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### **Generational Differences in the Workplace: Thinking Outside the Boxes**

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**Abstract:** Generational differences in contemporary work settings are popular topics that are lacking rigorous empirical research. Contemporary workplaces are complex, necessitating knowledge on the part of managers and human resource personnel of generational diversity. This article seeks to explore generational diversity variability by conducting several in-depth interviews with managers across multiple generations. Responses are assessed using Mannheim's theory of generations. Findings indicate that technological changes spur differences in communication styles across generations; increased access to media lie at the root of these difference.

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## INTRODUCTION

Generational differences in the workplace have been the topic of volumes of books, countless articles, a number of academic research papers and are reflected in popular culture. Employers need knowledge of differences in communication style between generational cohorts. Employers and entrepreneurs that want to regain or retain relevance seek to understand their employees' talents and how they interact with others. A 1969 Gallup Survey revealed that 74% of Americans believed there was a "generation gap" (Pew, 2010). Pew Research Center (2010) (Pew) conducted a follow up survey in 2009 that found this belief increased to 79% (Pew, 2010). Research on management of multigenerational workplaces indicates that the basis of tension may stem from generational differences in work norms and communication style. It is proposed that advanced communication technology usage lie at the core of these differences. Data from two Pew studies regarding generational technology usage seem to support such claims. To assist in the examination of the connection between communication technology usage and generational differences in the workplace, I first turn to Karl Mannheim's generational theory.

### Generational Theory

In Mannheim's (Mannheim, 1952, p. 292) 'The Problem of Generations,' he posits "the social phenomenon 'generation' represents nothing more than a particular kind of identity of location, embracing 'age groups' embedded in a historical-social process." For Mannheim, generation is not a concrete group, but a 'similar location' of individuals in a social structure (Mannheim, 1952, p. 292). In order to be similarly located individuals must historically experience similar events and cultural knowledge. Merely being born in the same

year does not in itself create a similarity of location (Mannheim, 1952). For example, two individuals born in two distinctly different societies in the same time period would not find themselves 'similarly located'. In order for one to be 'similarly located' within a generation, an individual must participate similar social processes, experience similar historical events, and be exposed to similar cultural information.

Mannheim likened generation location to class position. Like class position, a generation is not a concrete group in which participants must be consciously aware of their belonging. "For any group of individuals sharing the same class position, society always appears under the same aspect, familiarized by constantly repeated experience" (Mannheim, 1952, p. 291). Just as class location can be explained in terms of economic and social conditions, generational location can be explained by patterns of experience and thought in the process of data transmission from one generation to the next (Mannheim, 1952). This is a continuous process because people are constantly being born and are constantly dying. Members of any single generation are limited to a section of the process; transmission of cultural knowledge from the old to the young is endless (Mannheim, 1952).

When we juxtapose this continuous lifecycle process with typical generational models, we begin to see that there is as much change within generations; rather than generational blocks, a gradient of change emerges. Mannheim refers to this gradual change as social rejuvenation.

The continuous emergence of new human beings certainly results in some loss of accumulated cultural possessions; but, on the other hand, it alone makes a fresh selection possible when it becomes necessary; it facilitates reevaluation of our inventory and

teaches us both to forget that which has yet to be won...all psychic and cultural data only really exist in so far as they are produced and reproduced in the present: hence past experience is only relevant when it exists concretely incorporated in the present (Mannheim, 1952, p. 294).

Social and cultural accumulations of knowledge are transmitted from the old to the young. Relevant information is accepted and utilized by the younger group, while outdated information fades away and becomes replaced by newer information and practices that are more relevant to their lives.

Pew (2010) data reflects the gradient-model in their findings. As shown in Table 1, Pew ranked the top five open-ended responses of four generations regarding what makes their generation unique. It seems that as technology appears as a conscious identifier of generational distinction, intrinsic value responses (honest, work ethic, respectful) begin to fade away. Technology ranked number one for Generation X yielding 12% of the responses, followed by work ethic at number two, and respect at number five. Technology ranked number one for Millennials also, but yields twice the response of Generation X. There were no intrinsic values in the top five for Millennials, instead music/pop culture and clothes shows up in their place (Pew, 2010).

McMullin, Cameau and Jovic's (2007) study of information technology (IT) workers find that these respondents prioritized generation over other bases of difference (gender, race, education etc.). It appears that support for a gradient-model is evident in their responses, as most of their respondents vaguely refer to the disadvantaged generation of IT workers as one that is slightly older than their self (McMullin, Cameau & Jovic, 2007).

While these changes may be subtle between pupil and teacher, greater distinctions appear in the data as time between groups becomes greater. This process is rendered more seamless because it is continual; generations are in constant contact with one another. Mannheim asserts that it is not the oldest that meet the youngest at once, but that first contacts are made by other intermediary generations less removed. Mannheim (1952) believes that different interpretations of the world could be a point of tension between adjacent cohorts, but this tension could be assuaged through reciprocal learning (Mannheim, 1952). That is, the teacher teaches the pupil, and the pupil teaches the teacher something in return. Reith (2005) similarly argues "technology has introduced to Millennials the reversal of the parent as teacher and child as student schema that has been the norm since the beginning of time" (Reith, 2005, p. 323). While, for Mannheim, this is a relatively normal response to a changing society, Reith may be pointing to this particular situation as the first time in history that we have seen a role reversal of this magnitude, i.e., whereby highly technical devices are better understood by the child rather than the older more experienced parent.

Mannheim posits that a generation takes shape on the individual level somewhere between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five, whereby "personal experimentation with life begins" (Mannheim, 1952, p. 300). It is during these years that a distinctive personal outlook on the world emerges, which he believes individuals use as the basis for comparison of all future events (Schuman & Scott, 1989). Regardless of whether affirming or negating their initial understanding formed during this time period, an individual will disproportionately refer back to these initial experiences as a

**Table 1. What Makes Your Generation Unique?**

Millennial	Gen X	Boomer	Silent
1. Technology use (24%)	Technology use (12%)	Work ethic (17%)	WWII/Depression (14%)
2. Music/Pop culture (11%)	Work Ethic (11%)	Respectful (14%)	Smarter (13%)
3. Liberal/tolerant (7%)	Conservative/Trad'l (7%)	Values/Morals (8%)	Honest (12%)
4. Smarter (6%)	Smarter (6%)	"Baby Boomers" (6%)	Work ethic (10%)
5. Clothes (5%)	Respectful (5%)	Smarter (5%)	Values/Morals (10%)

*Note:* Based on respondents who said their generation was unique/distinct. Items represent individual, open-ended responses. Top five responses are shown for each age group. Sample sizes for sub-groups are as follows: Millennials, n=527; Gen X n=173; Boomers, n=283; Silent, n=205. Pew Research Center (February 24, 2010).

point of comparison in order to evaluate their most recent experiences.

Schuman and Schott (1989) find support for this idea in their study on generational memories. They conclude that different cohorts seem to recall events or changes that largely occurred during late adolescence and early adulthood years. Sze Chong Lin (2010) also finds support for this concept regarding technology usage, however, the formative years indicated for technology seem to be a bit different. This study finds that the ease or difficulty with which an individual engages a new technological device can largely be explained by what type of devices they learned to operate between the ages of ten and thirty.

Pilcher (1994) emphasizes Spitzer's concerns regarding the ambiguity of drawing generational lines discussed in his 1973 critique of Mannheim's work. While this is certainly an issue worthy of discussion, Mannheim acknowledges this issue, stating:

Even more difficult is it to find the natural beginning of the generation series, because birth and death in society as a whole follow continuously one upon the other, and full intervals exist only in the individual family where there is a definite period before children attain marriageable age (Mannheim, 1952, p. 278).

Here Mannheim acknowledges that drawing the line is a difficult process because the process is in fact continual. By the very nature of this system, there seems to be little consensus as to the exact years in which a single generation ends and the next one begins. Therefore, the line drawn between these cohorts may vary several years in either direction.

Mannheim also acknowledges that 'generation' can be interpreted both in familial terms as well as in societal terms. As such, there certainly is merit to Spitzer and Pilcher's concerns. The way in which we define generational cohorts has implications for how we attribute meaning to them. However, Mannheim's continual process model reminds us that we simply use 'generation' as a means of grouping cohorts based on similar patterns of behavior and thought. Thus, generation is merely a social construct and that generational distinctions may only become apparent in societies where social change occurs rather rapidly. In agrarian peasant societies, for example, in which very little may change over an individual's lifespan, generational distinctions would likely go undetected (Schuman & Scott, 1989; Mannheim, 1952). Our understanding of generation is merely a byproduct of social change, therefore chosen demarcations between cohorts is always subjective.

## **GENERATION PROFILES**

This study focuses on the three dominant generations in the contemporary workplace: Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. The Baby Boom generation has generally been defined as having been born between 1946 and 1964 and is the largest cohort of the twentieth century. This generation grew up in a time of national economic prosperity, witnessed the growth of the suburbs, and was raised among strong nuclear families (Cekada, 2012; Carlson, 2009). Baby Boomers experienced the Vietnam War, advancement of women in educational attainment career opportunities, and lived by the mantra: "Sex, drugs, and rock and roll" (Shragay & Tziner, 2011; Carlson, 2009). It has also been asserted that they are loyal competitive workaholics who have difficulties balancing their private and work lives.

Members of Generation X were born somewhere between 1965 and 1979. This cohort grew up amongst rising divorce rates and an increasing number of working moms. Children of this generation were often referred to as 'latchkey kids' because they typically came home to an empty house (Cekada, 2012). Generation X is famously known to be cynical, presumably because they experienced corporate downsizing, the AIDS epidemic, the War on Drugs, and a turbulent economic climate. It has been said that they are viewed as slackers by Baby Boomers because they are known to switch jobs more than previous generations. They were also the first generation to be considered computer literate, delay marriage and parenthood, and to have more women graduate college than men (Carlson, 2009).

Millennials, sometimes referred to as Generation Y, were born between 1980 and 2000. This generation has been said to be the most racially diverse generation in United States history, with more than one-

third of this cohort being non-white (Reith, 2005). Millennials are just as numerous as the Baby Boom generation, and it is believed they will add a larger share of immigrants than the first generation to arrive on American soil (Carlson, 2009). This cohort experienced Columbine, 9/11, celebrity scandals and a whole new wave of technologies (Gibson, Greenwood & Murphy, 2009). Millennials have been entangled with technology since birth, staying connected through email, instant messaging, and cell phones (Reith, 2005). They are believed to be socially conscious, but also highly cynical and narcissistic (Constanza, Badger, Fraser, Severt & Gade, 2012).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Gibson, Greenwood, and Murphy (2009) find these profiles accurate. In their study, 5,057 respondents from three generations (Baby Boomer, Generation X and Millennial) were asked to rank a list of values in order from most important to least important. Although the article claims that this value ranking verifies generational profiles, there does not seem to be strong evidence for this claim. Value rankings only display slight shifts between generations. It may be that each cohort interpreted the meanings of these values differently. Twenge (2012) conducts a similar study examining life goal differences between Millennials and Baby Boomers at the same age comparing the Monitoring the Future Survey (MTF) and the American Freshman Survey (AFS). It is believed Millennials are more civic minded and socially aware. Compared to Baby Boomers at the same age in their careers, Millennials considered extrinsic values (money, fame, image) more important than intrinsic values (self-acceptance, affiliation, community). This may be because early twenty-first century American high schools require community

service as a graduation requirement, which explains why it would appear that this cohort were more prone to volunteerism. Prior cohorts faced no such requirements. Interest in social problems, political participation, trust in governments, and pro-environment action declined dramatically between the Baby Boomer and the Millennial generation cohorts.

Ferres (2003) measures level of trust, commitment, and intention to turnover between Generation X and older employees. Based on the generational profiles, one would assume that Generation X would be less loyal and more likely to leave the company than older workers. After polling 83 Generation X workers and 151 older employees, the data revealed that there were no differences found between the groups for levels of commitment to the company or trust. Generation X did however display lower continuance commitment, which is thought to be due to perceived job opportunities elsewhere. Costanza (2012) finds similar results from a meta-analysis of findings from twenty academic journals. A cross-sectional design is employed to assess the degree to which a relationship exists between generation, organizational commitment, and intent to stay. Costanza's findings indicate that substantive differences among generations probably do not exist.

Shragay and Tziner (2011) examine the effect of generation on job involvement, work satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB is the contribution of employees to the organization above and beyond the official demands of the job). A questionnaire was posted online for one month; 133 participants responded. The expectation based on previous literature is that Generation X respondents would be less committed and Baby Boomers would display higher levels of OCB due to their workaholic nature. To the contrary, the data

reveals that Generation X employees were more committed to the job than Baby Boomers and displayed the strongest and most positive effects on job involvement and OCB. In short, their findings suggest that job satisfaction does not depend on generation or age. Shragay and Tziner (2011) suggest there is no need to bridge the generation gap, for it seems to have bridged itself.

Sze Chong Lin (2010) explores the affects prior knowledge and usage of information and communication technology (ICT) on adaptability to new ICT products. Both a case study of twelve participants and a cross-sectional study of thirty-five volunteers are employed to determine how past knowledge and experience with various technologies affect the learning curve of various cohorts. This study grouped generational cohorts into three technological eras: the mechanical era (before 1930), the 'electro-mechanical' era (c. 1930 to c. 1960), and the 'digital software' era (after c. 1960). Sze Chong Lin (2010) bases his study off a 1993 Weymann and Sackaman study that asserts people who have used or experienced certain technologies during their formative years (ages ten to twenty-five) might also exhibit similar usage behavior in later years. Findings show that older adult participants find present day devices difficult to use because they belong to a different technological generation. Sze Chong Lin (2010) suggests that the formative ages in which individuals acquire values, norms, attitudes, behaviors, and skills should be between ten and thirty.

McMullin, Cameau and Jovic (2007) examine the concept of generation in relation to innovations in computing technology and assess whether and how it is used to create cultures of difference in the workplace. This study draws upon an international study of information technology (IT) work, 'Workforce Aging in

the New Economy'. Open-ended interview data from 141 IT workers from small firms (between 4 and 21 workers) across three Canadian locales are extracted and examined for this study. The study finds that 'there was evident 'generational connection' in their exposure to technology form their growing years" (McMullin, Cameau & Jovic, 2007, p. 297). The interviews reveal that nearly all respondents spoke of a generational advantage of younger IT workers. Although there were significant discrepancies about how 'young' this younger generation was, it was perceived as one just slightly younger than their self. Members of all generations used generational discourse to frame discussions of technology expertise and ability.

Pew Research Center (2010) (Pew) reports on the values, behaviors and demographic characteristics of the Millennial generation. Findings in this study are largely based on the results of 2,020 telephone surveys conducted between January 14 through 27, 2010, on landline and cell phones in both English and Spanish. Data for this study also draws on findings from two other Pew Research Center surveys regarding changing attitudes on work and generational differences. Research shows three-quarters of Millennials report having a profile on a social networking site compared to 30% of Generation X and 6% of Baby Boomers. Millennials (88%) use their phones for texting significantly more than both Generation X (77%) and Baby Boomers (51%). Behavior differences within the Millennial generation also emerge. Younger Millennials are more likely than older Millennials to use social networking sites, and to send and receive more text messages per day. Nearly six-in-ten respondents report work ethic as one of the biggest differences between young and old, three-fourths of respondents claim that older people have a better work ethic.

Research also indicates Millennials are less religious, less likely to have served in the military, and are on track to become the most educated generation in American history. Finally, more than half (54%) of Millennials have at least some college education, compared with Generation X (49%) and Baby Boomers (36%).

Zickuhr and Smith (2012) examine who is most likely to go online and own digital devices. Data from Pew Internet Project tracking survey serves as the primary resource for this report. Landline and cellphone surveys collected 2,260 responses from adult's age 18 and older over the course of one month in 2011. Findings suggest both age and educational attainment represents one of the most pronounced gaps in Internet access. Under half (43%) of adults who have not completed high school use the Internet compared to almost three-quarters (74%) of high school graduates, and nearly all (94%) college graduates. Roughly half (48%) of non-internet users report not going online because they feel it is not relevant to their lives. Data reveals 63% of Millennials with less than a high school education own a smartphone, compared to 70% of Millennials with at least some college experience. The gap grows larger for older generations. Smartphone ownership for Baby Boomers (22%) with less than a high school education is exactly half of Baby Boomers (44%) with at least some college experience. Even though Internet users age sixty-five and older are still relatively small in number, data indicates they represent one of the fastest growing segments of new users to social-networking sites.

## **HYPOTHESIS**

I hypothesize that technological change, not differences in generational belief, affects communication variability across generational cohorts. As younger

generations lead lives dominated by digital media and instant communication devices, it is likely that this has created a sort of *digital divide* between older and younger generations. Typically digital divide refers to those who have access to information technology and those who do not. In this case it has been modified to also refer to technological literacy. This study proposes that the generational differences that exist within the workplace can be largely attributed to this divide. The issues we experience are essentially a form of anomie (rapid advancement results in tension based on literacy and use levels of various contemporary technologies) caused by material social facts that are pushing society forward (Communication technology and increased access to new forms of information media). Based on Karl Mannheim's perception that an individual's frame of reference is based on experiences that largely occur between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five, it is believed that the communication media technologies prevalent during these years for each individual interviewed will be reflected in their communication preferences.

H1: Communication and media technologies prevalent between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five will be reflected in the individual's technological behavior and communication preference.

Borrowing from Mannheim's concept of reciprocal learning, it is believed that older generations who currently use new technologies for communication and media (e.g. smartphones, tablets, laptops etc.) were introduced and taught by younger generations less removed. Based on the continuous life process, explained by Mannheim, which essentially creates a gradient-like separation between age groups, it is likely that we will find a 'trickle-up' effect of younger cohorts teaching older

cohorts. It is expected that the greatest technological literacy will be found at the younger end of the spectrum.

H2: Older generations will report that members from a younger generation have instructed them how to operate newer technologies. Younger generations will also report the highest levels of technological literacy.

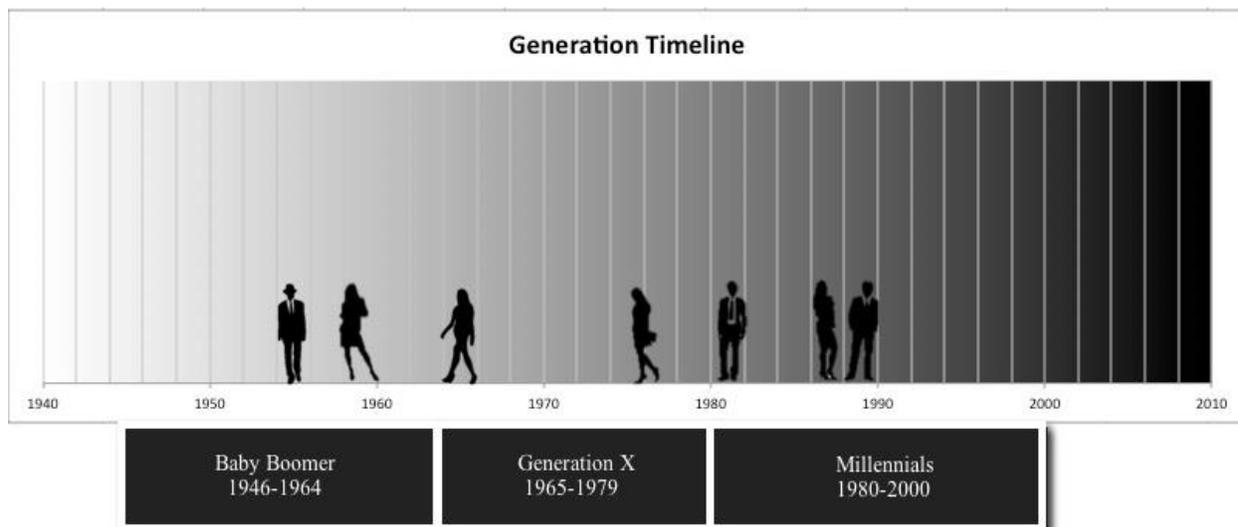
Employing the gradient-model (Figure 1) of gradual separation of age cohorts once more, it is expected that individuals will report greater similarities of technological usage and communication preference based on age proximity rather than which generational category they happen to belong to.

H3: Individuals closest in age will report greater similarities in technological usage and communication preference regardless of which generational category they belong to.

H0: There is no relationship between generational membership, technology usage and communication preference.

## METHODS

A qualitative exploratory study was conducted in which seven managers from three different generational cohorts (2 Baby Boomer, 3 Gen X, 2 Gen Y) were interviewed. Questions regarding working in a multigenerational workplace, and their individual experience and usage patterns of modern communication technology were posed to each individual. All managers interviewed work for the same retail corporation representing four stores in the same market. The concept of modern technology was purposefully left vague in order to prompt respondents to express their ideas as to what constitutes modern technology. Managerial experience of these seven managers range from six months to thirty years, ranging in age from twenty-four



to fifty-eight years; there is a thirty-four year age difference between the youngest and oldest manager.

Six out of seven managers reported having an associates degree or greater. All managers interviewed reported owning a smartphone. The four youngest managers reported being a user of social media, while the three oldest managers reported having never used social media. Each manager was asked the same twenty open-ended questions. Responses were recorded, transcribed and analyzed for patterns.

The purpose of this study was to support or reject each of the hypotheses formulated from the work of Karl Mannheim, in addition to exploring the relationship between technological literacy, usages patterns, and management-communication style across generations. Due to the low sample size findings will only prompt whether or not further exploration of this proposed relationship is warranted.

### Findings

H1: Support found. An interesting trend found among the four oldest managers were their observations of younger associates behavior regarding courtesy and communication. All four managers grew up with little or no access to modern communication technology. Only the

youngest of the four, Generation X manager 2 (X2), mentioned TV as the source of entertainment growing up, and the three oldest reports playing with neighborhood friends as the dominant activity.

Managers across all cohorts report currently using both phone calls and text messaging when communicating with family and friends. Four out of seven managers reported text messaging as their primary means of communication. The four youngest managers all reported text messaging to be the dominant form of communication, while the oldest manager still prefers making phone calls. Both Baby Boom generation managers (BB1 & BB2) began using text messaging because others insisted on sending text messages:

I get texts all the time ‘have a good day’ or ‘have a nice day’ but a telephone call would probably be better for me...I call 90% of the time, they are texting me 75% of the time (BB1, age 58).

I actually text now, which came about in the last few years...mainly because my sister and niece are a great deal younger than me, and its their way of communicating...so it was either I start doing it with them or I don’t get to talk to them. (BB2, age 54)

As seen in Table 2, both Baby Boom managers report phone calls and letter writing as their primary means of communication with family and friends during high school and college. Both Generation X managers reported face-to-face communication and phone calls, while all millennial managers reported using some form of instant messaging as their primary means of communication during high school and college.

Findings suggest that older cohorts reliance on interpersonal interaction during their adolescent and early adulthood years helped to shape their communication preferences. Since letter writing and face-to-face interaction were the dominant means of communication for the oldest managers, written or verbally expressed courtesy may be viewed as an important part of interpersonal communication. A pattern emerges in the four oldest managers responses:

...older generations are more customer service friendly...I find that I have to coach younger generation to say "please," "thank you" or "may I help you".... they don't develop relationships. They use technology to say what they want to say but its no interaction between bodies (BB1, age 58).

I always notice when we leave at night the younger generation always have their phones out text messaging and checking their messages to see what they missed out on...sometimes I don't know how to communicate with them or what is important to them or how to relate to them (BB2, age 54)

Older generations just want to do their job and they want some praise and they want to please you...younger kids want instant gratification, want you to notice things right away... and they are not as respectful (X1, age 48)

The younger generation does not seem to be as responsible as older generations. They seem to be more apt to call in, more apt to use their cell phone on the floor, and more apt to talk back to authority (X2, age 37)

No Millennial manager mentioned any courtesy or communication issues when referring to younger generation associates. These differing perspectives may be due to the distance modern communication technology has created between individuals. Individuals who grew up connecting to others via communication technology may have less of a need for verbal or written courtesy cues since instant messaging (IM) and text-messaging tends to be terse, while letter writing or face-to-face communication is more intimate and thoughtful. Karl Mannheim's concept of social rejuvenation seems to shed light here. Verbal curtsey cues may have begun to disappear due to modern communication technology being predicated on the speed rather than the quality of the response. Thus curtsey cues may no longer be useful for those engaged in this sort of communication. However, curtsey cues do seem to appear in instant communication via emoticons. While older generations prefer to express themselves verbally, younger generations may display curtsey in a different form (e.g. sarcasm and tonality of the voice may be playful and endearing to younger generations while older generations may perceive this as disrespectful or rude). It is possible that the social distance modern communication technology creates decreases the intimacy of the interaction. In such a situation, emotion may be lost in the speed and pithiness of the conversation, thus not showing up in their face-to-face interaction. Cohorts that grew up with this understanding of communication may not

**Table 2.** *Primary Means of Communication in High School and College*

Generation	Response
BB1	Phone, Letter Writing
BB2	Phone, In Person, Letter Writing
X1	Phone, In Person
X2	In Person
M1	Cell Phone
M2	Text, IM
M3	Facebook, IM, Text

*Note:* Managers listed by birth order. BB= Baby Boomer manager; X=Generation X manager; M=Millennial manager.

realize they are violating the communication norms held by older cohorts.

H2: Some support found. Two of the three oldest managers (BB2, X1) reported learning how to use new technology from younger family members and coworkers. The oldest manager (BB1) reports that consulting a manual and learning through trial and error as the primary means of learning new technology. This manager also reported a higher literacy rate than most managers, rating their self as 75% efficient. The next oldest two managers (BB2, X1) report much lower self-assessments of technological literacy (BB2 claims to be novice at home, but proficient at work, while X1 reports having low technological literacy). The youngest four managers all report considerably higher literacy rates.

The oldest three managers report regular use of modern technology as occurring between their early twenties to the late thirties. The youngest four all began using computers between elementary and junior high school years. There seems to be evidence of the digital divide suggested above. The oldest three managers were well into adulthood when they began using communication technology regularly, while the youngest four managers grew up using these technologies. The oldest manager appears to have kept up with technology

from the inception of household computers, therefore this manager may have had less of a need to learn from younger individuals. This same manager added that their 84-year-old mother currently uses Facebook and online banking/bill pay; she was taught how to use it by a younger relative.

H3 Support found. As seen in Figure 1, the generational differences found in this study may better be explained using the gradient-model discussed above. X1 shared similar preferences in communication style with Baby Boomer managers than with either of the Generation X managers. X2, the manager closest to the middle of the spectrum, share similarities with both older and younger cohorts, advising other managers to treat everyone the same. This advice may be due to their generational position—the relative middle—creating the impression that this person does not have to act much differently in either direction. This manager was the oldest manager to report being able to communicate with and understand younger associates better than the older managers. Mannheim’s contention that intermediate cohorts buffer tension between generations seems to be valid in this case.

Seems like with the younger generation I can control them a little bit

better. I don't know if it is because they can relate to me as far as shared interests...even though we are not the same generation, I can still understand parts of their generation. (X2, age 37)

## **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES**

Limitations of this study include the broadness of the topic in relation to the depth of the interview questions posed. As all managers worked for the same retail corporation in the same market, much different results may be produced in different sectors and markets. Some managers were pre-exposed to generational training, which may have influenced their responses. Finally, all interviews were conducted under limited time constraints, which may have also influenced responses, two of which were interrupted and had to resume several minutes later. Though this study did provide some more insight into this subject, future studies should examine the impact technology has made on perceived curtesy. Is this something that has been lost due to lack of usefulness, or has it changed form to fit with the new high-speed highly technical climate?

## **CONCLUSION**

Although the generational profiles seem to have some merit, most of them are lacking empirical scientific support. It is important that companies recognize this as a problem if they wish to invest resources into generational management training. Much of the literature on this topic focuses on political events, as well as familial and economic climates as the catalyst for these differences despite providing little support for these assertions. It is believed that rapid technological advances in communication and other daily technologies are the driving force behind communication breakdowns between younger and older cohorts, assuming communication is the root of the

problem. Data indicates education attainment may also play a significant role in the digital divide, revealing that as education increases so does technology usage. This begs the question, is it technology or education that best explain these changes?

Due to the nature of retail, it is important to acknowledge that generational membership may be less of a factor than mere age itself. Younger employees have much less at stake than older cohorts, typically having the safety net of their parents to fall back on. Lack of maturity, lack of responsibility, and parental support may better explain the difficulty of managing younger generation employees. One manager put it best:

A big challenge that we do have in this retail environment is that people are not career oriented here. They are working here just to get a paycheck. It is very hard to try and motivate those people because they are just here...they are not invested in the company, and they are not invested in the success of the company. The biggest challenge is trying to get people invested in making this [company] successful (X1, age 48).

Pilcher (1994) concludes that more sociological research must be done on generations, and that Mannheim provides a stimulating point of departure. Mannheim's argument that rapidly changing societies create generational distinctions provides a sound basis for generational research. It becomes clear that our society is changing rapidly when we examine the lives of elderly individuals. My grandmother, for example, lived an amazing ninety-seven years. Born in rural Kentucky in 1916, she inherited a life where horse and carriage, oil lamps, and outhouses were the norm. When she passed in 2013 the world was different than the world she knew as a child. In her

small community she witnessed an agricultural dominated way of life shrivel up and factories take root. With them fast food, Wal-Mart, and a litany of other service based jobs settled in the town. She watched her grandchildren play outside with sticks and mud pies, and watched her great-grandchildren sit inside playing with iPads. There is no doubt that the norms, values, and life expectations my grandmother acquired in her youth are different for her great-grandchildren. If the world has changed this much over the course of one individual's lifetime, it is clear that a person's behavior can be, in part, explained according to when they came into the world and how they learned to communicate.

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