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Baby Boomers and Generation X: How organizations understand the generational differences of employees

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BABY BOOMERS AND GENERATION X: HOW ORGANIZATIONS UNDERSTAND THE GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES OF EMPLOYEES

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BABY BOOMERS AND GENERATION X: HOW ORGANIZATIONS UNDERSTAND THE GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES OF EMPLOYEES

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The generational differences of Baby Boomers and Generation X have been a topic of increased attention over the last decade; although previous research has not examined to what extent organizational strategy influences an organization's ability to understand generational differences. This study investigated the influence of the traditional, relational, and cultural strategies for understanding the generational differences of Baby Boomers and Generation Xers and presents the results of interviews with a management representative from 10 companies to determine how their organization understands and deals with generational differences. The research focused primarily on the factors of influence for understanding generational differences for each organizational strategy, and how organizational strategy benefits an organization's ability to understand these differences. The findings are discussed, and organizational and generational characteristics are examined in terms of similarities and differences.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

As organizations struggle with attracting, retaining and satisfying talented employees, they cannot ignore the intergenerational mix of America's workforce in their recruiting and retention efforts. The Silent Generation (1925-1940), the Baby Boomers (1940-1960), and Generation X (1960-1980) make up today's workforce.

As new generations enter the workforce, each sets a tone and establishes boundaries, ground rules, and expectations (O'Bannon, 2001). Each generation also has its own problems, strengths, and weaknesses (Adams, 2000). A generation is further defined by what it thinks and feels, as well as by its tastes and attitudes (Zemke, Raines, & Flipczak, 2000). From an organizational perspective, employees from different generations have different value systems and work demands, causing them to react and respond differently to common life events (Kupperschmidt, 2000).

Generations are not just defined by dates of birth (Zemke et al., 2000). Zemke et al. suggest that the commonalities of generations "cut across racial, ethnic, and economic differences" (p. 17). However, it should be noted that not every individual fits a generation's personality profile (Zemke et al.).

According to Corley (1999), each demographic group seeks a "different deal from employers" (p. 22). For example, Corley found that what motivates Baby Boomers may not carry the same weight with Generation X. In addition, different generations will want the same things at similar points in their life cycles (Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998). For example, employees want upward progress in their careers, such as increased income,

responsibility, and influence within the organization – an orientation deeply imbedded in the American psyche (Jurkiewicz & Brown).

It is both important and advantageous for organizations to understand generations and to learn about the expectations and motivations of these very different groups (Nyhof, 2000; Zemke et al., 2000). Zemke et al. suggest that understanding generational differences is critical to make these differences work *for* the organization instead of against it. When managers and coworkers do not understand each other's generational differences, tension increases and job satisfaction and productivity decrease (Kupperschmidt, 2000).

I am a member of Generation X. During my career, I have been employed in situations working for and with Baby Boomers. In many instances, my Baby Boomer management and coworkers offered priceless direction garnered from their own career experiences – yet these individuals remained open to "younger" ideas for projects, etc. Unfortunately, in other instances my Baby Boomer management and coworkers exhibited an "it's my way or the highway" attitude and rejected any ideas not of their own – particularly ideas generated by younger staff.

While working for Boomers, I have found myself often ridiculed for "not thinking their way" and involved in multiple conversations about "what's wrong with young people." Through my experience with Baby Boomer management, I have witnessed their failure to recognize generational differences, as well as an attempt to force younger staff into accepting their Boomer way. In my experience, younger staff have been made to feel subservient and been talked to like children. If I had a $100 for each time a Boomer

addressed me as "Kiddo," I would be a wealthy woman. The result of these situations: tremendous employee dissatisfaction and excessive employee turnover.

I entered this research with the desire to understand the differences between Baby Boomer and Generation X employees. Why are we so different? Are we the same about anything? As I profiled these two generations, I found both differences and similarities, but more importantly, I discovered how our backgrounds and upbringings have shaped our personalities, thoughts, and behaviors. As I became more engrossed in this research, I wanted to understand if organizations attempt to understand the generational differences of their employees. In today's workforce, diversity is a prominent focus but it is unclear if generational differences are included in this focus. My goal with this study was to determine which factors – including organizational strategy (i.e., relational, traditional, cultural) – influence an organization's ability to understand generational differences.

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

Baby Boomer research dates back to studies conducted by Reich (1970), Jones (1980), Wheeler (1984), Carpini (1986), and Dyer and Dyer (1984). Reich examined the social, economic, and political climate Boomers grew up in. Studies by Jones, Wheeler, and Carpini researched America's expectations of radical social and political change from this generation. Finally, Dyer and Dyer examined the organizational processes and conditions, such as leadership characteristics, desired by the Baby Boomer generation.

Generation X research dates back to early studies by Yankelovich (1974) and Carpini (1986). Although they were not yet known as Xers, Yankelovich profiled American youth in the 1970s, and Carpini described the generation of the 1960s. The actual term "Generation X" was taken from the title of a book by Coupland (1991). Prior to this time, America's 13th generation, a term coined by Strauss and Howe (1993), was known as "twentysomethings," a term credited to *Time* magazine (Ladd, 1993). Research on Generation X erupted in the early 1990s and has continued through today.

Research studies specifically comparing and contrasting the Baby Boomer and Generation X generations began in the early 1990s. Strauss and Howe (1991) examined generations spanning from 1584 to 2069, including Baby Boomers and Generation Xers.

It is clear that research on Baby Boomers and Generation Xers has increased concurrently with each generation's entrance into the workforce and establishment in organizations.

Baby Boomers

The period in which Boomers were born spanned from the end of World War II through 1960 (Corbo, 1997). Boomers were born during optimistic (Corbo, 1997; Thiedke, 1998; Zemke et al., 2000) and positive times (Zemke et al., 2000). They grew up in a time of economic prosperity (*HR Focus,* 2000; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Thiedke, 1998; Zemke et al., 2000) and divorce was rare (Conrad & Poole, 2002). O'Bannon (2001) noted that Boomers grew up with faith in the American Dream. For Boomers, heroes inspired hope and idealism (Corley, 1999).

This generation embraced a psychology of entitlement (Kupperschmidt, 2000) and had high expectations – expectations that were first met in the 1980s (*HR Focus,* 2000; Smith & Clurman, 1997) and then were disappointed by the early 1990s (*HR Focus*). Smith and Clurman noted, "Boomers presumed success, and expected nothing less" (p. 48).

As young adults, Baby Boomers redefined gender roles and family configurations, as their divorce rates increased (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Losyk, 1997; Strauss & Howe, 1991) and their children became latchkey kids (Burke, 1994; Corbo, 1997; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Losyk, 1997; Muchnick, 1996; Nyhof, 2000; Reese, 1999; Thiedke, 1998; Zemke et al., 1999). Many Boomers were "idealists" and initiated or joined many causes, such as the civil rights movement for African Americans and women (Kupperschmidt). Additionally, many Boomers either participated in or protested the Vietnam War (Kupperschmidt).

Born into a post-war era of prosperity, Baby Boomers were the kids of Depression-era parents who believed that getting and keeping a job was the highest priority in life (Flynn, 1996). As they became young adults, Baby Boomers were fortunate to become employed by large, financially stable companies, which they had learned from their parents was a great thing (Flynn). They entered the workforce when jobs were plentiful, pay was competitive, and advancement opportunities seemed endless (Rosen, 2001).

Baby Boomers defined and redefined work and work life during the last quarter of the 20th century, according to Joyner (2000). This author further noted, "When they [Baby Boomers] weren't chasing corner offices, they invented double-income families and perfected the 50-hour work week, off-the scale productivity, and office politics" (p. 64). This generation became characterized as workaholic, strong-willed employees concerned about work content and material gain (Kupperschmidt, 2000). Boomers believed that hard work is rewarded and dedicated their lives to the organization at the expense of personal life and family (Nyhof, 2000). Nyhof noted that the "dominance of the Boomers in the workplace is reflected in workplace strategies and policies rewarding long work hours and personal sacrifice for the organization" (p. 9).

Unfortunately, many of these dedicated Baby Boomer employees were downsized and restructured out of their long-held jobs during the 1980s (Augustine, 2001; Brown, LeMaster, & Swisher, 2001; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Losyk, 1997; Nyhof, 2000; Rapp, 1999; Reese, 1999; Ruch, 2000) and forced to leave behind good salaries, management positions, and benefits and pensions (Kupperschmidt). Generation X watched the

traditional employer-employee relationship breakdown during this time period of restructuring (Nyhof).

Generation X

America's 13th generation, Generation X, was born between 1960 and 1980. Many members of Generation X grew up as children of divorce and became the first generation of latchkey kids (Burke, 1994; Corbo, 1997; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Losyk, 1997; Muchnick, 1996; Nyhof, 2000; Reese, 1999; Thiedke, 1998; Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 1999). For Gen-Xers, these experiences developed "diminished expectations and feelings of alienation, pragmatism, cynicism, conservation, and detachment" (Corbo, p. 58).

Gen-Xers grew up during the 1980s and never viewed this decade as a disappointment as did Boomers (*HR Focus*, 2000). This decade taught Xers that it is important to develop different skills and aspirations than their parents because they grew up in harder times than their Boomer parents (*HR Focus*). This experience has helped Xers deal with economic downturns better than Boomers (Smith & Clurman, 1997).

The 1980s also taught Generation X that a new way of thinking was needed and that large companies and government could not be relied on (*HR Focus*, 2000). Consequently, this young generation chose to rely on themselves, which created their "entrepreneurial spirit and positive responses to challenges" (*HR Focus*, p. 13).

Generation X "inherited Boomers' social debris" (Kupperschmidt, 2000, p. 69), such as divorce, an antichild society (Kupperschmidt), and a soaring national debt (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Strauss & Howe, 1991), as well as a stagnant job market,

corporate downsizing, and limited wage mobility (Muchnick, 1996). As a result, Xers feel abandoned, cheated, and left to defend themselves, according to Muchnick.

The experiences of Generation X are much different than the experiences of Baby Boomers (Ruch, 2000). For example, Tulgan (2000) found that this generation entered the workforce during an era of lost job and pension plan security resulting from corporate downsizing. For GenXers, this experience has resulted in reduced company loyalty and the idea of "paying dues" to corporate America (Tulgan, 2000).

Additionally, Generation X watched their workaholic Baby Boomer parents get laid off in the 1980s (Brown et al., 2000; Cole, 1999; Corbo, 1997; Gregerson, 1999; *Industry Week*, 1994; Izzo & Klein, 1998; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Losyk, 1997) due to corporate downsizing and restructuring (Augustine, 2001; Brown et al., 2001; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Nyhof, 2000; Rapp, 1999; Reese, 1999; Ruch, 2000; Wah, 2000). Xers witnessed their parents' receipt of a "pink slip" in thanks for company dedication (Augustine, p. 20) and learned to expect their own layoff (Cole). Xers became more cynical about corporate commitment as they witness their parents and grandparents being "ushered out of work despite years of dedicated service" (Corley, 1999, p. 24) and became determined not to let themselves be victims of corporate America (Augustine, 2001; Rapp, 1999).

Gen-Xers tend to have a temporary view of jobs because they heard their parents complain of corporate policies (Corbo, 1997) and view the future as uncertain (Kupperschmidt, 2000). This generation feels there is no such thing as job security (Losyk, 1997). According to Hogarty (1996, as cited by Adams, 2000), "neither the easy

money of the 1980s nor the burnout and widespread layoffs of the 1990s have done much to convince Xers that patience and corporate loyalty are the keys to success" (p. 27). Sunoo (1995, as cited by Adams, 2000) concluded that Xers are not disloyal toward organizations but are skeptical and are "cautious about investing creative energy without any promised return" (p. 27).

Because of the events and circumstances that shaped them as people, Gen-Xers often think about the environment, materialism, the divorce rate, and commitment to organizations and relationships (Burke, 1994). In addition, this young generation has great tolerance for divorce, remarriage, and alternative lifestyles (Kupperschmidt, 2000).

Generation X rejects the workaholic and materialist nature of Baby Boomers and is determined to have a more balanced life (Thiedke, 1998). Xers have never presumed success but have concluded that the American Dream is dead (Smith & Clurman, 1997).

Generation Xers are more diverse than any previous generation (Losyk, 1997; Smith & Clurman, 1997). Members of this generation grew up in a diverse setting (Brown et al., 2001; Kupperschmidt, 2000) with more cultural and global diversity awareness than any other generation (*HR Focus*, 2000).

Technological developments defined this generation during their formative years (Corley, 1999; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Losyk, 1997; Rosen, 2001; Tulgan, 2000), and because Xers grew up in the information revolution, they can process more data than previous generations (Gregerson, 1999). Generation X was the first generation to grow up with computers at home, in the office, and at the sales counter (Corley, 1999; Rapp,

1999) and were shaped by the media more than any other age group or generation (Corbo, 1997).

Generational Characteristics

Every generation has its own characteristics. Generational characteristics, as defined by Kupperschmidt (2000), are "worldview, values and attitudes commonly shared by or descriptive of cohorts (often referred to as peer or generational personality)" (p. 66). This author suggests several generational characteristics of Baby Boomers and Generation X, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Generational Characteristics

Factor	Boomer Generation	Generation X
Their times: Childhood	Cherished Education and economic expansion Independence stressed Psychology of entitlement	Latchkey kids Many born into and raised in poverty Society unfriendly to children Independence stressed
Their times: Young adults	Radical individualism Challenged, protested, and rejected social norms	Free agents Boomerang (leave home and return) Extended adolescence
Maturity defined as	Redefined – swinging singles, childless, dual careers, self-gratification	Commitment reluctance – hesitant to commit long-term to relationships
View of technology	Expedient Commodity	Fact of life
View of work	Challenge Opportunity for advancement	A job Learning opportunity to enhance marketability
	Means to self-fulfillment Work is shortcut to leisure	Work to have money for leisure Balance work and leisure

Factor	Boomer Generation	Generation X
View of work values	Meaningful and purposeful work Self-fulfillment	Balance Fun New employment bargain
View of authority	Untrustworthy Loss of credibility except in self as authority	Disdain hierarchy and the word 'boss' Refuse to pay dues Demand managers who are competent
View of rewards and recognition	Valued – deserved	Valued – demand them
Prefer leadership by	Consensus, participation	Competence, shared
View of money	I deserved it – I spent it.	I demand it – I invest it.
Style (in general)	Idealists, optimistic, self-absorbed Inner-directed	Realists, cynical, entrepreneurial Self-reliant

Generational Similarities and Differences

The generations of Boomers and Xers have both similarities and differences, or gaps. Smith and Clurman (1997), for example, linked the two generations through shared life experiences of their formative years (pp. 13, 175, 197, 296), as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2

Generational Life Experiences of Boomers and Gen-Xers During Formative Years

Boomers	Gen-Xers
Hair	Skinheads
Drive-ins	Drive-bys
Mom and Dad	Mom or Dad
Nixon	Reagan
Strawberry Fields	Smashing Pumpkins
Candid Camera	America's Funniest Home Videos
Panty raids	Fear of AIDS
Dallas	Melrose Place
Super Bowl	Dream Team
Inner space	Cyberspace
First house	First computer
Dr. Strangelove	Dr. Kevorkian
No more war	No more ozone layer

A study conducted by Southwestern Professional Services, found specific generational gaps between Baby Boomers and Generation X (Fontana, 1996), as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3

Generation Gap Generalizations

Baby Boomers	Generation X
• Are artistic; value creativity	• Want to be experts; value information
• Are self-directed	• Like guidance from caring supervisors
• Can work with general goals and direction	• Work best with specific, concrete goals
• Understand ambiguous and multiple answers	• Expect the right answers, procedures, and standards
• Understand concept of paying dues	• Believe they have already paid their dues
• Loathe evaluation	• Love evaluation
• Are stressed out	• Are stressed out

Generational differences are more apparent outside the workplace than within the workplace. For example, while at work, employees of all generations are involved in similar activities, dress and speak the same, and have shared goals (Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998). However, organizational differences outside of work are quite pronounced (Jurkiewicz & Brown), such as styles, entertainment preferences, schedules, and family relationships (Thau & Heflin, 1997, as cited by Jurkiewicz & Brown).

Stereotypes of Both Generations

Several authors have researched the stereotypes of the Baby Boomer and Generation X generations (Adams, 2000; Augustine, 2001; Corley, 1999; Hogarty, 1996, as cited by Adams, 2000; Izzo & Klein, 1998; Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998; Karp, Sirias, & Arnold, 1999; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Losyk, 1997; McGarvey, 1999; Mitchell, 2000; Muchnick, 1996; Nyhof, 2000; O'Bannon, 2001; Pruitt, 2002; Rapp, 1999; Ratan, 1993, as cited by Adams, 2000; Salbury, 1995, as cited by Adams, 2000; Smith & Thompson, as cited by Adams, 2000; Stroh, 1971, as cited by Augustine, 2001; Tulgan, 2000; Wah, 2000; Williams & Coupland, 1997; Zemke et al., 2000). These stereotypes of the two generations influence the attitudes of workers and impede the communication between these two groups.

Stereotypes used by Generation X to describe Boomers include self-righteous, workaholic, clueless, too political (Zemke et al., 2000), people who think too highly of themselves (Pruitt, 2002), flower children (McGarvey, 1999), and free-loving hippies

(Williams & Coupland, 1997). Generation X also thinks that Boomers are too often in their face, have weekly management fads, and need to lighten up because "it's only a job" (Zemke et al., p. 89).

According to Williams and Coupland (1997), Baby Boomers "dodged the draft, protested against the war in Vietnam, attended Woodstock, and enjoyed economic prosperity" (p. 251). Gen-Xers view the Baby Boomer approach to problems, which they developed through life experience and disappointment, as characterized by stubbornness and archaic thinking (Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998). Additionally, Ratan (1993, as cited by Adams, 2000) found that Generation X perceives Boomers as "having coasted through life . . . without ever having built anything" (p. 58). Kupperschmidt (2000) concluded that Boomers are stereotyped as "the sandwich generation" (p. 69) because they are between the "remnants of their parents' culture and their subculture and between caring for their aging parents and their own children" (p. 69).

Losyk (1997) indicates that Generation X views Baby Boomers as a generation who "spent too much time partying and messing up the world that Xers have inherited" (p. 5). This author added that Generation X feels responsible to fix the world and that Baby Boomers are standing in their way.

Stereotypes used by Baby Boomers to describe Generation X include immature (Smith & Thompson, 1992, as cited by Adams, 2000), unmotivated (Adams, 2000; Izzo & Klein, 1998), slackers (Augustine, 2001; Corley, 1999; Hogarty, 1996, as cited by Adams, 2000; Karp et al., 1999; Mitchell, 2000; Muchnick, 1996; Nyhof, 2000; O'Bannon, 2001; Pruitt, 2002; Rapp, 1999; Tulgan, 2000; Williams & Coupland, 1997;

Zemke et al., 1999, 2000), spoiled brats (Adams, 2000), whiners (Muchnick, 1996; Rapp, 1999; Williams & Coupland, 1997), job hoppers (Rapp, 1999), unreliable (Karp et al., 1999), arrogant (Karp et al., 1999; Ratan, 1993, as cited by Adams, 2000; Sunoo, 1995, as cited by Adams, 2000; Tulgan, 2000), refusing to accept authority (Adams, 2000), lazy (Karp et al., 1999; Muchnick, 1996), disloyal (O'Bannon, 2001; Wah, 2000), cynical (Karp et al., 1999), self-absorbed (Ratan, 1993, as cited by Adams, 2000; Wah, 2000), rude, lacking social skills, won't wait their turn (Zemke et al., 2000), materialistic (Tulgan, 2000), and unwilling to pay their dues (Ratan, 1993, as cited by Adams, 2000; Thiedke, 1998; Wah, 2000). In addition, the eagerness and optimism of Generation X is viewed as naïve and potentially dangerous by Baby Boomers (Jukiewicz & Brown, 1998).

Generation X has been described by Boomers as "psychologically damaged children of divorce" (Hogarty, 1996, as cited by Adams, 2000, p. 27) and "unmotivated, unskilled spoiled brats who watch the clock and never miss a chance to take time off work" (Salbury, 1995, as cited by Adams, 2000, p. 27). In support of Generation X, Adams concluded, "No one would dare make similar hostile statements about minorities, females, or the disabled" (p. 27).

According to Augustine (2001), generational conflicts at work are not a new concept. For example, Stroh (1971, as cited by Augustine, 2001) discussed problems between Baby Boomers and the Veteran Generation. Veterans described Boomers as "long-haired hippie" subordinates, according to Stroh (1971, as cited by Augustine, 2001, p. 11). Stroh further quoted Veteran managers as saying a young Baby Boomer

subordinate "seems more interested in outside activities than work" (p. 13). Zemke et al. (1999) concluded that these complaints by Veterans are similar to those expressed by Boomers about Gen-Xers.

Values

Several authors have researched workplace values of Baby Boomers and Generation X (Corley, 1999; Hall & Richter, 1990; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Nyhof, 2000; Tulgan, 2000; Zemke et al., 2000) and found key differences between the two generations.

Hall and Richter (1999), for example, found that Baby Boomers have a strong concern for basic values, and not only are the particular values held by this generation a great personal concern, but the *issue* of values is also of great importance to them. This generation, too, is more likely to act out their values and express their need for freedom (Hall & Richter). To the Baby Boomer generation, Zemke et al. (2000) ascribe these eight core values:

- Optimism
- Team orientation
- Personal gratification
- Health and wellness
- Personal growth
- Youth
- Work
- Involvement

Boomers are focused on individuality (Hall & Richter, 1990) and personal gratification (Zemke et al., 2000). This generation, for example, values titles, promotions, corner offices, and reserved parking spaces (Kupperschmidt, 2000), which are symbols of power that create the impression that the *individual* who possesses them should be honored and obeyed (Conrad & Poole, 2002). Boomers also value control, choice, stability, and security (Corley, 1999).

The values of Generation X are very different from those of Boomers. This generation, for example, values independence, flexibility (Corley, 1999; Tulgan, 2000), and security both economically and individually (Nyhof, 2000). For Generation X, Zemke et al. (2000) also suggest eight core values:

- Diversity
- Thinking globally
- Balance
- Technoliteracy
- Fun
- Informality
- Self-reliance
- Pragmatism

Employee Characteristics

Previous research studies have examined the characteristics of Baby Boomer and Generation X employees (Adams, 2000; Ainsworth, 1995, as cited by Adams, 2000;

Augustine, 2001; Brown et al., 2001; Gregerson, 1999; *HR Focus,* 2000; Joyner, 2000; Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998; Losyk, 1997; McGarvey, 1999; Muchnick, 1996; Nyhof, 2000; Rosen, 2001; Smith & Clurman, 1997; Sunoo, 1995, as cited by Adams, 2000; Tulgan, 2000; Woodruffe, 2000; Zemke et al., 1999, 2000).

Brown et al. (2001), for example, found that Baby Boomers seek personal gratification both personally and professionally. Adams (2000) found that this generation considers themselves progressive and trendsetters. They are self-absorbed (*HR Focus,* 2000; Rosen, 2001) and fixated on self-improvement and individual accomplishment (Smith & Clurman, 1997).

Also, Brown et al. (2001) found that this generation has defined themselves through their work and expect the same from others. Boomers have great passion for workplace participation, bringing heart and humanity to the office, and creating a fair and level playing field (Zemke et al., 1999). Yet, this generation is also control-oriented (Smith & Clurman, 1997). Zemke et al. (2000) suggest specific "on the job" assets and liabilities of Baby Boomers (p. 76), as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Baby Boomers on the Job

Assets	Liabilities
• Service oriented • Driven • Willing to "go the extra mile" • Good at relationships • Want to please • Good team players	• Not naturally "budget minded" • Uncomfortable with conflict • Reluctant to go against peers • May put process ahead of result • Overtly sensitive to feedback • Judgmental of those who see things differently • Self-centered

Zemke et al. (1999, 2000) noted that Boomers have a need to prove that their worthiness has created a work ethic that can be called dedicated or even driven. Boomers are optimistic and believe in growth and expansion (Zemke et al.). Additionally, the Boomer generation is fascinated by the role of spirit in their lives and pursue personal gratification at a high price to themselves and others (Nyhof, 2000; Zemke et al.).

As employees, Baby Boomers have more consistent attendance and greater practical knowledge than Generation X (Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998). Finally, Boomers are more committed to an organization and to a supervisor than are Gen-Xers (Nyhof, 2000).

Generation X employees are self-reliant (Brown et al., 2001; Gregerson, 1999; Nyhof, 2000; Zemke et al., 2000), innovative (Nyhof), thrive in teams (Tulgan, 2000), think on a global level when addressing problems and conflict (Brown et al., 2001), and want to be kept informed (Tulgan). Gen-Xers are savvy (*HR Focus,* 2000; Kupperschmidt, 2000), entrepreneurial (*HR Focus*; Kupperschmidt; Tulgan), independent (Nyhof; Zemke et al.; Tulgan), people who hate labels and seek self-identity (Joyner,

2000). Generation X also believes that their ideas and abilities should be evaluated on the basis of merit (Brown et al.).

Zemke et al. (2000) suggest specific "on the job" assets and liabilities of Generation X (p. 111), as illustrated by Table 5.

Table 5

Gen-Xers on the Job

Assets	Liabilities
• Adaptable	• Impatient
• Technoliterate	• Poor people skills
• Independent	• Inexperienced
• Unintimidated by authority	• Cynical
• Creative	

This generation thrives on being challenged (Brown et al., 2001; Woodruffe, 2000) and on challenging others (Brown et al.). They want freedom, recognition, empathy, understanding, direct communication (Muchnick, 1996), involvement (Muchnick; Tulgan, 2000), and informality (Zemke et al., 2000). Zemke et al. (1999) concluded that Generation X works to live but does not live to work.

The individual nature and entrepreneurial style of Generation X is often perceived as arrogant (Sunoo, 1995, as cited by Adams, 2000). As latchkey kids, Generation X became accustomed to self-care and solving their own problems (Sunoo, 1995, as cited by Adams, 2000). Xers crave attention in the workplace (Losyk, 1997), take teamwork seriously (McGarvey, 1999), and have greater technological skill than Boomers (Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998; Losyk, 1997; McGarvey, 1999; Nyhof, 2000; Thiedke, 1998; Zemke et al., 2000).

Carson (1995) found that Generation X employees are positive about their jobs, while Baby Boomers are more negative. Contrarily, Jurkiewicz and Brown (1998) found Baby Boomers to have more positive attitudes generally than Generation X.

Baby Boomer employees are less open minded to process changes or "new ways of doing things" than Generation X, according to Ainsworth (1995, as cited by Adams, 2000). But Xers are not afraid of change because that's what they know best (Tulgan, 2000). Because they are mostly risk takers, Generation Xers are comfortable with quick change in organizations (Rapp, 1999).

Members of both the Baby Boomer and Generation X generations are highly educated. The parents of Baby Boomers were fortunate enough to be able to afford a college education for their children, which created a generation with more education per person than any other generation (Tulgan, 2000). Generation X, too, is a highly educated generation and when entering the workforce, they make an effort to establish themselves as educated professionals (Augustine, 2001). Consequently, many Baby Boomers become angry when they are passed up for jobs and promotions for younger, cheaper, and often more technologically savvy applicants (Augustine).

Employment Contracts

Few authors have researched the changes in employment contracts from the era of the Baby Boomers to the new Generation X era (Corley, 1999; Gregerson, 1999). For instance, Generation X doesn't buy the old "employment contract" or want long-term

relationships with employers (Gregerson). Corley (1999) suggests the components of the "old" and "new" contract concepts (p. 22), as Table 6 shows.

Table 6

Old Employment Contract versus New Employment Contract

Old Employment Contract	New Employment Contract
If you: • Are loyal • Work hard • Do as you're told We will: • Give you a secure job • Offer steady pay increases • Provide financial security	If you: • Develop needed competencies • Apply them effectively • Live our values We will: • Listen to your needs • Create an enabling work environment • Support your self-development • Recognize your contribution • Pay you fairly – and enable you to share in our successes

Work Environment and Dynamics

Several authors have researched the work environment and dynamics needed by Baby Boomers and Generation X (Brown et al., 2001; Cole, 1999; Corley, 1999; Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998; Zemke et al., 1999).

In this regard, Cole (1999) observed that Baby Boomers and Generation X need different work environments. In addition, Jurkiewicz and Brown (1998) found that the two generations favor different work-related dynamics. For example, Generation X looks for a work environment that is flexible (Zemke et al., 1999), unique, and interesting with

short-term projects (Corley, 1999). In addition, Xers desire a balance of technology, information, policy, and informality in their work environments (Brown et al., 2001). Jurkiewicz and Brown also suggest that Baby Boomers and Generation Xers prefer different work-related factors, as illustrated in Table 7 (p. 26).

Table 7

Favored Work-Related Factors

Boomers	Gen-Xers
• A stable and secure future • Chance to benefit society • High salary • High prestige and social status • Freedom from pressures to conform both on and off the job	• Chance to learn new things • Chance to engage in satisfying leisure activities • Chance to exercise leadership • Chance to use their special abilities • Chance to make a contribution to important decisions • Freedom from supervision • Freedom from pressures to conform both on and off the job • Opportunity for advancement • Variety in work assignments

Work Arrangements

Previous studies have also examined the work arrangements desired by Boomers and Xers (Flynn, 1996; Gregerson; 1999; Tulgan, 2000; Zemke et al., 2000). For example, Flynn found that Boomers and Xers both desire flexible work arrangements.

Boomers can expect longer healthier work lives than any generation before them (Zemke et al., 2000). As life expectancy has increased, so has retirement age (Flynn,

1996). Workers previously retired at age 65, but today many workers stay employed well past age 65 (Flynn). Generally, employees retiring at age 65, with 15 to 20 years of retirement ahead, have only saved one decade's worth of living expenses, which has created the need for Boomers to work longer (Flynn, 1996; Smith & Clurman, 1997). According to Flynn, Baby Boomers will be staying in the workplace much longer than their parents did because of "greater financial strain, limited retirement budgets, and youthful ethos" (p. 86).

Flynn (1996) also suggests that work arrangement flexibility will aid employers in retaining Baby Boomers. Although they may need to continue working, Boomers may desire more free time in their later years for such activities as playing golf and spending time with grandchildren (Flynn). Flynn suggests that employers offer the flexibility of part-time work or job sharing to retain these older employees.

As to work arrangements, Zemke et al. (2000) found that Xers have a nontraditional orientation about space and time and don't think much about work hours. Flynn (1996) notes that flexible work arrangements are even more critical as this generation considers this flexibility to be "just a smart way to work" (p. 87). Flexible work hours, for example, help address Gen-Xers' concern with quality-of-life issues (Gregerson, 1999). Tulgan (2000) suggests that it is highly important to Generation X that they are trusted to get the job done – regardless of how, where, and when it was done (i.e., working from home, working from noon to 8 p.m.).

Motivation

Several authors have researched the motivators of the Baby Boomer and Gen-Xers (Bradford & Raines, 1991, as cited by Burke, 1994; Brown et al., 2001; Corbo, 1997; Corley, 1999; Izzo & Klein, 1998; Joyner, 2000; Montana & Lenaghan, 1999; Woodruffe, 2000; Zemke et al., 2000).

Baby Boomers, for example, are motivated by recognition and inherent reward for their work ethic (Brown et al., 2001). As another example, Boomers are motivated by feedback that expresses their value, worth, need for, and importance (Zemke et al., 2000). Managers can motivate Boomers by communicating the importance of their contributions and by rewarding their work ethic and long hours (Zemke et al.). Public recognition and the opportunity to prove themselves and their worth are also key motivators of Baby Boomers (Zemke et al.). Finally, company-wide recognition and perks, such as having a company car or expense account, motivate Boomers (Zemke et al.).

Generation Xers are ruled by a sense of accomplishment (Joyner, 2000; Woodruffe, 2000) and are motivated by money (Corbo, 1997; Montana & Lenaghan, 1999), rewards (Corbo, 1997; Woodruffe, 2000), training opportunities (Corbo), self-development and improvement opportunities, respect, and freedom on the job (Montana & Lenaghan). Zemke et al. (2000) recommend using specific messages to motivate Generation X, such as "Do it your way," "We've got the newest hardware and software," "There aren't a lot of rules here," and "We're not very corporate" (p. 113).

Despite stereotypes, Generation Xers are very motivated but motivated differently than preceding generations (Izzo & Klein, 1998). Bradford and Raines (1991, as cited by

Burke, 1994) found specific sources of motivation and demotivation for Generation X (p. 556), which are illustrated in Table 8.

Table 8

Sources of Motivation and Demotivation for Generation X

Motivation	Demotivation
• Recognition • Praise • Time with manager • Developing skills for greater marketability • Opportunity to learn new things • Fun at work • Small, unexpected rewards for jobs well done	• Hearing about their past • Inflexibility about time • Workaholism • Being watched and scrutinized • Feeling disrespected • Pressures to conform • Negative comments about their generation's tastes and styles

Work-Life Balance

Several authors have found the balance between home and work life to be of high importance to Generation X (Adams, 2000; Burke, 1994; Deutchman, 1990, as cited by Burke, 1994; Gregerson, 1999; McGarvey, 1999; Manter & Benjamin, 1989, as cited by Burke, 1994; Nyhof, 2000; Salbury, 1995, as cited by Adams, 2000; Solomon, 1992, as cited by Burke, 1994; Thiedke, 1998; Wah, 2000; Zemke et al., 2000).

For instance, members of Generation X worry about achieving a balanced life even before they have a job (Burke, 1994) because they seek a sense of family (Zemke et al., 2000). Contrarily, Boomers traditionally have pursued personal gratification at a high

price to themselves and others (Zemke et al., 1999; 2000; Nyhof, 2000), such as their family.

Additionally, Adams (2000) found that members of Generation X watch the clock at work because their values are different than those of Baby Boomers. In support of this finding, Salbury (1995, as cited by Adams, 2000) found that this generation of employees is not running from work but running to their families. Gen-Xers witnessed the past destruction of marriages, family and society, and thus prefer a balanced approach to work and family (Nyhof, 2000).

Job Satisfaction

Researchers have also examined the job satisfaction of Baby Boomer and Generation X employees (Carson, 1995). Accordingly, Carson found that previous research by Wyatt Company, a management-consulting firm, suggests that employees under age 30 have more job satisfaction than employees in any other age group. In fact, Carson added that Boomers have the most negativity. The study further revealed that "a curious combination of cynicism and naivety" (p. 18) causes higher job satisfaction among younger employees with low expectations.

As another example, the amount of work experience a worker has also impacts their job satisfaction (Carson, 1995). For example, Generation Xers have not been in the workplace as long as Boomers, who have witnessed a higher number of recessions, downsizings, and managerial incompetence (Carson).

Managing

Previous research studies have examined the organizational management of Baby Boomer and Generation X employees (Ainsworth, 1995, as cited by Adams, 2000; Brown et al., 2001; Carson, 1995; Corbo, 1997; Corley, 1999; Hall & Richter, 1990; Joyner, 2000; Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Losyk, 1997; McGarvey, 1999; Muchnick, 1996; Nyhof, 2000; Thiedke, 1998; Tulgan, 2000; Zemke et al., 2000).

Jurkiewicz and Brown (1998), for example, discovered that in order for organizations to effectively manage today's workforce, they must develop an understanding of general employee similarities (Jurkiewicz & Brown). As an additional example, Jurkiewicz and Brown (1998) and Kupperschmidt (2000) found that organizations must develop an understanding of the generational differences dividing Baby Boomers and Generation Xers both inside and outside of the workplace to effectively manage the two groups. Jurkiewicz and Brown added that the ability to "synthesize the two views" (p. 29) can deliver a competitive advantage to employers in the tight labor market.

Managers must assure that employees understand and respect one another's generational differences as well (Kupperschmidt, 2000). Organizational managers should foster an open discussion of generational differences that influence employee attitudes toward work and organizations (Kupperschmidt). This author suggests that by adopting a generational perspective, managers can leverage the uniqueness of employees as a source

of learning, productivity, and innovation. Kupperschmidt also noted that this perspective can also create and model a shared vision of positive co-worker relationships.

In regard to organization, Hall and Richter (1990) learned that Baby Boomers are impatient with formal hierarchy. Zemke et al. (2000) also discovered that if Baby Boomers feel they are being mismanaged, they will "make life hell" (p. 81). Carson (1995) noted that work experience increases the likelihood of this generation to "question company leadership and decisions" (p. 18).

To effectively manage Boomers, managers need to value their experience and let them know they will get credit and respect for their accomplishments (Zemke et al., 2000). Because Boomers are future oriented, managers should direct discussion to future oriented opportunities and projects for the company (Zemke et al.).

Members of Generation X have a more casual view of authority (Brown et al., 2001; Zemke et al., 2000) and hierarchy, and seek to be comfortable at work, avoiding politics along the way (Brown et al.). For example, they often reject traditional management approaches in the workplace (Muchnick, 1996) and have little patience for bureaucracy (Ainsworth, 1995, as cited by Adams, 2000). Xers view rigid workplace rules as a big drawback and want little to do with corporate bureaucracy (Corley, 1999). They believe bureaucracy inhibits a company's response to market changes (Corley).

Although they strongly dislike bureaucracy, Ainsworth (1995, as cited by Adams, 2000) found that Gen-Xers rarely speak out against it. On the contrary, McGarvey (1999) found that Xers are not hesitant to criticize Baby Boomer management styles.

According to Carson (1995), the Wyatt study suggests that Generation X employees are more confident in their company's management than Baby Boomers. Generation X wants strong leadership (Joyner, 2000) and good management (Tulgan, 2000) but does not want to be micromanaged by their leaders (Joyner; Tulgan).

One of the greatest challenges for managers with Generation X is their attitude (Corbo, 1997). This generation dislikes direct supervision (Corbo; Zemke et al., 1999) and likes to work alone (Corbo). Because their parents were not around to tell them what to do or to discipline them, Generation X struggles with authority (Losyk, 1997) and views authority-based cultures with dishonor (Nyhof, 2000). By comparison, this generation has less respect for rules and policies than Boomers (McGarvey, 1999).

To effectively manage Generation X, managers should create a casual environment, provide high-quality training and opportunities to excel, clearly define expectations (Thiedke, 1998), and give feedback (Thiedke; Tulgan, 2000; Zemke, et al., 1999). In addition, the work atmosphere for Xers should be fun, flexible, educational, and nonmicromanaged (Zemke et al., 2000). Finally, Xers want to be treated as peers instead of subordinates (McGarvey, 1999).

Management Skills

Several authors have researched the specific management skills of Boomers and Xers (Brown et al., 2001; McGarvey, 1999; Smith & Clurman, 1997; Tulgan, 2000; Zemke et al., 2000).

Zemke et al. (2000), for example, learned that although many Baby Boomers distrust authority, they have a fetish for it. In addition, Smith and Clurman (1997) found that this generation wants "to be on top and in charge" (p. 51). According to Zemke et al., this generation has "lusted after leadership roles, seeking to prove their status, prestige, and general worthiness by climbing the ladder" (p. 115). These authors further asserted that Boomer managers will tell you that they are better at corporate politics than Gen X managers and know exactly what to say to the right person at the right time.

In another example, Brown et al. (2001) found that Baby Boomer managers and leaders tend to focus on the future and challenges. In addition, McGarvey (1999) found that managers from this generation tend to speak more indirectly and softly to subordinates. This author further noted that Boomer managers are hesitant about the value of teamwork because it was introduced after this generation had been employed in a nonteam-based organizational environment for several years.

Many Boomers wound up in management positions without any training and were poor managers (McGarvey, 1999). Furthermore, Zemke et al. (2000) suggest that many Baby Boomer managers struggle to practice the management styles they profess. For example, many managers of this generation feel they are managing participatively but lack understanding, listening, communicating, motivating, and delegating skills that are required for participative management (Zemke et al., 2000). As a result, Generation X often thinks that Boomers "do a great job of talking the talk. But they don't walk the walk" (Zemke et al., p. 89).

Generation X assumes management roles for more unselfish reasons than Baby Boomers (McGarvey, 1999; Zemke et al., 2001) and do not view the management role as "status" (McGarvey). For example, Generation X wants to be the managers they would have preferred (Tulgan, 2000). They delegate well, reward performance (Tulgan), and have a more professional approach (McGarvey). When communicating with subordinates, Generation X managers are very straightforward and direct (McGarvey). Generation X managers are fair, honest, competent, straightforward (Zemke et al., 2000), and take teamwork seriously because they were raised on this concept (McGarvey).

Training

Previous research has examined the training approaches for Boomers and Generation Xers (Brown, et al., 2001; Corbo, 1997; Corley, 1999; Dunne, 2000; Gregerson, 1999; Nyhof, 2000; Tulgan, 2000; Zemke et al., 1999, 2000).

Zemke et al. (1999), for example, found that Boomers prefer to learn in an environment that is interactive and nonauthoritarian. In addition, these authors found that this generation responds well to a traditional classroom environment, as long as they can interact and network. Boomers are dedicated workers and respond best to trainers they view as equals (Zemke et al.). However, Baby Boomers may carry an attitude of "I know all that" (Zemke et al., 1999, 2000), which can create challenges for trainers.

When training Baby Boomers, Zemke et al. (1999) recommend using interactive training activities (i.e., icebreakers, discussion) and avoid role-playing exercises. They further noted that this generation tends to know things on an intellectual level but has not

translated this knowledge into skills. Therefore, Zemke et al. suggest skill practice training but caution trainers to be aware that Boomers dislike demonstrating their shortcomings publicly.

Zemke et al. (2000) found that ongoing development is critically important to members of Generation X. For instance, this generation sees training as a way of building new skills to become more marketable (Corbo, 1997; Zemke et al., 1999) and thinks, "just teach me what I need to know to improve" (Brown et al., 2001, p. 120). This generation of highly motivated learners (Zemke et al.) seeks jobs that deliver continued learning and believe that the only real job security is the ability to develop knowledge and skills to advance to their next job (Corley, 1999; Nyhof, 2000). In fact, one of the best ways to retain Gen-Xers as employees is to help them acquire skills that will make them more marketable (Gregerson, 1999).

According to Dunne (2000), Gen-Xers do not respond to traditional authoritarian educational methods. When training this workforce generation, Dunne suggests firm and consistent policies and procedures that are relevant and effective. Gen-Xers prefer a learning environment that is self-directed and fun (Zemke et al., 1999).

Trainers of Generation Xers should explain themselves and their qualifications, as well as clarify the purpose of the training (Dunne, 2000; Zemke et al., 1999). Zemke et al. noted that trainers should not expect Xers to respect them just because they are the trainer. Instead, these authors conclude that trainers must earn Xers respect through their knowledge of the training subject. If trainers make mistakes, they should be self-

deprecating since Gen-Xers highly respect honesty because they don't expect or want a perfect leader (Dunne).

Trainers should use games (Zemke et al., 1999), tell stories, use humor, and encourage involvement and participation (Dunne, 2000) when training this young workforce. The most effective training activities for Generation X provide them the opportunity to sample and learn by doing (Zemke et al.; Tulgan, 2000), such as role-playing (Zemke et al.).

When developing training programs for Gen-Xers, presented material should be broken down into segments due to the short attention span of this generation (Dunne, 2000; Zemke et al., 1999). Materials with fewer words are ideal for training Gen X (Zemke et al.). Finally, Brown et al. (2001) concluded that Generation X prefers to be trained "specifically from the beginning, have information 'chunked' into sound and video bites, and would like to be provided with lists of whom to contact for questions" (p. 120).

Career Paths

Researchers have also studied the specific career paths of Baby Boomer and Generation X employees (Adams, 2000; Carson, 1995; Corbo, 1997; *Industry Week*, 1994; McGarvey, 1999; Tulgan, 2000; Lang, 1999).

Industry Week (1994), for example, noted that when entering the work force, Baby Boomers sought jobs with a solid career path and were willing to "play the game" to get promotions. Gen-Xers, on the other hand, are not willing to take a job and "pay their dues" to get ahead (*Industry Week*, 1994; Tulgan, 2000). Corbo (1997) noted that

Generation X likes temporary assignments and lateral promotions, as they don't plan to stay in one position too long. This generation employee wants to know the short-term benefits of organizational benefits (Adams, 2000) and is more loyal to their profession than their employers (McGarvey, 1999). However, Lang (1999) noted that Gen-Xers are loyal to employers who provide the opportunity for career advancement.

As an additional example, Carson (1995) noted that the Wyatt study suggests that younger workers believe that their employers promote the most competent of employees, but unfortunately not all Baby Boomers agree. Due to the fact there are fewer Generation X than Baby Boomers employees, this younger work group will likely have more advancement opportunities because of less competition (Carson).

Benefits

Previous research by various authors focused on the benefits desired by Boomers and Xers (Corbo, 1997; Corley, 1999; Flynn, 1996). For example, Flynn found that employees demand benefits that are specific to their needs but that the needs of these two generations are different. Flynn reports that employees ages 50 to 60 want greater 401(k) contributions and more information about how to save for retirement. However, some members of Generation X are not yet focused on retirement (Flynn). In addition, childcare is of particular interest to Generation X but of little or no interest to Boomers (Flynn, 1996). Employer communications about benefits are challenging due to these very different audiences (Flynn).

Also regarding benefits, Corbo (1997) found that Generation X focuses on those they can use (i.e., time off and child care) rather than on pension plans. Gen-Xers want flexibility with their benefits in order to make decisions tailored to their individual lifestyles and needs (Corley, 1999).

Income and Rewards

Several authors have researched the income levels and desired rewards of Baby Boomer and Generation X employees. For example, *HR Focus* (2000) indicates that Generation X employees earn less than Boomers did at the same age. In another example, Muchnick (1996) found Xers to be the first generation to earn less than their parents did.

Money is important to Generation X, but they are not driven by it (Joyner, 2000). Instead, Generation X is driven more by non-financial rewards than financial, such as personal credit, increased responsibility, opportunity for creative expression, and exposure to decision makers (Corley, 1999). To Generation X, opportunity is a tangible reward because the future is uncertain (Tulgan, 2000).

On the other hand, Baby Boomers are more likely to be very satisfied with their current salaries than are Generation Xers, who are more materialistic and have not yet reached their prime earning potential (Lang, 1999).

Diversity

Previous studies have examined the impact of diversity in shaping the workplace for Generation X (Brown et al., 2001; Corley, 1999; *HR Focus,* 2000). Baby Boomers

have not experienced diversity to the same extent as Generation X. Consequently, research has not focused on this area of study.

In this regard, Brown et al. (2001) found that Gen X expects diversity in their workplace (Brown et al.). This diversity is reshaping the workplace and lifestyle orientations (*HR Focus*, 2000). Additionally, Corley (1999) noted that African Americans represent 14% of Generation X versus 12% of the entire population. In addition, this author indicates that Hispanics represent 12% of Generation X versus 9.5% of the entire population while Asians represent 4% versus 3%. Thus, the racial diversity of Generation X presents unique challenges and opportunities for employers, which ultimately alters the means of recruiting and retaining staff (Corley).

Intergenerational Workforce

Boomers and Xers will work together for the next three decades (Zemke et al., 2000). During this time, as noted by Adams (2000), the future will "[bind] these groups together" (p. 27), which will force them to develop a mutual understanding of each other.

Many organizations have tapped into the positive potential of their generationally diverse workforce and utilized the power of their different viewpoints, passions, and inspirations, according to Zemke et al. (2000). These authors suggest two keys to create a successful intergenerational workforce: aggressive communication and difference deployment.

Zemke et al. (2000) first define aggressive communication as a process where generational conflicts and potential conflicts are anticipated and surfaced. Generational

differences, according to Zemke et al., are primarily based on unspoken assumptions and unconscious criteria. By surfacing these assumptions and criteria, organizations are taking a huge step toward resolving the differences (Zemke et al.). These authors suggest that organizations, through the use of ad hoc small group discussions, generationally integrated meetings, e-mail messages, and water cooler chats, can discuss the differing viewpoints and perspectives of generations in their workplace.

Organizations that address generational issues head on and validate the different points of view fare better than organizations that continue to function amidst intergenerational conflict in hopes that the problems will disappear on their own (Zemke et al., 2000). According to Zemke et al., addressing the issues head on allows organizations to attract and retain people with different needs, viewpoints, and job and work expectations. They have delineated the specific viewpoints of Boomers and Xers (p. 155), as shown in Table 9.

Table 9

The Way They See the World

	Boomers	Xers
Outlook	Optimistic	Skeptical
Work ethic	Driven	Balanced
View of authority	Love/hate	Unimpressed
Leadership by	Consensus	Competence
Relationships	Personal gratification	Reluctant to commit
Turnoffs	Political incorrectness	Cliché, hype

Secondly, Zemke et al. (2000) suggest that organizations utilize difference deployment to create a successful intergenerational workforce. The authors define this

strategy as "the tactical use of employees with different backgrounds, experiences, skills, and viewpoints to strengthen project teams, customer contact functions, and, at times, whole departments and units" (p. 154). Organizations that are generationally savvy value differences between employees and view differences as strengths (Zemke et al.).

On the other hand, generationally dysfunctional organizations are controlled by a desire to create one corporate culture that requires employees to "fit in" (Zemke et al., 2000). These authors suggest that a "generationally blind organization" (p. 154) tends to homogenize employees in order to fit them into a single "good employee" template.

Zemke et al. (2000) suggest five approaches that companies are taking to focus on their employees and become generationally knowledgeable. These authors have labeled these approaches as "The ACORN imperatives":

- Accommodate employee differences;
- Create workplace choices;
- Operate from a sophisticated management style;
- Respect competence and initiative; and
- Nourish retention. (pp. 155-159)

Theoretical Approach

The Strauss and Howe (1991) theory of generations was selected as the theoretical approach for this study because it helped identify and organize the factors of influence on American generations, which can ultimately affect their values, attitudes, and behaviors toward organizations. Strauss and Howe derived their theory of generations by merging two related theories from two separate traditions of scholarship, as briefly described below.

Generations Approach Theory

Strauss and Howe (1991) noted that the first related theory they used was the "generations approach" theory, developed by the European school of sociology, which provides the foundation for an "age location" view of history. Strauss and Howe define an age location as "the age of a cohort group at a particular moment or era in history" (p. 429). They posit that by examining history by age location, a researcher can "see how events shape personalities of different age groups differently according to their phase of life, and how these personality differences are retained as they grow older" (p. 34). They further define the theoretical concept of cohort as "a group of all persons born within a limited span of years" (p. 34).

Social Moments Theory

Strauss and Howe (1991) noted that the second related theory was "social moments," a historical scholarship perspective. These authors define a social moment as "an era, typically about a decade, when people perceive that historic events are radically altering their social environment" (p. 71). Strauss and Howe theorize that "because generations in different phases of life can together trigger a social moment, they help shape and define history – and hence, new generations" (p. 35). However, historians view this "rhythm" (p. 35) as mere coincidence, according to Strauss and Howe.

Strauss and Howe's Generation Theory

Strauss and Howe (1991) define a generation as "a cohort group whose length approximates the span of a phase of life and whose boundaries are fixed by a peer personality" (p. 429). They further define a peer personality "as a generational persona recognized and determined by:

1. Common age location;
2. Common beliefs and behaviors; and
3. Perceived membership in a common generation." (p. 429)

Strauss and Howe (1991) theorize that a generation has collective attitudes about family, sex roles, institutions, politics, religion, lifestyle, and the future. It "can think, feel, or do anything an individual might think, feel, or do" (p. 53). Each generation specializes in its own unique negative and positive talents (Strauss & Howe).

In conclusion, Strauss and Howe (1991) theorize that the values and attitudes are different for each generation; however, these values and attitudes are influenced by and reflective of previous generations. In fact, two generations, similar to two neighbors, can have personalities that mesh, clash, are attracted to, or repelled by one another (Strauss & Howe).

Statement of Purpose

Today's American workforce is more diverse than ever before. The mix of race, gender, ethnicity, and generations is truly unique. However, each of these elements creates organizational challenges that cannot be ignored. The generational diversity of

our workforce presents its own tensions and challenges as many previous studies have revealed. Yet, few studies have examined the organizational opportunity that America's diverse workforce engenders.

Previous studies have revealed many generational differences between Baby Boomer and Generation X as organizational members. Several studies have examined the importance of organizational understanding of generational differences (Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Nyhof, 2000; Zemke et al., 2000). But unfortunately, research to examine the factors of influence for understanding generational differences has not been an area of focus. In addition, research has not investigated if an organization's strategy influences its ability to understand generational differences.

The purpose of this study then was to examine the influence of organizational strategies on understanding the generational differences of Baby Boomers (1940-1960) and Generation X (1960-1980).

The specific research questions addressed by this study were:

RQ1: What are the factors of influence for understanding generational differences for each organizational strategy?

RQ2: To what extent might organizational strategy influence an organization's ability to understand the generational differences of Baby Boomers and Generation X?

RQ3: What benefit does organizational strategy have for an organization's ability to understand the generational differences of Baby Boomers and Generation X?

Chapter Three

METHODOLOGY

Research on human subjects for this qualitative study was authorized by the University of Nebraska Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A).

Participants

For this study, I randomly selected one person from the management level of the Diversity and/or Human Relations department of 10 large Omaha businesses (i.e., 150+ employees) to participate in interviews as part of my research. I contacted the potential participants by telephone in advance of the study to request their participation and contacted them again to schedule a one-hour interview appointment.

At the interview, I provided each participant with an informed consent form (see Appendix B), assuring them confidentiality and asking them to authorize audio recording of the interview session. I explained the consent form to each participant and procured their signature before the interview session began.

Procedures

After making the arrangements, I conducted an in-person, respondent interview with each individual participant at their place of business. According to Lindlof (1995), the respondent interview approach evokes open-ended responses to a series of directive questions (see Appendix C for interview questions). I used the Lindlof approach, which

notes that respondents are asked the same questions in roughly the same order, to minimize interviewer effects and to achieve greater efficiency of information gathering.

Lazarsfeld (1944, as cited by Lindlof, 1995, p. 172) describes the aims of this respondent interview approach as:

1. To clarify the meanings of common concepts and opinions;
2. To distinguish the decisive elements of an expressed opinion;
3. To determine what influenced a person to form an opinion or act in a certain way;
4. To classify complex attitude patterns; and
5. To understand the interpretations that people attribute to their motivations to act.

Previous research has adopted the respondent interview methodology to study how people "read" the codes of ideology, class, gender, and race in popular texts (Hoijer, 1990, as cited by Lindlof, 1995; Lindlof, 1991, as cited by Lindlof, 1995).

Using the respondent interview method for this study minimized my participation and influence on the respondents, and efficiently garnered data for coding. Furthermore, this method helped me to clarify how organizations define diversity, develop opinions or attitudes about diversity, and address diversity in the workplace. I personally transcribed the audio tape of each individual interview session, beginning after the first interview. Once I completed the transcriptions, I coded and analyzed the data.

Data Coding and Analysis

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) suggest that the term coding encompasses a variety of approaches to and ways of organizing qualitative data. These authors regard coding as "a way of relating our data to our ideas about those data" (p. 27). In practice, coding is generally a mixture of data reduction and data complication (Coffey & Atkinson). They suggest that coding generally is used to break up and segment the data into simpler, general terms and is used to expand and tease out the data, in order to formulate new questions and levels of interpretation.

The process of coding reduces information to themes or categories, according to Creswell (1994), who suggests that flexible rules govern how the researcher sorts through interview transcriptions. It is clear, however, that the researcher ultimately forms categories of information and attaches codes to these categories (Creswell). These categories and codes form the basis for the emerging story to be told by the qualitative researcher (Creswell). Tesch (1990, as cited by Creswell, 1994) identifies this process as "segmenting" the information or decontextualizing data (Tesch, 1990, as cited by Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Tesch defines segmenting as "dividing data into portions that are comprehensible by themselves and large enough to be meaningful" (p. 30).

To work with interview transcriptions of unstructured data, or data collected through interview questions with little structure to shape the responses from the informant (Creswell, 1994), Tesch (1990, as cited by Creswell, 1994) suggests these eight systematic steps of textual data analysis:

1. Get a sense of the whole. Read through all of the transcriptions carefully. Perhaps jot down some ideas as they come to mind.
2. Pick one document (one interview) the most interesting, the shortest, the one on the top of the pile. Go through it, asking yourself, What is it about? Do not think about the "substance" of the information, but rather its underlying meaning. Write thoughts in the margin.
3. When you have completed this task for several informants, make a list of all topics. Cluster together similar topics. Form these topics into columns that might be arrayed as major topics, unique topics, and leftovers.
4. Now take this list and go back to your data. Abbreviate the topics as codes and write the codes next to the appropriate segments of the text. Try out this preliminary organizing scheme to see whether new categories and codes emerge.
5. Find the most descriptive wording for your topics and turn them into categories. Look for reducing your total list of categories by grouping topics that relate to each other. Perhaps draw lines between your categories to show interrelationships.
6. Make a final decision on the abbreviation for each category and alphabetize these codes.
7. Assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis.
8. If necessary, recode your data. (pp. 154-155)

According to Tesch (1990, as cited by Coffey & Atkinson, 1996), once data segments have been coded, they are still not ready for interpretation as the data must be organized into a system based on developing pools of meaning. Tesch suggests that concepts are identified or constructed from the data and that the segmented data is then coded and resorted according to these categories. In other words, the data segments are reassembled or recontextualized, and this recontexualization provides a new context for data segments (Tesch). This author regards coding as a means of providing new contexts for viewing and analyzing data.

In summary, Coffey and Atkinson (1996) explain that decontextualizing and recontextualizing help to reduce and then expand the data in new forms and with new organizing principles. In other words, segmenting and coding data enable the researcher to think about and work with the data (Coffey & Atkinson).

Chapter Four

RESULTS

This chapter discusses each management interview and the organization's approach to workforce diversity. Additionally, this chapter compares each organization's approach in the context of the research questions. To protect confidentiality, actual names of the company and industries as well as the participant names and titles are not revealed.

Company 1

Company 1 is an Omaha-based organization with a workforce that extends through sections of Nebraska. It has an established formal diversity program.

Company 1 has a formal definition of diversity that identifies primary and secondary characteristics. The primary characteristics are race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, disability, and sexual orientation. The secondary characteristics include, but are not limited to, geographic location, education, and economic status.

The diversity initiative of Company 1 is driven from the top of the organizational hierarchy down and reflects the leadership support for understanding and addressing diversity in the workplace. The visibility of leadership at diversity events further establishes support of a diverse work environment. An open door policy fosters an interactive communication environment to discuss issues, ideas, and questions about any organizational aspect, including diversity, directly with the senior levels of the company.

Diversity is managed at the manager/employee level at Company 1. First, managers are responsible for hiring candidates for affirmative action. Secondly, managers

have a performance measure for hiring candidates categorized by the organization's definition of diversity.

The workforce of Company 1 is both union and nonunion. The union environment has an established series of promotional steps that individuals complete to gain seniority within the organization. Seniority and status are correlated with the individual's length of service, rather than with his or her experience or ability. Company 1 identified the tendency for Baby Boomers to be in manager roles and Gen-Xers to have subordinate employee roles.

The union environment has created a challenge for Company 1. The organization is faced with the retirement of Boomer managers and must replace these individuals with qualified people, who may have experience and skills, but are in fact, younger. This role reversal challenges the union's cultural norm of older manager and younger employee, and Company 1 acknowledges the difficulty in changing this mindset.

Company 1 indicated that the nonunion work environment does not have an established series of promotional steps. Instead, advancement through this exempt side of the organization is based on individual skills and abilities.

To help diverse groups fit into the organization, Company 1 established a diversity council to speak for and listen to its workforce about diversity issues. The council leads and develops recommendations for the formal diversity program and manages the controlled release of diversity communications.

Socialization into the organization begins when new members enter the organization. New hires first experience diversity learning through the orientation

process. Following orientation, each new employee is assigned a buddy or mentor to interact with, ask questions, and obtain guidance from. Once integrated into the organization, social groups, such as the Black Employees Association, Men's Social Group, Women's Social Group, and sporting teams, welcome membership.

Company 1 does not consciously employ motivational strategies by generational groups. However, the organization does motivate different job categories differently. For example, customer call center jobs are not considered pleasant, so special efforts are made to motivate these employees, such as food days and holiday celebrations. Coincidentally, Company 1 indicated that most of the call center employees are Gen-Xers.

Company 1 also incorporates a diversity focus in the strategic goals established for the organization. Identified as a motivational strategy, the goals support the recognition, inclusion, and understanding of differences of internal and external customers, employees, key opinion leaders, and the community.

The diversity communication efforts and events of Company 1 are visible (i.e., displays, posters), interactive (i.e., brown bag sessions), and sensitive to be inclusive of all diverse groups in the company's advertising and photographs. Company 1 provides the "teachable moment" through its diversity communications and aims to provide people with a positive diversity experience or a familiarity with diversity that they have not yet experienced in life. The organization utilizes various technologies to ensure its formal diversity program reaches all employees, regardless of where they are located.

Diversity training is not a focus for Company 1 because it feels that a short training session (e.g., four-hour) will not change a lifetime of feelings, attitudes, or experiences. Diversity training is offered to provide an overview of diversity and individual differences. An outside party facilitates the training program for more effectiveness and to create an open communication forum for employees.

For Company 1, the synergy of a generational workforce optimizes each generation's focus for handling tasks and projects, which allows new and creative approaches to emerge. This recognized synergy benefits the overall growth of the organization.

Company 2

Company 2 is an Omaha-based organization with a formal diversity program with some planned changes.

Company 2 is currently developing a formal definition of diversity for the organization. The focus of the definition will be "inclusion and appreciation of all walks of life" and will incorporate some specific characteristics (i.e., age, gender, race). The diversity of both customers and employees will be incorporated in the definition.

Manager responsibilities are considerably emphasized at Company 2. For example, managers play a strong role in the orientation process as they are expected to make sure a new hire feels that his or her entrance was well planned.

Both employees and upper management expect managers to find ways to utilize an individual's talent or to find the right role for that individual. Furthermore, each

manager is responsible to motivate and manage employees individually to achieve the defined department objectives.

Company 2 has an "individual" focus on both employees and customers. Company 2 is attentive to individual needs and "life stage." This theme is incorporated into employee retention and recruiting efforts and customer product and service development.

Employees of Company 2 expect an appreciation of their individual talents, skills, knowledge, and abilities. In addition, employees expect to be treated with respect, dignity, and fairness. They also expect a certain conduct of behavior from the individuals they interact with at work (i.e., coworkers, managers, vendors).

Company 2 has defined "values" that translate into the behaviors that are expected of individuals within the organization.

Socialization into the organization begins when new members enter Company 2. During new hire orientation, entrants engage in a discussion about the value that diversity brings to the organization.

Company 2 hosts diversity events to educate and create awareness of diverse groups, as well as encourage employee participation. Events are centered around national events, such as Black History Month, Women's History Month, and Hispanic Heritage Month. Company 2 also makes volunteer opportunities available for employees to get involved with diversity events.

Informal affinity and support groups at Company 2 also offer employees opportunities to interact with other employees.

Finally, Company 2 is currently developing a diversity council to broaden its diversity objectives and increase the prominence level of the program. It is assumed that the efforts of this council will further support the socialization process at Company 2.

The diversity communication efforts and events of Company 2 are visible (i.e., daily newsletter, promotional events), educational (i.e., speakers), and sensitive to a diverse presentation (i.e., photographs). Company 2 does not develop communication topics that are targeted at specific employee groups; however, certain subjects addressed (i.e., 401k communications, 529 Education Savings Plan) may appeal to different employee groups depending on their "life stage."

Company 2 opted against implementing a separate training program outside of promotional diversity events and communication. Instead, the organization has integrated diversity communication in all organizational processes (i.e., orientation, manager interview training).

Company 2 identifies many broad benefits of diversity in relationship to its business goals. For example, diversity enables the organization to understand the customer target market they aim to serve. As an additional example, Company 2 believes understanding diversity support their efforts to meet their employees' long-term needs.

Company 3

Company 3 is an Omaha-based company that serves customers on a national level. A formal diversity program is in place.

Company 3 defines diversity as the "inclusion of, understanding, and acceptance of anyone different than you are." Company 3 approaches diversity from "the perspective of understanding yourself." The organization aims for employees to understand their own differences and how they set them apart from others. Diversity is a written corporate objective for Company 3.

The diversity initiative of Company 3 is driven from the top of the organizational hierarchy down and reflects the leadership support for understanding and addressing diversity in the workplace. Diversity is managed at the manager/employee level at Company 3, and managers are required to attend diversity training. Employees expect managers to treat everyone fairly and equally.

The workforce at Company 3 consists of many long-time employees in management, a few younger, seasoned employees in management, and a new younger workforce. Company 3 identifies the fact that the older management has issues of "behavior expectations" with the younger workforce. The younger management, however, is more open to addressing and facing these challenges, and has directed its attention to finding the right role for the right person. Company 3 indicates that some "generational barriers" have been broken down as a result.

Company 3 is adapting to its new work force, as well as its aging workforce. The organization has adopted the attitude of, "Can we accomplish what we need to accomplish outside of the traditional 8-5?" Company 3 is open to a flexible workforce (e.g., four-day workweek) and offers services (i.e., child development center) and

benefits to meet the needs of its changing workforce, with retention and recruitment in mind.

To help diverse groups fit into the organization, Company 3 established a diversity council with a governing board. The council hosts various events including, but not limited to, a diversity fair, a woman's entrepreneurial session, and Black History Month. The council also organizes support groups for employees, such as a Parents-At-Work group.

The diversity communication efforts and events of Company 3 are visible (i.e., promotional events) and interactive (i.e., Intranet). Company 3 utilizes the technology of its Intranet for diversity and employee communications. The Intranet is used to promote events, acknowledge rewards, and highlight community events sponsored by the organization.

Diversity training at Company 3 is required for all managers of the organization. The positive approach of Company 3's diversity program helps managers find out who they are and understand their individual strengths and talents. The program teaches managers about the strengths of others in the session and supports a "sharing of knowledge" atmosphere.

To measure the effectiveness of diversity programming, Company 3 uses its affirmative action plan and goals as a benchmark.

Company 3 recognizes the benefits of understanding generational differences in terms of motivation and recruitment. This understanding can support cross-generational

issues in a management situation, such as clearly communicating expectations and accountability.

Company 4

Company 4 is an Omaha-based company that offers consumer products in North America. The organization does not currently have a formal diversity program but efforts to create one are in mind.

Company 4 defines diversity in the organization's leadership statement. This statement recognizes diversity in employees, customers, consumers, suppliers, and communities in which the organization operates. The statement focuses on the promotion of a sensitive and responsive "organizational climate" toward diversity.

Manager responsibilities are highly emphasized at Company 4. For example, the expectation that *managers* "act in line" with the organization's values and diversity approach is stated in the leadership statement.

Company 4 has a formal training program for managers, which promotes embracing differences and "job carving." Managers are encouraged to continuously look at and create work around the talents and strengths of their staff.

The workforce of Company 4 consists of a generation of long-term employees retiring or close to retiring. Company 4 recognizes a strong correlation between an individual's years of experience, age, and power or status.

Company 4 identifies itself as a "stodgy, formal, conservative company," where younger ideas have been met with resistance. The culture is older and "rules" are in place

for what you can and can't do. Company 4 indicates that immature, younger people would probably be uncomfortable in the organization's "traditional" culture.

At Company 4, some retirees are reentering the workforce at entry-level positions and are being managed by younger managers. Company 4 suggests that generational differences may become more obvious.

Project groups at Company 4 are a blend of people, from long-term employees to new hires and 30 year olds to 60 year olds. Company 4 indicates that generational differences are either eliminated or blended as a result.

Company 4 identifies a low employee expectation for a formal diversity program. The organization has an unstated "understanding and maturity" approach to diversity in the workplace for its professionals. Company 4 noted that a small group of employees would like to see a formal diversity program in place.

Company 4 has one formal networking group for black employees. Creating social groups for employees faced with traditional barriers in corporate work environments have been discussed but are not in place at this time.

Company 4 labels itself as an "all business" work environment. Few conversations about personal life (i.e., family) and free time (i.e., what did you do this weekend?) occur. Company 4 suggests that this type of environment prevents knowledge of generational differences.

Company 4 offers employees a "Rest Easy" program to help with child or elderly dependent care and benefits employees at various life stages.

Company 4 employs different motivational strategies for different jobs. For example, training or motivational presentations are tailored differently for senior management than for entry-level mail clerks. The organization indicates an "expectation level" for this type of motivation that is centered on the maturity and age of those to be trained or motivated.

The diversity communication efforts of Company 4 are very quiet and camouflaged. Diversity is not really "talked about" at Company 4, as there isn't a comfort level with the subject with no formal diversity program in place. Company 4 states that it does not market diversity because it is not ready for the "tough questions."

Annually, Company 4 publishes a report that highlights the "good things" the organization does. Within this report, recruiting and work life efforts are discussed, including critical illness, family issues, and racial and economic diversity. Other employee communications utilize technologies (i.e., Internet, Intranet) and are sensitive to a diverse presentation (i.e., annual report, commercials).

Within the formal management training of Company 4, one section focuses on diversity and suggests "best practices" in the workplace. Again, embracing differences and "job carving" are emphasized to managers.

Company 4 identifies a benefit of diversity understanding in that it "actually contributes to your bottom line" and productivity. Diversity understanding fosters a better and more comfortable environment at work. Additionally, generational differences present an opportunity for pairing and coaching individuals, as well as "job carving" based on the strengths of the individual.

Company 5

Company 5 is an Omaha-based organization with operations in surrounding states. A formal diversity program is not currently in place.

Company 5 defines diversity as recognizing differences in people by age, sex, marital status, family status, and job.

Senior management at Company 5 is primarily Caucasian and efforts are being made to increase diversity at this level. Human Resources is developing diversity awareness at the senior levels. In other words, it is being driven up the hierarchical ladder.

Manager responsibilities are very pronounced at Company 5. For example, managers "lead by example" and must find ways to motivate staff. Managers are expected to "always be walking the walk" when it comes to Human Resource policies. Managers also have formal management training for college graduates, whether they are new or existing employees.

At Company 5, an open door policy fosters an interactive communication environment to discuss issues, ideas, and questions about any organizational aspect, including diversity, directly with the senior levels of the company. Employees at all levels of the organization are encouraged to use the policy.

The employees of Company 5 expect fairness and consistency in employment policies, job postings, and pay. The employees expect management to treat them based on their performance and not on the characteristics that make them diverse.

Company 5 helps diverse groups fit into the organization through its consistent and fair practices. The organization is focused on not treating anybody differently. Human Resources is very involved in the hiring process to ensure that no one is treated unfairly or discriminated against.

The Employee Assistance Program at Company 5 is available to help employees with issues or challenges they face. The program offers training opportunities on different topics for employee participation.

Company 5 primarily motivates employees through the benefits it offers. For example, a 401k plan is offered to all employees but draws most interest from Baby Boomers.

A "promote from within policy" is very strong at Company 5. The majority of management entered the organization in an entry-level position and worked their way up. Company 5 suggests that the organization has a "visual motivation of working hard."

The diversity communications of Company 5 are limited and policy oriented. Company 5 has defined "values" that communicate about the diversity of employees and customers. The organization requires that employees treat people fairly, consistently, and with respect, honor, and dignity, regardless of race, age, sex, color, or any individual difference. The organization's harassment policy further communicates no tolerance for harassment for sexual orientation, race, age, etc. Company 5 communicates by email, voice mail, and bulletin boards but recognizes a need for improvement in this area.

Managers complete a formal training program that educates them about being professional at all times regardless of whom you are talking to. All employees are

required to attend "skills plus training" designed to help them garner customer service skill. This training reiterates Company 5's values of fairness, consistency, respect, honor, and dignity for all people.

Company 5 currently benefits from the multiple languages its employees speak. The organization captures fluencies in a database and utilizes these skills in translation situations with customers. Company 5 also believes understanding generational differences can help a company understand that "people don't all have to be the same." In addition, it helps the organization recognize that differences are good because the differences bring in new perspectives, methods, advances, marketing, and ideas.

Company 6

Company 6 is an Omaha-based organization with customers on a national level. The company does not have a formal diversity program in place.

From the Human Resources perspective, Company 6 defines diversity as recognizing, understanding, and respecting differences, such as age, gender, race, culture, and religion, in the workforce.

The management approach of Company 6 embraces and respects every employee. Managers at Company 6 are responsible for motivating, encouraging, and coaching their employees, as well as determining the motivational strategy for each employee. Managers are very in tune with the individuality of their employees. Company 6 has a high respect for individuality. The organization leads the company with this approach and communicates to all that "you matter."

Employees at Company 6 expect fairness and to be kept informed by their management. Employees expect the organization to understand them as individuals and to communicate about the importance of understanding and respecting diversity.

Company 6 has behavioral expectations for its employees. Employees are expected to respect, trust, and get along with each other and treat people with kindness. Company 6 identifies "people" as employees, policyholders, clients, and customers.

The culture of Company 6 helps diverse groups fit into the organization. It is a culture that is not hierarchical or traditional but involves constant interaction and respect for the individual. Company 6 suggests that this structure allows the organization to be very open to employee differences and embrace what employee diversity brings to the organization.

Communications at Company 6 are not diversity specific.

Managers at Company 6 attend an extensive management program, which includes training in leadership, influence, workforce practices, and human interaction. Employees at Company 6 participate in training programs focused on teamwork, customer service, and communication improvement.

Company 6 suggests that it is important for a manager to understand the individuality of their employees because that understanding embraces diversity in the workplace.

Company 7

Company 7 is an Omaha-based company with operating plants in Nebraska. Company 7 has a formal diversity program in place.

Company 7 elects not to use the term diversity and instead uses the term "valuing differences" to encompass more employee traits and characteristics. The organization considers the term diversity to be overused and limited.

Company 7 is a family owned and managed organization. The dynamics of the traditional family are carried throughout the culture of the organization and successes are celebrated as a family. Currently managing the organization are the 4th and 5th generations of the family.

The visible interaction of the family generations promotes the benefits of generational differences throughout the organization. The family demonstrates that they work together to benefit the organization, and employees are able to see the value of generational differences. At Company 7, organizational growth also starts at the top.

The management of Company 7 is very visible and believes in "Walk Around Management" or WAM. This weekly management activity demonstrates the humanity and family focus of the owners. Company 7 has a formal open door policy to foster an interactive communication environment for employees to voice concerns, opinions, and ideas directly with the family owners of the company.

The desire to maintain the generational culture of Company 7 is emphasized by one of its approaches to hiring. Company 7 likes to hire generationally, as "most bright people beget bright people."

At Company 7, employees of different cultures expect the organization to accommodate their language in communications. The organization understands how critical communication differences are in its business and connects this difference to the

effectiveness and safety of the worker. This accommodation is easily granted and supported.

Socialization into the organization begins when new members enter Company 7. New employees have an extensive orientation process that extends through their first year of employment. Each new employee is also assigned a buddy, from a different generation, to interact with, ask questions, and obtain guidance from. The buddy system helps employees learn about generational differences, as well as commonalities. This system fosters a caring and supportive relationship between the generations of employees.

Company 7 hosts diversity events to educate and create awareness of diverse groups, as well as encourage employee participation. For example, twice a year a "food day" is hosted for employees to bring in a dish from their heritage for "tasting." Employees share recipes and discuss why the particular dish is important to their culture. This type of event helps diverse groups contribute and other groups learn.

Company 7 has a well developed reward and recognition program for motivating employees. The program, which reaches across all organizational employee groups, provides the opportunity for management and teams to commend employees for a job well done. The program incorporates a treasure chest of gifts, as well as formal awards given quarterly and annually. The management of Company 7 gathers together for formal award presentations to employees, which is somewhat representative of a family event.

The diversity communication efforts and events of Company 7 are visible (i.e., newsletter, closed circuit television), interactive (i.e., food day, brown bag lunches),

educational (i.e., speakers), and management involved (i.e., WAM, HR office day). Company 7 aims to be clear, succinct, and upbeat in its communications to give the employee a reason to read them.

Company 7 does continual measurement of its communication and sets a high standard for itself. In addition to surveys, the organization utilizes focus groups to learn about employees' thoughts.

"Valuing Differences" training, a program developed and facilitated by an outside party, helps employees deal with diversity and employee differences at Company 7. Company 7 also garners feedback from employees during the training. "Just in Time" training sessions are also hosted to address specific organizational issues on an as needed basis.

Company 7 recognizes that each generation brings something to the table and by understanding generational differences, the organization can reduce turnover and improve retention. In addition, when the organization honors and recognizes different generations, it demonstrates to the employees that the organization really values differences.

Company 8

Company 8 is an Omaha-based plant of a international corporation. It has an established formal diversity program. Company 8 defines diversity as an individual's gender, race, religion, and ethnic background. Diversity also includes the individual's regional influence (i.e., Midwest puritan work ethic).

The management of Company 8 is focused on productivity goals and maintaining a lean workforce to control employee expenses (i.e., benefit costs). The management is labeled as "paternalistic" with the desire to "raise you from the bottom up."

The workforce of Company 8 is both union and nonunion. The union environment has an established series of promotional steps that individuals complete to gain seniority within the organization. Seniority and status are correlated with the individual's length of service, rather than his or her experience or ability. Company 8 has an extremely loyal workforce and experiences little turnover. The average employee at the organization has nearly 20 years of service.

Because of the union environment, Company 8 is challenged with a very aging workforce and expects to lose approximately 60 percent of its employees to retirement. In it efforts to recruit and retain a younger workforce, the organization is experiencing a rejection of cultural norms (i.e., 7-day work week, excessive overtime, workaholic nature) that the union and management have instilled in the organization. The younger workforce desires a 40-hour week and a quality of life. Company 8 has not been successful in motivating the younger workforce with the same strategies (i.e., money) it uses to motivate the older workers. The management of Company 8 is not yet in support of organizational adaptation for the younger workforce.

The nonunion workforce does not have the same series of promotional steps the union workforce has in place. Instead, Company 8 is working to develop better opportunities for promoting people up through the organization. Nonunion employees have been subject to working their way up in the past.

The recruitment and retention of younger employees is a great challenge for Company 8 because it does not foster a work environment that the workforce wants or desires. Company 8 acknowledges an increase in work injuries among its younger generation of workers and correlates this increase with the need for time off. Without an organizational adaptation, Company 8 will not attract a younger workforce and may experience excessive turnover among the younger workers currently employed. Both results will impact productivity at the plant.

Company 8 is a unionized environment. As a result, employee expectations are of the union and not of Company 8. However, Company 8 entices participation and interest in diversity activities from union members.

Company 8 expects employees to work hard and be at its "beck and call." This expectation is hard on the personal lives of the employees, but it is a nondiscriminatory expectation for all employee age groups. Employees are expected to work excessive hours.

To help diverse groups fit into the organization, Company 8 maintains a balance in its hiring practice. Company 8 has high standards for quality hires and has been fortunate in attracting new hires.

Company 8 hosts diversity events to educate and create awareness of diverse groups, as well as encourages employee participation. Some events are centered on national events, such as Black History Month. Other events are focused on specific groups, such as Greek, Irish, and women.

The diversity communication efforts and events of Company 8 are visible (i.e., booths, literature), interactive (i.e., diversity dinners), educational (i.e., speakers), and on a local level (i.e., community). Company 8 is very effective with addressing diversity issues and practices, as well as the treatment of people. The corporate offices of Company 8 have a formal process to measure how well it is doing with diversity, as well as overall company operation.

Company 8 mandates employees computer-based training to learn about diversity and safety.

Understanding generational differences truly prepares organizations for the employees of the future, according to Company 8. Without this preparation and adjustment, Company 8 may face several workforce challenges.

Company 9

Company 9 is a regional organization located in Omaha. It does not have a formal diversity program in place. Company 9 defines diversity as an employee population with a variety of different types of people, to include different ages, ethnicities, religions, countries of origin, and education levels. According to this definition, people who are not all alike are diverse. To employ a diverse population is a core value of the organization.

Company 9 has a very formal, predominantly white male structure that supports the diversity initiative of the organization. Human Resources is developing diversity awareness at the senior levels. In other words, it is being driven up the hierarchical ladder.

Company 9 is adapting to its new workforce, as well as its aging workforce. For example, Company 9 offers a six-month work schedule and child development centers targeted to Generation X and others with young families. In addition, part-time hours are available for older staff or college students.

At Company 9, employees expect to be treated equally and not treated differently because of the characteristics that make them diverse. Employees also expect to be treated with dignity and respect. Employees expect the organization to accommodate their challenges, such as computer illiteracy and language barriers.

In many ways, Company 9 focuses on eliminating the communication barriers created by language differences for their employees. For example, Company 9 sponsors an English as a second language course to help various groups learn its common language. The organization also uses a language resource to aid with interpretation during interviews and the application process.

The Employee Assistance Program at Company 9 helps employees with issues or challenges they face.

Company 9 communicates its organizational values, which include diversity, through a defined program. Communications include posters and web communications. These communications are aimed at reminding employees of the commitments the organization makes.

Company 9 has not conducted diversity training in the past but is initiating development of a program with the aid of an affirmative action consultant. The organization seeks to develop a program to help employees understand differences.

Company 9 recognizes that generational differences help employees understand how to work differently and accomplish tasks differently. Understanding generational differences also helps employees appreciate the differences in people.

Company 10

Company 10 is an Omaha-based plant of a company headquartered in Colorado. It does not have a formal diversity program. Company 10 defines diversity as the various skills, backgrounds, and ideas that employees bring to the organization as it approaches customer projects or initiatives.

Company 10 is a relatively young company with a primarily young work force (i.e., average age 35-37). As a result, the organization finds itself "growing up" with their employees and experiencing life with them. Generational issues are not present.

The formal corporate office of Company 10 recognizes and supports the "laid back" culture of the Omaha plant. The corporate office respects the culture in Omaha and does not try to impose a different value system. The corporate office supports a relaxed and comfortable environment, and recognizes the creativity that comes forth as a result. Employees enjoy this freedom, and it creates a great place to work. Human Resources' role is to maintain this relaxed culture.

Company 10 does not focus on the diversity of its employees but instead focuses on their individuality. Skills sets, innovation, and creativity to better serve customers is what Company 10 looks for and aims to bring out of its employees.

The "customer oriented design" of Company 10 allows the organization to structure itself by customer needs with the individuals who can best serve the needs of the customer. Company 10 matches customer styles with employee styles and tendencies for project effectiveness.

Organizational expectations for Company 10 vary by the work experience and the geographic location of individuals. For example, many employees at the Omaha operation have previous work experience with corporate culture and application of skills. These individuals are sophisticated in their experience, which translates into knowledge of expectations and rights as employees. On the contrary, employees at the Tallahassee, Florida location do not have previous work experience with corporate culture. As a result, Company 10 is defining their expectations for them.

Company 10 employs a very formal reward and recognition programs to motivate employees. The program, available to everyone in the organization, provides the opportunity to thank others for helping on projects. It also recognizes employees for their skills. Informal programs also motivate employees, such as Friday bagels and donuts, free coffee, and subsidized soft drinks. Managers do various things to thank project teams (e.g., pizza lunches).

Company 10 is communicating cultural diversity to its employees stemming from a 2002 merger, changing it from a national company to an international company. The organization is helping employees understand and acknowledge the cultural differences and expectations of the countries in which they now operate.

Experience and knowledge are two key benefits that Company 10 identifies with understanding generational differences. New tools and methods are also garnered through this understanding.

Similarities and Differences

My interviews with diversity and human resource management at Companies 1 through 10 provided a total of 13 different perceived factors of influence for understanding generational differences. These factors are illustrated in Table 10. My first research question asked: What are the factors of influence for understanding generational differences for each organizational strategy?

First, in looking at the similarities in factors of influence, several companies place strong emphasis on their managers' level of responsibility from diversity management to motivational strategies. For example, many participants indicate strong upper level or senior management support for diversity, but the managers must ultimately *demonstrate* support for diversity with their employees.

Similarities in organizational philosophy regarding diversity were also revealed. For example, half of the participant companies include "diversity" in formal and written organizational goals or corporate values, statements, or commitments. The incorporation of diversity in an organization's philosophy suggests the *importance* of diversity to each organization. This importance in some instances stretches beyond the workforce to the customers the organization serves.

The organizational approach in addressing diversity also displayed similarities. For example, half of the organizations provide activities and communications for their

employees to create an "experience" or "familiarity" with diverse groups. The goal is to "ingrain" diversity in the workplace and demonstrate the desire to make diversity part of the organizational culture.

Several companies exhibit an "individual" focus on employees. For example, half of the participant organizations focus on employees as "individuals" to prevent generalizations of diverse groups, such as Baby Boomers and Generation X. Individual skills, abilities, knowledge, and experience are greatly valued.

Three participant organizations have or are currently developing a formal work team or "council" for diversity management and program development. Each council consists of company-wide members to garner different viewpoints and is not strictly a Human Resources extension. Formal diversity work teams signify organizational support of diversity and employee differences.

Similarities in the initial socialization process were found. For example, three organizations introduce diversity to employees during the new employee orientation process. This initiates familiarity with diverse populations and helps diverse groups fit into the organization. It also signifies the organization's concern about socialization for diverse groups and employee differences.

The approach to diversity communication in the workplace displayed similarities between two organizations. A formal approach to diversity communication management in these organizations supports the integration and time release of information. This management process indicates support for ingraining diversity into the culture and preventing communication overload.

Similarities were found in the cultural norms of four participating companies. Entrants conform to the culture in two of the four organizations, but reject them in one organization. Yet another organization is adapting its culture to entrants. Cultural norms appear to be generationally influenced (i.e., unions, old style organization). Although an organization may formally support diversity and employee differences, it may not accept employee differences that challenge its cultural norms (i.e., young creative ideas, desire for a 40-hour work week).

Four organizations suggest a correlation between an employee's years of employment and status, power, or seniority. A relationship between cultural norms and this correlation is suggested for three of the four organizations.

To foster an open communication environment, three companies have an "open door policy" established for employees to communicate directly with senior levels of the organization. An open communication environment fosters support of generational differences (i.e., different approaches to projects).

Similarities in generational visibility were revealed among three companies. Union environments and a family ownership consisting of more than one generation display visible awareness of generations and their differences. The generational differences are perceived very differently in each organization. For example, the differences are either perceived positively and accepted, "against the norm" and not accepted, or are not acknowledged at all.

To help newcomers fit into the organization, two companies have mentor or "buddy" programs to help with socialization. For example, mentors provide new

employees with guidance and learning of "how things work" in the organization. One company employs mentoring to break down generational barriers and encourages learning about different generations.

Similarities were revealed in the adaptation to generational differences by three participant companies. These organizations quickly recognized the changing workforce and adapted to support retention and recruiting efforts. In one instance, the adaptation is initiating changes to the organization's cultural norms. Adaptation signifies a recognized need to change in order to accommodate generational differences.

Table 10

Factors of Influence for Understanding Generational Differences

Factor	Co. 1	Co. 2	Co. 3	Co. 4	Co. 5	Co. 6	Co. 7	Co. 8	Co. 9	Co. 10
Manager responsibility level	x	x	x	x	x	x				
Organizational philosophy	x	x	x	x					x	
Diversity experience & exposure	x	x	x				x	x		
Focus on the individual	x	x	x			x				x
Formal work team	x	x	x							
Orientation process	x	x					x			
Communication management	x	x								
Cultural norms	x		x	x				x		x
Employment years & status correlation	x			x	x			x		
Open door policy	x				x		x			
Generation visibility	x						x	x		
Mentoring	x						x			
Organization adaptation			x						x	x

My second research question was concerned with the extent that organizational strategy influences an organization's ability to understand the generational differences of Baby Boomers and Generation X.

Conrad and Poole (2002) suggest specific characteristics of the traditional, relational, and cultural strategies. My research revealed certain characteristics of each strategy that influence the organization's ability to understand generational differences. These characteristics are illustrated in Tables 11, 12, and 13.

Traditional Strategy

For the traditional strategy, impersonal supervisor-subordinate relationships influence understanding generational differences. For example, the "all business" environment of Company 4 inhibits discussion of personal life and free time that may reveal knowledge of one's generation (i.e., entertainment preferences, life stage).

Traditional strategies of organizing are also hierarchical. This, too, influences understanding of generational differences in a couple of ways. For example, Company 1 and 8 are union environments with defined promotional steps for members to complete in order to attain seniority. These environments promote a pattern of Baby Boomer as manager and Gen-Xer as employee. A union structure makes generational differences visible for an organization to address; however, it may not simplify the process of doing so.

Secondly, hierarchies reinforce the formal and bureaucratic nature of an organization. For example, the "traditional" culture of Company 4 is one in which

immature, younger people, like Generation X, may not feel comfortable. As a result, younger employees must conform to the organization's cultural norms and "old style."

The paternalistic nature of the traditional strategy influences its ability to understand generational differences. For example, the management of Company 8 is very paternalistic and has a desire to "raise you from the bottom up." As a result, employees are taught to adopt the cultural norms of the organization. The Baby Boomers have adopted these norms but the Gen-Xers have rejected them. These norms conflict with the wants and needs (i.e., quality of life) of Generation X.

Traditional strategies have a very formal approach to communication. With diversity communications, this formal approach is represented by formal definitions and programs found at Companies 1, 2, 3, 7, and 8. These formal communications reflect each company's active initiative to acknowledge employee differences in the workplace. A formal communication approach provides the opportunity to include generational differences; however, presently *generations* are not *formally* addressed in these definitions and programs. In Company 7, generational differences are part of the cultural norm created by the generational ownership of the organization.

The rules and cultural norms of traditional strategies reinforce what is and is not acceptable (i.e., young ideas) and expected (i.e., workaholism). For example, young ideas are met with resistance by the traditional nature of Company 4 and rules are established for what employees can and cannot do. Rules discourage the synergy of new and different ideas generations can create together. As an additional example, the union environments of Company 8 reinforce the cultural norm of workaholism (i.e., seven-day

work week, excessive overtime). This cultural norm may be widely accepted by Boomers but not Generation X. There is no apparent understanding for the work ethic of Generation X.

The traditional strategy characteristics of economic motivation and focus on effective and efficient productivity do not necessarily influence understanding of generational differences; however, these characteristics do point out differences between Baby Boomers and Generation X. For example, Company 8 motivates its workforce with money. This motivational strategy is effective with Boomers but ineffective with Gen-Xers. In addition, the management of Company 8 is focused on running a lean workforce to be cost effective, while meeting its productivity goals. This management approach supports the workaholic nature accepted by its Boomer workforce but rejected by its Generation X workforce.

Table 11

Traditional Strategy Characteristics That Influence Understanding of Generational Differences

• Impersonal Supervisor-Subordinate Relationships • Hierarchicalization • Paternalistic View of Employees	• Formal Communication • Rules and Cultural Norms • Economic Motivation • Focus on Effective and Efficient Productivity

Relational Strategy

For the relational strategy, the team-based approach influences the organizations ability to understand the generational differences of Baby Boomers and Generation X. For example, project teams at Company 4 combine members from all ages and levels of

work experience. Because of the "all business" focus of these teams, generational differences are not apparent at Company 4.

The individualistic focus of the relational strategy also influences understanding of generational differences. For example, Companies 1, 2, 3, 6, and 10 are focused on the individual skills, abilities, knowledge, and experience of their employees. As a result, these organizations may ignore "group" characteristics (i.e., generations, Latinos) in an attempt to avoid generalizations.

The positive and comfortable climate approach of the relational strategy influences generational difference understanding. For example, the organizational climate of Company 10 is designed to be comfortable, free, and "laid back" to foster creativity. The cultural norm of this environment provides the opportunity for employees to be themselves and generational characteristics can emerge. When employee differences are encouraged, it provides the opportunity for organizations to learn about and benefit from the different approaches, ideas, and viewpoints of each generation.

The relational strategy encourages open and supportive supervisor-subordinate relationships and two-way interactive communication. This relationship style encourages an understanding of generational differences between supervisor and subordinate. For example, Companies 2, 6, 7, and 10 all aim to learn *about* the individual (i.e., social needs) and are encouraged by an open and supportive supervisor-subordinate relationship.

As an additional example, the open door policy of Companies 1, 4, and 7 promotes interactive communication between employees and their management. By

doing so, the organization is enabled to learn about the different ideas, opinions, and thoughts of their generational workforce.

Table 12

Relational Strategy Characteristics That Influence Understanding of Generational Differences

• Team-Based • Individualistic Focus • Positive, Comfortable Climate	• Open and supportive supervisor-subordinate relationships

Cultural Strategy

In cultural strategies, the organization supports a "learning" of the culture. Mentoring programs, a socialization approach of Companies 1 and 7, teach newcomers "how things work" and provide the opportunity for generations to be paired together. This pairing allows the partners to learn about each other's generation and to identify similarities and differences.

The value and belief system of cultural organizations also supports its ability to understand generational differences. For example, Companies 1, 2, 3, 4, and 9 all include diversity in defined organizational values or statements. By acknowledging differences in employees, the opportunity for these organizations to include generational differences can be accommodated.

The cultural strategy characteristic of connectedness and community can also influence an organization's ability to understand generational differences. For example, family dynamics are an inherent aspect of the culture at Company 7. The organization celebrates successes as a family, and the interactive management approach demonstrates

the family focus of the owners. Employees are made to feel like "family." In addition, the generational culture supports understanding generational differences to help the company benefit from them.

Table 13

Cultural Strategy Characteristics That Influence Understanding of Generational Differences

• Learning of culture • Value and belief systems	• Connectedness and community

My third and final question was concerned with the benefits an organization's strategy has on its ability to understand the generational differences of Baby Boomers and Generation X.

Understanding Generational Differences

Conrad and Poole (2002) suggest specific characteristics of the traditional, relational, and cultural strategies. My research revealed certain characteristics of each strategy that benefit the organization's ability to understand generational differences.

First, examining each organizational strategy independently, the traditional strategy benefits an organization's ability to understand generational differences through its characteristic of formal communication. For example, a formal communication approach demonstrates the organization's support of diversity and employee differences, as demonstrated by Companies 1, 2, 3, 7, and 8. This support can easily be extended to include generational differences.

Second, the relational strategy benefits an organization's ability to understand generational differences through its characteristics of individualistic focus and open and supportive supervisor-subordinate relationships. For example, interest in the "individual" lends itself to be conscientious of an individual's personality traits and characteristics, as demonstrated by Companies 1, 2, 3, 6, and 10. Some traits and characteristics may be inherent in the individual's generation. As an additional example, open and supportive supervisor-subordinate relationships further support interest in the "individual" and sharing of feelings, ideas, opinions, and thoughts, which may also be generational characteristics (i.e., creative ideas of Generation X).

Third, the cultural strategy benefits an organization's ability to understand generational differences through its characteristics of learning the culture and connectedness and community. For example, Companies 1 and 7 have established mentoring programs to help employees learn their culture. This approach benefits the organization as employees learn about the generation of their mentor or the generation of the employee being mentored. This fosters an environment to appreciate the similarities and differences of other generations, as well as to learn from them.

The generational and family culture of Company 7 encourages understanding generational differences, as the organization already sees the value and benefits of the multiple generations in their owners. This generational understanding aids employees of all generations in feeling connected to the organization because it demonstrates that their own generational differences are also valued.

Chapter Five

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of organizational strategies for understanding the generational differences of Baby Boomers (1940-1960) and Generation X (1960-1980). Although these findings cannot be generalized to all organizations, they do provide useful information.

Factors of Influence for Understanding Generational Differences

Many participants expressed the strong support their management has for diversity programs or diversity in the workplace. However, the demonstration of this support lies in each individual manager. Some organizations require managers to attend diversity training (i.e., Company 3), while other organizations recognize that short training sessions will not change a lifetime of feelings, attitudes, and experiences (i.e., Company 1). In the end, the individual manager's perceptions of and experiences with diversity, as well as his or her generation, influence his or her ability to understand generational differences. This understanding may or may not support the organization's attitude toward diversity or be of a positive nature. The organization may communicate to the employee that it embraces diversity and employee differences, but the behavior of the individual manager may communicate the opposite.

Organizations demonstrate support of diversity in their organizational philosophy, publicized through formal, written values, goals, commitments, and statements. Organizations must "walk the walk" of these philosophies, however, in order to reinforce

their support, otherwise they may be interpreted as efforts to only be "politically correct." Also, an organization may have a formalized diversity program to embrace differences, but if it does not accept differences that conflict with its cultural norms (i.e., generational work life and ethics), then what differences does it embrace exactly?

Expanding diversity beyond the organization's workforce expresses the "level" of organizational awareness and focus for diversity. Including customers, clients, vendors, and communities presents a "universal" appreciation for diversity.

Diversity activities and communications are generally aimed at creating an "experience" or "familiarity" with diverse groups. These efforts are creating a cultural norm of diversity, citing what it means, etc. Also, through these efforts, organizations assume the role of shaping their employees as people and are defining diversity for their employees. This role may be perceived as an untraditional "employer" role. Employees may view their employer as whom they work for, not learn from, and be challenged with program acceptance. Diversity may be translated into "another employment policy" and associated entirely with work. Organizations with formal programs should incorporate activities and communications to express the notion that diversity has no boundaries. Organizations should also be cautious in defining diversity, as to not limit or discard groups (i.e., generations).

The individual focus of many organizations may avoid acknowledging generational differences. The nature of this approach prevents generalizing people with associated groups (i.e., African Americans, Latinos). However, failing to recognize generational differences among employees may prevent organizations from

understanding individual differences. For example, a certain employee may want to work independently. The employee's desire for independence may be translated into "doesn't work well with others," when, in fact, he or she grew up as a latch-key child and learned to survive on his or her own. Knowledge of the Generation X characteristics would create greater understanding of the individual in this example.

Formal work teams or "councils" also demonstrate organizational support for diversity. The fact that these councils are separate from Human Resources is positive, and it dilutes the perception that diversity is just another HR policy or procedure. Because these programs speak and hear for employees, the councils should periodically ask employees how the programs are doing in addressing diversity in the workplace. The councils should also ask employees about their challenges, frustrations, and problems at work, as some generational difference problems may be uncovered (e.g., promotional step requirements, organization is not open to ideas).

Incorporating diversity in the socialization process certainly helps diverse groups fit in. Again, organizations need to be conscious of their diversity definitions in order to prevent alienation of certain groups. If during the orientation process an individual does not feel that his or her "group" is addressed, he or she may not feel as though he or she fits in.

Formal diversity communications further demonstrate organizational support of diversity. However, if communications are "group" specific, the danger of overlooking or not addressing certain groups is possible. If employees receive communication focused only on certain groups, such as African Americans, Latinos, and women, they may be led

to believe that these are the "accepted" groups. Organizations should continually interact with their employees to uncover individual definitions of diversity and focus events and communications around the diverse groups (i.e., Baby Boomers, Generation X) suggested.

A few companies identified an established open door policy to encourage an open communication environment for employees to suggest ideas and voice their opinions. Although this policy is in place, it does not eliminate the inherent communication barrier that exists between management and employees in organizations. Employees, regardless of generation, may always be hesitant or afraid to use these policies that are available to them. Organizations with these policies may want to change them to "no door" policies, as "open door" does suggest that it can close.

Although union environments make generational differences very visible, these environments are not supportive for understanding differences. Union environments have strong cultural norms and failure to accept and adapt to these norms may be perceived as a weakness. As generations change at union leadership levels, the cultural norms may also change; however, as new generations enter the workforce, they too may challenge these norms. Union environments encourage a "this is the way we've always done business" attitude and may be difficult to change. Unfortunately, without organizational change, union environments may never be able to attract and keep new workforce generations.

Understanding generational differences is second nature in a generational organizational culture. This culture type recognizes, values, and uses benefits from

generational differences. Generations are visible and their different perspectives are appreciated.

Generational understanding can be gained through mentoring programs as different generational dyads work together. However, organizations should be aware that some mentor-employee relationships could be one generation influencing the other generation to "do things my way." In this instance, the new employee is being influenced to adjust to a cultural norm of the mentor.

Organizational adaptation to new workforces signifies the desire or need to understand generational differences. These organizations should be considered "ahead of the curve" when it comes to understanding generational differences. Organizations are beginning to see the relationship between their recruiting and retention efforts and generational understanding. Ultimately, this understanding is directly connected to their survival and growth as an organization. Without employees, an organization may just be an empty building.

Influence of Organizational Strategy for Understanding Generational Differences

My research revealed that several organizational strategy characteristics are also generational characteristics. These correlations suggest that similarities between organizational strategy characteristics and generational characteristics support understanding generational differences. Contrarily, these correlations also suggest that

differences between organizational strategy characteristics and generational characteristics do not support understanding generational differences.

The specific traditional strategy characteristics that are similar to Baby Boomer characteristics include impersonal superior-subordinate relationships, hierarchicalization, paternalistic view of employees, rules and cultural norms, economic motivation, and focus on effective and efficient productivity.

Boomers, for example, prefer direct communications about future opportunities and company work projects from their managers (Zemke et al., 2000). This suggests a preference for a "work oriented" supervisor-subordinate relationship, which minimizes personal relationships. In contrast, spending time with his or her manager motivates a Gen-Xer (Bradford & Raines, 1991, as noted by Burke, 1994).

As an additional example, Baby Boomers favor prestige and status (Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998) and have a fetish for authority (Zemke et al., 2000). This favoritism suggests a desire for hierarchicalization. In contrast, Gen-Xers strongly dislike bureaucracy and have little patience for it (Ainsworth, 1995, as noted by Adams, 2000).

The paternalistic nature of the traditional strategy reinforces the Boomer goal to gain "worthiness by climbing the ladder" (Zemke et al., 2000, p. 115). Boomers are willing to "play the game" to get promotions (*Industry Week,* 1994). Gen-Xers, on the other hand, are not willing to take a job and "pay their dues" to get ahead (*Industry Week,* 1994; Tulgan, 2000).

Finally, Boomers are more resistant to process changes or "new ways of doing things" than Generation X, according to Ainsworth (1995, as noted by Adams, 2000).

This suggests a Boomer preference for cultural norms. Also, Baby Boomers have more respect for rules than Generation X (McGarvey, 1999). Xers are not afraid of change because that's what they know the best (Tulgan, 2000) and are more comfortable with quick change in organizations (Rapp, 1999). Also, Xers view rules as a big drawback (Corley, 1999).

Economic motivation and focus on effective and efficient productivity are traditional characteristics that distinguish Baby Boomers from Generation Xers. For example, managers can motivate Baby Boomers by rewarding their work ethic and long hours (Zemke et al., 2000), in many instances economically. Money is important to Generation X, but they are not driven by it (Joyner, 2000). As an additional example, Baby Boomers value work and are willing to "go the extra mile," according to Zemke et al. This supports the traditional strategy characteristic of effective and efficient productivity. However, Boomers may also put process ahead of result and are not naturally "budget minded" (Zemke et al., p. 76), which conflicts with the traditional strategy ideas.

A traditional strategy characteristic that supports generational understanding is its formal communication approach. A formal communication approach provides the opportunity to include generational differences of Baby Boomers and Generation X in communication efforts. In addition, a formal communication approach may be *required* in order to address diversity in a traditional strategy. In other words, accepting individual differences is not inherent in a traditional culture because of the omission of personal and

interpersonal factors in this strategy. Research on Baby Boomers and Generation X has not examined their preferences for formal or informal communication approaches.

The relational strategy characteristics and generational characteristics of Baby Boomers and Generation X identified both similarities and differences. Similarities are noted with the strategy characteristics of a team-based nature and individualistic focus with both generations. However, the characteristics of a positive, comfortable climate and open and supportive supervisor-subordinate relationship only matched Generation X characteristics.

Boomers, for example, value team orientation and are good team players (Zemke et al., 2000). Generation X employees are more independent (Zemke et al.) but do take teamwork seriously (McGarvey, 1999), and thrive in teams (Tulgan, 2000). Thus, the team-based nature of the relational strategy supports both generations.

As an additional example, Baby Boomers are focused on individuality (Hall & Richter, 1990) and fixated on self-improvement and individual accomplishment (Smith & Clurman, 1997). The individualistic focus of the relational strategy supports understanding of Boomers. This focus also supports Gen-Xers' value of independence (Zemke et al., 2000) and need to use their special abilities (Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998).

Gen-Xers value fun and informality (Zemke et al., 2000) and want a flexible (Zemke et al., 1999) and unique (Corley, 1999) work environment. This supports the relational approach of creating a positive, comfortable climate. In contrast, Boomers want a fair and level playing field (Zemke et al.).

Finally, Generation X employees enjoy spending time with their manager (Bradford & Raines, 1991, as noted by Burke, 1994), which supports the relational strategy of fostering open and supportive supervisor-subordinate relationships. Contrarily, Boomers prefer direct communications about future opportunities and company work projects from their managers (Zemke et al., 2000). This minimizes personal relationships.

The similarities between cultural characteristics and generational characteristics of Baby Boomers and Generation X are not significant. For example, neither Baby Boomers nor Generation X favors pressures to conform both on and off the job (Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998), as encouraged by the cultural strategy characteristics of learning the culture and value and belief systems. However, Baby Boomers value involvement (Zemke et al., 2000) and workplace participation (Zemke et al., 1999), which may support the cultural characteristic of connectedness and community.

Benefit of Organizational Strategy for Understanding Generational Differences

The formal communication approach of the traditional strategy demonstrates organizational support of diversity. As mentioned previously, this formalized approach may be *required* in order to address diversity in a traditional strategy. In other words, accepting individual differences is not inherent in traditional culture because of the omission of personal and interpersonal factors in this strategy. When an organization develops a formal communication approach to diversity, efforts are concentrated to, among other things, *define* diversity. This definition can include or omit whomever the

organization identifies as a "diverse group." Of course, this definition can certainly incorporate Baby Boomer and Generation X characteristics, but the challenge may be in getting the organization to first recognize generational differences.

The individualistic focus of the relational strategy can benefit an organization's understanding of Baby Boomer and Generation X differences. Typically, the individual focus is used by organizations to prevent generalizations of individuals with certain groups. However, including generational differences in the analysis of individual traits will help an organization understand how the trait was *developed* (i.e., childhood experiences, parental influences). The organization should not assume generational characteristics fit all individuals in a specific generation because not every individual fits a generation's personality profile (Zemke et al., 2000). Instead, the organization should use this knowledge to better understand the individuals and common traits among them.

The open and supportive supervisor-subordinate relationship of the relational strategy can also benefit an organization in understanding generational differences of Baby Boomers and Generation X. This relationship fosters a means to really "get to know your employees." Through relationship building, supervisors can learn about their employees' feelings, ideas, opinions, and thoughts, which may be generational characteristics. By getting to know employees, supervisors can better understand how to motivate, manage, and support their employees, as well as help find the right role for the right person. The end result: job satisfaction and reduced employee turnover.

Learning the culture characteristic of the cultural strategy can benefit an organization in understanding the generational differences of Boomers and Xers. For

example, mentoring programs, designed to help newcomers in the socialization process, of generational dyads support individual learning of generational characteristics and the process of identifying similarities and differences. This learning helps employees find commonalities, as well as eliminate generational stereotypes. Employees who understand each other ultimately work better together. The end result: synergy.

Finally, the connectedness and community characteristic of the cultural strategy can benefit in understanding the generational differences of Baby Boomers and Generation X, particularity in a generational and family culture. In a generational and family culture, generational differences are recognized, valued, and appreciated because these differences are visible in the generations of the owners. The environment supports feelings of connectedness and community for employees because they are considered, and therefore treated like, family. The connectedness and community may also provide the family structure that the employee missed in life (e.g., a child of divorce) and may greatly appeal to family-oriented employees.

Chapter Six

CONCLUSION

This qualitative study identified specific factors that influence an organization's ability to understand generational differences. It is assumed that a broader study would reveal additional factors. Additionally, this study found similar organizational and generational characteristics that influence and benefit an organization's ability to understand generational differences. It is assumed that a broader study would reveal additional characteristic similarities and differences. These conclusions cannot be generalized to all organizations.

Limitations and Future Research

Methodologically, this study had a few limitations. The respondent interview, with its directive questioning, prevented me from probing interview participants further for clarity or from helping participants thoroughly understand the interview questions. This difference may have garnered stronger answers in some instances, such as information I felt the participant might be unintentionally leaving out of the interview.

Confidentiality was ensured for all participants; however, as representatives of their companies, their answers may not have been as forthright as they could have been. In addition, the participants may have maintained a "spokesperson" approach to the interview with reluctance to speak negatively about their organizations. Their levels in

the organization may also have influenced the amount and type of information they provided.

Of the participating companies, half have formal and established diversity programs. For this reason, these individuals are "well versed" regarding their organization's diversity efforts. Participants from organizations without formal programs may have struggled to organize their thoughts in order to communicate their organization's approach to diversity.

An additional limitation in this study was my own personal bias because I am a member of Generation X, one of the two generations explored in this research. Qualitative approaches are subjective and biased, however. As the researcher for this study, I attempted to minimize my influence on the participants through use of the respondent interview approach.

These results cannot be generalized to other organizations of similar characteristics because of the study's small sample size of 10 participants. Although an interview approach was effective for gathering necessary information, other research approaches could be used. For example, a case study would allow for an in-depth study of an organization, enabling the researcher to explore the culture to identify its strategy or strategies, surface its cultural norms, and interact with its leadership and members. Future research might use alternative methods to study organizational understanding of generational differences. For example, enlarging the sample size to include several organizations of similar business or industry types (e.g., financial, manufacturing) and

organizational size may provide a better picture of factors that influence understanding of generational differences.

Future research should further examine generational differences in organizations. Some areas of study that could be pursued are: (1) How do union environments adapt to new workforce generations; (2) How do generational family ownerships influence understanding of generational differences; (3) What generational differences exist in different industries?

Much opportunity exists for future research on generations and organizational strategies. For example, one might look at preferences of organizational strategy by generation. Another study might examine the preference of generational communication styles in comparison to organizational strategy communication approaches. A phenomenological study might examine individual employees of different generations to learn about their experiences with other generation(s) within an organization. Finally, a future qualitative study might look at Boomers or Xers, or both, whose generational challenges are compounded by another difference (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation).

Final Thoughts

My purpose for this study was to initiate research to understand the factors that influence an organization's ability to understand generational differences and to explore how organizational strategy further influences understanding of Baby Boomers and Generation Xers. The strength of this study lies in its having been a completely

untouched topic. As an exploratory study, however, conclusions are difficult to draw, but I have attempted to do so. The findings cannot generalize to all organizations; however, they certainly provide some good groundwork for future research in this area.

It is evident that organizations have not formally acknowledged generational differences in their definitions of diversity. Organizations have embraced many differences, such as age, gender, ethnicity, race, and religion. Yet the question remains, why not generations? Are generations less obvious than these other differences? Or does acknowledging generational differences thereby acknowledge diversity in all of us? After all, we all belong to a generation regardless of whether we match its profile or not. Acknowledging or encountering generational differences may enter a comfort zone organizations are not ready for. That is, admitting that *everyone* is diverse. Diversity is not limited to racial and ethnic diversity as some might think. It applies to everyone in some way.

To put it more directly: Who knew that the year you were born would make you diverse?

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Appendix A

IRB EXEMPTION LETTER

University of Nebraska Medical Center

NEBRASKA'S HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER
A Partner with Nebraska Health System

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Office of Regulatory Affairs (ORA)

February 3, 2003

Sharon Pettid
UNO Communication
UNO - VIA COURIER

IRB#: 022-03-EX

TITLE OF PROTOCOL: Baby Boomers and Generation X: How Organizations Understand Differences of Employees

Dear Ms. Pettid:

The IRB has reviewed your Exemption Form for the above-titled research project. According to the information provided, this project is exempt under 45 CFR 46:101b, category 2. You are therefore authorized to begin the research.

It is understood this project will be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines. It is also understood that the IRB will be immediately notified of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project.

Please be advised that the IRB has a maximum protocol approval period of three years from the original date of approval and release. If this study continues beyond the three year approval period, the project must be resubmitted in order to maintain an active approval status.

Sincerely,

Ernest Prentice, PhD/NOK

Ernest D. Prentice, Ph.D.
Co-Chair, IRB

EDP/gdk

Appendix B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

IRB# 022-03-EX

University of Nebraska Omaha

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
Department of Communication
Broadcasting Journalism Speech

Informed Consent Form

Project Title: Baby Boomers and Generation X: How Organizations Understand The Generational Differences of Employees

INVITATION

You are invited to participate in this research study. The information in this consent form is provided to help you decide whether to participate. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

WHY ARE YOU ELIGIBLE?

You are eligible to participate because you are employed in a diversity and/or human resources management position for a large company (150+ employees).

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this project is to examine the influence of organizational strategies on understanding the generational differences of Baby Boomers (born between 1940 and 1960) and Generation X (born between 1960 and 1980). The goal of this study is to determine what factors influence an organization's ability to understand generational differences. In addition, this study will examine the organizational benefits of understanding generational differences.

WHAT DOES THIS STUDY INVOLVE?

This study will be completed by April 2003. Your study involvement consists of one 1-hour audio taped interview session. Your interview is audio taped for simplicity of transcription for data coding.

HOW WILL YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?

The only persons who will have access to your research records (i.e., field notes, audio tape) are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and any other person or agency required by law. The information from this study will be published to fulfill the requirement of thesis for Sharon Rues Pettid, University of Nebraska at Omaha but your identity and your organization's identity will be kept confidential. No appearance of your name, title, company, or company's industry will be referenced.

Participant's Initials _____

3-13-03

6001 Dodge Street / Omaha, NE 68182-0112
402-554-2600 / 402-554-2520 / FAX: 402-554-3836

IRB# 022-03-EX

WHAT ARE YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?

You have rights as a research participant. These rights are explained in *The Rights of Research Participants*, which you have been given. If you have questions concerning your rights, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 402.559.6463.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF YOU DECIDE NOT TO PARTICIPATE?

You can decide not to participate in this study or withdraw from this study at any time.

DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

YOU ARE VOLUNTARILY MAKING A DECISION WHETHER TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH. YOUR SIGNATURE MEANS THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTOOD THE INFORMATION PRESENTED AND DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE. YOUR SIGNATURE ALSO MEANS THAT THE INFORMATION ON THIS CONSENT FORM HAS BEEN FULLY EXPLAINED TO YOU AND ALL YOUR QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED TO YOUR SATISFACTION. IF YOU THINK OF ANY ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS DURING THE STUDY, YOU SHOULD CONTACT THE INVESTIGATOR(S). YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM.

_____ _____

Signature of participant **Date**

I CERTIFY THAT ALL ELEMENTS OF INFORMED CONSENT DESCRIBED ON THIS CONSENT FORM HAVE BEEN EXPLAINED FULLY TO THE PARTICIPANT. IN MY JUDGEMENT, THE PARTICIPANT IS VOLUNTARILY AND KNOWINGLY GIVING INFORMED CONSENT AND POSSESSES THE LEGAL CAPACITY TO GIVE INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH.

_____ _____

Signature of investigator **Date**

Principal Investigator
Sharon Rues Pettid
Cellular 402.968.8017
Home 402.896.1744

Thesis Adviser
Dr. Randall Rose
University of Nebraska at Omaha
Communication Department
Office 402.554.4850

Appendix C

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

1. How does your organization define diversity?

2. What are your employees' expectations of the organization in managing diversity?

3. How does your organization help diverse groups fit into the organization?

4. How does your organization's structure or hierarchy influence the handling of generational diversity?

5. Describe your organization's strategy or strategies for motivating employees to understand the generational differences of your employees.

6. Does your organization employ different motivational strategies for different generational groups? Please explain.

7. Describe how your organization's leadership approach influences the handling of generational diversity.

8. How does your organization communicate about diversity and employee differences? Please give some examples.

9. How effective do you think your organization's communications regarding generational diversity are?

10. What kind of diversity or employee difference training programs has your organization developed to help employees deal with diversity and employee differences? How effective are these programs?

11. How does understanding generational diversity benefit your organization?