Chapter 1
Introduction and Literature Review

Introduction
In his book, ‘The Rebel’, the existentialist writer Albert Camus said, ‘Man is the only creature that refuses to be what he is’. We are constantly dealing with the meaning and emotions of existence. The dilemma deepens when faced with the unwillingness of others to let one believe what one is. The unawareness that characterizes inter-generational communications is emblematic of the issue. This problem is reflected in the ‘like us’ or ‘not like us’ attitude that is based on pre-conceived notions. This study is an examination of the problem of intergenerational communications at the workplace.

The role of generational diversity in the familial context is not a new area of study in social sciences (see works of Das, 1971; Gangrade, 1975; Giles, 2003). With organizational changes (organizational flattening in their structure) affecting all three generations in the workforce (older, middle-aged, younger) and the organization, it is imperative for management to understand and manage these diverse expectations. McGinn and Ehrenfeld (2008) state that more the generational diversity in the workforce, the greater is the probability of communication gap in the organization. At the workplace, employees share common work goals; but have differing values, communication styles, and language. It is widely accepted that every generation has its own set of values, beliefs, desires, aspirations, and style of working. These differences, if not recognized and managed, may even lead to conflicts or a situation that is detrimental to organizational well-being. Therefore, it is essential for the organization to be aware of the issue and take the necessary measures before any adverse effects set in (Dwyer, 2009; Bennett et al., 2012).

Each generation functions within a given paradigm of values, beliefs and assumptions. An employee in a given generation is comfortable with an in-group setting. However, when the paradigm is challenged from outgroup, there is a strong likelihood of conflict/divide/gap. Organizations must be aware of this aspect when they are dealing with multigenerational workforce.

DiRomualdo (2006) endorses this view and discusses the role of technology. He proposed that differing work values and attitude towards technology are the
predominant factors in intergenerational conflicts. It is also widely accepted that inability of the managers to understand generational differences can result in communication breakdown and can cause misunderstandings (Westerman & Yamaura, 2006). Several scholars have also asserted that if differing work values, beliefs, and generational differences are not addressed, they can result in miscommunication and misunderstanding, the consequences being lower productivity and reduced organizational citizenship behaviour (Smola & Sutton, 2002; Kupperschmidt, 2000; Wong et al., 2008). Sago (2001) quoted extensive research to show miscommunication as one of the byproducts of generational differences. Generational differences in communication styles and discomfort with technology were delineated as ‘specific’ differences. He further stated that misunderstandings caused by generational differences negatively impact interaction. Future studies should focus on how to communicate with employees of different generations (Sullivan et al., 2009).

It is also important to note that organizations are not oblivious to the relevance of intergenerational diversity. Communication barriers across generations are regarded as one of the major challenges organizations face. It was also pointed out by Madera (2011) that there is no single way to deal with generational diversity; people should be made aware of generational differences and taught to convert threats into opportunities. One possibility, for example, is to have mentoring programs. Organizations must also strive to match rewards to expectations, and focus on integration.

Many organizations are contemplating measures to mitigate the effects of generational differences that have resulted—or could result—in miscommunications and hinder the company’s performance (Ethic Resource Center, 2010). SHRM (2004), in their research, showed that 57% of the participants occasionally faced communication breakdown with workers of a different generation. Communications can be used as a tool to deal effectively with generational differences. Communicating about generational differences is the most prudent way to alleviate the problems. 65% of the participants in the SHRM study (2004) quoted above considered communications to be successful in managing generational diversity. Employees across generations agree that using differing means to communicate ensure that the target audience gets the information in a manner they are comfortable with. This
approach provides a certainty that people will get same information multiple times to gain better understanding.

In addition, employees are also aware of intergenerational differences, Kelly services (n.d.) claimed that people from the Asia-Pacific region have a better understanding of generational differences. It is the highest amongst the baby boomers, followed by generation X and generation Y. Employees from Asia-Pacific also have a positive perception about generational diversity. This is an important consideration when planning improvements in productivity. Failing to do so would lead to conflicts and non-fulfillment of objectives.

AARP (2007) stressed that rigorous communications should take place across generations to reduce the impact of stereotypes. This approach would ultimately make organizations more effective and profitable. It is believed that age-neutral workplaces foster effective communications and understanding across generations by building on the unique values of each age-group. Organizations that pay attention to intergenerational issues will see the impact on various areas like corporate culture, recruitment, retention, employee engagement, and customer service. Having a multigenerational work team offers several benefits like innovation, creativity, and broad-based multiple perspectives. Communication skills are one of the many areas, which people across generations need to work on and develop. Acquiring communication skills should considered as an essential part of the learning curve (Deal, n.d.)

From the discussion above, a possible relationship can be deduced to show how communication influences and, in turn, is influenced by generational diversity.

![Figure 1.1 Dual role of communication in generational diversity](image)

*Figure 1.1 Dual role of communication in generational diversity*
The intergenerational differences in communication are evident from the varying communication styles, channel, and behavior of each generation. These differences require elucidation. Feiertag and Berge (2008) concluded that the younger generation lacks communication skills. The critical thinking skills necessary to grow in a business environment are absent. The younger generation does not read books; instead rely on cut-copy-paste of information that is easily accessed to complete assignments. Despite technological advancements, the skill to communicate effectively has been lost.

It is also believed that though the younger generation is aware of and receptive to new technology and obsessed with the latest devices; their communication skills have not kept pace and fall short of expectations in the current organizational environment. Technology has facilitated the transformation of one-way communications into an interactive one. However, older people view the younger generation as lacking in adequate communication skills. Employees belonging to the younger generation are given to using slang and colloquialisms at the workplace. Usage of slangs and colloquial language has a negative impact on work-based communications (Feiertag & Berge, 2008). Technology has also significantly impacted the way the younger generation works. Young people tend to adopt technology in the work processes effortlessly. The Technological revolution has made the concept of time and space redundant (Deal et al., 2010). Younger people prefer open communication and approachable managers (Susaeta, 2013).

The constant tussle between the digital native and digital immigrants needs to be addressed by the leaders. It is essential to understand the impact of the technological revolution on organizational aspects. Due to technology, digital natives are able to receive, process, and analyze information with ease rapidly. They prefer to communicate through social networking media like Facebook and Twitter. This has challenged the traditional communication means that the older generation is more accustomed (Office memos, hard copies). Managers need to reevaluate the process and medium for sharing information (Dumeresque, 2012), which falls in the purview of communication. Information sharing is a key area of intergenerational differences.

Communication among the younger generation is usually mediated by technology. However, the older generation prefers face-to-face communication for sharing information. The relationship that the middle-aged and the younger generations on information sharing differ from the relationship they have with the
older generation. There may be a clash of attitudes. Traditionally, older people believe that they have propriety right over information (Barrett, 2010). The perceived lack of ability to access resources might result in negative stereotyping of the older generation (Maurer et al., 2008). Growing negative perception of the older people by the younger generation has directed scholars to investigate intergenerational communication and gain better understanding of its dynamics. On the other hand, the younger generation is inclined to use diverse means to communicate and to incorporate technology. Technology based communication has become the prudent way of communicating for the younger generation (Ferguson, 2011). Older generation people place greater value on their interpersonal skills in communications, empathy, and patience (Helyer & Lee, 2012).

The middle-aged and the younger generations in the Asian context are more individualistic as compared to their elders. Therefore, they are seen to approximate the gap on Hofstede’s dimensions of individualism with respect to their Western counterparts. It is believed that the advances in technology, telecommunications, combined with liberalization, have left national cultures fragmented and resulted in significant changes (Vieregge & Quick, 2011). The frequency of interaction between the older and the younger generation coworkers is less than the communication amongst the younger workers. As a result, the chances of forming relationships for psychosocial support diminish.

In most countries, people are living working longer with an extended stay in workforce. As a result there is a lack of shared symbols and meanings among the generations forces people to work under assumptions, which results in the likelihood of intergenerational conflict. However, Wok and Hashim (2013) take a different view to negative stereotyping of the older generation. They observed that the younger generation has a positive perception about their elders and have satisfactory communications with them. Younger employees prefer teamwork with the older generation because they feel that it offers them valuable learning opportunities, even if the older employees are not always receptive to their ideas. The benefits of learning from experience and feedback outweigh the communication issues. A possible explanation may lie in Hofstede’s power distance dimension, which places importance on sharing the positives and close relationships.
Every generation is shaped by its experiences, which impact the development of their strengths and weaknesses. Some of them may be common across generations and a few can even be complementary to one another. As an example, the younger generation’s ability to use technology and come up with new ideas, and the older generation experience and knowledge may appear to be areas of divergence. However, having a large knowledge base in a generationally diverse workforce can actually improve productivity and be beneficial for the organization.

Scholars have not directly addressed the issue of managing intergenerational communication; but there is a brief discussion on how to deal with the issue. Deeper level communication often helps to know the person well and increases interpersonal understanding. It helps people to develop more open and positive attitudes towards those who are not similar to them (Lauring & Selmer, 2012). AARP (2007) states that rigorous communication should take place among the generations to reduce the impact of stereotypes and ultimately make organization more effective and profitable.

The older and the middle-aged believe that effective communication should be considered as one way to reduce the intergenerational gap. Rigorous communication may be seen as a sign of a healthy organization. Communications that are open in nature and accommodative of different communication styles are more effective. It is important for organizations to do away with the ‘one size fits all’ mindset. Their approach must be tailored according to the generational differences and their employees must be suitably prepared (Govitvatan, 2001). On similar lines, ensuring an environment for effective communication has been identified as one of the areas that must be addressed in order to deal with intergenerational conflicts at the workplace (Glass, 2007). Technology can be used to bridge the age gap between the younger and the older generations (Harley et al., 2009).

In their pioneering work Kelly services (n.d.) reported that managing generational diversity is only one part of the understanding; it is more about engaging in effective generational communication. It was seen that more than 70% of the cases, employees make a conscious effort to adapt to the communication style of their counterparts from other generations. Thais are seen to be most the adaptive, followed by the Chinese. Indians are lagging behind them, but are comparatively more adaptive than the Singaporeans and Australians.
Study of literature shows that that communication is treated as an independent and dependent variable; that is, it influences generational differences and is also influenced by generational differences (Deal, n. d.)

**Shift from Cross-Cultural Approach to Cultural Approach**

The present research adopted a cultural approach to examine research concerns. It is common practice to use cross-cultural and cultural approaches interchangeably. However, this should be avoided, as they are different, address different issues and are based on different assumptions. The predominant amount of research in the area of intergenerational communication in the workplace or non-workplace (Giles et al. 2007, 2010; McCann et al. 2004, 2005; Ota et al. 2002, 2012) was carried out in a cross-cultural framework. Cross-cultural research compares two cultures on different constructs in order to understand the convergences and divergences in cognitive, behavioural, and affective functioning. On the other hand, cultural approach is based on the assumption that the human mind and culture constitute each other in a given socio-cultural context.

The present research is based on the cultural approach. Lowe (2012) concluded that the cross-cultural approach results in cultural myopia in which conceptualization are more important than consciousness. Consequently, the understanding process takes a backseat to structural knowledge. Therefore, there is a lack of integration, and synthesis of knowledge.

According to Triandis (1988, 2000), cross-cultural psychologists collect data on a given phenomenon from different cultures and then seek to compare them on the basis of cultural differences. Cross-cultural psychology believes that culture exists outside of the individual and influences him/her, whereas cultural psychology believes that culture resides within the individual.

In this study, the researcher considers that culture resides both inside and outside of the individual. Thus, culture influences the person and, in turn, is influenced by the person. The study focuses on tracing the shift in values, beliefs and norms from one generation to another, thus viewing culture as a dynamic concept. When the focus is more on the context than content, the cultural approach to research is more appropriate than the cross-cultural one. A cross-cultural approach is relevant when culture is viewed as static.
Lastly, cultural psychology is more aligned to collectivist culture, whereas cross-cultural psychology is aligned to individualism. Since Indian society is predominantly collectivist by nature, an approach through cultural psychology is better suited for this study. It is assumed that people in collectivist culture use context to a greater extent than content. In the context of intergenerational communications, what seems simple and linear in a cross-cultural paradigm is actually complex and dynamic.

**Understanding Who ‘we’ (Indians) are**

In ‘Walking the Indian Streets’, Ved Meula (1959 as cited in D. Sinha, 1988) described India as a land of paradoxes, contradictions and extremes on different planes. Indians have a pluralistic worldview, which can be traced to the ancient scriptures that propagated the view that thoughts can come from various directions. The ability of Indians to synthesize is the reason that India can accommodate extensive diversity.

India has been subjected to diverse influences over millennia — from invasions, colonial rule, Western influences and, in recent times, due to liberalization. Indians have shown a remarkable tendency to absorb these influences and integrate them into their lives over a period of time. These influences have shaped the ways we think, feel and behave. Another distinctive characteristic of Indian thinking is ‘context sensitivity’. Indians are sensitive to the context in which they are placed and change their behaviour as per the needs of the situation (J.B.P Sinha, 2008).

Therefore, Indians draw from a vast repertoire of values, beliefs and norms and retrieve those cultural aspects that are well suited for the given situation and which can result in the best transaction. D. Sinha (1988) observed that there are certain characteristic values, beliefs and behaviour that differentiate Indians from other people. To reinforce this opinion, he quoted Mead’s posit that, in every society, there is a ‘learned’ cultural behavior as some of the values are sustained. The socio-cultural system of which the individual is a part of has deep influence on his/her attitudes, outlook and behaviour.

D. Sinha further proposed that irrespective of the diversity in India, there are certain cultural beliefs and values that make us characteristically Indian. Many studies have investigated the collectivist v/s Individualistic dimension in Indian thought and behaviour. Meta-analysis of extant research shows that though Indians are said to be collectivist by nature, they also exhibit individualism on matters that pertain to their
personal aspirations, goals and competitiveness. For these reasons it may be concluded that Indians are both collectivist and individualistic (J.B.P Sinha, 2008).

Concurrent with collectivism is the emphasis on personal relationships. Indians believe in relationships that are personal in nature, which tends to guide their behaviour. They also have the ability to switch the nature of the relationship from personal to the contractual, especially if it is felt that the interaction is only for that occasion. Repeated interactions call for personalized relationships, which tend to make the emotional component more prominent. Thus, in general, Indians are considered to be more emotional in comparison to other nationals (J.B.P Sinha, 2008)

At the same time, it is also important to note that logic, rationality, analytical approach and emotion coexist for Indians. Like other peoples, Indians are also exposed to the uncertainties of life and living; and have developed their own coping and mitigation mechanisms. Culture determines the way we tolerate uncertainty. A strong belief in the ancient tradition of collectivism fosters harmony. Avoidance of conflict is the preferred response; hence, the tendency is to not express oneself in order to avoid a conflict. Consequently, rather than facing up to the situation, Indians prefer to modify their own behavior and adapt (J.B.P Sinha, 2008)

Indians also demonstrate Brahminical idealism in seeking perfection in whatever they do. But, at the same time, they also demonstrate the ‘aaram’ (relaxed) and ‘chalta hain’ (let it be) approach (J.B.P Sinha, 2008) to issues. Seagal (1966, cited in D. Sinha, 1988) asserted that Indians have an attitude of acceptance. They make themselves comfortable with situations easily by submitting to them. The Indian personality is characterized by passivity and conformity. This characteristic has roots in the socialization process of the Indian child. An Indian child is taught to be always passive and submissive to his/her parents and elders. The lesson is applied to general behavior also. In such an environment, only a ‘yes-man’ could emerge (Sinha, 1988).

Another basic disposition influenced by familial interaction is an acute sense of dependency and related characteristics brought about by extreme submission to parental authority. Consequently, there is a lack of personal initiative. The absence of positive reinforcement and greater reliance on ‘scolding combined with constant surveillance reinforces this dependency. Dependency and Paternalism have made Indians less assertive. It has also influence their communication styles. It is believed that many Indians prefer less assertive styles of communication. While discussing the collectivist orientation of Indians, Kapp (1963 as cited in D. Sinha, 1988) states that
the Indian attitude of submergence of individual in the group carries personal and professional relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coexistence of opposites in Indian behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collectivism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured hierarchical orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahminical Idealism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoiding Uncertainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proneness to Dependency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmonious</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: J.B.P. Sinha (2008:44)

Culture is regarded as the soul of the larger milieu which, in turn, is regarded as the body of the society. The Indian milieu has been changing at a fast pace, the change being mostly driven by several influences and diverse social, political and economic factors. On the economic front, post-independence India went through a receptive phase (1947-mid 1960s) that was characterized by a socialistic form of growth by establishing Public Sector Industries. This was the period when government was not averse to foreign aid. This followed by the restrictive phase (1968-79), which was also known as the ‘license raj’. There were severe restrictions on foreign investment, and bureaucratic controls increased several-fold. The Indian economy suffered serious damage during this period (J.B.P Sinha, 2008).

Liberalization set in during the 1980s. Positive and forward looking reforms were adopted. Two decades of liberalization has steered Indian economy to a position of greater safety and sustainable growth. However, serious constraints exist: there is shortage of human resources, gender inequality in employment persists; and inadequate infrastructure and bureaucratic delays are bottlenecks (J.B.P Sinha, 2008).

The political management of the economy has suffered from the limitations of coalition government. Although Coalition ensured fair representation of various political interests, serious and frequent differences within the government have badly affected governance. On many occasions, the government has been unable to take
decisive action due to the compulsions of coalition politics. Increasing corruption and criminalization have also influenced people's attitudes and behavior.

The Indian family dynamic has also changed significantly. The joint family system has given way to nuclear families. This change has also resulted into shifts in values and norms. Traditionally, Indian family dynamics were rooted in the values of group embeddedness, personal and dependent relationships (J.B.P Sinha, 2008).

The study of culture is a subject that has engaged many social scientists. There is no single definition of culture. Culture is dynamic and is viewed and examined from various perspectives. However, certain aspects of culture are relatively stable. They are: assumptions, beliefs, values and norms. It is believed that employees acquire certain beliefs and values during the socialization days of childhood, which are brought to their workplaces. These mirror societal culture.

Although this study does not touch upon organization culture, it is pertinent to mention that organizational culture is a subset of societal culture. However, organizational culture is not solely determined by societal culture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Indians have pluralistic view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ability to handle paradoxes and grey areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Indians show shades of collectivism and individualism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Indians prefer to maintain harmonious relationship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Literature Review

The Concept of Diversity and its Relevance in the Workplace

India is synonymous with — and is often talked about for — its diversity. The diversity that exists at the societal level is also present at the workplace. Indeed, it is impossible imagine a completely homogeneous organization in the 21st century. Accepting diversity is also a business imperative because an organization cannot afford to limit its human resource pool on the grounds of cultural unsuitability or other objective measures. Diversity in the workforce accelerated in the 1980s and 1990s. Today, it is an irrefutable fact of workplace life (Barker, 2011).

A diverse workforce is the result of a series of societal actions and reactions at different levels. Workplace diversity first caught attention in the US and American organizations initiated its systematic study. Academia too devoted considerable amount of its time and effort on the subject. The first published research study was by Johnston and Packer in their book, ‘Workforce 2000: Work and Workers for the 21st Century’ in the late 1980s (Barak, 2011).

Business organizations address issues related to diversity management if they feel that the time and resources required make sound business sense (increased workforce diversity resulting in a measurable increase in business performance). In addition, employees will show keenness towards participating in diversity management initiatives if they have an important stake in the business (Kossek, Lobel & Brown, 2006). Organizations that do not give importance to diversity and address related issues proactively are most likely to fall short of meeting the demands of diverse market (Gilbert et al., 1999).

Cox and Blake (1991) articulated the case for diversity management. They argued that if people from different cross-sections (gender, race, nationality) have different perspectives and attitudes on issues then the diversity should result in a surge of creativity and innovation. Decisions are of highest quality when it comes from a group with balanced degree of homogeneity and heterogeneity.

Diversity is moulded by the macro-societal context (social, political and economic events). Therefore, in order to have a holistic understanding of the concept of diversity, it is imperative to study it across cultures and sub-cultures. Such a study will facilitate the understanding of salient generational characteristics. While focusing on workplace diversity, it is important to understand that diversity is not imported into
the workplace, but is an inherent part of—and is constructed at—the workplace (Prasad, Pringle & Kringle, 2006).

Workforce diversity is not a transient occurrence; it has taken deep roots and is here to stay. Managing diversity is a challenge thrown at business leaders, human resource managers and management consultants, who must take a long term view of the subject. A heterogeneous workforce should not carry negative connotations for the organization; rather, the focus should be on developing the ability of organizations to manage diversity efficiently and effectively (Barak, 2011). “Businesses should invest in creating a more effective and diverse workforce not because it is the legal, ethical or moral ‘right’ thing to do, but because it is the savvy, bottom-line focused, pragmatic, self-interested ‘right’ thing to do” (Litivin, 2006: 83)

An organization is as good as its workforce. The inherent characteristic of a diverse workforce influence key processes in organizations. Diversity is also like a double-edged sword—if managed well, organizations can reap huge benefits. If not handled properly, the consequences on business processes can be severe. It is for this reason that diversity management is considered to be one of the effective human resource strategies.

Groschl and Doherty (1999) cited several advantages of diversity management: it improves the decision-making process, increases productivity, enhances creativity, innovation and encourages divergent thinking. According to Flurry (1999, cited in Gröschl, 2011) diversity management aids in creating a work environment that foster’s attainment of individual goals in alignment with organizational goals. Organizations acknowledge diversity as an integral aspect of business, but have lagged in considering diversity in their business initiatives in favour of other, more tangible business priorities.
Robinson and Dechant, 1997 cited the following excerpt from the Workforce 2000 study.

**Diversity Rationale Poll**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HR Executives Cited Business Reasons for Diversity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Resource executives from 15 Fortune 100 companies were asked to identify primary business reasons for engaging in diversity management. The results focus more on reasons that leverage the opportunities diversity management offers than on those having to do with avoiding penalties of mismanagement (eg. Turnover, costs, and lawsuits).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Top five Reasons
1. Better utilization of talent (93%)
2. Increased marketplace understanding (80%)
3. Enhanced breadth of understanding in leadership positions (60%)
4. Enhanced creativity (53%)
5. Increased quality of team problem solving (40%)

**Source:** (Robinson & Dechant, 1997:22, Workforce study 2000).

Diversity management also enhances leadership effectiveness. Heterogeneity at the top level of management results in a churn of new ideas as well as a better appreciation of diversity. In the beginning, members of a diverse workgroup might find it difficult to communicate and understand each other. However, with time and focus on shared objectives, they will be able to solve problems more productively because of the multiple perspectives that will be on offer. The outcome would be greater degree of creativity and innovation (Robinson & Dechant, 1997).

Diversity management not only helps in attracting talent but also in its retention. It is said that it is easy to attract talent but extremely difficult to retain it. Proper diversity management can have a positive impact on a company’s long term financial prospects as well its short-term stock performance. Therefore, diversity initiatives should be regarded as a business investment rather than a series of token actions (Robinson & Dechant, 1997).

This literature review discusses previous studies on diversity management. Sadri and Tran (2002) discussed three approaches to deal with diversity: affirmative action, valuing diversity and managing diversity. According to them, managing diversity is the appropriate strategy. Managing diversity aims to build specific skills and policies that draw the best out of people. This approach is also based on the assumption that a
diverse group is likely to have multiple perspectives, which will result in better performance and productivity.

Leading practitioners, consultants, HR managers agree that valuing diversity is a key approach that organizations should adopt for its management. It is believed that a diverse and well-managed workforce positively impacts all aspects of the organization (Cox & Blake, 1991). Shrivastava and Gregory (2009 as cited in Lauring & Selmer, 2012) postulated that an attitude of acceptance of the divergence and convergence that may exist within groups or across groups could create an open climate in which people respect the differing views that each person may hold.

Workforce diversity influences individual, group and organizational outcomes. Thus, Human Resource practices have broadened beyond conventional affirmative actions and equal employment opportunity efforts. Kossek, Lobel and Brown (2006), in their meta analysis of studies, reported that there can be different kinds of interventions at different levels for managing. At an individual level, training and mentoring can be adopted to make employees more aware of the diversity of the workforce. At group level, they can consider the involvement of identity-based networking groups, which can be formal or informal networks of employees with common group identities. At the organizational level, top management and leaders have to play a participative role in diversity management.

Lauring and Selmer (2012) quoted studies to show that dissimilarities have a positive impact on organizational performance. In addition, organizations should raise the level of communications to overcome stereotypical images. Frequent communication is seen to have a positive influence on organizational aspects like project success, reduced dysfunction and conflicts, improved coordination and effective relationships (Weick, 1993 & Dougherty, 1992 as cited in Lauring & Selmer 2012).

Barker and Gower (2010) proposed a new approach − storytelling − to bridge the communication divide in diverse workforces, the underlying assumption being that people of all cultures are familiar with and accept storytelling.

“… recognizing all humans as storytellers with the ability to send and receive messages that establish a value-laden reality, establishes a common ground among all participants and provides a faster method of establishing a social relationship. This enhanced exchange of communication allows for swift evaluation and reaction in a competitive business environment, thereby allowing for the accomplishment of corporate and individual goals among all participants. With this existing support for the cross-cultural power of storytelling and its business application, and the critical
need for a communication tool addressing the organizational diversity continuum, it follows that story-telling is a viable solution to promote cogent communication and assist in the development of organizational understanding, building stronger employee relationships and therefore increasing business productivity” (302:303).

Available literature is focused primarily on demographics-based diversity. Wrench (2007) enumerated the six primary dimensions of diversity. They are: age, ethnicity, gender, physical abilities or qualities, race and sexual/affection orientation. Diversity is not merely about highlighting salient differences in features. Diversity-based differences that have significant impact on the individual and the organization are often neglected by the management (Prasad, Pringle & kringle, 2006). This study adds to extant information by investigating the role of intergenerational diversity in relation to workplace communications.

### Key Points

- Diverse workforce is no longer a matter of choice for organizations
- Organizations do not address diversity issues proactively
- Diversity can result in a surge of creativity, innovation, and better decision making
- Diversity management can improve leadership effectiveness and has

### Generational Diversity and its Relevance in the Workplace

There is general agreement among practitioners and academicians that generational differences exist in the workplace. Published literature has tended to summarize these differences as generational characteristics. Generational differences are seen to impact several variables in organization like communication, satisfaction, motivation, and leadership style (Costanza et al., 2012).

Benson and Brown (2011) argued that, despite acceptance of the presence of generational differences in workplaces, there is an absence of systematic research into its influence and impact in the organizational context. As stated in the previous section, it is for the first time that all the four generations are working together. This scenario challenges HR managers as they cannot adopt a ‘one plan for all’ approach. Strategies must be customized to suit different generations. It becomes difficult to attract, hire, engage, and retain people from different age groups (Cogin, 2012).
Policies and practices that were adopted to deal with the Traditionalist and Boomer cannot apply to generation X and Y. Organizations have to devise context-specific measures for the younger generations. This calls for further investigation of the phenomenon (Luscombe, Lewis & Biggs, 2013). Organizations cannot afford to be in the reactive mode in respect of matters related to generational diversity. The correct approach is to be proactive for long-term business benefits. It is imperative to align business goals with generational differences (Bennett et al., 2012).

In the past, generations were separated by job profiles and seniority. Thus, older employees mostly worked at senior levels and the younger ones lower in the hierarchy. With organizations having flatter structures, age and experience do not necessarily decide seniority. Younger employees move up the ladder faster than earlier generations. Thus, young and older employees may be found to be working at the same level. This situation increases the chances of intergenerational conflict.

A generational ‘us’ v/s ‘them’ situation is detrimental to the organization. The resulting polarization is a fertile breeding ground for altercations. Therefore, organizations should look at building an interdependent culture (Gursoy et al., 2008).

Generational diversity has been studied in relation to several variables like organization commitment, job satisfaction, work attitudes, and technology. The researcher presents key findings in relation to important organizational variables for each generation. Baby Boomers are seen to be high on job satisfaction and less willing to quit the organization as compared to generation X (Benson & Brown, 2011). Lub et al., (2012) reasoned that generation X valued work-life balance, autonomy and job security. A lower level of commitment and satisfaction was seen in generation Y.

Benett, et al. (2012) argued that it is necessary for organizations to fulfill the demands of the new generation in the workplace because of the changing work-life perceptions. Cogin (2012) found that work values differ from generation to generation. To give an example, Traditionalist and Boomers valued hard work above everything else, whereas generation X valued asceticism and Generation Y gave high importance to work and leisure.

Generational differences were also investigated from Hofstede’s cultural dimension approach. Vieregee and Quick (2011) found that generation X and Y in Asian cultures are more individualistic as compared to their elders. In this aspect, the
gap with the West is closing. The negotiation behaviour of these generations has also changed; less time and effort are spent on building relations and the focus now is on persuasion and compromise.

Communication is also one of the variables in the study generational diversity. In the present study, the researcher endeavours an in-depth examination of the phenomenon of intergenerational communication in the workplace.

### Key Points

- Lack of systematic research that explores influence of generational diversity on the workplace.
- Generational diversity studied in relation to work motivation, job satisfaction, and meaning of work to elucidate its importance
- Generational differences do influence communication.

### Importance of Generational Diversity in the Indian Context

In their report, Deloitte (2010) stressed that generation is not a homogenous concept; rather it is a culturally rooted notion that differs from nation to nation. Therefore, it is difficult to establish a universal definition. It is widely held that handling generational differences will become an important part of organizational strategy of ‘plan locally and connect globally’.

Western scholarship has devoted considerable effort and resources in the study of multigenerational diversity in workplaces. The diversity has been categorized, the expression ‘generation’ defined in their specific social-cultural contexts and the impact on several business processes were studied. However, there is little known academic research of the subject in the Indian context. In particular, there is a need to focus on generational diversity as a workplace issue (Business Standard, 2011).

SHRM conducted a poll in 2011 on intergenerational conflicts in the workplace. The poll found that more than 50% of workers in Indian organizations considered generational conflict to be an issue. Therefore, Indian organizations should recognize this and focus on building trust, conducting regular audits of procedures, organizing focus groups, coaching/mentoring, and training programs (Oberoi, 2011).

Ravindran (2012) proposed that Indian organizations approached diversity issues from the point of view of geography (rural/urban), gender and caste. Since recently, generational diversity has also caught the attention of business leaders. Policies like
allowing employees to wear casual dress on Fridays, DJ nights, etc., is an indication that the expectations of the younger generations are being addressed. Ravindran also argues that the manner in which generational differences and similarities are handled will not only give organizations a healthy advantage; it may also improve their competitiveness in the long run. But generational diversity management is not always about the younger generation. With the advent of technology, it is important in the Indian context to study how the older generations are responding to workplace issues like communications, conflict resolution, and collaboration processes. Srinivasan (2012) along with Roongrerngsuke (2010); Erickson (2009) and Ghosh & Chaudhuri (2009) are the few who have explored generational diversity in Indian context.

An article in the Economic Times (2012) discussed how generational differences have influenced communication styles, thinking approach, use of technology and has posed challenges at the workplace. Older generation employees in India are often seen putting in extra efforts by staying late in the office, preferring face-to-face communications, and enjoying power and authority. Middle-aged employees are seen trying to strike a balance between work and life, preferring emails to phone conversation, disliking authority and conventional meetings. They appear to have distinctive thought processes. In contrast, younger generation employees believe in working in teams and virtual teams, communicating with short text and instant messages, and dislike traditional meetings.

Organizations in India recognize the importance of generational diversity and have adopted several mechanisms to address it. TCS launched ‘Knome’ an internal social networking site on the lines of Facebook and Twitter to encourage collaboration among employees. ‘After its rapid expansion in recent years, Tata Consulting Services (TCS) now has a 240,000-strong workforce of which over 70% are under 30. This has put enormous pressure on the firm to change’ (Ajay Mukerjee, Head Human resources, TCS) (Economist, 2013). In 2008, Airtel started a reverse mentoring programme (Kumar, n.d.) to help older generation employees to adapt to the current environment. Godrej, GE, Mahindra and Mahindra established a young executive board, which functioned like a parallel board (shadow board) to make the young managers ready for future roles.
Nature of Communication

Communication in Asian (Indian) context. High context-based communication takes place in the Asian cultures where meanings and information are derived from the context. The communication is less direct and the stress is on drawing inferences (Hall, 1978 as cited in Gudykunst, 2001). On the other hand, in a low context-based communication the message is direct and explicit. Such types of communications are the norm in Western countries. Here, the emphasis is on clarity and effectiveness.

Gudykunst (2001) stated that in high-context communications, the stress is on inferring the meaning. Hence, interpersonal sensitivity is high and feelings are seen to guide behaviour. People even tend to use silence to communicate. In low-context communications the focus is on being dramatic, dominant, animated, open, friendly, relaxed, and attentive and leaving an impression. Asian peoples are seen to relate and communicate with each other on the basis of social status and interpersonal relationship structures. A common example is in how Asians demonstrate different linguistic codes on the basis of social status, degree of intimacy, age, sex and level of formality in communication with the recipient. Maintaining harmonious relationships is of paramount importance.

Brew and Crains (2002) state that Asians use more indirect communications with superiors/higher status individuals as compared to Europeans at workplace. Out of concern for potential conflict, Asians try to adopt an ‘avoiding’ style whereas Europeans are direct (Ting Toomey et al., 2000). Indirect communication in Asian cultures requires the stakeholder to be sensitive to the context and infer meanings in order to negotiate the understanding of the message (Gao, 1998 as cited in Gudykunst, 2001).

Key Points

- Generation is not a homogenous concept; one cannot rely entirely on western literature for understanding.
- There exists a considerable gap in academic studies on generational diversity at workplaces in the Indian context.
- Generational differences influence Indian employees at workplace.
- Employees in Indian organizations admit that they face generation gap and conflict.
Indians are typified as associative rather than abstract in relation to thinking pattern. Since Indians are high on context-sensitivity. They try to accommodate, tolerate and integrate. Nishimura et al. (n.d) proposed that Indian culture is high-context. Communication in the Indian context is governed by respect and norms while interacting with elders. Indian English is formal in nature; people prefix ‘Please’ in their written text and suffix ‘ji’ to names while addressing people. Indians have a tendency to use long sentences, which can be confusing to Westerners and may result in misunderstandings.

However, Chella (2007 as cited in Nishimural et al., n.d) argued that India is gradually moving towards a low-context culture. Technology, travel and television have played a significant role in this trend, especially in communication styles. In a collectivist and high-context culture, people are more visually oriented as compared to an individualistic low-context culture that focuses on written communications. Communications in India are governed by the use of understatements, silence, and pauses. Silence in communication and between words carries implicit meanings (Mooij, 2014).

**Role of communication in organizations.** Communication plays a pivotal role at all levels in an organization. It helps employees in sharing information, motivating, coordinating and influencing actions. Besides these functions, communications also facilitate healthy work relationships among teams and members of the organization. The type and style of communication predominantly followed in an organization is a reflection of its culture (Cheney et al. 2004; Miller 2009; Scott et al. 1998 ; Myers 2009; Sias 2009 as cited in Myers & Sadaghiani 2010).

Patri and Patri (2002) delineated intergenerational differences as one of the barriers to effective communication. While discussing perceptual barriers, they asserted that people might interpret the same message differently by using stereotypes. This is one of the perceptual barriers in communication. People of different generations generally apply stereotypes to understand their counterparts in other generations. Therefore, examining generational differences in communications is an important area of concern for organizations for maintaining harmonious working relationships.

---

1 Culture refers to belief, values and artifacts.
Communication is an effective means of dealing with intergenerational conflict. Glass (2007) asserted that ensuring an environment of effective communication is one of the four areas that organizations need to focus on to manage intergenerational differences. Effective communication leads to better interaction between generations. It results in the sharing of different perspectives across generations and fosters creativity and innovation (Meredith et al., 2002 as cited in Arsenault, 2003).

**Key Points**
- Communication in India is high-context in nature.
- Indians are high on context-sensitivity.
- Indians tend to indulge in formal and respect-based communication.
- With the onset of the technological revolution, there has been a shift in style of communication and the communication behaviour of Indians.

**Intergroup Aspects to Intergenerational Communication in the Workplace**

Myer and Davis (2012) identified three key aspects of intergroup communications from an intergenerational perspective:

(a) *Perception about age- and experience-related status.* In a Western context, the younger generation, during their growing up phase, is encouraged to ask questions and debate. Therefore, when they enter the workplace there is the expectation that their viewpoint will be heard and welcomed by their supervisors and senior co-workers (Martin, 2005). On the other hand, the older generation is accustomed to — and expects — communications with ‘respect’ and ‘deference’ as they were taught to when they were young.

However, the younger generation may or may not have grown up with a similar set of values. Therefore, communicating respectfully and passive acceptance of the older generation’s viewpoints may not come easily to younger employees. More likely, they will challenge the notion that the older employees are more experienced and wiser. It is the perception of power and status that is believed to be one of the primary reasons for misunderstandings in intergenerational communication (Coupland, Wiemann & Giles, 1991 as cited in Myers & Davis, 2012).
It has been often observed that communication between generations is based on assumptions. For example, the younger generation’s casual attitude to discussions in a meeting is viewed as a sign of laziness by the older generation, who feel that the younger generation does not prepare for the meetings. Kupperschimidt (2006) observed that the older generation considered it as their responsibility to organize the younger generation and get the work done. Naturally, they carry the impression that their viewpoint will be accepted because of their experience and seniority.

However, the advice is often questioned by the younger generation, which offends the seniors. However, Martin (2005) is of the opinion that when the young people’s opinions and suggestions are not taken seriously by the older generation, they are likely to experience frustration and disappointment at not being heard.

(b) **Work-life balance.** Myer and Davis (2012) believe that the concept of work-life balance has a bearing on the mismatch of values in intergenerational communication. The older generation considers work as central to their being. In contrast, young adults prefer a work-life balance. Thus, they may not like to work on weekends and holidays. In the organizational context, the most important goal of an employee is to work hard and perform well. However, when there are fundamental generational differences in the definition of work as well as its centrality to being (Singh, 2013), there is likelihood that it will negatively influence communications. Therefore, lack of awareness of different and conflicting work values can negatively impact communications.

(c) **Communication Media.** Myer and Davis (2012) argued that the choice of conflicting communication channels could negatively influence communication satisfaction and effectiveness. In a later section, role of differing communication channels adopted by the generations will be discussed in more detail.
A Model to Understand Generational Interactions within Organizations.
Hutchings and McGuire (2006); McGuire, Todnem and Hutchings (2007) proposed a model to understand intergenerational interactions in workplaces based on Parker and Ross theories. The model includes four distinct stages for generational interaction: 1) initial contact, 2) Conflict, 3) Cooperation and ending with 4) assimilation.

The central idea of this model is that people are unaware and do not understand the generational differences arising from age-stereotypes. It reasons that the need for accommodation and differentiation will result in the formation of generational groups. It identifies the significance of HR interventions in achieving and managing interactions amongst such groups in order to create a positive, empowering work environment.

It is also important for organizations to communicate diversity within organizations in order to have functional communications across generations. Employees should be aware of generational differences so that their communication is not coloured by age stereotypes. As example, organizations can post information about diversity-related policies, statements, workforce profile. (Gröschl, 2011).

Initial contact. In a workplace setup, people tend to form group-based identities and friendships to seek and give support. Therefore, there exists the likelihood that people may enter into a social contact from an ‘us’ and ‘them’ perspective. They will also indulge in rigorous self-categorization and social comparisons to build a positive identity for themselves.

Conflict. Employees from different generations have less shared space and experiences. They are also likely to have differing opinions, which increases the likelihood of conflict. Conflict is seldom useful for the organization. They are affective and emotional in nature.

Cooperation. In order to build a co-operative environment, the social distance between generations must be reduced. The emphasis should be on building shared norms and experience across generations. Efforts should be made to construct a culture of interdependence.

Assimilation. In the assimilation stage, attempt is made to construct an integrated workforce. Assimilation of diversity can significantly impact intergenerational communication in a positive manner and create a healthy work environment.
Study of Intergenerational Communication

The researcher proposes the categorization of extant literature on intergenerational communication according to themes.

(a) Staircase pattern-based research. A considerable amount of research is focused on the staircase pattern. The studies are based on the assumption that as age increases, the level of respect, obligation, communication avoidance, and benevolence towards them increases. However, the degree of satisfaction and vitality decreases.

In their comparison of African countries (South Africa and Ghana), Giles et al. (2005) explored the perception of the younger generation towards persons of the older generation during the communication process. The results showed that the onset of young adulthood occurs earlier in the Americans than in African countries. In both contexts, communication avoidance was highest towards the older generation, though the Americans demonstrated a higher level of respect as compared to the South Africans towards their elders. Although both countries showed lower levels of communication satisfaction with their elders, the South African countries showed a significant difference from the Americans. To them, communication satisfaction and enjoyment was significantly lower in comparison to their American counterparts.

In relation to age stereotypes, following insights were gleaned from the study. Personal vitality (age stereotype) decreased with increasing age. However, benevolence (age stereotype) increased with the increase in age. Positive stereotyping of the older generation had both positive and negative influences on communication satisfaction. South Africans considered positive stereotyping to be intimidating; however, the Ghanaians found it pleasing. As an indication of respect, politeness and deference was found to be the highest towards the older generation. Ghanaians and Americans showed lower levels of deference across age groups in comparison to South Africans (Giles et al., 2005).

Avoidance as a communication behaviour and politeness could be seen to predict communication satisfaction and enjoyment. In general, it was found that the African findings mirrored the American results. They showed
staircase patterns of stereotypes, norms, communication behaviour, and communication satisfaction. Although the findings of made certain robust postulates that are in consonance with the extant works, it laid importance on cultural context for future research (Giles et al., 2005).

However, the study failed to capture the perceptions of the older generation on intergenerational communications. It also did not attempt to find a common ground between the two generations. The authors did not provide context-based explanations for their findings. Also, the sample population comprised university students, which is the common practice — for reasons of convenience—in studies of this kind. However, in doing so the relevance of context is often compromised as it is being assumed that people across contexts are going to behave in a similar manner.

McCann et al., (2006) studied young American adults for their beliefs about intra- and intergenerational communication. The staircase pattern was observed — as the target age increased, the level of respect, politeness, obligation, benevolence, and avoidance increased. On the other hand, the level of communication satisfaction and personal vitality decreased. Contrary to popular perception, communication discomfort was found to increase when these young adults interacted with middle-aged people with whom the in- and out-group distance is considered to be less distinct.

It was also seen that respect is decisively rooted in the early phase of an individual’s life rather than s/he invoking it whenever it is needed. Thus, for this study, the researcher proposes certain linkages. They are:

First, positive age stereotypes can improve and lessen communication avoidance with the older generation. Generally, negative stereotypes are considered to be predictors of communication behavior and hence, examining this proposition will provide useful insights. Age stereotypes do not have a direct impact on communication but indirectly so through communication avoidance. Secondly, respect for norms, deference is reflected in the communication behaviour of the young adults towards elders. It was seen that the norms of deference and obligation have a more negative impact on communication avoidance rather than politeness, especially in a non-family context. Like Asians, the American also tend to avoid situations where they feel that have to demonstrate excessive degrees of respect and deference.
Thirdly, communication avoidance influences communication satisfaction. Possibly, seeing oneself as strategically avoiding communication with someone can be seen as indicative of a sense of dissatisfaction. In addition, showing respect is such an ingrained and routine behaviour that it is seldom seen as a construct that would influence communication satisfaction or otherwise. Communication satisfaction or dissatisfaction mobilizes the process of forming and reforming stereotypes. Most of the studies pointed out that role of gender in intergenerational communication needs study in more detail.

Ota et al., (2007) investigated beliefs about intra- and intergenerational communications in both Western (United States) and the Asian context (Japan and Philippines). The findings were consistent with study referred earlier: young adults in all three cultural contexts perceived communication more positively within their age group as compared with older people (Respect-obligation, and avoidance). This makes the younger generation’s perception about intergenerational communication a robust stand, wherein communication is effective within-group as compared to out-group.

A more positive environment for intergenerational communication was seen in Western cultures because there was less expectations of obligation and respectfulness towards the elders as compared to Asian cultures. In-group and out-group\(^2\) distinctions were salient features in the Asian context. Older generation showed in-group bias—they rated same-age group family members to be more accommodative. For them, even non-family members of their generation were more accommodating than younger adults (Ota et al., 2007).

Interestingly, the older generation also denied any identification with their age group so as to avoid the negative image of collective identity. The authors felt that further inquiry is required to explore why intergenerational communication is difficult in the eastern context as compared to the western context (Ota et al., 2007). There is a need to investigate whether the reluctance of the older generation to be identified with their age group also holds true in organizational context.

\(^2\) In-group and out-group has been used as given by Tajfel and Turner’s Social Identity theory (1979)
Ota et al., (2012) studied inter-Asian variability in intergenerational communications. Japanese and Thai participants showed staircase pattern in relation to respect, avoidance, and politeness. In both the cultures communication avoidance negatively influenced communication enjoyment and satisfaction. Communication avoidance causes unpleasantness, anxiety and a sense of lack of authenticity. It was seen that the Thai participants were more particular about offering respect and being deferent in comparison to the Japanese.

An explanation for these findings may be found in the notions of dynamic externality (in which the focus is on maintaining interpersonal relationships, high religiosity and status-seeking behaviour) than societal cynicism (in which the emphasis is on autonomy rather than maintaining relationships). Thais are respectful to people irrespective of age, rank or status. One distinguishing feature about this study was that it endeavoured to unravel the nuances of intergenerational communication by restricting its scope to inter-Asian comparison (Ota et al., 2012).

Giles et al., (2010) investigated communication satisfaction in Bulgaria and the United States. They concluded that culture did not play a role in intergenerational communication. In both cultural blocks, as the target age increased so did the ascriptions of benevolence, communication respect, and avoidance whereas the level of communication satisfaction and personal vitality decreased. Though the Americans tended to avoid elders more, they were more respectful to them than were the Bulgarians. Consistent with published studies, it was seen that communication avoidance and norm of politeness were predictors of communication satisfaction. Like previous studies, this study also focused on the perceptions of the younger generation on intergenerational communication. Further studies are necessary to determine and understand the perspectives of the older generation.

(b) Research based on cognition as an aspect of communication. Lin et al. (2004) investigated intergenerational communication schema formed by the younger generation about the older generation in the Taiwanese context. The authors observed that there is abundant literature on intergenerational communication in the North American and Western European contexts; and
that there was a need to investigate this phenomenon through the lens of a non-western society.

The sample size of the study was small in comparison to the standards prescribed for quantitative approach. A sample size of 41 prevents generalizations. The findings of their study revealed that young adults were keen to participate in conversations with older persons and even felt that their interactions would be useful to the older person. Seldom did they experience intimidation by the older generation. In other words, younger people showed an inclination to interact with the older generation. They considered that such communications made the older person happy and better.

The younger generation’s sympathy towards their elders was one of the salient reasons for their experiencing communication satisfaction. In a gist, this can be seen as the ‘helping’ schema. Experience was seen to be a double-edge sword. Though conversation with older people is often a one-way process, it also provides an avenue to the younger generation to learn from the older generation’s experiences. The Younger generation showed greater readiness to accept criticism from an older employee rather than from a peer (Lin et al., 2004).

On the other hand, however, the lessons from the elders’ experiences often deterred the younger generation from experimentation and improvisation. Some of the older generation’s values like valuing job stability and thrift were not fully accepted by the young people. Therefore, on several occasions, they dismissed the older generation’s suggestion while being respectful at the same time (Lin et al., 2004).

The younger generation was also not appreciative of the manner — over-parenting and nagging — in which advice and suggestions were presented to them by the older generation. Young people did try to change their communication behaviour to accommodate their seniors. At the same time, they also perceived a large generation gap. They felt that old people have a tendency to repeat things, which the younger generation views negatively. On several occasions the younger generation in a respectful manner overruled the older generation’s suggestions. Younger generation did not appreciate the manner (Ladoo – over-parenting and nagging) suggestions were presented to them. Schemas developed by the younger generation were influenced by their
cultural context and constraints. Filial piety played a predominant role, direct confrontation was considered to be disrespectful. Thus, there is a need to follow prescriptive norms (Lin et al., 2004).

Harwood et al. (2007) conducted two studies to investigate cognitive representation of intergenerational communication by young and old adults. Old and young people were asked to report their conversations with older and younger subjects. This study was a departure from mainstream methodological approach and adopted qualitative methods to collect the data. However, quantitative (multivariate) techniques were used to analyze the data.

Qualitative data have often provided an edge to the researchers. Younger people’s account of intergenerational communication revealed that there is a certain distance between older people and young adults. Elders were generally attributed with positive characteristics like warmth and caring. Younger adults reported that they show politeness and restrained behavior towards elders. But they also experiences boredom while communicating with an elder due to which there was the constant desire to leave the conversation.

On the negative side, constant help and sympathy that the younger generation had to offer the older generation, a distance developed between both generations. The younger adults felt that the elders were hostile towards them and thus less inclined to converse. From the perspective of an older person, the older generation recalled instances of helping younger adults by giving advice and sharing experiences. Older people claimed that they felt young and vibrant while interacting with the young adults. In such cases, the older people did not feel that there existed a generation gap.

However, there were also instances when the older generation was unable to find common ground with the younger adults. Then, the younger generation was seen as hostile, disapproving, and antagonistic. Methodologically, the study ignored certain aspects like quantitative analysis of qualitative data. Older generation participants were residents of the community whereas the younger generation participants were university students. The younger participants came from differing backgrounds; hence there contextual variables, which the study did not investigate.
(c) **Age stereotypes and intergenerational communication.** Researchers in the area of social cognition have described human beings as ‘cognitive misers’. They avoid spending time in analyzing and understanding people. Instead, they rely on schemas and stereotypes to know others. They tend to ignore information that is available about the person and rely on stereotypes to ‘fill in the gaps’ (Schneider, 2004).

In the context of workplace diversity, is it possible to do away with stereotypes? It is seen that dual process demands that information processing takes place in a continuum; hence it is impossible to do away with the process of stereotyping. At one end people rely on heuristics to form an impression. At the other end, perceivers suppress their stereotypes and instead engage in controlled and careful processing of information about the subject person. Several factors are seen to influence controlled processing: (a) perceivers must have access to sufficient information about the subject person (b) perceivers must be motivated from within to obtain accurate information and (c) they should have adequate time and cognitive resources to carry out cognitive processes. A conclusion may be drawn that the amount of resources (time and information) available to the employees, and knowledge of the consequences of forming inaccurate impressions can impact the employees’ motivation and/or ability to use or suppress stereotyping in the judgment process. Ironically, it is seen that the more the individual endeavours to suppress using stereotypes, the greater is the likelihood of forming stereotypical images (Schneider, 2004).

Age-defined stereotypes influence intergenerational communication (Lin et al, 2004). Most studies on stereotyping in different cultures suggest that the older generation is portrayed negatively and with inaccurate beliefs about them (McCann et al., 2006). Age-defined stereotyping may influence employees’ attitude, behaviour towards individuals, groups, and organizations. Recent studies also indicate that this stereotyping differs from country to country (Lin et al., 2004).

Studies carried out in the American and the British context reported that older workers are characterized as being less flexible, less interested in training, and less motivated as compared to younger workers. Australians view the older generation as more dependable, making better decisions and
doing a better job overall as compared to younger workers; however, they are also seen as being less creative and difficult to train. In New Zealand, older workers are stereotyped as being less motivated towards learning new job skills and unable to adapt to new technology (Hassell & Perrwe, 1995; Lyon & Pollard, 1997; Gray & McGregor, 2003 as cited in Kulik & Bainbridge, 2006).

The older generation is not efficient in communicating expressively; they are considered reclusive, slow thinking, prejudiced, demanding and stubborn (Harwood, 2007). Another area of stereotyping the older generation is that older workers are seen to be slow in adapting to technology. This is stronger in certain business sectors like finance, retail and IT. Older workers are considered to be less flexible and more cautious at workplace. In the face of such attitudes, there is resistance to training the older people for change (McCann and Keaton, 2013).

However, studies have also shown that older workers are excellent learners. Loyalty is considered as one of the most positive stereotypes held of the older generation (McCann & Keaton, 2013). The younger generation is stereotyped to be self-centered, unmotivated, disrespectful and disloyal to the organization (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Stereotypes ascribed to older workers are pervasive and share a number of similarities across countries. While older employees are considered to be more stable and reliable, they are also viewed as a challenge.

Stereotyping often has a negative effect as they are usually inaccurate and are applied to all individuals in the group while decontextualizing his (or her) individuality. Researches on the role of stereotypes in intergenerational communications have focused on the stereotypes that the younger generations hold about the older generation. Past experiences with the older generation is cited as one of the trigger points for activation of negative stereotypes. Stereotypes that are held about older generation negatively affect the older generation’s performance, the quality of intergenerational communication and in extreme situations; it might lead to discrimination (Harwood, 2007).

At a theoretical level, CPA (Communication Predicament of Aging) model grounded in CAT explains the role of stereotypes in intergenerational communication. The CPA model asserts recognition of old age characteristics cause activation of negative stereotypes. Activation of negative stereotypes
calls for accommodation in communication behaviour on the part of the younger generation. Accommodation strategies often lead to patronizing styles of communication and internalization of stereotypes as generational characteristics (Hummert et al, 1998).

Guirdham (1999) explained how stereotypes distort intergroup communications. Stereotypes influence the way communication is processed, more favorable information is remembered about in-groups as compared to out-groups. Variations that occur within the group are often overlooked as compared to variations between groups. In addition, stereotypes make people conform to them.

Positive age-defined stereotypes like benevolent and personal vitality that are identified with elders facilitated intergenerational communication rather than stifling it. The stereotypes of personal vitality and benevolence predicted greater communication satisfaction in the Indian context than in the American one. Thus, if an older person is seen as more healthy and active, the younger generation attains a higher degree of communication satisfaction than would have been otherwise (Giles et al, 2007).

Hummer et al. (1998) discussed the role of stereotypes on intergenerational communication. It was seen that the younger generation used a patronizing manner of speech with the older generation, who were attributed as despondent (less functional) in comparison to those who were termed as Golden Ager (more functional). The younger generation made changes in their speech like speaking slowly to the despondent target group and not with the Golden ager. Subtle negative stereotypes did not result in fast accommodation by the younger generation. Strong and categorical bracketing of the older generation to negative stereotypes resulted into fast accommodation.

It was found that context does influence the process of stereotyping. As an example, if a person from the older generation person was mobile and independent, then negative stereotypes were not attached. However, if the person were weak and ill, the negative stereotypes attached easily. The types of messages communicated to such elderly persons reflected an over-nurturing approach, whereas for the golden ager the messages were directive in nature in the medical institution context. The older participants seldom seemed to
change their speech to despondent and the gold ager of the group sent affirmative messages, whereas the other two age groups did change their speech styles. Therefore, functioning of the older generation resulted in their categorization into golden ager and despondent, and also influenced the processes of stereotyping (Hummer et al. 1998).

McCann et al., (2004) found that an ambivalent nature in communications with elders in Vietnam and the USA. Participants found that communicating with older persons to be both problematic and pleasing. A novel aspect of the finding was that the older generation was regarded positively. Researchers articulated that while in most cases, negative stereotypes were attached to the older generation; there were also instances when positive stereotypes were attached, especially to the golden ager or perfect grandparents.

Young people reported that they were expected to show more respect and obligation towards the older generation and are less avoidant in their communication with them. This shows the paradoxical situation the younger generation finds itself in, as they find the older generation to be both accommodating and unaccommodating. Age was seen as the salient factor for understanding intergenerational communication. The role of culture was not considered. This finding differs from that of cross-cultural intergenerational communication studies in a non-organizational setting and is consistent with the observations in a workplace context.

McCann and Keaton (2013) carried out a comparative analysis of age stereotypes and communication patterns of the older and the younger workers in Thailand and the USA. The sample population for the study was workers instead of college students, which made the study more relevant to the organizational context. Generally, the younger workers perceived their older colleagues to be less conversant with technology, less flexible, risk averse, and more loyal to the organization in comparison to the Americans.

Thais attributed more negative stereotypes to the older generation; but at the same time attached a few positive notions. Some of the negative perceptions were: prone to making mistakes, reluctant to adapt to technology, and less flexible at work. Older workers took more time to adapt to technology and were not forthcoming in their efforts. Positive stereotypes included positive attitude towards work and greater commitment to the organization.
Young Thai workers perceived avoidant communication behaviour to be greater in other young adults and elders as compared to American workers irrespective of age. In addition, younger Thai workers perceived same age Thai workers to be less accommodating as compared to the Americans. Though the study touches upon the age-defined stereotypes attached by the younger generation, the perspective of the older generation is not taken into consideration. Secondly, mechanisms involved in the formation of stereotypes and their impact on intergenerational communication has not been discussed in detail.

(d) **Intergenerational communication in the Indian context.** Giles et al. (2007) carried out a comparative study between the USA and India. This is the only known study of the Indian context, which looked into intergenerational communications. It tried to examine the perception of intergenerational communication and establish whether Indians demonstrate a linear pattern with respect to age stereotypes, norms, communication behaviour, and predictors of communication satisfaction. 232 college graduates participated in the study; however, the representation of Indians was only 39.7%. Therefore, the results reported need further investigation and validation.

The findings are mirrors of the American context and follow the staircase pattern for stereotypes, norms, communicative behavior and communicative satisfaction. In other words, as the subject’s age increases, the younger adults confer greater respect, give more deference, and are more benevolent towards them. However, at the same time, the degree of personal vitality towards the older generation reduces and communication satisfaction reduces.

In general, across cultures it was seen that the younger generation avoids communication with the older employees. However, in comparison to the Americans, Indians rated higher for personal vitality and benevolence towards elders although the Americans claimed that they accord a greater degree of respect than their Indian counterparts. For Indians, age stereotypes were the predictor of communication satisfaction, whereas for the Americans personal vitality was the predictor. Politeness was negatively related to communication satisfaction—communication satisfaction was high when the younger generation felt less pressured to be polite with elders. The study fails find the
reasons for why politeness played a bigger role in India than in the USA. The role of Indian culture was also not investigated in detail.

(e) **Intergenerational communication in workplace and familial setting.** Giles et al. (2003) conducted a large cross-national study. They compared perceptions of young adults from three western countries (Canada, USA, New Zealand) to three Eastern countries (Philippines, Japan, and South Korea) about their communication with family and non-family elders and same age-group peers. In both contexts, it was seen that the younger generation had better communications with same age group (family and non-family) in comparison to family elders. However, they had more communication with family elders as compared to non-family elders. Western participants communicated rigorously with both groups (family and non-family) of elders as compared to the Asians. Both cultural groups considered people (family and non-family) of the same age group to be equally accommodating.

In contrast to the people from the west, the Asians considered family and non-family elders to be less accommodating. In the Asian context, younger adults found equal accommodation from same age peers and older family members, whereas the level of accommodation by non-family adults was reported to be less. In relation to non-accommodation, both cultural groups saw non-family elders to be the most unaccommodating. Asians felt that they had to offer more respect and show obligation to elders in comparison to Westerners. It may be concluded that age and family relationships matter in intergenerational communication (Giles et al., 2003).

Intergenerational relations were more strained in the Asian context as compared with the West. The main reason given for these findings is the ethics of filial piety. In the Asian culture, people feel obliged to respect elders irrespective of their feelings or the elders deserving it. Therefore, there is the likelihood of the younger generation having dissatisfying experiences with the older generation. The authors further opined that this could result in negative stereotyping of the out-group thus further marring intergenerational contact (Giles et al., 2003).

Demographic changes in modern families have been significant and substantial. Life expectancy is higher and there are fewer dependent children.
Yet another change is that children often live away from their parents, but are able to stay in touch with the help of technology. Despite the demographic changes, the generations remain in contact with each other. But these demographic changes have influenced intergenerational relationships. Intergenerational contact has adapted itself to the modern times in the family context. People have adopted creative ways to stay in touch (Williams and Nussbaum, 2001).

The younger generation feels that older generation’s lack of accommodation is one of the principal problems that negatively influence communication. Young people may react to this attitude of the older generation by overaccommodating. This is especially observed in medical institutions, where nurses tend to overaccommodate elder patients. But overaccommodation has not been established in a non-medical situation (Williams and Nussbaum, 2001).

McCann and Giles (2006) carried out their study in a workplace setup and attempted to study perceptions of intra- and intergenerational communications at non-managerial positions. Irrespective of culture, it was seen that young bankers found communication with older colleagues to be unsatisfactory and problematic. No direct differences were observed in intergenerational communication between Thai and American bankers. However, at the workplace, it was partially seen that communication was more challenging in the Thai context than in the American context.

Thais viewed others as more unaccommodating in comparison to Americans. The possible reasons as articulated by the researcher may lie in the religious and agricultural traditions of the two cultures. The traditional agrarian culture of the Thais suppresses self-expression and open communication. Extrovertedness considered as a mark of disrespect, being ignorant, and crude. This makes Thais sensitive to insults and negative remarks.

Organizational factors do influence intergenerational communications. McCann and Giles investigated the role of the level of management in intergenerational communication. It was seen that, irrespective of culture, young bankers found it more difficult to communicate with managers (non-accommodation) than with their non-managers. Job titles act as a distinctive
characteristic for in-and out-group demarcation. The authors felt that the workplace setup has unique factors—convergence, work tasks, chain of command, etc.—that are absent in a non-workplace setup like family, which forces people to behave similarly regardless of their national culture. Secondly, a certain degree of cultural convergence due westernization has set in. Thus, the office culture in a Thai or an American organization might be similar. This is in disagreement with Nisbett’s proposition that the influence of cultural factors may not be applicable in the organizational context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication with in-group is more effective and satisfactory than with an out-group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The staircase pattern in intergenerational communication research is a robust finding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings in the Indian context mirror American findings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-context culture influences intergenerational communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filial piety is more prevalent in Asian context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>According to the younger generation, the experience of the older generation is a double-edged sword.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger generation attaches positive and negative characteristics/schemas to the older generation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Communication Channels: A Comparison between Technology- and Non-Technology Based Channels**

It is important to reflect on how the rapid advances in technology have influenced the way people think and communicate about society and its institutions rather than restricting the discussions to how they use the tools of technology. This will help to understand the tensions that exist between groups (Meigel & Olsson, 2012). Technology is a key component at the workplace. Workplaces have evolved with technology. The shift from typewriters to Blackberry to smartphones has happened over just a few generations. In India, technology is the byproduct of globalization and the people have enthusiastically engaged with the changes (Feiertag & Berge, 2008).
The internet contributed the most to workplace influences. Employees have become more dependent on search engines like Google and online resources like Wikipedia for information required to accomplish their tasks. Employees started to believe in instant communications (BBM -Blackberry messenger, emails, etc.). What is mentioned here is just the generic impact of technology on the workplace. The picture becomes more complex as we study the phenomenon further (Feiertag & Berge, 2008).

The technology revolution has not been welcomed by all cross-sections of employees in organizations. For instance, the older generation (Veterans and Baby Boomers) has shown its displeasure and rigidness in adapting to the technology boom. On other hand, Generation X and Y, who were exposed to technology as they were growing, are enthusiastic advocates of technology. The technology divide that exists between generations is bound to influence business processes of which communication is one such (Feiertag & Berge, 2008).

There is a belief that although the current generation thrives on Internet and instant messaging to communicate, their communication skills have not kept pace with requirements. They are not able to communicate in an appropriate manner with people having traditional mindsets. In this context, the internet is viewed as a handicap as information is easily available, which are uncritically accepted and applied. It is no longer believed that understanding a problem is important (Feiertag & Berge, 2008). The current generation is cognizant of the fact that application of technology to business processes is necessary to increase efficiency, productivity and competitiveness. The problem arises in the different perceptions over its application. The older generation, known for its rigidity, should make attempts to embrace technology and harness its potential for the benefit of the organizations (Helyer & Lee, 2012).

**Influence of technology on the concept of work.** There is has also been significant decline in the extent of manual and physical labour required at work. Technology places a greater demand on the mental capabilities of the employees. The technological revolution has made the work environment employee-friendly by making physical work less strenuous. The concept of work has also been given new dimensions with the adoption of scientific rules of management (Fedrick Taylor).
The role of specialisation was given more importance. More efficient ways of working and increasing productivity were developed.

The internet and new age media (MTV) brought about paradigm shift in employees approach to work. To a large extent, work has been made simple for the younger generation because of the easy availability of resources. In today’s information era, information, communication and technology (ICT) have become vital components of work and the job (Porter & Kakabadse, 2005). Robertson (2000) mentioned that the technology revolution has compelled organisations to become more creative in the way they manage their resources in order to become more productive.

The older generation tends to view technology as a nuisance though it also gives it due importance because it is acknowledged role in changing the concept of work. The younger generation tends to incorporate technology into the workplace with greater ease and enthusiasm (Goldman & Schmalz, 2006). Technology has influenced the thinking and learning patterns of the younger generation. In turn, this has influenced their concept of work and working style (Govitvatana, 2001).

Technology is seen to influence the younger generation in a positive way, as their work-based decisions are rational and logical. To reinforce this view, Barrett quoted an excerpt from the interview of an employee from the younger generation:

We expect to be able to work in corporate America and have pink hair; to be doctors and have tattoos; to wear fishnets and be librarians. Our generation doesn’t like our personal expression to have to conform to the Baby Boomers expectations. Generation Y loves their media and won’t be penalised for it. We’re multi-taskers, and we expect to be on Twitter while taking phone calls, checking Facebook while making meetings. More and more reports are coming out in favor of this, too, saying that social media sites help increase our productivity by granting us a way to refresh our brains while we’re working.

Goldman and Schmalz (2006) and Kupperschmidt (2000) concluded that the older generation considers technology a nuisance and finds it difficult to adjust to the changes that technology brings with it and demands of people. In contrast, the young generation relies on technology and are able to incorporate it with ease.

---

3 www.ebsco.com
Technology as a dimension used for generation profiling. Studies have used technology as one dimension in the profiling and classifying generations. Thus, it is not uncommon to read about the ‘internet generation’, ‘Google generation’, ‘BlackBerry generation’, etc. (McGuire, By & Hutchings, 2007). Technology is used as a parameter to describe the older generation, which was born and raised during an era in which technology played only a peripheral role. The younger generation is described as one born and raised in the technological age. They have been exposure to technology in great detail, which makes it their strength and also a barrier for the older generation. Therefore, it is only to be expected that generation X and Y, to whom technology has always been a fact of life, should expect communications in a manner that they are comfortable with—instant and fast-paced (Wong, Gardiner & Lang, 2008).

A huge technological disparity exists between the younger and the older generations. Older generation views technology as a tool to carry out their work, whereas the younger generation considers it to be an extension of their self. Even while not working, their relaxation and recreation time and activities are governed by technology. They prefer conversations over the phone, listen to music, network and watch movies on their smartphones. Technology facilitates a flexible and virtual working style for the younger generation, which did not exist for the people of older generation, who are more comfortable with the workplace as a physical feature (Smith-Deloitte Report, 2008).

The younger generation has to bridge the wide gap between their tech-savvy capabilities and the traditional work environment. Technology also helps in breaking traditional hierarchies, builds networks and breaks boundaries within organizations. (Smith-Deloitte Report, 2008). Deal, Altman and Rogelberg (2010) compared technology with language. If one starts using a language from the early stage of his/her life, s/he is more fluent in it. Thus, exposure to technology from early life has made the younger generation integrate its applications and potential to their way of life.

Usage of communication channels. The older generation prefers a formal style of communication memos, written communications, etc. Face-to-face communication with the personal touch works best for them. The middle-aged generation prefers direct communication and likes to seek and give regular feedback. People of the
younger generation have a participative approach towards work; they believe in using technology 24*7 and have developed the ability to multi-task (Haynes, 2011). The conference board of Canada (2009), reported that the younger generation prefers written communication to the verbal in comparison to the older generation. E-mails were the preferred mode. Persons of the younger and the middle-aged generations were observed to use technology more intensively as compared to the older generation. All three generations, in general, prefer informal gathering and communications. It was also observed that the younger and middle-aged generations socialize more than the older generation.

**Measures to bridge the technology-based gap.** Birkman (2009) and AARP (2007) reported that the older generation has not adapted to the advances in technology and are unable to relate to impersonal communication styles. To give a common example, they are reluctant to use social media (intranet, within office platforms) for communications. On the other hand, the younger generation looks at social media as a primary channel for communications. Therefore, there is a need for all generations of employees at the workplace to be familiarized with diverse channels/styles so as to minimize assumption-based communication.

Barrett (2010) traces technology advances across generations. For the older generation it was landline phones, computers, early file transfer, and email. The middle-aged generation considered cell-phones, email, Personal digital assistants, Internet, and music players as advanced. For the younger generation cell phones, emails, personal digital assistant and social networking sites are the new normal.

Bridging this technology-based gap is possible through the formation of cross-generational teams. This will provide the older generation an opportunity to learn from the younger generation and, at the same time, facilitate the transfer experiences and nuance knowledge to the younger generation. In addition, this builds a platform on which the younger generation can get constant feedback.

Communication channels are a potential cause for friction between generations. Older people do not think twice before walking to a colleague’s workstation for a discussion. They prefer face-to-face communication. On the other hand, the middle-aged and the younger generations prefer a channel that is more efficient in time. People of the younger generation are considered to be digital natives. They are extremely comfortable with technology-based channels like instant messaging and e-
mails. The younger generation’s over-reliance on technology can be a reason for workplace conflicts. In addition, it acts as an obstacle to developing healthy relationships with colleagues (Glass, 2007).

Another area of conflict is feedback. Older generation is seldom in need of feedback whereas the younger generation requires constant feedback. Young people like to know whether they are on the right track with their work as well as the direct impact of their work. This is similar to the positive reinforcements that parents give to their children. But problems can arise when a young manager supervises an older generation worker. One possible solution to prevent such a situation is to make expectations of each other clear at the very outset (Glass, 2007).

Lack of communication and miscommunications occur because of the lack of proper attitude on the part of the middle-aged and the younger generations. This is an obstacle to the process of knowledge sharing by the older generation. The younger generation may display disrespect or resentment. The transfer of knowledge requires an appropriate relationship between sender and receiver. Middle-aged generation prefer an open and two-way communication for knowledge transfer. Generation X (and on occasion, the middle-aged) has the perception that the older generation is insecure and hence reluctant to share knowledge and information. They feel that the older generation has the fear that sharing of knowledge leads to loss of control. Organizations have to work on attitudinal changes. Mentoring can be considered as a strategy to deal with the problem of knowledge transfer (McNichols, 2010).

Key Points

- Different generations have different preferred communication channels. Older people prefer verbal, face-to-face communications and the younger generations prefer technology-aided means.
- Technology has influenced the concept of work and workplace.
- Generations are profiled on the basis of the readiness and ease with which they have accepted and adapted to technology.
Intergenerational Communication Styles

The concept of generation is rooted in phenomenology. The lived experiences of the stakeholder form the basis of their thinking, feeling and behaving. Therefore, the communication styles adopted by employees are likely to be based on their experiences. The older generation grew up in an environment that demanded submission to authority and to being constantly directed and instructed. In contrast, the younger generation is skeptical by nature and has the tendency to question things. They are not passive receptors. Such characteristics of the younger generation tend to influence their communication style. Other factors that influence communication style are age stereotypes, awareness about generational characteristics and cultural context.

Familiarity and experience with technology has an important role in the type of communication style that a generation is likely to adopt in a given situation. The older generation was not exposed to technology in their formative years as result of which they preferred physical documentation (memos, records, etc.), face-to-face interaction and meetings. Although the older generation traditionally favoured face-to-face, use of formal language and straight-to-the point approach in their communications, the Baby Boomers, though inclined to face-to-face communications, are also comfortable with electronic methods and more open and direct by nature. While communicating with baby boomers, conversation should be more relational as they tend see relationship and business as intertwined.

The younger generation was part of the technology revolution during their formative years. Hence, young people are more inclined to direct, immediate communications and are heavily reliant on technology (emails, voice mails, etc.). Within this generation, generation X prefers technology-aided informal and straightforward communication style. The expectation of open communications are rooted in the reasoning that their seniors (in age or position) do not intimidate them as they grew up in an environment that encouraged them to consider their parents (and parent’s friends) as friends.

Generation Y prefers any technology that helps to communicate in a respectful manner as well as give and seek immediate feedback. The need for regular feedback is based on family relationships in which regular feedback was given by teachers and parents. The messages should be linked to personal as well as organizational goals.
Cynicism and sarcasm should be avoided (Fase 2009; Wong, Gardiner, Lang & Coulon, 2008; Murphy, 2007; Raines, 2002; Myer & Sadaghiani, 2010).

**Critique of Extant Literature**

Intergenerational communication research in the organizational context is a recent area of study. For the most part, it is seen that the research addresses intergenerational communications from cross-cultural perspectives. Although the cross-cultural perspective has its own advantage, there is also a need to shift from the comparative mode and to study the phenomenon from the cultural perspective. Cross-cultural and comparative approaches have explained discrepancies on the basis of cultural divide. However, they also tend to dilute the importance of context. With Southeast Asia exercising an influential presence in global business, there is a compelling need for an in-depth study of intergenerational communications in the Asian context. There is a paucity of such studies that have been undertaken in an Eastern context.

In general, the studies have focused on cultural (national) differences that influence intergenerational communication across countries. Different generations have specific social and cultural settings, which give rise to generation-based subcultures. Very little attention has been paid to sub-cultural differences that are fertile grounds for the communication divide. In a given situation, two people belonging to different generations may behave differently. It becomes difficult for one to predict the other’s response.

For example, the lack of a shared system (verbal and non-verbal) makes communication between the two generations difficult. It is assumed that such a shared system is built over a period and is influenced by the culture one has been grown up in. It also becomes difficult for both the generations to accept the beliefs and values of each other. The state of non-acceptance acts as a barrier to effective intergenerational communication (Sarabaugh, 1979 as cited in Tubbs and Moss 2000).

The studies have largely focused on exploring communicative behavior and the communication divide. There is a paucity of literature that directly addresses the question: ‘How to deal with the communication divide?’ As discussed in the previous sections, it is evident that intergenerational communication influences organizations in several ways. Therefore, it is important to widen the research horizon and HR
practices to develop and incorporate measures to manage generational differences in relation to communication.

While investigating intergenerational communications, studies have restricted themselves to the broader demarcation of generational groups (older and younger generation); and not much attention has been allocated to 'middle-aged adults'. Scholars need to pay due attention to the nuances in communications that are being undermined due to generational differences. It is a well-accepted fact that many workforces span three, or even more, generations. Any research and its findings are likely to give an incomplete view of the issues till all the key stakeholders are made a part of it.

Studies of intergenerational communications in diverse situations like workplaces, medical institutions, and family set-up approached the phenomenon from the perspective of aging. This is a myopic view as intergenerational diversity is treated as problem of discrimination against older people. As a consequence, the essential characteristics of diversity are overlooked. Important factors like the context in which generations have matured or are currently living in have not been given due importance.

Today’s organizations have flatter management structures and career advancements are faster. It is common to find very young people in middle and senior management positions. It is not necessary that age and experience will ensure a person a senior management position.

There have been extensive studies in the fields of Social psychology on non-verbal behavior and non-verbal communications. As an aspect of intergenerational communications, non-verbal transactions have not been considered in detail. Non-verbal communications play an important role in the Asian context. India is a high-context culture where people rely on implicit and indirect messages. Therefore, investigating the role of non-verbal communication in intergenerational research is important.

Literature discusses the role of technology (communication channel) from a unidirectional view. The focus is on usage of technology-based communication channels as compared to non-technology based modes of communication. The interplay of the choice of communication channel and the different communication constructs (communication behaviour, style, effectiveness and satisfaction) has not
been investigated. How the technology influences several other dimensions of communication has not been explored by the extant researches.

Theoretical underpinnings like communication accommodation theory and communication predicament model address the issue of intergenerational communication from the perspective of the younger generation and the mechanisms they adopt during the communication process. The perspectives of the older and the middle-aged generations have not been considered. They are portrayed as passive recipients of the younger generation’s communication behaviour. The manner by which older generation persons approach the process of communication with their counterparts and the techniques they use to accommodate the younger generation have not been studied.

Studies in the field of management have seldom drawn from the work of Mannheim to contextualize generation as he had done. The conventional approach merely focused on birth years and social events for classifying generations. Concepts like generation location, generation actuality, and generation as a unit has not found space in management literature. There is a need to question the biology-based deductive approach to define generation.

The methodology adopted by extant research to study intergenerational communication falls under the purview of the positivist paradigm. The sample profiles in the studies were university undergraduate students (non-family). Questionnaires were administered and variables studied were communicative behaviour, norms of respect, communication satisfaction, age-stereotypes, perception about others’ communication behaviour and self-perception about communication behaviour. Multivariate analysis and descriptive statistics have been used for data analysis. The contribution of quantitative paradigm cannot be ignored future research must acknowledge its existence and importance. However, there is also the need to adopt an approach (qualitative) that positions participants in an active role and present reality from their perspective.
Challenging Existing Assumptions and Defining the Problem.

Broadly, research follows the predominant approach of formulating the research concern on the basis of the identified research gaps from extant literature. While doing so, the researcher may add to the literature or confirm it; but seldom does he/she contribute to the existing body of knowledge (Avlesson & Sandberg, 2011). Therefore, it is important to not only identify the gaps but also elucidate on why it is important to fill those gaps. In addition, an attempt should be made to challenge existing assumptions in literature. The present research attempts to challenge following assumptions:

a) Generation is predominantly a biological concept with social factors playing only a residual role
b) By its nature, intergenerational communication is deductive. It can be understood in an objective manner through a scientific approach.
c) Inter-group processes and interpersonal relations/behaviours function in silos.
d) Communication behaviour is more productive with the in-group as compared with out-group.

Nature, Scope, and Relevance of the Study

Differences in intergenerational communications are one of the factors that have been influenced organizational and employee behaviour. If addressed in an appropriate manner, intergenerational differences can be leveraged for the betterment of organization and its employees. The literature review in the previous sections showed that intergenerational differences influence several organizational variables. Therefore, it is imperative for organizations, leadership, HR managers and the stakeholder generations to proactively address the issue. The present study address intergenerational communications through the lens of workplace communication. Workplace communications encapsulates both formal and informal communications.

For this study, three generations of employees (older, middle-aged and younger) of a manufacturing, production & exploration industry made up the sample. The study adopted a constructionist approach to understand intergenerational communications. Communication in the constructionist paradigm views peoples as active interpreters
of their reality. Hence, for a researcher, it is important to focus on their interpretations. In addition, the participants in the communication process have the ability to construct reality as they experience it.

Therefore, adopting a constructionist approach will help to understand the nuances of intergenerational communications by placing the generations in active positions. This approach allows us understand how people construe generation-based identity; and how and when they are able to sense they have to bring in changes to their communications in response to generational differences.

The approach in this study is interdisciplinary; it draws from diverse disciplines like sociology, organizational behavior, and social psychology. The concept of generation has a sociological base; communications are studied from the perspective of social psychology and psychology; and the context of the study (workplace) falls in the purview of organizational behavior. The multidisciplinary approach not only provides a holistic view but also adds nuances and depth to the findings. In a broad sense, psychology addresses the research concern from a psychological perspective; sociology focuses on the phenomenon from societal perspective. Social psychology is the bridge between the two disciplines that addresses psychology-based concerns from social perspective.

The findings of this study have theoretical and practical implications. They can contribute to the development of an intergenerational communication theory in the organizational context. The study also makes significant contributions to the social identity theory and communication accommodation theory. There is also a strong argument in favour of context-specific theories and models over sweeping generalizations. For example, the communication predicament model did not fit into the organizational context in this study. Considering the practical implications, the study can aid HR managers to formulate generation-specific policies and make employees and leaders aware of communications-based issues in relation to generational diversity. It will also make stakeholders (generations, organization, leaders, and HR managers) more proactive towards generational diversity. Often, the communication processes take place at the subconscious level and leave less scope for people to improvise, adapt, and rectify their approach should the outcomes be negative. This study also makes an attempt to make several intergenerational communication processes apparent.
This dissertation has been divided into eight chapters. A brief description of each chapter is as follows: **Chapter I**- This chapter attempts to problematize the research concern and critically reviews literature about the topic. **Chapter II**- discusses the how the present research has been carried out. It also discusses several theories at the over-arching and substantive have been drawn from the several disciplines. **Chapter III**- attempts to contextualize generation in the Indian context and seeks to explore the social identification process of generations. **Chapter IV**- explores several facets of intergenerational communication like communication channel, style, effectiveness, and satisfaction to understand intergenerational communication process. **Chapter V**- attempts to unravel dynamics of intergenerational communication by looking age stereotypes, role of culture, communication gap, accommodation strategies, and communication behavior. **Chapter VI**- focuses on the initiatives to deal with the intergenerational communications challenges. **Chapter VII**- attempts to discuss the major findings of the present study across the generations. **Chapter IX**- concludes the research with the implications, scope for future research, and limitations of the present study.