Chapter 7
Discussion

The present study examined intergenerational communications at the workplace. The fundamental question is whether commitment to organizational goals and complete immersion in organizational culture are sufficient conditions for employees to indulge in effective communication and make it a satisfying experience. However, there are several other concepts influencing workplace communications that must be considered.

Generational diversity is one of the important concepts. The focus of this study was on the constructs of generational diversity and communication. Today, generational diversity is a by-product of the recruitment and retention process; and communication is necessary to facilitate an organization’s business processes. Their influence is not entirely in the control of the organizations. In the present times, people of several generations work together and interact, which was unthinkable 20-30 years ago. Therefore, we are encountering situations where we have to deal with people coming from different era’s under one roof (organization).

The previous chapters discussed how intergenerational communications impact several facets within the organization. The generational differences in communication styles, channels, characteristics and culture increase the likelihood of communication gap. Every generation has a unique paradigm, which guides its behaviour in a given set of circumstances, of which communication is one. Communication behavior is influenced by the set of values, beliefs and other generational characteristics.

Generational diversity should not be viewed as a barrier to the achievement of organizational goals. Properly harnessed, it can have a positive impact on the business processes. However, generational diversity cannot thrive or be capitalized on if there is a lack of effective communication and a conducive environment for communications. Thus, establishing and maintaining effective and satisfying intergenerational communications can be considered as one of the ways of managing generational diversity. Neglecting diversity and the need for effective communications can aggravate intergenerational issues. A lack of awareness of the diversity, preconceived notions and stereotypes as well as the inability of sender and receiver to understand each other’s expectations can aggravate the issues.
The objectives of the present study are recapitulated as follows:

- To examine the various facets of intergenerational communications.
- To study the role of culture in intergenerational communications in the Indian context.
- To investigate the nature of communication gap between generations and the accommodation strategies adopted by them.
- To study the role of age-based stereotypes in intergenerational communications.
- To study the approaches/mechanisms of older, middle-aged and younger generations as well as organizations to manage the communication divide.

If we look at the concepts that have been undertaken in the present research, it might give an impression that an over-ambitious attempt has been made to study such wide range of concepts in one research. However, this study adopted an exploratory approach to understand what, essentially, is a process-related issue. It is imperative to study all concepts and theories that can contribute to the analysis. The aim of this research is not to propose a generalized or universal claim about relationships between concepts. Rather, it is a modest attempt to understand the phenomenon and raise its awareness among a larger audience. The hypotheses that emerge from the findings of should be tested in the field to establish causative relationships. The research took a social constructionist position to investigate its objectives.

**Findings**

**Generation as a Sociological Issue**

Studies show that conceptualization of generation in the management literature stops at the first stage of Mannheim’s theory, which is generation location. Most works restrict generation classification to birth years and the socio-cultural context. This study takes it further by trying to explore the last two stages of Mannheim’s theory—generation as actuality and generation unit.

In this study, the older, middle-aged and younger generations were first classified on the basis of a biological determinant, which is their birth year. In the second phase, they were contextualized on a socio-cultural basis. Older generation persons were
placed in the age group of 47-57 years, middle-aged generation in the age group 35-45 and the younger generation, 22-32 years. The significant events that impacted them respectively were the state of Indian economy (closed), LPG, and the technology/IT revolution followed by economic recession.

Karl Mannheim’s theory was applied to determine whether a group that shared birth year and socio-cultural contexts could be considered to be part of one generation. It was seen that all the three generations fitted in the tripartite representation of generation suggested by Mannheim. Generations showed stronger bond by being participating in the significant events (generation as actuality) and showing similar reaction towards it (generation as unit) Studies in an eastern context relied on western literature and seldom arrived at a context dependent generation classification. Srinivasan (2012), Ghosh and Chaudhari (2009) and Roongrerngsuke (2010) are some of the few in academia who have contributed to the subject. This study makes a contribution by proposing a context-dependent classification of generations.

It was seen that the concept of generation is a socially dynamic one, which cannot be restricted to establish birth cycles in history. The present research breaks away from the deterministic, mathematical and measurable approaches of the mainstream academia to address the concept of generation. It does not undermine the role of biological factors; instead, it makes the sociological component more visible.

Socialization plays an extensive role. It influences the communication behaviour of people of all generations. The middle-aged generation claimed that they were taught to not indulge in an argument with elders in the family. Thus, they developed a communication behaviour that required demonstration of respect in their communications with elders, which is carried into their workplace. They also avoided arguments with persons of the older generation irrespective of the level of management. Therefore, being part of a generation should not just mean sharing the same period of birth and events. Persons of a given generations showed similar reactions to significant events, thereby strengthening their generational identity. As an example, all the younger participants reported that their generation held a positive attitude (reaction) towards the technology revolution (significant event).

**Impact of Socialization on Intergenerational Communication**

Socialization is the process through which a person is introduced and absorbed into the objective world. In this study, socialization was seen at two levels, which were
termed by Berger and Luckmann (1966) as primary socialization and secondary socialization. Primary socialization takes place at the childhood stage and plays important role in formation of the framework for secondary socialization. It was for this reason that participants in the study were asked to report key event from their childhood or adolescence rather than from adulthood. The intent of the researcher was to give primacy to primary socialization as determined the mindset of an individual at the workplace.

In primary socialization, a person develops understanding of society through the lens of significant others — the family members. In the present study, the younger generation participants said that, when they were growing up, the elders in the family taught them to respect elders. The respect could be shown in several forms: by not answering back, listening, not addressing the elders by their names and by using a passive style of communication. This conditioning was carried by the individual into a workplace setup. At this stage the primary socialization process is considered to have ended.

Primary socialization is believed to end when the individual comes in contact with the generalized other. In this study, the generalized others were the employees from different generations. An older generation employee may be regarded as a generalized other corresponding to parent (significant other). During primary socialization, reality is internalized and maintained in the consciousness (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

Socialization is a continuous process. From primary socialization the individual progresses to secondary socialization. In secondary socialization, identification with a significant other is not important and can be proceed with mutual identification. Secondary socialization is also less emotional in its nature. It is more about acquiring role-specific knowledge. As the individual moves from a family context to college to organization, the process of secondary socialization begins to take place.

It is at this stage that people start to reflect and make their own decisions because the significant other has been replaced by generalized other. In the present study, older employees replaced the family elders. A carry over effect from primary socialization to secondary socialization is observed in the respect with which the younger generation employees showed older generation colleagues.

At the same time, the level of respect might not be the same as that given to family elders. The younger generation would like to negotiate their values, beliefs and
norms with non-family persons. Even for the older generation, their interactions with their younger co-workers might not be as direct, caring or nurturing as they would be with their own family (children). In both examples, the persons are not just reacting or blindly acting; they are trying to reflect and act. It must be mentioned here that the older generation realizes an excessively caring or nurturing behaviour may not be good for the learning curve of the young employees.

In the role-defined positions of an organization, the older, middle-aged and younger generation employees are fully aware of their roles. Therefore, people acquire role-specific knowledge for their sub-worlds. Role-specific knowledge includes imbibing values, norms, language, etc. Primary socialization is stronger and more powerful than secondary socialization. Therefore, the learnings of primary socialization are relatively more permanent and sustainable.

Cultural Nuances in the Indian context
Indians are considered to be highly context sensitive. They will alter their behaviour to suit the changing situation (JBP Sinha, 2008; D. Sinha, 1988; Mooij, 2014). The present study showed that participants from all generations tended to change their communication style, and channel. They also accommodated in view of the generational differences.

It was also seen that, in a collectivist society like India’s, the generations tried to maintain their group identity. They believed in decisions by getting people together and arriving at a consensus. At the same time, however, individual goals are considered to be equally, especially for of the younger generation. This is one of the reasons for low levels of commitment to the organization. It was also seen that, irrespective of the generation they belonged to, the participants showed readiness to dilute their group identity to accommodate the generational differences. Therefore, Indian society cannot be considered as a purely collectivist one.

In this study, generations believed that adding a personal touch to communications or trying build relationships will help to improve intergenerational communication. This observation reinforces J.B.P Sinha’s (2008) postulate that Indians have a tendency to personalize relationships at workplace, thereby increasing the emotional content of their communications.

D Sinha (1977) said that though change is inevitable, values evolve with time; but there are certain values, beliefs and norms that make us uniquely ‘Indian’. Such
attributes are passed from one generation to the next. Similarly, in the present study, offering respect to elders while communicating is one such ‘Indian’ trait and can be observed in all age-groups. Indian children are taught to be submissive accept the constant surveillance of elders. When he (or she) joins the workforce, they behave similarly with the older employees. The submissiveness is reflected in their style when they are in communication with the older generation.

Indians consider themselves to be a part of several collectives. Their first membership is that of the family collective. It was observed that people believe in exercising control over themselves than in trying to change the situation. This trait was seen in the younger generation refraining from the extensive usage of technology to avoid friction with those who were not as proficient. In the eastern context, according to Nisbett (2003), there are a prescribed set of roles for each individual in the large and complex system to guide them in their ethical conduct. Thus, it can be seen in India that, confrontation and debates are discouraged regardless of the social setting (family, friends, workplace, etc.). People from Eastern cultures are better able to deal with contradictions in a constantly changing world. For instance, the older generation prefers non-technology based communication, however they are making an attempt to learn technology and incorporate it.

Context sensitivity is high in all the generations. Contextualizing experiences is important rather than oversimplifying situations and seeking superficial explanations. To highlight this point, it was seen that the older generation understood that their younger colleagues grew in a technology-enabled environment and will be more inclined to use it. On the other hand, the younger generation was also aware that the older generation was brought up in a conservative environment. The younger generation chose to be respectful to the older people in their communications.

There is a paradoxical situation in Indian workplaces. Employees believe in interdependency; and, at the same time are finding it difficult to communicate with one another. The interdependence is seen in the younger generation looking up to the older generation for guidance and the wisdom that comes with experience; and the older generation looking at the younger generation fresh ideas and insights. Interdependence and independence are not mutually exclusive. They are to be found together in every individual. The only difference is the relative dominance of one over the other. The collectivist culture of Indian society reinforces interdependence.
Persons across generations are aware of the intergenerational communication gap. However, the reluctance of Indians to discuss, especially in hierarchical settings, prevent a meaningful debate on the issue. All the three generations are aware of intergenerational communication gap issues but on several occasions discussions about the issue get restricted to in-group as a cathartic experience and seldom effort is taken to debate/discuss it with the key stakeholders (counterpart generation).

**Characteristics of the Generations: What Sets One Generation Apart from the Others?**

*Older generation is experienced but aversive to technology.* The younger and the middle-aged generations consider the older generation’s experience to be a distinguishing characteristic. On the positive side, experience brings maturity and foresight in thinking. In addition, their style of communication has a stroke of maturity. The negative, however, is that experience results in a conventional mindset that fosters rigidity. Rigidity prevents risk-taking and experimentation. As a consequence the younger and the middle-aged employees feel discouraged.

Inability to keep with the advances and changes in technology is another characteristic ascribed to the older generation. Older people are also reluctant to use technology in their day-to-day work. They are more comfortable with verbal and written communications.

*Middle-aged generation: A balanced generation and the bridge between generations.* The older and younger generations characterized the middle-aged generation on various parameters. Older generation acknowledged their experience and maturity and its positive influence on communications. The middle-generation understood the importance of body language as a key aspect of spoken communication.

The younger generation characterized their middle-aged colleagues as a bridge between them and the older generation. Being familiar with the styles of both, they help the communication process. The negative aspect is that, in the process, the contents of the communication may get modified with detrimental effect on communication effectiveness. The middle-aged generation is seen as more liberal in comparison with the older generation as they listen willingly, welcome inputs and mentor their younger colleagues personally and professionally.
A non-passive (younger) generation: Gushing with ideas and perspectives. Younger generation is seen to be non-passive in comparison to the older and middle-aged generations. They have the ability to discuss and talk issues out. They are not passive recipients of culture. The older and the middle-aged generations considered inexperience as a prominent characteristic of the younger generation. The younger generation lacks the depth of knowledge and confidence that comes with experience, which is reflected in their communications. The positive perception is that the younger generation is more agile, dynamic, and proactive with high grasping and learning abilities. They present fresh ideas and insights that enrich communication. The younger generation is also not governed by conventional societal norms; it is ready to take risks, direct while communicating and not afraid of interacting with their elder generations. The younger generation does not see technology as a mere tool; it is a language to communicate with.

It is about ‘us’ than ‘I’- Generation-based identity
Participants across the generations were proud to belong to their generations. They feel that being part of a particular generation is a cyclical process; it is not in one’s volition to be part of a particular generation.

Several reasons were given for their strong sense of identification. Age and the contexts in which they were socialized was a common theme. The older generation cited their experience and commitment to the organization commitment as the driving factors. It is important to understand that when they joined the organization, there were very few opportunities. There was no option other than to remain in the organization and hence considered themselves to highly committed to the organization. Middle-aged considered their ability to bridge the gap between the older and the younger generations as a factor that increases their group distinctiveness. The reason is that the middle-aged generation socialized in the period during which they learnt from both the older and younger generations. Younger generation considered that they were open-minded and had a learning approach, which increased their group distinctiveness. It is important to stress here, their relatively young age and less

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23 Older generation defines organizational commitment with number of years of stay with a given organization.
experience meant that rigidity had not set in and they were able to contribute with fresh ideas. According to the younger generation, they could compensate for their inexperience with learning approach.

A few key insights are revealed here. People categorize themselves in generations to maintain and increase their self-esteem and to sort information. Age and generation gap were the salient factors that drove generation into social categorization.

According to SIT (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), the in-group will indulge in comparisons on the dimensions (in-group bias) that are likely to enhance the positive distinctiveness. However, in the present study it was seen that though the participants did seek to enhance their distinctiveness, they also compared themselves on the attributes that they felt they were lagging in as compared to the out-groups. To explain this point, it was seen that the older generation conceded their lack of proficiency with technology with respect to the younger generation.

Therefore, the relative status of the in-group and the out-groups differs with the dimensions (or attributes) that are measured. Although the groups admitted that, in certain aspects, they may not consider themselves as good, there were no expressions of intent to change group membership. This reveals an important insight: the dimensions with which the groups compared themselves are value loaded. The values attached to the positive dimensions are far more than that of the negative dimensions.

The social comparison that takes place between the older and the younger generations is rigorous in comparison with the middle-aged generation. Thus, a hypothesis may be proposed that, as the generation gap between the older and the younger generations is larger, the chances of comparisons are also higher. However, as the middle-aged generation is closer to the both generations, social comparisons with them do not yield any significant outcomes.

The middle-aged generation’s claims of constantly seeking to balance between the older and the younger generations may result in dilution of their identity as they are try to be similar to both the generation. A counterpoint to this assertion can be that this ability of the middle-aged generation is actually their identity.

**Communication effectiveness- An Outcome Based Approach**

The participants from all generations defined communication effectiveness from an outcome-based perspective. Effective communication takes place when the recipient
has understood the message in its entirety. The younger generation added a qualification by saying that effective communication should be noise free. Participants from all the three generations said that a two-way communication is a pre-requisite for effective communication. Emphasis is laid on building interpersonal relationships, which help to increase understanding and make communication a smoother process.

This study also challenges the dominant view as expressed in published studies (Giles et al, 2010, McCann et al., 2005, Giles et al., 2007). It was seen that older and the middle-aged generations find communication effectiveness higher with each other rather than with their in-group (own generation). The older generation considered ego conflicts as the reason for not having effective communications. The middle-aged and older generations consider knowledge and shared experiences as the reasons why their communications which each other are effective. They are also not over reliant on technology.

The younger generation achieves the highest communication effectiveness with its own generation. This may be explained by the amount of time that they spend with one another, which results in better personal relationships. The nature of their communications is informal and the styles are similar. Communication effectiveness is the lowest with the older generation because of their rigid and traditional mindsets, which made communications difficult.

The findings reveal a few insights. Communication effectiveness largely refers to attainment of personal and organizational goals. The participants agreed that experience and knowledge have positive influence on communication effectiveness. Here, participants from the older generation did not only attribute external factors for the low effectiveness with the younger generation and did not indulge in self-serving bias. They admitted that certain traits like rigidity and lag in technology could be obstacles in improving communication effectiveness.

**Communication satisfaction: A process-based approach**

Communication satisfaction is highest with the younger generation and lowest with the older generation. The findings for the middle-aged and the younger generations validated predominant literature. Findings for older generation contradict the results of previous works, where communication satisfaction is high with own generation (Giles, Makoni and Dailey, 2007). It was observed that the older generation attained
the highest degree of communication satisfaction with the younger generation than with their own generation.

As an explanation, the researcher submits that emotionality is a significant component of communication satisfaction. The older generation considered the younger generation to be open-minded and eager to learn. On other hand, communications within their generation are more formal and structured. They are conventional and rigid making communications seem routine. For the middle-aged generation also, communication satisfaction is the highest with the younger generation because of a wide range of shared experiences.

These discussions lead to some inferences. If communication effectiveness is pitched at the organizational level then communication satisfaction has been pitched at the personal level. In order to achieve greater communication satisfaction, efforts should directed towards building interpersonal and non-formal relationships. However, as it will be discussed in a later section, efforts of building non-formal relations with the older generation is least making communication satisfaction further lower with them.

**Communication Styles Adopted by Generations**

*Individual style.* Individually, people from all generations follow a participative style of communication. Participants were emphatic that participative style facilitates two-way communications. If, for the older generation, two-way communication accentuates the sense of belonging, for the middle-aged generation it facilitates feedback and for the younger generation found that it gives them scope to discuss issues that they have no experience of.

*Communication style adopted with in-group.* It is believed that style seldom changes in communications with members of the in-group. However, this study found that the older generation changed its style to a more formal with their generation. Older generation participants said that had to respect age and experience. Respect makes communications formal. The middle-aged generation adopted a participative style to share experiences. The younger generation’s preference for a participative style is to enhance interpersonal relationship within their generation.
Communication styles adopted by the older and the younger generations with the middle-aged generation. The participative style is preferred because efforts required to make communication is minimal. However, the younger generation participants added that communications could not be casual as they had to be respectful with the middle-aged generation.

Communication styles adopted by the middle-aged and the younger generation with the older generation. Here, the communication style is passive and submissive. For the middle-aged generation participants, the principal reason is that they were unable to understand the older generation’s mindset. Therefore, they preferred a safe approach, which is based on respect and deference. Such communications are passive and submissive. The younger generation is in the learning phase of their careers and, hence, had to adopt a passive style to avoid antagonizing their older colleagues. Level of management also played a role. Younger employees are usually at lower levels of the management hierarchy and are required to be deferential in their behavior with their seniors.

Communication styles adopted by the older and the middle-aged generation with the younger generation. The choice of communication style is influenced by the age gap. As the age difference between the older and the younger generations is large, the older generation considers that it as their responsibility to share their knowledge with the younger generation. Therefore, a parental and nurturing style of communication is appropriate for the purpose. Age gap between the middle-aged and the younger generations is not as large; the middle-aged participants preferred a participative style certain modification. The communications are more unstructured because, in the opinion of the middle-aged generation participants, their younger colleagues were more open.

It can be concluded that generational dynamics influence communication. Both middle and younger generations adopted passive and submissive communication styles in communications with the older generation. The older generation had a nurturing approach with the younger generation. But within their generation and with each other, they followed individual styles. Studies (Tajfel&Turner, 1979; Gaetner et al., 1993) showed that we are ourselves in the presence of our own people. However,
this study showed that this is not so with the older generation (in-group), they adopt formal style of communication.

**Convergence and Divergence in Usage of Channels of Communication**

*Preferred channel of communication.* Situation permitting, face-to-face was the preferred channel of communication across the generations. They admit to the importance of non-verbal communication. Body language acts is a major source of feedback. Triangulation of cues (voice, body-language, paralanguage) helps to reduce the communication gap. It is difficult to conceal much in a face-to-face interaction. Total reliance on technology alone prevents a holistic approach to communication and leaves it incomplete.

At the same time, it must be stressed here, the middle-aged and the younger generations stressed the importance of technology. The middle-aged and the younger generations made a case for more face-to-face communication by stressing its positives; but the older generation stressed its importance by criticizing technology.

*Choice of communication channel with in-group.* The reason for the older generation’s preference for face-to-face communication as usage of technology does not come naturally to them. However, the middle-aged and the younger generations used channels of communications that were most suited for the situation. Thus, they demonstrated more flexibility in the approach.

*Choice of communication channel by the older and the younger generations towards the middle-aged generation.* Though participants of the older generation said that they would combine technology with face-to-face communication, in practice, they rely more on the latter. The younger generation’s choice of communication channel with the middle-aged generation, on the other hand, is dependent on the situation because of the comfort level enjoyed with them.

*Choice of communication channel by the middle-aged and the younger generations towards the older generation.* Irrespective of the needs of the situation, the middle-

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24 Non-verbal communication for the participants referred to body-language, speech modulation, and gestures.
aged and younger generations prefer face-to-face communications with the older generation. According to the younger generation participants, the older generation tends towards technology-phobia although most persons are familiar with the basics. In their defence, the older generation concedes that they are aware of the importance of technology; and are trying to keep abreast of the younger generation.

The older generation also admitted their reluctance to use technology because of the mental block. Face-to-face communications are preferred and, if necessary, written records of the discussions are maintained. The younger generation considers the use of technology by the older people a waste of time because they are constant need of help. The participants were critical of the reluctance of their older colleagues to use technology.

*Choice of communication channel by the older and the middle-aged generations towards the younger generation.* The older generation participants’ defence of their preference for face-to-face communications was robust. Considering the younger generation’s inclination towards the use of technology, they try to adapt. There is an evident confusion here, the younger generation uses face-to-face communication in respect to their older colleagues; and the older generation uses technology. The communication gap still remains. Therefore, the question: Does accommodation from both sides in a given situation solve the problem? Middle-aged choice is situation dependent with inclination towards technology.

The discussion on the channels of communication employed by persons from all three generations reveals a few key insights. Body language is considered important by all to such an extent that it can be considered as a communication channel in itself. Then again, behaviour is a function of cognitive and affective factors. To highlight this point, we must consider the assertion by the older generations that they are aware of the basics of technology, but they do not incorporate it vigorously as compared to the other generations. The reluctance is also attributed to inertia. Potential possible explanation (affective) can be that the older generation does not want to be seen to fail at this age and stage of their careers and, hence, the anxiety.

It was also seen that the middle-aged generation is the most agile generation in that they were able to act as balancing influence and accommodating the diversities of both generations. Individually, persons may have a preferred choice of channel; however, the actual use is aligned to the generation that they are identified with and
the listener’s generation. Therefore, it may be inferred that generational diversity influences communication. It was also noteworthy that the younger generation broke the stereotypical image of being technology savvy by preferring face-to-face communication, but without undermining the importance of technology.

**Preconceived Notions that Influence Intergenerational Communications**

There are differences in the stereotypes a generation perceives for itself and the stereotypes that are actually attached to them. The older generation feels that they are stereotyped as having a rigid mindset and being ignorant of technology. But the stereotypes actually attached to them are that they are pessimistic and rigid. The middle-aged perceives itself as being materially well to do; but the older generation views them as vacillating and behaving like the older generation. The younger generation feels that it is negatively perceived for its language, immaturity and impatience. However, they are actually viewed as being multi-taskers, argumentative and casual in communications. Stereotyping is activated by such cues as physical characteristics and experiences of prior interaction.

Key insights from the analysis of age stereotypes: The negative stereotypes were not considered as their true characteristics by the participants, irrespective of their generation and challenges CPA model. But Stereotyping is one of the main reasons for communication gap. Middle-aged generation participation took a pragmatic view of stereotyping: they treated it as transitory. They were also the least stereotyped. The main reason for the low level of stereotyping is that they are less rigorously compared with the others. Social comparisons increase the likelihood of in-group positivity bias, which is accompanied by negative stereotyping of the out-group and negative influencing of the communication process. Therefore, by relating age stereotype with communication gap and communication behaviour, it may be concluded that people communicate not only on the basis of the stereotypes but also to the generational characteristics of the person.

**Communication gap**

The results validated the findings of previously published works (McGinn & Ehrenfeld, 2008). For the older, middle-aged and younger generations, the communication gap increases with generation gap. Therefore, the middle-aged and younger generations experience the largest communication gap with the older
generation due to generation gap, which leads to differences of opinion, working styles and, sometimes, conflict. The older generation has the largest communication gap with the younger generation. The reason for the gap with the younger generation is clashing value systems — Experience versus inexperience, rigidity versus open-mindedness and the contrasting effects of socialization. The gap cannot be closed quickly and completely. A more practical approach for organizations would be to try and bridge the gap. There was also observed a deviation from observations in previous studies: the older generation participants claimed that they faced a communication gap even with their generation. The reason is that primary socialization of the older generation took place in an environment that encouraged distance between people. This characteristic was carried to the workplace.

To summarize the discussion in this section: communication gap is a function of context-based social-psychological factors. The process of communication is not always smooth and seamless even with the in-group. Communication gap will be larger with the groups where social comparisons are more.

**Deliberation on ‘overaccommodative Young generations and non-accommodative older generation’**

The older generation is of the opinion that a drastic reduction in communication gap cannot be achieved because of the differing context in which each generations grew up. Convergence is a strategy that is commonly used to reduce communication gap. However, there are few exceptions (deviant cases) in which the middle-aged and the younger generations preferred divergence. Examples of convergence are as follows. With their in-group, the older generation has to be logical, demonstrate their knowledge and focus on building relationships. Across generations, the participants tried to converge in order to understand the other stakeholders and make adjustment as needed — as with the older generation adopting technology, the middle-aged generation being more patient or passive and the younger generation not using technology.

For the middle-aged and the younger generations, divergence meant that the older generation had to change by adopting technology. Older generation cannot ignore the importance of technology. Both generations felt intimidated by the older generation and felt that the first step should be taken by the older generation. The
younger generation proposed other strategies that were largely technical and less behavioural in their approaches.

The findings lead to some important insights. The communication accommodation strategies that different generations employ reflect national culture. In a collectivist society as in India’s, divergence should be used as an accommodation strategy to maintain their identity (Gallois et al., 2006). The reason is that convergence as a strategy is considered to dilute the identity of the group. However, in the present study, it was seen that convergence was the preferred strategy. A possible explanation is that the Indian context places more emphasis on values and norms are than on maintaining identity. Thus, the younger generation preferred to show respect by using minimum technology to communicate with the older generation.

Influence of Culture on Intergenerational Communication

Older generation’s culture. The older generation tries to practice their values with rigour. Respect, discipline, sincerity, honesty, and work commitment are their dominant values. They believed that transparency in behaviour positively influences communication because it enhances the authenticity of the interaction. It is also the older generation’s objective to pass these values to the generations that follow them.

Perceptions of the middle-aged and the younger generations about the older generation value system. The older generation’s value system was more positively viewed by the middle-aged than the younger generation. They aspired to imbibe the values of the older generation. However, the older generation’s value system was found to be restrictive and conventional by the younger generation. Younger generation finds older generation’s value system suffocating and conventional because older adults make respect a norm. On certain values like managerial skills they find the older generation better as compared to other generations. On exception (deviant case) in the middle-aged suggested that the value system of the older generation is neutral as it is focused on outcomes and not processes.

Middle-aged generation’s culture. Transparency, honesty in communications and being society- oriented are some of the important aspects of the middle-aged generations value system as per them. They are thus able to bridge the gap between
the older and the younger generations. High commitment level to the organization is another characteristic of their value system.

**Perceptions of the older and the younger generations about the middle-aged generation value system.** The value system of middle-aged people is perceived positively by their older colleagues, who see it as being similar to theirs. The older participants also admitted that the middle-aged generation has a greater degree of work and organizational commitment as compared to the younger generation. The younger generation perceived the middle-aged generation as having to manage the contradictions of conventionalism and modernity.

**Younger generation’s cultural values.** The younger generation considered themselves to be accommodating, ambitious, and enterprising, which are reflected in their communications. They are more solutions-oriented and tend to have fresh ideas.

**Perceptions of the older and the middle-aged generations about the younger generation value system.** The older generation’s perception of the younger generation’s value systems was not positive. The younger generation was seen as arrogant, materialistic and having high expectations and it negatively impacts communications. They also felt that the younger generation’s socialization process was responsible. On the positive side, the younger generation was seen as being more communicative and open. Middle-aged generation found the younger generation to be accommodative and forthcoming and had a positive impression of younger generation’s value system.

**Shift in the values across generations.** All participants conceded that values have deteriorated over time. Both the older and middle-aged generation participants thought that the younger generation is more materialistic, individualistic and low in work and commitment. The level of respect for elders has also declined. The younger generation agrees that they do not offer the same degree of respect as their elders did. But the cardinal values are still in place may be not professed with same intensity. They stressed that values are context-dependent and they will follow those values only that will benefit them. In this regard, the older generation agreed that values must be debated.
Cultural convergence. There was convergence on some points across the generations: respect for elders and commitment to organization’s goals. The degree of respect may have diminished but its importance and relevance has not changed. It was also seen that, generally, everyone worked toward achieving the organization’s goals and objective. When the goals and objectives are properly understood, communications become smoother and more effective. In addition, all the three generations showed their urge to learn.

Cultural divide. A cultural divide was not felt. Values are always evolving and some conflict is unavoidable. But these are few and not a cause for concern. A divide as such is not apparent, as essence of Indian culture is still intact. However, among the older generation, a few felt that a cultural divide existed and does that the younger generation is unwilling to communicate, even if there is a need.

The discussion shows that culture both facilitates and thwarts the communication process. Respect brought the younger generation closer to the older generation and built a platform for communications; however, it also makes communication an extremely formal process that caused the younger generation to hold back their views.

The socialization process influenced value systems. Respect for family hierarchy was carried to the workplace in the form of respect for seniors. Thus, it may be concluded that primary socialization influences behaviour in the organization. This raises an important point that metamorphism of people does not takes place when they enter organization, they may be bounded by rules and regulation but their essence remains the same. They keep their individuality and social behavior intact with modification rather than being a mechanical being in the organization.

Lastly, familial roles also influence approach to communications at the workplace. For example, the older generation adopted a parental role with nurturing approach while communicating with the younger generation. The younger generation considered middle-aged colleagues as elder brothers in whom they could confide. Cultural shifts do not mean a dismantling of the existing structure; rather, it is building on the existing structure. There will be some positives and a few negatives.
Varied Aspects of Intergenerational Communication Behavior

**Respect.** The need to be respectful was acknowledged by participants of all three generations. Indian culture has an important role to play in such behaviour. The socialization process inculcates respect for older people and is carried into the secondary socialization. Thus, respect is not restricted to seniority in management; age and experience are also important consideration. For the older generation, respect helps to create a friendly environment for communication. For the younger generation, respecting an older employee gains the latter’s attention and interest.

The exceptions (deviant cases in the middle-aged and the younger generations) felt that, on occasion, respects becomes an obligation and may actually hinder the communication process. The older generation is also more careful about respecting members of their generation because, they feel that, even though they belong to the same generation, their age and experience must be given due regard. Failure to show respect may result in taking offence. Socialization reinforces this thought process and the older generation expects to be respected by others.

**Argument.** Arguments are avoided, especially with the older generation. Arguments were seen as a negative aspect of communication because they deviate from the purpose of the communication, are seen as disrespectful and not constructive. For the older generation, it is conflicts of ego are common in their generation. The middle-aged generation believes that Indian culture discourages debating and fosters servitude. The younger generation feels that the older generation is overconfident of their knowledge and do not allow room for discussion or alternative opinions. The older generation also avoids argument with the younger generation to avoid being disrespected.

**Holding back opinion.** The findings did not lead to a clear conclusion. Possible ego conflicts prevented the older generation from sharing opinions with their generation colleagues. The middle-aged generation did not believe in being reticent with their opinions but, when needed to, they tried not to share with the older generation because they could not foresee the reactions. The younger generation’s reason for holding back is that they did not expect their opinions to be respected by the older generation.
Changing communication behaviour. Both the younger and older generations tended to change their behaviour with each other to a greater extent. Older generation participants felt that they had to adopt a mentoring approach. Younger generation needs to converge to the older generation’s expectations and demands. Middle-aged generation participants had to change for both generations by employing the conventional approach for the older generation and keeping up to date with technology for the younger generation.

Ending conversation. The middle-aged and younger generations do not believe terminating conversation with their older colleagues. At the same time, they did not show any inclination to extend the interaction beyond what was necessary.

The discussion on communication behavior in this section shows that intergenerational communication with the older generation takes place in silos. The middle-aged and younger generations avoid the ‘personal touch’ in their conversations with the older generation. Their approach is safe and defensive. The intent is more to avoid mistakes than in making an effort to improve the communication process. However, this approach will not yield any long-term gain. It is seen on various dimensions like respect and argument that the older generation facing difficulty to communicate with their own generation.

Initiatives on generational diversity
Organizations do not appear take cognizance of the intergenerational communication gap. The HR departments in a few organizations have set up forums and platforms, but the group who should benefit the most from them — the employees, does not use them.

Awareness cannot happen overnight. The participants agreed that the initiatives should not be too structured. The training and seminar approach is not going to help. The stress should be on increasing the level of interaction on rigorous communications. Functional teams should have good cross-generational representation. HR policies should specifically address age issues and not just seniority.

The middle-aged generation also suggested more academic study to investigate the ‘what and how’ of the phenomenon. Younger generation participants would like generational diversity to part of their induction process. Informal and interpersonal
relationships were considered important for improving communications. Training and sensitization should start from the socialization stage (childhood).

A common communication platform, rigorous cross-generational communications, breaking of stereotypes and understanding conflicting generational characteristics will contribute to enhancing communication satisfaction and effectiveness. Emphasis should be laid on building in interpersonal relationship. Interpersonal and inter-group dynamics are not mutually antagonistic; they complement each other can coexist.

The Ambivalent Nature of Technology
Technology has become such an integral part of the communication process that it is now also used to profile generations. Thus, it is not uncommon to refer to a Blackberry generation or a web 2.0 generation (Salkowitz, 2008). In the present study the older generation views technology to be a tool that aids in the achievement of specific goals and objectives. For the younger generation, however, it is a part of their being. Technology defines them.

There can be no denying that technology has deeply influenced business processes and transformed organizations. In the present study, it is seen that technology has had both positive and negative effects on communications. On the positive side, according to the participants it increased the speed and turnaround time of the communication process.

On the other hand, technology has also made communication a detached and impersonal process. This study shows that technology accentuates intergenerational differences and leads to communication breakdown. At a broader level in the Indian context, the older generation finds it difficult adapt to technology. It was also found that they are aware of the importance of technology in business. They do not undermine its role, but admit to lagging in the skills to sue it.

The older generation participants also claimed to make efforts to keep abreast of the advances. At the same time, they also admit to a mental block and an anxiety over committing mistakes that prevents them. The younger participants perceived that this reluctance hampers the communication process. Face-to-face communication remains the most suitable way to communicate. Technology should be used only when the situation demands it. One way of overcoming the reluctance is to arrange
reverse mentoring in which the older generation is mentored by the younger generations.

Ogburn’s (1922, 1957 as cited in Brinkman & Brinkman, 1997) concept of cultural lag has been used in the present study to explain how cultural notions take time to keep pace with evolution of material culture (technological innovations). With the advent of technology, there is also a cultural struggle to adapt to the change. The older generation, despite recognizing the importance of technology, is finding it difficult to adapt it. They feel that technology has reduced the emotional component of communications and a decline in face-to-face communication. It is therefore evident that the older generation’s beliefs and values are not able to adjust to changes.

On the other hand, the younger generation has to adapt its values to the technological innovations and changes. As a common example, they should follow the official procedure for leave approvals rather than sending a text message. Ogburn also described the four stages of technological development: invention, accumulation, diffusion and adjustment. It is when the third stage is reached that people find it difficult to adjust their cultural notions to the material changes; hence the cultural lag.

**Comparison of the Present research with Previous Works**

Studies in the West and Eastern Asia (Japan, china, Thailand), in general, have arrived at robust findings, making culture as a mediating variable. However, in the present study, through socialization, it was seen that culture plays an active role in intergenerational communication. Researchers in the west concluded that the Westernization of organizations restricts the role of culture. The role of culture cannot be undermined when it is viewed in the contexts of generation and communications.

Western studies show that the younger generation is high on communication avoidance with the older generation (Giles et al., 2005; McCann et al., 2006). However, in the present study it is seen that the younger generation or the middle-aged generation does not avoid communication with the older generation; rather, they avoid its extension beyond the essentials. They do not attempt to give the ‘personal touch’ to communications.

In the present study, one of the reasons that communication avoidance was not observed is that employees have to communicate in the fulfillment of their responsibilities and to attain business goals and targets. Therefore, in the current study, which is in the context of workplaces, communication avoidance is not the
predictor of communication satisfaction. It can, instead, be hypothesized avoidance of interpersonal relationship can be the predictor of communication satisfaction. This needs to be tested in field. Participants of all the three generations agreed that the ‘personal touch’ in communication helps in furthering interpersonal relationships, which results in better intergenerational communications. In accordance to the western findings, communication satisfaction is seen to be lowest with the older generation.

Giles et al. (2003) findings that Asians considered non-family members to be more non-accommodating has been challenged in the present study. Here, the participants accepted that, irrespective of the generation they belonged to, all persons at the workplace try to change their communicative behavior in view of generational differences. Level of accommodation may vary depending on the generation.

Ota et al. (2007, 2012) observed that intergenerational communication is more problematic in the Asian context as compared to the West. A somewhat similar scenario exists in India. The main reason is filial piety. Indeed, intergenerational relations are more strained in the East than in the West. A young adult is expected to respect elders irrespective of the context (family/organization). This may result in making communication a dissatisfying experience and, hence, resulting in negative stereotyping and communication breakdown.

This study also validates the previous findings on strong in-group and out-group identification (Ota et al., 2007) in the Asian context.

The findings of the present study reveal that the perceptions of generations about each other are conflicting, which is in agreement with McCann et al. (2004). These perceptions are problematic and positive. McCann et al. reported that, in the American and Vietnamese contexts, only the younger and the older generations had conflicting perceptions about each other. This study showed that all the three generations are seen to experience conflicting perceptions about one another. This is a validation of Trompenaar’s postulate that Indians can better manage the gray areas than Western peoples.

Published studies also show that the older generation is attached with both positive and negative stereotypes (McCann & Keaton, 2013; Myers and Sadaghiani, 2010; Kulik & Bainbridge, 2006). Here, however, it was seen that only negative stereotypes were attached to the older generation. Personal vitality, regarded as a
positive stereotype, was seen as a generational characteristic. Personal vitality is reflected in experience, knowledge, and business acumen.

The present study also validates the findings of Western studies that the negative stereotypes attached to the older generation — lagging in use of technology and less flexibility make communication susceptible to breakdown due to misunderstandings. However, it was found that people did not internalize the stereotypes, which would lead to low self-esteem as shown in the CPA model.

It was also seen that hierarchical level plays a significant role for the younger generation. This finding converges with the results of the competitive studies carried out with USA and Thai bankers by McCann et al (2006). The study found that the younger generation employees found it more difficult to communicate with managers than non-managers. Similarly, in this study, younger generation employees found it difficult to communicate with older colleagues who were at higher levels in the hierarchy.

McCann et al., (2004, 2006; Giles, 2007) postulates on respect are also validated. Respect and deference have a more negative impact on communication than being polite. In the present study, people of all generations said that being polite was not as difficult as having to be respectful and deferential. Respect and deference are considered to be restrictive for the communication process and tend to shift the focus away from the subject. Thus, people try to avoid situations where they have to offer excessive respect. This was evident from the younger generation confession that on certain instances they avoid arriving early at meeting venues and having to welcome older colleagues.

Lastly, the staircase pattern (Giles et al, 2010) holds partially holds true for the present study. It applies to a significant extent for the middle-aged generation and the younger as their communication satisfaction, communication gap, and effectiveness increases with reducing age gap; and reduces with increasing with age gap. However, for the older generation, the level of communication satisfaction is lowest with their generation where there is no age gap. They also experience communication gap with their own generation.