Chapter 8
Conclusion

This study was an endeavour to explore intergenerational communication at the workplace. From the discussions, it is clear that intergenerational communications play an indispensable role in the organizational context. They impact productivity, performance, interpersonal relationship and, on occasion, cause communications to break down. This study argues that every generation functions within a given paradigm set of values, beliefs and assumptions. An employee is usually comfortable in an in-group (his or her generation) setting. However, when this paradigm is challenged from outside the group, conflict/gap is likely. What happens when intergenerational communications take place in such situations was the focus of the study. Organizations and businesses with generationally diverse workforces must be aware of this aspect and its impact on the business goals.

The present study attempted to explore: 1) the diverse aspects of intergenerational communications in the workplace, 2) the role of culture in intergenerational communications in the Indian context, 3) the role of communication accommodation behaviour in intergenerational communication, 4) the role of age-based stereotyping in intergenerational communication and 5) the approaches and/or mechanisms adopted by the older, middle-aged and the younger generations and organizations to manage the intergenerational communication gap.

Major findings

Given below are the important findings of this study:

- The concept of generation is a socially dynamic one and has biological as well as sociological components.
- The socialization process is the foundation on which we built a given generation’s values and beliefs.
- Intergenerational communication behaviour is a reflection of culture
- National culture influences a generation’s behaviour in the workplace.
- Generations may have difficulties in communicating with the in-group.
• Accommodation strategies are not long-term solutions to the issue of intergenerational communication gap.

• Intergroup relationship / behaviour and interpersonal relationship / behavior exist in a continuum and are not exclusive of each other.

• Maintaining values and beliefs are more important than maintaining the generation’s identity.

• Communication behaviour is a function of age stereotypes, characteristics of a generation and culture.

• People do not always internalize negative stereotypes leveled against them.

• Models and Theories are context specific

• A cultural lag exists among the generations. Material culture (technology) has advanced but the non-material culture (values and beliefs) has not been adapted to the changes.
Figure 8.1 shows the schematic representation of few of above mentioned findings. It tries to recapitulate the role of key concepts in the present study.

Figure 8.1 Schematic representation of findings

Implications
This has theoretical, explanatory\textsuperscript{25} and practical implications, which were discussed in detail in Data Analysis. A summarization of these implications would be appropriate here. The deviations from social identity theory, CPA model, notion of collectivism, communication accommodation theory and staircase pattern have implications on theory.

This study explains how Mannheim’s generational theory, Giles’ broad framework of intergenerational communication, social identity theory can be applied to the given context is the explanatory contribution. On the practical aspects, organizations must recognize that there are more dimensions to workplace diversity

\textsuperscript{25} Explanatory means explaining and reconfirming the findings of the extant literature.
than the traditional ones of gender, culture, religion, etc. Generational diversity should be made an integral part of diversity management initiatives.

HR initiatives in diversity management take into account that ‘one approach’ for all generations will not yield the desired results. Lack of communication effectiveness has direct impact on the attainment of an organization’s goals and objectives. Dissatisfaction among employees — usually the outcome of ineffective communications — will result in suboptimal use of human resources with consequences for the business. Therefore, leaders and HR managers need to focus on developing mechanisms to increase communication effectiveness and communication satisfaction across the workforce.

It was also seen that national culture, on certain occasions, are barriers to the intergenerational communication process. Thus, an attempt should be made to increase awareness of the diverse cultural views on the idea and concept generation. These initiatives should be directed at minimizing the effect of cultural issues on communication. Although stereotyping by age acts as a heuristic to categorize people, over reliance on stereotyping significantly mars communications.

Doing away with stereotyping altogether is difficult. Instead, organizations should focus on restricting the influence of stereotyping. Stereotyping may help in forming a first impression; however, people should be open to changing their opinions with of empirical evidences. Generational differences should be part of HR policies and practices to raise awareness in the workplace and encourage employees to be more tolerating and accommodating.

**Delimitation**

There were limitations to this study. Before these are discussed, it is important to mention what the study did not aim to investigate, which are 1) influence of gender on intergenerational communication, 2) influence of location differences [Data was gathered in Mumbai and Delhi] 3) influence of hierarchical level in intergenerational communication. These were not the areas of interest for this study. However, data revealed that these factors do play a part, especially with the younger generation it has been given due space. (4)There already exists a communication accommodation theory based that is on intergenerational communication. Therefore, the researcher
did not consider it necessary to develop a separate model. (5) The present study focused on workplace communications and (6) did not look at diversity from discrimination perspective.

**Limitations**

The findings of the present study must be viewed with its limitations. Firstly, the physical characteristics of each generation can have significant impact of the communication process because they influence stereotyping behaviour. In this study, there is only passing reference to physical characteristics. They were not studied in detail.

Secondly, the study employed a single-dimensional definition of communication effectiveness and communication satisfaction. A multi-dimensional approach would have given deeper insights.

Thirdly, the influence of culture was examined from the perspectives of values, beliefs, assumptions and collectivist / individualistic standpoints, which are consistent with extant literature. However, culture is a fluid concept and findings of the present research would have been richer, if other dimensions were also included.

Fourthly, the researcher was not allowed access to documents and written communications of the participants. It is possible that such access might have revealed more insights and revealed a more holistic picture.

Lastly, the findings of the present study would have been more insightful had this study been industry specific. It would have given scope of further generalization to an industry specific finding.

**Future Research**

Several hypotheses were revealed from the findings of this study, which are potential areas for future research. The findings of this study suggest that experience can positively influence communication effectiveness. Future research may examine the role of experience on communication effectiveness in intergenerational interactions. It was also seen that emotion is a factor in communication satisfaction. This, too, may be studied in detail.
The role of emotions and mood in communication satisfaction are also possible areas of research. Socialization has an influence on the choice of the communication styles of each generation. It is more so with the older generation, which is a potential area for fruitful research.

Body language is seen as a subset of face-to-face communication. However, people across generations considered body language as a significant component of communication because it is a feedback process by itself. How body language can increase the level of communication effectiveness is another area that could interest researchers.

The role of management hierarchy is significant and deserving of further study, especially their influence on the younger generation.

This study also endeavoured to establish a linkage between communication effectiveness and communication satisfaction. This required more study to determine if communication effectiveness results in communication satisfaction. Would a person be satisfied with his/ her communication if s/he has achieved the intended goal from a cross-generation perspective?

Convergence, as accommodation strategy, may be investigated to determine if Indians have a casual attitude towards addressing issues or if they are more focused on maintaining relationships.

This study also showed that the middle-aged generation indulged in extreme forms of accommodation to achieve balance between the older and younger generations. Does this approach dilute the identity of their generation? Are they more vulnerable to change in their group membership? Do they have unique value system? These are a few questions that need to be reflected on.

Convergence was found to be necessary to preserve societal norms and values. Therefore, the relationship between societal norms and maintenance of social identity merit further study. Will convergence result in a deterioration of the communication process? Future research may also examine whether avoidance of build interpersonal relationships is a predictor of communication satisfaction.