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WORKER BEHAVIORS TO ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE: HOW A GENERATIONAL WORKFORCE RESPONDS TO A COMPANY ACQUISITION

By

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A DISSERTATION

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study is to develop a better understanding on how a generational workforce responds to significant change. The significant change is a global company acquisition, which the researcher defines as revolutionary. The change is considered revolutionary because it is the first time the researcher’s company (Company A), a U.S. based domestic services Company, has been acquired by a significantly larger, globally based organization (Company B). Prior to the acquisition, Company A had completed a joint merger and acquisition with a company of similar assets. New leadership, new systems, and new protocols were implemented as a result of the global acquisition. The generational workforce under study is classified as Traditionals, Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials, all simultaneously working within the researcher’s company. One-on-one interviews with senior management, and focus group sessions with non-management staff was conducted to gather opinion, attitudes, and beliefs about workplace values, the impact of culture in the workplace amongst generational workers, differences in generational workplace ethics, and the significance of operational continuity when change occurs. The study helped the researcher gain a better understanding on the importance of culture-sharing groups, generational knowledge, and how the individual company can meet the challenges of operational disruption through knowledge management.

Keywords: Organizational Change, Generational Cohort, Workplace values

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School: Creighton University
Dedication

Thank you is extended to the Executive Leadership team at Company A for providing permission to conduct the study on site to complete the doctoral program. This work would not have been accomplished without the participation of Company A employees. Thank you to Dr. Gretchen Oltman for helping me to understand the doctoral writing process better, Amy Bauman for proofreading, and Dr. Leah Georges for advising through encouragement.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Organizational change (OC), particularly changes in company culture, can be challenging and problematic, specifically for the workers who are tasked with managing the demands of change. Bettignies and Boddewyn (1971) described OC as wholesale change ranging from leadership to branding to systems to culture. OC can have positive and negative impacts on the company’s operations. Druid (2010) wrote that mental stress, loss of loyalty, and increased time away from work are just a few negative impacts to consider. Nevertheless, only in a few cases have researchers explicitly considered how culturally shared generational differences explain affective, cognitive, and behavioral reactions to OC (Oreg & Michel, 2013). As Oreg and Michel (2013) suggested, further research that takes such considerations is likely to yield valuable insights. The researcher’s company (Company A) in this study endured such a change, an acquisition, which many of the company’s leaders considered significant.

Company A is a small privately held company operating in North America that became a leader in providing learning services to postsecondary educational institutions in the mid-90s through the turn of the century. The company’s leadership and business model served as an expert resource for academic institutions in need of capital infusion, program development, marketing, and technology support to grow a new student demographic: the adult online learner. Company A employed a hybrid workforce of generational cohort members that included Traditionals, Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials. As the American Management Association (2014) asserted, each group has its own distinct characteristics, values, and attitudes toward work, based on its
generation’s life experiences. Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (2000) described generational cohorts as groups of people who share birth years, history, and a collective personality as a result of their defining experiences.

Table 1

Defined Characteristics of Four Generational Cohort Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Profile</th>
<th>Traditionals</th>
<th>Baby Boomers</th>
<th>Generation Xers</th>
<th>Millennials</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outlook</strong></td>
<td>Practical</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>Skeptical</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Work Ethic</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Perspective</strong></td>
<td>Civic</td>
<td>Team</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Civic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Generational cohort characteristics table From University of Iowa School of Social Work (2009).

Table 1 provides a profile and characteristic traits of the four generational cohorts employed by Company A.

Company A was acquired in October, 2012, by a significantly larger and globally foot-printed company (Company B) with assets that far exceeded the scope of Company A with 40,000 employees in more than 80 countries. Company A employed less than 500 employees in North America with two site operations in the United States and one site operation in Canada. National publications such as *Bloomberg BusinessWeek* and
Forbes asserted that the acquisition would boost adjusted earnings per share and generate a return on invested capital above Company B’s weighted average cost of capital from 2014. Other media outlets, such as Inside Higher Ed commented on the positive implications for Company B, stating that it was a good deal at a good price and that Company A’s leadership team was very impressive.

Although there are numerous studies on the positive impacts of an acquisition, such as improving profits and productivity of a company (Coontz, 2004; Dickerson et al., 1989), as with any significant organizational change, there was some level of uncertainty experienced by the workforce that could undermine Company A’s ability to remain competitive. Disruptions to operational continuity were affected by employee retention and morale and interruption in project work as the uncertainty of change loomed. The researcher noted that some Company A workers chose to immediately look for other employment, some workers stood still waiting for further direction, and others proactively found ways to remain productive in anticipation of the change’s effect on the organization. Company A management team members also seemed to have a varying degree of responses ranging from a low emotional commitment to change to high commitment to change with little attending to worker emotions to change. The researcher noted some company leaders displaying workplace behaviors, such as a “business as usual” approach to speaking out negatively about the acquisition. The sum total of individual responses to the acquisition seemed to have created a working environment of miscommunications and mixed signals that the researcher asserts had an unproductive impact on operational continuity. In an IBM (2009) study on managing operational continuity from workplace and worker disruptions, success factors like
communication, connectivity, and counseling are critical to sustaining operational continuity when change occurs.

How Company A workers dealt with change could have been predicated on many factors, such as tenure with the company, area of expertise, job autonomy, emotional maturity, and work values. The researcher found insufficient research on how culture, as defined by a series of shared national events by a generational cohort, positively or negatively affects workplace values, such as dealing with organizational change. The researcher asserts that events during a generational era, like The Gulf War, 9/11, the Vietnam War, and President Obama's election, have a persuasive impact on an individual’s personal and professional social behavior. Ultimately, the study proved to be critical to the researcher having a better understanding on the importance of culture-sharing groups, generational experiences, workplace values defined by each generational cohort, and how the individual company can meet the challenges of operational continuity when an acquisition occurs.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand meaningful generational cohort differences in the workplace and their responses when disruptions to operational continuity occur due to an organizational change. The change was a company acquisition. The collection of data from the study proved to be critical in helping the researcher gain a better understanding on the importance of culture-sharing groups, generational knowledge, and how the individual company can meet the challenges of operational disruption through knowledge management and workforce development. The researcher’s intent was to address the nature of today's socially
interconnected workforce. There are currently up to four different generations working side by side in organizations across America. According the Bureau of Labor Statics (2012), the labor demographic participation rate for the distinct generational cohorts is as follows: Traditionals cohort at 17.4%, Baby Boomer cohort at 40.2%, Generation X cohort at 26.2%, and Millennials at 16.2%. Company A’s generational cohort employee breakdown prior to the acquisition is as follows: Traditionals cohort at 13.8%, Baby Boomer cohort at 35.2%, Generation X cohort at 29.6%, and Millennials cohort at 21.4%. The close proximity of Company A’s demographic job participation to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012) suggest that Company A serves as a credible microcosm of today’s national labor force, potentially enhancing the generalizability to the study.

**Problem Statement**

A Company acquisition presented the workforce with the uncertainty of change. The organizational challenge for company leaders is the management of the workforce and the competing workplace values and priorities that generational workers exhibit (Benjamin, 2011). This mixing of generations adds valuable diversity to the workforce, but also lends itself to potential conflicts and complications as workers from different generations try to work together (Burke, 2004). Organizational leaders who fail to understand generational differences may communicate in a way that can cause workplace operational misunderstandings that can impede financial growth and competitive sustainability (Fyock, 1990). Company A is dealing with the challenges of change and the disruption to operational continuity as personnel make the adjustments to learning new systems, new operating procedures, and new company protocols.
Methodology

This research utilized face-to-face interviews with senior leadership members, focus group sessions comprised of non-management generational cohort member subsets, and a hybrid focus group representing members of each generational cohort. The hybrid group was assembled to provide qualitative data on whether meaningful differences among generations exist. All of the participants are current employees of the acquired company, and range from ten year plus employees to employees with no less than one year with the company. Since the acquisition took place approximately one year ago from the date of this study, the researcher wanted to ensure that every participant had at least one area of commonality: experiencing a significant company acquisition.

The participants selected for the face-to-face recorded interviews were all in leadership positions prior to the acquisition. A total of 20 individuals were interviewed during a sixty-minute recorded session. Open-ended questions were used to allow for unguided participant expression. The questions focused on organizational change and gathered their insight and opinion on how they view change, the impact it had on the workforce, and how they view the organization’s culture. The interview questions are found in Appendix D.

The next collection of qualitative data was the use of focus groups. The researcher studied articles from BusinessWeek, Duke University, and Loyola University on how to effectively conduct a focus group. The participants selected were verbally asked by the researcher to participate. Participants chosen for the focus group were excluded from the participants that conducted the face-to-face interview with the researcher. Although focus group members can be defined as a homogeneous group of
co-workers, the researcher acknowledges that these members did not work directly with each other and may or may not be complete strangers. The normal workplace interaction of focus group members selected is limited, with many working in different functional departments, which the researcher believes reduced inhibitions among members.

A series of six questions were discussed among the participants in the focus groups over a sixty-minute time period. The goal was to get the participants to tell the researcher a story and describe their feelings on culture, generational events, and work values. The focus group questions are found in Appendix E. Data triangulation helped the researcher validate the data by cross-verifying information utilizing the data from the interviews, focus groups, and other existing literature.

**Research Questions**

The purpose of the study is to better understand the following questions:

1. How do different generational cohort workers respond when disruptions in operational continuity occur due to significant organizational change?
2. How do company leaders view generational workforce differences and their impact when significant organizational change happens?

**Assumptions**

The main theoretical assumptions of the study take into consideration the following assertions:

1. Disruptions in operational continuity caused by organizational change are significant when leadership does not understand generational cohort work values.
2. Culture-sharing generational cohort members exhibit meaningful
differences in the workplace regarding their social behaviors.

The researcher’s philosophical assumptions as a Generation X worker differ from
prior generations and the Millennials with regards to the value placed on work. The
researcher asserts that freedom and autonomy are strong motivators for a Generations Xer
in the workplace. Therefore, a higher value is placed on achieving those workplace
liberties.

Significance of the Study

This study has both practical and theoretical significance that relate to social
behaviors in the workplace for the individual, group behavior, organizational structure,
and organizational processes. The researcher intended to better understand the nature of
today's convergent workforce of generational cohort members and how those culture-
sharing differences’ can impact operational continuity when an acquisition occurs. There
is currently insufficient direct, large-scale evidence on the effects of acquisitions on
individual workers (Siegel & Simons, 2010). Moreover, the aspect of culture and
generational classification is critical in understanding individual differences. Drucker
(1997) noted that the most important concern for businesses will not be technology or
economics, but demographics. Drucker’s (1997) foreshadowing has proven to be a
significant challenge for company leaders today. The evolving demographics, such as the
varying needs of a convergent generational workforce, have increased the importance of
understanding the characteristics of older and younger workers. Due to the positive and
negative impact that acquisitions can have on company operations and the workforce, it is
important for organizational leaders to understand the significance of a globally footprinted economy on global competition, worker demands, and organizational needs.

**Delimitations**

One of the most significant delimitations of this study is that it was conducted with only employees of the acquired company, which, prior to the acquisition, operated as a North American based company with no global footprint. Those employees are predominately U.S. citizens. Due to the nature of a global economy, future researchers that replicate this study at globally based companies may have participants with international generational experiences that may differ from workers who were raised in the U.S.

**Limitations**

The researcher does not intend to provide a clear-cut solution to all of the organizational challenges caused by disruptions to operational continuity when change occurs, but to only provide qualitative data to better understand the impact of generational work-related values and culture-sharing identities.

The researcher believes that the study has merit in its data collection for the organizational leaders and will advance knowledge through qualitative research, but the researcher will not predict that any of the data mentioned will conclusively provide a long-term fix to the organizational challenge of disruption caused by an acquisition.

Organizational change impacts competitive sustainability, such as the inequalities of worker skill sets, the continued advancement of technology, and generational attitudes and motivations regarding today’s workplace environment.
Assumptions

This study assumes that a) participants answered honestly about how generational events help define their culture-sharing identity and workplace values, and b) a large percentage of workers ranging from years with the company to functional job type to generational membership would respond to the request for participation to create a more valid study. It is assumed that generational cohort experiences, workplace attitudes, and motivations vary amongst the members and that meaningful differences among generations exist. It was also assumed that the differences that exist may also be attributed to factors other than generational membership, such as household size, parenting make-up, family educational achievement, and socio-economic classification.

Definition of Terms

There are many descriptions for social behaviors in the workplace and organizational change dating back prior to 1960, in which Skinner (1957) published his acclaimed book titled, ‘Verbal Behavior.’ Skinner (1957) investigated human behavior, which was later called linguistics. The description that best supports this study for social behaviors in the workplace comes from Kramer (2006) in which he termed social behavior in the workplace to be the equivalent of social capital in the workplace. Kramer (2006) asserted that a group’s social capital, or behavior in the workplace, derives from a historic network of strong, cross-cutting personal relationships that develop over time and provide a basis for trust, cooperation, and collective action among culture-sharing members. The definition that supports this study for OC comes from Demers’s (2007) analytical summation of organizational change theories over the past century in which he asserted that OC is a process of gradual adaptation. Demers (2007) continued to assert
that except for a small group of scholars who view change as emergent, the dominant view is that adaptation is largely controlled by management reacting to either internal or external pressures (p. 1).

The researcher-developed questions for the face-to-face interviews and the focus group sessions included terms that may or may not be clearly known to those who participated, and for the outside reader. These terms were used with the following understanding:

*Baby Boomers*: individuals born from 1946 to 1964 in the U.S., approximately nine months after World War II ended. U.S. Census indicated more babies were born in 1946 than ever before. Older Americans, who had postponed marriage and childbirth during the Great Depression and World War II, were joined in the nation’s maternity wards by young adults who were eager to start families.

*Competencies*: a measurable pattern of knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and other characteristics that an individual needs to perform work roles or occupational functions successfully. Competencies specify the "how" of performing job tasks, or what the person needs to do the job successfully.

*Competition*: the effort of two or more parties acting independently to secure the business of a third party by offering the most favorable terms. Competition will also be referred to as global completion to imply the existence of competing organizations that serve domestic and international customers.

*Culture*: the language, beliefs, values and norms, customs, dress, diet, roles, knowledge and skills, and all the other things that people learn that make up the ‘way of life’ of any society.
Culture-sharing identities: the boundaries for collective intelligence and collective action, and consequently sets boundaries for social learning, which leads to cultural differentiation. The need for affiliation arose from the advantages of being in a group, such as safety, resource sharing, and reducing uncertainty (Mullin & Hogg, 1999).

Generational Cohorts: groups of people who share birth years, history, and a collective personality as a result of their defining experiences. Although the term is intended to serve only as rough shorthand for particular age cohorts with significant common experiences, national events have an impact on all members of the generation in one way or another, such as growing up during The Great Depression and World War 2.

Generation X: individuals born from 1965 to 1981 in the U.S. that grew up in the political climate in the aftermath of Watergate and the Vietnam War and during a series of recessions, the Reagan presidency, the AIDS epidemic, and the end of the Cold War. Also known as: Baby busters, the MTV generation.

Knowledge: the fact or condition of knowing something with familiarity gained through experience or association.

Knowledge Economy: Production and services based on knowledge-intensive activities that contribute to an accelerated pace of technical and scientific advancement, as well as rapid obsolescence.

Knowledge Management: a discipline that promotes an integrated approach to identifying, capturing, evaluating, retrieving, and sharing all of an enterprise's information assets. These assets may include databases, documents, policies,
procedures, and previously un-captured expertise and experience in individual workers.

*Millennials*: individuals born from 1982 to 2004 in the U.S. that grew up during a time of economic prosperity and then entered the workforce during a recession. These individuals are surrounded by the rapid advancement of technology, particularly the Internet. Also known as: Gen Y, Nexters, and Generation Next.

*Operational Continuity*: the capability of the organization to continue delivery of products or services at acceptable predefined levels following a disruptive incident. The term is also referred to as Business Continuity.

*Organizational Change (OC)*: a process in which a company or organization goes through a transformation, such as changing business strategies or major sections of its operations often times having an impact on the way that work is performed.

*Private organization*: any person, partnership, corporation, association or agency that is not a public body and is operated for profit.

*Skills Gap*: the difference between the skills needed on the job and skills possessed by job applicants or current workforce.

*Soft Skills*: a cluster of personal qualities, habits, attitudes, and social graces that make someone a good employee and compatible to work with, such as being a good listener and communicator.

*Technological Opportunity*: the potential for technological progress in general or within a particular field.
Traditionals: individuals born from 1925 to 1945 in the U.S. that grew up in difficult
times with life experiences that included World War II and the Great Depression.

Workforce Development: A long-term commitment by a company to continually train its
employees as part of the company mission, vision, and strategic goals.

Workplace values: the guiding principles that are most important to employees about the
way that they work, such as integrity, accountability, diligence, perseverance, and
discipline.

Data Collections

There were two unique parts to the study that included face-to-face interviews
with senior management level company leaders and focus group sessions with non-
management employees across functional departments, such as Marketing, Sales, and IT.
All researcher-developed interview questions and focus group questions were qualitative
in nature. The interview and focus group questions related to the workers’ generational
experiences, culture-sharing identities with other generational members, responses to
change, and workplace values. Those management level employees that participated in
the face-to-face interview were asked questions about their experiences with
organizational change, any professional and personal impact the acquisition had on them,
their opinion on how different generational cohort employees react to change, and how
they manage change.

The researcher developed a total of sixteen questions for the interview session,
while taking into consideration that the allotted one-hour interview session would not
allow for all questions to be asked and answered. The researcher acknowledges that
some participants chose to spend more time elaborating on their thoughts regarding
questions focused on generational differences and workplace ethics, which left little remaining time to focus on organizational change and the impact on workers, while other participants spent more time providing their insight on organizational change. The researcher did ensure that every question was addressed over the entirety of the data collection process for the face-to-face interviews.

The non-management employees that participated in the focus group sessions were asked five questions over a one-hour session. The researcher made observations about the participants’ dress, body language, rate of response, and proximity to each other during the focus group. The researcher’s age demographic fell within the Generation Xer cohort. In order to eliminate any potential bias, no directions were provided to participants on dress, code of conduct, and response requirements. The researcher dressed in business casual wear, which consisted of a polo shirt and khaki pants, to help create a level of comfort for all participants. Those observations will be further explained in Chapter Four.

**Researcher Resources and Skills**

The researcher is trained in Institutional Review Board procedures with Creighton University and is knowledgeable about securing confidential information. Completing the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) IRB courses was one of three criteria for Initial Certification by the Creighton University Institutional Review Board. CITI is a web-based tutorial maintained by the University of Miami. The courses were developed by experts in the human subject’s safety community, and each course consisted of modules with an associated quiz. The first course consisted of 19 modules that were required of all investigators, staff, and students performing research. The
second course was the Responsible Conduct of Research, which consisted of 17 modules. The third course was the HIPAA course. Completing these courses required approximately 4-6 hours.

**Participant Protection**

As defined per the Institutional Review Board, the research presented no more than minimal risk of harm to participants and involved no procedures for which written consent was normally required outside of the research context. Participants were informed that they can choose not to participate at any time. Participants were not required to provide their names or positions during the data collection process, nor will any of their responses be shared within the company. Participants were asked to acknowledge a verbal confidentiality agreement.

**Summary**

Chapter One provided an overview of the study, describing the background of the problem, purpose and significance of the study. The overriding consensus is that disruptions to operational continuity are inevitable to any organization as change occurs. Change is an evolving constant that does not discriminate based on company size, stature, and expertise. The convergence of generational employees tasked with managing change for a company to sustain competitive relevance is equally important. The research design, research questions and assumptions in the study set the direction in which the researcher used to gain a better understanding on the topic and fill in the gap of knowledge that prompted the research questions. Chapter Two highlights, cites, and reviews the major conclusions, findings, and methodological issues related to the gap in the knowledge from Chapter One.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The cultural and social groups under study are current employees of Company A. Their observable and learned patterns of behavior, customs, and shared culture are attributed to their personal and professional experiences, parental guidance and involvement, and national events that shaped the way they view the world. Individuals with different workplace values and different ways of communicating in the workplace have always existed, but according to Hammill (2005), this is the first time in American history that there are four different generations side-by-side in the workplace. Fyock (1990) cautioned that failure to understand generational differences may cause operational misunderstandings, miscommunications, and mixed signals. Smola and Sutton (2002) revisited a study that was conducted in 1974 and explored generational differences and the causes of those differences. The results of their study suggested that generational work values do differ and that organizational leaders are encouraged to make a concerted effort to gain a better understanding of the generational differences that appear to exist among workers.

The initial part of this literature review is for the purpose of establishing a definition for the term social behavior, specifically social behavior in the workplace. The next step is to establish the differences between the needs and communication preferences of the generational cohort members under study. Since communication is a fundamental of social behavior, Hammill (2005) stated that company leaders that learn how to communicate with the different generational employees can eliminate many major confrontations and misunderstandings in the workplace and the world of business. For
example, Zemke et al. (2000) wrote, Traditionals need structure and prefer to communicate in a formal, memo-style format. Baby boomers prefer in-person communication to email or voicemail. Generation Xers prefer direct and immediate communication. Millennials prefer less personable communication and are content in receiving emails or voicemails (p. 27). These distinctions serve as a small example of social behavior in the workplace and help provide a better understanding of the meaningful differences that exist among generations.

Third, it is essential to establish the early history of organizational change theory and how the majority of organizational change theory focused primarily on management’s responsibility with a limited focus on the workers and their generational membership (Cummings, 2004; Kaluzny & Hernandez, 1998; Kotter, 2002). The researcher then progressed to identify the common elements, or culture-sharing identities, related to generational cohort members, as well as, look at how the ability to recognize how culture, generational work values, social behavior, and organizational change intersect to show the impact on competitive sustainability. In the next section of the literature review, the researcher explored the demands of a global economy and whether those demands place a heavier burden or expectation on managers and the workers tasked with meeting those expectations. Finally, the researcher provides a review of literature that contradicts the study (Costanza, Badger, Fraser, Severt, & Gade, 2012; Conger, 2000), that suggest that meaningful differences among generations do not exist.

**Definitions of Social Behaviors**

A review of literature offered a wide spectrum of definitions for social behavior, specifically social behavior in the workplace. Muchinsky (2000) proposed that the
workplace is a rich arena for the manifestation of human emotions, both positive and negative. One of the fundamentals of social behavior is how individuals communicate or transfer information from one person to another. Hammill’s (2005) research indicated that people communicate based on their generational backgrounds. Each generation has distinct attitudes, behaviors, expectations, habits and motivational buttons. Robinson (2008) pointed out that not only is communication fundamental to social behavior, but diverse social behaviors involve the production, reception, and interpretation of signals that influence individual behavior in a manner that depends on social context (p. 896). Social behavior includes psychological aspects of how humans relate and respond to each other. The researcher in this study examined the social behavior of the Traditionals, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials working together. The social interactions, including the aspects of how humans relate to each other in the workplace, have a significant impact on how companies deal with significant organizational change. Rummel (1976) asserted that human beings behave socially towards the more or less stable perception of another on the basis of some perceived occasion and for some intention or reason. That is, there is some immediate event which stimulates or triggers, or provides a goal or reason for social behavior.

**Organizational Change (Acquisitions)**

A review of literature offered several definitions to the concept of OC, including delineation between revolutionary and evolutionary change. The ability to cope with dramatically altering forces has become a key determinant of competitive advantage and organizational survival (D'Aveni, 1994). The Carnegie School (1950) described OC as both the process in which an organization changes its structure, strategies, operational
methods, technologies, or organizational culture to affect change within the organization and the effects of these changes on the organization. Burke (2014) asserted that OC is evolutionary and can be planned or unplanned. Burke (2014) went on to state that the external environment or competitive landscape is the catalyst for OC because it is rapidly outpacing how organizations change from within (p. 1). The impact on the workers tasked with meeting the demands of rapid change is a critical part of this study.

OC will have direct costs for organizations (Dahl, 2010). The change observed in the study is a company acquisition. Siegel and Simons (2010) asserted that acquisitions have harmful effects on workers. Oreg and Michel (2013) concluded that most of the research on how employees deal with change stems from their collective set of personal experiences (p. 117). Siegel and Simons (2008) asserted that the unit of analysis in empirical studies of the employment and wage effects of mergers and acquisitions is typically based on the company as a whole. In contrast, their study observed the individual worker, which allowed them to provide direct, systematic empirical evidence on the effects of different types of mergers and acquisitions on employees. An individual’s core beliefs and assumptions play a huge part in the way he or she will make decisions. Dean (n.d.) asserted that it is undeniable that people are inextricably impacted by their respective familial upbringings, social environments and academic experiences.

**Negative Impacts to OC**

Whenever human communities are forced to adjust to shifting conditions, emotional, and at times, physical pain is ever present (Kotter, 2007). The pain Kotter (2007) wrote about is due to the uncertainty of change. The level of emotional and physical pain will vary depending on the individual. Dahl’s (2010) research on the topic
of organizational change indicated that the potentially negative outcomes of change at the level of the employee relates to the ongoing debate over how employees react to and respond to organizational change. From an economic perspective, workplace conflicts and unrest can decrease labor productivity and lead to significant financial losses (Mas, 2008; Krueger & Mas, 2004). During any merger or acquisition effort, employees are faced with uncertainty about what the future may hold and whose job is on the chopping block (Richards, n.d.).

Smith and Clurman (2007) wrote that the Baby Boomer generation witnessed and participated in some of the greatest social changes in the country’s history during the 1960s and 1970s, with the Civil Rights Movement and the Women’s Movement. This generation experienced dramatic shifts in educational, economic and social opportunities. Baby Boomers are generally believed to be adaptive to change because of the era in which they came of age (p. 119). How the Baby Boomer generation deals with the impact of organizational change could conceptually and pragmatically differ from the Millennial generation, a generation that has come of age at a time when information is available instantly (Gilbert, 2011).

**Generational Cohorts**

The generational cohort members in this study are the Traditionals, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. There are quantitatively driven researched differences amongst generational cohorts, specifically regarding career motivations and expectations, which need to be recognized by organizations (Deal, 2007). Johnson and Johnson (2010) reported that each generation has been influenced by the major historical events, social trends, and cultural phenomena of its time. These forces shape ideas about
everything from expectations and perceptions about what the workplace will provide and how employees should behave, to company loyalty and work ethic. Benjamin (2011) stated the mix of generations in the workplace continues to create challenges for managers, who must deal with the competing values and priorities of the different groups. For example, Millennials place the greatest burden on the individual firm because they discover greater career and promotion opportunities quicker through the steady use of digital technology (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010). Millennials, born between 1979 and 1994 (Smola & Sutton 2002), have been described in both literature and press as the look at me generation, implying that they are overly self-confident and self-absorbed (Pew Research Center, 2007, p.1).

Generation Xers work today more for intrinsic rewards, to demand more of a role in decision making, and to switch jobs more frequently than prior generations (Yang & Guy, 2006). Burke (2004) stated that Generation X workers can be counted on in situations that conditions are fluid or ill-defined. Generation Xers comprise about one-third of the American labor force and have become a major influence in the workplace (Zemke et al., 2000). That generation is assuming positions of leadership as Baby Boomers exit the workforce. This generation is skeptical of authority and tends to not respect hierarchy, status or title. According to Benjamin (2011), Generation Xers seek a healthy work-life balance and prefer an informal, fun workplace. The researcher would be classified as a member of the Generation X cohort and can identify with certain attitudes and motivations in the workplace that are important to that generation.

Organizations cannot ignore the motivations, attitudes, and incentives that drive workplace behavior. The extent to which knowledge is shared by organizational
members or uniquely possessed by a member also affects its transfer. Baby Boomers grew up in a post-World War II era and economic depression. That generation will have different attitudes about workplace sharing than Generation Xers that grew up in an era of civil rights (Zemke et al., 2000). Baby Boomers’ shared experiences resulted in a generation with a strong customer-service orientation. Baby Boomers are dedicated, optimistic, future-oriented team players with a wealth of knowledge and experience to contribute to the workplace.

Empirical studies (Klun, 2008; Santos & Cox, 2000; Santos, Carroll, Cox, Teasley, Simon, & Bainbridge, 2003) demonstrated that throughout their careers, many Baby Boomers have embraced competitiveness and have focused on climbing organizational ranks. They are the original workaholics who, even as young adults, had little notion of healthy work-life balance (Gursoy, Maier, & Chi, 2008; McGuire, By, & Hutchings, 2007; Stauffer, 1997).

Traditionals were influenced by the Great Depression and World War II (Zemke et al., 2000). Traits such as loyalty, respect for authority, stubborn independence, excellent work ethic, and dependability have been attributed to this generation. The economic and political uncertainty that they experienced in their childhood years led them to be hard working, financially conservative, and cautious (Daniels, 2009). Organizational loyalty is attributed to their workplace values and they have advanced with the premise that seniority is important to advance in one’s career (Smith, 2008).

**Early Workplace Values Research**

Taylor and Thompson (1974) investigated differences in the work ethic of younger and older people in areas like self-reliance, morality, hard work, and wasted
time. They concluded that education, age, culture, and career status strongly influenced work-related ethics and values (p. 522). Their work led others to study a range of circumstances that would correlate with generational differences, which spanned topics such as job satisfaction, career status, and an individual’s organizational commitment for different cohort groups (Carrell & Elbert, 1974; Hunt & Saul, 1975). Smola and Sutton (2002) examined data collected in 1974 exploring possible changes in work values. The Smola and Sutton (2002) study (N = 16,507) examined the work values of a nationally representative sample of U.S. high school seniors in 1976, 1991, and 2006, representing Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. Unlike other studies investigating generational differences (Bolick & Nestleroth, 1988; Johnston & Packer, 1987; Towers Perrin & Hudson Institute, 1990), Smola and Sutton (2002) collected data across time so that they could isolate generational differences from age differences. They concluded that different age groups had contrary positions and attitudes in workplace values, such as Baby Boomers placed a less than important belief that work should be an important part of life or working hard made one a better person as opposed to Traditionals belief that how a person did his or her job was indicative of this individual’s worth.

Other noted research (Guss & Miller, 2008; Weaver, 1993; Weaver & Trevino, 1999) examined older studies on how different generations approach questions of integrity and purpose. These works concluded that value systems and motivation is at the heart of ethics, and value systems are inherent within the four generational groups.

**Culture-sharing Identities in Generational Cohorts**

Meaningful differences among generations are of increasing interest to organizational leaders, and researchers alike (Deal, 2007). Many of those differences can
be attributed to the culture or era a particular generation may have been exposed to when preparing themselves for the workforce (Costanza et al., 2012; Noble & Schewe, 2003). From a sociological perspective, people who belong to the same generation are those who, during their formative years, were marked by the same historical events and cultural phenomena (Noble & Schewe, 2003; Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008). Swidler (1986) asserted that culture can relate to the shaping of an individual’s ideas, attitudes, and motivations regarding a specific issue, cause, or event. Culture can be created through random acts of occurrences, or it can be premeditated based on social, political, and economic norms imposed on a particular group. Swidler (1986) concluded that culture influences individual actions by shaping a repertoire of habits, skills, and styles from which a person constructs strategies of action.

The underlying view of culture for this study derives from Max Weber (1912). Gerth and Mills (1946) in Weber’s (1912) famous Essays in Sociology wrote:

> Not ideas, but material and ideal interests, directly govern men’s conduct. Yet very frequently the “world images” that have been created by “ideas” have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest. (p. 274).

The symbolism in this particular passage creates a connection between the “world images” in a particular era and the impact they have on the actions of man. Generational cohort members develop their social behaviors from the collective memory and images that define their culture (Dencker et al., 2008).

Research has shown the cultural identity is determined by the importance that an individual assigns to his or her membership in those cultural groups (Oetzel & Ting-
Toomey, 2003; Ting-Toomey, Yee-Jung, Shapiro, Garcia, Wright, & Oetzel, 2000). All cultures base their communication behaviors on norms and rules and personal values based on those norms and rules (Verderber, Verderber, & Sellnow, 2009).

The Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA, 1993) defined culture as the shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs, and affective understanding that are learned through a process of socialization. Banks et al. (1989) symbolized the spirit of culture to show how the members of the group interpret and perceive elements or events in society that represent the group. Culture is critical in understanding and identifying the social behaviors of individuals within their social environments. Cennamo and Gardner (2008) stated that values are derivatives of culture and can be important in guiding behavior and enhancing work motivation. Generations are influenced by various socio-cultural shifts. These could include wars and their results, new technologies that significantly alter work and lifestyles, and political-socio-economic transitions (Macky, Gardner, & Forsyth, 2008).

The best-known typology of generations and the connection to culture in the United States was introduced by Strauss and Howe (1991). Generational theorists Macky et al., (2008) postulated that shared experiences and the environment affect the process of socialization in a way that influences the development of various characteristics such as personality, values, beliefs and expectations. Eikenberry (2008) stated that the workplace is considered a social environment, and culture thrives or dies in it.

Culture-sharing groups (Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Howe, 1991) derive their social behaviors not only from their interconnected shared experiences, but also from life events specific to their particular eras. Whether empirical or coincidental, certain events
are identified as belonging to a certain generation (Howe & Strauss, 2007). The Vietnam War, the Civil Rights movement, Reaganomics, the invasion of MTV, and Smartphones are all associated with particular generations. The past is a vital component of how people form social behavior. The past can contribute to how present generations deal with social issues (Howe & Strauss, 2007). Kaspersion, Renn, Slovic, Brown, Emel, Goble, Kasperson, & Ratick, (2006) illustrated how economic, political, and nationally historical events have a direct and indirect impact on social behaviors, and those behaviors spill-over into the workplace. The impact that Kasperson et al. (2006) asserted related to social behaviors such as, an individual’s ability to trust others, build healthy relationship, and desire to stay loyal to a particular organization. The culture and characteristics of a workplace are shaped by those responsible for decision-making within the workplace, so managers must be mindful of the impact of their own generational biases when making workplace decisions (Benjamin, 2011).

**Demands of a Global Economy**

A common phenomenon impacting a generational hybrid workforce is the demands of a global economy, also known as a knowledge economy (Powell & Snellman, 2004). The forces of globalization and technological progress are altering the way that people all over the planet make a living. The term knowledge economy was first coined in the late 1960s by Drucker (1969) to refer to the application of knowledge from any field or source, new or old, to spur economic development (p. 263). Foray and Lundvall (1996) reintroduced the concept of a knowledge-based economy at a workshop of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 1996). The concept was defined as production and services based on knowledge-intensive activities
that contribute to an accelerated pace of technical and scientific advance, as well as rapid obsolescence (Foray & Lundvall, 1996). Carter (1996) noted that the measurement of a knowledge-based economy poses serious problems, and to date there remains insufficient evidence to measure its impact on the individual organization (p. 80). Drucker (2001) described the opportunity characteristics of a knowledge economy as follows:

1. Knowledge workers will be the dominant group in its workforce.
2. Knowledge will travel more effortlessly than money.
3. Upward mobility will be available to everyone through easily acquired formal education.
4. Anyone will be able to acquire the means of production (i.e., the knowledge required for the job).

The key component of a knowledge economy is a greater reliance on intellectual capabilities than on physical inputs or natural resources (Buckley & Carter, 1999). Along with the opportunities presented by Drucker (2001), there are some challenges associated with a knowledge economy:

1. There are no generally accepted empirical measures of key theoretical concepts, such as the stock of technological knowledge, human capital, and the resource cost of knowledge acquisition (Howitt, 1996).
2. The properties of knowledge itself make measuring it difficult at the individual firm level (Buckley & Carter, 1999).
3. No account is taken of the depreciation of the stock of knowledge and physical capital due to the creation of new knowledge (Howitt, 1996).
4. There is an exclusion of a large and growing proportion of the labor force from normal wage work (OECD, 1996).

5. There is a slow rate of diffusion of knowledge creating a skills gap for individual firms (Powell & Snellman, 2004).

Although there is a need for skills training, both on the job and through formal education in a knowledge economy, there is a debate over whether new forms of work that embody technological change have generated more worker autonomy or greater managerial control (Beck, 1992; Castells, 2000; Stehr, 1994).

A knowledge economy introduces new technologies (Boisot, 1998; Grant, 1997; Stewart, 1997). Those technologies have created organizational needs that must be met in the form of workforce skillsets that may not have been readily available within the current structure of the organization. As a result, the new growth economy has created skills gap challenges (Drucker, 1993; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Prusak, 1997), not just from the infusion of technological advancements, but also from the fact that internal knowledge is leaving the organization and being replaced with a younger generational cohort that are struggling to keep pace with workplace demands (Tyre & Hauptman, 1996). The subsequent challenges for the individual organization that have emerged appear to relate to knowledge management, workforce development, and the uncertainty of technological opportunity (Powell & Snellman, 2004).

In a knowledge economy, the retention of knowledge, skills, and abilities are critical to the economic sustainability of the organization (Madsen, Mosakowski, & Zaheer, 2002). Jarche (2014) stated that emergent practices are dependent on the cooperation of all workers, as well as the free flow of knowledge. Ultimately, knowledge
for the organization is a culmination of the hybrid of generational workers that are employed by the individual firm.

The concept of a knowledge economy provides a broad perspective of the workers’ roles in the new economy, but fails to take into account the social component of workers and the culture-sharing characteristics of the workers (Argote, McEvily, & Reagans, 2003; Hafeez & Addelmeguid, 2003). Theorists (Powell & Snellman, 2004; Schultze, 2000) label a knowledge-based economy as advanced global capitalism, and many of them argue that it is failing to provide fair and equitable wealth across the domestic and international landscape.

Contradictions to the Study

Costanza et al., (2012) suggested that meaningful differences among generations in the workplace probably do not exist. Researchers (Conger, 2000; Costanza et al, 2012; Finegold et al. 2002; Saba, 2009) contended that the differences that appear are likely attributable to factors other than generational membership. The literature on this subject is abundant but contradictory. Wils et al. (2011) asserted that the descriptions of differences in values, needs and attitudes are often entangled and based on opinions and speculative findings. Chen and Choi (2008) have asserted that it is not enough to observe and describe the generations, rather, it is imperative to base these observations on a solid theory that specifies the unique character of each generation so as to be able to establish assumptions and point to real differences between them.

Summary

The objective of Chapter Two was to acquaint the reader with existing studies relative to the gap in the knowledge as indicated by the research questions. The literature
review provided studies on social behaviors in the workplace, organizational change, generational cohorts, and their culture-sharing identities. Based on the review of the literature, the gap in the knowledge that is the subject of the study has not been studied. Chapter Three provides the rational for the qualitative study, describes the research setting, sample population, and data collection methods. The following chapter provides a detailed description of all aspects of the design and procedures of the study.
CHAPTER THREE

Research Design and Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand meaningful generational cohort differences in the workplace and their responses when disruptions to operational continuity occur due to organizational change. This chapter outlines the following: (a) research design, (b) sample population, (c) data collection procedures, (d) and instruments used to collect data. The intent of the study is to gain a better understanding of how generational work groups respond to significant organizational change and determine whether their culture-sharing generational classification is indicative of how they respond to the demands of a global economy. The research was conducted within the researcher’s current workplace, a service-oriented company specializing in offering online platform solutions to higher education institutions looking to grow their online student population. Conducting a study within the researcher’s place of employment poses some challenges. Creswell (1998) cautioned against studying the backyard because the researcher may not be able to separate himself from the organizational culture because of his insider knowledge (p.114). In order to protect the integrity of the data, multiple forms of validation were implemented. Eisner (1991) suggested a structural corroboration strategy, which relates multiple types of data to support or contradict interpretations. The researcher used this technique to look for recurring behaviors, and consider non-confirming evidence and contrary interpretations.

Research Questions

1. How do different generational cohort workers respond when disruptions in operational continuity occur due to significant organizational change?
2. How does company leaders’ ability to understand generational differences impact disruptions in operational continuity caused by significant organizational change?

Research Design

The research utilized two components: face-to-face interviews and focus group sessions. The instruments were not issued at the same time or to the same participants. The researcher identified factors, such as national events, and political and economic climate in the U.S. in a particular era, as it related to the individuals adulthood years to assess the attitudes and opinions on social behaviors in the workplace. The research method teased out possible experiences that have happened and cannot, therefore, be engineered or manipulated by the investigator. Examples of past experiences, such as the Vietnam War, the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., the introduction of the World Wide Web, and the election of the U.S. first black President all contributed to answering the research questions and gaining a better understanding of the meaningful differences in the workplace among generational cohorts.

The first component, face-to-face interviews, consisted of researcher-developed questions that focused the attention on company leaders perspective on organizational change and their insight and opinion on how they view change, the impact it has on the workforce, and how they view the organization’s culture. These questions were influenced by current research on the topic of organizational change and circumstantial observations with floor managers, senior managers, and executive leadership that managed through the acquisition of Company A.

The second component, focus group sessions, consisted of generational cohort non-management employees. Five focus groups of five members were chosen based on
perceived researcher observations of the participants’ generational cohort classification. The participants’ generational cohort was confirmed based on their self-acknowledged birth year. Four of the five focus groups represented each generational cohort identified in the study, and the fifth focus group represented a hybrid of each cohort. Focus group members were excluded from component one. Participants were asked researcher-developed questions about generational experiences, culture-sharing identities, and opinions about work values.

**Population and Sample**

The first groups of participants in the study are management-level leaders that had at least one year of leadership experience with Company A prior to the acquisition. The leaders were selected from the most recent organizational chart at the time of the study. There were a total of 42 management level leaders with Company A to solicit participation. The researcher anticipated that all of the qualified leaders would not be able to participate due to work scheduling conflicts, and therefore, the final sample size was twenty (n = 20). Representation of each generational cohort was present from the twenty individuals that participated in the study. A breakdown of each representation is presented in Figure 1.

Each individual participated in a one-hour, recorded, face-to-face interview. All company leaders were personally asked by the researcher as to how they would prefer to communicate. If they verbally agreed to receive an email from the researcher, an email explaining the research, assuring anonymity, and stressing the ability to decline to participate (Appendix B) was promptly forwarded within 48 hours. The company leaders were not asked to create any identification for the study. The researcher created five
letters and/or numbers for manual coding. The participating management level leaders were provided the IRB formatted letter explaining the research, the intent of the interview, and an opportunity to see the final study (Appendix A).

The second group of participants are also Company A employees; however, this group did not consist of management-level employees. Participants were verbally asked which generational cohort classification best described them after being provided with the generational year ranges. All individuals who agreed to participate in the focus group were also asked how they would prefer to communicate. If they verbally agreed to receive an email from the researcher, an email explaining the research, assuring anonymity, and stressing the ability to decline to participate (Appendix B) was forwarded. They were subsequently asked to participate in a one-hour focus group session with four other peers from their same generation cohort. The fifth group consisted of a hybrid group representing each generational cohort. The researcher contacted 85 workers in total from the most current organizational chart at the time of the study, and 25 workers eventually were selected for the focus group sessions: five members in each focus group session. There were four separate sessions representing each generational cohort class and one dynamic group comprising of one Traditional, two Baby Boomers, one Generation Xer, and one Millennial. The researcher intentionally chose the composition of the generational cohort participants of the fifth focus group session to further align with the national distribution of the U.S. labor force projections (BLS, 2012). These participants were provided the IRB formatted letter explaining the research, the intent of the interview, and an opportunity to see the final study (Appendix A).
Instrumentation

The first instrument, face-to-face interviews, was created by the researcher. Feeling-finding questions were used to uncover subjective information which gets at the participant's opinions, feelings, values and beliefs. These questions are intended to help the researcher understand a participant’s desired situation and contained words like think or feel. The researcher-developed interview included questions like, “Tell me how you feel your role with Company A has been impacted by the most current acquisition?” and “In thinking about organizational culture, how would you describe the workplace culture within Company A prior to the acquisition?” The generational cohort and culture questions included queries such as, “Tell me your opinion on whether a worker’s generational era impacts their workplace behavior?” and “Thinking about your personal workplace behavior, what are some characteristics come to mind that you would use to define them?” Additional questions included the following: “Thinking back in your leadership experiences, tell me how you handle change in the workplace?” and “What is your opinion of the latest acquisition with our current company?”

All face-to-face interviews were recorded with an Olympus digital voice recording device. The device was clearly displayed on the desk of the interviewee. The digital voice recording device allowed the researcher to quickly download the recorded session to a separate hard drive that was secured at the researcher’s home office.

The second instrument of the study was the generational cohort focus group sessions. This part of the study included questions such as, “In thinking about your generational cohort, what characteristics would you use to describe your generation?” and
“Describe your feelings regarding if you feel if there are any obstacles with your generation and longevity in the workplace?” There were six questions for this part.

All data was manually coded. The researcher was able to identify themes from the participant responses. Those themes will be further explained in Chapter Four. The researcher acknowledges that manual coding is not a precise science, but rather an interpretive act.

Data Collection Procedures

An email was sent to all of the participants requesting their participation and providing an overview of the research and its importance. All participants were made aware of the voluntary nature of participation and their Bill of Rights (Appendix G). No incentives were provided to participants for their contribution to the study.

Storing Data

Choosing to gather data utilizing one-on-one interviews and focus group sessions allowed the researcher to evaluate the data objectively. The amount and content of the data needed to be organized and categorized in such a manner that would allow for further investigation by subsequent researchers. All recorded transcriptions of interviews and focus group sessions that may in any way identify a participant’s involvement, are stored on a mobile terabyte drive that is locked in the researcher’s office away from Company A. No data was stored utilizing the company network or shared drives.

Analysis of Potential Bias

Research bias, also called experimenter bias, is a process wherein the investigator performing the research influences the data in order to portray a certain outcome (Gerhard, 2008). The researcher acknowledges the affiliation as a current employee in a
leadership position of Company A; however, there are no personal relationships with any of the participants nor does the researcher have supervisory responsibilities with any of the participants. The researcher’s position with Company A serves as a support role in talent development, and therefore, has working knowledge of the professional development needs of employees of Company A, including some of the individuals that chose to participate in the study. The researcher asserts that the credibility of the study is upheld and the potential for bias is mitigated due to the support role functionality of the researcher’s position with Company A and having no direct supervisory duties for any of the participants.

The researcher is also a member of the Generation X cohort and maintains personal assumptions regarding national events that shaped the researcher’s social behavior in the workplace, such as the debilitating impact of crack cocaine in urban communities across the country and the racial tensions created from the Rodney King verdict. Events such as the ones previously mentioned helped the researcher better understand the significance of social injustices that exist in society. Having an increased awareness of the social injustices of the world created a sense of cynicism regarding authority figures, which helped create a feeling of distrust for leadership. Those feelings require the researcher to verify and independently research all directives from company leaders, as well as act and treat others with equity and fairness.

**Limitations**

This research involved employees from the Orlando, Florida; Chicago, Illinois; and Toronto, Canada locations who were employed by Company A prior to acquisition. There are some limitations from a broader perspective of employees that have worked for
a globally diverse and internationally foot-printed organization. The data may not
generalize to the global, international worker with regards to how he or she reacts to
organizational change.

Summary

Company A Senior Management members indicated that they were interested in
this type of research because of the opportunity of having a better understanding of the
workforce’s identity and behavioral patterns. Senior leaders expressed the need to
remain competitive by capitalizing on the workforce’s diversity, particularly the social
construct of the overall employee group, while gaining a better understanding of the
creativity, adaptation and innovation, and access to external networks associated with an
engaged diverse workgroup. The researcher’s intent of the study is not to explore the
question of how to get employees more engaged; however, increased employee
engagement could be a positive offshoot as management gains a better understanding of
meaningful differences of generational cohort workers. The literature provided in
Chapter Two supports that there are meaningful differences in generational cohort
workers, and those differences can be supported or neglected in the organization’s
culture.

The acquisition was significant with Company A having a singular organizational
cultural identity with less than 500 employees all working towards servicing academic
institutions in contrast to Company B having multiple lines of business with different
identities and well over 40,000 employees in 80 countries. Company A would be viewed
as another investment for Company B.
The company prior to the acquisition experienced operational success being labeled as innovators and trendsetters in the education industry. The partnerships built with top-tier, not-for-profit academic institutions had created a highly credible and profitable position with industry experts. However, in the global economy wherein organizational change is a more demanding and pressing constant in every aspect of employees’ lives (Castells, 1996, 2000; Dawson, 2003), the global scope of this particular acquisition led to the question of whether or not company leaders are willing to understand the relevance of generational cohort differences in the workplace and how those differences impact operational continuity during significant organizational change.

The costs associated with a lack of understanding the dynamics and diversity of the workforce can be significant because managers and their employees perceive organizational conflicts and organize their interactions along social identity lines (Schneider & Northcraft, 1999). The researcher’s study supports that the social identity lines are recognized as generational and the culture-sharing identities that bond strangers, acquaintances, and colleagues should not be neglected. Company leaders are losing the battle of knowledge management by not grasping the meaningful differences among generations with regard to work-related values in responding to significant organizational change (Asoh, Belardo, & Neilson, 2002; Smith, 2013).

Chapter Three provided the basis for the conclusions and recommendations to follow, as well as provided enough information for the study to be replicated to further the research. All of the major parts of the research project, including the sample population, data collection methods, and limitations of the study were designed to address the research questions in the study: 1) how do different generational cohort workers
respond when disruptions in operational continuity occur? and; 2) how does company leaders’ ability to understand generational differences impact disruptions in operational continuity caused by significant organizational change? Chapter Four explains the findings of the data collection, as well as includes many quotes from participants who were interviewed.
CHAPTER FOUR

Data Analysis

Company acquisitions present the workforce with the uncertainty of change. The organizational challenge for company leaders is the management of the workforce and the competing workplace values and priorities that generational workers exhibit (Benjamin, 2011). The data collected from the interviews and focus group sessions provided the researcher a better understanding of generational cohorts, their culture-sharing identities, and how their workplace values and behavioral differences play a factor with operational continuity when significant organizational change occurs. The chapter is organized according to the assumptions in relationship to the research questions. The chapter outlines the two assumptions and the data from the study that supported or rejected each assumption. The two assumptions are 1) Disruptions in operational continuity caused by organizational change are enhanced when leadership does not understand generational cohort work values; and 2) Culture-sharing generational members exhibit meaningful social behavior workplace differences.

Participants

Face-to-face interviews and generational cohort focus group sessions were conducted with full-time workers, all of whom were employed by Company A across the three sites at the time of the study and prior to the acquisition. Participation in the interviews and focus group sessions was voluntary. Conference rooms and private office spaces were used onsite, and coffee houses and restaurants were used offsite to conduct the interviews. A total of sixteen questions were targeted for each face-to-face interview. The average number of questions asked and answered during the allotted one hour
recorded session was 12.5. Participants provided enough ancillary responses that addressed questions that may not have been explicitly asked that could be used for data analysis. The face-to-face interviews were completed with 20 management level employees with the following generational cohort breakdown: 2 Traditionals, 7 Baby Boomers, 6 Generation Xers, and 3 Millennials. The percentage is summarized in the following table.

Table 2

*Breakdown of Face-to-face Interview Participation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generational Cohort</th>
<th>% of Participation</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditionals</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Boomers</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation X</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millennials</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in Chapter One in Table 1, each group has its own distinct characteristics, values, and attitudes toward work, based on its generation’s life experiences. In the literature review, Zemke et al. (2000) described generational cohorts as groups of people who share birth years, history, and a collective personality as a result of their defining experiences. Traditionals were influenced by the Great Depression and World War II and their shared birth years ranged from 1925 to 1945. Baby Boomers grew up in a post-World War II era and economic depression and their shared birth years ranged from 1946 to 1964. Generations Xers shared birth years ranging from 1965 to 1981 in the U.S. and they grew up in the political climate in the aftermath of Watergate and the Vietnam War.
Millennials grew up during a time of economic prosperity and technological advancements and shared birth years ranging from 1982 to 2004.

The generational cohort focus group sessions were completed with 45 non-management employees. Conference rooms were used for the sessions and the researcher made preparations for each session by ensuring that the room was devout of distractions, such as bad lighting and poor room temperature. Chairs were organized in a circle in the middle of the room with a small round table in the middle of the chairs. On the table at the beginning of each interview were copies of the consent letter and a digital recording device placed on the table.

Participants were told at the beginning of each session the generational cohort they were classified and provided a definition of the generation, along with the birth range. Each session was started with an explanation that the session would be recorded, and that their names would not be included in the research. Each focus group was then given a number that would be used in place of their name during the session. Four of the five group session had five members of the same generational cohort. The fifth group comprised of a representative of each generational cohort plus one additional member chosen at random. A total of six questions were targeted for each focus group session and all six questions were asked and answered during the timed one-hour recorded session.
Table 3

*Focus Group Coding Identifier*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identifier</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Birth Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FGTRAD0001</td>
<td>5 Members</td>
<td>1925 - 1945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGBABB0001</td>
<td>5 Members</td>
<td>1946 - 1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGGENX0001</td>
<td>5 Members</td>
<td>1965 - 1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGMILL0001</td>
<td>5 Members</td>
<td>1982 - 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGTRBAGEMI1001</td>
<td>5 Members</td>
<td>1925 - 2004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1.* Pie chart showing breakdown of hybrid focus group session.

The researcher made a concerted effort in selecting participants that accurately reflected the current labor situation. Data triangulation was used in the study, utilizing the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012) breakdown of generational workers. The data collected from BLS (2012) was compared to generational cohort breakdown of the participants, as well as, Company A employees prior to the acquisition to support the credibility, generalizability, and validity of the study.
The participants self-identified their ethnicity and gender in some cases during the interviews and focus group session, and in other cases, the researcher made a best guess in identifying a participant’s ethnicity and gender. The ethnic representation for the face-to-face interviews was 50% Caucasian, 20% African American, 15% Hispanic, 10% Asian, and 5% Pacific Islander. The gender representation was 65% male and 35% female. The participants work tenure ranged from 24 months to 15 years.

Figure 2. Bar graph showing ethnic demographic breakdown of Company A Leaders that conducted face-to-face interviews.
Figure 3. Pie chart showing breakdown of gender participants that conducted face-to-face interviews.

The ethnic representation for the focus group sessions was 50% Caucasian, 20% African American, 15% Hispanic, 10% Asian, and 5% Pacific Islander. The gender representation was 65% male and 35% female. Figure 2 provides a breakdown of the participant demographics and Figure 3 provides a breakdown of gender.

Social Behavior Categories and Descriptions Overview

Investigators of social behavior have consistently found three dimensions of social evaluation describing them as power, affection, and contribution to group tasks (Carter, 1954; Rummel, 1976). These descriptions provided a reference to understanding the characteristics and attributes of the participants’ responses so that categorical themes were developed.

The power dimension is described as a capacity to produce effects through another self. The interpretation of this dimension was that the person or group feels they have a strong sense of influence on other's perceptions, dispositions, interests, will, and all the other aspects of a person's self in the form of social space and status (Rummel, 1976). As indicated in the literature review, these people are highly regarded by others
because of their pioneering ways and ability to set new standards of behavior (Rummel, 1976; Rummel, 1981).

The affection dimension is described as a social capacity consisting of organized or unorganized, direct or indirect, shallow or intense, complex interactions of one’s self to another. The interpretation of this dimension is that a person identifies a certain level of affection based on specific behaviors he or she perceives. Whether the individual agrees or not with the actual behavior, the perception of that behavior creates a level of acceptance for the self in identifying a social behavior (Rummel, 1976).

The contribution to group tasks dimension is described as a causal and meaningful unity of individuals, unity based on shared meanings, values, and norms and a structure of associated expectations (Rummel, 1976). The interpretation of this dimension is that a person identifies with law-norms that establish a right-obligation relationship among individuals. Those norms are not based on territory or material factors. They are based on implicit rules and understandings, and an informal structure of expectations.

Participants also self-identified the most common social behaviors in the workplace as they provided their insight to the interview and focus group session questions. Table 4 provides the common descriptors as presented by the participants.
Table 4

*Common Social Behaviors in the Workplace*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Social Behaviors</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal Communication</td>
<td>Interacting effectively with peers, superiors, and assistants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding the feelings of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal and Organizational Integrity</td>
<td>Identifying and prioritizing tasks to be accomplished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giving constructive feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal and Professional Accountability</td>
<td>Doing things the right way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taking responsibility for one’s own success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asking questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Making and keeping commitments to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Listening effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Influencing the actions of team members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dealing with individuals fairly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>Treating co-workers, superiors, assistants with respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Showing loyalty to an organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Producing high quality results</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher utilized a manual coding process. During the coding process the researcher found that participants were willing to speak candidly about their personal experiences from an individual-centric perspective to a group to an organizational perspective, moving seamlessly between the three. Following this insight, several themes emerged:
Individual-centric perspective

1. Personal Goals and Needs
2. Perception (Real and Assumed)
3. Methods of Communication
4. Status and social position
5. Individual Responsibility (Stated and Implied)

Figure 4. Pie chart showing breakdown percentage of coding instances related to personal experiences for the Individual-centric perspective. Participants revealed how they perceive themselves as an individual as a part of a generational cohort.
Group perspective

1. Cultural Identity, Norms, and Needs
2. Perception (Real and Assumed)
3. Internal Methods of Communication
4. Status and Social Position
5. Motivators and Drivers

Figure 5. Pie chart showing breakdown percentage of coding instances related to personal experiences from a generational cohort group perspective. Participants revealed how their personal perspectives align with their generational cohort.
**Organizational Perspective**

1. Perception (Real and Assumed)
2. Organization’s Responsibility
3. Methods of Internal Communication
4. Reactions to Change

*Figure 6.* Pie chart showing percentage of coding instances related to personal experiences from an organizational perspective. Participants revealed how their personal perspectives align with the organization.

**Individual-centric Perspective Themes: Personal Goals and Needs**

Personal goals and needs are different amongst every generation in important ways that are influenced by external variables such as economic conditions, political climate, and current social conditions to internal drivers that come from personal experiences and influences in a person’s life. Shin (2014) asserted that Millennials are more concerned with making a difference, as opposed to Generation Xers. Volunteer
rates have been climbing with organizations like Peace Corps, Teach for America and AmeriCorps benefiting from this trend. Millennials target personal goals that are more civic minded like and less materialistic compared to the Baby Boom generation. For the context of this study participants were able to discuss perceptions as it related to their individual-centricity as a member of their generational cohort. During coding, this category was found to have the most instances with 35 comments attributed to personal perceptions. Figure 7 shows a breakdown of the categories and the number of instances found from the data collection.

![Pie chart showing breakdown percentage of coding instances for each category of participant responses.](image)

**Figure 7.** Pie chart showing breakdown percentage of coding instances for each category of participant responses.

Participant responses were diverse across all individual and group session, with some distinct responses that appeared to be unique to a particular generation. One interviewee talked about needing stability and having personal goals to line up with a stable lifestyle,
“I want to work for a company where I never have any interest to go anywhere else ever. And in fact, the goal I was looking at was the 25 year club. So much so that next June is my 25 year club entrance... I don't want to call it risk tolerance it really isn't risk tolerance but it has a lot of similarities to how you invest money. There are individuals that their entire approach to investing money is I want steadier returns over the long term and there are individuals that buy and trade for the day.”

Another contributor stated that,

“So what I sense from the company, it has everything to do with why I'm doing what I'm doing and who I get to work with. If the company damages that, I will go and do it elsewhere. There will be no anything, I will be here one day and I won’t be here the next.”

One Generation Xer talked about the need to be winning on her own terms and having the personal freedoms to be successful,

“I believe in my ability to find the right answers for me. I think that helps someone to have the confidence that they need to go out there and climb the mountains that they want to climb.” Another participant stated, “I think that’s driven because I am very passionate. When I'm doing something I want to do it all the way. I get very excited about it. I want to do my very best at it.”

Interviewees indicated that being focused on personal goals and needs have much to do with their personal value system. A respondent noted, “I think my personal values contribute to that...I think in order for me to feel good about a win, it needs to be a win
Another respondent stated, “I need to believe in myself and what I bring to the table and research further on how to expand upon those skills.”

In some cases personal goals and needs are based on personal virtues of ethics and morality, in other cases it is based on competitive drivers. One contributor asserted, “I know that just trying my best isn't good enough for me. That I am capable of more than I even recognize in myself. I do hold high expectations for performance for myself.”

A Generation Xer noted,

“I like the idea of being able to complete a project based on my skill, my knowledge, my imagination...not necessarily seeking help if needed...autonomy and freedom to do the job that I was hired to do.”

Contributors to the study were keenly aware of their individual demographics and positioned race, gender, and ethnicity as drivers for their personal goals and needs. One participant noted, “I allow myself to also feel successful as woman, as a mother, as a wife and recognize that when I'm here that I am still all of those things as well.” One individual provided a detailed example of how perceived opinions of her physical appearance drive her personal goals and needs. She noted,

I look very young. I'm a shorter, smaller, Latina female. I think that being someone who wanted to hustle and wanted to get promoted, people would overlook me for the guy in the room, although I was qualified to that next job. But I maybe wasn't the one that you would look at very quickly and say we should hire her. So I wanted to look that part so I started asking what do I need to do?

Several interviewees provided insight on how certain child-rearing upbringings influenced their personal goals and needs. One person stated,
I’ve had conversation with my family about how my parents getting divorced at the age of 11...I had to be the man of the house. I didn't play anymore...I had to make money...I need to buy my own shoes and I didn't have to depend on my mom to buy a pair of shoes. So I feel in many ways that social acceptance of divorce had to be strong influence as how I viewed the world and how I value money and work.

Another individual noted,

I grew up in an inner city urban community and so the music of the age that really started to merge was hip hop / rap music, which was the sound of my generation, the voice of my generation...political issues, social issues and that shaped and informed a lot of the way I started to think about what I needed in life, both personally and professionally.

Perception (Real and Assumed)

Focus group and interview contributors seemed to be intimately aware of their individual perception to others, not only within their character, but the perceptions of their generational cohort. The degree to which participants believed in those stereotypes or perceptions of their character and individual work ethic ranged from strongly agreed to somewhat disagreed. Interviewees self-reported their personal perceptions and the researcher verbally asked to rate their belief in the stereotypes of their individual generations.
Thirty-one of the forty-five total participants self-acknowledged that not only are they aware of the perceptions that are particular to their generation, but that they strongly to somewhat agree with those perceptions. Many of the individuals were able to recall a generational perception or stereotype and how it has affected them, positively or negatively, as an individual. One adamant individual noted,

“I can only speak to my experience as a Gen Xer, but those in my immediate circle possess a type of cynicism. There is a common distrust that we have and I believe a lot of the mistrust we learned from our parents...being mistrustful of each other. I would also say skepticism because I think a lot of the times we will hear what someone is saying but still have the need to see proof of that thing.”
A Baby Boomer member stated, “I think it is also important to note that we are workers who are driven, wanting to accomplish something, wanting to learn more...that perception has opened opportunities for me that I know some of my successor generation colleagues have not.” A Millennial member alluded to the influence of technology saying,

“We are considered technologically advanced, goal oriented, and we're raised to be that way... we grew up around it and we've always looked at it as to how we can use technology to see how we can be more efficient.”

Methods of Communication

Several contributors to the study referenced preferred methods of individual and collective communication in the workplace, and a divide between what is preferred to what is actually demonstrated by management or colleagues of different generation. An individual noted,

“Communication begins with the day you're hired and it’s a set of expectations clearly written down and being set, its responsibilities being outlined, and it’s the training & development process because it is ongoing as you learn and develop... I think it’s having that understanding that goes beyond the responsibilities and the accountabilities and that doesn’t happen enough.”

Another Baby Boomer member noted,

“You learn not to get upset over small things...you try to understand the other perspective...ask yourself the question, does this really impact me and where I want to go...It doesn’t matter how it’s communicated to me, it matters what is
communicated to me. If I know what is communicated to me, I can keep my forward progress and act accordingly.”

Status and Social Position

During coding, this category was found to have the least instances with 20 comments attributed to status and social position. One non-management interviewee noted,

“Being in a position where I actually have a level of comfort to do what I want to do... it’s hard to have a work/life balance if you can't support yourself at home. Being able to have that kind of life where you can go out have fun, meet up with your friends, and if you don't have an equal end at work where you get only entry level positions, it's hard to support those habits.”

A female contributor noted that she wasn’t so much concerned with individual status and social position, but the ability to have a certain level of stability:

“I feel like as my generation coming into the workforce, the economy the way it has been, it’s very much been a thing of change. It’s like what's next...there really hasn't been a lot of longstanding stability in the workplace. So for me it’s just what does that change look like and what do I need to do to survive?”

Individual Responsibility (Stated and Implied)

This category pertains to an individual’s viewpoint of their responsibility for their own success. Management and non-management contributors felt strongly about the degree of individual responsibility with regards to professional growth. One non-management member noted,
“I've always felt like a piece to a puzzle and a puzzle with no picture, but as long as you fit the shape you can go here. And I've always felt replaceable, always a pawn, you can come here and we'll pay you and if you don't like it, we'll replace you. It's never been a situation where you were able to grow into what you wanted to do besides what you're doing right now...I think it makes sense for a company to invest in their employee. I think it is the best way for a company to grow.”

One management level member provided a different perspective,

“I think that a company’s responsibility is to its stakeholders or shareholders. In either instance, an organization's responsibilities are to those whose interest is profiting or expanding to fill its mission. I think there is a correlation to developing human capital and achieving set goals...I think there is a symbiotic relationship b/w professional development and a company ability to thrive and grow. My responsibility is to my part for my own professional development but not to expect someone or something else to do it for me.”

Participants also chose to delineate between and reference other generations in their responses for this category:

“It seems that in the generation older than me, it seems that everybody had to work for what they had and appreciated what they had and knew that's what they had to do to get through life. Whereas I feel in many cases in my generation, it is almost like you coming up in a time where people are flipping houses for fortune, easy money, get a degree and you'll be set. I think a lot of people in my generation they have that get rich quick work ethic. They've fallen in the cracks
because they haven't learned to scratch to get ahead because they were expecting things that they shouldn't have been expecting.”

A Baby Boomer cohort contributor noted,

“Tom Brokaw said the greatest generation was the Post WWII Vets. They fought a war, defeated fascism...it was a time of optimism, time of economic growth, the rise of the Levitt towns and you could realize the American dream. It was a generation like my Dad's that grew up during the depression that picked up coal with his grandma to go feed the stove, started a full time job back in the mid-30s...it was a generation that had a lot of optimism and you fed off that as part of the Baby Boomers generation. There wasn't anything you couldn't achieve if you worked hard.”

**Group Perspective Themes: Cultural Identity, Norms, and Needs**

Culture encompasses a broad scope and it represents the basic level of society. Culture represents a community’s art, music, writing, its politics, and its treatment of other individuals. One participant stated, “Culture comprises all of these elements in my opinion. It’s the environment you grow up in that helps influence differences.” During coding, this category was found to have the most instances with 37 comments attributed to cultural identities and shared norms and needs.

A management level interviewee expressed his perspective of how culture binds us:

“I think culture is sort of like a tapestry in a way...you have certain threads that are woven that apply to everyone. I'm an American citizen in this certain economic environment. I'm influenced by where I grew up, by my parents, by my
peers, by my studies...if I grow up in the Midwest, I may have a different set of values based on hard work and ethics and certainly education as opposed to someone who doesn't have certain opportunities. The key with culture commonality, you're American, you’re free, you have the ability to succeed, and you have the ability to improve your lot as my Dad used to say... Culture is broad in scope but as narrow as one individual.”

Two group members spoke about the idea of shared culture from the standpoint of music:

“I would say yes and citing some of my own research...the thesis that I put together hip hop as a culture. There will be certain things that stand out, there will be their own music, style of dress, dance, all of these things to be found in hip hop. I know that we're looking currently at Generation X where the Hip Hop culture was born. Many folks in Gen X share in hip hop culture where they may not share in particular demographics or socio-economic growth and standing or any of those common areas.”

One participant made a poignant statement suggesting that even within generations, there are distinctions:

“I think there are certainly cultural distinctions that occur inside of Gen X because a Gen Xer that grew up in Connecticut may not necessarily have the same values as a Gen X who grew up in Louisiana or New Orleans...someone who grew up in South Central, LA vs someone who grew up in Montana...music is a type of galvanizing force, however, I think that there are cultural distinctions that are relevant to geographic location, ethnic background, etc.”
The topic of culture and culture-sharing identities proved to be an emotional subject for many of the contributors to the study evoking personal and intimate experiences. Albeit the participant’s responses were unique to each individual, the shared experiences showed the commonality of those experiences in how they viewed the world and how behavior was shaped. One Baby Boomer focus group member lamented,

“I think there has been many historical events that happened nationally or internationally that impacted my overall perspective on what I do and how I do it...such as the assassinations of some key figures like Martin Luther King Jr, John F. Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy, and Malcolm X. It’s been several and I think probably those individuals were some of the stalwart of individuals that many people looked up to...once your foundation is shaken a little it leaves you with an uncertainty, but you draw on the experiences of when they were here and how they lived their lives and integrate your own personality...for me it was a matter of learning tolerance. I believe my generation learned that the most from those individuals as a culture.”

One respondent stated, “The generation of the 60s had the greatest interest in change and diversity, a greater commitment to public service, compared to my dad’s generation...I met people from all over the United States from my generation and we call all relate to the impact certain events had on shaping our cultural identity.”

Perception (Real and Assumed)

Interviewees were sensitive to group perceptions of their generational cohort as well as other generations. One participant stated, “I think Baby Boomers have been the most predominate generation in divorce, which I think effects a generation when it comes
to looking for stability and having to have that at work.” Another individual spoke about the negative connotations of perceptions:

“The main one that comes to mind is disloyal. I've learned a lot about perceptions. I don't think their fair but a common trait as people see us as always looking for the next opportunity, lazy, and we just work for the next opportunity...it’s unfair because we would like to have a career and retire with a company.”

Several respondents focused on the implications of those perceptions and how it negatively affects opportunities in the workplace:

“Individuals are going to work longer and I think you're going to have biases too that aren't reflected certainly not face-to-face...you may interview well and great a writing resumes, but I think there is a definite perceived experience as you get older that we are a culture that doesn't value senior citizens or the elderly or hold them high esteem as other cultures. Interviewers might not see the value that we would be able to contribute is diminished at a higher level...now if you wanted to be a greeter at Walmart that would be different.”

A Baby Boomer cohort member echoed a similar sentiment when he noted, “There is a lack of faith and confidence from your superiors in you because of your age...something that is self-perceived...something that is stereotyped.” Participant’s perception and opinion about other generations has influence on how they treat and communicate with each other:

“Although we are classified as Gen X, we tend to take on a lot of the attributes of the Baby Boomers and then the younger Gen X will take on lessor attributes of the
Baby Boomers. Millennials however are folks growing up in a digital age...they haven’t necessarily discovered what their values and morals are. I believe that while some things are common, I don't think those things have carried on to Millennials.”

A management level member stated,

“Baby Boomers have an attitude of what’s in it for me and can handle tough conversations...they want to earn it and not be given anything. Millennials need help corralling their emotions...they don’t know what it’s like to earn it.”

Internal Methods of Communication

Generational Cohort focus group participants had a distinct method of communication that was evident in their body language, their dress, their mannerism, their proximity to each other. Generation X participants mimicked each other’s body language by keeping their hands folded in front of them. They took on a very protective stance and kept a safe equal distance a part from each other, almost to protect their personal space. Participants appeared to not want to be outdueled, as if they were competing with each other. They were all dressed professionally, although they were not instructed to dress in any particular fashion nor does Company A require professional attire. Company A has a business casual protocol, which included jeans and sneakers. One participant noted,

“Well you look like you're 19, you need to wear a suit, so that people see that you are serious about business. You need to not look to trendy ‘cause that can be distracting and make you seem too casual. I think that through all that mentorship over the years I have this very 80's version in my mind of what a
business person is supposed to be like... we have a very casual dress code here and it's outside of my comfort zone.”

Baby Boomer focus group members were comfortable casual and much more expressive and engaging in their communication with each other. Their body language was relaxed and confident with hands resting on knees. Participants made consistent eye contact throughout the session. One member noted,

“In my generation I think when I look back, we are full of questions. We have challenging questions. It wasn't the status quo...we just didn't accept everything because someone told us because it's been done the same way for 400 years. We sort of looked at as we don't have all the answers but we had the guts to question. You tell me I have to fit in that box, I want to know why....we weren't afraid to make friends and a lot more relaxed... we took a person for who they were, black blue or green, if they are good or bad person.”

Millennials focus group participants were casual, confident, and passionate about their beliefs and opinions. They made several adjustments to the seating throughout the session choosing to be more acquainted with each other and not reveling in the idea of private space. All of the participants brought their mobile devices with them and kept them in plain sight. This group needed questions clarified the most out of the other groups.

**Status and Social Position**

Very few participants had an opinion on this category from a group perspective, but what appeared to be a pervading attitude was one based on perceived fairness. One interviewee noted,
“Being honest among your co-workers...that's all you can ask that someone is honest upfront, backstabbing and underhanded stuff is such a waste of time....benefits of course, pay scale, effort and reward...I'm a firm believer in that equation. If I put the effort, I expect to be rewarded accordingly.”

Another individual emphasized the idea of trust and importance regarding status and not monetary gain. The participant stated,

“Connected with autonomy is that I am trusted by the organization to do what it is I was brought on to do. An aside to that, it is critically important to be engaged in the work that is meaningful to me...work that it is going to yield something for the greater good. Otherwise, I simply won't be engaged.”

**Motivators and Drivers**

Both management and non-management contributors to the study acknowledged that a one-size-fits-all management style simply does not work, especially as the four generations work side-by-side. Each generation brings unique viewpoints to the table and has specific values that guide their daily actions. One participant spoke about the importance of motivating others by the way he communicates:

“As a leader you have to have an understanding of who you're dealing with...you have to take different approaches based on generation...there is a certain control aspect of ego or cockiness...leaders have to over communicate.”

Participants spoke about their work environments as motivators and drivers. One individual stated,

“The factors that most strongly contribute would be a boss whom I can align to. If my boss distinctly has different goals (i.e. integrity) that's not a boss for me. So,
I need individuals around me that can understand my core values and goal set and who will align to it, including employees who work for me.”

A management level participant noted,

“I think that it has to be an environment that everyone feels comfortable raising their hand, raising their hand, asking questions and learning. I think that for me a work place culture should be one that is professional. There are things that are not acceptable in the work place that might be other places. It is important that people feel comfortable at work. And they can focus on the good work that they want to be doing.”

A Traditionals cohort member talked about workplace culture as a motivator stating,

“I believe having a diverse workplace is important because you have different ideas and viewpoints. You have perspectives that should broaden and enrich you as a person. This gets into the culture of the company, are they interested in their employees? Is there a safe work environment not in the physical sense but the freedom to chat with anyone without judgment and being guarded in your comments for fear of someone thinking poorly of you? I think it’s the culture that developed and the ability to succeed and recognition of that and have fun in the workplace.”

Organizational Perspectives Theme: Perception (Real and Assumed)

Participants catered their comments towards organizational change. One individual stated,

“I think they’ve (Company B) had to have some impact on how we lead, how we measure our performance of our staff...they're a bit more organized as far as
housing all the information in one area. They do offer some additional training but I feel we are still such an afterthought or far enough away that we're not truly impacted in the sense that there is no one over us watching whether we are taking advantage of the training and development.”

Another interviewee stated,

“Work place success is being able to have a team of people that are engaged and genuinely interested in reaching their goals as a result of believing in the vision of the organization. People who feel that they are in an environment that things are ethical, they are encouraged to do business on the right terms, that they also are ethical team players.”

A Generation Xer cohort member talked about the difficulties working in an organization in transition:

“It seemed as though decisions were made based off a quarter, so as to appear profitable, we made decisions that were better maybe short term than long term. As leadership changed it became very unpredictable as to what changes you would be managing through.”

Another contributor iterated aspects of the organization’s management:

“The idea is management by empowerment and in order to empower someone, you need to set expectations, you need to set goals, train, mentor, and coach...once they've reached a certain level of knowledge and expertise and execution then they can be empowered to make their own decisions and their own choices.”
Organization’s Responsibility

One participant stated, “I have a fair understanding of what it takes to attract, recruit, and maintain an employee. The company has already invested resources to acquire that employee; not preparing that employee to take on that next role is actually a loss for the company, for everyone.” While another interviewee noted, “I think having been in various management roles, having been in Training and Development, I think our responsibility to our associates is to help individuals achieve their potential whatever that may be...so like culture is broad in scope, so I think that part of the development and my belief is you develop individuals...most organizations pay lip service to that because its complex, its time consuming, and I would say there would be more of what you would want to do because there's not enough to go around.”

Participants overwhelmingly seemed to agree that the organization’s responsibility should be to develop its staff, but it wasn’t sufficient. A Millennials cohort member stated, “I don't think company's invest enough time into making sure that the employee's that they hire are happy staying with the employer and that is something that has become very important to any generation.”

Methods of Internal Communication

One participant talked about the importance of communicating as an organization stating, “As a leader you have to have an understanding of who you’re dealing with...you have to take different approaches based on generation.” Another management level respondent stated,
“I like to sit down with my employee. It’s about setting up timeline and ensuring they have tools. I manage Millennials by the way. It’s interesting and a lot of it has to do with in most cases, entry level jobs and they don’t have a lot of experiences. They like autonomy but you need to trust but verify. In those situations, you have someone with a lot of creativity but not a lot of experiences. You need to keep regular check-ins and showing them your appreciation for their efforts in a manner that is positive. They don’t take negative feedback very well. Have finesse with your constructive criticism and a strong sense of trust with that person so that they can give you the benefit of the doubt when something doesn’t come off as soft as you would have liked.”

Reactions to Change

Participants addressed aspects of change and how they deal with change from an employee view and from a larger perspective as a part of the organization. One participant stated, “I feel as long as I can get sense clarity on how to tackle it I’m very comfortable with it. I’ve also learned the right questions to ask when that change doesn’t come with the clarity that you would hope it would.” A female in management noted,

“I can receive a message, accept the message and I think my brain go right to what do I do with this, how does this affect the people under me, what questions are their going to ask of me, and am I going to be able to direct them? So, I think I am very much like a machine when change comes. Even extreme change, like layoffs, I don’t react in an emotional way. I sort of accept it asap and then I go right into, “how do I fix it, what do I do about, what are my next steps, how are
people around me going to react to it, should I practice with someone on how I go about communicating this, and who should I communicate this message to first?"

Assumption 1

Disruptions in operational continuity caused by organizational change are enhanced when leadership does not understand generational cohort work values.

As reflected in the literature review Dahl (2010), the potentially negative outcomes of organizational change at the level of the employee relates to how employees react to and respond to organizational change. Many of the participants stated the acquisition of Company A by Company B brought about varying levels of stress to employees because of the uncertainty of what changes would occur and how individuals would be affected. Interviewees acknowledged diverse reactions amongst their peers. Each generational cohort member provided words or phrases to describe their feelings when asked how they handle change. Table 5 illustrates a list of common responses provided by each generation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generational Cohort</th>
<th>Common Words or Phrase Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditionals</strong></td>
<td>I accept it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I’m very comfortable with it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t get upset over things you can’t control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Baby Boomers</strong></td>
<td>Figure out the “how” vs. the “why”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How does this affect the people under me?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do I fix it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Generation X</strong></td>
<td>Uncertainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How am I impacted?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What do I do with this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What’s next?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Here we go again?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Millennials</strong></td>
<td>I’m going to get replaced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have to watch my back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>My voice won’t get heard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interview and focus group sessions identified that employees of the four different generations form their opinions and shape their behaviors based on experiences that have made the greatest impression from their generational era. Contributors responded to questions that allowed them to think about those moments in United States history that shaped their work values. Responses for Baby Boomers ranged from events such as the election of John F. Kennedy to the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr
and Bobby Kennedy, which not only sparked a new direction of hope for that generation, but also evoked a feeling of distrust for government.

Traditionals provided responses that they survived World War II, the Great Depression, and fascism. Those events shaped an attitude of optimism, economic growth, opportunity, and loyalty to their families and to their profession. Generation Xers provided responses about seeing stories and personally witnessing the epidemic of crack cocaine, Reaganomics, and corrupt corporations that destroyed the retirement savings of their parents. They developed an attitude of cynicism and skepticism of social justice, a deeper distrust of government, and the shifting desire to be loyal to their personal wealth and not a particular organization.

Millennials experienced the technology boom that changed many aspects of daily living, such as studying, watching a movie, communicating with friends, and learning how to use technology to their personal advantage. Cohort members agreed that their parents had the greatest impact on them because they pushed them to believe that they can have anything they want. Millennials tended to use the words, “driven” and “forward-thinking” quite often in their responses; more than any other generational cohort.

Contributors that conducted face-to-face interviews were all in leadership roles, and members of each generational cohort were represented. Participants were given the opportunity to expound on any thoughts or observations they made in their interactions with the various generational cohort workers at the conclusion of each session. Table 6 provides a list of common responses provided by each leader.
**Table 6**

*Common Responses of Leaders with Generational Cohort Interactions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generational Cohort</th>
<th>Common Words or Phrase Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditionals</strong></td>
<td>“Employees have to earn their position”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Dealing with change comes from life experiences”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Experiences you have mold you”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“They don’t know what it’s like to earn it”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Baby Boomers</strong></td>
<td>“20 something’s don’t have the life experiences”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Leaders have to have control”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Having Emotional Maturity”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Major influences came from our parents”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Generation X</strong></td>
<td>“Millennials have been empowered that they can do anything”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Millennials need help corralling their emotions”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Baby Boomers have a ‘What’s in it for me’ attitude”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“A leader has to understand who you’re dealing with”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Oldest generation work the hardest and appreciate their work”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Millennials</strong></td>
<td>“I wouldn’t stereotype people”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Invest in yourself”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Older generations don’t always respect my opinions”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Millennials require regular check-ins and a lot of appreciation</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assumption 1 showed that generational workers interpret and respond to change based on the social experiences that have the greatest impact on their personal and professional lives. Those social experiences are consistent with the generational era in which they identify. Their responses indicated that their sensitivity and attitudes towards change rested on a continuum in stress levels from steady and unfazed to unstable and insecure due to the uncertainty of change. The collection of data identified the prominent generational cohorts that represented most closely within the continuum. The collection of data also supports a misinterpretation of perceptions and stereotypes by both leadership and non-management personnel regarding generational cohorts. The misinterpretation or lack of understanding of the work values of generational cohorts leads to miscommunications and mixed signals as Fyock (1990) cautioned leaders against. One participant poignantly addressed Assumption 1 as such, “As leaders you have to have an understanding of who you’re dealing with...Leaders have to over communicate.”

Assumption 2

Culture-sharing generational members exhibit meaningful social behavior workplace differences.

The research questions for this assumption were focused on the common behaviors of generational cohort workers as it related to shared-experiences and whether those experiences were meaningful enough to be identified as culture-sharing. There were greater than seventy-two percent of the respondents who indicated that they felt there was a shared culture among generations when asked the question. As illustrated in
Figure 9, each participant provided their opinion, along with the generational cohort they belong.

Figure 9. Bar graph showing participants opinion on whether they believe generational cohorts have a shared culture.

The highest concentration of participants that affirmed there was a shared culture among generations was Generation X. Members from this cohort also shared the strongest sentiments regarding the perception of stereotypes of other generations. The researcher’s data collection also took into account the diverse nature of the participants in terms of geographic environment and upbringing. Participants self-identified their geographic environments, such as rural, suburban, and urban locations as points of emphasis prior to settling in their current environment and working for Company A. Figure 10 illustrates a breakdown of geographic environment of the participants.
Figure 10. Pie chart showing breakdown of self-identified geographic environment of upbringing for the participants.

The study provided a better understanding on the influence of national events across generations and how those generational members begin to identify with those events as a promoter for developing a shared culture. There were a total of six participants that did not self-identify their geographic environment and two participants identified their geographic environment as military, which can include experiencing all three types of developed environments throughout their upbringing. Culture within a military community can be treated as an outlier.

Summary

Chapter Four noted all relevant results, even those that were contrary to the research questions and assumptions. Chapter Five summarizes the Chapter Four findings and discusses observations made from the tables, figures, and charts. Chapter Five also provides areas of interest to further expand the research.
CHAPTER FIVE

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to better understand meaningful generational cohort differences in the workplace and their responses when disruptions in operational continuity occur due to organizational change. The organizational change was an acquisition and the factors that contribute to disruptions in operational continuity were of interest to the researcher because of the four different generations working side-by-side in the workplace. There was anecdotal evidence that meaningful differences in workplace values amongst generational cohorts existed (Deal, 2007; Santos & Cox, 2000; Zemke et al., 2000). Nevertheless, there has been some empirical evidence to support that the different generations respond to change based on personal experiences that are unique to a particular generational era (Costanza et al., 2012; Noble & Schewe, 2003).

The researcher made the assumption that there was more that Company leaders could do to better understand generational cohort work values in order to decrease the likelihood of prolonged disruptions in operational continuity attributed to organizational restructuring, changed business processes, and loss of revenue due to employee adjustment. This assumption was supported based on the importance of how high interviewees ranked communication, but also acknowledged that perceptions misguide how communication is delivered to different generational cohorts. The researcher also made the assumption that generational cohort work values are meaningful in that an identifiable shared culture exists of events that are unique to that generation that bonds them together. This assumption was supported based on the respondents’ ability to identify significant national events negating geographic environment as indicated in
figure 9. Those events help shape their opinions, attitudes, and beliefs about what they value in life and in work, how they communicate with each other, and how they behave towards others of a similar and different generational cohort. The study attempted to show the importance of gaining a better understanding of those perceived and real differences of the four generational cohort workers needs so as to better prepare company leaders for the process of talent management in times of significant organizational change.

As indicated in Chapter One, all companies face change and researchers have found that the most successful companies leverage change to their advantage by not underestimating the cost of an ill-prepared, unengaged workforce that has to cope with the uncertainty of change (Bettignies & Boddewyn, 1971; Coontz, 2004; Dickerson et al., 1989; Druid, 2010). A workforce experiencing significant change can react in several ways that could include mental stress, loss of loyalty to the company, increased time away from work, and unanticipated life changes for employees (Druid, 2010). Reactions to change can be universal to all employees or they could be tendencies more predominantly shown in individuals that are not able to handle change. Company leaders benefit from understanding the tendencies and characteristics of its workforce. It accomplishes several feats in a changing work environment: 1) increases the engagement of the workforce; 2) builds trust and meaning from leadership; 3) reduces the level of anxiety felt by the workforce; 4) creates flexibility and inclusion of the workplace (Deloitte, 2014).

In a Deloitte (2014) study of 2,500 organizations in 90 countries, it was shown that companies are struggling to engage the modern, 21st century workforce. The
information gathered from the study provided insights into what Company A leaders think and perceive about their workforce, and whether they believe the diversity of the generational workers matter to operational continuity in times of significant organizational change. The information gathered also provided insights to what non-management generational employees thought about themselves, and whether the perceptions of their work ethics and values perpetuated miscommunications.

The theoretical framework for this study is the culture-sharing commonalities of experiences that help shape, mold, and define attitudes and behaviors of the four unique generational cohort workers. Culture is not exclusive to geography, but more defined as a way of thinking, behaving, or working that exists in a place or organization (Banks et al., 1989). The study identified three perspectives; 1) individual-centric perspective; 2) group perspective; and 3) organizational perspective, to gain a better understanding of generational cohort differences in the workplace and their responses when disruptions to operational continuity occur due to organizational change. Two themes were shared between each of the three perspectives. The two themes were a) perception (real and assumed), and b) internal methods of communication. These will each be discussed in this chapter with reflection back to the literature review and data as to why these themes occurred across all three perspectives.

Assumption 1

Disruptions in operational continuity caused by organizational change are enhanced when leadership does not understand generational cohort work values.
Perceptions

The study found that perceptions can be misguided based on a lack of understanding proliferated by stereotypes. The generational diversity that exists in Company A is consistent with organizations across the United States, and the breakdown of the labor force of generational workers is consistent with the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012). Company A generational age workers have significant common experiences that in many cases excludes geographic proximity and environmental living conditions. The groups under study have what Wendover (1991) called generational markers. Those generational markers are significant because they exist in all spheres of society and create experiences and values for that particular generation. The study shows the diversity within the generational cohort based on age range, race and ethnicity, geographic location of family upbringing, parental status, and work history, but within that diversity there is a shared commonality of attitudes of behaviors within the workplace.

Company A leaders commented on perceptions of the workers values that were in many cases contra to the reality of what a particular generational cohort held as a core value. The perceptions that drive Company A leaders attitudes also influences the expectations that they have of the workers. Managers that are members of the Baby Boomers cohort asserted that Millennials are not loyal to the position and expect only to be compensated fairly based on the role and not on their experience. Subsequently, this group of managers expects that they will not go above and beyond the role expectations because “going above and beyond” as one participant stated is not tied to their salary. Nearly 50% of management participants commented that they begin to view a worker as
old by the age of 50, which influences their perception of Baby Boomers and Traditionals workers. Expectations from Company A leaders suggested that these workers are disinterested in promotion, yearning for stability, and decelerating in their desire to take on greater responsibility. Generation Xer management participants promoted the most uniform bias with perceptions of themselves and expectations of workers within the generation. This cohort asserted that the opportunity for meaningful learning was more important to Generation X than any other generational cohort. As the perceptions and stereotypes proliferated within the opinions of the management participants, the researcher’s interpretation of the data suggested a slightly different reality.

Millennials were pronounced by other generational participants to be emotionally unstable, inexperienced, and selfish, yet the core values established from the study revealed a work ethic commensurate with Traditionals, an optimistic attitude like Baby Boomers, and a desire for personal gratification like Generation Xers.

Generation Xers self-admittedly stated they were a cynical group primarily driven by how they witnessed their parent’s treatment when it was their time to retire. Many of them witnessed or read about large corporations’ unethical use of company funds that wiped away pensions for Baby Boomers. They developed attitudes of distrust for institutions and felt more inclined to pursue greater intrinsic rewards than rely on any particular company for financial fulfillment. As indicated in the literature review, Generation Xers switch jobs more frequently than any other generation (Yang & Guy, 2006), while demanding more of a role in decision making. Yet, the perception from participants in the study suggested that Millennials are less loyal to an organization and Generation Xers are hard workers that are emotionally stable. Traditionals were
perceived by other generational participants as not having a lot of faith and confidence in their superiors, stubborn, and hesitant to change traditional thinking to a moderate integrated level of thinking and behaving. The core values established from the study revealed Traditionals have a high respect for authority, loyalty to the organization, and believe in sacrificing for the common good.

There may be a number of reasons why these perceptions exist in the workplace that contribute to miscommunications of work-related expectations and mixed signals from management. The researcher noted that 100% of the participants acknowledged that they are aware of the perceptions of their generational cohorts and proceeded to provide descriptive examples. 69% of the participants strongly to somewhat agreed with the perceptions and subsequent stereotypes. The researcher found most revealing was that 75% of the 69% were in a leadership role. The implications of a large percentage of the existing management staff proliferating the stereotypes would suggest that the company culture will continue to mishandle demographic diversity in the workplace. Company A leaders acknowledgement of agreement to those stereotypes also speaks to how leaders communicate to the workforce on the floor and in private. Workers witness the treatment and communication style of management to employees and develop a level of social behavior acceptance.

Another reason why these perceptions exist in the workplace is the perceived disproportionate level of promotions witnessed by the workforce in which Traditionals and Millennials are often excluded. Prior to the acquisition, there were six management level positions that were made available to internal candidates. The six positions were filled by two Baby Boomers and four Generation Xers. The researcher could not
ascertain all of the circumstances that went into the promotion of those individuals, however, three internal candidates were Traditionals, four internal candidates were Millennials, two were Baby Boomers, and four were Generation Xers. The observation of who gets promoted can lead to deeper misperceptions of generational cohort traits and characteristics. The researcher was not a candidate nor did the researcher intend to be a candidate for any of the aforementioned promotion opportunities.

**Methods of Communication**

Another theme studied was the method in how Company A leaders communicated with the employees, and how generational cohort workers communicated amongst each other. Misguided means of communication to diverse work groups can be debilitating to an organization, especially when their beliefs and attitudes are not taken into consideration (Tolbize, 2008). Individual differences and beliefs affect how a person behaves and how they respond to change. The misguided perceptions of company leaders contributed to the lack of awareness of these differences, which is often based on expectations of others and personal experiences. As indicated in the literature review, generational conflict is more likely to arise from errors of attribution and perception, than from valid differences. Therefore, effective communication is critical in dealing with generational conflict (Zemke et al., 2000). The study indicated that respecting competence and initiative by assuming the best of people was an attitude devoid from company leaders, especially in perceived treatment and stereotyping of Millennials and Traditionals.

Zemke et al., (2000) examined organizations that have been successful in managing multiple generations, and identified what they called the ACORN imperatives,
which are approaches that contribute to intergenerational comfort. Those imperatives included accommodating employee differences by learning about their unique needs and serving them accordingly; creating workplace choices such as how people learn, operating from a sophisticated management style which would involve adapting leadership style to the strengths of the workforce (p. 153).

The study indicated that certain aspects of a generational worker social behavior was often misconstrued such as employees asking questions. The Baby Boomer generation characterized themselves as a curious generation full of questions, often times challenging questions. As one participant stated, “We didn't accept everything because someone told us it’s been done the same way for 400 years.” That attitude would be perceived as causing trouble, being disrespectful or trying to make the person in authority look bad. Deal (2007) noted that members of different generations view respect differently and never assume that disrespect is intended.

Millennials in the study perception of asking questions to leaders meant that they did not understand a directive and needed more clarity. It was also perceived by management participants that asking more questions proved their inexperience and immaturity in the workplace. Millennials agreed that getting clarity on a directive is important, but it is less about professional experience and more about supporting Company A leaders that know how to effectively communicate to the staff as a whole. Generation Xers participants asked questions out of a sense of skepticism of what is being asked of them. They want to ensure that what is being asked of them directly correlates to the expectations they are held accountable. Leaders benefit from gaining a
better understanding of how generational workers communicate in an effort to avoid misunderstandings.

Both company leaders and employees need to consider how they communicate certain task to each other. For instance, management level participants suggested that Millennials do not have the emotional maturity to handle negative criticism and as one participant stated, “You need to keep regular check-ins on them.” That statement could be perceived negatively or positively depending on the intent of how that communication is delivered to the recipient. Providing employees with regular guidance as needed and keeping employees in the loop would be considered a positive with workers, but using that same mentality to challenge their credibility or trust level as employees makes a tremendous difference on how that employee will respond. Workers are more likely to remain in workplaces that make them happy.

Organizations in which workers feel valued, recognized, appreciated, and supported contribute to higher retention rates. The methods in which leaders communicate to generational workers, while taking into consideration the meaningful differences that exist between the groups; will help increase worker readiness to change. Regardless of generation, workers know if one organization is unwilling to satisfy their needs and communicate in a style to which they respond, they will simply go to another organization that is willing to fulfill their demands (Eisner, 2005).

The study also revealed how communication amongst generational cohort provides a better understanding of shared culture. The researcher noted several communication tendencies or assumptions that generational cohorts exhibited with each other during focus group sessions. Each generational cohort exhibited their own identity
and personality. Traditionals revealed that they want to stay youthful, active and have fun. This was evident in their interactions with one another. The researcher describes them as playful. They want a friendly environment and personal touches go a long way with this cohort. One participant noted that he still prefers to send out handwritten notes. The focus group session was lively and the researcher had to ensure they stayed on task and not stray too far away from the questions to be discussed. The participants were gracious to participate in the study and considered it their personal obligation to participate in helping management understand their generational cohort better.

Baby Boomers communicated and debated with each other in a stern, authoritative tone. They presented themselves as not to be outdueled by each other, but to ensure that someone got the last word. The researcher allowed this generational cohort to feel as they were in charge of the focus group session, which created a higher level of active participation. This cohort wanted to feel that their input is critical to the study. They were thorough, affirmative, and confident in their responses. Generation Xers cohort wanted to be coached through the focus group session. They presented an attitude of wanting to be accepted for their responses. Several participants kept reiterating the statement, “Is that what you were looking for?”, or “I hope I answered your question correctly.” They needed to be reassured and provided with positive reinforcement statements like, “thank you for your response”, “that’s an interesting response”, “I like your use of words, please elaborate.” The researcher also noted how uniformity of dress, body language, and mannerism of each member. Recognizing the commonality presented by this cohort, the researcher made a concerted effort to allow each member a
sense of fairness in providing their insight and not allowing any one individual to
dominate the discussion.

Millennials presented the greatest challenge for the researcher because of the need
to consistently clarify the focus group questions. This cohort asked numerous questions
to help them better understand the researcher-developed questions being presented for
discussion. Like Traditionals, this cohort was lively and enjoyed their interaction with
one another. They exhibited a passion with their work value convictions and a disdain
for the misguided perceptions that they feel have debilitated their ability for promotion.

As indicated in the literature review, a primary common motivator between the four
generational cohorts is the desire for respect by understanding their differences.

In summary, how leaders perceive the work values of its employees sets the
direction on what leaders will come to expect from those workers. Continuity in
management and supervisory practice are important for success in supporting multiple
generations (Yang & Guy, 2006). A successful supervisory practice is effective
communication to the generational identities of the workers. For instance, the perception
of older workers (Traditionals and Baby Boomers), are different from the reality of what
these generational cohorts value themselves. They see themselves as more reliable than
younger workers, more productive, and as having great loyalty to the company.

Company leaders have a complex balancing act to meet the expectations and needs of a
multi-generational workforce, especially as preferences associated with a particular
generation are not necessarily true of all its members. Nevertheless, as the study shows
generational conflict and miscommunications is more likely to arise from errors of
attribution and perception, than from valid differences. Therefore, disruptions in
operational continuity caused by organizational change are enhanced when leadership
does not understand generational cohort work values. Therefore, effective
communication is critical in dealing with generational conflict.

**Assumption 2**

*Culture-sharing generational members exhibit meaningful social behavior workplace differences.*

The research studied how culture is broadly defined in the individual and as a
society. The aspects of culture that contribute to meaningful differences in the workplace
of generational cohorts are based on shared experiences. As indicated in the literature
review, many of the studies find that when you were born has more influence on your
personality than the family that raised you (Twenge, 2006). Shared events influence and
define each generation (Zemke et al., 2000), and although individuals in different
generations are diverse, they share certain thoughts, values, and behaviors because of the
shared events (Tolbize, 2008). The degree of influence to which shared events create
meaningful social behavior workplace differences can be associated with purpose and
meaning the generational members relate to the job. As indicated in the literature review,
work is one of the fundamental experiences of human life (Dik, Byrne, & Steger, 2013).
There is a link between happiness and productivity, increasingly on factors such as the
nature of the work itself, how well it is suited to the worker, and the ways in which
employees can derive meaning and purpose from their work. Generational cohorts
shared experiences provided them a lesson in what they value in work and life. The
meaningful differences of social behaviors displayed in the workplace are complimented
by the meaning they place in the work itself.
Shared Events

The first aspect studied what impact shared national events, experienced directly or indirectly, would have on generational cohort workplace values. Although the sample size for this study is small (n=45), there was a high level of participants that responded affirmative that certain events helped create and mold their thinking in life and work. Traditionals in the study focused on economic conditions and the political characters of their time, like Dwight Eisenhower and Franklin D. Roosevelt. Much of their optimistic attitude was shaped by the heroic nature of the country in winning wars, overcoming the Great Depression, and finding new work opportunities. This cohort had a chance to experience new technology for the first time that is now entrenched in everyday modern culture, such as the automobile, television, telephone, and kitchen appliances. The sentiments echoed by the participants is that nothing came easy and they had to simply put their heads down, work hard, and earn their positions in life. Participants agreed that they share a culture of working hard, respecting authority, and being loyal to their family, community, and their organization. As indicated in the literature review, Traditionals prefer formality and have been characterized as the most hardworking generation (Jenkins, 2007). Company leaders that acknowledge this shared culture could properly position this generational cohort to provide a calming, stable presence for the workforce in times of organizational change.

Baby Boomers in the study focused on more tragic political events that redefined the direction of the country, such as the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr, and Malcolm X. The riots that ensued from those assassinations and the depiction of the National Guard across all television sets in the United States gave this
cohort a new perspective or attitude of tolerance. They witnessed the gross mistreatment of other Americans because of their ethnicity and racial profile. They lived in a tense political, social, and economic time and what came out of that era was a shared culture of understanding and prioritizing what matters. This cohort wanted to distance themselves from the social biases that their parents believed and focus more on a liberal perspective, in many cases pursuing more of a liberal education.

Participants noted that they wanted to see the world in a different way than their parents, but also followed in their parent’s footsteps as a culture of hard work. As indicated in the literature review, they started the workaholic trend (Glass, 2007; The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Association Office of Diversity, 2006; Zemke et al., 2000). Participants agreed that they have an outgoing, trusting, giving of oneself, and more experimental attitude that serves them well in the workplace. Their shared events perpetuated those attitudes and company leaders can utilize this shared culture in work values to help foster creative ways to help the organization maintain operational continuity in times of organizational change. As indicated in the literature review, they like teamwork, collaboration and group decision-making (The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Association Office of Diversity, 2006; Zemke et al., 2000). Participants admitted that they are competitive and believe in loyalty toward their employers, also indicated in the literature review (Karp, 2002; Niemic, 2002).

Generations Xers focused not only on the economic conditions of their era, but more so the internal framework of the family structure. Many of the participants witnessed the deterioration of the family unit, in which divorce was a dominant factor in the raising of children. Many of the participants recalled seeing their peers being pushed
toward adulthood at an age earlier than any other recent generation. Participants noted that they saw their parents struggle economically. They saw an increase in drug use that hit closer to their respective homes, schools, and communities and they spent less time with their parents than previous generations of children. As indicated in the literature review divorce was common (Dawson, 2011; Thomas, 2011). Participants learned, or at least realized, that their parents were human and fallible. The cohort asserted that they often found themselves treating their parents like older friends and developing an attitude of autonomy and self-reliance, rather than respect for authority. Self-reliance and autonomy can be a positive attribute for an organization if positioned properly by management, especially during organizational change. The literature review indicated that Generations Xers often times produce high-quality end results, are highly productive, and are adaptable to work flexible work hours; all of which are necessary for operational continuity during organizational change (James et al., 2007; Tolbize, 2008). Burke (2004) stated that Generation X workers can be counted on in situations that conditions are fluid or ill-defined.

Nevertheless, those shared events also created a generational culture of skepticism because of the turmoil of the family structure. That attitude has shown itself in many cases in the workplace. As indicated in the literature review, Generation Xers switch jobs more frequently than prior generations (Yang & Guy, 2006). Xers presumably learned that loyalty to an employer did not guarantee job security, from witnessing job losses among parents who were loyal to their employers and played by the rules (Karp, 2002).

Millennials who participated in the study focused on being raised with technology. At a young age, they were introduced to the capabilities of technology and
how it can be used to create their own story. Parental excesses, computers (Niemiec, 2000), and dramatic technological advances in how people communicate are the shared events that they recognize and shared in the discussion. Many of the participants suggested that technology allows them to thrive on their terms and they have learned to expect more of themselves and the organization that they work, even if the organization does not expect more from them. They are a diverse generation, demographically, ethnically, and racially more than any other generation (Loden & Rosener, 1991). They have high pressures placed on them by their parents to excel academically because of the greater access to opportunities afforded to them than any generation that preceded them. Many of the Millennials that participated in the study obtained post baccalaureate degrees, and one participant is pursuing a doctorate degree. They are a forward-thinking, driven cohort that wants to shape the world. As indicated in the literature review, they are purported to value team work and collective action (Zemke et al., 2000), embrace diversity (The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Office of Diversity, 2006), be optimistic (Kersten, 2002), and be adaptable to change (Jenkins, 2007). Company leaders that understand the importance of how this cohort’s shared events shaped their workplace values can utilize these workers to help unify diverse workgroups to maintain productivity levels that can be impeded by organizational change.

**Defining Meaning**

Researchers (Dik et al., 2013) have provided studies that show the meaning workers place in the work itself has an influence on the social behaviors displayed in the workplace. Participants in the study spoke about factors such as having a meaningful career, doing meaningful work, and working with a meaningful organization that has a
higher purpose all to be contributors to their social behaviors in the workplace. The
differences in their social behaviors were tied to three aspects of the workplace. Figures
11 and 12 show their level of importance to each aspect and the ranking participants gave
to each factor.

![Bar graph illustrating three dominant factors that influence how participants define meaning in the workplace.](image)

*Figure 11.* Bar graph illustrating three dominant factors that influence how participants define meaning in the workplace.
Millennials in the study were driven by their social behavior most prominently by the economics tied to their role. This cohort wants to feel compensated for the job and not on their perceived experience. This is consistent with their shared culture of being tech savvy and having access to information that helps them identify what is perceived to be fair compensation. They also require and demand the highest level of work / life balance. That is achieved based on their salaries and the ability to work hard and play hard. Generation Xers highest driver was politics and this is consistent with the level skepticism that this cohort has for authority. Participants acknowledged that the more perceived power they feel the organization has over them, the more it influences their social behaviors in the workplace. Baby Boomers and Traditionals ranked community
the highest which is consistent with participant responses on the importance of who they work with versus who they work for.

The ranking of factors also shed light on the meaningful differences culture-sharing generational cohorts place on social behaviors in the workplace. Traditions and Millennials share in their viewpoint of having meaningful careers, which is inconsistent to how company leaders perceive the two generational cohorts. Generational Xers are more concerned with the meaning of their work and being able to rely on their expertise to do good work. This is consistent with their shared attitude of needing autonomy to work freely. Millennials have showed the highest factor tied to working with a meaningful organization. This is consistent with the literature review in that Millennials are more socially conscious and active than their generational colleagues in today’s work environment.

In summary, the display of social behaviors in the workplace can be contributed to the meaning generational workers place on the work itself. The meaning-making processes for an individual is embedded in and used during social interactions (Alexander, 2012). Culture is a product of meaning-making processes and in itself possesses a relative autonomy in shaping actions and institutions. Participants agreed that work has to have meaning, and the more defined that meaning is for the individual, differences in workplace behavior become more distinguished. The study demonstrated that generational cohorts have culture-sharing identities that are a part of their experiences. Those shared experiences serve as catalyst to social behaviors in the workplace. The most common social behaviors mentioned from participants were the style of interpersonal communication, personal and organizational integrity, personal and
professional accountability, leadership, and professionalism. Earning money, achieving status, making a difference, following an individual’s passions, and using one’s talents are all components that participants agreed were a part of their culture-sharing identity. As indicated in the study, each generation placed more importance on aspects of those components that provide greater meaning to the cohort and the individual as a member of the cohort. Therefore, the assumption that culture-sharing generational members exhibit meaningful social behavior workplace differences is supported because of the emphasis cohort members place on aspects of social behavior that have more meaning to them.

Limitations of the Findings

One limitation of the study findings was that there was not a study question about the differences of personal experiences that contribute to a certain level of Emotional Maturity (EM). Individuals can have varying levels of EM on the experiences they have endured. EM refers to a person’s ability to understand, and manage his emotions. Each person has a different level of EM and it can measure work values like flexibility, responsibility, personal growth, and resilience; all important factors in maintaining operational continuity during times of organizational change. This topic of EM could also be explored as future research to the study.

Future Research

This study focused on Company A workers of four distinct generational classifications; Traditionals, Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials. The researcher identified from the collection of data that there are meaningful differences amongst generations, and those differences are shaped by experiences that are unique to the individual, but common to generational members of the same era. The shared
experiences of generational members produce a shared culture. The study indicated that shared culture is a learned pattern or model for living (Damen, 1987); a set of values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish one people from another (Banks et al., 1989); created by a group of people perceiving, interpreting, expressing, and responding to the social realities of the day (Lederach, 1995). The workers that participated in the study are all United States citizens and the shared events are relegated to America’s history of events, political climate, and socioeconomic patterns. Further research may be necessary to determine if the same themes can be derived from workers that are international workers and non-United States citizens.

Organizations may want to undertake directed research on various levels of organizational change that are unique to them. Organizations may determine the word ‘significant’ in this study to mean something other than an acquisition as discussed in this study. There is also room for more research in understanding why company leaders resist the need to better understand meaningful generational differences in the workplace. Studies have shown that competing business priorities have taken some focus away from leadership development at many organizations (ASTD, 2009). The skills gap challenge that organizations face could be attributed to not taking advantage of the workplace values that different workers have that would contribute to decreasing that skills gap. Lyons (2007) conducted research to explore how four generations differ in their basic human values such as openness to change, conservation, self-enhancement, and self-transcendence. This research shows that generations differ in basic human values; therefore the research claims that generational cohort culture-sharing differences are valid to investigate.
Conclusions

Organizational change does create feelings of uncertainty for many employees, but not all employees respond the same. A key finding from the study is the distinct differences in how generational cohort workers respond to change. A key challenge for company leaders is being able to communicate one message to four distinct demographic worker subgroups. As an example, a company leader needs to deliver the message that the company will be impacted by a significant change in the operations. As a leader, the communication may be to Traditionals, “We are going through a significant change as a company and this is what I need you to do.” The communication to a Baby Boomer may be, “We are going through a significant change as a company, and we need your input to ensure disruptions to operational continuity is minimized.” The message to a Generation Xer may be, “We are going through a significant change as a company, what do you think would be the best way to ensure disruptions to operational continuity is minimized.” Last, the message to Millennials may be, “We are going through a significant change as a company, continue to work as normal which will help minimize any disruptions to our operational continuity.”

Traditionals stand firm to change because they accept change in the midst of adversity. Having endured two world wars, an economic depression, and political unrest, this generation practices loyalty in the workplace and does not fret over things they cannot control. Baby Boomers do fret over things they cannot control, but not because of feelings of unrest. This cohort wants to fix things. They want to figure out the ‘how’ versus the ‘why’ and get back to order. Baby Boomers learned to be more tolerant to change, but not to accept change without asking questions. National events like the civil
rights movement and the assassination of political and community activists helped to foster their attitudes and social behaviors. Generation Xers felt the most level of anxiety to change and the study highlighted an elevated level of cynicism associated with their generational era; more than any other cohort. This cohort shared the spotlight with the deterioration of society’s family structure, and corrupt politics that consumed Americans on a national scale. A distrust for authority was acknowledged by participants and often times can create indecisiveness and poor decision-making for this cohort. Last, Millennials did not necessarily react well to change, but still showed a level of resiliency in their work ethics and determination that was commensurate with Traditionals. Subsequently, how change is viewed will dictate how workers will respond.

Another key finding from the study highlighted the changing attitudes or perceptions of leaders regarding the workforce, especially as Traditionals and Baby Boomers leave and Generation Xers and Millennials take on more leadership roles. Perceptions of generational workers once held by older Company leaders are being replaced with more biased ideologies of younger generational leaders. Older leaders may be retiring, but older workers are projected to rise. Generation Xers biases towards the work ethics of Millennials and Traditionals, and Millennials biases towards Generation Xers and Baby Boomers will continue to create misguided expectations of each generational cohort which can exacerbate efforts to stabilize operational continuity during organizational change.

Another key finding is the distinction of social behaviors in the workplace and how they become meaningful differences for generational cohorts. Social behaviors such as interpersonal communication, professionalism, leadership, accountability, and integrity
become more distinguished among generational cohorts based on the meaning workers have towards the work itself and the change that is occurring. Traditionals and Millennials share in their viewpoint of having meaningful careers, and behaviors like professionalism and accountability have more meaning to them. Generational Xers and Baby Boomers are more concerned with the meaning of their work and displaying leadership and accountability have more meaning to them. In conjunction, common needs such as earning money, achieving status, and making a difference also distinguished themselves amongst generational cohorts based on the meaning placed on each category. For example, Millennials expect to earn a good salary while making a difference in the community. Traditionals are not as concerned with earning money as they are with having stability. Ultimately, the meaning-making process for each generational cohort creates a distinction of social behaviors that can help managers’ direct staff better in dealing with organizational change.

Eventually, the researcher was able to gain a better understanding to some of the elements that disrupt operational continuity when significant organizational change occurs; specifically from a management and non-management workers perspective. The components that stood out the most from the study were perceptions of misguided stereotypes of the four generational cohorts, work-related expectations driven by those perceptions, management’s proliferation of those stereotypes in how they communicate to the worker subsets, and the meanings that workers associate with work itself that help bind their culture-sharing identities. The study highlighted that shared cultural-identities contribute to workplace values exhibited by generational workers. Failure to incorporate
workplace values when change occurs will cause miscommunications and mixed signals that prolong disruptions in operational continuity.

The importance of this research cannot be known until some of the findings are implemented and Company leaders start making a concerted effort to re-identify the workforce for all of its diversity, not just its ethnic, racial, and gender characteristics. The company should make it a priority to develop programs and opportunities for management and non-management employees to develop their diversity and sensitivity training all in an effort to further knowledge in generational delineation, knowledge management, and workforce development.
REFERENCES


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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Letter of Consent

Dear Participant,

I am conducting a study to determine if there are relationships that exist between the era in which a generational worker is defined, and their observable social behaviors in the workplace amidst revolutionary organizational change. I would like to invite your participation in providing your opinions, beliefs, and experiences related to your particular generation by completing a brief survey, joining a defined focus group, or conducting a one-on-one interview. The purpose of this study is to examine how today’s convergence of different generational workforce groups, such as Traditionals, Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials respond to revolutionary organizational change and whether their culture-sharing generational classification of experiences is indicative of a certain social behavior in the workplace. The study involves extensive research and the expectations of your participation are to provide an honest assessment from your personal and professional experiences. The study is voluntary and you can withdraw or choose not to participate. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

There is no psychological, physical, or social risk associated with participating in the study. If you choose and are selected to participate in the survey, focus group sessions, or one-on-one interview, you can expect to spend 15 minutes completing the survey, one-hour participating in a focus group or one-hour conducting an interview. You will only be invited to participate in one of the three aforementioned data collection methods for the study. Although there are no direct benefits to participants, the overall benefits of the study may be materialized in how leaders gain a better understanding of organizational culture, knowledge management, and workforce development in a global revolutionary change economy.

The data obtained from the study will be kept confidential and anonymous as per study design. Your participation in the study will not be compensated.

Please feel free to contact me at 773.819.0476 for answers to questions about the research. If you should have additional questions about research subjects’ rights, you can contact Creighton University’s Institutional Review Board at 402-280-2126.

Sincerely,

Sean David Bailey
Creighton University
Doctor of Education in Interdisciplinary Leadership
Appendix B - Email Recruitment Letter (Focus Group)

**Topic:** Worker Behaviors to Organizational Change: How a Generational Workforce Responds to a Company Acquisition

Greetings,

I am conducting a study to determine if there are relationships that exist between the eras in which a generation is defined and their observable social behaviors in the workplace in the midst of revolutionary organizational change. I would like to invite your participation in providing your opinions, beliefs, and experiences related to your particular generation by participating in a focus group of individuals that were raised within the same generational era or timeline. The purpose of this study is to examine how different generational workforce groups, such as Traditionals, Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials respond to organizational change and whether their generational era of experiences is indicative of a certain social behavior in the workplace. The study is voluntary and you can withdraw or choose not to participate.

Although there are no direct benefits to participants, the overall benefits of the study may be materialized in how leaders gain a better understanding of organizational culture, knowledge management, and workforce development in today’s revolutionary globally-based economy.

The responses you provide and all data obtained from the study will be kept confidential and anonymous as per study design. Your participation in the study will not be compensated. Thank you advance for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Sean David Bailey, Primary Researcher
Creighton University
Doctor of Education in Interdisciplinary Leadership
Appendix C - Email Recruitment Letter (Face-to-Face Interview)

Greetings,

I am conducting a study to determine if there are relationships that exist between the eras in which a generation is defined and their observable social behaviors in the workplace in the midst of revolutionary organizational change. I would like to invite your participation in providing your opinions, beliefs, and experiences related to your particular generation by conducting a face-to-face interview. The interview will be timed and digitally recorded for one-hour. A sample of the questions can be provided upon your request for review. Depending on your availability and level of comfort, the interview can be conducted on site or at an external dedicated location. The purpose of this study is to examine how different generational workforce groups, such as Traditionals, Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials respond to organizational change and whether their culture-sharing generational classification of experiences is indicative of a certain social behavior in the workplace. The study is voluntary and you can withdraw or choose not to participate.

Although there are no direct benefits to participants, the overall benefits of the study may be materialized in how leaders, like yourself, gain a better understanding of organizational culture, knowledge management, and workforce development in today’s revolutionary globally-based economy.

The responses you provide and all data obtained from the study will be kept confidential and anonymous as per study design. Your participation in the study will not be compensated. Thank you advance for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Sean David Bailey, Primary Researcher  
Creighton University  
Doctor of Education in Interdisciplinary Leadership
Appendix D - Interview Questions

1. How long have you been with the organization?
2. What type of work did you do prior to joining the organization?
3. What is your experience with mergers and/or acquisitions in the past?
4. In your opinion, how has the most recent acquisition impacted your role with the organization?
5. In your opinion, how would you define workplace success?
6. Based on your definition, what factors contribute to an individual’s success in the workplace?
7. When you hear the words organizational culture, what thoughts come to mind?
8. When you hear the words workplace behavior, what thoughts come to mind?
9. Based on those thoughts, in your opinion, what are some observable characteristics that individual’s exhibit?
10. Are there certain characteristics that individuals exhibit more than others?
11. What is your opinion on whether an individual’s generational era of classification has an impact on their workplace behavior?
12. How do you manage change in the workplace?
13. How do you prefer to communicate in the workplace?
14. What is your opinion on today’s workforce with regards to the different types of generational workers?
15. Thinking back about all of the events that you have experienced in your adult life, are there any particular event(s) that have had a greater than average impression on your personal life?
16. Please identify which of the following decades you were born:
   a. 50s – 60
b. 60s – 70

c. 70s – 80

d. 80s - 90
Appendix E - Focus Group Questions

1. Thinking back about all of the events that you have experienced in your adult life, are there any particular event(s) that have had a greater than average impression on your personal life?

2. What characteristics would you use to describe your particular generation?

3. When you hear the words culture, what thoughts come to mind?

4. When thinking about how you identified culture, do you feel it is shared among those from your generation?

5. Do you feel there is an organizational responsibility to your professional development?

6. In your opinion, what aspects of work life are most important to you?
Appendix F - Bill of Rights for Research Participants

As a participant in a research study, you have the right:

1. To have enough time to decide whether or not to be in the research study, and to make that decision without any pressure from the people who are conducting the research.

2. To refuse to be in the study at all, or to stop participating at any time after you begin the study.

3. To be told what the study is trying to find out, what will happen to you, and what you will be asked to do if you are in the study.

4. To be told about the reasonably foreseeable risks of being in the study.

5. To be told about the possible benefits of being in the study.

6. To be told whether there are any costs associated with being in the study and whether you will be compensated for participating in the study.

7. To be told who will have access to information collected about you and how your confidentiality will be protected.

8. To be told whom to contact with questions about the research, about research-related injury, and about your rights as a research subject.

9. If the study involves treatment or therapy:
   a. To be told about the other non-research treatment choices you have.
   b. To be told where treatment is available should you have a research-related injury, and who will pay for research-related treatment.
Appendix H – Letter of Site Agreement

7/28/2014

To the Creighton University IRB:

We are familiar with Sean Bailey’s research project Worker Behaviors to Organizational Change: How a Generational Workforce Responds to a Company Acquisition. I understand Company A’s involvement to be non-evasive to our employees with the sole purpose of probing employees on their generational cohort ideologies, opinions on workplace values, and attitudes regarding change. Data collection activities to include:

• Face-to-face interviews
• Focus group sessions

We understand that this research will be carried out following sound ethical principles, that participant involvement in this research study is strictly voluntary, and that confidentiality of participants’ research data is ensured, as described in the protocol.

Therefore, as a representative of Company A, I agree that Sean Bailey’s research project may be conducted at our agency/organization.

Rich A
Director HR and Total Rewards
Company A
Appendix I - Email Agreement to Conduct Research on Site

Initial Request to Rich A., Director HR and Total Rewards

From: Bailey, Sean
Sent: Monday, July 07, 2014 10:03 AM
To: Rich A
Subject: Organizational Survey - Dissertation Study

Hi Rich,

In preparation for the completion of my dissertation for my doctorate from Creighton University, I request your permission to conduct research with employees with face-to-face interviews and focus group sessions to further evaluate generational differences in work values. I have attached a copy of the interview and focus group questions for your review. The interviews will be completely voluntary and participants can opt-out at any point. Participants will not be required to provide their name, title, or position for participation.

I'd also like the opportunity to interview you regarding your opinion on organizational change and workplace behaviors. If you'd be willing to participate, please advise on your general availability and I will schedule a time once I am approved by Creighton University’s Institutional Review Board. Thanks in advance for your consideration!

Sean David Bailey
Associate Director of Training, Recruitment Services

CONFIDENTIALITY: This email (including any attachments) may contain confidential, proprietary and privileged information, and unauthorized disclosure or use is prohibited. If you received this email in error, please notify the sender and delete this email from your system. Thank you.
Response provided

From: Rich Ahrens
To: Sean Bailey
Date: Mon, Jul 14, 2014 at 1:58 PM
Subject: RE: Organizational Survey - Dissertation Study

Sean David,

Sorry for the delayed response as I have been traveling and just got way too far behind on e-mails.

A couple of quick thoughts before I get buried again:

1. The interview and focus group is fine but mass distribution to the team would not be possible. We cannot authorize the use of company resources for private events (such as surveys) otherwise we open the door to some very slippery slopes. Namely, an employee requiring us to allow him to poll the work-force for unionization interest. I am sure you understand. That does not mean that you could not reach out to individuals and determine interest. You simply need to avoid mass-distribution approaches; approach each individual and you can conduct your research with Company A on site.

2. As for a discussion between you and me – that would be welcomed. If the past is any indication of what we need for future timing – we should block out more time than we first think we need. My calendar is up to date so here are the quick availabilities... Friday afternoon, Next Monday morning, Tuesday morning and Wednesday afternoon all have larger blocks of time open. Let me know what you think we need and what prep work I need to accomplish in advance of the discussion.

Rich

Rich A
Director HR and Total Rewards

CONFIDENTIALITY: This email (including any attachments) may contain confidential, proprietary and privileged information, and unauthorized disclosure or use is prohibited. If you received this email in error, please notify the sender and delete this email from your system. Thank you.