Chapter 2
Theoretical Framework and Methodology

In the previous chapter, existing literature on intergenerational communications was critically reviewed. An attempt was also made to define the problem and present a case for this study, which underscores the need to shift the paradigm from cross-cultural comparisons to one in which cultural context is the focus. Therefore, the Indian context was described so that the backdrop, against which this study was carried out, could be understood.

In addition, previous studies on diversity in workplaces were reviewed. It was argued that scant attention has been paid to generational diversity. In particular, it was pointed out that communications are a crucial feature of generational diversity. Known research on intergenerational communication was discussed from the following perspectives (a) study of intergenerational communications (b) channels of communication (c) Types of communication styles (d) critique of extant literature.

This study examines the concept of intergenerational communication at the workplace. Communication, in the context of this research, primarily refers to work-related communication, which may be formal or informal in nature.

It is necessary here to first draw attention to the inter-disciplinary nature of the present research. The research objectives and questions have been articulated and the reasons given for examining them. In the following section, basic concepts like communications, generation and stereotypes have been defined. The sections that follow in this chapter elaborate on the theoretical framework, qualitative approach of the present research, and substantive theories. Then, the location selected for the study, participants and sample profile are described, which are followed by sampling method, research strategies, and procedures have been discussed. Finally, the methodological issues in the present research are discussed along with the notion of reflexivity. Ethical considerations have also been articulated.

The present study attempts to explore the concept of intergenerational communication at workplace. Communication, in the present study, primarily refers to work-based communication that is both formal and informal in nature.
The present research is interdisciplinary in nature. It draws from the principles of sociology and psychology. In this respect, Popper’s remark seems most apt: ‘We are not students of some subject matter, but students of problems. And problems may cut right across the borders of any subject matter or discipline’ (Popper, 1962 as cited in Lapsely, 2011:59). Thus, in the present study, the concepts of stereotypes, communication, group dynamics, and communication behaviour are based on the principles of social psychology. The idea of generation is better understood from a sociological view point. This study avoids applying the principles in silos. Indeed, an attempt is made to integrate their contributions and synthesize an understanding of the phenomenon. For instance, in the present study generation as a construct, was synthesized from Karl Mannheim’s Theory of Generation and Tajfel’s Social identity theory to elucidate the concept of group identity. An interdisciplinary approach helps to examine the research concerns from a wider perspective multiple lenses.

**Research Objectives and Questions**

The study of Generational diversity has attracted considerable interest, particularly in relation to matters like attitude, work values and loyalty. However, intergenerational differences in workplace communications remain relatively less researched. Understanding its various aspects is essential to the study of intergenerational communications.

To study diverse facets of intergenerational communication in the workplace

- What does ‘effective communication’ mean to the older, the middle-aged and the younger generations?
- What are the factors that facilitate communication satisfaction?
- What channels of communication are preferred by the older, the middle-aged and the younger generations?
- What type of communication styles is preferred by different generations? Do they adopt changes in their communication styles to accommodate generational differences?
Culture permeates our lives. The way we think, behave and feel are representative of the culture we are part of. Our values and beliefs are rooted in our culture. Culture is learned and not innate. We are not born with culture but in culture. We acquire the beliefs and values of the culture in which we are brought up. The link between culture and communication is direct. Culture is a communication phenomenon because it is transmitted by communication: written, oral, verbal or non-verbal.

Culture is the software that enables the hardware (the person) to perform (Berko, Wolvin & Wolvin, 2004). Das, Sinha, & Gangrade (1971, 1975) claimed that, in a society like India’s, values and beliefs held by individuals are most likely to influence their behaviour. In addition, if the older and the younger generations participate in communication with different sets of beliefs and values, a divergence may result.

Culture, communication, and generation are dynamic and context-dependent concepts. They change and evolve with time depending on the context. Tracing the changes that took place in the cultural system vis-à-vis intergenerational communications are likely to provide new insights.

Exploring the role of culture in intergenerational communication in the context of India, the following questions are relevant:

- What are the values and beliefs that form the base for intergenerational communications?
- Was there a shift in the value system in intergenerational communications?
- Does cultural divide result in communication divide?
- What is the role of ‘cultural convergence’ in intergenerational communication?

Literature on intergenerational communication research is predominantly focused on communication accommodation behaviours. Giles’ pioneering work on the formulation of communication accommodation theory is the anchor for subsequent researches. Communication accommodation research largely paints the picture that the older generation is non-accommodative and the younger generation indulges in

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4 The researcher uses communication gap and communication divide interchangeably.
overaccommodation in non-workplace contexts. It is necessary to understand whether this pattern holds in workplace context also.

Unraveling role of communication accommodation behavior in intergenerational communication

- What kind of accommodation strategies do the generations adopt?
- Which generation indulges in the rigorous use of accommodation measures?
- Do accommodation mechanisms help to reduce the communication gap?

Stereotyping often has negative effects as it is usually inaccurate and applied to individuals or group members after decontextualizing the person. Researches dealing with the role of stereotypes in intergenerational communications have mostly concentrated on the stereotypes that are held about the older generation by the young. Common stereotypes about the older generation are: they do not express themselves well in their communications, reclusive, slow-thinking, prejudiced, demanding and stubborn.

A trigger for negative stereotyping is past contact with the older generation. Stereotypes about the older generation can affect their work, quality of intergenerational communications and in extreme situations, may result in discrimination (Harwood, 2007). It may be concluded that age-stereotypes are one of the active factors in intergenerational communication and are a significant barrier to effective communication. It is important to investigate the role and nature of age-stereotypes from a holistic perspective in order to improve intergenerational communication.

Exploring the role of age-based stereotypes in intergenerational communication

- What are the different types of stereotypes that different generations have about each other?
- What are the reasons for the activation of stereotypes?
- What alters stereotypical behavior and how?

Predominant literature on intergenerational communication mostly investigated the reasons for the communications divide between older and the younger generations from the perspectives of differing values, beliefs and stereotypical notions. However, there is no discussion on approaches needed to bridge this divide. There is substantial
literature on the management of diversity in relation to gender, race, ethnic and sexual orientation; but generational diversity issues have been largely neglected.

To explore approaches/mechanisms adopted by the older, middle-aged and the younger generations and organizations to address intergenerational communication gap.

- What are the ways in which generational stereotypes are dealt with?
- What are the possible mechanisms that can build an environment of ‘openness’ across the different generations?
- How can cultural convergence be achieved in order to reduce the communication divide?

**A Basic Understanding of Concepts**

**Culture:** Culture refers to shared beliefs, values, and assumptions.

**Cultural convergence:** When aspects of two different cultures combine and result in a degree of commonness in beliefs, values and assumptions, a state of cultural convergence may be said to have been achieved.

**Generation:** ‘A generation is a group of people... who share birth years and experiences as they move through time together, influencing and being influenced by a variety of critical factors.’ (2000:66)

a) Older generation: Significant event is pre-liberalization 47-57 years old (born between the years 1955- 1965)

b) Middle –aged generation: Significant event is liberalization 35-45 years old (born between 1967-1977)

c) Younger generation: Significant event is technology revolution and state of economy 22-32 years old (born between1980-1990)

Generations do not have a clear start and end date; and an individual person may relate to two generations. Thus generation overlap is possible; to avoid its likelihood in this study, a gap of two-three years between each generation was maintained.

**Communication:** Communication is a socially situated meaning making process that generates pockets of coherence and community through cultural meanings and forms (Donal Carbsugh, 1988: 38 as cited in Papa, Daniels &Spiker, 2008).
**Work-based communication**: This involves human communication that occurs within the context of organizations; for it is people — not organizations — who communicate to achieve work-based goals (adapted from Tubbs & Moss, 2000:416). Workplace communication encapsulates both formal and informal communication.

**Communication effectiveness**: Communication effectiveness extends the concept of communication and focuses on attainment of the final goals of the communication, which is receiver understating the message as it was intended by the sender.

**Communication satisfaction**: “the personal satisfaction inherent in successfully communicating to someone or in successfully being communicated with” (Thayer 1968 as cited in Nakra, 2006)

**Stereotype**: A stereotype is a stable set of beliefs or pre-conceived ideas, which the members of as group share about the characteristics of other groups (Guirdham, 1999).

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**Theoretical Framework**

**Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions**

The Ontological and epistemological assumptions that were adopted guided the structure of methodology. An ontological assumption is an assumption about the nature of reality. In the present study, it is assumed that intergenerational communication takes place through active participation of senders and receivers in both generations. Intergenerational communications at the workplace exist in the multiple context-dependent constructions of the participants.

Epistemological assumptions refer to the means of knowing reality. It is the relationship between the knower and the known. Looking into the processes involved in the construction of the reality, an attempt to grasp the participant’s perspective can aid the researcher to understand intergenerational communication as a phenomenon. Nature of intergenerational communication is revealed through interaction between the researcher and the researched. If reality is constructed and resides in human minds/behaviour, it can be revealed and comprehended through in-depth interaction. Such assumptions guided the choice of research approach and theoretical framework.
Logic of Procedure and Methods
The present research predominantly adopts a procedure of inductive logic. Inductive approach is grounded at different stages of the current study. For instance, at the theoretical framework stage, the imposition of theoretical bias was avoided. The choice of an overarching theory or substantive theories was based on what would best help to address the research concerns. At the data collection stage, an attempt was made to involve all stakeholders who could provide clarity to the research concern. For example, the data collection process was initiated in a government organization. However, in order to ensure that the sector (public or private) was itself not a variable influencing intergenerational communications, people from private organization were also interviewed.

Every effort was made to reduce the distance between the researcher and respondents during interviews. During data analysis, it was ensured that the participants’ voice was given due space and the researcher’s vision did not colour the findings.

Methods adopted to collect data are discussed in detail in the later section. On the basis ontological and epistemological assumptions, the interview method was used to collect the data. In addition, the intricacies of intergenerational communications were gleaned from non-participant observation.

Social Constructionism
This study was conceptualized in terms of overarching theoretical position, popularly described as constructionism. It is opposed to positivism in terms of its ontology, epistemology, and methods.

The works of classical theorists, Berger and Luckman works were inspired by their teacher, Alfred Schutz, who espoused social constructionism. In their book, ‘Social construction of reality- A treatise’, Berger and Luckman (1966), state that the sociology of knowledge is concerned with analysis of the social construction of reality.

Suppose that I am an automobile mechanic who is highly knowledgeable about all American-made cars. Everything that pertains to the latter is a routine, unproblematic facet of my everyday life. But one day someone appears in the garage and asks me to repair his Volkswagen...I may do so reluctantly or from
professional curiosity; but in either case I am now faced with the problems that I have not yet routinized. At the same time, of course, I do not leave reality of everyday life. Indeed, the latter becomes enriched as I begin to incorporate into it the knowledge and skills required for the repair of foreign made cars (Berger and Luckman, 1966:38).

In a similar manner, the research assumed that generations communicate with the in-group in a routine and unproblematic way; communications with people from other generations (out-group) present a challenge to the routine. They find that their ability to cope with a new situation is not adequate. It is at this point that people start constructing reality as a response to the challenges posed by an unfamiliar demand. While constructing reality, people factor in the demands of the situation. This study is an attempt to explore such a situation as exists in intergenerational communications.

Social constructionism has provided theoretical orientation to the various offshoots of non-positivism like discourse analysis, narrative analysis and critical psychology. It is difficult to define what social constructionism actually is; theorists have proposed diverse definitions (Burr,1995). Social constructionism found separate space in the field of psychology with the works of Gergen. Social constructionism rests on the compounded critique of positivism. Positivistic tradition, empiricism and realism believe that reality should be studied without the influence of culture, history or ideology (Geregen, 1985,2001).

Burr (1995) stated the key assumptions of social constructionism. First, a critical stance is taken for granted. In the present study, the researcher challenges conventional knowledge about intergenerational communications, which places significant stresses on the role of stereotypes. Then, the researcher investigates diverse factors like the role of generational characteristics, culture, channels or styles of communication. It must also be mentioned here that the researcher’s intention is not to debunk the role of stereotypes. Rather, she is challenging the notion that intergenerational communications are governed predominantly governed by stereotypes.

The second assumption is the historical and cultural specificity. The present study marks the importance and relevance of context. It is assumed that generation and communication are context-specific phenomenon. For example, the communication styles of Indians will be strikingly different from that of the Americans due to cultural factors. Generations are classified differently in an Indian context than in the American one because the classification may be based not only on the birth and death
years, but also on the impact of key social/political/economic events. These events will be different from context to context.

The third assumption is that social processes sustain knowledge. Applying this assumption to this study, it means that intergenerational communication processes undergo certain changes with the arrival new generations. At the same time, some features of the process will remain unchanged. From a broader perspective, this assumption is about convergences and divergences, which reflect the dynamic nature of society. Therefore, knowledge (intergenerational communication) is created through social processes.

Finally, knowledge and social actions go together. There is no single way of carrying out intergenerational communication; these are determined by the several social constructions of this reality.

**Qualitative Approach**

The present study adopted an exploratory research design. This is necessary when the researcher attempts to understand a situation. It does not fathom to produce definitive answers to the research problem. Rather, the study is an attempt to understand the nature of intergenerational communication in the organizational context. It focuses on understanding the dynamics of the phenomenon. The web of hypotheses generated from this study (discussed in ‘Discussion’ chapter ) must be validated by testing in the field.

Meta-analysis of articles in top-three tier journals (Journal of Management, Administrative Science Quarterly, Academy of Management) shows that management research is still quantitatively driven with qualitative approaches rarely reported (Scandura & Williams, 2000). Scientificity, standardization and the potential to generalize continue to govern methodology in management research.

Quantitative paradigm remains the traditional and mainstream research approach to explore the concepts of communication, stereotypes, generations, and culture in considerable detail. The quantitative approach investigates the phenomenon without capturing the perceptions of those who construct and experience communications. This study also attempts to look into the processes that are involved in the construction of intergenerational communication as a reality. This is possible when the distance between the researcher and researched is reduced. Therefore, participants’ voices were given space in this study. The findings of this study are
grounded in the experiences of the participants and their construct of the phenomenon.

Constructs like communication accommodation, intergroup behaviour and stereotypes in which people are inclined to give socially desirable responses. In order to minimize such a possibility, it was necessary to carry out a preliminary analysis of data as it was being collected and make changes as necessary. This called for a flexible research approach, which the qualitative research paradigm offered.

Generation and communication are culturally rooted concepts. Therefore, intergenerational communications in the East and West will be different. This requires that the researcher adopt an emic view. Qualitative research places the experiences of participants in context and emphasizes the role of culture. The underlying assumption in a qualitative approach is that any given phenomenon is context-dependent.

Qualitative research helped me to establish my position. I was able to identify myself not only as a researcher, but also as a participant in the whole process as I belong to the younger generation. It was expected (and confirmed) that this — being part of the younger generation — would influence participants’ behaviour. Sometimes, people of the older generation referred to my generation as ‘your generation’. To them, I was representing the younger generation. The younger generation expected me to empathize with them as I belonged to their generation and addressed questions ‘our generation would do this’. Thus, a qualitative approach not only helps to contextualize participants’ thoughts and experiences, it also helps the researcher to himself/herself in the same context.

Substantive Theories

Karl Mannheim's Generation’s theory. The problem of generation was initially approached from the dominant perspectives of positivism and historical romanticism. Essentially these two schools were opposed to each other in their perception of reality. The positivist approach stresses on reducing reality to quantitative terms. Hence, the focus is on determining the basic, immutable factors that determine human existence. The other approach draws from a qualitative perspective and moves away from data reduction (Mannheim, 1927).

The rationale for exploring the problem of generation, as offered by positivists, was their potential to explain the factors that ultimately determine human existence. It was assumed that human destiny is comprehensible, even measurable. Therefore, all
other data are part of life process and expressions of particular relationships. Prominent French Scholars Comte and Hume laid considerable emphasis on the positivistic approach to the problem. Positivistic approach attributed biological factors as the important determinant and everything is mathematically clear. Mannheim felt that the rationalism of positivism is a direct continuation of classical rationalism. It can therefore be deduced that, for the positivist, the problem of generation was to formulate a general law to express the rhythm of historical development, which is based on the biological law of the limited life-span of man and the overlap of new and old generation (1927:278)

The aim was to understand the changing patterns of intellectual and social currents directly in biological terms, to construct the curve of the progress of the human species in terms of its vital substructure (1927:278).

The foremost critique of the positivistic approach to the problem of generation is its focus on reducing ideas to a chronological sequence. The core of the problem was to find the average time taken for something to be outmoded by the new. While staying within the positivistic paradigm, Mentre tried to go beyond the pure quantitative approach (Mannheim, 1927).

The academic climate in Germany was very different from France’s. Dilthey’s work saw the revival of romantic traditions. The problem of generation for the Romantic historical was seen as the problem of existence of an interior time, which cannot be experienced but only be measured. The reasons for Dilthey’s pursuit of the problem was (a) the adoption of generation as a temporal unit of the history of intellectual evolution made it possible to replace such external units as hours and months (Mannheim 1927:282). (b) Dilthey also concluded that co-existence is more important than chronology and introduced the concept of contemporaries.

Pinder contended that contemporaries cannot be termed as a generation because, for each, the ‘same time’ is a different time — that is, it represents a different period of the self, which one can share with one’s own generation. Therefore, every moment in reality is multi-dimensional in nature. Generations do not exist alone, alongside each other. Pinder also suggested a concept— the entelechy of generation. It was believed that each generation builds its own entelechy in order to become a qualitative unit. Entelechy of generation is termed as expression of the unity of its inner aim — its inborn way of experiencing life and world (Mannheim 1927)
However, the romantic tendency ignored and neglected the importance of social forces and factors between the natural (physical) sphere and the mental sphere. When social factors are left out, the concept of generation is reduced to a state of being a chance product of nature. The ultimate aim of positivism and romantic historical was thus to come up with a magic formula of generations to predict or determine their birth cycle and to establish measurable intervals in history (Mannheim 1927).

(a) The sociological problem of generation. It is important to understand the augmented social changes that have taken place in the recent past. The major issue with investigating the problem of generation is that researchers in different disciplines have pursued their studies with attempting to synthesize an understanding from various extant research. Although an inter-disciplinary approach is necessary to elucidate and investigate the problems of generation, it is the task of sociology to ‘paint the big picture’. Therefore, Mannheim referred to it as ‘the sociological problem of generations’. In the realm of sociology, the problem of generation has to be investigated through the lens of social dynamism rather than the traditional static approach. Thus, the problem of generations falls in the domain of applied sociology (Mannheim, 1927).

Mannheim further posited the key sociological terms regarding problem of generation. He started by explaining the difference between concrete group and social location. Then, he moved on to the biological and sociological formulation of the problem of generation. He stated that though generational location is based on biological rhythm, one cannot derive sociological components from biological facts.

The sociological phenomenon of generations is ultimately based on the biological rhythm of birth and death. But to be based on a factor does not necessarily mean to be deducible from it, or to be implied (Mannheim, 1927: 290)

Therefore, the study of the sociological problem of generation must begin with an investigation of the sociological relevance of biological factors. Mannheim discussed the inherent tendency of a generation to have a common location. Finally, Mannheim elucidated key concepts like generation location, generation actuality and generation as unit. Membership to a historical community (generational location) is a broad criterion for classifying a group of people as generation. One must tailor the criterion. Mannheim achieved this by introducing (as mentioned above) generation as actuality.
Individuals of the same age, they were and are, however, only united as an actual generation in so far as they participate in the characteristic social and intellectual current of their society and period, and in so far as they have an active or passive experience of the interactions of forces, which made up the situation (Mannheim, 1927: 304).

Generational unit is a concept related to generation actuality, which came into being to answer a question whether there might be two groups, which are part of the actual generation, but differ in their intellectual and social response to the historical stimulus that is experienced by all.

Youth experiencing the same concrete historical problems may be said to be part of the same actual generation; while those groups with the same actual generation which work up the material of their common experiences in different specific ways, constitute separate generation unit (Mannheim, 1927:304)

**Intergroup (communication) theories.** The dynamics of intergenerational communication is rooted in intergroup communication theories. Intergroup communication occurs when either party in a social interaction defines self or others in terms of group memberships. The salient features of intergroup communications are (a) they do not refer to one group interacting with another; rather they are about how group membership of one group is shaping the communication with another, (b) self and other categorizations are linked. For example, categorizing oneself as part of the younger generation means that the person does not belong to the older generation (Harwood, Giles, & Palomares, 2005; Abrams &Giles, 1999).

- Groups institutionalize distinctive cultures that coexist with comparative others; in part by transmitting messages about their intergroup histories and in the language of their numbers;
- Multiple categories of group members, identities and boundaries are marked, sometimes by language (constructed by themselves or imposed from without) and in other diverse communicative ways;
- The communicative practices and boundaries that differentiate social groups can themselves dynamically redefine or change the prevailing nature of intergroup relations.
- Group members will strive — and sometimes be strategically encouraged — to acquire the communicative resources of others, an “accommodative chase” that can have a long, yet limited, currency (Giles, Ried, Harwood, 2010: 13)

(a) **Social Identity theory.** Social identity theory (SIT) came into existence to address the limitations of Realistic group conflict theory (RCT). Intergroup dynamics and identification with intergroup was not fully addressed by RCT. In addition, it is
essential to mention here that SIT is different from social categorization theory. SIT focuses primarily on intergroup processes whereas SCT aims at unraveling group processes, including intergroup relations, at a generic level (Brown, 2000).

It is imperative to establish a distinction between interpersonal and intergroup behavior. Interpersonal behaviour is the result when interaction between two people is fully determined by their interpersonal relationship. Intergroup behaviour is the result when interaction between two people is influenced by their respective memberships in different social groups. The essence of social identity theory is that people have a tendency to categorize themselves and others into diverse social categories (Ashforth and Mael, 1989). Tajfel and Turner defined social identity as the individual’s self-image derived from the social categories to which s/he perceives herself/himself as belonging to (1979:40).

They arrived at three theoretical principles on the basis of the above definition:

1. Individuals strive to achieve or to maintain a positive social identity
2. Positive social identity, to a large extent, is based on favourable comparison that can be made between the in-group and some relevant out-groups.
3. When social identity is unsatisfactory, individuals will strive either to leave their existing group or join some more positively distinct group/or to make their existing group more positively distinct (1979:40).

In addition to these basic principles, Tajfel proposed three variables that might influence intergroup differentiation:

(a) People must be subjectively identified within their in-group;
(b) Situations should permit evaluative intergroup comparisons;
(c) The out-group should be sufficiently comparable. (Brown, 2000:747).

SIT applies to phenomena like prejudice, discrimination, intergroup conflict, stereotyping, group identification, conformity, and normative behavior. In the present study the researcher shall apply SIT to explain generational stereotyping, group identification and normative behavior. Social Identity theory has been applied to explain variables in organizational context; one of these is communication.

Social identity theory is also used to explain intergenerational findings. It is believed that people express their sense of belonging and identity through communication (Scott 2007). Hogg and Terry (2001b. as cited in Scott 2007) stated that there are two underlying cognitive processes of SIT—Categorization (which aids
people to distinguish boundaries and membership) and Self-enhancement (comparisons with salient groups are drawn to enhance the self by favouring one’s own group).

SIT stated that people have a predilection to displaying in-group positivity bias”. In-group positivity bias developed by the older/younger generations (in-group) laid the foundations for people’s psychological and communicative approaches towards members of the older/younger generations (out-group); and the strategies they may employ to change the relationship involving the groups in contact (Tajfel & Turner 1986. Cited in Ota, McCann, & Honeycutt, 2012). A limitation of SIT is that it is essentially a theory of inter-group relations that has been applied to communication.

(b) Communication accommodation theory. Since its origins in the 1970s, communication accommodation theory (CAT) has undergone refinements at regular intervals to make it more robust and well-grounded. Communication accommodation theory is the revised version of speech accommodation theory proposed by Giles and his colleagues. SAT was developed with scope for understanding how, when and why people change their language and dialect when communicating. In the 1980s it was contemplated that non-linguistic and discursive components are also important to understand the accommodation process. In order to address the widening scope, the theory was renamed as communication accommodation theory. CAT has rich legacy of 40 years. Meta-analysis review carried out by Giles (2012) reflected how the theory grew manifold and has sustained itself to become one of the key theoretical propositions in communication studies.

Originally a socio-psychological model of communication, in its present state CAT is considered to be an interdisciplinary theory. CAT is applied to varied contexts like gender, culture and generations to understand the nature of the communication process. In methodological too, it is seen that CAT could be applied successfully in both qualitative and quantitative traditions. Some of the major areas (or clusters) in which CAT has been applied are cultural ethnicity, computer mediated communication, educational, instructional, family, Gender/sexuality, Health, Inter/intragenerational, Professional/Organizational.

These clusters are not mutually exclusive in nature (Giles, 2012). For example, in the present research the researcher is studying intergenerational communication in an organizational context. Therefore, two clusters (communication and organization) are
being studied in relation to each other. Meta analysis of literature demonstrates that studies in the area of communication accommodation are predominantly focused on cultural ethnicity and Inter/intragenerational cluster (Giles, 2012).

CAT is considered to be both an intergroup and interpersonal theory. It links interpersonal aspects of communication to the larger context of intergroup issues. Essentially, CAT argues that people enter a communication with an initial orientation which is based on past experiences with the target person as well as in a socio-historical context. During communications people tend to adjust their communicative behavior on the basis of evaluation of their own communication characteristics and of the other person’s.

The basic principles of CAT (Giles, 2012: 5) are:

- Communication is influenced not only by features of the immediate situation and participants’ initial orientations to it, but also by the socio-historical context in which the interaction is embedded. For example, an isolated encounter between members of two ethnic groups could be marred by alleged and past hostile relations between other members of their groups in the neighborhood and/or on the media.

- The important roles of perceptions and attributions in conversation are fundamental to accommodative practices. Specifically, the speaker and listener may not (and, often times do not) perceive similar levels of accommodation. An individual may believe they are appropriately accommodating their conversational partner when, in actuality, their communication is perceived as over- or under-accommodative. Moreover, the listener may perceive these behaviors as motivated out of disrespect or a desire to show distinctiveness when the actual goal of the speaker was to show relational solidarity.

- Accommodation may or may not be reciprocal. While one person may be accommodating, another may be maintaining or nonaccommodating in their communication style throughout the duration of the interaction. The consequences of this asymmetrical accommodation depend on the goals and perceptions of the individuals involved.

- Interactants have expectations regarding optimal levels and rates of accommodation. These expectations are based on stereotypes about outgroup members as well as on the prevailing social and situational norms. Calibrating the amount of non-, under-, and overaccommodating one receives can be an important ingredient in investing effort in, or withdrawing from, an interaction.

- Interactants use specific communication strategies to signal their attitudes towards each other and their respective social groups and, in this way, social interaction can be a subtle and ongoing balancing act within as well as between interactions.

The constant shift between moving away from, and towards the target person in communication strategies is referred to as accommodation. Literature demarcates three accommodation strategies: Convergence, Divergence and Maintenance. Convergence takes place when individuals adapt their communicative behaviors (linguistics, Paralinguistics, non-verbal features) in order to be similar to other person in the
conversation. Divergence involves adoption of communicative strategies that enhances the differences between both the individuals/groups. Maintenance being similar to divergence, person sticks to his/her original style of communication without making any changes in it (Giles, 2012).

Our behavior is invariably governed by certain motives; hence, accommodation strategies adopted are also driven by motives. It is said that people tend to converge in their communicative behavior so that they can gain approval from one another and to increase communication effectiveness. However, in the process of converging, people dilute their social identity.

The motive behind divergence can be the individual’s need to preserve his/her social identity and to emphasize differences between the groups. Divergence is considered an important strategy to reflect valued distinctiveness from the out-group. It not only portrays in-group pride but also enhances self-worth. Divergence can also be adopted to manage the interlocutor’s attribution and feelings. In addition, divergence can also entice (or compel) the interlocutor to adopt a more communicative stance (Giles & Ogay, 2006).

The above-mentioned approximation strategies have their benefits and limitations. Literature suggests that convergence is seen to be more positive and favourable as compared to divergence. However, when convergence crosses a threshold, it is likely to be negatively perceived, but divergence at an optimal level might be viewed favourably. This leads to a vital question: What is the optimal level of convergence and divergence? This is relative in nature and depends on the socio-cultural norms of the intergroup contact.

**c) Applying Communication Accommodation Theory to Intergenerational communication.** CAT has been applied extensively to intergeneration communications to explain communication patterns. In his meta-analysis of literature on CAT, Giles (2012) stated that 32.89% of the work in CAT was carried out in the context of inter/intragenerational communications, with predominant focus on patient and nurse/doctor relationship. The present study puts intergenerational communication in an organizational context. At a holistic level, during communications the older generation is not seen to be accommodative to make communication effective; hence they are regarded as ‘underaccommodative’.
On the other hand, the younger generation is seen to overaccommodate. A patronizing manner while speaking with the older generation is indication of overaccomodative communication behavior. This is a major cause of intergenerational communication gap. Literature suggests it is the stereotype that that people accommodate and not the person. The negative stereotypes that the younger generation holds about their elders make them overaccommodate. Although the intentions might be positive, it may be perceived as patronizing (as well as disrespectful and insensitive) behavior by the older person. It is considered to be insensitive and disrespectful by the older generation. Thus, excessive accommodation in intergenerational communication can be detrimental and counterproductive.

To the researcher, it is important to answer the question as to why and how CAT can be applied in the present study. In the Indian context, where filial piety is given high importance as compared to western countries, respect for generational hierarchy is inculcated at the family level. The younger generation is conditioned several dos and don’ts with the result that young people should adapt suitably (in communications, behaviour and mindset) while communicating with elders. The degree of adjustment shown by the younger generation is considered as the level of respect and deference that they show towards the older generation. J B P Sinha (2008) rightly pointed out that organizations are part of the bigger social system. Thus, if an individual is conditioned in a particular way at family level, his behaviour in the organization would reflect the conditioning. Communication Accommodation theory is based on the premise that people alter their communicative behavior to make their communications effective. CAT will help to unfold the nuances and dynamics underlying the changes in behaviour of the older and the younger generations when they communicate with each other.

Another reason for adopting CAT to this study is that it stresses the importance of the socio-historcial context. Generation is a socially and culturally rooted concept. As a result, intergenerational communication is influenced by the social, political and economic experiences of the people. Literature also asserts that being interdisciplinary, CAT places importance on the context. It contextualizes communication rather treating it as Universalist or essentialist. This would help the researcher to contextualize intergenerational communication. Lastly, CAT remains the only theory that has directly addressed to the issue of intergenerational communication for almost 40 years.
Methodology

Data Collection
Data collection was carried out in two phases — pilot study and actual study. The pilot study assessed the existence and nature of the phenomenon. Three focused group — 8 to 9 members in each group — discussions with the older, the middle-aged, and the younger generations were carried out. The participants in each group were drawn from a cross-section of industry. There was a balanced gender representation. A focused group guide was prepared for the FGD. With the informed consent of the participants, every FGD was recorded. Data collected was transcribed and thematically analyzed. It was found that intergenerational communication differences indeed existed.

The second phase of the data collection involved the actual study. The following section discusses the process of data collection in the final study.

Research Sites
Mumbai and Delhi were selected as the research sites for reasons of convenience. Samples were drawn from three organizations. It was ensured that there is a fair representation of generations in these organizations. The researcher does not attempt to draw conclusions for specific industries in contention in this study.

Of the several organizations that were approached, three agreed to participate in the study. The data collection process began in a government organization; but, as the study progressed, it was realized that sector (government or private) could be a factor that might influence the responses. Therefore, while gathering data collection at the government organization, I also began to collect data from a private organization. The purpose was participants’ responses were, indeed, influenced by the sector they worked in. Thus, the initial set of interviews were transcribed and analyzed simultaneously to map the difference. It was found that sector was not an influencing factor in participants’ responses.
A brief profile of the three organizations\(^5\) would serve as useful background information:

1. **Parivartan-** A public sector oil and gas organization was founded in 1955. It ranks among the Maharatnas (most valued) of India’s public sector enterprises. It is one of the largest exploration and production organizations in India. It contributes to 72% of India’s total production of crude oil and 48% of natural gas. Parivartan’s turnover in 2011-2012 was Rs.150,185 crores with net profit of Rs. 28,144 crores. The net worth of the organization is Rs. 135,266 crores. The HR policies of Parivartan include integration of culture, enrich and sustain commitment, teamwork, innovation, talent management, training and development, focus is on workforce balance. Parivartan also carries out engagement surveys, HR audit, coaching and mentoring, executive education. Key values of Parivartan are respect and dignity, which are the basis of their relationships with their human assets. Parivartan is committed to women empowerment. Presently 5% of their workforce is women.

2. **Parikarma** is a private steel organization established in 1982. It is India’s leading steel producer and is a $9 Billion dollar global conglomerate in India and abroad (USA, South America, and Africa). Parikarma’s innovative technology and diverse product portfolio gives them a distinct competitive edge. Parikarma has implemented several employee-retention initiatives like MDP and LDP (Management development program and leadership development program). Engagement surveys are conducted in the organization and there is feedback process for performance management. A ‘Mera Sujahv’ (my ideas) initiative encourages participation in employee welfare.

3. **Navchetna** is a private organization in the steel industry. It was established in 1984 and is a $16 billion dollar business group. Navchetna manufactures pipes and is the market leader in India for tubular steel products. It also diversified from a single product to multiple product-based organizations. Navchetna revised its HR policies to meet the current business requirements. There is focus on work-life balance and employee retention. The company has also initiated engagement surveys, training and development programs and

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\(^5\) In order to maintain confidentiality of the organizations, the source has not been cited or referenced.
executive education. The emphasis is on developing technical expertise with behavioural skills.

Research Participants

Unit of analysis. The units of analysis used in the present study are the employees from the older/middle-aged/younger generations. As mentioned earlier, this study adopted a constructionist position, which gives importance to the processes followed. In-depth interactions with the people reveal significant insights. Therefore, the research participants from three generation are the unit of analysis.

It was also necessary that the organizations from which samples were drawn were well represented by all three generations. For this reason, the researcher selected the companies that were in existence for a considerable period of time. In addition, it was also important for this study that the organizations had the policy of recruiting young people at regular intervals so that there is a fair representation of the younger generation. While selecting, the researcher also inquired whether generational diversity was affected by high attrition and voluntary retirements. Thus, the services sector, BPO’s, IT organization, Start-ups, etc., were excluded as generational representation would have been skewed.

Inclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria guided sample selection process. Two criteria were considered — experience and generational.

(a) Experience: Participants were selected on the basis of experience. Here, experience is defined by the number of years the person has worked with the organization. It was decided that only have worked for two or more years would be part of the sample. Mohpatara and Sharma (2010) proposed that the time spent in organization is one of the indicators of deeper commitment and engagement.

The justification for a minimum of two years of employment with the organization is based on the assumption that people take time to connect, get associated and committed themselves. As this study attempts to investigate concepts like communication effectiveness, communication satisfaction and communication accommodation at the workplace, it is required that people demonstrate a degree of attachment to their workplace in order to show shades on accommodation in their communication behaviour in view of intergenerational differences. The other side of the argument can be that we
generally want to be liked by others and hence change ourselves suitably. However, I would like to stick to the former argument.

(b) Categorization of generations: Generational classification in the present study is based on biological aspects like the birth year and social components based on significant events experienced during their growing up years. It is believed that, along with our birth year, the events in which we are socialized tend to influence our behaviour and thinking style. Thus, for example, a person who has lived in the period of India’s independence struggle likely to have a worldview quite different from that of a person who grew up in recent times.

Values, beliefs and norms change over time. The year of birth and the events of the time are predetermined. Therefore, to avoid imposing generational classification, the participants were asked whether they agreed with the generational classification? Most participants responded that accepted the generation they were placed in. The only exception was a 39-year old participant who objected to being placed among the middle-aged. His argument was that if Rahul Gandhi could be considered as an ambassador of the youth at the age of 42, it was unfair to bracket him in the middle-aged generation!

Though the significant events for categorizing the generations were pre-decided but they were changed in view of participant’s responses. A pre-decided significant event for the younger generation was post-liberalization. However, I realized that post-liberalization was too large a phase for the younger generation to relate with. On the basis of their responses, it was decided that a significant event for the younger generation was the technology revolution and economic recession.

Significant event for the older generation (in the age group of 47 to 57 years or born between 1955 and 1965) were selected was the pre-liberalization state of the economy (closed). Pre-liberalization phase of the economy was marked by a socialist approach. Policies were aimed at self-reliance and imports were restricted. A bureaucratic licensing system choked growth and development.

For the middle-aged generation (born during 1966-77, 35-45 years of age), significant event was the advent of liberalization. In the late 1980s and early 1990s the growth and economy paradigm shifted. GDP increased 3.5%
in 1950-80 and surged to 5.5-6% in the period 1980-2003 (McCartney, 2009). LPG opened up the economy and multinationals made their entry in a big way. Soon people had more career options. Liberalisation resulted in growth of private sector. Business groups invested in textiles, cement, chemicals, fertilisers, pharmaceuticals, and electronics, steel and engineering. Family-owned and run businesses turned to professional managers to lead organizations. (McCartney, 2009).

The younger generation were people who were born during 1980-1990 (23-32 years-old). For them, the significant event for them was technology revolution and the state of the economy. The advent of technology began in the 1980s and became a revolution in 1990s and 2000s. It influenced the behaviour patterns and thinking styles of the younger generation. Due to technology, the younger generation identified itself as different from older and middle-aged generations.

There is a gap of two years between each generation. This was necessary to have a clear transition from one generation to another. In reality, there is no start or end date for a generation.

**Exclusion criterion.** Employees at executive level were considered for sampling. It was that assumed work concerns and the communication patterns of non-executives would be significantly different from that of executives.

It must be stressed here that management seniority, gender, work profile (department) of the employees, and type of industry were not the part of the research concerns. As in quantitative research where the researcher includes most of the demographic variables, the qualitative approach in this study is restricted to the concepts and constructs that directly contribute to the study.

Traditionally, level of management was considered to be the defining feature for a generation. In a traditional management structure, generations were segregated — the older generation employees occupied the top- or middle-levels of management and the younger generation at the first level. However, in the present day business scenario, organization structures are flatter and horizontal. This has led to the mixing of generations at various levels, which profoundly influences organizational processes (Harvay & Allard, 2005).
However, this does not mean that most of the younger generation who participated in this study was in the top level of management in their organizations. A horizontal structure existed predominantly in the case of the older and middle-aged generations. As a result, in certain dimensions (which are discussed in the chapters on data analysis), the level of management played a role in intergenerational communications, especially for the younger generation.

Every effort was made to have a sample pool in which management level would play minimal role. Thus, there were participants from the older generation, but who worked at the first or mid-level management. A few of the participants were part of the younger generation but occupied middle-level management positions.

**Sample Profile**

![Bar Chart](image)

*Figure 2.1 Representing Mean Age of the Generations*

The mean age for older generation employees was 52 years, for the middle-aged generation it was 39 years, and for the younger generation it was 27 years.
Figure 2.2 Representing Number of Participants across generations

56 interviews were conducted in all out which 51 interviews were used for the data analysis as they were ‘rich and thick’ in description. However, for data analysis ‘rich’ information-based interviews were used. Those interviewed were 16 from the older generation, 16 from the middle-aged and 19 participants were from the younger generation.

Education level. Older generation employees were mostly engineering graduates. Middle-aged generation employees were mostly post-graduates. A few were graduates. Younger generation employees were largely post-graduates (MBA). The education profile of the sample indicates a shift in educational aspirations over the generations. Middle-aged and the younger generations preferred higher education because they considered it necessary to keep up with the changes and to acquire qualifications that would advance their careers.

Family structure. It was seen that the older generation employees grew up in a joint family environment whereas the younger generation came from nuclear families. Middle-aged generation employees showed a mix of joint and nuclear families. They may be considered to part of the transition phase from joint to nuclear.

Gender. Overall, there were 11 female and 39 male participants. In the older generation there were 15 males and 1 female participant. The middle-aged generation
samples comprised 12 males and 4 females. The younger generation participant pool was made up of 12 male and 6 female participants. It needs to be stressed again that gender was not the area of interest; the gender profile in this study is a mere by-product of the data collection process.

**Sampling Method**

A qualitative approach to sampling significantly differs from the quantitative as the emphasis is not on the generalizability of the results, but on understanding complex relationships and human issues in the given context. Purposive sampling technique was used to draw the sample.

Purposive sampling technique is non-probabilistic in nature. It is often applied in qualitative research to draw samples. Purposive sampling is based on the assumption that the sample is not drawn randomly but is based on certain purposes. It is essential to mention here that one sampling criteria should not be confused with purpose. ‘Purpose’ refers to selecting information-rich cases (be it individuals or groups) in order to understand reality (Devers et al, 2000). In addition, specific purposes related to the research question are addressed. The selection of sample is often based on the thoughtful and sound judgment of the researcher.

A researcher with qualitative approach believes that some participants are ‘richer’ than others and can provide better insights and understanding. This belief is based on the assumption that all people are not adept at observing, understanding and interpreting reality with equal rigor (Marshall, 1996).

In purposive sampling, the researcher consciously and proactively selects the most productive sample to answer the research question. Thus, in this present study, I made an attempt to select those units from the older, middle-aged and younger generations who could provide ‘rich’ information in their responses to the interview questions. This resulted in convergence and divergence of data.

**Research Strategies- Method/ tool, and technique**

*Interview*. The interview method was used to collect data. Within interview ‘unstructured’ interview as a technique for data collection and interview schedule as a tool were adopted. The researcher is of the opinion that the ‘unstructured’ interview is ideal for such studies. However, all interviews cannot be completely unstructured. As
literature classifies interviews into unstructured, semi-structured, and structured, the technique used in the present study should be considered as an unstructured interview.

The researcher would like to restrict the use of ‘in-depth’ interview. An interview guide is a tool used in the field to help conduct interviews. Kubinger, Wiesflecker, Steindle (2008) used experimental design to assert that interview guides elicit valid and relevant information as compared to an intuitive and unstructured approach. In addition, if a researcher has less practical experience, the interview guide is more effective than the intuitive approach. In the present study some anchor points, key questions were used to guide the course of interview. As I did not have experience in the field, I found the anchor points necessary to avoid digression.

Researchers making use of ‘unstructured’ interviews often hold a constructivist point of view of social reality and correspondingly design studies within an interpretive research paradigm. Communication paradigm in the social sciences mainly focused on quantitative methods to reveal communication-based issues. They are mostly descriptive and explanatory in nature rather than being exploratory. In-depth interviews are more apt for communication research as they aid the researcher to unfold those aspects of communication (stereotypes and cultural beliefs) that are not apparent and are difficult to be mapped by a questionnaire. In other words, if concepts like stereotypes, evaluating self and values are being investigated, there is a tendency that a person will give socially desirable responses. If quantitative methods are used they do not leave us with the option of probing. Instead, they give a predefined structure in which we place the responses. This kind of deductive approach is not suited for the present study.

The technique of in-depth ‘unstructured’ interview was developed for use in diverse disciplines like anthropology and sociology to know and understand people’s social realities. The term is also used interchangeably with informal conversational interview, in-depth interview, non-standardized interview, and ethnographic interview. There are several definitions of an unstructured interview. Minichiello et al. (1990) defined interviews as a method of data collection in which questions to be asked or the responses elicited are boxed into categories and the responses of the participants are given their space.

Data in the given case is information generated from the interaction between researcher and the informant. Interviews are recognized as a method of understanding complex behaviours of people without stereotyping them. It is believed that pre-
determined categorization limits the lines of inquiry (Punch, 1998). In an interview, the researcher end up asking questions spontaneously in relation to the data available to maintain flow of interaction. The interview process limits the scope for pre-determined questions. However, this does not mean that interview is a non-directional and random process. An interview demands in-depth preparation on the part of the researcher if he/she must cull deeper insights. Lack of preparation results in superficial data being collected (Patton, 2002).

As a researcher, it is important to be focused on the research objectives and the scope of the study (Fife, 2005). Though the researcher does not control the interview process and allows the participant to voice his/her point of view, at the same time s/he ensures that the interview does not deviate from subject of the research concern (Burgess, 1982 as cited in Zhang & Wildemuth, n.d.). At the start of an unstructured interview, the participants may not be aware of the shape that interview is going to take and the nature of information that s/he may share. Larossa et al. (1981 as cited in Corbin & Morse, 2003:338) state that in a comfortable atmosphere of trust, information shared by the participant might not have otherwise have been revealed. The authors implied the stance of the interviewer as a “friend”. It is this very essence of trust and conversational intimacy that creates potential threats as well as essential data collection tools.

Although the interviewer plays an active role, the participants/interviewees are the central point of the process as they are one’s who are the source of data. As a researcher one is expected to respond to the queries of the participant, probe further, and make him/ her comfortable (Fontana & Frey, 1998). It is important to break stereotypical notions and understand that unstructured interviews are not an interrogation session. It is not a forced activity wherein the respondent has to respond to all the questions. They have the freedom to say ‘no’ to any question or avoid answering them (Hutchinson, Wilson, & Wilson, 1994. Cited in Corbin and Morse, 2003).

Regardless of how many times individuals have told their story or how experienced a researcher might be, each time an interviewer and an interviewee come together for the first time, it marks the beginning of a new relationship. The dynamic nature

6 As quoted by Yan Zhang and Barbara M. Wildemuth, Unstructured Interviews.
of qualitative interviews makes it impossible to predict with certainty what will transpire. However, most interviews follow a standard course (Corbin and Morse, 2003: 341).

**Scope and benefit of In-depth ‘Unstructured’ interview.** The increasing use of qualitative research, especially in multisite studies, calls for robust data collection techniques and documentation of research procedures (Constat 1992; Miles & Huberman 1994:22; Mays & Pope 1996; Long & Johnson 2000; Malterud 2001 as cited in McLellan, MacQueen, & Neidig, 2003). Hutchinson et al.(1994 as cited in Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wyanden, 2000: 94) listed seven possible benefits of qualitative interviews. Qualitative interviews 1) serve as a catharsis, 2) provide self acknowledgement and validation, 3) contribute to a sense of purpose, 4) increase self-awareness, 5) confer a sense of empowerment, 6) promote healing, and 7) give voice to the voiceless and disenfranchised.

Honeycutt (1995) described such interviews as “informal, unorthodox, lay interventions.” Other benefits innate to qualitative interview research include its flexibility; and the opportunity it provides to access meanings, perspectives and interpretations as well as embracing individual differences; and its sensitivity to diverse forms of expression (Willig, 2001).

The choice of interview as the method for data collection should be based on ontological and epistemological assumptions. It is seen that those who adopt constructivist paradigm prefer qualitative interviews as the data collection method. It is assumed that the participants are the creators of reality, which is best understood from a conversation that gives adequate space to express their viewpoint (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984)

**Research Procedures**

**Process of data collection and data analysis.** “Apply Apply and No Reply!” Researchers have to live with a high probability of rejection by organizations of their proposals and requests to conduct studies in their companies. The reasons are mostly on grounds of non-feasibility or that the subject is not in the interest areas of the organizations. Thus, carrying out qualitative research in an organizational (corporate) setting imposes several constraints.

Difficulty of access is the first barrier. Most organizations are not comfortable with the idea of an external agency in conducting a research the findings of which will
be placed in public domain. Understandably, they are apprehensive about being shown in a bad light and the consequences on their ‘brand image’. This ‘brand consciousness’ deters organizations from granting permissions for study. Even when access is allowed, the researcher is expected to comply with several conditions, which are restrictive in nature. This makes it difficult to carry out a study from a qualitative approach.

It was experienced that organizations are also more oriented to the quantitative approach as it is a business necessity to have measurable outcomes. Thus, they are inclined to view qualitative approach as non-scientific and not given to generalizations in a larger context. Another constraint is the sample size. Small samples are not considered to be truly representative of the universe being studied.

A qualitative approach generally requires greater involvement by the participants. Reducing the distance between the researcher and the subjects of research is a fundamental requirement of Qualitative research. However, participants in a corporate setting are reluctant for having long interactions with the researcher. They are also skeptical about the relevance of the research and cautious in their responses for fear that the information they give might be shared with the management. The researcher’s personal experiences validate these concerns. On one occasion, the HR head of a leading manufacturing organization expressed his enthusiasm for a research proposal but was firm in his opposition to its qualitative approach. He insisted that the quantitative approach should be considered as it is more ‘scientific’.

The ‘qualitative’ versus ‘quantitative’ turned out to be formidable barrier. Finding a research site that would allow the researcher was turning out to be more difficult than previously thought. After a long wait, I received consent from organizations, which gave me the leeway to choose my approach to the study. A ‘Maharatna’ organization expressed its interest in the subject of my research and wanted to participate in the study. The gatekeeper at that government organization changed my long-held perception of the attitude of public sector employees. He was proactive and helpful; and did not have the casual, uninterested attitude of public sector employees.

Permission was obtained from the organization and participants before recording the interviews. Most of interviews were recorded. A few were not recorded as the participants were not comfortable with going on record. In such cases I had to rely on
my memory to retrieve accurate narration or notes. Appointments for the interviews were fixed with the help of the gatekeeper.

Before the formal start of data collection started, mails were sent to potential participants giving them a brief idea about the research and seeking their consent to participate (see appendix). It was expected that this would introduce the researcher and the subjects of research to each other; and would also establish comfortable rapport.

The first interview was held in the month of August 2012 and the last in July 2013. Thus, data collection lasted a period of about 11 months. More data was collected from Mumbai than Delhi. Both locations had their advantages. Being my hometown, Delhi offered me the advantage of being familiar about the systemic environment in government offices. This helped me to overcome bottlenecks.

Being part of the younger generation had its benefits and limitations. On the one hand it made interviews with the younger generation easier. The younger generation shared their experiences more openly. However, interactions with the older generation were difficult. I had to change my style of putting a question across. Interactions with the older generation could be termed as a kind of ‘intergenerational communication’, or an ‘insider-outsider’ if so wishes. Insider or outsider, as researcher, my viewpoints do not have relevance here. What mattered was that in the end, it was about discovering a kind of reality. According to the researcher, both insider and outsider stand unravels different realities, which are pertinent to the research concern.

With the help of the gatekeeper I tried to schedule one or two additional appointments during each field visit, the reason being that should any person decide to drop out of the interview, a replacement would be available and the pace of data collection would not suffer. It was important to understand and accept that there were going to be days when things will not go as planned.

Our reference point was a list of people who worked in the Mumbai and Delhi offices. The employees in the list were classified into three generation on the basis of the inclusion criteria. Efforts were made to interview a wide cross-section of employees to obtain a range of responses and opinions. Besides honouring their organization’s request to participate in the study, it was seen that a key reason for

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7 This practice was followed with all three organizations.
their participation in the study was that the employees viewed this as a platform to talk and share their feelings, which is often the case in studies like this one.

Lastly, the selection of Mumbai and Delhi as the sites for research was based purely on convenience. This study does not attempt to compare intergenerational communication between two states.

**Interview process.** The often-quoted statement that ‘Indians have a circular notion of time’ was proved right in the field. On many instances, participants would cancel appointments for work-related reasons. Data collection was also delayed because of extraneous factors like the festival season (for example the Ganapati festival in Mumbai), uncertain political environment, and so.

Samples were selected ‘serially’. This means no sample unit was selected until after data collection from the preceding elements was largely accomplished. Stemming from this condition is the next one in which the sample was drawn ‘contingently’, which means that the next sample unit to be interviewed was dependent on the previous interview. The data collection process also attempted to select a sample unit would give divergent information rather than confirm the previous statements.

Therefore, at the initial stage of the data collection we needed informants who could give completely rich data. As data collection progressed, the researcher identified certain patterns were more important than the others. Then an attempt was made to explore these patterns in detail in the subsequent interviews.

The preliminary interviews acted as icebreakers as they to build familiarity with the settings. At this stage an interview schedule was used for the questions and participants were expected to respond to them. Once the anchor points were identified, reliance on interview schedule diminished significantly. The initial interviews were carried out in two or more sessions because researcher needed the additional time get a sense of reality. Questions that were asked in initial interviews were based on free association technique. The insights gathered from the initial interviews became the anchor points for the subsequent interviews.

All interviews were conducted at the workplace in which the participant’s experiences are embedded. Such a setting aided the researcher as well as the researched to ensure that responses were grounded. It also helped the researcher to assume the role of detached, non-participating observer. Non-participant observation
is a useful cross-validation tool and helped the researcher to discern whether what the participant was saying was accurate or not.

Interviews were conducted at locations within company premises. The choice of venue was left to the interviewees’ convenience: at the workstation, cafeteria, colleague’s workstation, conference room or meeting room. Ratan, a middle-aged participant, did not feel comfortable being interviewed at his workstation because he was apprehensive of his superior listening in to the conversation. There would be frequent interruptions in workstation interviews, but it was also an invaluable insight to intergenerational communications.

A few interviews were conducted in Hindi, which initially caused difficulties in translation. I quickly learned to focus on the quality of data and not allow language to be barrier to obtaining rich, descriptive data. It was important not lead respondents to give a particular answer and to not allow them to challenge the research assumptions.

Participants could speak in any language. However, the interviews were mostly in a mix of Hindi and English mixed, with few completely in Hindi. Each interview session was of approximately 40 minutes’ duration and participants had the liberty to end interview whenever he/she chose to.

**Data Analysis**

Data was thematically analyzed. This study adopted both inductive and theoretical strands to analyze the data. Therefore, the themes identified were based on data and theoretical assumptions. For example, while focusing on accommodation strategies, data analysis was driven by strategies identified in CAT. However, differing strategies were also given due consideration as and when they surfaced.

The themes derived thus were arranged at different levels as latent and semantic themes. Generations’ adopting face-to-face communication channels is a semantic theme. It is identified as the explicit meaning of the data. Socialization-influenced communication behaviour is a latent theme as it based on underlying ideas and assumptions.

The steps that were followed in data analysis process were 1) familiarization with data 2) generation of initial codes 3) searching for themes and 4) defining and naming themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
1. **Familiarization with data.** Immersion in data is an important in qualitative data analysis; and familiarization with data is the first step towards immersion. The researcher realized the initial texture of data by transcribing interviews and making notes alongside. The transcripts were repeatedly read till a proper understanding was gained. Coding or drawing out the themes was not carried out at this stage.

2. **Generating initial codes.** Codes can be either data- or theory- driven. In the present study, a mixed approach was taken; the codes generated from data were both data- and theory- driven.

3. **Searching for themes.** The themes are based on codes. Therefore, codes were sorted according to themes. Several codes were then combined under an over-arching theme. Establishing relationships between codes is one of the ways of drawing out themes. Some codes may fall under a major theme; others may be part of a sub-theme.

4. **Review and refine themes.** This step ensures coherence among themes. At this stage, internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity of themes are established. It is important that themes are distinct and do not overlap.

5. **Assigning Name to themes.** This is the final stage of data analysis. Giving the theme a name must reflect understanding of the theme. Each theme tells explains the data in relation to the research questions.

*Example of Data analysis.*

Theme- Younger generation lacks experience  
Codes-  
- Just out of college  
- Sometimes foolish  
- Cannot handle pressure  
- Cannot be trusted with work  
- Low on confidence while communicating  
- Just induced into the organization  
- Unable to take things seriously (does not distinguish between office and outside environment)  

Findings: Lack of experience negatively influences communication.
Methodological Issues Involved in the Present (Qualitative) Research

Quantitative research is recognized for its precision, which is attained through standardization. The key components of standardization are reliability, norms, and validity. Applying reliability and validity to qualitative research is a recent trend. However, the researcher is of the opinion that applying the test of reliability and validity to a qualitative research is an attempt to romanticize the quantitative paradigm. It is merely an endeavor to make qualitative research appear ‘scientific’.

The wider consensus remains, however, that it would be incorrect to evaluate qualitative works with the criteria of validity and reliability that are applied to quantitative studies (Smith, 2003. Cited in Llyod et al., 2006). Feminist scholars have questioned the need to emphasize reliability, validity, and standardization to make the voice of unheard be heard. They have also questioned the concept of ‘universal’ theories and, instead, stressed on the contextualization of phenomenon. It is difficult to establish quality if qualitative research is conducted on the basis of reliability and validity (Seale, 1999). The appropriate response should be ‘rigor of the research’.

The rigor with which a research is carried out in the qualitative paradigm ensures ‘validity’ of the findings. Rigor depends on clear exposition of methods of data collection and findings, triangulation, reflexivity, attention to deviant cases and member checking. Qualitative research makes an epistemological deviation from quantitative research by providing voice to the participants and including their perspective as well as questioning the concept of neutrality and objectivity (Seale, 1999). This position raises the concern of validity of the data.

In this study, the researcher has attempted to adopt the triangulation method in data collection. Triangulation redefines traditional concepts of validity and ensures that the data collected provides the answers to the questions being investigated. For the pilot study, the researcher used focus group discussion as the mode of data collection. During the interviews, the researcher tried to paraphrase participant’s crucial responses to eliminate the possibility of ambiguity in the meaning of participants’ responses. However, post-data analysis, the reactions of the participants to the findings were not taken into account. This may be termed as a methodological limitation of this study. As a researcher, I tried to be reflexive of the research process. At every stage of the research, I was conscious of my standpoint and how it
influenced the research. The researcher has tried to follow the data analysis process (as explained in appendix no 1.1).

Data analysis chapters have been written in manner that major themes in the research are made apparent. The researcher documented data collection process when she was field, so that memory decay did not influence documentation. Authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) of the research was maintained by drawing out the findings from participants’ information and focusing on the reality that was being studied.

**Reflexivity**

Sacrament of Penance is a metaphor to describe the relationship between researcher and researched. On several occasions, participants shared information and confided in me. It was a cathartic experience. Ethically, I was bound to respect confidentiality and protect the identity of the persons. I reflected on my experience and how it was influencing me. A significant learning was the experiencing of reverse power dynamics. The participants understood that it is I who was in need, which brought me to them.

Belonging to the younger generation made the process more difficult. Older generation employees treated me as a person who is not connected with their generation and cannot understand their difficulties. Generational stereotypes were attached to me on a few occasions. However discomfiting, it helped me to understand the inter-group dynamics.

A few examples:

For instance, R B Singh (older generation) said,

*Your generation is interested and dependent on technology and does not prefer to interact with others...we have done everything for you...you don’t have the pressure of building your first house or buying a car. Everything has been done for your generation. For us it was a pressure situation, as result we could not explore other avenues.*

The younger generation respondents considered me as a part of them and expected me to understand their point of view:

*For our generation, our sort of ambition is different, we have our first house made, we want to explore the world and travel the world and figure out stuff. So because of these differences in our experiences, the older generation does not relate to us (Amit, younger generation).*
Interaction with the older generation and knowing their side made me realize that I was no different from younger generation respondents. I also had negative generational stereotypes. As my interactions progressed, these stereotypes were broken.

**Ethical Consideration**

In contrast to the natural science, the ethical lines are blurred in social sciences. Research in social sciences has been critiqued on ethical grounds (see Milgram, 1974; Zimbardo’s, 1971 study). This does not mean that natural science is more ethical. Natural sciences deal with physical reality. However, in social sciences, as we are dealing with metaphysical realities it becomes difficult to establish a code of conduct. In the present study, I have followed high ethical standards. People are addressed as participants instead of subject or respondents so that they are not looked at as objects or data churning machines. By addressing a person as a participant, we are empowering the person and deal with the power dynamics.

Formal consent was obtained from all participants. The reasons and rationale of the research was explained to them. Participants were not misled into sharing information. Participants (employees and organizations) were assured of protection of their identity and the confidentiality of information. Pseudo-names have been used for employees and organizations. Participants were also given the option to exit the study whenever they wanted to. They could also choose not to answer a question if they did not want to. The research findings were shared with respective participating organizations.