CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Having located the focus of the study in the previous chapter, this chapter aims at understanding key concepts related to the generational dynamics. Theoretical positions and the existing body of research on generations have been examined in order to identify gaps in the research and aid formation of a conceptual basis for the current study. This chapter also presents the findings of the baseline study that was conducted to define the scope of the present study.
The previous chapter briefly defined the concept of generations and presented some classifications of generations used in existing research. However, to gain a deeper understanding of this concept, it is imperative to examine the underlying theories that shaped these definitions, and trace them chronologically.

The Theory of Generations

Tracing the Roots

The term ‘generations’ is often used in colloquial terms, to refer to differences in age groups in the society, especially in terms of values, attitudes, preferences, and other behavioral characteristics. However, it received little research attention till the mid 20th century, when the concept was first introduced by Karl Mannheim, in his essay, “The Problem of Generations” (Eyerman & Turner, 1998). For a lack of theories to explain the process of social change, Mannheim examined the role of generations in shaping historical change. Thus, he purported that as members of a generation shared historical experiences at a particular point in time, they were held together by these experiences (Edmunds & Turner, 2005). He emphasized on the importance of traumatic historical events, especially warfare, which according to him, shaped the collective consciousness of the generation (Pilcher, 1994). Thus, events such as the World Wars, Russian Revolution, Communist Revolution of China, Spanish Civil War, etc., are viewed as salient events that color the political consciousness of those who experienced such events (Edmunds & Turner, 2005).

In this context, two important concepts of Mannheim took precedence in sociological literature on generations, which were later applied to other fields of studied. Firstly, Mannheim identified generational location as the vital aspect of the existential knowledge of a generation. He identified them as nodal points that determined the formative experiences of the youth during a particular point in time, which was certainly believed to impact their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors (Pilcher, 1994). Thus, Mannheim’s concept is similar to a cohort-based classification of generations, which is commonly used in generational research (as explained in Chapter 1), especially in terms of shared experiences. Mannheim further stressed that, in order for generational location to be salient in terms of shaping social change, individuals must be born in the same socio-historical and cultural context, and share the formative
experiences in their adult years (Pilcher, 1994). This conceptualization, later led to the concept of generational memories, discussed in a later section in this chapter.

The second important concept put forth by Mannheim was that of generational units. He recognized that despite shared experiences caused by the generational location, in reality, within a generation, there will be individual differences in responding to salient historical experiences. Therefore, he suggested that a generation, in actuality, is likely to be further stratified into several “generational units” (Eyerman & Turner, 1998, Pilcher, 1994). Thus, Mannheim’s work not only stressed on shared generational experiences, but also focused on how individual’s constructed the meaning of these shared experiences, which eventually formed their generational consciousness.

Mannheim’s theory on generations was developed at a time when societies approaching modernity experienced a weakening of kinship ties and associated roles and relationships, and faced a lack of integration of young adults in the society (Meja & Kettler, 1993). This viewed younger generations as challengers of the status quo, and the older generations as preservers of tradition (Laufer, 1971). Based on this conceptualization, the earlier work on generations in India has focused solely on intergenerational conflict’s and Youth movements in India (Gangardes, 1975; Gores, 1990). A second important dimension of Mannheim’s theory is that generations as a collective are historically and socially aware of their location in time. This critical consciousness emerged as a result of every new generation trying to fit into existing traditions and social patterns and, in doing so, bringing about social change.

This brings us to a vital concept in relation to generational theory, i.e., generational memories. At the core of this concept is the assumption that generational units behave a certain way due to their shared generational memories. In addition, the concepts of critical period and formative events further explicate the process of development of these collective memories. Therefore, to understand the dynamics between generational units at the workplace, it is first necessary elucidate what entails generational memories.

**Generational Memories, the Critical Period, and Formative Events**

As purported by Mannheim, generations are tied together by the meaning they construct from shared historical experiences. Thus, collective memories are considered a medium for the transfer of socio-cultural beliefs and attitudes that affect the individuals’ behavior (Griffin, 2004). Schuman and Scott (1989) pioneered the study of
the collective memories in social contexts. They tested Mannheim’s concept of formation of generations on 1400 Americans, and reported, “…the generational character created by the events a cohort experiences during its youth” (p. 359) impacted what each generation remembered, and subsequently influenced later values and behaviors. Interestingly, both Mannheim and Schuman and Scott identified “youth” as a “critical period” for formation of these collective memories. Generally ranging from mid-teens to mid-twenties (or about 12 to 29 years), they purported that this was a critical age for developing generational memories based on the salience of the historical experiences for those experiencing them. As Griffin (2004) explained, on one hand, national and world events before a person’s birth or in the earliest years of life are generally learned from secondary sources, like education or older generations. Therefore, the impact of such events would be less than those experienced firsthand. On the other hand, the impact of other large events experienced beyond one’s early adulthood are marred by a primacy effect of salient events that young people experience, thus reducing their impact. Thus, the experiences during late adolescence and early adulthood were identified as the strongest memories that shaped generational behaviors.

In this context, the importance of certain events on shaping generational memories needs to be discussed. These “formative events” are considered as those specific events that hold highest salience for those experiencing them. Their salience is attributed to their role in developing the individual’s sense of self as well as the crystallization of the social realities into one’s identity. This identity that was formed by the shared experiences of a generation is considered to remain stable over time (Griffin, 2004). As explained by Conway (1997), “the original generation-specific self remains the self with which all later selves must be negotiated” (p. 43), which brings us back to the concept of the relevance of the formative events experiences in the critical period. Thus, these two processes, i.e., the shaping of one’s identity based on the formative socio-historical events, and the salience of such events in the critical period, develop the collective memories that constitute a generation. Indeed, a generational cohort survives by maintaining a collective memory of its origins, its historical struggles, its primary historical and political events and its leading characters and ideologies.

In their attempt to construct the chronology of American generational cohorts and collective memories, Schuman and Rodgers (2004) put forth critical insights on the
nature of collective memories. Firstly, they stressed on the fact that, irrespective of all those who experiences a certain event, the real carriers of collective memories of an event are individuals who experienced the event during their critical ages of late adolescence and early adulthood. Secondly, they put forth an assumption that cohort effects on collective memories sustain over time because old events can be saved from extinction, at least temporarily, by new occurrences that bring them to mind. For example, those who experienced the economic slowdown during the Great Depression relived those experiences during the stock market crash of 2000. Such recurrence of similar events prevents new events from replacing old salient events. Finally, they shared an interesting observation that, contrary to beliefs that only the events which one experienced were salient enough to shape generational memories, both personal experience and secondary learning through education contributed to the content of collective memory. Thus, they indicated the importance of vicarious experiences on generational memories.

In sum, it is clear that members of a generational group share generational memories which have a direct effect on their attitudes, behaviors, aspirations, and expectations. These have been applied to the workplace, and research, as discussed later, has emphasized on the importance of generational attitudes in workplace dynamics. The current study aims at understanding the difference in aspirations and expectations of members of different generations.

Building on Mannheim’s work on generations, several researchers applied the insights to various contexts and elaborated on them. For instance, David Wyatt (1993) put forth that a generation is constituted by

1) A traumatic event (such as civil war, natural catastrophe, or assassination of a political leader).

2) A set of cultural or political mentors which stand in an adversarial relation to the dominant culture and which gives articulation to the traumatic event.

3) A dramatic shift in demography which influences the distribution of the resources of the society.

4) A privileged interval which connects a generation into a cycle of success and failure.

5) The creation of a sacred space which sustain a collective memory of utopia.

6) The notion of the happy few who provide mutual support for individuals who are accepted as bona fide members of the cohort.
The contemporary management and sociological literature is divided into 1) studies of generational experience of major historical disruptions such as warfare and migration, 2) research on generational differences in cultural experience and consumerism, 3) studies of generational cohorts in terms of intellectual tradition and political perspectives, and 4) sociological analysis of specific generations such as the lucky generation or the sixties (Eyerman & Turner, 1998). The next section examines some such studies in the organizational context.

**Research on Generations in the Organization**

Since long, generational researchers have been keenly focusing on the aspects of creation of generation. Scholars in this tradition have attempted to go beyond research examining systematically the effect of cohort based on age group on later behavior, which generally assume a formative event leading to the creation of a generation, by identifying the specific events leading to a shared identity among a generational cohort (Dencker, Joshi, & Martocchio, 2008). One of the prominent studies in this area was that by Schuman and Scott (1989). Based on the assumptions of unique historical events driving generational memory, Schuman and Scott (1989) designed open ended interviews to link historical events to generational identities. In particular, Schuman and Scott asked a representative national sample of individuals to recall critical historical events that were very important to them, and then to explain the rationale for their choices among these events. This open-ended interview process resulted in 12 major national or world events and changes between 1930 and 1980. They revealed that different cohorts tended to recall different events, with formative experiences playing a key role in individuals’ “collective memories.” For example, they demonstrated that critical historical events and periods such as the Great Depression, World War II, and Space Exploration had lasting influences on individuals who were in their mid teens to mid twenties (that is their formative years) during these respective time frames.

The Schuman and Scott framework of linking historical events to generational memory was further adopted by numerous other researchers (e.g., Dencker, Joshi, & Martocchio, 2008; Noble & Schewe, 2003; Schuman & Rodgers, 2004) to understand various generational phenomena. Griffin (2004) found that race and geographical location played a key role in defining the generational memories. Griffin elaborated that collective memories of civil rights movements were stronger for whites in the South,
who experienced this struggle during adolescence and early adulthood, than similarly aged peers in other regions of the US, as well as whites in the south of different age groups.

Schuman and Rodgers (2004) extended Schuman and Scott’s study by considering panel data from the early 2000s. They found that although collective memories remained strong, there were also indications of “collective forgetting” that tended to occur when a salient event, such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks, reduced collective memories of more events such as the end of communism. This finding reemphasizes the importance of self experience in the formation of generational memory. The study also highlighted that gender and ethnicity often played important roles in generational memory.

Taken together, research on collective memories associated with age, life course perspectives on generations, and organizational research on age similarity and age diversity, suggests that membership in an age-cohort can be a basis for a shared identity and age-based differences can be a basis for conflict at interpersonal and at work group levels. The concept of generations allows us to introduce the historical dimension of time into social research and to consequently limit the risk of excessively abstract and arbitrary generalizations historically undermined (Abrams, 1982). However, the attempt to go directly from the formal delineation of cohort in terms of age to the prediction of later behavior skips an important step, that of identifying what earlier experience is carried forward in memory by a particular cohort (Schuman & Scott, 1989).

Age demography research provides ample empirical evidence relating age similarity to work group members on individual level outcomes such as turnover, satisfaction, and commitment (e.g., Jackson et al., 1991; Wagner, Pfeffer, & O’Reilly, 1984; Wiersema & Bird, 1993; Zenger & Lawrence, 1989). The work of Dencker, Joshi, and Martocchio (2008) on linking generational collective memories to work place attitudes and behaviors was an exception. Directly applying Mannheim’s perspectives and collective memories research, they proposed that responses to several benefits and compensation practices could be better understood by recognizing generational differences that are shaped by collective memories of formative events such as the Vietnam war, the JFK assassination, the Civil Rights movement. Building on the notion of collective memory, research on the psychological contract, and affective events theory, they developed a two stage framework that (1) emphasized that collective memories are a function of the level and nature of significance that
individuals attach to key historic events, and (2) highlighted critical antecedents and consequences of generational memories in age diverse organizations. However, there have been no further empirical extensions of this research in work settings, especially in the Indian context. The present study aims to fill this gap and examine the generational cohorts in the Indian workforce, and the generational memories that created these cohorts.

The previous chapter, and the preceding sections of this chapter, discussed the complex nature of generational effects on the workforce. It is clear that generational influences affect several aspects of work, such as attitudes, expectations, career aspirations, learning patterns, teamwork tendencies, transfer of knowledge, etc. However, each of these aspects is a complex concept in itself. Therefore, as a first step towards attempting to understand the generational dynamics in the Indian workforce, it was necessary to assess the field reality, and to subsequently locate the need and scope of the present study. The researcher felt that the best way to do this was to conduct a baseline study to understand the challenges managers faced while managing a multigenerational workforce.

**Locating the Need:**

**A Baseline Study on Managing a Multigenerational Indian Workforce**

In this baseline study, the researcher interviewed HR practitioners from public and private sector organizations in Delhi and Mumbai. The organizations selected for the baseline study included those from different fields, such as IT, pharmaceutical, manufacturing, banking, FMCG, power, and others. The organizations were selected on the basis of 3 criteria:

1) Age of the organization: It was ensured that participants from both new (below 10 years) and old (above 60 years) organizations were selected, to understand the underlying nuances of the generational challenges.

2) Number of employees in the organization: organizations with at least 500 employees were selected to ensure a range of responses related to the HR issues encountered.

3) Diverse industries: Diversity in industry was sought to understand inter sector differences in handling multigenerational challenges.

Thus, 30 HR managers took part in the qualitative study. The sample characteristics have been presented in Table 2.1. In-depth interviews were conducted,
Table 2.1

*Sample characteristics of the baseline study*

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lasting an average of 90 minutes. The interviews were then transcribed and analyzed to identify key themes. This was done by reading the transcripts several times, to identify general categories that emerged, and subsequently identify and label themes and sub-themes. It was found that the respondents shared several key challenges while attempting to understand and manage generations in the Indian workforce. The views of the practitioners have been elaborated in the following sections.

**Theme 1: Understanding Generational Markers in the Indian Workforce**

As explained in Chapter 1, generations can be categorized in various ways based on age, cohorts, kinship, etc. However, the lack of consensus on any one preferred classification poses difficulty in selecting the basis for such a classification in the present study. In addition, the need for identifying culture-specific generational markers was identified, and it was recommended that a classification be based on the socio-historical events of a particular country or region. In line with these recommendations, the baseline study found that practitioners acknowledged the need to understand generational markers in the Indian context. For instance, Abbas Bamji⁴, Ex Executive Director and President of a more than 100 year old, FMCG conglomerate expressed that to accrue the benefits of the demographic dividend, it is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the multigenerational workforce of India. According to him,

_The relevance for comprehensive research in the area of multigenerational workforce is crucial in a country like India than it has ever been, especially if we want to harness the opportunities posited by the demographic dividend. Our ability to tap the potential of this bulging youth force along with the current working population would determine organizational success and failures in times to come._

Shrihari Pillai, Senior Vice President, HR, of an international IT conglomerate elaborated on the inadequacies of international generational definitions in elucidating the Indian phenomenon, and hence pressed on the need to identify generational markers for the Indian generations. He posited that

_There are currently three to three and a half generations in the workforce, depending upon how rapidly society is changing. So one of the key aspects to look at is how exactly you are defining the four generations from a demographic labeling perspective. So the most common US dominated thinking is start with baby boomers, gen x and gen y, but its established now that it does not lend itself to universal replication, because we don’t have an equivalent of baby boomers. We_

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⁴ Please note that, throughout this study, pseudonyms have been used for the participants, to protect their identity.
have what it’s called Mid night children of people born around independence, between 1945 to 1950. Then you have the emerging generation which represents the 60’s and 70’s where there was a growth phase in various sectors of the society. The 80’s saw the growth of mixed economy and the growth of the Gen X equivalent, and then there are the Millennials, who comprise the post 95 post liberalization generations, which grew with the peak in private economy and globalization. Hence the major life events in India are around this time. The social and economic situation of each of these generations had an impact on what it did to do with its members, how it impacted the mindset, orientation and expectation of each generation, and all that. Hence there is a need to understand some of these cross sections in specific ways.

Similarly, Hari Cherian, Executive Director, HR, of a 150 year old oil and natural gas company emphasized the importance of a comprehensive multigenerational study in the work place. According to him

The engagement survey at HPCL showed that employees from different age groups had different engagement drivers and expected different things from the organization. Hence, we thought of segmenting our employees according to age groups, so as to tailor our HR offerings accordingly. In the absence of any robust Indian generational definition, we did this small research with in HPCL, to cluster employees according to different generations. We found that employees could be predominantly categorized under four groups. First is the post independence generation, with those born between 1945 and 1965. Then you have the second generation, born since the late 60’s. The third generation is Gen X born in the 80’s, and lastly you have the Gen Y born in the 90’s. We call Gen Y as the EMI generation since they have taken up a lot of loan for everything, right from education, to car, to a house; hence their salary expectation is always 30% more then what they have to pay for the EMI. The behavioral descriptors of all these groups are different. I am sure a thorough research on generations with a larger sample size would be very relevant for practicing HR managers. Secondly, HPCL is an old public sector organization with an average employee age of 44 years. The dynamics of generational issues in the private sector younger organizations would be very different. An analysis of these differences could assist HR managers in taking informed decisions.

With a plethora of ways to categorize generations in the Indian context, there is a need for a deeper and thorough understanding of the theme of multigenerations in the work place (Shrinivasan, 2012). Indeed, as explained in Chapter 1, the current understanding of generations is based on secondary literature, and there is lack of research on generational classification on the basis of primary data. The practitioner’s perspectives resonated with this view. The most crucial questions from the practitioner’s perspective are:

1. What are generations?
2. What is the impact of key historical events in shaping generational identities in India?
3. Which key social, cultural, and economic events have created these generations?
4. How are we labeling them to depict the true nature of the generation?
5. To what extent are there similarities and dissimilarities between the Indian and international classification of generations?

Beyond the understanding of generational differences in work values and attitudes towards work, the practitioners felt that there is an imminent need to decipher how these work attitudes and values play out in the organizational context. Among the various generational influences, career, learning, and leadership are the three key areas which differentiate the generations and organizational outcomes. Hence, under the ambit of multigenerational study, as identified by the practitioners, there is a need to study these three aspects of generational differences.

**Theme 2: Career**

Understanding career from the multigenerational perspective could facilitate the formation of career management policies, reward policies, and job mobility interventions for all generations. Paramjeet Sandhu, Senior Vice President, Corporate HR, for a manufacturing and infrastructure company posited that understanding the career definition from a multigenerational perspective would assist in designing appropriate career policies, especially for the Gen Y. He elaborated,

*I feel that, contrary to the view that the younger generation is frivolous about careers, I think they are very serious about their career. It is just that they have a lot of career options and choices to choose from. The definition of career and career success have gone under massive changes, and Gen y makes choices based on these new found definitions. Restlessness often is a function of choice, the more choices you have the more restless you are, especially because there is a pressure on you to make the right choice. These choices were not there for the earlier generations, as they are for the present generations. Hence, career choices become an important question. Would it be better for organizations to limit career choices of people so that they could foster less restlessness? Or foster greater career choices so that they could foster fulfillment? HR managers today are perplexed with this important question whilst keeping generations in mind. Secondly, Younger generation today is very keen to have properly defined roles, they don’t like very fluffy and loose roles where you tell a person to find his job or find what kind of work you are best at.*

Mohana Pai, a senior HR professional at an FMCG organization stated that the organization, for long, had been following a boundary-less career philosophy, which
suited the needs of Gen X, but with the huge influx of Gen Y in the workforce, these assumptions have been challenged heavily.

*We have explicitly stated boundarylessness as an organizational value and that’s something which has helped us a lot in growth. As an organization we are really not comfortable putting up a boundary for a role. Hence we don’t have job description or any clearly defined SOP’s for any new joiner. So, as new projects come up, people take up newer aspirations and start doing new things. We predominantly have Gen X in our organization, but with more Gen Y coming in, we are not sure if the current practice holds true, since Gen Y want very clearly defined roles. Organizations like Nestle, HUL, and P&G have very clear roles. I am not sure what should we do since the career aspirations of different generations differ vastly.*

Abhishek Pradhan, Managing Director and Head of HR at an international BFSI organization stressed on issues of handing senior generations and Gen X in the organizational context.

*Though we have structured career management programs for gen Y employees, organizations tend to get a little non directional when it comes to middle level management. At that stage the process becomes extremely competitive since at the senior level you do not have too many roles. Hence career growth becomes an outcome of individual initiative. Further Gen Xers’ aged between 32 and 45 years are very self driven and individualistic and coupled with it there is a huge market demand for experienced talent because of which organizations lose valuable employees. There is a need to understand career aspirations and success markers of this generation to assist retention of these employees. Another issue is with the senior generation. In India we retire people at the youngest, that is at the age of 58 years. In London the retirement age is 65, in Germany it is 62. Because of this we miss out on a talented workforce too early. We need to think of career policies of reutilizing this valuable generation.*

Most part of career research in India has focused either on career choices of Young MBA graduates (Agarwala, 2008), vocational career choices (Leong, Austin, Sekaran, & Komarraju, 1998) or career management practices (Budhwar & Baruch, 2003). The crucial questions according to practitioners are:

1. Which is the best career philosophy for which generation (boundaryless vs Protean careers)?
2. What is the definition of career according to various generations?
3. How this impacts the career aspirations of generational participants?

**Theme 3: Learning**

Niharika Mehta, training leader at a leading consulting organization insisted on the need to understand learning needs from a generational perspective. She explained,
In my experience generations differ in their approach towards learning. How they want to learn and what they want to learn depends totally on the age of the learning participant. For example senior members of the organization would not be comfortable in a session conducted by a young facilitator, for them gray hairs matter whereas for gen y expertise matters. Secondly Gen Y today are not keen at learning theory or concepts hence at Mercer we have formulated a new method of training them. We call it Camouflaged Learning. The principles of this method are based on learning through activities and experiences. We found that when you engage gen y in activities there learning is better and has higher retention as compared to regular training sessions.

Abbas Bamji, Ex Executive Director and President of a more than 100 year old FMCG conglomerate insisted that age based stereotypes by learning professionals should be removed through research, and development of accelerated learning platforms should be designed to utilize talent individuals across ages.

We underutilize people who are at their 50’s, because we think why to skill people who are so old. The mindset that corporate in India need to get out is “how long does it take for someone to acquire the competencies necessary to be an effective executive or a manager” that’s the revolution we need to do in our minds. Otherwise we would just extrapolate the experience of the past. The heart of that problem lies in accelerating the speed with which you pass learning to these young people, so as to make them better managers.

Malavika Kumar, a senior HR executive from a manufacturing company shared the issues involved in developing Gen X employees.

Many many Gen Xers tell us that leave us alone, you want to mentor us but we may not want to mentored. Whereas Baby Boomers take it for granted that they can be mentors because many years ago they saw company in a certain shape they saw the world in a certain shape and hence feel the need to share the knowledge with younger people. Hence, what to learn and how to learn are very generationally governed, and we need more research in this area.

Abhijit dasgupta, Group HR Director at a young fashion retail organization suggested that a different level of thinking should guide the learning interventions for Gen Y. He shared that globally, Adidas has gone through a change in learning philosophies to suite their young employee workforce. He explained,

The average age of our employees is 30 years and hence we think that learning should be fun, engaging, and sustainable. Based on the understanding that 80% of the learning happens informally, we have brought in a new way of learning at Adidas which is based on blended learning. We have tossed off class room based learning and brought in on the job interactive learning platforms. With the help of the platform, once an employee chooses a training topic, the platform suggests specific videos, PDFs, quizzes, TED talks, blog posts, and YouTube videos to refer to. Employees drive their learning and development program, but leaders are also actively involved in making learning a part of every assignment and project.
Thus, the practitioners’ perspectives pointed towards the following questions:

1. What are the learning styles and preferences of different generations?
2. What do they want to learn and how do they want to learn?
3. Is coaching and mentoring suitable for all generations?
4. To what extent are the platforms of e-learning and mobile based learning preferred by different generations?
5. Should learning interventions be based on different philosophies for different generational employees?

**Theme 4: Leadership**

Nirankar Singh, an HR manager from a young IT company quoted that different leaders management styles creates satisfaction and dissonance among followers. In a younger organization, task driven transactional leadership followed by the Gen X is not fully appreciated by the Gen Y, hence raising the important question of which leadership style is suitable for whom. The manager quoted:

*In my organization, the number of baby boomers is very less. Gen X is majorly at a leadership level and in terms of team members it is mostly Gen Y. The Gen Ys are saying that over a period of time we have become very transactional in nature, we are not transformational. It is just business discussion, and care and concern has gone down as compared to the earlier set of people. But the leaders complain that if Gen Y is going to stay with us for just 2-3 years, let us make a best use of it, rather than caring for them and providing a learning culture. Today people with 6-7 years of experience are becoming leaders and people are complaining about the loss of care and concern and bad people leadership.*

Himanshu Arora, another HR manager from an IT company quoted:

*Young people want an informal culture. A person may flout rules with impunity because he or she is at a position of authority. I think what the younger generation wants to see is positive power, where people are role models. They demonstrate a high sense of ethics, integrity which means coming on time to office, submitting your bills honestly, the way you attend to your personal affairs. How you conduct yourself etc.*

Isha Kohli, Chief HR Officer at a 150 year old retail organization quoted the need for understanding follower expectations from a generational perspective, to bring in equity and fairness in the organization:

*As an organization, we were largely averse to any kind of distinction between people in terms of performance, or the way they are remunerated or rewarded etc. For instance a reward process is not welcomed. A reason for that is when you are rewarding somebody; you are making five other people unhappy, so one would rather go with not rewarding the performing guy than making the other five*
unhappy. So it’s a very socialist, family kind of a culture. But this becomes a repellent for younger people today who want to show their capabilities and get rewarded for performance. The need for transparency, fairness, and equity is very high for younger people, and this becomes an issue with seniors in the organization, who would value trust and loyalty as important factors. Another big challenge in terms of generations working together is the sense of time in their mind is very different. An older person would think it is a must to spend time thinking and incubating an idea and if you don’t spend that kind of time on a particular idea, it is sure to bomb. Where as a younger person would like to first work on it and then think about it. So their need for action is so much higher. Hence when these younger people work under older people it’s very frustrating for them since the pace of working is different. I don’t think enough leaders give a thought about it. There is a general tendency to think that older is right. The way generations differ in their expectations from leaders creates cultural nuances in organizations. Leaders today need to put a lot of thought in follower expectations. Hence the other important area which need through research is follower expectations from leaders from a generational perspective.

**Theme 5: Communication and Perspectives towards Technology**

The respondents felt that generations differed on communication patterns of generations, and usage of technology in communication. This was substantiated by their experiences and observations on how people differed in terms of the usage of technology in work and daily lives. For instance, Srinivas Joshi, an HR manager from an IT company observed,

*Today's generation is a generation which spends their personal lives on public platforms. The moment they join organizations, we stop them from doing that. No Facebook, no Google nothing works in organizations. This acts as a big disengagement factor for them.*

Similarly, Preeti Gupta, a manager from a leading FMCG noted,

*The way in which we communicate and want to be communicated to, there is a huge shift in that. So while for a senior person it’s quite OK to walk across tables and strike a conversation, build up rapport and spend time to build up relationship, the younger lot, even if they are sitting two cubicles away, will send a mail. Or they will use technological tools like Facebook, Gtalk or the internet to communicate and get work done. This doesn’t make them good or bad. It just makes them different. But it’s difficult for a manager from the older group to understand that. When I walk around the floor and see the young graduate trainees working, all of them have their Gtalk on. So for me it does ring a bell that they are chatting. I don’t become judgemental, but I know that someone with more tenure will look at this and say that these kids are all ways on the internet and they are never focused on work. But I also know that this enables them to connect with a far larger audience, so if I need some data I don’t have to cross hierarchies of organizations to do it, my young managers could get it for me through their network. So there are advantages and there are disadvantages, but Gen Y thinks that this is the only way*
of communicating and getting work done. So I think that really puts great stress on young and old managers relationships sometimes.

Theme 6: Attitudes towards Work

In this regard, Preeti Gupta, the manager from a leading FMCG shared,

*The approach to work and the tools that generations are using to get work done are different. The older generation has got different work ethic. So for example, if their boss has said that a particular project has to be done in a particular way, there is a lot less rebellion and there is a lot of toeing the line, there is a lot more detail orientation and desire to work in tradition ways. Whereas with the younger generation will find its own method of completing the work. The other thing that challenges the system is that these guys are always in a hurry. They want everything faster. They want rewards faster, their aspirations are high, therefore their willingness to be patient with the system is non existential. See, all of us have similar aspirations but the amount of time we are willing to put in and wait for a system is getting crunched.*

Rahul Beri, a head of HR of a BPO observed that with all his employees being from the Gen Y, he faces a challenge of continuously reinventing the wheel of employee engagement interventions as the expectations from work keep on getting redefined continuously. He added,

*The whole concept of loyalty, engagement, motivation has gone through change. Every organization has fun at work, every organization has a cafeteria, every organization has pick up and drop facilities, because these have become tools of work rather than engagement tools.*

To reiterate, the baseline study identified the need to study six facets of the impact of generational differences on work. However, as indicated in Chapter 1, some of these areas have been studied extensively from the intergenerational perspective. Further, in the Indian context, the themes of communication and technology, and attitude towards work have been researched in recent works by Singh, Bhandarkar, and Rai (2012) and Singh (2013). Additionally, studying all these facets in a single study would not be feasible. Therefore, considering the existing work that has already been accomplished in this field, as well as to limit the scope of the present study to ensure its feasibility, the researcher decided to focus on four vital aspects. To begin with, this entailed the examination of the social fabric of the Indian workforce, specifically in terms of the existing generational classification therein, as recommended by the practitioners. Further, they awarded salience to three areas that seemed to pose greatest challenges for them as managers, i.e., career, learning, and leadership.
Focusing on these points, the researcher then explored the existing literature on these three key attributes, and identified the gaps to be addressed, as discussed in the following sections.

**Existing Literature on Career, Learning, and Leadership**

**Career**

Substantial research evidence suggests that generational diversity has an impact on every aspect of the workplace, one of them being their approaches to work, or work-related attitudes and aspirations (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011; Gursoy, Geng-Qing Chi, & Karadag, 2013). Researchers suggest that these characteristics, which are mediated by the generational differences, affect employees’ expectations related to their work (Dencker, Joshi, & Martocchio, 2008). As a concept, career entails several constructs related to one’s expectations from the job, including, but not limited to, meaning of career (which includes expectations regarding work flexibility, rewards, motivations, etc.), career mobility, career development, and career success.

Over the last couple of decades, phenomena such as economic globalization, organizational restructuring (mergers, horizontal and vertical integrations, and re-engineering) and the growth of services have drastically altered the notion of careers (Barley, 1989; DeMeuse & Tornow, 1990; Mirvis & Hall, 1994; Rousseau, 1990). Recent “post-modern” career literature has focused, for the most part, on the shift from traditional (organizational, linear) careers to more “boundaryless” (non-linear) career types (e.g. Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Briscoe and Hall, 2005; Collin, 1998). While linear view of career focused on progressive, upward steps along the organizational hierarchy, to positions of greater authority (Broussseau, Driver, Eneroth, & Larson, 1996), the new concept of career defies traditional employment assumptions, emphasizing on changing career paths and possibilities, being more dynamic, fluid, and multidirectional (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Baruch, 2003, 2004; Littleton, Arthur, & Rousseau, 2000). Recent research suggests that while a modified linear career path may hold for most men of the baby boomer generation, thus providing support for Super’s theory, alternative career paths may be more likely for women and men of the X and Y generations (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005).

When considering the definitions of “career” as a social construct (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005) over the years, it is noticeable that, parallel to the
changes going on in the society, there has been a shift in terminology. Wilensky (1961) referred to career as a succession of related jobs, arranged in a hierarchy of prestige, through which persons move in an ordered (more-or-less predictable) sequence. Later, Super (1980) defined career as the combination and sequence of roles played by a person during the course of a lifetime. Eventually, the definition changed into one indicative of a more dynamic course of progression, as evident from Arthur, Hall, and Lawrence’s (1989) definition of career as the evolving sequence of a person’s work experiences over time. This definition is being used most frequently today. Further, during the late 1980s, there was a transition from “jobs” to “experiences,” which was reflected in the post-modern social sciences literature (Savickas, 1995). During this period, attention increasingly shifted from the objective to the subjective world of work. In this conceptualization, while the objective career is publicly accessible (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005), as expressed by symbols such as more or less identifiable positions, offices, statuses, and situations serving as markers for assessing a person’s movement throughout society (Barley, 1989; Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005), the subjective career relies on individuals’ internal apprehensions and evaluations of their own career, across any dimensions that are important to them (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005; Bozionelos, 2004).

Evidently, motivations play an important role, as often, they determine one’s career trajectory. Motivation could be intrinsic (where the individual is driven by inherent interest or liking towards the job) or extrinsic (where the individual is motivated by external outcomes such as rewards and recognition) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Both these factors affect individuals differently. Indeed, like the other work attributes, motivation has been found reflect generational differences. A considerable amount of research suggests that there are large-scale generational differences in the factors that motivate or drive employees (Wong, Gardiner, Lang, & Coulon, 2008). For instance, a large-scale cross-sectional study on more than 3500 Australian managers and professionals from moderate to large sized organizations revealed generational differences in preferences towards motivators such as affiliation, power, and progression. Specifically, while the Gen X and Gen Y participants reported to be motivated by progression and affiliation, Baby Boomers expressed an inclination towards power (Wong, Gardiner, Lang, & Coulon, 2008).

In the Indian context, Singh (2013) found that in both pre- and post-liberalization generations, intrinsic factors were greater motivators than extrinsic ones
like salary. Similarly, a challenging role, an intrinsic motivator, has also found to be considered as a strong motivating factor as it enables employees to expand their abilities (Srinivasan, 2012; Singh, 2013). Further, in their study on 278 Gen Y participants from various fields, Anantatmula and Shrivastav (2012) revealed that, in comparison to the other generations, those from Gen Y were found to be strongly affected by position in the organization, community presence, and monetary gain. In these lines, Srinivasan (2012) examined the work-related attributes of the Indian Gen Y, and found that they considered equitable pay, responsibility and independence, and achievement as strong intrinsic motivators. In addition, the extrinsic motivators such as having a considerate and sympathetic supervisor, restricted hours of work, and clear company policies were identified as strong influences for this group (Srinivasan, 2012).

Another construct within career is career success. Assessments of the amount of success in a career vary according to the assessor (Jaskolka, Beyer, & Trice, 1985). Since traditional public symbols of career (i.e., job titles referring to hierarchical positions, continuity and pace of promotions, salary) are losing relevance in the post-modern world of work, reference points for career success evaluation are disappearing. It seems that a clear and comprehensive understanding of what “career” and “career success” mean is no longer self-evident (Adamson, Doherty, & Viney, 1998; Osterman, 1996; Spilerman, 1977). Surprisingly, however, although the construct has often been used as a research variable (e.g., Eby, Butts, & Lockwood, 2003; Kirchmeyer, 1998, 2000; Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005; Wayne, Liden, Krainer, & Graf, 1999), little research has been devoted to the nature of career success (Greenhaus, 2003; Heslin, 2003; Sturges, 1999).

Status, time for self, challenge, security, appreciation for their work, being involved, and receiving a personal treatment were the most highly rated elements of career success in different studies (Cangemini & Guttschalk 1986; Friedman & Greenhaus 2000). With the exception of status, these results reveal a considerable emphasis on subjective criteria, rather than focusing on objective indicators of career success, such as prestige, power, money, and advancement. Although all these studies have made significant contributions to the career literature, it is clear that they focus mostly on the increasing diversity in idiosyncratic evaluations of what career success means to the individual, rather than looking at societal trends, the collective, the generational or reference groups and subcultures (Barley, 1989; Chen, 1997; Shibutani, 1962).
Alternatively, the current study aims to call attention to the shared social understanding of what “career success” means (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005) and to question whether this understanding has undergone a shift as well. Although individuals tend to see themselves as operating within structures that have an objective existence, these structures are actually constituted by their own “instantiation” of the social reality of career, i.e., the collective underwriting of its terms. In a way, career structures are reproduced in the minds, actions and interpretations of the people who have careers (Evetts, 1992). In order to be able to investigate whether the shared social understanding of career success has shifted during the last few decades, this study turns to the literature on generations and their differences. Generations’ beliefs and value systems are believed to epitomize societal trends. Further, as a result of the experiences that have been shared by people from the same generational cohort, it is indeed plausible that they would develop a so-called “peer personality” or certain shared “generational characteristics,” at least to some extent (De Kort, 2004; Kupperschmidt, 2000).

A popular approach in the literature has been to rely on cross-sectional designs, and within them, on the analysis of correlation (Bray & Howard, 1980; Judge & Bretz, 1992). However in a meta-analysis of definitions of career success, Arthur, Khapova, and Wilderom (2005) noted that

....not a single article involves in directly listening to the research subjects or even allowing them to elaborate on their own criteria for career success...., How can subjective careers be adequately researched when the subjective interpretations of the career actors themselves—apart from their non-verbal responses to a limited set of questionnaire items— are not allowed expression? (p. 196)

Indeed, the answer lies in more qualitative research into the subjective criteria that people bring to their own career situations.

As indicated before, one of the important components of career success is perceptions and expectations regarding rewards and benefits. Since long, employee benefits have been viewed as a major source of intergenerational conflict in organizations. Dencker, Joshi, and Martocchio (2007) examined the impact of demographic diversity, specifically, age-related generational diversity in American companies. They acknowledged that benefits triggered intergenerational conflicts. Further, they observed that the “one-size-fits-all” policies for employee benefits proved
to be counterproductive in motivating the employees, due to the unique needs of each generation. Thus, they strongly recommended a close examination of generation specific factors that affected employee expectations related to benefits.

In the context of rewards, studies have also reported generational differences in other forms of appreciation provided to employees. For instance, comparing the work-related attitudes of Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Gen Y participants, Gursoy, Geng-Qing Chi, and Karadag (2013) found that as compared to the other groups, the Millennials were found to view recognition as an important aspect of their work and sought the same. Thus, benefits and rewards are another aspect related to career, in which the generational dynamics involved need to be examined. Further, its relevance to the Indian workforce continues to be unclear, which needs to be cautiously examined.

While discussing individual career trajectories, it is imperative to consider the relationship between individuals and their employing organizations. Here, the scholars point to a shift from the long-term-based career relationships, into transactional, short-term-based ones (Adamson, Doherty, & Viney, 1998; Baruch, 2003). In the past, people expected to serve a single organization for their entire working life. Even if this was not the actual case, this was the desirable course of development. However, now people expect the organization to serve them, and the time span for the relationship to last could be easily reduced to very few years.

In this context, the frequency of career mobility, i.e., changes in jobs and employers, and pattern of mobility (upward, downward, lateral or change in career track) would indicate important features regarding the trajectory of career development. Ng, Sorensen, Eby, and Feldman’s (2007) theory of job mobility put forth that social, economic, and individual factors predicted job mobility. Here, indeed, Mannheim’s (1952) concept that shared experiences of a cohort shape values and attitudes suggests that within a generational cohort, individual trajectories may be similar. Therefore, instead of comparing generational cohorts among themselves, Lyons, Schweitzer, Ng, and Kuron (2012) recommend intra-group comparisons, i.e., “comparing apples to apples” to understand career trajectories. Using this approach on a Canadian population, they found that younger generations, especially those aged between 20–24 years and 30–34 years had a higher tendency to change jobs than did previous generations, and in this process, they were more likely to accept non-upward moves. This indicates that the change mattered more to them, than did growth in terms of upward mobility.
Regarding the experience within a single organization, expectations regarding flexibility and roles vary across generations. The advent of knowledge work in the organizational context sparked research interest related to workplace flexibility and its strategies (Dex & Scheibl, 2001). For instance, in their study on a multigenerational workforce from 22 different companies in the US, Pitt-Catsouphes and Matzcosa (2008) found that workplace flexibility has a positive effect on employee engagement, especially for employees above 45 years of age. In addition, in this study, senior employees were found to view workplace flexibility as a tool to enhance employee wellness and organizational commitment, and employee engagement. However, other than a few general studies like Pitt-Catsouphes and Matzcosa (2008), research on workplace flexibility has concentrated mostly on tele-working and flexi timing, since it is seen as the most preferred arrangement over any other workplace flexibility strategy (Galpin & Skinner, 2004; Lo, 2003; Solomon, 1994).

Research in the Indian context has focused on workplace flexibility and its effects on employee work-life balance issues and employee wellness issues in the IT and ITES sectors. For instance, the HAYS Recruitment Experts (2013) found that workplace flexibility and specifically availability of flexi timing and work from home options formed one of the major reasons for the Gen Y to join or reject an organization. In a study that compared participants from the pre-liberalization and post-liberalization period, Singh (2013) found that the use of technology was seen as a method to augment work-life balance by both groups due to the flexibility it offered. Hence, from the multigenerational perspective it is imperative to understand the attitude of generational participants towards workplace flexibility, and its impact on their career aspirations.

Both social identity and career development are influenced by psychological and sociological factors, including personality, behavior, learning, experiences, and cohort effects (Baltes & Nesselroade, 1984; Miller-Tiedman, 1988). Recent works on career development (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996) describe career development as an assemblage of learning experiences and social interactions across time, and accommodates individual differences in work and life satisfaction, considering that work may be a peripheral means to implement one’s self-concept and identity.

As clear from the above discussion, these preferences would color employees’ work-related aspirations and styles, which make it necessary for managers to have a deep understanding of their team members’ unique preferences. As mentioned before, career entails several constructs related to one’s expectations from the job, including,
but not limited to, work flexibility, career mobility, expectations regarding rewards and feedback, career success, etc. However, in keeping with the need identified by the practitioners in the baseline study, it is unclear which of these aspects hold salience for the Indian workforce, and if and how they vary across generations. While previous studies provide sufficient evidence for the importance of career, there is little research on generational differences in the same. Especially in the Indian context, most of the studies (e.g., Singh 2013) looked at the short-term concept of “work” rather than “career.” This contextualizes the present study’s focus on studying the generational differences in career.

Learning

Learning, especially learning styles and inclination to learn, has received substantial research attention in the popular literature on generational differences. Various studies have investigated the motivation of “skills-hungry employees” (Withers, 1998), showing that their desire for development is derived from fears about employability (Martin, Staines, & Pate, 1998) or “marketability” in an uncertain world (Gabriel, 1999). In addition, employees recognize that, with the evolution of their workplace, learning and training will help them keep up with their younger counterparts. In line with this, more recently, in a study on Gen Y and leadership, Dulin (2008) found that Gen Ys viewed learning as a life time commitment and sought professional growth opportunities, which they believed, not only allowed them to advance in the careers, but also prevent them from getting bored in their jobs.

On the other hand, employers increasingly feel an obligation to train their employees (Robinson, Kraatz, & Rousseau, 1994) because they understand that continuous development is a necessity, especially for knowledge workers (Barner, 1996) and the desire to develop such skills in younger generations (Daboval, 1998; Kennedy, 1998). The need for learning is amplified by the rapidly changing work environment where new technologies, markets, business strategies, and products emerge frequently.

Meanwhile, learning is becoming vastly more accessible, from the expanded professional development offerings at colleges and universities to the growth of e-learning. However, while generational experts have identified traits of the generations that may hinder or facilitate different methods of learning, learning professionals have questioned the value of generational-based learning methods (ODJFS, 2003;
Schlichtemeier-Nutzman, 2001). Most studies claim that members of each generation are most comfortable with the learning methods that were prevalent during their early days of work (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). For instance, traditionalists received little assistance from more experienced co-workers, and had to self-learn several aspects of their work. Boomers, on the other hand, were allowed selective learning, in which employees identified as having potential received additional training. Generation Xers demand training and learning opportunities, and leverage the added education into new career opportunities. With training delivery methods changing with technology and business demands, an analysis of the relevancy of generational differences to learning techniques becomes critical. In this context, as corroborated by the findings of the baseline study in the present research, the main question is which particular learning method is preferred by employees of a generation to create the greatest business impact?

In her doctoral dissertation titled Schlichtemeier-Nutzman (2001) examined thirty-four training approaches with respect to preferences by generation. She found that while some differences existed between generations, all three of the generations surveyed—Veterans, Boomers, and Gen X—preferred linear training techniques, or those that are broken down into components and applied step-by-step. Further, her research indicated greater differences regarding training and learning preferences within generations, and among sexes, than between generations. In her opinion, such similarities of learning preferences between the generations allow HR professionals to apply uniform techniques based on the context of the workplace rather than the generational makeup of the workforce (Schlichtemeier-Nutzman, 2001).

The 2001 study performed by NIOSH evaluated learning preferences of 88 miners identified as members of either Gen X or Gen Y. The miners were asked to choose the three preferences from a list of ten training methods, including one technology-intensive method (computer-based training), that they felt would best to assist them in the learning process, as well as the three that they enjoyed the most. The results indicated that computer based training was chosen by only 3.6% as the preferred mode, and by only 15.5% as the method they most enjoyed. Further, “hands-on practice in a classroom or lab” was chosen as both the most enjoyed (by 42.9% of those surveyed) and the most effective method (by 61.9% of respondents) (Mallett, Reinke, & Brnich, 2002). On the other hand, computer-based training has been found effective with Gen Y’s in general, and has been called ‘fast paced and entertaining, and
“effective,” even for those at the entry level, such as grocery store clerks (Chester, 2002).

In a recent study on 2200 professionals, Meister and Willyerd (2010) found that millennials preferred mentoring over coaching for learning new skills. The study also found that millennials wanted to focus their learning for enhancing technical skills in their area of expertise and improve functional and industry knowledge. Similarly, other studies have concluded that the learning preferences of members of Gen Y varied from those of the other cohorts due to early childhood learning patterns and socialization experiences.

As is clear from the above literature, while learning orientation shows relatively high intra-person stability, little research so far has investigated cohort differences. Hence, the current research looks at learning preferences from generational cohort perspective, especially in the Indian contexts, where the generational cohorts may not necessarily match those found in Western societies.

Leadership

The concept of achieving organizational goals and promoting business through leadership development and teamwork has gained tremendous momentum in recent years, especially in India. Managers are faced by the critical challenge of keeping people motivated, creating meaning in work, retaining employees, and harnessing their full potential. Thus, leadership behaviors and traits are an important part of organizational effectiveness (Raelin, 2005).

On the other hand, relationship with one’s immediate boss/superior not only affects intention to leave, but also influences one’s attitude towards the organization (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975; Graen, 1976; Graen & Scandura, 1987; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Ferris, 1985). There is substantial evidence to prove that leaders affect the work attitudes, motivation, career development, and job satisfaction of followers (Horwitz et al., 2003; Roehling, Cavanaugh, Moynihan, & Boswell, 2000; Turnley & Feldman, 2000). As astutely observed by Buckingham and Coffman (1999), in their famous book “First break all the rules: What the world’s greatest managers do differently,” people leave their bosses and not their organizations. This further substantiates that the organizational reality for an employee depends on his experience with the boss.
A recent study conducted in Indian organizations on knowledge workers found that the relationship between the employee and the direct supervisor/boss was one of the major influences on turnover, followed by lack of recognition, salary, and career advancement (Yiu & Saner, 2011).

However, the current workforce comprises about four generations, which poses considerable challenges for managers, especially in terms of managing intergenerational conflicts arising from differing views on leadership. For instance, organizational leaders, who are likely to be from the older generation, develop policies, practices, and procedures, often without the input of their followers in the various generations. The impact of these decisions may cause discontent and dissatisfaction. However, a study done by Cascio (1974) showed that 75% of Indian managers were mostly satisfied in such decision making sessions where the subordinates were uninvolved. The same study highlighted that only 29.4% of Indian subordinates preferred participative meetings with their superiors, indicating an intergenerational difference of opinion.

Understanding what makes different generations behave in a certain way is critical to implementing a culture that is inviting. However, leaders cannot create a culture without followers (Hansen, 1987). As such, leadership must be understood in the context of a particular group of followers as well as in the context of a particular leader. Of particular interest in research is the impact of generational cohort differences on leaders and leadership—that different generations view leaders differently, and that different generations manifest leadership differently (see Arsenault, 2004; Conger, 2001; Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 1999). Further, with an increasing trend toward organizations mixing generations within their leadership ranks (Bower & Fidler, 1994), and suggestions that multigenerational top leadership teams will increasingly become the norm in business settings (Cufaude & Riemersma, 1999; Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 1999), it is important to understand whether there are generational cohort differences in views on leadership and in manifestations of leadership.

In terms of traits of a leader, Arsenault (2004) found that, Veterans and Baby Boomers placed more importance on honestly and loyalty as an absolute imperative for leadership. Their importance of loyalty correlates well with their belief in authority and hierarchical relationships. On the other hand, participants from Gen X and Y were found to consider determination and ambition as important traits of leaders. They wanted leaders who challenged the system and create change. Further, Xers,
especially Baby Boomers, were much more likely to want leaders with abilities to challenge, inspire, and enable their employees, and act as role-models. Bennis and Thomas (2002) found that optimism, tenacity, self-confidence, and “neoteny” (“the retention of youthful qualities by adults, [such as] curiosity, playfulness, eagerness, fearfulness, warmth, energy”) were characteristics of leaders that help them in forming positive relationships with followers from different generations, particularly with those from the Gen X and Y. In this context, a recent research on Millennials in India, found that they expected their leaders to be humble, have great listening skills, be inspiring and empowering, just and fair, and a man of ideas (Singh, Bhandarkar, & Rai, 2012).

With reference to leadership styles, Salahuddin (2010) found a stark difference in the preferred leadership styles among different generations in the US. Specifically, the characteristics individuals admired in leaders differed among generations. While the Boomer generation focused on personal gratification and discussed servant leadership as their preferred style, the Gen X labeled their leadership as situational. Finally, the Veterans were observed to lack characterization using current leadership styles. Zemke and colleagues (1999) proposed the following preferred generational leadership styles. The WWIIers and Silents (together) prefer a well-defined structure with respect for hierarchy and authority. They tend toward a directive style that is simple and clear. Baby Boomers prefer a collegial and consensual style—communication and sharing responsibility. They do not like the traditional hierarchy. Gen-Xers are egalitarian and do not respect authority. They value honesty, fairness, competence, and straightforwardness. They like change. The Millennials prefer a polite relationship with authority. They like collective action and expect their leaders to pull people together. Indeed these differences have an impact on the day-to-day functioning of a team. To negotiate such vast differences in preferred styles, Meredith et al. (2002) recommended all leaders to have a style that is broad and flexible. They added that the style should include a structured style for Veterans that emphasizes delegation, an individualist approach that values self-expression for Baby Boomers, an excitement style that makes Xers feel like change agents and a team one that is relevant to Nexters’ values of accomplishing greater societal and corporate goals.

In the Indian context, most of the studies conducted in the 1960’s (Bass, 1967; Ganguli, 1964; Meade, 1967; Thiagrajan & Deep, 1970) found that authoritarian leaders were preferred in the Indian context. Later, Singh and Bhandarkar (1988) work on transformational leadership, created a new discussion of Indian tenets of
transformational leadership. Furthering their work, Singh and Krishnan (2005) operationalized seven dimensions of transformational leadership which are specific to the Indian context. These dimensions indicated that Gen Y wants their leaders to have the expertise, i.e., the knowledge of all functional and technical areas. On the other hand, mid-night children appreciate that the leader encourages and expects loyalty from their followers. However, such research in a workforce with a growing young population is virtually non-existent.

As is clear from the above discussion, research on preferred leadership styles across generations, and generational differences in leadership traits in the Indian context is more or less out-dated. With changing times, and the changing composition if the Indian workforce, it is essential to examine these aspects in the current workforce.

Based on the findings of the baseline study, the researcher decided to examine the existing literature on the three key work attributes that were identified, i.e., career aspiration, learning, and leadership. This analysis, insights from the baseline study, as well as the research body discussed in Chapter 1, helped the researcher identify the knowledge gaps, and subsequently determine the focus and scope of the present study. These gaps have been explicated below:

1. A rich body of research suggests that while generational influences on work attributes are strong, the very classification of generations in an organizational context is a function of the socio-cultural and historical fabric of the reference population. A few recent studies in India, have attempted a classification based on India’s contextual features, but such evidence is limited. The present study aimed to start off by examining the existing generational cohorts in the Indian workforce, and the underlying socio-historical events that shaped this classification.

2. Building on research on generational differences in work related attributes, and on the findings of the baseline study, the current study decided to focus on three key attributes, namely career, learning, and leadership.

3. In terms of career attributes, research indicated that this is a multi-faceted attribute that entails several other constructs like expectations regarding work flexibility, success, mobility, rewards, motivations, etc. While different studies have identified how generational cohorts vary on each or some of these attributes, there is a paucity of such studies in the Indian context. In addition, it is unclear, which of these attributes hold salience for the Indian workforce, and
how the salient attributes manifest in the different generational cohorts. Therefore, the present study focused on examining the generational differences in career, in an attempt to identify the sub-attributes that matter to the Indian working population.

4. Due to its importance in the long term development of the organization, learning has received a lot of research attention. In addition, several Western studies have examined, in detail, generational differences in learning preferences and styles. However, such research in the Indian context is nearly missing. India has a unique learning tradition, which has been mediated by the socio-cultural values, the influence of family ties, and a gradually changing learning philosophy that is characteristic to India, given the influence of Vedic traditions, Colonial influences, nationalistic movements, and other such events. Therefore, examining learning in the Indian workforce, from a generational perspective, would be interesting, which the present study aimed to explore.

5. The literature review unearthed interesting trends about leadership research, especially from the multigenerational view-point. However, as indicated in the discussion of previous research in the Indian context, most studies were outdated and lacked generalizability to the dynamic socio-cultural structure of the present workforce. The presented study attempted to fill this gap by examining the leadership styles of different generations, as well as the leadership traits that each generation found important, in the Indian context.

These points of focus were then translated to the research objectives, which determined the methodology used in the present study. Both these aspects have been presented in the next chapter, along with a rationale for the research decisions made during this study.