tact necessary to address and handle difficulties in the workplace (Tolbize, 2008).

### **Bridging the Gap Among the Four Generations**

This section examines existing strategies of how organizations can work to create a workplace harmonious to the four generations explored in this study. According to Senge, et al., (1999), organizations must be more dedicated to recognizing and bridging the gaps among the various generations in the workplace. Doing so would lead organizations to be more competitive in recruiting, managing, and retaining top employees. Many scholars, including Senge and Kurpius (1993), Yu and Miller (2005), and Zemke, et al. (2000) have studied conflict generated by generational differences and the nuisance faced by business leaders (Tolbize, 2008). The authors agree that managers need to show sensitivity and thoughtfulness towards the differences experienced between the multiple generations in the workforce. Managers must acknowledge the experiences and education that each generation brings to the organization, as well as accept and embrace the differences each possesses as well (Rajput, et al., 2013; Senge, et al., 1999).

By researching the qualities that each generational cohort brings to the workplace, a framework can be developed to leverage the knowledge and strengths of each cohort (Smith, as cited in Baker, 2015). Valcour (2013) suggested that human resource leaders should concentrate on the similar characteristics of the generations, as studies have shown that only slight differences in viewpoints and values exist among Millennials and the older generations. According to Smola and Sutton (2002) little of what is presented regarding negative interactions between generations offers conclusively findings or



empirically tested delineations within and between cohort differences (p. 370). Moreover, college lecturer and human resource practitioner Frank Giancola (2006) asserts “even though the generations are different, it does not necessarily mean they hold divisive values and attitudes that will affect their ability to work well together” (p. 32).

J. Bret Becton (Becton, Walker, & Jones-Farmer, 2014) from the University of Southern Mississippi conducted a study and found that assumed workplace differences and common stereotypes of the different generations are often exaggerated and overemphasized (Becton, et al., 2014). Furthermore, while generalizations can be made about the four generations in this study, it should not be expected every member of a specific generation to act in the same manner as everyone has had different life experiences, influencing their behaviors and attitudes. While persons from the same generation may act more similarly than differently, they may act more similarly with individuals from cohorts other than their own (ASHHRA, 2014). Nevertheless, Jennifer Deal, Ph.D. concluded from a research study she conducted of 3,000 corporate leaders, that all generations hold like values with family topping the list, followed by desiring respect, as well as supervisors who are trustworthy and willing to coach them (Deal, 2007).

Reitman (2006) posited that “successful organizations develop strategies to bridge the gaps in the workplace which result in generations working together effectively, learning from one another, showing mutual respect to one another” (p. 1). She added that leaders “need to consider and address what the four generations value and want to experience in their workplaces” (p.1). According to Reitman, these strategies include work and life balance, opportunities for learning and career development, talent management,

regular performance appraisals and feedback, two-way communication, recognition, and trust.

Zemke, et al., (2000) recommended that employers build nontraditional workplaces to address the mixture of values and ages. They suggested the following ways to avoid confusion and conflict in the workplace among generations: accommodate employee differences; get to know employees individually when possible; work to accommodate their personal needs, work-life balance issues, and non-traditional lifestyles; and give staff feedback and recognition as appropriate. Strauss and Howe (1997) opined that to understand the multiple generations in the workforce, leaders must examine the factors that truly motivate each respective generational group. Further, Zemke, et al., (2000) suggested that to create a thriving intergenerational workforce, organizations should utilize assertive communication and deployment techniques. Aggressive communication is the practice of noticing conflict and addressing it as soon as observed. Difference deployment is utilizing the unique background, skills, and experience of employees to fortify others in the workplace (Bober, 2005). Lastly, Bober (2005) asserted that it is beneficial for organizations to find a way to keep acrimonious feelings among members of the workforce at a minimum to avoid interference with the organization's goals.

### **Benefits and Rewards of Proactively Managing a Multigenerational Workplace**

In the AARP publication *Leading a Multigenerational Workforce*, Murphy (2007) discussed the advantages of addressing multigenerational issues in the workplace. The benefits include:

1. Improved corporate culture. Organization leaders and human resource leaders that invest in educating their employees on the issues and differences of

multiple generations will advance generational support, inclusiveness, respect, and productivity in their organizations. Educating the workforce about the multiple generations their coworkers represent reduces age discrimination and may lead to retention of older workers in the organization, potentially alleviating *brain drain*.

2. Improved employee morale and engagement. Workforce leaders who know how to successfully inspire their employees from multiple generations will increase staff morale and commitment.
3. Improved employee retention. Businesses that supervise multiple generations effectively generally have joyful, and more engaged, connected staff members. Murphy added that additional benefits from organizations utilizing multigenerational work team include: teams that are more flexible, gaining and maintaining greater market shares of the multigenerational market, better business decision-making due to the multiple perspectives of multigenerational staff, and increased innovation and creativity.

Grenny (Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, & Switzler, 2012), in his study co-authored with ASTD (as cited in "Crucial Applications," 2014), recommended that to resolve conflict and improve productivity among the four generations currently in the workforce, employers encourage their employees to develop the following four basic communication skills:

1. Make conversations safe. Start dialogue by displaying and demonstrating respect for the people involved in the conversation, sharing the desire to accomplish a mutual objective through the conversation.

2. Open the conversation by describing the purpose of the conversations. Share concerns with the use of facts (e.g., “I wanted to speak to you about the importance of clocking in when you arrive to work and the repercussions from our auditors if they do not see a regular attendance record for an employee.”)
3. If a fellow staff member becomes defensive during a conversation, pause and reassure the employee of the constructive intent of the encounter and permit the employee an opportunity to share his/her anxieties. Allow the colleague to offer his/her perspective so that the conversation remains open and two-way. (Patterson, et al., 2012).

Progressus Therapy’s Vice-President of Business Development Erica Fener (2013) developed the following list of suggestions to assist in leveraging each generational cohort’s strengths while promoting collaboration in the organization:

1. Communicate with the workforce utilizing generational preferences when possible. For example, Generation Y prefers quick and to the point communication methods such as emails and texts, whereas Millennials prefer the opportunity to interact personally, provide feedback, and receive reinforcement.
2. Develop programs that give generational cohorts the opportunity to work together and share knowledge and information. Stress to the Traditionalists and Baby Boomers the importance sharing their knowledge and expertise to avoid knowledge forfeiture when they retire from the workforce.
3. Build teams that are both diverse and multigenerational with members of all ages, genders, and cultures.

4. Recognize and embrace the various management styles that each generation values. While some generations appreciate direct supervision and a more involved management style, other generations prefer their managers to let them work independently with little or no supervision.

Gaines & Wilson (2009) suggested the following ways for organizational leaders to guide and manage diverse teams effectively:

1. Become educated about generational issues. Through learning about and understanding generational issues, business leaders can gain a better understanding of what motivates their workforce at different ages and stages of their careers. Generational issues include preferred styles of management, work ethics and values, motivational factors, communication preferences, and feelings about technology.
2. Avoid the use of age stereotypes. Encourage employees of all ages to avoid using stereotypes about other generations, young and old. Help employees to recognize unconscious stereotypes and preconceived typecasts that they may believe about colleagues from other generations.
3. Utilize a management style that considers the strengths and needs of each generation. One cannot successfully manage a diverse, multigenerational workforce by using one style of management. Flexibility is required to accommodate the different cohort members in today's workforce. Being flexible may include allowing various dress styles, work schedules, and methods of reward and acknowledgment.

4. Support employment development and training opportunities across all workforce generations. Offer the chance for all employees of all ages and stages of their careers the opportunity to learn new skills and work with colleagues from different generational cohorts. By bringing older and younger employees together, vital knowledge is shared, and mentoring can occur among the generations.
5. Do not assume that all workplace conflicts are due to generational issues. Conflict can be caused by a multitude of reasons exclusive of the factor of various ages working together. These reasons can include personality issues, varying belief systems, or general miscommunications that occur among people of all ages.
6. Create a strong, vital multigenerational workforce. Creating a vital multigenerational work group requires people management skills, flexibility, and attention to the needs of various cohort group members. Managers should begin this process by getting to know employees individually when possible, finding out what it will take to keep them with the organization. Managers should utilize the information they receive from the workforce members to create an action plan to retain the organization's valuable talent pool. Managers must be familiar with generational differences and adapt their management style to the needs of the individual employee and cohort styles when possible. Highlighting the contributions of individuals and teams during group, and one-on-one meetings, will emphasize what each generation brings to the workplace. Being open to discussing generation issues with the workforce at informal

settings when possible will create the opportunities to share ideas, knowledge, as well as clear up misunderstandings.

Author Eroca Gabriel (2013) outlined five communication strategies that she asserted will help ease misunderstandings between the multiple generations currently in the workplace that is “fraught with intergenerational misunderstandings” (p. 2):

1. Complexity. Because of the multiple generations currently in the workplace simultaneously, communication has become even more complex than ever before, and the situation calls for multiple perspectives. Employees should take advantage of the ideas and knowledge offered by members of other generations to create a competitive edge and develop ways that the cohorts working together can create a successful workforce.
2. And/Both. All of the generational cohorts exhibit some form of cultural/civic/communication orientation. Organizations should pool the efforts, share ideas, and make a difference both within the organization and the community at large.
3. Perspective-Taking. Gabriel used Sheryl Sandberg’s adage of *leaning in* to recommend that members of the generational cohorts take the opportunity to get to know each other and their respective perspectives, which can be used to work collaboratively to get the job done.
4. Web-Like. The American workplace and its culture are shifting from a hierarchical format to a web-like design. Information now flows multi-dimensionally. The older generations still think and work with a hierarchical mindset, while the younger generations are often still developing their

professionalism needed for the workplace. This area is still a work in progress for the generations, and the cohorts need to find a way to organize themselves for success.

5. Time-Binding. As the Traditionalists and Boomers prepare to exit the workforce, attention must be given to the transfer of knowledge to the younger generations. Generations X and Y are more concerned about the influence they bring than the legacy they leave. The four generations need to forge together so both a legacy and their influence can be left for other generations.

In *Generations, Inc.: From Boomers to Linksters—Managing the Friction Between Generations at Work*, workplace training experts Meagan and Larry Johnson (2010) discussed generational differences that impact work and communication styles, team behavior, and communication styles and offered the following recommendations for resolving generational conflicts:

1. Understand work styles. Each generation has unique methods of how they prefer to be managed in the workplace. Managers need to take the time to learn the preferred style of management for the generations they are managing.
2. Consider generational values. Each generation has a distinct set of values and feels threatened if their values are challenged. Managers should honor the values of the generations.
3. Share perceptions. When employees of different generations are involved in workplace conflict, a great deal can be learned and gained by each person sharing his or her distinct perspective on the situation or dispute.



4. Find a generationally appropriate fix. While people's life experiences cannot be changed, they are ways to work with generational workplace attitudes and expectations, making it fit into the organization's culture.
5. Find commonality. Common values transcend across more than one generation. Managers should discover what these values are and highlight them to show commonality among the generations. For example, Traditionalists and Generation Y members value security and stability because of childhood experiences. Generations X and Y members prefer workplace flexibility and work-life balance.
6. Learn from each generation. Every generation has important messages to teach to the other generational cohorts. Traditionalists and Boomers have workplace knowledge and tips to share with the younger generations. Generation X employees have gifts for mediation and fairness, which are needed in the office environment. Generation Y is a technology wizard; a talent that all generations could use and should be given the opportunity to learn.

Murphy (2007) posited that organizations "who are ahead of the curve will be able to analyze the structure of their present and future labor force" (p. 25). She developed "strategic questions" for organizational leaders and human resource professionals to use in analyzing the state of their current workforce, and how successful the organization is managing the changing generational demographics. Murphy recommended that organizations and human resource professional ask themselves the following questions:

1. What are the current practices in your business that support the differences of the four generations?

- a. Describe the current generational composition of your organization?
- b. Is there a greater concentration of one generation in line staff or management positions?
- c. Do you see a higher attrition rate among employees of any specific generation?
- d. Does each generation get the opportunity to participate in making decisions concerning hiring? Some individuals often prefer to hire people who mirror themselves, so hiring decisions according to Murphy (2007) should be made by mixed generations, so new employees come from various generations.
- e. When making advancements, are qualified members of each generation in your workforce considered and are promotional selections made by a multigeneration panel?
- f. Are members of the workforce older than 50 years of age passed over for promotional opportunities as it is presumed that they are at the end of their careers?
- g. Are there generational differences that need to be addressed with the workforce through skill-building, recruiting or retention?
- h. Does the organization offer a confidential employee assistance program for its workforce and it is utilized by members of all generations?
- i. Do internal employee surveys and poll results regarding the organization's workplace culture vary significantly for the different

generations? If so, what will your organization's leadership do to address the variances?

- j. During exit interviews, if used by your organization, does your organization ask for details as to why the best employees (of each of the generations) opt to leave the organization?
- k. Are there issues amongst the generations that effect exits, and if so, what could have triggered departing individuals to remain with the company?
- l. Would the company consider performing a loss analysis which consists of identifying staff who have departed over the last one to three years, who the company wished had remained? When those individuals are contacted and asked, "Why did you leave and what would it have taken for you to stay?" the responses can be used by the organization to detect issues that add to retention issues. The responses also shed light on issues that members of the various generational cohorts may be experiencing at the organization.

- 2. What is the organization doing to address what the makeup of the workforce will be in the next five to ten years?

According to Murphy (2007), the proportion of Generation X currently in the workforce will remain steady, while the percentage of Generation Y will increase.

Murphy (2007) offers that leaders can use dialogue in their conversations with their workforce to demonstrate behavior that is "generation-friendly" and suggests using the

following types of statements to assist in creating a culture where communication is open, and all generations can thrive:

- There is not just one type of successful person in our organization.
- We talk openly about our different viewpoints and it is safe to do so.
- Our work environment is relaxed and informal.
- We work assignments that provide employees with diversified duties and challenges, allowing each employee to develop a range of skills.
- We focus on retention every day; we value you.
- When we develop a project team, we purposefully include an assortment of perspectives.

Murphy (2007) closed her article by stating that organizations can ease the transition of the workforce moving into multiple generations working together by helping their staff become more cognizant and accepting of the differences of the multiple generations. She posits that this can be accomplished by beginning to address and remove the stereotypes that generations may assume about each other (e.g., young people are rude and disrespectful and devalue older workers). She further suggests that by organizational leaders facilitating the conversations concerning generations differences and uniqueness as well as offering training on the subject, employees become aware of their misjudgments and begin to find the positives in the differences among the cohorts. As a result, morale, creativity, and productivity will increase in the organization (Murphy, 2007). Finally, Dr. Betty Kupperschmidt opined, “a generational perspective enables managers to leverage employee uniqueness as a source of

learning, productivity, and innovation and to create a role model and shared vision of positive co-worker relationships” (Kupperschmidt, 2000, p. 65).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the various features of the four generations in the current workplace, and to discover the best practices currently utilized by organizations and senior human resource professionals to create and sustain a vital workforce. While defining the theoretical framework for this study, the researcher endeavored to thoroughly examine the prior research conducted on the issues of generational analyses with a concentration of generational attitudes in the workplace. Multiple theories on generations exist in literature. Utilizing a funnel approach, the researcher began with examining the Mannheim generational theory and then the Strauss-Howe generational theory.

**Generational theories.** Sajjadi, Castillo, & Sun (2012) acknowledged that sociologists, philosophers, and anthropologists have been studying the distinctive characteristics of generations for many years. They posited that while an anthropologist focuses and relies on biological features as the greatest traits while examining the differences and characteristics among generations, a social theorist focuses on the social and behavioral qualities and attributes that visibly distinguishes generations from one other. Deal et al., (2012) opined that attentiveness to generational differences in the sources of motivation is a key element in achieving employee success and performance. Sajjadi, Castillo, & Sun (2012) further asserted that by studying generational theories, a better understanding can be gained of the traits, values and work attitudes that each generation maintains. Schofield & Honore (2009) believed that generation theories could

be used as shorthand in analyzing and gaining comprehensive of the generations. However, existing and popular established models and theories of research should not limit the researcher's proficiency to venture into novel areas of research concerning the study's topic.

Additionally, generational theories may help to provide organization leaders and human resource managers with a greater comprehension of the generational cohort members thus providing leadership with additional tools for creating a better working environment, ultimately achieving better business success (Sajjadi, Castillo, & Sun, 2012). McCrindle (2006) maintained that understanding generational trends may assist employees and employers which are part of multigenerational cohorts, provide for a friendlier and more collaborative working environment. The above arguments justify the need to look closely at the two major generational theories of Mannheim (1952) and Strauss and Howe (1991).

**Mannheim theory of generations.** Karl Mannheim (1952), a sociologist who lived during the 20th century, wrote extensively about generations from a sociological frame of reference. Mannheim's essay "The Problem of Generations" explored his philosophy on generations and his concept of cohort group theory focused on life experiences and historical events occurring during an individual's early childhood (Festing & Schafer, 2014; Iden, 2016). Mannheim (1952) posited that biological factors alone could not explain the historical and generation differences that dominate generations, and that it was equally necessary to examine social and cultural factors that may validate the prevalence of specific characteristics among generations. Mannheim firmly believed that generations are characterized by their common behaviors, collectively shared knowledge

and experiences (Corsten, 1999). Author Foster (2013) opined that Mannheim's generation theory focuses on the birth cycle, biological timing and ultimately death. Foster added that the concept of a generation is based upon actions, mental attitude, the thinking method of cohorts which brings about a planned approach toward a meaningful purpose of life (Foster, 2013; Iden, 2016).

Mannheim further contended the elaboration of the distinct generational awareness, interactions and unique methods in comparison with other generations depended upon social changes (Leavitt, 2014; Pilcher, 1994). Thus, is it essential for researchers to consider political, economic, and social influences which may influence and affect generational characteristics and features. These features will lead into the maturity of certain qualities and characteristics in each generation that distinguishes them from their respective generations (Sajjadi, Castillo, & Sun, 2012). The generation who survived the Great Depression is a demonstration of how events shape cohort members, as those affected by financial hardships had their attitudes and behaviors shift towards matters of personal finance, the labor market as well as government subsidies that resulted from difficult financial conditions (Sajjadi, Castillo, & Sun, 2012).

**Strauss and Howe's generational theory.** Strauss and Howe (1991) published *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*, which is regarded as groundbreaking literature on the examination of the theory of generations. Strauss & Howe posited that generational theory, the study of generational cohorts, involves understanding the characteristics of different generations and using cataloging as a tool to articulate the differences amongst the groups. Moreover, the theory offers an understanding into the distinctive characteristics of each generation, providing

organization leaders and human resource managers with a better grasp of what shaped each generation's beliefs, values, work styles, and managerial preferences. Strauss and Howe compared the lifespan of humans to that of leaves, as both come into existence, grow for a season, and ultimately pass away, making way for a new season/generation, which the authors described as the cycle of life, believing that generational cycles repeat in American history (Sajjadi, Castillo, & Sun, 2012). Figure 2 is an illustration of the Strauss and Howe's generational theory model, illustrating their belief that U.S. generations recycle and live through different "turnings"—eras approximately two decades long.



Figure 2. Strauss and Howe's generational theory. Note. Reprinted from *The Fourth Turning* by W. Strauss and N. Howe (1997). Copyright 1997 by Broadway Books. Reprinted with permission.



Strauss and Howe further asserted in their book *Generations* (1991) that workplaces, like humans and nature, are also continuously evolving as new generations are replacing older generations, resulting in changes of societal moods and behaviors. As time passes, society's views on morality, values, attitudes, and opinions are changing and reshaping each generation's view of the world as well as their ethics and beliefs. In their book *The Fourth Turning*, Strauss and Howe (1997) described their belief that "repeating cycles" or "stages of turnings" shape the qualities of different generations, known also by the axiom "peer personalities" (p. 123). The generational cycle according to Strauss and Howe is categorized into four dimensions:

- High. An era that follows a period of great crisis. During this stage, Strauss and Howe believe that individualism is weak, and institutions are strong. Society is confident about its future although those who see themselves outside of the majority feel stifled by the group's conformity. The most recent high stage commenced in 1946 after World War II, ending 50 years later in 1993, with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.
- Awakening. During the Awakening stage, institutions that were in power during the High stage are now questioned and attacked in the name of personal independence, with a desire for personal authenticity and truth. The most recent period of Awakening was known as the Consciousness Revolution and spanned from the mid-1960s (the period of civil rights and other revolt movements) to the re-election of President Ronald Reagan in 1984.
- Unraveling. This stage is the opposite of the High stage, and during this period of turning, individualism is again strong and flourishing, while institutions are

considered feeble and mistrusted. The last turning period of unraveling was from the mid-1980s and ended in the late 2000s.

- **Crisis.** This period is described as an era where utilitarian life is decimated and rebuilt because of a perceived danger to the survival of the people. Civilian and community authority arise, and people begin seeing the larger picture and the bigger scope of the state of the world's affairs. The last crisis period began with the crash of the stock market in 1929 and ended with the close of World War II).

Table 4 below describes the characteristics of Strauss and Howe's generation cycle and how it correlates to the four generations being focused on in this research study. The four generational styles are branded as follows: Idealist, Reactive, Civic, and Adaptive.

Table 4

*Strauss and Howe "Generational Cycle"*

Generational Cycle	General description of generation	Today's equivalent
Adaptive	Recessive in public life, checking the excesses of their more powerful neighbors	Mature
Idealist	Dominant in public life by redefining the inner world of values and culture	Baby Boomer
Reactive	Recessive in public life, checking the excesses of their more powerful neighbors as pragmatists	Generation X
Civics	Dominant in public life through rebuilding the outer world of technology and institutions	Nexter

*Note.* Adapted from (The Fourth Turning) by W. Strauss and N. Howe (1997). Copyright 1997 by Broadway Books. Reprinted with permission.

**Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory.** While Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1943) is not classified as a generational theory, it assists organizational leaders and human resource professionals in understanding what motivates employees of all generations and gives them purpose. Common needs motivate all humans, according to Maslow, but the factors that motivate generational cohort members may be different as each generation brings a distinct set of attitudes, values and behaviors, including their preferred method of recognition (Amabile & Kramer, 2010).

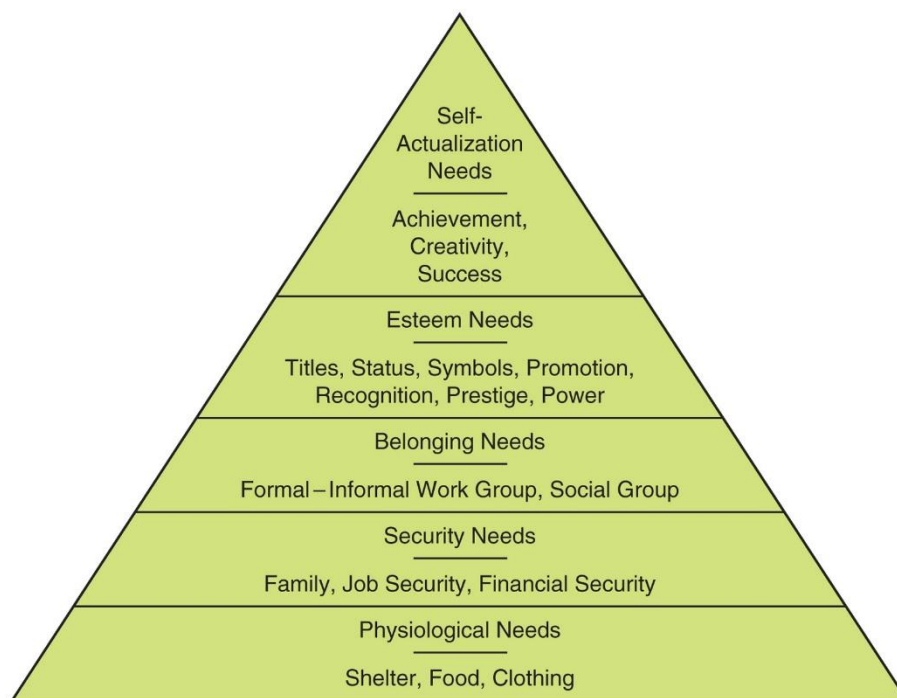
Bolton (2010) asserted that generational differences experienced among the generations—such as motivating factors, work preferences, and values—cannot be avoided, due to the connection to distinctive events experienced by those born during a specific era. Bolton (2010) further posited that “workers from younger generations have different motivational factors, reasons for working, leadership styles and productivity levels than do workers from older generational cohorts” (p. 2). It is crucial for organizations to understand the reasons why people work, as each has different things that motivate him or her.

While monetary necessity is an important factor, it is not the only reason for working. According to Randstad Work Solutions (2007) employees view work as an opportunity to gain personal self-actualization and satisfaction, and people do not work solely for financial necessity. Other factors of enjoyment derived from working include workplace friendships, the importance of accomplishing tasks, and a sense of pride for the organization for which they work (Graves, Ruderman, Ohlott, & Weber, 2012). Realizing that something that motivates one generation may not motivate another is an important element in managing multiple generations. Managers must discover what

motivates the respective generations (Bober, 2005). Leaders' abilities to respond to the differences of the generational cohort members within their organization will affect their business' environment and work values (Bolton, 2010).

Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs projected that all humans have primary needs that direct their activities and possess a motivation system not connected to rewards or unaware desires (McLeod, 2007). Maslow's theory is essential to this research as it postulates a basis for interpreting human motivation, which can help organizations manage their employees by understanding their motivational factors. Additionally, Maslow's theory also explores employers' responsibility to provide an environment at work that supports workers in their search to realize their distinctive capabilities, referred to as *self-actualization* on Maslow's hierarchy of needs pyramid (Bolton, 2010).

Moreover, Maslow's theory groups human needs into five distinct levels: psychological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization. The hierarchy of needs is depicted in a pyramid format, as Maslow contended that the lower levels of needs must be fulfilled before the higher levels can be achieved (Maslow, 1943; See Figure 3). Harber (2011) noted that needs in the middle to top of Maslow's pyramid which includes respect, recognition, trust, friendship and opportunities for learning, are desires that people value despite their generation (p. 52). Moreover, Speer (2011) postulated that desires common to each of the four generations include an enjoyable job, stability in their workplace, validation, appreciation, benefits, good pay, purpose, and personal fulfillment. Finally, Randstad Work Solutions (2007) concluded that the highest indicator of job satisfaction for all generations is feeling valued in their job roles.



*Figure 3.* Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

## Summary

Over the past 50 years, the workforce had been dominated by employees who were Traditionalists and Boomers. As Generation X and Millennials enter the workforce with different work ethics and values, organizations have begun rethinking the way they view generations (Tolbize, 2008). As four distinct generations are working alongside one other, tensions and competition have arisen, which contributes to the stereotyping of generation cohorts often made by workforce members as well as organizational leaders (Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998).

The literature reviewed in this chapter reinforced the need to explore and understand the unique characteristics of the four generations in the workplace and filled a gap in the literature regarding advancing management strategies for creating and managing a vital intergenerational workforce. The theoretical framework for this research was supported by Strauss & Howe's (1991) generation theory, Mannheim's (1952) theory

of generation and his hierarchy of needs theory. Chapter III describes the qualitative research conducted to explore what challenges organizations face, strategies and practices they employ, tools they use to measure their success, and recommendations and future implications organizational leaders would give in creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce. The multigenerational workforce brings a variety of challenges as well as opportunities for the businesses for which they are employed. Members of the workforce should be supported in grasping the viewpoints and partialities of the four generations, which can be utilized to help diminish perceived generation differences, and alternatively emphasize the similarities, values, and benefits that each generational cohort offers.

### **Chapter III: Research Design and Methodology**

The chapter begins with discussing the nature of the research, the phenomenological examination practice, and the research method utilized. The following section identified the research design and interview protocols, which includes the method for participant selection and recruitment, the data collection plan, the procedures utilized for the protection of the human subjects, interview techniques, the data collection instrument and the methods utilized to confirm the validity and reliability of the study. The final section provides information on the researcher's statement of personal bias and the data analysis.

#### **Nature of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to assess and identify best practices and strategies for leaders to gain an understanding of the unique characteristics and needs of the four generations in the current labor force. This chapter describes the research design, the suitability of the design, and the methods and procedures utilized for collecting and evaluating the data obtained from a sample of 15 participants - human resource senior level professionals located in Los Angeles County. This chapter also includes:

- the research design and rationale
- a restatement of the interview questions
- the phenomenological method being utilized
- the sources of data for the study
- validity of the interview protocol
- validity and reliability of the study

- statement of the researcher's bias
- data collection procedures
- data analysis process used to achieve the function of this study.

### **Restatement of the Research Questions**

Research questions recognize elements of an “empirical domain that researchers want to explore and may be general, particular, descriptive, or explanatory” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 23). The following research questions were utilized for this research study:

RQ1. What challenges do organizations face in implementing strategies and practices employed in creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce?

RQ2. What strategies and practices do organizations employ in creating and sustaining a vital, intergenerational workforce?

RQ3. How do organizations measure the success of their action plans to create and sustain a vital, intergenerational workforce?

RQ4. What recommendations would workers make for future implementation of creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce?

This descriptive study employs a qualitative approach that addresses the research questions proposed, incorporating interviews and content analysis. The next section is the basis for selecting a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach as the method for this study.

### **Methodology**

“The methodology and research design directed the researcher in designing and implementing a study in a way that is most likely to achieve the researcher's intended



goal. It is the strategic blueprint for conducting a study” (Burns & Grove, 2005, p. 581). The methodology, according to Mouton (1996), is the means or method of achieving something. Polit and Hungler (1999) refer to methodology “as the process of following steps and procedures for gathering and analysis data in a research investigation” (p. 233). The research design connects the methods of research, the philosophy, and inquiry strategies (Creswell, 2009).

A qualitative methodology study was chosen to gain an understanding of what challenges organizations face, strategies and practices organizations employ in creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce, the tools they use to measure if their implementation strategies are working, and what recommendations these leaders would make for future leaders. Qualitative infers an importance on the qualities of entities, processes, and connotations that are not measured for quality or occurrence. Qualitative methodology is dialectic and interpretive. During the interface between the research and the study participants, the interviewee’s domain is learned and construed by way of qualitative methods (De & Strydom, 1998).

According to Larabee (2013), qualitative research emphasizes the socially constructed nature of reality, the close existence between the researcher and the individual being studied, and the limitations that shape inquiry. Trauth (2011) asserted that qualitative research allows the researcher to explore the story behind data obtained and allows both interpretative and analytical research. Miles and Huberman (1994) posited that “qualitative research employs words or open-ended questions that allow the researcher to investigate and understand the meaning individuals contribute to a human or social condition” (p. 5). Qualitative researchers highlight the value loaded nature of

inquiry, seeking responses to questions that focus on how societal experiences are created and assigned significance (Labaree, 2013).

The current study used structured, open-ended questions during the interview process to provide a basis to explore and compare challenges, strategies, success-measuring tools, and future implications for creating and managing a vital multigenerational workforce. Open-ended questions during the interviews allowed the respondents to reveal direct experiences while working with multiple generations in the workplace (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Moustakas (1994) highlighted the worth of qualitative methodologies, as analyses of human experiences are generally not best accomplished through quantitative methods. Qualitative studies offer the complete experience as shared by the participants, and the narratives are experiences in first-person accounts. A qualitative research method was chosen rather than a mixed-method or quantitative approach because the principle investigator was concerned with the analysis of meaning, and was not seeking to explain the relationship between variables, which relies primarily on collecting and analyzing numerical data (Cronholm & Hjalmarsson, 2011).

**Phenomenological approach.** Moustakas (1994) described the phenomenological approach as “encompassing a return to actual experiences which provides the foundation for a structural analysis that portrays the essence of experience” (p. 13). Parker-Hewett (2015) asserted that “the goal of phenomenological research is to construe the action of individuals in the social world and the way individuals give meaning to social phenomena” (p. 53). Creswell added that phenomenological study “identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon” (2009, p. 13). Phenomenology

studies center on experiences, occurrences and episodes with minimum consideration for the external certainty (Sanders, 1982). Moustakas (1994) further asserted that phenomenological research utilizes a small number of survey respondents to form patterns of significance based upon on their individual vital statements.

In this study, the principal investigator employed the phenomenological methodology. This method was chosen for the study because of its ability to provide an understanding of participants' direct experiences, giving them the opportunity to verbalize their experiences of the phenomenon (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). This study involved interviewing participants to obtain their verbal accounts of their lived experiences instead of seeking objective answers or testing a set of hypotheses as open-ended questions provide the greatest opportunity for data to emerge that leads to the development of themes (Creswell, 2003). The participants' experiences included adapting to the changing demographics of the current workforce, challenges encountered, and successful strategies leaders utilize in managing members from various generations. Creswell (2009) discussed how social constructivists assume "individuals strive for an understanding of the world in which they live and work, creating meaning of their experiences" (p. 85). The researcher in this study remained objective and made no assumption that there was a set body of information or lived experiences of principals adjusting to the challenges faced, and strategies used in managing the multiple generational cohorts in today's workplaces.

### **Selection of Data Sources**

The selection of data sources for this study was collected from the population defined below. These contributors were chosen by purposive sampling. Before contact with potential participants, consideration was engaged to ensure the rights of the

participants as required by Pepperdine University and the University's Institutional Review Board.

**Population.** Polit and Hungler (1999) described a population “as a set of individuals having common characteristics as defined by sampling criteria for a study” (p. 232). The definition of population according to Polit and Beck (2010) is the “unmitigated aggregation of cases that specifically meet the requirements of a designated set of criteria which researchers use when making generalizations” (p. 273). Human resource senior level professionals currently working in Los Angeles County—possessing ten or more years of work experience in human resources, or alternately having obtained their SPHR certification and experienced in managing a workforce of at least 50 staff members—constituted the population of this study. According to Patton (2004), researchers define their sample population as the group in which they are most interested (p. 45). From this group, a sample of 15 contributors was asked to partake in interviews.

**Participant description.** This study's participants were obtained by utilizing purposive sampling, which is a sample that is obtained by asking members of the population of interest, of their desire to voluntarily partake in a research study. The inclusion criteria for the 15 human resource level professionals chosen for this study were that individuals had (a) at least ten years of experience working as a human resource senior level professional or had successfully obtained the Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR) Certification, and (b) managed a workforce of at least 50 staff. Participants were of varied ethnicities as well as genders. There were no restrictions regarding economic status, health, or social affiliations or religious preferences within this population. According to Creswell (2003), “one of the main tenets of qualitative research

is to purposefully select participants that will best assist the researcher with understanding the problem and the research questions being studied” (p. 14). The members of this study were chosen and interviewed because of their knowledge base and ability to credibly articulate to his or her experiences and practices employed in creating and sustaining a multigenerational workforce.

**Data collection methods.** Burns and Grove (2005) described collection as “the precise and systematic gathering of information relevant to the research problem, using methods such as interviews, observations, group discussions and case histories” (p. 74). Data in this study was obtained from human resource senior level professionals of Los Angeles County with more than 10 years of experience in their position or who had successfully obtained the Senior Professional in Human Resource Certification, coupled with managing a workforce of at least 50 staff members. Data was obtained for the study by administering semi-structured, in-depth interviews with participants who were selected through a purposive sampling approach. The interview candidates were not targeted by industry or gender, as the purpose of this study was to explore best practices for creating and sustaining a multigenerational workforce without regard to industry or gender. The data collection focused on best practices that human resource professionals had successfully utilized when managing multiple generations, as well as difficulties and obstacles encountered, and strategies for overcoming the challenges. The phenomena measured was oriented towards recollections of past and present experiences as well as anticipation of future trends and occurrences regarding multiple generations working together.

Prior to commencing contact with potential interviewees for participation in the study and to access data collection sites, the principal investigator participated in the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process at Pepperdine University during the month of January 2016. The investigator asked the Institution Review Board permission to conduct research with the various senior level human resource professionals during the month of February 2016 along with the completion of any additional requirements needed as outlined within the data collection timeframe. Once IRB approval was received along with the approved recruitment script, the investigator began contacting human resource professional organizations based in Los Angeles County via phone and email to identify possible candidates who fit the study criteria. The researcher explained the subject and significance of the study to the professional organizations and was voluntarily given the 2014–2015 membership rosters by two of the Los Angeles County human resource professional groups. The rosters contained information on its members, including their names, their current job titles, their educational background, any professional certifications they held (e.g., SPHR certification), their email addresses and phone numbers, as well as their current employer and years of practice in the field of human resources. Personal information such as the member's home addresses, birthdates and ethnicities had been redacted from the lists by the professional organizations to protect the privacy of its members. The two membership groups additionally provided written permission in the form of a consent allowing the principal investigator to contact its members on the lists provided.

Upon receiving the lists from the two membership organizations, the investigator reviewed the data for prospective individuals who fit the study's criteria. The only critical

piece of relevant information missing from the lists provided by the membership associations to determine whether a potential participant met the eligibility criteria, were the group sizes of employees the members had supervised. The researcher would have to ascertain this information concerning the prospective interviewees when contacting the individuals. The researcher contacted the individuals via phone and explained to them the purpose and significance of the study and the criteria for them being selected as a potential interview participant. Potential interviewees who were not available by phone were contacted via email with the purpose of reaching out to each prospective participant. Individuals who opted to partake in the study were sent an email detailing the study's purpose and time commitment that would be required of them as well as a request to schedule a personal interview during the month of February 2016.

The data collection method was comprehensive, face-to-face recorded interviews with 11 questions structured to identify best practices in creating and sustaining a multigenerational workforce. The interviews were conducted during February 2016. Participants in the study were interviewed in person at a location suitable to fit their scheduling and locale needs with the interviews lasting approximately 60 minutes. The researcher made certain that the day and time were conducive to the participants to ensure they had time to complete the entire interview and were comfortable with the process. Although the preference was to perform the interviews with the participants face-to-face, an alternative means of performing the interview by telephone was also utilized for the process. Participants were provided the interview questions ahead of the interviews to give them the opportunity to ponder the questions and their anticipated responses, as well as ensuring the time for the interview was utilized to explore the

responses given by the participants. Reminder emails were sent to the participants one week prior to the interview and a follow-up telephone call was made on the prior day to confirm the locale and time of interview. Follow-up emails were sent to potential participants who had not yet replied to the voicemail and email communications, until the sample size representation of the population had been successfully obtained by the researcher.

**Purposive sampling.** A purposive sampling was utilized because it aims for the insight about a phenomenon, not empirical generalization derived from a sample, and then is applied to a population (Lund Research, 2012). Guarte and Barrios (2006) described purposive sampling “as a random selection of sampling units within the segment of the population, with the greatest amount of information on the characteristic of interest” (p. 275). During this research, 15 senior-level human resource professionals from the Los Angeles County area that met the criteria were identified. Additionally, recommendations of potential senior level human resources professionals were given from their colleagues and fellow members of human resource associations in Los Angeles County endorsing the participant’s job history and experience assisted in ensuring the maximum variation of the sample for this study.

**Protection of human participants.** Approval from Pepperdine’s Institutional Review Board was secured before making any contact or data collection commenced from the survey participants. The participants were solicited using a recruitment script inviting them for their voluntary participation, as well as discussed, the consent needed. A consent form was sent via email to all potential contributors interested in voluntarily taking part in the research. The researcher committed to maintaining the confidentiality of all



individuals who participated using pseudonyms in place of actual names, and of reporting the data in aggregate to avoid confidential information or the participants being possibly identified by the responses given. The participants were informed that while complete anonymity could not be promised, their identities would not be referred to in the final dissertation, nor was their participation in the study discussed with any of their industry counterparts or human resource association colleagues.

After the interviews were completed, all data relating to the study was maintained in a secured file cabinet in the researcher's office. The researcher is the only individual who had access to the research information, which would be kept for seven years and then securely disposed of at that time. No monetary benefit was provided to the survey participants for partaking in the study. Participants were informed of the value that their contributions of personal experiences and professional knowledge of cohorts of multiple generations would provide to the evolving field of managing multiple generations in the workforce. There was no dishonesty displayed by the researcher during the study process, nor conflicts of interest encountered. The data collection instruments were developed by the researcher.

### **Interview Protocol**

This section discusses the interview protocol for this study which was reviewed by the preliminary review committee, accepted and finalized by the dissertation committee.

**Interview techniques.** The data collection method utilized was in-depth face-to-face recorded interviews with 11 questions structured to identify best practices in creating and sustaining a multigenerational workforce. The interviews commenced during February 2016 and the participants in the study were interviewed at a location suitable to

fit their scheduling and locale needs. The researcher made certain that the day and time were conducive to the participants to ensure they had time to complete the entire interview and were comfortable with the process.

On the day of the interview, the researcher arrived at the agreed meeting venue at least 30 minutes before the start of the interview to be adequately prepared and posed for the interview, bringing two tape recorders, a note pad, several pens, and highlighter markers. Upon greeting and sitting down with the participant, the researcher inquired of the participant whether he or she had any questions or concerns before the beginning of the interview. After the researcher answered any questions of the participant, the informed consent form was presented to the participant. After agreeing to the disclaimer, the participant selected the option agreeing to voluntary participation in the study.

The investigator again discussed the purpose of the study and how the participants' responses would be used as data for a doctoral dissertation focusing on identifying and developing best practices for human resource professionals leading multiple generations in the workforce. Instructions were given to the participants regarding completion of the open-ended interview questions with an emphasis on the participants answering honestly and taking their time when providing their responses. During the interview, the investigator utilized active listening skills, remaining quiet as the participant responded to the questions, making certain not to reply with follow up comments or dialogue representative of personal experiences or biases, to avoid any areas of personal interests or subject matter outside of the approved study and research being discussed. The researcher audiotaped the dialogue with the permission of the participant to make certain that the complete responses were captured, and nothing of importance was

omitted by the researcher when compiling the data, which would be done later in the processing through coding.

When the interview with each participant was concluded, the researcher thanked the participant for their time and their eagerness to voluntarily participate in the research study. The researcher also informed the participants that they would receive a copy of their transcribed responses along with the original questions for their review for accuracy. After the conclusion of the interviews, the transcribed interviews were sent to the participants within one week after the conclusion, allowing the participant to verify the information recorded and transcribed, and to make corrections or clarify information.

**Instrumentation.** The current study used a survey that consisted of structured, open-ended questions during the interview process to provide a basis to explore and compare challenges, strategies, success-measuring tools, and future implications for creating and managing a vital, multigenerational workforce.

### **Validity and Reliability**

**Validity of the interview protocol.** Validity of the instrument was employed to ensure that the research questions adequately addressed the subjects in the research questions. To complete this process, a three-step validation system was utilized. A table was constructed that showed the relationship between each research question and the corresponding interview questions (See Table 5). The questions were developed and first reviewed by the researcher utilizing the courses on research design taken at Pepperdine University.

Table 5

*Research Questions and Interview Questions*

Research Questions (RQ)	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ1: What challenges do organizations face in implementing strategies and practices employed in creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce?	<p>IQ1: What are the major issues and/or obstacles in creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce?</p> <p>IQ2: Can you share with me any instances of intergenerational conflict among the employees at your current organization? (Do not disclose names or information that would breach privacy of the employees).</p> <p>IQ3: What resources do you need to be better equipped to deal with intergenerational conflicts at your organization (e.g. training, coaching, etc.)?</p> <p>IQ4: What emerging challenges and/or obstacles around intergenerational workforce do you anticipate?</p>
RQ2: What strategies and practices do organizations employ in creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce?	<p>IQ5: What factors contribute to a vital intergenerational workforce?</p> <p>IQ6: What techniques/strategies have you employed that you have found successful in creating and sustaining an intergenerational workforce?</p> <p>IQ7: Describe your strategies in addressing workplace conflicts and how they have contributed to your effectiveness in sustaining your organization's intergenerational workforce?</p> <p>IQ8: What in your training, background and experience has been instrumental in helping you create and sustain an intergenerational workforce?</p>

(continued)

Research Questions (RQ)	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ3: How do organizations measure the success of their action plans to create and sustain a vital intergenerational workforce?	IQ9: How would you personally describe the elements of a successful intergenerational workforce? IQ10: How could these elements be measured and tracked by an organization to ensure a successful and vital intergenerational workforce?
RQ4: What recommendations workers would make for future implementation of creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce?	IQ11: What advice would you give for the successful building and implementation of a sustainable, vital intergenerational workforce?

The table was then evaluated by a preliminary panel of reviewers composed of four researchers, each a doctorate student enrolled in the Doctorate of Education Organizational Leadership program at Pepperdine University. These students were qualified to assist in the review process of the research and corresponding interview questions as they were all conducting and utilizing a comparable research methodology within their doctoral dissertations. The reviewers were provided with a packet which contained an outline of the research paper, the research questions, the corresponding interview questions and directions to follow to measure whether the interview questions accurately supported the research questions. The directions for the reviewers included instructions on how to document whether they agreed with the interview question's alignment to the applicable research or whether the question needed to be modified or deleted in its entirety.

The results of the preliminary review panel were then presented to the dissertation review committee comprised of three Pepperdine faculty members, Dr. Farzin Madjidi, Dr. Lani Fraizer, and Dr. Gabriella Miramontes, all of whom are experts in the field of research as well as gifted subject matter experts in the study of organizational leadership.

The responses from both the preliminary review panel and the dissertation committee were affirming and encouraged the researcher to continue refining the interview questions. Refining was suggested to the researcher to make certain that no vital information was left out during the interviews due to the questioning being of a general nature, lacking more detailed questions which better help yield answers to the research questions. The modified interview questions can be found in Appendix C, Interview Protocol for Participants.

**Validity and reliability of the study.** Validity and reliability of a study are important criteria in ensuring trustworthiness and reliability (Golafshani, 2003). Validity refers to the “accuracy of a result” (Robson, 2002, p. 100) and reliability refers to “the accuracy and precision of a measurement procedure” (Cooper and Schindler, 2006, p. 318). DeVon, Block, Moyle-Wright, Ernst, Hayden, Lazzara & Kostas-Polston (2007) asserted that although achieving perfect validity and reliability is difficult, they are crucial prerequisites for testing the integrity of the findings.

The first step toward understanding the challenges organizations face in managing a multigenerational workplace, as well as successful strategies and practices organizations used to measure their success in creating and sustaining a vital multigenerational workplace, was to validate the interview questions to assess whether the questions are aligned with the goal of the study. The responses given by the interviewees were their truths and experiences in building and maintaining vital intergenerational cohorts in the workplace (Retzliff, 2010).

Given the data collected and theoretical framework, the researcher had the data tools to begin developing tools for organizations to create and sustain vitality in a

multigenerational workforce. One element used to establish the validity in a qualitative study is to explore the responses of each interviewee. In this study, the researcher looked to ascertain the similarities or differences in what challenges organizations are facing in implementing strategies and practices to create and sustain vital, intergenerational workforces. The researcher listened for common themes among the practices the interviewees said were successful in creating and sustaining an intergenerational workforce and what, if any, recommendations the interviewer could make for other organizations desirous of implementing their action plans in their organizations.

Reliability involves another important analysis of the current study. In this study, reliability was determined through an assessment of the findings received from the survey responses given in reply to a single structured interview, to ensure the consistency and relevancy to the study being performed herein (Creswell, 2009). DeVon, et al., (2007) further asserted that validity and reliability of a guided interview are necessary to ensure that the findings and data are credible. Conducting face-to-face structured and recorded interviews, transcribed by the principal investigator immediately upon the conclusion of the interview meeting assisting in ensuring that the data in the current study was credible.

### **Statement of Personal Bias**

The topic in this study was chosen based on the researcher's personal experience of managing a workforce composed of four different generations, with employees ranging from 18 to 85 years of age. The researcher witnessed a variety of strengths and differences, work styles, and values among the various generational cohorts. The researcher also saw differences in communication styles as well as motivational factors between the cohorts, which often caused dissension and led to a segmentation of the

different age groups within the organization. The experience created an opportunity for the researcher to research and design best practices for creating and sustaining vitality in a multigenerational workforce.

The researcher in this study employed the practice of epoché, a Greek word denoting “to stay away or abstain.” By utilizing epoché, the researcher was directed to put aside her preconceptions and prejudgments about the subject matter (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). Practicing epoché or bracketing “aids the researcher to acknowledge and analyze prior knowledge, personal beliefs or theories he or she may have, but also to remain open to the information that is obtained through the research study” (Parker-Hewett, 2015, p. 54). “Bracketing refers to the process of suspending assumptions and presuppositions to improve the rigor of the research and exploring one’s preconceptions to set them aside so that they do not interfere with the information provided by participants” (Holloway & Wheeler, 1996, p. 207). The process of bracketing is critical during the research activity, particularly during the phase of data analysis, as it necessitates the researcher to remain unbiased on belief or disbelief in the presence of a phenomenon (Speziale & Carpenter, 1999).

Before and during the interviews of the study participants, the researcher engaged in the epoché process, setting aside biases, prejudices, personal interests, and experiences, enabling her to perceive and describe the interviewees’ experiences in a clear and unbiased matter. The researcher accomplished this by first identifying any preconceived ideas she had about multiple generations working together. Then she had to suspend any knowledge or recollections of personal experiences she might have had about differences in values, work and communication styles, motivations, or stereotypes



of generational cohorts to avoid this data from interfering with discovering an untainted description of the phenomenon (best practices for creating and sustaining a multigenerational workforce).

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher analyzed the interview data by transcribing the interview data immediately after the completion of each interview, using her handwritten notes taken during the interviews, memoranda prepared before and after the interviews and by coding the transcribed data. The interviews were recorded into a word processing program on the researcher's private and secure office computer. The researcher reviewed the transcript of each interview and wrote a summation. The outlines served as reference memos as well as an audit trail. The next step of the process, the identification of codes and themes, began when the researcher read the transcripts. The researcher searched for data related to the research questions included in the study, countering details, as well as for data which reinforced or refuted recognized generational features and conflicts (Angus, 2014). Interview transcriptions were coded utilizing a line-by-line highlighting of significant words. Marking the words as the researcher read the transcript line by line, enabled coding to take place, thus allowing themes to emerge. For consistency as well as accuracy, all the transcribed data was coded using the same key words, terms and labels (Angus, 2014). At the completion of the coding of the transcripts, the final phase of the validity process involved identifying common concepts and themes across the interviews, a process known as cross-case synthesis (Yin, 2013). The researcher examined the responses to establish if the instances showed sufficient likeness to be considered similar or if the cases contained significant differences.

## **Summary**

The goal of this chapter was to illustrate how the chosen methodology was utilized in this research. To explicate the findings of this chapter, a summary of the nature of the study was restated. A review of the research questions, research design, description of the sample, data collection procedures, and interview protocol was assessed to present the findings of this study. Finally, a discussion of the personal bias of the researcher and data analysis of this study was provided. The next chapter will detail the findings and themes of the data the researcher obtained from the interviews of the participants, how the data was analyzed by the researcher and the findings of the 11 interview questions displayed in graphs.

## Chapter IV: Findings

For the first time in history, the United States workforce is comprised of four distinctive generations. Each generational cohort brings unique variables to the workplace such as behaviors, expectations, personal values, communication styles, and motivational factors that create challenges for organizations. Learning how to overcome these challenges will assist in creating connectivity among the cohorts, benefiting organizations. The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of the best practices utilized by organizational leaders to build and sustain a vital, multigenerational workforce and decrease the gaps among the four generations currently in the labor force. To achieve this understanding, the following research questions were asked:

1. What challenges do organizations face in implementing strategies and practices employed in creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce?
2. What strategies and practices do organizations employ in creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce?
3. How do organizations measure the success of their action plans to create and sustain a vital intergenerational workforce?
4. What recommendations and common approaches would human resources professionals suggest for future implementation of creating and sustaining vital, intergenerational workforces?

These research questions were answered by asking 15 participants 11 interview questions with the intent of determining the practices and strategies leaders use to build and maintain a vibrant team of employees from the different generations. The research participants were additionally asked about the challenges organizations face in creating

the multigenerational team, and the ways in which businesses could measure if they are succeeding. Research participants identified implementation challenges, strategies used for developing and sustaining a workforce of four different generations, and tools for measuring whether the strategies are successful. Common themes were identified from the data and interpreted, and the findings discussed in the remainder of the chapter.

### **Participants**

The purposeful recruitment of participants for this study involved a selection process to help ensure the maximum diversity of the human resource professionals in Los Angeles County. The recruitment process began with reaching out to two Los Angeles County human resource professional groups through their public websites, explaining the nature of the study, asking for members who met the study criteria and whom were willing to be contacted. The criteria for participants included: (a) human resource level professionals currently working in or recently retired from a Los Angeles County business; (b) possessed at least 10 years of experience working as a human resource senior level professional or had obtained the Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR) Certification, and (c) managed a workforce of at least 50 staff persons. The selection process was limited to human resource professionals, the most relevant group to the researcher's area of study. A target of 15 human resources professionals was the consideration for this study.

The two human resource organizations provided rosters of persons who agreed to participate in this voluntary study. The rosters included the members' names, current job titles, educational background, professional certifications (such as the SPHR certification), email addresses, business phone numbers, name of their current employer, and their

years of experience in the field of human resources. To ensure maximum variation of the study's participants, the investigator selected individuals with diverse work experiences and more than 10 years of experience in the field of human resources. Participants were also selected from diverse industries, educational backgrounds, regional locations within Los Angeles County, and for a balance between genders.

Of the 76 members from the provided lists, 41 persons were identified and selected for recruitment via email and telephone contact. Twenty-four from the identified 41 persons agreed to take part in the study, for an overall response rate of 56% percent. Another 17 persons from these lists were excluded from the study because:

- a. they indicated they did not believe they could provide insightful information from which other human professionals could benefit;
- b. they were not available to participate in the study during the period when the interviews would be conducted; or
- c. the potential participants did not reply to the introductory email or follow-up telephone call inquiries.

The sample size determined for this study was 15 participants. This number was ample to provide data that was representative of human resource professionals in Los Angeles County, yet small enough to ensure data collection was manageable. The researcher selected 15 participants who were able to meet personally to complete face-to-face interviews, instead of telephone interviews. The 15 participants consisted of six men and nine women. Three participants were employed in the field of education, three in local government, one in the entertainment industry, three in human services, two in the finance industry, three in hospitality, and one in the fashion industry. This cross section of

business human resource professionals provided a unique opportunity to gain knowledge and an understanding of best practices for creating and sustaining intergenerational workforces.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection commenced on March 16, 2016 and concluded on March 30, 2016. This collection period included the initial participant contact completion of the interviews, and the opportunity for the participants to review the typed interview transcript for accuracy and clarification. Data collection was performed in person through one-to-one interviews consisting of semi-structured, open-ended interview questions created to provide answers to the study's four research questions. Semi-structured interview questions were utilized to guide the inquiry without limiting the participants' opportunity to expand on their experiences and suggestions on the study's topic. Valuable information and experiences from human resource professionals were extrapolated from the interview data, allowing for further theorizing of the best practices in creating and sustaining vital, multigenerational workplaces.

The interviews were anticipated to last 30 to 45 minutes. Each participant was sent a copy of the Informed Consent (Appendix B), Interview Questions (Appendix C) and an abstract of the dissertation study before their scheduled interview by the researcher. The interviews were scheduled at locations and times designated by the participations to minimize their inconvenience and any potential discomfort. At the commencement of each of interview, the participant was again given a copy of the informed consent for their reading, asked for written permission for their voluntary participation in the interview, and asked if he or she had questions. One participant requested his interview not be recorded

electronically but allowed the interviewer to take notes using paper and a pen. Fourteen of the participants allowed the researcher to record the interview electronically. The interviews ranged in length from 30 minutes to 120 minutes. A Panasonic LQ cassette recorder was used to record the interviews. The following questions were asked of each participant:

IQ1: What are the major challenges and/or obstacles in creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce?

IQ2: Can you share any instances of intergenerational conflict among the employees at your current organization?

IQ3: What resources do you need to be better equipped to deal with intergenerational conflicts at your organization?

IQ4: What emerging challenges and/or obstacles do you anticipate or foresee concerning an intergenerational workforce?

IQ5: What factors contribute to a vital intergenerational workforce?

IQ6: What techniques and strategies have you employed and found to be successful in creating and sustaining an intergenerational workforce?

IQ7: Describe the strategies you use in addressing workplace conflict and how have they contributed to the effectiveness of sustaining your organization's intergenerational workforce.

IQ8: What in your training, background, and experience has been instrumental in helping you create and sustain a vital, intergenerational workforce?

IQ9: How would you personally describe the elements of a successful intergenerational workforce?

IQ10: How can these elements be measured and tracked to ensure a successful and vital intergenerational workforce?

1Q11: What advice would you give for the successful building and implementation of a sustainable, vital intergenerational workforce?

At the completion of the interviews, the participants were thanked for their participation, and given the opportunity to ask additional questions regarding the study and how the data was to be utilized. The electronically recorded interviews were transcribed by the researcher to gain a deeper level of understanding of the depth and richness of the data. The data was typed directly into a Word template, in the format of an interview transcript. The template included the prepopulated interview questions, title of the study, and a place for the date, time, and location of the interview, as well as a unique, nameless identifier for each participant. The researcher personally transcribed each of the completed interviews. Upon completing the transcription of each audio recording, the researcher listened to the audio recording again from the beginning to ensure the accuracy of the transcription, as well as proofread the transcripts several times to guarantee the correctness of the data. After listening to the audio recordings of the interviews, the recordings were destroyed. The handwritten notes for the participant who did not agree to an electronic recording were typed into the Word template interview transcript format, so they would closely resemble the other transcribed interviews. In each of the completed transcripts, all identifiers were removed that could potentially reveal the participants' identities, such as names mentioned during the interviews, including business entity names or professional affiliations.



## Data Analysis

Qualitative methodology was chosen for this study to gain an understanding of the challenges organizations face and the successful practices used in developing and sustaining a multigenerational workforce. This method allows the investigator to explore the meaning individuals and/or groups give to a human condition (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Further, this methodology allowed a return to actual experiences, which provides the foundation for a structural analysis that portrays the essence of experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

The following process was utilized to facilitate the analysis of the data contained in the interview transcripts:

1. Each transcript was read by the researcher three times in its entirety to establish increased familiarity with the responses.
2. The data was coded by the researcher with using amorphous coding allowing connotations to emerge.
3. A second and third coder trained in qualitative research were recruited from Pepperdine University to assist with performing the data coding, as well to help diminish any intrinsic biases of the researcher. NVivo and MaxQDA were considered as potential tools to assist in managing the coding process and to verify the consistency of the responses between the researchers and the two coders. The third-person auditor was ultimately chosen and utilized based upon the recommendation of the dissertation committee.

4. The researcher and coders developed themes and categories separately, highlighted pertinent, meaningful statements in the transcripts, and then reviewed their results together.
5. Fundamental ideas, codes, and common themes were identified, noted, clustered, and compared with the original list of codes and themes identified in the investigator's list.
6. An Excel table was created to facilitate the clustering of related and emerging themes as they appeared.
7. Discrepancies during the coding process between the researcher and/or between the secondary and third coders were discussed among the three utilizing the interview transcripts and literature when necessary.
8. The data was sorted by the rate of occurrence and the related, emerging themes were bundled.
9. Finally, the results were displayed in graphs with corresponding narrative.

### **Data Display**

The summary of the final results of the data collected is displayed in order of the research questions and corresponding interview questions. The analyzed data produced commonalities and common themes. The themes that arose are recounted, followed by graphs demonstrating the frequency of each common theme. Moreover, to preserve the authenticity of the responses from the participants in this study, quotes are recounted as stated. The quotes may include statements or colloquialisms; however, in perspective of the semi-structured interviews conducted, the responses undoubtedly communicated the

participants' meaning (Fraizer, 2009). The research participants were identified only as by reference number (i.e., Participant 1, Participant 2).

**Research Question 1:** What challenges do organizations face in implementing strategies and practices employed in creating and sustaining a vital, intergenerational workforce? Research Question 1 sought to discover the challenges organizations face in implementing strategies and practices employed in creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce, utilizing a series of four interview questions that were analyzed individually and collectively. To answer this question, the survey participants were asked the following four interview questions:

IQ1: What are the major challenges and/or obstacles you have experienced in creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce?

IQ2. Can you share any instances of intergenerational conflict among the employees at your current organization?

IQ3: What resources do you need to be better equipped to deal with intergenerational conflicts at your organization?

IQ4: What challenges and/or obstacles around the intergenerational workforce do you anticipate or foresee?

**Interview question 1.** What are the major challenges and/or obstacles you have experienced in creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce? This question developed four common themes: (a) value/work styles, (b) expectations, (c) change/acceptance, and (d) communication, and are detailed as follows (see Figure 4).

Interview Question 1  
 N = 15 Multiple Responses per Interviewee

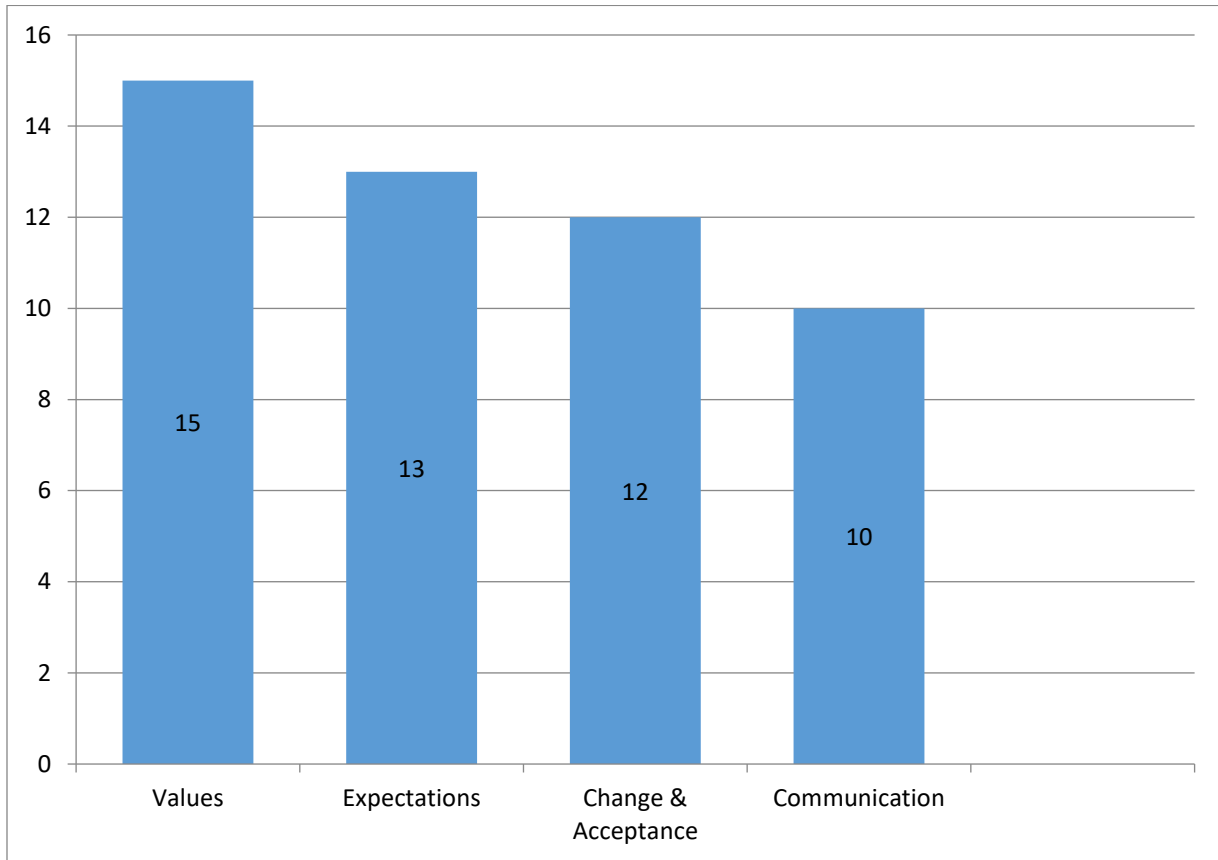


Figure 4. IQ1: Obstacles in creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce.

**Values.** Common theme of obstacles and challenges human resources leaders have encountered in building and maintaining a workforce of multiple generations were derived from the interview responses. The theme identified by each the 15 participants was values, which had three factors the research participants singled out: unique views, personal beliefs, and work styles of the respective four generations. These characteristics were common among all responses to the question, as well as repeated in two other interview questions.

Value, for use in this interview question, focused on how differing generational values (unique views, beliefs, and work styles) may impact or impede a leader's ability to successfully create and sustain a vital, multigenerational workplace. The 15 participants concurred in their responses that values—defined as differing views, beliefs, and work styles among the cohorts—were challenges. Participant 4 reported, “Employees from different generations bring various things to the workplace: patience, dedication, and loyalty, while others are less committed, work fewer hours and are stuck in their ways” (personal communication, March 10, 2016). Similarly, Participant 5 stated,

Some veteran staff members will not embrace the younger generation's ideals of workplace conduct and styles. The older generations are not open to other ways and new methods. They were taught many years ago how to behave, dress, and succeed in the work environment and this is engrained in them as the only way to make it in the workplace” (personal communication, March 17, 2016)

Participant 13 iterated this sentiment regarding the work styles differences among the four generations. “The four generations contrast greatly in their work and communication styles, as well as how they work with co-workers from other generations” (personal communication, March 25, 2016). Further, Participant 14 shared an example of how the value of demonstrating respect for elders and senior employees in the workplace is no longer an assured behavior commonly seen in prior generational times.

Generational members have varying views on respect for members of other generations, both old and young. Respect for older persons or senior staff members is no longer automatically given. The younger generations are no longer taught to respect older, senior members in the workforce and feel that the older

generation must earn their respect, just as members from the younger generations [do]. (personal communication, March 24, 2016)

**Expectations.** Thirteen of the participants asserted that varying workplace expectations among the generation members were a consistent challenge experienced by leaders. Expectations, for purposes of this interview question, is defined as the requirements that each worker personally desires to have in or derive from their employment. Examples of worker expectations as communicated by the participants included compensation levels, physical ergonomics and office setup, benefits, the speed of promotional and advancement opportunities, incentives and perks, work schedules, technology, management style preferences, the amount of annual vacation time, as well as the offering of non-traditional paid leaves.

Participant 2 reported that “Generation Y wants and expects faster career movement. Their expectation is to be promoted after working in a position for roughly 12–18 months and if not, they leave quickly for the next best opportunity” (personal communication, March 18, 2016). Participant 2 added,

Companies must meet the expectations of the newer generations around rewards and benefits to attract and keep these generations engaged and content. Benefits need to be less traditional. Younger employees want day care available for their children, as well as their pets at the workplace. (personal communication, March 18, 2016)

**Change.** Kotter’s (1996) eight-step change model is a template for understanding the necessity of managing change. Each of the eight stages identified by Kotter relates to a person’s emotional responses and approaches to implementing and sustaining change.

Organizational change models do not however diminish the discomfort people often encountered when faced with a change in the status quo. For purposes of this interview question, *change* relates to the shifting of established workplace rules and generational customs. The changing norms include traditional leadership roles, technology use, methods of communication, promotional opportunity criteria, marketing approaches, acceptable office attire and behaviors, and the amount of time employees are expected to physically spend at the office during a work day.

Twelve participants opined that shifts in office practices and customs were viewed as a challenge to some generations, most noticeable the two oldest generations. Participant 12 discussed witnessing Traditionalist and Baby Boomer generational employees being highly resistant and uncomfortable with changes taking place within the organization.

The old guard had been successful for a very long time doing the work, but it became clearer [*sic*] that their methods were becoming outdated. They stood firm that their ideas were the only right way. These individuals were put off by the idea of a younger generation doing the work in a different style. The new generation was being discounted solely because of their age, not their abilities. The time had come for me to facilitate a discussion with the entire group about realizing and accepting that it was time for change in the way the organization did business.

(personal communication, March 19, 2016)

Further illustrating the difficulties some employees experience in adapting to and accepting change in the workplace, Participant 3 described the hurdles with breaks encountered in traditional workplace roles.

Boomers have a very difficult time being supervised by a Gen Xer. Millennials tend to be very outspoken and vocal as opposed to previous younger workers in the workplace, which rub Traditionalists and Boomers the wrong way. These scenarios make the older generations resistant to changes in the workplace, even to beneficial changes. (personal communication, March 28, 2016)

**Communication.** Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (Hornby, Gatenby, & Wakefield, 2016) describes communication as "a process of expressing ideas, feelings or relaying information to other people; methods of sending information such as telephones, computers, communication systems, and technology" (para. 16). For the purposes of this interview question, communication is used in the context of the difference in communication styles among the four generations, and the problems that can arise in the workplace around communication styles between the generations. The 10 identified challenges around the different communication methods and preferences among the age groups, included how messages were disseminated to others, such as face-to-face interactions versus the use of technology, and the lack of interpersonal skills in new generations necessary to conduct meaning conversations. Participant 3 discussed the communication difficulties witnessed between Generation Xers and Millennials.

I encounter difficulties between the generations communicating all of the time, even in supervisor-subordinate relationships. I see it as a lack of communication skills that is caused by the two newest generations in the workforce using technology in lieu of face-to-face, personal interactions. (personal communication, March 28, 2016)



Participant 7 further described how differences in communication styles among the generations makes it challenging not only for workplace colleagues to connect, but also can hinder business relationships with clients and customers, which affects the organization in its entirety and can create further hostility among the generational cohorts.

Generation X and Y employees are really tech savvy and rely heavily on technology for their work and lifestyle in comparison to Traditionalists and Baby Boomers. The two older generations built their careers by forging relationships and dealing with people in person. People don't spend time interacting face-to-face or writing letters anymore. Communication is done over the Internet and texting, and the personal relationships are disappearing. (personal communication, March 18, 2016)

**Interview question 1 summary.** The participants felt very strongly that challenges do occur in multigenerational workforces. Values and expectations, specifically, the unique differences and expectations of the generational cohorts, are foundational points for leaders to explore. Accepting changes in the norms and culture of a workplace, as well as differences in communication styles and methods, were also characteristics that yielded pronounced responses.

**Interview question 2.** Can you share any instances of intergenerational conflict among the employees at your current organization? This question was designed to yield examples from the participants of actual instances of intergenerational conflict they had witnessed among their employees. Three common themes were derived from the participants' responses: (a) communication, (b) values, and (c) expectations (see Figure 5).

Interview Question 2  
 N = 15 Multiple Responses per Interviewee

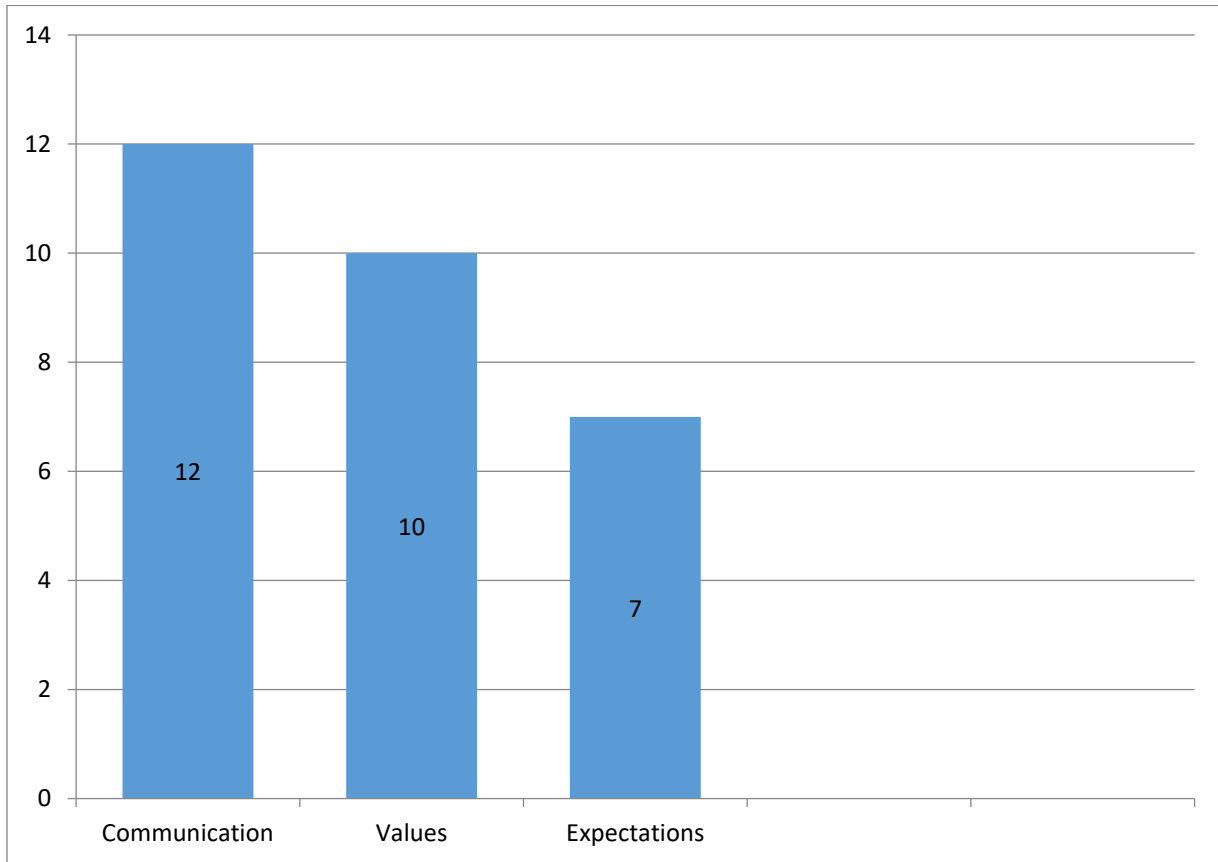


Figure 5. IQ2: Causes of conflict.

**Communication.** For the purposes of this interview question, communication differences and struggles were viewed by 12 of the participants as a source of conflict amongst the four generations. Participant 3 illustrated the challenges created by communication style differences between the generations by offering the following scenario:

The supervisor of the team (a Gen Xer) was having a tough time getting through to her secretary (a Millennial) the importance of utilizing the company policies to communicate absences, tardiness, etc. The Gen X supervisor instructed the Millennial employee several times that absences needed to be reported by a

phone call to the supervisor, who relied heavily on telephone contact. The Millennial, whose preferred form of communication was texting, would not honor the Gen X supervisor's request for notification via a telephone call, ultimately causing the Millennial to be terminated for not following [the] supervisor's protocol" (personal communication, March 28, 2016).

**Values.** The theme of *value* in this interview question focused on how differing generational values (unique views, beliefs, and work styles) are a cause of intergenerational conflict that needs to be recognized and respected by organization leaders and members of the workforce. Participant 8 reported the difficulties around modifying workplace behaviors (work style) demonstrated and thought to be acceptable by older generations, but no longer permitted in the current workforce due to changing employment laws.

The values of the older two generations are very different than the two younger generations. I managed a male employee of the Baby Boomer generation, who felt it was okay to hug and refer to the female staff as sweethearts. This didn't mesh well with the 20-something year olds, who viewed this man as a grandfather figure. He was indoctrinated from a bygone era and refused to adapt, to his detriment which cost his job opportunities [*sic*]. (personal communication, March 17, 2016)

This was a clear example of how differing values between two generations became a source of conflict.

**Expectations.** Seven of the participants concurred that the unique workplace expectations of a generation's members were a challenge experienced by leaders. Expectations, for purposes of this interview question, is described as the requirements

that each worker personally desires to have or derive from their employment, as well as their expectations of how their workplace colleagues should behave. Participant 6 illustrated how workplace expectations differ with age.

The older employees have more of a sense of entitlement and believe they deserve better perks based solely upon their age and years on the job. The office with the best view is always occupied by the employee who has been with the company for the greatest amount of years. It is expected that when that employee leaves, the employee with the next amount of seniority will move into that space. (personal communication, March 18, 2016)

**Interview question 2 summary.** Although identified as independent issues that generate conflict in intergenerational workforces, differences in communication styles, values, and expectations are sources of consistent conflict in the workplace. Understanding and managing these three categories of intergenerational conflict is one of the primary areas where human resource and organizational leaders can begin to bridge the gaps between the four generation cohorts.

**Interview question 3.** What resources do you need to be better equipped to deal with intergenerational conflicts in your organization? Four common themes arose among the participants in response to this interview question: (a) collaboration, (b) conflict negotiation skills, (c) training, and (d) partnering/mentoring (see Figure 6).

Interview Question 3  
 N = 15 Multiple Responses per Interviewee

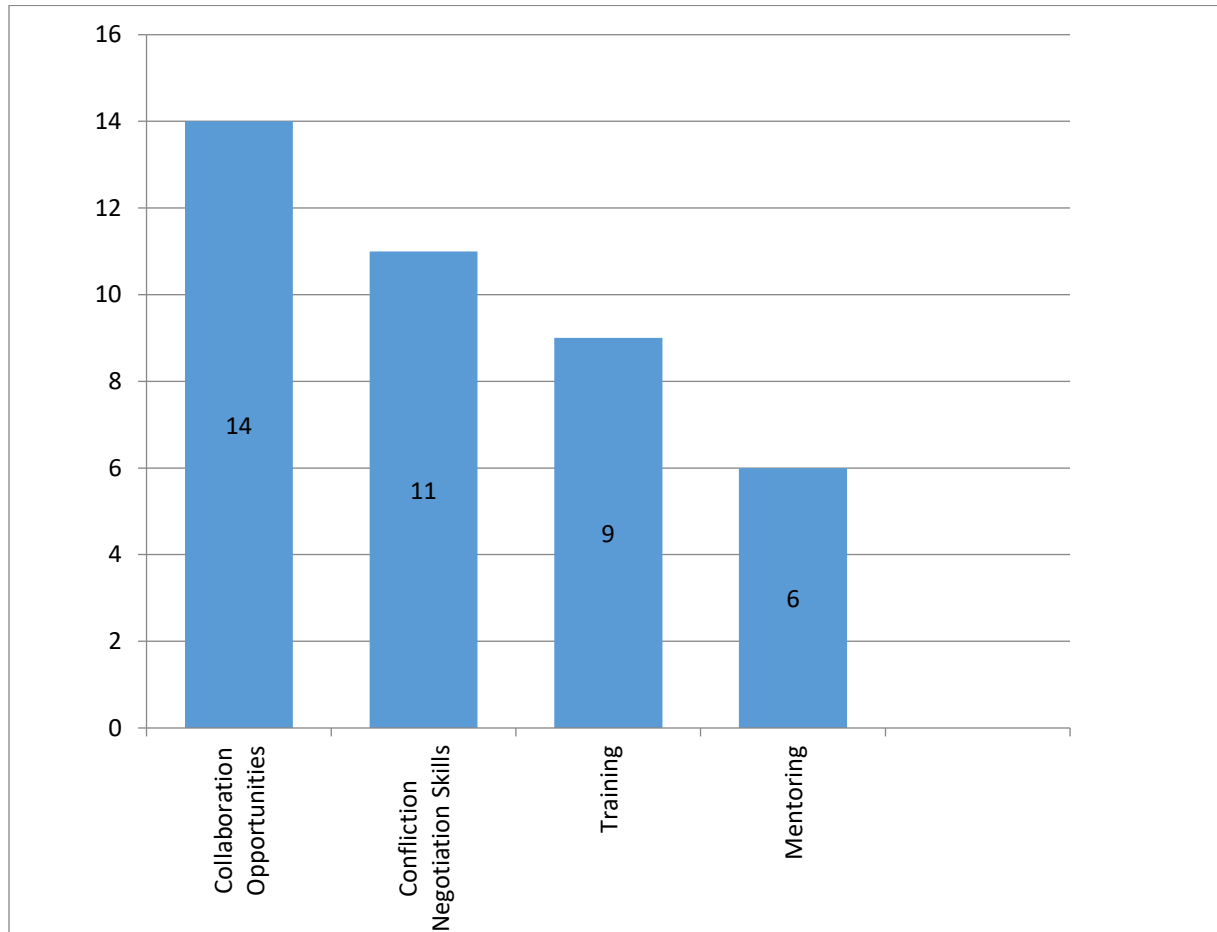


Figure 6. IQ3: Resources needed.

**Collaboration.** Collaboration, as it relates to this interview question, can be described as the supporting of fellow workers as they perform tasks, helping with task-related issues, and being willing to assist colleagues in the workforce (Marshall, 1995). Collaboration, or the lack of it among workplace employees, can be an asset or a detriment to the building and maintaining of a multigenerational workforce. All 15 participants identified collaboration and the necessity of relationships among the workforce members as the starting point for eradicating conflict between the generations. Participant 10 discussed the need for collaboration in the workforce to begin building

relationships among the cohorts. “There must be opportunities for the generations to come together in a collaborative environment where there are opportunities to share and hear from different people’s perspective and value the contributions of each cohort” (personal communication, March 22, 2016). Similarly, Participant 11 illustrated how collaboration in the workplace would begin to bridge gaps amongst the generation cohorts. “Although employees bring different value systems on how work should be carried out in [the] workforce, ultimately it is about getting everyone on the same page in terms of getting to the bottom line” (personal communication, March 23, 2016).

***Conflict negotiations skills.*** Eleven respondents replied that conflict negotiation skills were a resource that they need to better manage issues that occur between employees of the different generations. The respondents cited differences in value systems, viewpoints, and communication styles as the biggest triggers of conflict between the generation members. Participant 6 noted that many people in her office choose to avoid conflict, and ultimately the underlying issues would blow up. Additionally, she opined that teaching the workforce conflict resolution skills would assist in resolving issues which arise between generations and can be prevented by talking things out (personal communication, March 24, 2016).

***Training.*** Nine of the participants responded that training opportunities for themselves as human resource leaders, as well as their employees, would help the workforce to develop skills and be better equipped to deal with conflict between the generations. “Employers should provide educational opportunities for employees to learn about the different generations in their workforce as well as what the organization’s expectation of workplace etiquette. Often the missing piece of a strong multigenerational

workforce is understanding what makes each generation tick.” (Participant 10, personal communication, March 22, 2016).

**Partnering/Mentoring.** Participant 6 discussed the importance of, and the need for, collaboration in the workplace between the multiple generations as a tool to better manage generational conflicts.

While there is much information about the importance of a supportive, inclusive workplace, some employees do not embrace this concept yet. Employers must make sure they are implementing systems processes and an organizational culture that supports a multigenerational workplace, which is supportive of employees working together for the common goal or mission of the organization. (personal communication, March 24, 2016)

**Interview question 3 summary.** The participants’ responses identified resources which could be utilized by both human resources leaders and the generation cohort members to equip themselves for better management of workplace conflict. These resources included: (a) opportunities for the various cohorts to collaborate and work together on projects as teams to encourage collaboration between the generations, (b) conflict negotiation training for the organization leaders and managers to be used to manage tension and differences between the cohorts, (c) training for the entire workforce on the distinctions, strengths and the preferences of each generation, and (d) mentoring opportunities between staff members of other generations to facilitate knowledge sharing and support.

**Interview question 4.** What emerging challenges and/or obstacles around intergenerational workforces do you anticipate? Three common themes emerged from the participants' answers: (a) expectations, (b) resistance to change, and (c) differing values (see Figure 7).

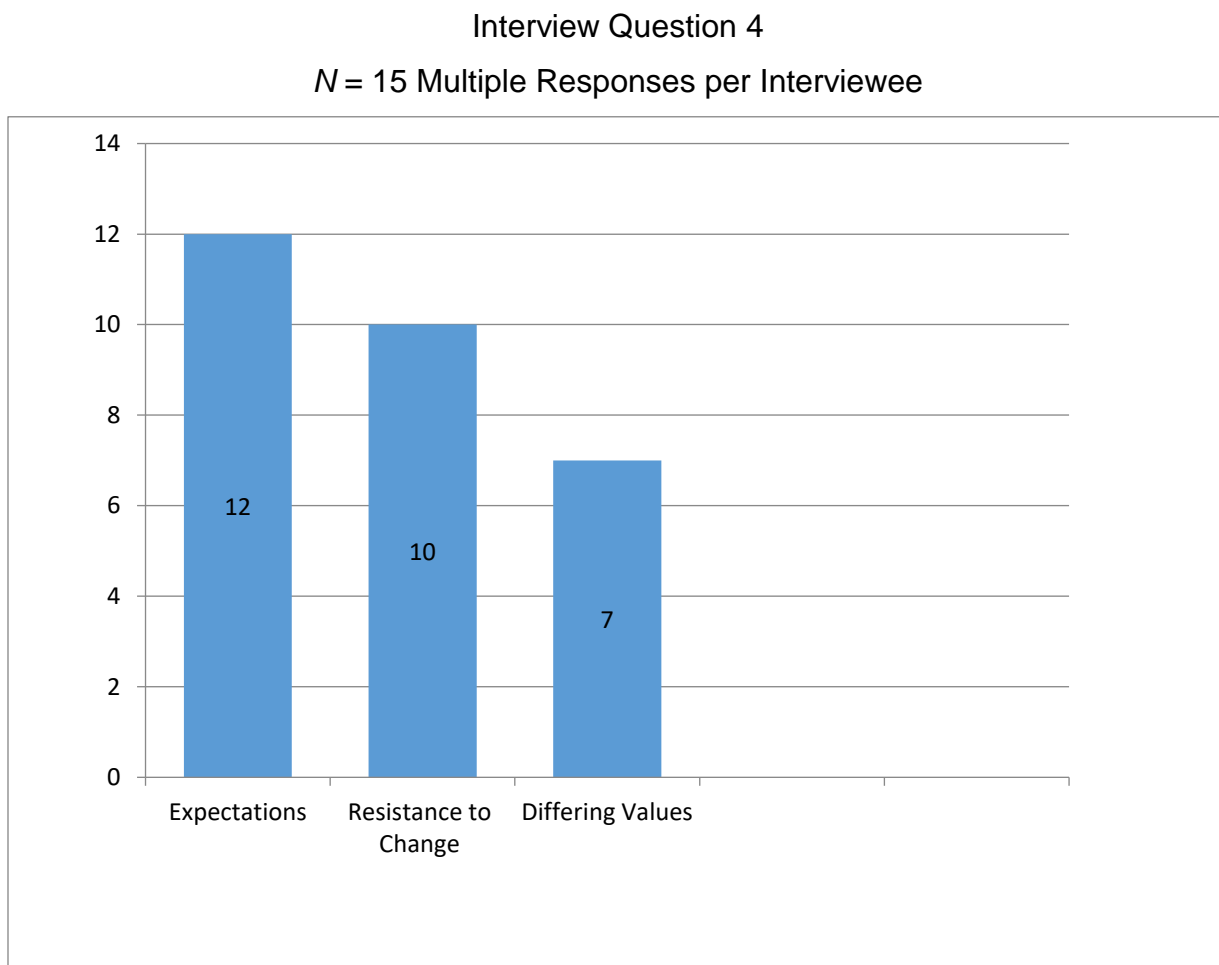


Figure 7. IQ4: Challenges and obstacles.

**Expectations.** Twelve of the participants provided responses under the theme of workplace expectations as a challenge to accomplishing a vital multigenerational workforce. For this interview question, expectation is defined as the requirements that each worker personally desires to have or derive from their employment, as well as their expectations of how their workplace colleagues should behave. Like the responses



provided by the participants in Interview question 1, examples of worker expectations to this question included levels of compensation, employee benefits, expectations of managers, annual leave time and the speed at which advancement could be obtained. Participant 7 described the method which they preferred to be evaluated annually by their supervisor.

Unlike the younger generations who prefer not to be micromanaged by their bosses, I am from the old school and like to have frequent updates and feedback from my manager. Let's talk face-to-face and discuss issues. If there are areas in which I need to improve, I want to discuss this in person with my boss, not through an email or by receiving a form memorandum. This prevents miscommunication and keeps me aligned with my manager's expectations of me (personal communication, March 18, 2016).

***Resistance to change.*** Ten of the participants provided responses that indicated cohort members were resistant to change in the workplace. Most often, the participants alluded to members of the older generations—Traditionalists and Baby Boomers—as being against change in the work environment. Participant 5 addressed the issue of older, veteran staff members being resistant to new, younger staff members from Generations X and Z, and how the resistance impeded the productivity of the group.

Veteran staff members wanted to supersede the newly hired younger staff members, opposing any ideas or new curriculum that they proposed. The older staff members wanted to stay in control and resisted any new ideals [sic] or new ways of learning and were not interested in working with the young employees as a team. (personal communication, March 16, 2016).

Participant 9 further added the difficulties with managing change in the workforce.

For any change, you need a vision. People must have a reason, an incentive to get your staff to want to accept the change, and an action plan for how that change is going to be managed. There will still be frustration even with the best plan, because people do not like change. (personal communication, March 17, 2016)

**Values.** As defined in interview question 2, a value is an important, lasting belief or ideal shared by members of a group, concerning what is desirable or undesirable, and has a major influence on an individual's behavior and attitude. Differences in values among the generations emerged from the responses as an obstacle faced by the participants. Participant 4 offered the following thought on the unique values of the different generations.

For successfully building a multigenerational workforce, business leaders need to be flexible, accommodating, evolving, and understanding of the needs and wants of each of the generations. Employers today must be sensitive and in tune to the generational needs to be competitive, and to hire and retain talent. (personal communication, March 10, 2016)

Participant 6 added this insight regarding the values each cohort brings to the workforce and how employers can embrace the differences, making them a positive contribution to the workplace.

Ask yourself, what are you doing to make sure there is a place for everyone in the workplace—both generationally and culturally? What are you doing to make sure your team is representative and embracing to [sic] people of all ages with different values and attitudes, which can actually be used to build on? [sic]"

(personal communication, March 24, 2016).

**Interview question 4 summary.** Responses from the participants to this interview question concerning emerging challenges and obstacles they anticipated encountering with the intergenerational workforce resulted in three themes: expectations, resistance to change, and differing values. Expectations as explained by the respondents included expected compensation levels, office setup and ergonomics in the workplace, benefits (health insurance and vacation time), incentives, the pace at which promotional opportunities were available, available technology, and management style preferences. Resistance to change was described as veteran cohort members struggling with new ideas and concepts being introduced by younger generations, as well as general difficulties with accepting change in their workplace routines. The theme of differing values was described as differences (as well as similarities) in the four cohort members' behaviors, attitudes, and shared ideals. The respondents put an emphasis on the need for organizational leaders to embrace the different values of each generation and find methods to incorporate each generation's ideals and principles into the organization's culture, thereby alleviating the possible alienation of any of the four generation members.

**Research question 1 summary.** Research question 1 addressed the challenges the respondents encountered with the four generations currently in the workplace, as well as ways in which business leaders can be equipped to cope with the difficulties that arise due to generational differences. The challenges the respondents faced included different values, expectations, and communication styles of the respective four generations, as well as resistance to change from the older two generations. The resources which the respondents identified would enable them to be better prepared to handle conflicts

between the cohorts, as well as assist the labor force to adapt to working with co-workers of other age groups were: (a) opportunities for the various cohorts to collaborate and work together on teams to encourage collaboration between the generations, (b) conflict negotiation training for the organization leaders, managers and staff members to be used to mediate tension which arises as a result of the differences between the generational cohorts, (c) training for the entire workforce on the distinctions, strengths, and the preferences of each generation, and (d) mentoring opportunities between staff members of other generations to facilitate knowledge sharing and support.

**Research Question 2.** Research Question 2 asked the following question: What strategies and practices do organizations employ in creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce? To answer this question, participants were asked the following four interview questions:

IQ5. What factors contribute to a vital intergenerational workforce?

IQ6. What techniques and strategies have you employed and found to be successful in creating and sustaining an intergenerational workforce?

IQ7. Describe strategies you use in addressing workplace conflict and how have they contributed to the effectiveness of sustaining your organization's intergenerational workforce.

IQ8. What in your training, background, and experience has been instrumental in helping you create and sustain an intergenerational workforce?

These interview questions were designed to allow each participant the opportunity to share personal experiences on the strategies, techniques, training, or work experiences

they found instrumental in developing creating and sustaining a multigenerational workforce.

**Interview question 5.** What factors contribute to a vital intergenerational workforce? Four common themes were identified among the participants: (a) education, (b) relationships, (c) knowledge sharing, and (d) communication (see Figure 8).

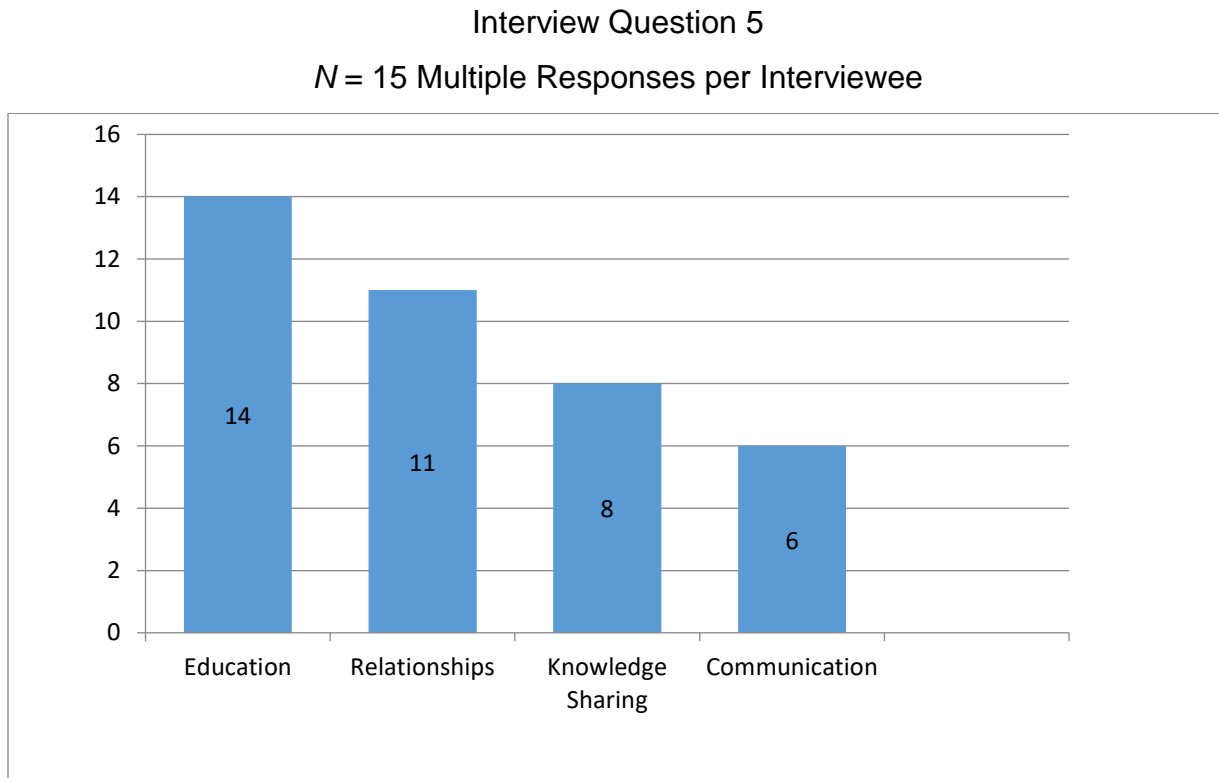


Figure 8. IQ5: Contributing factors.

**Education.** Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (Hornby, Gatensby, & Wakefield, 2016) defines education as the process of teaching and learning to improve knowledge and develop skills. For this interview question, education is used in the context of the factors leaders felt organizations contributed to a vital intergenerational workforce. All 15 participants responded with an answer that fell under the theme of education. Participant 5 shared the following reflection on the benefits of providing training for the entire staff about the uniqueness of each generational cohort to unite the various age groups.

It is always good to have an outside neutral facilitator come in to do in-service trainings and workshops with the staff to help everyone gain an understanding of who comprises the current workforce and what their needs are. It helps start the conversations about the differences as well as strengths, in a positive light.

Trainings for managers are essential to give them the knowledge to work with employees of different ages. (personal communication, March 16, 2016)

**Relationships.** Author Patricia Sias (2008) described workplace relationships as the sharing of information, resource distribution, and support systems. She emphasized the importance of these characteristics for both the organizational and individual well-being (pp. 2–11). For this research question, positive relationships among the generations were viewed as a contributing factor to vital, intergenerational workforces. Eleven of the participants agreed that relationships are critical to building a strong team which are comprised of different cohorts. Participant Four illustrated the importance of this relationship among colleagues.

When we hire new employees of Generations X and Y, during the training and onboarding process, they are partnered with veteran staff from the Traditionalist or Baby Boomer generations. This helps the younger generations develop people and communication skills while learning the company procedures. The younger staff conversely challenge the tenured, older employees to enrich their skills, such as technology . . . they can help each other out. (personal communication, March 10, 2016)

**Knowledge sharing.** Sharratt and Usoro (2003) defined knowledge sharing as the process whereby a resource is given by one party and received by another. Regarding its business significance, Gurteen (1999) opined that knowledge sharing is vital for companies to achieve a competitive advantage, as well as to retain knowledge due to increasing staff turnover. For this interview question, knowledge sharing between members of different generation cohorts is a practice recommended for other human resource leaders in the work of developing and sustaining a multigenerational workforce. Among the responses by the participants, this relevant statement was provided by Participant 7:

The biggest challenge we are going to see is the brain drain phenomena. We have 300 employees retiring this month alone. It takes time to recruit and find people to replace the employees leaving and when we do find the replacement, the employee is already retired. These retiring employees have all of the history and knowledge of the organization in their heads and they are taking it with them. We need to create and implement a knowledge sharing program where employees are sharing the information. (personal communication, March 18, 2016)

Participant 6 offered the following advice on the importance of knowledge sharing for developing and maintaining a workforce of multiple generations.

There aren't enough opportunities for employees of multiple generations to get together and connect before the brain drain takes place. There needs to be occasions for relationships to be developed, so this pivotal time is utilized before the knowledge is gone. Seize the day and take advantage. Don't let your older generations leave without mentoring or building strong relationships with the

younger generations, preparing them to take over. (personal communication, March 24, 2016)

**Communication.** Participant 12 reported the following:

Conversations and open communication among the generations needs to take place, giving people the chance to speak and express views without being sanctioned. It is important that the person facilitating those conversations is sensitive to appreciating all the talents everyone brings, from whatever generation they come from [*sic*]. (personal communication, March 19, 2016)

Participant 12 further illustrated the importance of communication in bridging generational gaps:

I recall facilitating a conversation between two people who were just not seeing eye-to-eye. One of them was of a much older generation and one from a much younger generation. Both presented really, really interesting points of view and both were fearful. Once we were able to crack the ice and talk about what each other [*sic*] was fearful of and the issues of disagreement, they realized their fears were the same. Once they realized they had something really important in common as they never imagined they would, they were completely open to starting to discuss their differences and getting to know each other. (personal communication, March 19, 2016)

**Interview question 5 summary.** The responses given by the participants to interview question 5 provided a practical list of obtainable factors for positive contributions to a team consisting of different age groups. Practical suggestions were given by the survey participants on what contributes to a vital, intergenerational workforce. The



suggestions included ways in which the workforce could learn about their colleagues from other generations to begin facilitating an understanding of each cohort's strengths, similarities which exist between the four generations, and respective preferences to be honored and embraced.

**Interview question 6.** What techniques and strategies have you employed that you have found successful in creating and sustaining an intergenerational workforce? The four common themes were (a) education, (b) conflict resolution, (c) training, and (d) mentoring (see Figure 9).

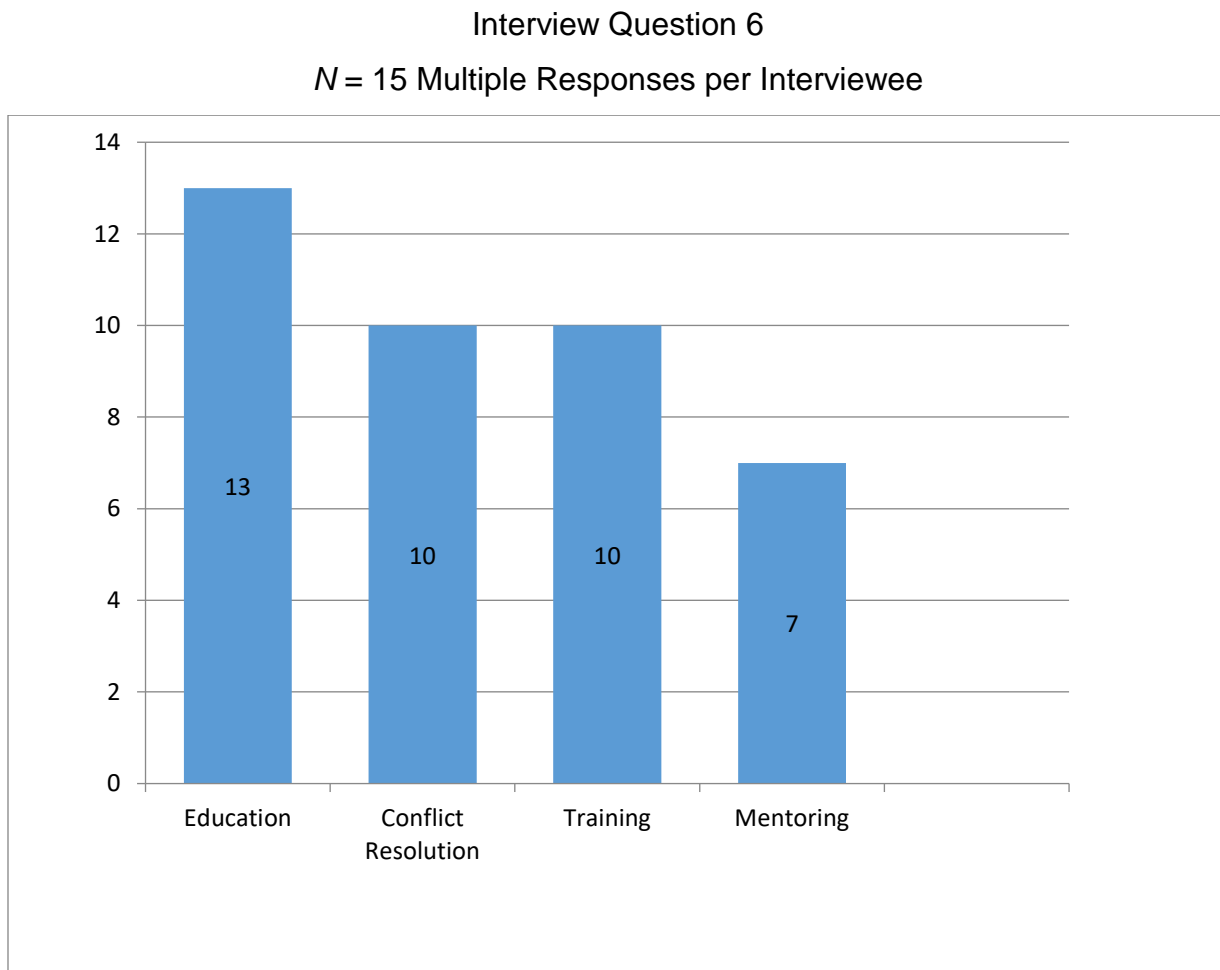


Figure 9. IQ6: Successful strategies used to create a vital workplace.

**Education.** For purposes of this research question, education is used in the context of methods organizations can utilize to create vital relationships among the generations in the workplace by learning about each other's unique values, strengths, differences, and workplace expectations. Participant 6 discussed how training about generational differences helped the participant to train co-workers. "My company sent me to the Franklin-Covey course, *Generations in the Workplace*. I learned techniques that I brought back to teach and use with the workforce, including training on conflict resolution skills, work style, and communication preferences" (personal communication, March 24, 2016).

**Conflict resolution.** Participant 11 discussed the usefulness of conflict resolution in the workplace.

Although employees bring different value systems on how work should be carried out in workforce, ultimately it is about getting everyone on the same page in terms of getting to the bottom line. That is how I describe successful conflict resolution. (personal communication, March 23, 2016)

**Training.** Participant 10 spoke about the benefits of workforce training as a tool for helping workers of various generations become more comfortable working together.

Training that is interactive, where people can role play and act out scenarios in a safe setting, helps to expand people's awareness levels of other's similarities, as well as a chance to explore issues going on in the workplace, which includes generational differences. (personal communication, March 22, 2016)

***Mentoring/relationships.*** Sias (2008) described optimum workplace relationships as “the sharing of information, resource distribution, and support systems.” She emphasized the importance of these characteristics to both the organizational and individual well-being (pp. 2–11). For this interview question, mentoring and the strengthening of relationships among the various generations is one strategy in addressing workplace conflict. The themes of the participants’ responses to the interview question were: (a) teams of multigenerational working together, (b) sharing strengths, (c) cross-mentoring, and (d) partnering. The terms the participants used when discussing the theme of relationships as a recommendation for other human resource professionals included collaboration, team building, mentoring, buddy systems, partners, and support. Participant 10 spoke of a favorite strategy for strengthening employees’ relationships among the different generations by holding off-site staff retreats.

I host annual staff retreats off-site. We do team building exercises, and partner people together of different races, genders and age. It really gives everyone the chance to get to know each other in a way they don’t get to during the normal business day. (personal communication, March 22, 2016)

***Interview question 6 summary.*** The participants shared strong strategies they have utilized and personally found successful in building and managing intergenerational workplaces. These techniques included educating the generations about each other’s unique strengths and differences, ways in which to manage and decrease conflict, as well as promoting opportunities for cross-mentoring among the staff to build and improve relationships between the different age groups. Although the response of mentoring/relationships did not have the greatest number of participant responses, it was

the category that generated the most enthusiastic responses from the participants regarding possible solutions to be utilized in the workplace to generate multigenerational partnerships.

**Interview question 7.** Participants were asked to “describe your strategies in addressing workplace conflicts and how they have contributed to your effectiveness in sustaining your organization’s intergenerational workforce.” Three common themes emerged from the participants’ answers: (a) communication, (b) change management, and (c) discipline (see Figure 10).

Interview Question 7  
N = 15 Multiple Responses per Interviewee

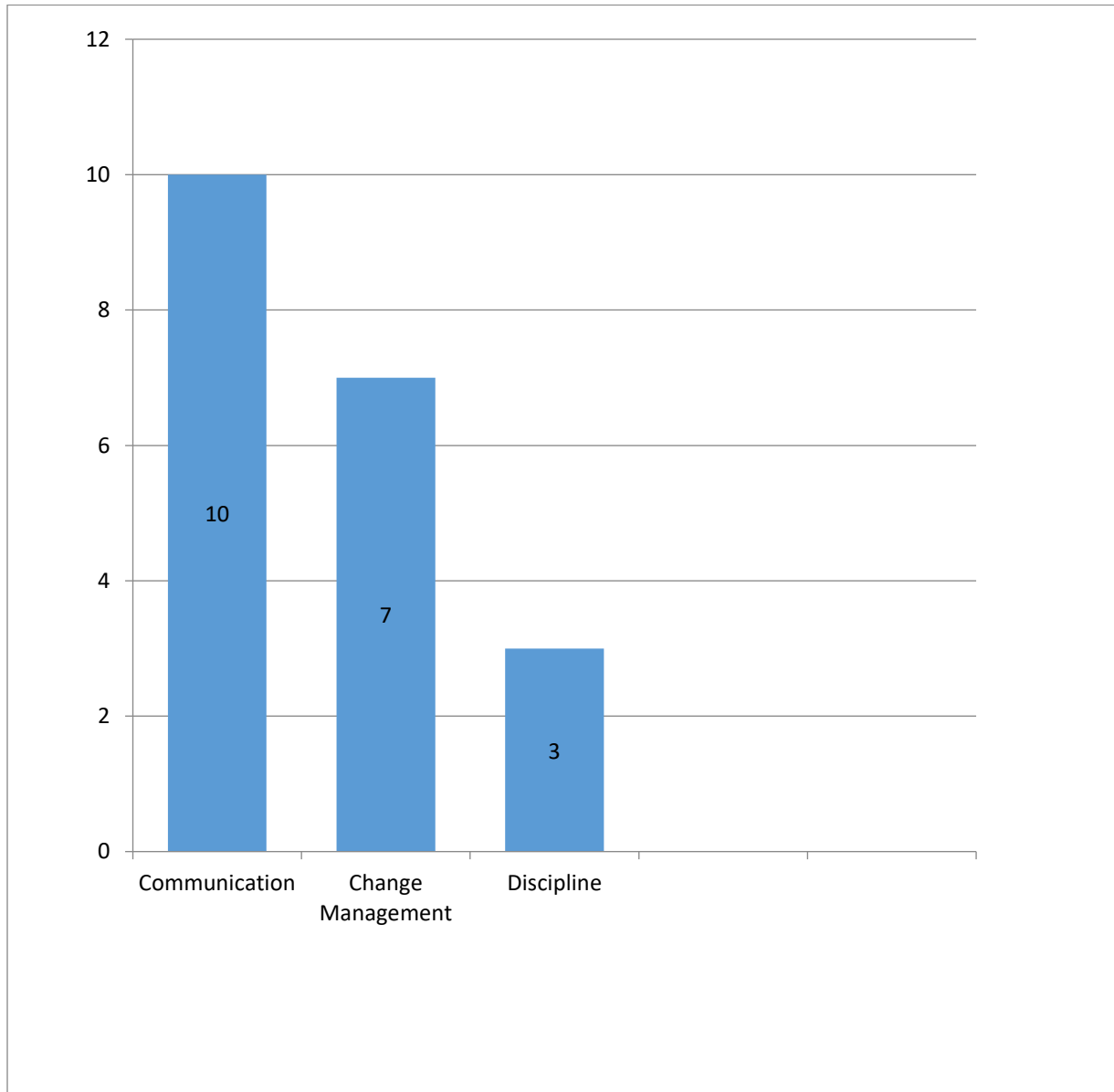


Figure 10. IQ7: Strategies for addressing conflict.

**Communication.** For this research question, communication is used in the context of how the different generations prefer to share information with each other, gain feedback from colleagues and supervisors in the workplace, as well as suggested methods that can be utilized to foster open communication between generations. The

following themes emerged from the responses concerning the need for and the importance of communication as a strategy for addressing conflict and discourse.

- Allow staff members to participate in conversations on ways the organization can bridge gaps between the generations in the workforce.
- Organizations should have an open-door policy for people to share their concerns around generational differences, both confidentially and during staff meetings when appropriate.
- Managers should poll staff members via company surveys on what is working, what is not, and the reasons why.
- Human resource leaders, managers, and supervisors should use conflict resolution to address and solve generational issues between employees, using communication as a tool in mediating the differences.
- Leaders need to stress continuously to the workforce the importance of multigenerational teams for the organization's mission, recognizing the differences and strengths of each generation.

***Discipline.*** Three of the participants replied with the response “disciplinary measures” as a strategy of managing workplace conflict among the various generations. Participant 9 specifically commented on the use of discipline if necessary to discourage disrespectful behavior between the generations.

If necessary, I will utilize progressive disciplinary measures to demonstrate my lack of tolerance for rudeness and disrespect shown by one colleague to another. I have very little patience for staff members who do not embrace the diversity in our

workplace, (i.e., ethnicities, gender, disabilities, and age differences). (personal communication, March 17, 2016)

**Change management.** Luecke (2003) discussed the issues which typically create change in business organizations such as a merger, the launch of a new product, or shift in leadership. He examined the necessity of change for organizations to progress but acknowledged that change can be traumatic and painful to its members. Luecke (2003) shared strategies to help organizational leaders and their employees manage through change. For this interview question, change management is used in the context of the methods organizations can utilize to assist employees in acclimating to the changes in the workplace because of the four different generations working together in the workplace, often for the first time.

As the responses were coded, themes emerged around the importance of supporting change management as a strategy to support organization members in adjusting to changes that may result as generations work together. Participant 3 illustrated the difficulties of getting employees to accept change in the workplace.

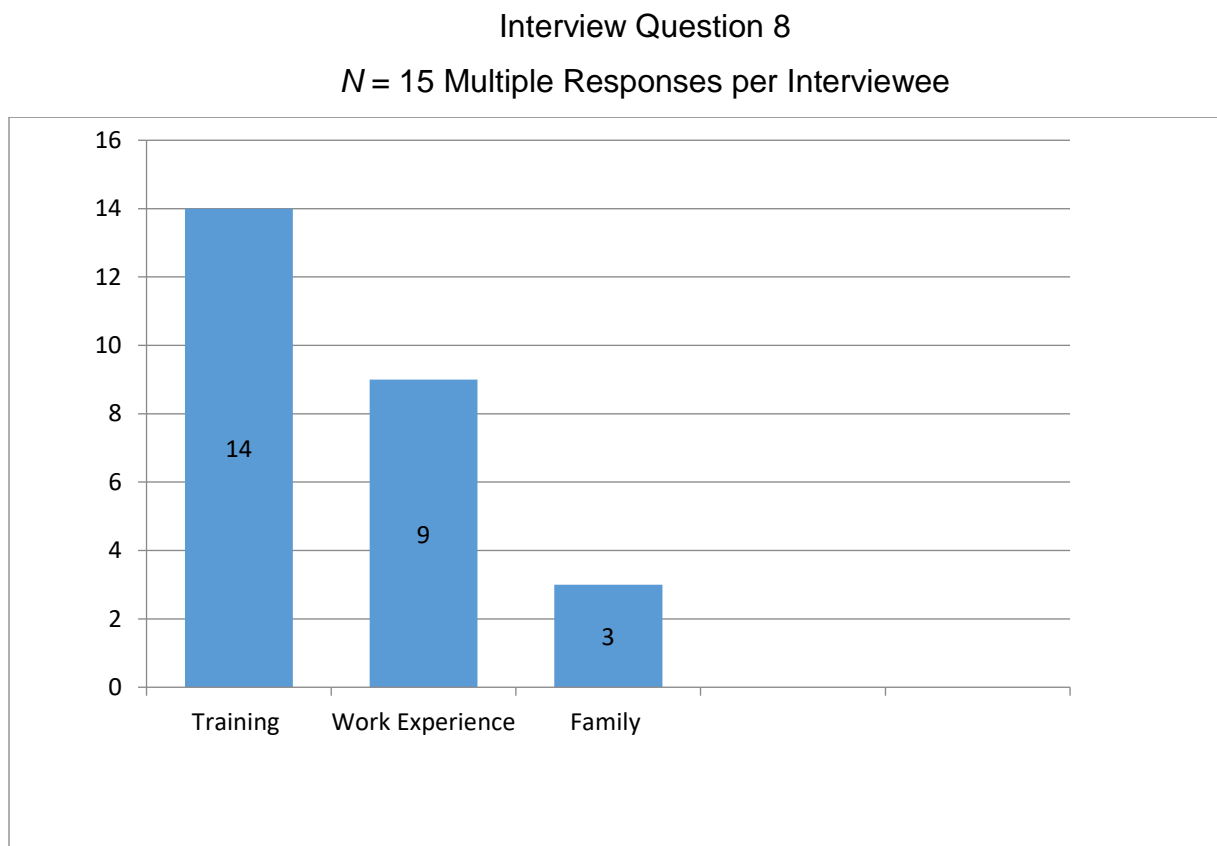
I have conversations with my workforce that [*sic*] things are supposed to change and evolve. And it's more of our own issues with letting go, and the fear of change, and demystifying the fears around change. These conversations helped the staff to welcome and embrace the changes that new generations brought to the company.

(personal communication, March 19, 2016)

**Interview question 7 summary.** Interview question 7 polled the participants for strategies they have successfully utilized in addressing workplace conflicts between the four generations. The use of communication to address and diffuse conflict was the top

theme that emerged, with 12 of the participants discussing the benefits of using various types of communication styles and strategies as methods to address office discourse. The other themes involved supporting and managing change, and if necessary, utilizing discipline to address negative behaviors.

**Interview question 8.** What in your training, background, and experience has been instrumental in helping you to create and sustain an intergenerational workforce? The participants identified three common themes: (a) training, (b) work experience, and (c) family interactions (see Figure 11).



*Figure 11.* IQ8: Instrumental in helping to create and sustain a multigenerational workforce.



**Education/training.** Fourteen (90%) of the participants indicated that they had received some training during their career to prepare them for working with multiple generations. Thirteen participants specifically indicated that the training received was not related to differences in generations or age group, but more on the general topic of diversity. Participant 8 stated that the organization where he currently worked offered many different online modules about workplace issues, and that if a module specifically focusing on success strategies for the multiple different generations working harmoniously together was not currently available, their organization would make it available in the very near future for its employees (personal communication, March 17, 2016).

**Work experience.** Eight of the participants explained that on-the-job work experience had been the primary method of gaining their knowledge on how to successfully build and support a team of several generations. Participant 9 discussed how she gained her vast knowledge of the values and preferences of the various generations from working side-by-side with the generations (personal communication, March 17, 2016). Participant 9 stressed that no matter how many trainings and conferences that they attended on the generations currently in the workplace, it would not amount to the knowledge gained from actual work experiences of working with other generation cohort members (personal communication, March 17, 2016).

**Family interactions.** Participant 6 acknowledged that their understanding of the two younger generations, Generations X and Y, was gained from having teenagers in their own family. "I have gained all my valuable experience knowledge of the newest

generations in the workforce from my own teenage daughters. First-hand experience!” (personal communication, March 24, 2016).

**Research question 2 summary.** Research question 2 was designed to ascertain from the participants which factors they felt contributed to a vital, intergenerational workforce, which strategies and practices they use in balancing the four generations within their workplaces, how they knew if these approaches were succeeding, and what training and/or experience equipped the respondents in creating and sustaining a multigenerational workforce. The helpful tools that emerged as four themes were (a) open communication systems, (b) purposeful collaboration among the cohorts, (c) training and education on the strengths and preferences of each group, and (d) indicators to measure the sustainability of the generation cohorts. Communication and collaboration among the four generations was viewed by the respondents as an essential attribute in contributing to a vital workforce of the multiple generations. Not only was communication and collaboration seen as a contributing factor in building the workforce, it was viewed as a strategy to assist with sustaining and balancing the workplace which could become strained because of the differences in the generational values. The respondents also added that additional education and training for the members of the entire organization would be an added tool to assist with enlightening the cohorts on the assets and preferences of each respective generation.

**Research question 3.** Research question 3 investigated the following question: How do organizations measure the success of their action plans to create and sustain a vital intergenerational workforce? This research question was designed to allow the participants to describe the measurements they used for gauging the successfulness of

their strategies in building and sustaining a multigenerational workforce. The interview protocol included the following two questions relevant to research question 3.

IQ 9—How would you personally describe the elements of a successful intergenerational workforce?

IQ10—How could these elements be measured and tracked by an organization to ensure a successful and vital intergenerational workforce?

**Interview question 9.** This interview question asked the participants to describe, from their viewpoints, what a successful workforce of multiple generations contained. They named three common themes: (a) mentoring, (b) morale, and (c) collaboration (see Figure 12).

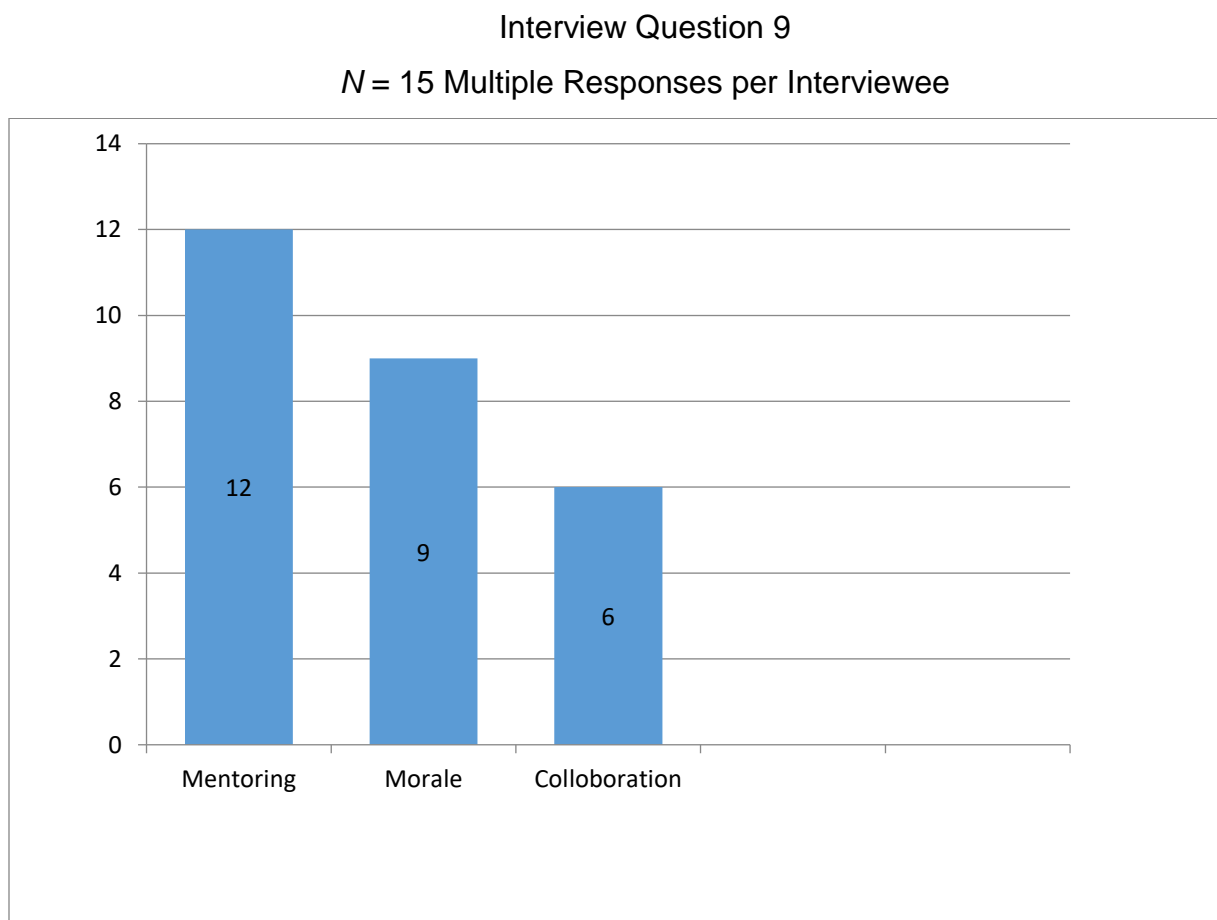


Figure 12. IQ9: The elements of success.

**Mentoring.** Twelve or 80% of the survey participants gave responses that demonstrated mentoring was an important tool in a creating and sustaining a vital multigenerational workforce. Participant 6 illustrated the importance of employing this tool in developing and maintaining multigenerational teams in the workplace.

There needs to be opportunities for staff of all generations to collaborate in teams, connect and exchange knowledge. You cannot have your older generations leave the workforce without mentoring and building strong relationships with the younger staff, who will one day be leading the organization. (personal communication, March 24, 2016)

**Morale.** Nine of the survey participants replied that morale in the workforce was a strong indicator of employee satisfaction. Participant 4 described morale as the state of the employees' happiness and a harmonious workforce. Participant 1 shared a very insightful outline for assessing the current morale of the workforce:

You can feel the level of morale by the numbers of employees who are remaining at the organization past the two-year anniversary mark. If they remain past two years, it is a sign a staff member is happy for the most part. Also, is there is a period of low morale. The bi-annual employee surveys come back to me with unsatisfactory to below average ratings on the employee satisfaction section. Another indicator of low morale is negative feedback received from departing employees during their exit interviews. In the past year, we have had quite a few employees from our most veteran group, the Traditionalists, suddenly leaving within a short period of time. When inquiring about their decision for the unexpected retirement, many of them offered similar replies—that the company

use to feel family oriented, but now feels like a corporate machine where everyone is just a number. (personal communication, March 10, 2016)

**Collaboration/relationships.** For the purposes of this interview question (IQ9), collaboration is used in the context of employees of different generations working together as teams to foster knowledge transfer, participating in cross-mentoring relationships, and partaking in opportunities for learning more about their workplace counterparts.

Participant 10 discussed the importance of collaboration among team members of all ages. “There must be opportunities for the generations to come together in a collaborative environment where there are opportunities to share and hear from different people’s perspectives and value the contributions of each cohort” (personal communication, March 22, 2016).

**Interview question 9 summary.** Interview question 9 asked the participants to illustrate, from their viewpoints, the characteristics of what they deem to be a successful workforce of multiple generations. The three common themes that the participants felt were indicative of a workplace where all generations are a vital, engaged part of the team were mentoring relationships of all cohorts intermingled, high employee morale, and great levels of intergenerational employee collaboration. An example of a measurement of success was an increase of cross-generational teams working together on assignments voluntarily, and without coercion from their supervisors resulting in increased communication and knowledge sharing, with the added benefit of decreased brain drain due to the increase of employee interactions.

**Interview Question 10.** This interview question asked the participants to describe how elements of a vital, multi-generation be measured. Six common themes were identified as (a) relationships, (b) communication, (c) knowledge sharing, (d) productivity, (e) environment, and (f) employee satisfaction (see Figure 13).

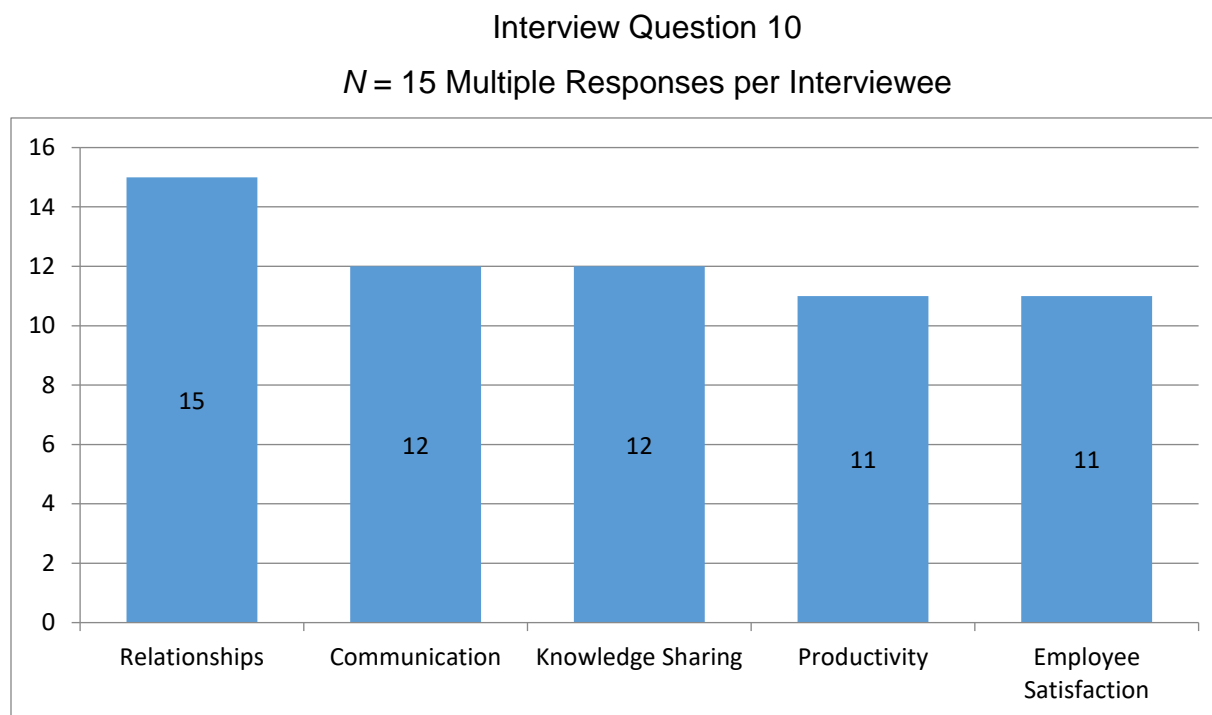


Figure 13. IQ10: How elements of a success can be measured.

**Knowledge sharing.** Participant 7 offered the following thought on relationships in the workplace as an element of multiple generations successfully co-existing.

At our agency, we have tons of cross-mentoring going on—younger to older, older to younger. It is not about the age factor, though; the partnerships are focused on developing a skill set and competence, not limited to age or years of experience on the job (personal communication, March 24, 2016).

Participant 3 submitted the following frank recommendation for organizations to consider when developing work teams of multiple generations. “Tracking which generations

worked best together on teams will allow management to sustain or reconfigure teams for future projects” (personal communication, March 28, 2016).

**Employee Satisfaction.** Social scientist Spector (1997) explored the nature of assessing job satisfaction as influenced by cultural and gender differences and described job satisfaction as the extent to which people like (satisfaction) or dislike (dissatisfaction) their jobs (p. 2). For purposes of this research question (IQ10), employee job satisfaction is used as a tool for organizations to measure the success of their strategies for developing and maintaining a workforce of multiple generations. Participant 10 suggested the following for employers to get an accurate assessment of employee satisfaction: Survey the workforce to see how you are faring, as this is the best test. Annually ask the employee population questions such as how do you rate your work environment? Is your supervisor approachable? (personal communication, March 22, 2016).

Participant 5 described how survey results can be utilized to gauge the satisfaction level of a workforce.

. . . by looking at survey results, sitting down during a staff development meeting and doing a roundtable asking all of the staff to give their input on the responses and issues they want to really discuss—good points and bad points concerning their job.” (personal communication, March 16, 2016)

Participant 9 described a method used to determine if the workforce is satisfied as looking at how many employees are staying with the organization and moving into promotional opportunities. (personal communication, March 10, 2016). Participant 9 also “pays close to attention during exit interviews of employees leaving the organization for

the reasons they give for their departure, as this is an accurate method of gauging the pulse of an employee's satisfaction level" (personal communication, March 10, 2016).

**Relationships.** Participant 12 discussed how the state of employee relationships can be used to gauge whether an organization is successfully integrating a workplace of multiple age cohorts.

We have succeeded in building an ideal team when people are less concerned about the different generations or the age of the different people they are working with, and more concerned about the strength of their ideas and the power of the work. [Then] people don't get hung up on the fact the person is so much older and not connected with the trends currently going on, [or] that the person is so young and doesn't have the life or business experience the job requires. (personal communication, March 19, 2016)

**Productivity.** Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (Hornby, Gatenby, & Wakefield, 2016) refers to productivity as the rate at which goods are produced and the amount produced in comparison with the time, work, and financial resources needed to produce the goods. For this interview question (IQ10), the level of productivity within an organization is used as a method for determining the success of methodologies utilized when assembling and maintaining a team of employees of various age groups. Further, productivity is used as a tool to evaluate organizational strategies for building and maintaining a workforce of multiple generational cohorts. The participants' responses to this theme included the following references: performance measures, getting the work completed promptly, meeting deadlines, and employees completing tasks by the designated due dates.



Participant 14 shared thoughts on how to measure productivity in the organization: “Track if the performance measures are being met. Compare the deliverables produced in comparison [*sic*] to the goals given to the team” (personal communication, March 24, 2016). Participant 6 illustrated the use of productivity as a measurement tool of a workplace that is successfully integrating each of the generations together. “When people feel safe and the workplace is inclusive, and values and personal needs are being honored and respected, there is a high degree of productivity that results” (personal communication, March 24, 2016).

***Environment.*** Business coach and author Ellory Wells (2016) described the ideal work environment as one that promotes group thinking yet allows for introverts to focus and be creative. He emphasized that creating a comfortable work environment increases productivity and creates a path for long-term employee success. For purposes of this interview question, environment (in the workplace), includes employees’ relationships with their co-workers and supervisors, and the organizational culture (communication within the organization, personal development opportunities, morale, recognition, and work-life balance). Participant 8 stated that an organization is succeeding in creating an inclusive workforce when “there is an environment where you have respect among all peers, regardless of the age or experience or career maturity of the employees” (personal communication, March 17, 2016).

Participant 6 defined a work environment succeeding in creating a harmonious place for all generations as follows: “Generational groups are not criticizing each other. They are complimenting each other’s strengths and successes. I see high collaboration between people of all ages, and even curbing their communication and work styles to

accommodate others. The workplace feels safe and inclusive” (personal communication, March 24, 2016).

**Interview Question 10 summary.** Interview question 10 asked the participants to describe the elements used to measure whether their organization was successful in creating and sustaining a vital workforce comprised of multiple generations. Six common themes that served as markers emerged: harmonious relationships, open voluntary communication and dialogue, sharing of knowledge between the groups, high levels of productivity being achieved, a jovial environment and positive employee satisfaction ratings and feedback. The respondents discussed markers which they personally utilized to evaluate success at their organization amongst the generation cohorts. These markers included workforce teams meeting their deadlines timely or earlier than expected, positive comments and feedback from employees on annual staff surveys, and employees voluntarily sharing knowledge and skills with co-workers outside of their own generation (such as technology tips and report writing techniques).

**Research Question 3 summary.** Research question 3 investigated the following question: How do organizations measure the success of their action plans to create and sustain a vital intergenerational workforce? The two interview questions asked of the participants regarding Research question 3 were: (a) how would you personally describe the elements of a successful intergenerational workforce? and (b) how could these elements identified by you be measured and tracked by the organization to ensure a successful and vital intergenerational workforce? The participants identified tools that leaders use to ascertain the temperature of a workforce, including knowledge transfer between the cohorts, productivity levels, and positive feedback from the staff members.

**Research Question 4.** Research question 4 explored the following query: What recommendations or advice would you make for the future implementation of a sustainable, vital intergenerational workforce? This question was designed to allow participants to share their recommendations based on their experiences as human resource professionals, and to make recommendations for other professionals developing and maintaining a vital multigenerational workforce. The interview protocol included the following question relevant to research question four:

IQ11: What advice would you give for the successful building and implementation of a sustainable, vital intergenerational workforce?

**Interview question 11.** What advice would you give for the successful building and implementation of a sustainable, vital intergenerational workforce? Two major themes emerged from the participants' responses—(a) the importance of relationship between the generations, and (b) the necessity of open communication between the four cohorts (see Figure 14).

Interview Question 11  
N = 15 Multiple Responses per Interviewee

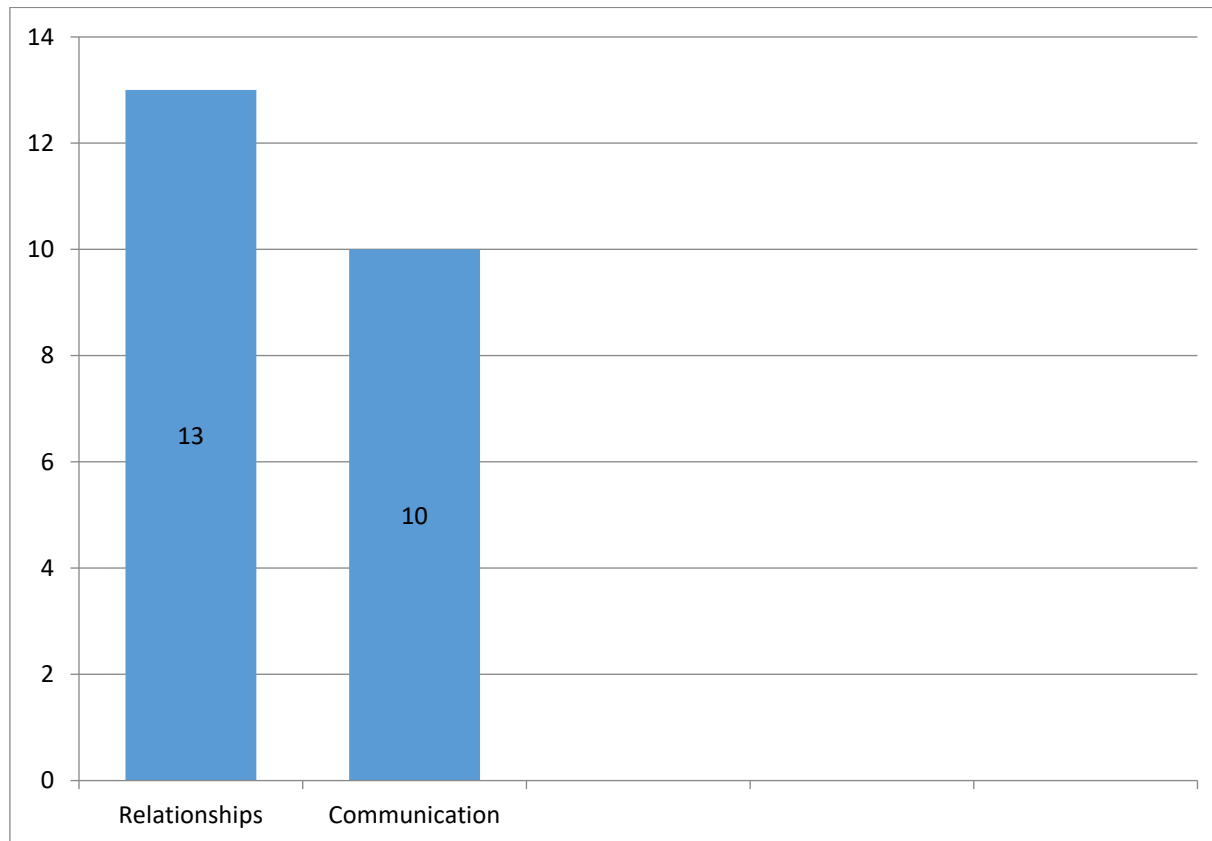


Figure 14. IQ11: Advice for future implementation.

**Relationships.** Participant 6 provided the following insight for other leaders and human resource professionals: “Training, training, and more training on communication style differences in the four generations, inclusiveness exercises, as well as discussions about the value systems of each cohort. Step back and assess the areas where your workforce needs training in to help bridge the gaps between the generations and strengthen the relationships between them” (personal communication, March 24, 2016).

Participant 3 emphasized the following:

There is a need for organizational leaders to create and make opportunities available for members of all generations to interact with each other outside of the

workplace. These types of activities may include off-site events to allow the workforce members to interact and mingle in a relaxed, informal setting which may foster new types of conversations and lead to discovering commonalities amongst the generations (personal communication, March 28, 2016).

**Communication.** Participant 9 identified the importance of communication between the generations in the workforce.

It is all about interpersonal communication and relationships. Looking at the generational thought processes and ways generations prefer to interact with their colleagues is important, as it leads to better communication. Without communication, you are not going to be able to have success in your organization. (personal communication, March 17, 2016)

Participant 4 further stressed the significance of communication among employees of the four generational cohorts.

There are differences among older generations and newer generations in the form of communication. Communication face-to-face is still vital for nurturing interpersonal relationships among the generations. Coaching on interpersonal skills is needed. Technology doesn't allow people to develop the skills from interacting face to face. (personal communication, March 10, 2016)

Participant 10 stressed the importance of listening. "Business leaders need to make themselves available to hear what their workforce is saying by utilizing different methods in which to hear input and feedback from your staff members, such as surveys, suggestion boxes, and all-staff meetings" (personal communication, March 22, 2016).

Participant 8 added the following thought:

Use the preferred methods of communication of the respective generations when possible to reach the generation you are speaking to. The younger generations prefer getting their information via social media such as a company Facebook page, whereas the older generation prefers you meet them at happy hour and be able to speak face-to-face. (personal communication, March 17, 2016)

Further, Participant 12 emphasized the importance of not just listening to your staff, but also being open to what they are saying.

Leaders are better for hearing other people's points of view, as it makes them more informed, sensitive, and ultimately much more competitive and responsive to the environment. It is okay for my staff and the leadership of the company to see the world differently than I do, and I appreciate that. (personal communication, March 19, 2016)

***Interview question 11 summary.*** Interview question 11 asked the participants for advice they would provide to future leaders for the successful building and implementation of their own vital, intergenerational workforce. Two major themes emerged from the participants' responses: the importance of relationships and open communication between the generations. Respondents stressed the need and importance of positive working relationships amongst colleagues of all generations which can be encouraged and strengthened by employers providing training specifically to address and teach communication methods inclusive of each of the four generations. The participants also recommended that companies offer opportunities for staff from the various generations to interact socially, such as off-site events to encourage and facilitate

less formal relationships and the chance for employees to find commonality with colleagues of other generations.

**Research question 4 summary.** Research question 4 explored the recommendations participants made for the future implementation of a sustainable vital, intergenerational workforce based upon their experiences as human resource professionals. Thirteen of the respondents concurred that relationship building was the favored recommendation, with 10 respondents expressing the need for communication amongst the generations as the second most critical theme. As discussed in the previous research and interview question responses, the participants felt that developing and creating relationships among the generation cohorts was essential. This included creating opportunities for collaboration among the groups through cross-mentoring, educational training sessions for the cohort members to learn more about their colleagues, as well as hosting team building events. The theme of communication as a recommendation for building multigenerational cohorts included the following ideas: (a) listening to the ideas and opinions of how generational gaps can be bridged; (b) learn ways in which the different generations prefer to communicate and honor that preference when possible; (c) have forum opportunities for the entire workforce to come together to share feedback on what is working and what is not, concerning the different styles and preferences of the generations; and (d) offer conflict resolution training for managers and staff to be used as a method of resolving differences that arise.

## **Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations**

This chapter provides the findings of the qualitative study to explore best practices and strategies senior human resource professionals and organization leaders in Los Angeles County utilize to develop and sustain a vital, intergenerational workforce. This section also includes (a) summary of the study, (b) discussion of the study's findings, (c) implication and application for professional practice, (d) recommendations for further study, and (e) final thoughts.

### **Summary of the Study**

The United States' workforce for the first time in its history is comprised of members of four different generations working in direct contact with each other (Lancaster, Stillman, Shina, & Phimister, 2007; Lyons, Schweitzer, & Ng, 2015). These generations, the Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y or the Millennials, ranging in age from 22 to 65 years and over, each comes with unique differences (American Hospital Association, 2014; Eisner & O'Grady-Harvey, 2009; Magnuson & Alexander, 2008). The distinctions of the generations, known as work-related variables, include personalities, work values, and attitudes, distinctive expectations, approaches to communication and leadership styles, work-life balance strategies, career goals, as well as unique expectations and motivational needs.

As four generational cohorts make up the current workforce, organization leaders and human resource professionals have had to increase their knowledge of the generational variations, diverse work expectations and preferences amongst generation cohorts to manage the challenges faced in the current workplace. These practices and strategies can be instrumental in helping other business leaders and managers



successfully manage their multigenerational labor force. The immediate objective of this study was to explore the common successful practices used by human resource professionals in creating and sustaining multigenerational workforces. Furthermore, the intent of this study was to also uncover the obstacles and challenges organization leaders faced in building and leading multiple generations in a work setting, as addressing these issues will not only benefit the workforce, but may benefit society as a whole.

The research participants of this study were senior human resource professionals of organizations located in Los Angeles County, California. The participants consisted of 15 human professionals, six men, and nine women. Three were from the field of education, three from local government, one from the entertainment industry, three from human services, two from the finance industry, three from hospitality, and one from the fashion industry. Data was collected during the month of March 2016 via semi-structured interviews, using eleven questions which were derived from the four study research questions. The interviews were conducted in a private environment where the participants felt comfortable presenting detailed responses to the interview questions.

A three-part method was used to ensure the validity and inter-rater reliability of the data analysis. The process began with the coding of the data. Second, a peer review process was utilized to ensure validity and finally, an expert review was performed. An Excel table was developed where significant phrases and identified important themes were positioned into column headers. Inside of the columns, significant words were placed to describe the chief themes. The results of the analysis of the data were summarized in the Excel table and submitted to two colleagues for review. The two reviewers were doctoral candidates who had previously completed courses in qualitative

research in Pepperdine University's Organizational Leadership program. The reviewers evaluated the table to ensure the relationship of the interview questions to the research questions. The reviewers made recommendations for revisions, which were incorporated into the Excel table. During the final steps of the expert review, the committee of expert reviewers recommended changes in the method of how the Excel table was structured, to capture the themes to generate a purer interpretation and reporting of the data results. The modifications to the format of the table structure were completed. The participants' responses from the interview questions generated common themes of which to develop strategies for human resource professionals and organizational leaders to utilize. This chapter presents the findings, implications, recommendations for future research, and the researcher's final thoughts on the study.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

The goal of the study was to address the following research questions:

RQ1. What challenges do organizations face in implementing strategies and practices employed in creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce?

RQ2. What strategies and practices do organizations employ in creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce?

RQ3. How do organizations measure the success of their action plans to create and sustain a vital intergenerational workforce?

RQ4. What recommendations would workers make for future implementation of creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce?

The foundation of the study of generational theory originates from Mannheim's *Problems of Generations* (1952). Additionally, an abundant amount of literature exists on

the various theories offering enlightenment on generations, including the distinctions of each cohort from another. The conceptual framework for this research was supported by Strauss and Howe's Generational Theory and Cycle (1997), and Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943), and was reviewed by the researcher to gain a better understanding of where the generations are similar, different, and how the generations evolved into the unique categories which represent them. Maslow's theory of needs (1943) reiterated the needs and desires of individuals which transcends generational boundaries.

**Common challenges of organizations in implementing strategies and practices in creating and sustaining vital intergenerational workforces.** The challenges the respondents identified included: (a) variations of the values and expectations of each of the generations, specifically, the unique differences and expectations of the generational cohorts (such as work-life balance and self-sacrifice for personal financial security), (b) the difficulties some cohorts face with accepting changes in the norms and culture of a workplace (older generation members not understanding younger generations wanting to remotely work from home, and more casual dress styles at the workplace from what older generations are used to), (c) differences in communication styles and methods utilized, and preferred by each of the generational cohorts.

**Common strategies and practices organizations employ in creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce.** Participants identified strategies most often used in organizational settings to build and manage teams of multiple generations. These recommendations included: (a) opportunities for the various cohorts to collaborate and work together on teams to encourage collaboration between the generations, as well

as businesses hosting off-site informal events where colleagues can interact and learn commonalities about their co-workers, (b) conflict negotiation training for the organization leaders, managers, and staff members to be used to mediate tensions which may arise as a result of workplace differences between the cohorts, (c) training for the entire workforce on the distinctions, strengths, and the preferences of each generation, and (d) cross-mentoring opportunities between staff members of other generations to facilitate knowledge sharing, support, and to build and improve relationships between the different age groups.

**How organizations measure the success of their action plans to create and sustain a vital intergenerational workforce.** The participants shared strategies they have utilized to measure the success of their plans to create and sustain intergenerational workforces. The three common themes the participants felt were indicative of a workplace where all generations are an engaged part of the team are mentoring relationships of all generational cohorts intermingled, high employee morale, and levels of intergenerational employee collaboration. Tangible examples of engaged teams included the following responses: fewer employees terminating their employment, more staff members remaining in their jobs for longer periods of time, positive employee survey feedback, and harmonious, multigenerational partnerships on projects.

**What recommendations human resources professionals would make for the future implementation of creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce.** Two major themes emerged from the participants' recommendations for future implementation of building and maintaining a vital, multigenerational workforce: The importance of relationships amongst workforce members of the various generational

cohorts, and open communication between the generations. The survey respondents expressed that developing and creating relationships across the four generation cohorts in the workforce was essential. The respondents suggested leaders facilitate opportunities for collaboration among the groups using cross-mentoring, training sessions, educational activities, and team building events (including off-site offerings) to enable and encourage the generations to learn more about their colleagues. The theme of communication as a recommendation for building multigenerational cohorts included the following ideas: (a) listening to the ideas and opinions of the entire workforce on how generational gaps can be bridged, which can be collected through employee surveys and focus groups; (b) learn the methods in which the different generations prefer to communicate with others, including their supervisors, and honor that preference when possible; (c) have forum opportunities for the entire workforce to come together to share feedback on what is working, and what is not, concerning the different styles and preferences of the generations, and (d) offer conflict resolution training for managers and staff to be utilized when necessary, as a method of resolving differences that arise.

### **Implications of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore strategies senior human resource managers use to develop and maintain a vital workforce comprised of the four generations currently in the workforce. It is the intention of the researcher to share the results of the study with human resource professionals and organizational leaders to assist in their developing and managing of their own workforces of multiple generations, through the researcher's professional consulting. Business leaders and human resource professionals will be able to utilize the findings of the study, and implement best practices

for creating and managing an intergenerational workforce. It is also the intention of the study's author to present her findings at scholarly conferences, publish academic journal articles and honor requests from universities for more information on the study and research findings.

The challenges of human resource and business leaders managing four distinct generations requires new management strategies and techniques unique to this scenario. Based on an analysis of the participants' interview responses, the following main themes were identified in response to the research questions examining generational workplaces: (a) the most common challenges senior human resource and business leaders face in the current workplace comprised of multiple generations, (b) the strategies senior human resource professionals deemed necessary for creating and sustaining a multigenerational workforce, (c) the ways organizations measure the success of their action plans for creating and sustaining a multigenerational workforce, and (d) what recommendations human resource managers and business leaders would give to other professionals for their future implementation of developing and successfully maintaining a vital, intergenerational workforce.

**Implications for human resource professionals.** This study has implications for the entire field of human resources. As the current workforce is comprised of four unique generations working side-by-side, the challenges and strategies for a successful labor force needs to be understood, and further developed for businesses to continue to operate efficiently and effectively. This study also provides insightful information for organization leaders and human resource professionals charged with effectively leading their current workforce, which is unique in comparison to previous workforces. As

described earlier in the study, older generations are choosing to remain longer in the labor force, changing the landscape of the pool of employees. Strategies must be developed and implemented to facilitate cooperation and cohesiveness amongst the four generations, as well as methods implemented to ensure transfer of the organizational knowledge from the older generations to the younger cohort employees. The benefits of a vital, intergenerational workforce may include increased morale, productivity, efficiency, knowledge sharing, greater communication, a friendlier work atmosphere, improved trust and commitment by employees, an environment that fosters increased creativity and learning, as well as greater collaboration amongst the generations. Failure of human resource leaders and business managers learn to effectively manage and lead employees from the four generations, could cause adverse consequences in the workplace, including employee turnover, a lack of personal commitment and productivity, as well as inefficiency (Yi, Ribbens, Fu, & Cheng, 2015).

**Implications for the members of the four generations in the workplace.** The goal of this study in obtaining the best practices of human resource professionals in building and maintaining a vital, intergenerational workforce is also important to the current members in the labor force. While some research and trainings currently exist on the topic of diversity in the workforce, not much literature exists on the challenges of people of different unique generations working side-by-side. This study's findings identified practices and strategies which can be utilized in the current workplace, and can be further built upon by other human resource professionals and organization leaders. As a result of human resource and business leaders utilizing the strategies and best practices for managing multiple generations identified in this study, the workplace may

become more inclusive to members of each of the four respective generations. The study's findings also include ways in which the strengths of the four generations can be used in the workplace as a benefit versus focusing solely on the challenges and difficulties experienced by multigenerational workforces.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The goal of this study was to conduct a complete and exhaustive review of the existing literature on the subject matter of generational cohorts in the workplace, and administer an approved research survey to a selected population of senior level human resource professionals in Los Angeles County. The literature review was conducted over a 9-month time span; however, the amount of literature and information directly related to the best practices to be used in the workplace was limited. Most of the existing literature concerning the four generations currently in the workplace discussed the differences in their values, and the forces which shaped the four generations (expectations, work ethic, communication style preferences, and motivation for working). Sparse literature exists about the benefits of a workforce comprised of multiple generations, and how businesses can harness this advantage.

As the topic of the four multiple generations working together is gaining more attention from business leaders and human resource professionals, continuing to research and ascertain the best practices as they emerge, will be an advantage to those searching for answers and information on managing teams of multiple generations, in anticipation for the new generations which will be joining the workforce. The landscape of the current workforce continues to evolve, and human resource professionals and business leaders must address the changing pool of talent to ensure the continued



efficient operation and success of their businesses. Progress is being made as employers are slowly beginning to recognize the respective motivational factors, effective communication methods for generations, and work-life balance strategies needed to be offered to attract and retain talent from each of the cohorts (Sabatini-Fraone, Hartmann & McNally, 2009).

Scholars and researchers should continue to conduct further studies expanding on potential problems, and additional solutions which may not have been uncovered in this study. The following are ways in which the author of this study and future practitioners could broaden the parameters of this research topic, increasing the benefits:

1. Expand the geographic scope of the study's participants to include human resource professionals outside of Los Angeles County. While this study was designed and approved to be conducted utilizing voluntary human resource professionals working within the County of Los Angeles, the study could gain further valuable information by including professionals outside of the Los Angeles region. During the interviews conducted, the researcher was referred to other study participants of various industries, years of management experience, and direct knowledge of the study's subject matter, including human professionals from other cities in the United States. The researcher was not able to utilize these experts in this study as to remain in compliance with the approved IRB study participants. Utilizing study participants from other geographic regions, as well as industries, may provide additional information and best practices than the responses provided by this study's participants.

2. Increase the study participant size and length of the study in which survey data is gathered. The researcher successfully completed the study with the approved study size of 15 participants. At the completion of the interviews and data coding, common themes emerged from the responses of the 15 respondents. The researcher would like the opportunity to survey a larger population of respondents. The researcher also desires a longer period in which to administer the surveys and compile the data from the survey results.
3. A further study that includes senior managers and organizational leaders who do not have a human resource background may be beneficial to the current body of knowledge. During the recruitment period, the principal investigator encountered organizational leaders who were interested in the study's subject matter and the researcher felt they may have had information that was relevant to the study. The leaders were intrigued by the study's topic and offered their time to participate in answering the interview questions, as well as offer antidotes on the challenges of managing a team of four generations from their personal experiences. Again, the researcher was not able to utilize business professionals outside of the approved scope of the study participants to remain in compliance with the approved IRB study participants.
4. Expand the list of interview questions to be used in the study, making certain they align with the approved research questions. Most of the interviews were completed within 30 minutes. The interview participants were excited to share their experiences, both the challenges and solutions of working with teams comprised of the four generations in the workforce. Many of the respondents

were desirous to continue the interview past the approved 11 interview questions, and share additional information which had not been asked in the scope of the interview questions. Questions for future studies may include:

- i. Describe the possible consequences businesses may encounter if they do not have strategies or solutions implemented to address the changing age demographics of the workforce.
- ii. What are the benefits and business advantages which are realized by having a labor force comprised of four generations?
- iii. How do the current federal employment and labor laws offer protection to older employees in the workplace? Does this benefit businesses as well as the employee?
- iv. What are the proper human resource management techniques for managing older generation employees who can no longer perform the essential duties of a job, but want to continue their participation in the workplace?
- v. Explain how your organization handles the issue of work-life balance of the respective generations? How do the different age groups mediate the difference in work styles, so employees accomplish their work goals as well as have time to complete their personal objectives outside of work (i.e. volunteering time at their child's school during the workday), and honor their work style preferences such as a desire to telecommute or work solely by remote access?

- vi. As a human resource professional, can you share specifics on the differences of requested benefits of the four generations? As an employer, are you able to provide these benefits?
- vii. How do employees of the multiple generations react to the changing benefit requests of the difference generations, such as same-sex partner health benefits or gender reassignment health coverage?
- viii. What measures must businesses engage in to meet the changing landscape of the workplace, previously not seen in other generations (i.e. designated areas for nursing mothers in the office setting, paid family leaves for fathers)?
- ix. How does a business determine (legally and ethically) that it cannot support the workplace requests of the generations (i.e. bringing pets to work)?
- x. Discuss the common stereotypes of the four generations. Are these descriptors accurate, and do you see these characteristics among your staff members of the respective generations?
- xi. Do employers have a preference of the generation(s) they prefer working with and why? Do different work ethics exist among the generations and if so, what will businesses need to do to adopt to these different styles in which workers view work?
- xii. Are some industries struggling more with the differences in generations than others (i.e. technology, healthcare) while others

- experience very little difficulty between the generations (i.e. academia)?
- xiii. Do some industries experience less challenges with strife between the generations because of the inherent respect that comes with the role of the leaders of the organization (i.e. physicians, clergy)? Is there a different level of respect each generation gives to leaders with certain education backgrounds and titles?
  - xiv. From the view of the study participants, what role does societal changes play in the behaviors demonstrated by workers of different generations towards their peers of different ages?
  - xv. What recommendations as a human resource professional would you make for trainings on ways to bridge the gaps of multiple generations in the workplace, in addition to the general diversity trainings currently offered?
  - xvi. In your opinion, why is there not more existing literature and trainings for supervisors and human resources professionals to address the changing demographics of the workplace?
  - xvii. Are there industries that are currently being hit harder with challenges of an age diverse workforce (i.e. nursing)?
  - xviii. How do you see communication between the generation members in the workplace evolving or disintegrating due to

technological advances where less face-to-face conversations take place?

- xix. How do business leaders decide what communication methods used by the different generations are acceptable workplace forms of communications (i.e. texting your supervisor that you are out sick versus leaving a voicemail)?

### **Final Thoughts**

As the literature review and the participants of this study have indicated, the workforce is rapidly growing and diversifying in its number of current generational cohorts working side-by-side. With the diversified workforce comes generational differences, which includes variances in values, preferred methods of communication, feedback approaches, and work style preferences. As the number of generations working together continues to expand and additional generations prepare to join the workforce, organizations will be required to utilize strategies and best practices to bridge the gaps that may be encountered to maintain a vital multigenerational workforce. As Generation Z enters the workforce, there will be a total of five generations in the workplace.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to answer the central questions: What challenges and obstacles do human resource and organization leaders face in building and sustaining a multigenerational workforce; what strategies do they employ in accomplishing this task; and how do business and human resource professionals measure their success? The findings from this study highlight successful practices and recommendations based upon experiences of 15 senior human resource professionals based in Los Angeles County, and include an association with the purpose and

significance of the study, and a review of the literature and conceptual framework. The study's findings include common obstacles and challenges faced, methods and best practices human resource leaders use to build bridges and fill the gaps between the generations, and indicators by which business leaders decide whether they are succeeding in their efforts.

Although the findings of this study and the review of the existing literature indicate there is action taking place amongst human resource leaders in addressing the changing workforce, much work is left to be accomplished to address the increasing challenges that comes with a workforce comprised of four generations. Business leaders and human resource professionals must decide which of the strategies recommended in this study can be implemented in their workplace to effectively supervise and motivate their multigenerational staff according to their organization's culture, as well as the management practices, and leadership styles of the business.

The phenomena of the multigenerational workforce are personal and professional to me. My interest in this study's topic grew from my direct experience of managing a workforce of employees whose ages spanned from 20 to 85 years, and from personally witnessing the difficulties that each generation sometimes experiences in the workforce. For example, I observed veteran generation employees being shown less patience from their managers and younger colleagues when struggling with grasping new technological advances in the workplace. Older employees were being given ultimatums to adapt to technological changes or seek alternative employee opportunities where technology was not needed to perform the essential functions of a job. Because of alienating elder employees who felt they had no option but to retire due to the pressure from

management, the organization lost valuable talent, as well as knowledge (brain drain), which had not been completely captured by other members of the workforce through succession planning or cross-mentoring.

My desire to explore the research subject of multiple generations in the workplace as a dissertation topic culminated because of my personal observations of age discrimination of various generations in the workplace. The journey and the findings of this study have influenced me to see the positive outcomes that can result from sharing the best practices with other human resource professional and business leaders managing intergenerational workforces, as well as with my professional colleagues with whom I work. As a professional consultant and a college professor, I will utilize the knowledge gained through this research study to teach and encourage tolerance amongst all generations in the workplace. I will continue to investigate the best practices of this topic, and share my results with organizational leaders and human resource professionals who are managing the changing labor force, and those aspiring to be managers and business leaders.

**Developing competencies.** As the research and literature review in this study has demonstrated many organization leaders, human resource professionals, business managers, corporate trainers and coaches need training on what the best practices are on how to effectively manage and lead employees from the four generations in the current workforce. In the role as a professional consultant and college instructor, I will provide via training sessions, strategies for businesses to utilize to capitalize on the strengths and differences of the four generations, to create an engaged workforce. The trainings offered will include the following topics:



1. How to utilize generational commonalities to bridge differences which may arise between the generation cohort members.
2. Strategies on how to effectively supervise and motivate a workforce comprised of multiple generations, addressing the needs of all ages of employees in the workplace.
3. Competencies for attracting and retaining productive employees of all generations utilizing methods which are appealing to each respective generation.
4. Understanding what the workplace motivational factors are for each of the four generations, including understanding the attitudes and penchants of the generations, their views of work-life balance, values, common clash points, varying expectations of work, preferred workstyles and how as a manager to support the respective values of each cohort.
5. Techniques to identify signs of generational strife and conflict, and solutions to counter age-related prejudices and biases.
6. Information and suggestions for utilizing the preferred communication methods of each generation in the workplace, including ways of administering performance evaluations and giving feedback for the respective generations.
7. Methods for fostering teamwork amongst the multigenerational workforce, including teaching tolerance of experiences and cultural differences that are likely to influence generation members' attitudes toward work.

8. Teaching organizations how to enhance their culture so their values reverberate with its staff members from each of the four generations.
9. Techniques to foster improved communication and collaboration among employees of the four cohorts to attain a focus on shared ideals and expectations.
10. The benefits to businesses of hiring mature workers, and retention strategies to keep them engaged in the workforce.
11. Ways in which human resource professionals and business leaders can offer skill training attractive to employees of all ages and learning styles, including opportunities for mature workers to contribute their knowledge to workers of younger generations.
12. How businesses can successfully develop cross-mentoring programs; pairing less experienced employees with tenured staff members to develop a better understanding of the respective generations, and the qualities they bring to the workplace, as well facilitate the transfer of knowledge of one generation to the others, preventing brain drain.
13. Best practices for developing employee surveys and facilitating focus groups to ascertain what each generation needs and expects from their jobs to remain productive and engaged.
14. Strategies for developing and implementing alternative work arrangements to accommodate various stages of employees' lives (i.e. telecommuting, job sharing, and flextime work schedules).
15. Conflict resolution strategies.

16. Methods of addressing gaps in technology strengths.

17. Flexibility in leadership and management styles as each generation has different expectations, priorities, approaches to work, motivators, recognition and inclusiveness.

**Benefits gained.** The Benefits gained by organizations who utilize the trainings I offer will include, but not be limited, to the following:

1. Lower generational conflicts and increased employee morale.
2. Strategies to attract and retain new talent to their organization (of each of the four generations) by demonstrating competency of generational needs.
3. Expertise on methods to develop and provide training relevant to all generations.
4. Approaches to improve performance, productivity, and increased problem solving by workforce members of each generation.
5. Methods to foster productive collaborations that occur because of a workplace designed to respect differing opinions, views, communication, and work styles.
6. An appreciation of the differences of the generations, and a focus on the positive attributes and strengths the generations bring to the workplace.
7. A competitive advantage by harnessing the needs of their employees unique to their generation.
8. Improved communication amongst the generations to foster an environment conducive to passing along workplace knowledge from one generation to

the other (avoiding brain drain), and an environment where team-based projects will succeed.

9. A close in the gap of understanding the management skills needed for managing a multi-generational workforce, an appreciation of the four generations, and improving relationships in the workplace.

As additional generations enter the workforce, and veteran generations remain employed past traditional retirement ages, employers will be faced with new challenges in their organizations. The insights gained from this study will help human resources professional and organizational leaders understand key approaches on building and maintaining their own vital workforce of multiple generations. It will be critically important that managers and business leaders continue to invest time, energy and resources (human and financial) into learning about and truly understanding the multiple generations, and use the information obtained to develop methods in which to better understand and support their workforce.

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## APPENDIX A

## Institutional Review Board Approval Letter



Pepperdine University  
 24255 Pacific Coast Highway  
 Malibu, CA 90263  
 TEL: 310-506-4000

## NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: March 03, 2016

Protocol Investigator Name: Monique Watts

Protocol #: 16-02-204

Project Title: HOW DO ORGANIZATIONS CREATE AND SUSTAIN VITALITY IN A MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE?

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Monique Watts:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that governs the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approval protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the [Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual](#) at [community.pepperdine.edu/irb](http://community.pepperdine.edu/irb).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chairperson

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives

## APPENDIX B

## Informed Consent Form

**PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY***Graduate School of Education and Psychology***INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES****“How Do Organizations Create and Sustain Vitality in a Multigenerational Workforce?”**

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Monique Watts, doctoral candidate and primary investigator, and faculty advisor Farzin Madjidi, Ed.D. at Pepperdine University's Graduate School of Education and Psychology, because you are a human resource professional in Los Angeles County. Your participation is voluntary. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. You should read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. Please take as much time as you need to read the consent form. You may also decide to discuss participation with your family or friends. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with Pepperdine University. Additionally, you are free to withdraw from participating in this study at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to acknowledge your consent to this form. You will also be given a copy of this form for your records.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of the study is to examine the challenges organizations face in implementing strategies and practices employed in creating and sustaining vital multigenerational workforces; ways in which organizations measure success of their action plans to create and sustain vital intergenerational workforces; and recommendations employees would make for future implementation of creating and sustaining vital, intergenerational workforces.

**STUDY PROCEDURES**

If you agree to volunteer and participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an 11-question survey, which will be administered to you in person, at a time and place convenient for you. Completing the survey should not take more than 60 minutes. Prior to the start of the interview, investigator will ask if you consent to the interview being audiotaped. If you do consent to being audiotaped, investigator will record the interview on a recorder which she will provide. On the recording, you will be identified by a unique pseudonym and your actual name will not appear on the recording or the transcription. If you do not agree to the interview being transcribed, the investigator will record the information with handwritten notes, again utilizing a pseudonym in place of your actual name.

Within seven days of completing the interview, you will receive from investigator a transcribed copy of the responses you provided to the survey. You will be asked to review the transcribed document for accuracy and that the typed responses mirror the responses you provided. The review of the responses will also provide you an opportunity to make corrections to the responses if needed, in addition to supplement the answers with new thoughts which you may have concerning the interview question posed. The investigator will be available by phone to discuss your agreement to the responses as heard and transcribed by investigator and/or changes or corrections which needed to be made to a response(s). There will be no further time requirement of you beyond the point of the transcript review, but the investigator will remain available to you for any questions you may have after the completion of the interview and transcript review.

### **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

There are no foreseeable or anticipated significant physical or psychological risks that are anticipated to arise from your participation in this study, as this study does not exceed minimal risk. There is a small risk to subjects that my notes or the audio transcription of my interview with you may be accessed by someone other than the investigator, but proper precautions are being taken to prevent any occurrence that would jeopardize your confidentiality, including identifying information which you may provide in your responses. (See Confidentiality section below).

You may decline to answer any or all questions and you may terminate your involvement at any time if you choose.

### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

While there are no direct benefits to the study participants, there are several anticipated benefits to society which include: helping human resource professionals and organizational leaders develop a greater understanding of what practices and strategies exist and are being utilized to successfully manage and create vital multigenerational work groups, which information can be used by other human resource professionals and organizational leaders in managing multiple generations of employees in the workplace.

### **PAYMENT/COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION**

You will not be compensated for your participation. There are no monetary benefits or gifts associated with this study.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Investigator will keep your records for this study confidential as far as permitted by law. However, if investigator is required to do so by law, she may be required to disclose information collected about you. Examples of the types of issues that would require investigator to break confidentiality are if you discuss with the investigator about instances of child abuse and elder abuse. Pepperdine's University's Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) may also access the data collected. The HSPP occasionally reviews and monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research subjects.

Investigator will not be retaining any information about your identity, as you will be assigned a unique pseudonym used to identify you in place of your actual name on my notes, audio recordings and on the transcription of the interview. Please do not provide any identifying information of yourself or other persons in the responses you provide to investigator. Every effort will be made by investigator to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

1. Your name will be replaced with a unique identifier on all documents (field notes, recordings, transcripts). The master list linking your actual name to your unique identifier/pseudonym will be maintained only on the external hard drive of investigator's password protected computer, which only investigator has access to. The hard drive is not backed up to any type of external cloud data storage service. Once the interviews for the study have been completed and all participants have completed their review and approval of their transcribed interviews, the master list containing the names and contact information of the survey participants will be permanently deleted from the investigator's computer.
2. All audiotapes of the conducted interview will be destroyed once the information has been transcribed and read for accuracy. Before destruction, the audiotapes will remain in a locked file cabinet in investigator's home office.
3. When the interview data is transcribed by investigator, the unique pseudonym id assigned to each survey participant will continue to be used in lieu of participant's actual name, to avoid identifying information being on the final interview transcripts. The de-identified interview transcripts will be kept for three years at which time they will be destroyed the use of a professional shredding vendor.
4. All of investigator's written field notes will be scanned onto and kept on an external hard drive of investigator's password protected computer. The hard copies of any notes taken by investigator will be destroyed by a professional shredding vendor, once the information is scanned and uploaded onto the external hard drive of investigator's password protected computer.
5. Three years after the study is completed, investigator will delete all field notes from her password protected external computer drive, as well as destroy all copies of the transcribed interview transcripts through a secure professional shredding service.

## **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the interview at any point during the process without giving a reason. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed. Additionally, you have the right to request that investigator not use any of your interview material. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

### **ALTERNATIVES TO FULL PARTICIPATION**

The alternative to participation in the study is not participating or completing only the items which you feel comfortable. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the interview at any point during the process without providing a reason.

### **EMERGENCY CARE AND COMPENSATION FOR INJURY**

If you are injured as a direct result of research procedures you will receive medical treatment; however, you or your insurance will be responsible for the cost. Pepperdine University does not provide any monetary compensation for injury.

### **INVESTIGATOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION**

I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact Monique Watts at [REDACTED] & [Monique.Watts@pepperdine.edu](mailto:Monique.Watts@pepperdine.edu) or Farzin Madjidi, Ed.D. at [REDACTED] & [Farzin.Madjidi@pepperdine.edu](mailto:Farzin.Madjidi@pepperdine.edu) if I have any other questions or concerns about this research.

### **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION**

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If you have questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant or research in general please contact Dr. Judy Ho, Chairperson of the Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University 6100 Center Drive Suite 500 Los Angeles, CA 90045, 310-568-5753 or [gpsirb@pepperdine.edu](mailto:gpsirb@pepperdine.edu).

## APPENDIX C

## Interview Protocol

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Interview Question 1: What are the major and/or obstacles in creating and sustaining a vital intergenerational workforce?

Interview Question 2: Can you share with me any instances of intergenerational conflict among the employees at your current organization? (Do not disclose names or information that would breach privacy of the employees).

Interview Question 3: What resources do you need to be better equipped to deal with intergenerational conflicts at your organization (e.g., training, coaching, etc.)

Interview Question 4: What emerging challenges and/or obstacles around intergenerational workforce do you anticipate?

Interview Question 5: What factors contribute to a vital intergenerational workforce?

Interview Question 6: What techniques/strategies have you employed that you have found successful in creating and sustaining an intergenerational workforce?

Interview Question 7: Describe your strategies in addressing workplace conflicts and how they have contributed to your effectiveness in sustaining your organization's intergenerational workforce?

Interview Question 8: What in your training, background, and experience have been instrumental in helping you create and sustain an intergenerational workforce?

Interview Question 9: How would you personally describe the elements of a successful intergenerational workforce?

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Interview Question 10: How could these elements be measured and tracked by an organization to ensure a successful and vital intergenerational workforce?

Interview Question 11: What advice would you give for the successful building and implementation of a sustainable, vital intergenerational workforce?

Closing question: Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience in building and implementing an intergenerational workforce that you think would be relevant to this study?

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## APPENDIX D

### Recruitment Script

**On the Phone:** “Hello, my name is Monique Watts. I am a doctoral candidate at Pepperdine University. I am conducting a research study about the current multigenerations working together in the workplace and am looking for volunteer participants for my research study. I am calling to ask if you would be willing to let me interview you on this subject. Your name and permission to contact you were given by the human resource association (PIHRA/SHRM) of Los Angeles County, which you are a member. For this study, I am looking for human resources professionals who currently work in Los Angeles County, have worked in the field of human resources at a manager level for at least ten years (or in the alternative have the Senior Professional Human Resource certification) with an organization of at least 50 staff members.”

“If you take part in this study, you would be asked to complete an 11-question interview, which I would conduct with you in person at a time and place convenient for you. It should take about 60 minutes to complete the interview. If you would be interested in participating in this interview, we can set up a time now or you can let me know when a good time for me to phone you back to schedule it.” [If interested, investigator will set up date and time and will provide subject with investigator contact information].

“If you have questions, I can be reached at 310-926-3193 or [monique.watts@pepperdine.edu](mailto:monique.watts@pepperdine.edu). Thank you for your help.” If not interested or the potential interview subject does not meet the inclusion criteria, the investigator will end the call: “Thank you for your time.”

**E-Mail:** Subject Line: Participants being sought for a human resources research study

My name is Monique Watts and I am a doctoral candidate at Pepperdine University. I am looking for volunteer participants for my research study. Your name and permission to contact you were given by the human resource association (PIHRA/SHRM) of Los Angeles County, which you are a member. For this study, I am looking voluntary participants who are human resources professionals who currently work in Los Angeles County, have worked in the field of human resources at a manager level for at least ten years (or in the alternative have the Senior Professional Human Resource certification) within an organization of at least 50 staff members.”

This study is about the current multiple generations working together in the workforce. If you take part in this study, you would be asked to complete an 11-question interview, which I would conduct with you in person at a time and place convenient for you. The interview should not take more than 60 minutes to complete in its entirety. To be able to take part in this study, you must a senior level human resource professional with at least 10 years in the HR field, or alternatively have the SPHR certificate, have managed a workforce of at least 50 employees and currently work in Los Angeles County.


If you are interested in participating or have any questions about the study, and meet the voluntary participant criteria as described, please email me at [Monique.watts@pepperdine.edu](mailto:Monique.watts@pepperdine.edu) or call me at 310-926-3193. Thank you, Monique Watts

## APPENDIX E

## Permissions for Use of Copyrighted Materials

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 **Chris Doyle** <Chris\_Doyle@americancentury.com> Mar 7 ☆ [ ] [ ]  
to me [ ]

Hi Monique:

We looked into your request and have no issues with you using the research. You should know that the original source material came from Pew Research. We simply repackaged it for a 2015 blog post. Here's the link to the Pew information.

**This year, Millennials will overtake Baby Boomers**  
<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/01/16/this-year-millennials-will-overtake-baby-boomers/>

---

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**Cc:** ~~monique.watts@pepperdine.edu~~  
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