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## **Multigenerational Teachers and Staff Experiences, Perceptions, and Preferences on Organizational Change Communication in Schools**

Chrystal Louise Fields  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Chrystal Louise Fields

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Walden University  
2025

Abstract

Multigenerational Teachers and Staff Experiences, Perceptions, and Preferences on

Organizational Change Communication in Schools

by

Chrystal Louise Fields

MA, Concordia University, 2008

MA, Roosevelt University, 2004

MS, Lewis University, 2000

BA, Bradley University, 1997

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

November 2025

## Abstract

Organizational leaders' failure to adopt effective change communication strategies in schools exacerbates teacher and staff shortages, compounding factors that undermine student outcomes and overall school effectiveness. Multigenerational teachers and staff must understand change communication strategies as a leading indicator of unsuccessful workforce and organizational change in schools. Grounded in social constructivist theory and conceptually informed by Goffman's frame analysis, the purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore how multigenerational teachers and staff experience change communication as recipients and agents of change in schools. The participants consisted of 16 multigenerational teachers and staff members across four generations from a charter school in Chicago, Illinois. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews during a period of large-scale change. Through thematic analysis, six themes were identified: (a) framing as meaning making, (b) dual identity as recipients and agents of change, (c) relationships as communication capital, (d) the emotional landscape of change, (e) barriers undermining effective communication, and (f) leaders as architects of meaning for the environment. Findings support the importance of language, thought, and forethought in leader intentionality within organizational communication, as well as their intersection with leader-member relationships and organizational culture. Implications for positive social change include the potential for organizational leaders to amplify teacher and staff voices regarding change communication's impact on attrition and retention, strengthen leader-member relationships, preserve school culture, and advance quality teaching and learning outcomes.

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## Dedication

To my parents, who sacrificed so much so that I could have the opportunities they only dreamed of — your strength and endless love have carried me farther than words can express.

To my twin brother, who has been my loudest cheerleader — your belief in what I could accomplish has remained steadfast and unwavering.

To my partner and love, you have been my safe space and refuge during the tough times — thank you for staying grounded for both of us.

To my extended family and closest friends, who have been my sanctuary on the hardest days and my greatest cheerleaders on the brightest ones — I am forever grateful.

To my mentors, who saw potential in me when I couldn't see it in myself — thank you for believing, even when I faltered.

To my Angels in Heaven, Mommy, Elijah, Auntee, Umpa, and other loved ones who were taken from us far too early. I've felt your encouragement, protection, and love every single day along this journey; I wish with all my heart you were still here with me.

And to everyone who reminded me, through their quiet kindness and unshakable faith, that no dream is too distant when love, faith, and perseverance walk beside it.

This work is not just mine — it is ours.

## Acknowledgments

This dissertation represents not only my own hard work but also the support, encouragement, and inspiration I have been fortunate to receive throughout this journey. First and foremost, I give honor to God, the author and finisher of my faith. I am humbled that God has chosen me to make an impact in this world through a passion for learning and impacting the lives of adults and youth through education, leadership, and service. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Lisa Barrow, whose guidance, wisdom, and patience have been invaluable. Your belief in my work and your tireless efforts to challenge and encourage me made this achievement possible. To my committee, Dr. Barrow, Dr. Quarterman, and all of my Walden University College of Management Professors, thank you for your time, your insightful feedback, and your dedication to helping me grow as a scholar.

To the strong women who demonstrated that educational excellence is possible: Dr. Bonds, Dr. Little, Dr. Johnson, Dr. Starks, Dr. Johnson, Dr. Denton, Dr. Freeman, Dr. Harris, Dr. Mohammed, Dr. Foster, Dr. Wright—your achievements have been my guide; your support and insights have been my anchors. Thank you for your stories and your contributions to this world through improving the lives of adults and youth. Finally, to anyone who supported me quietly, without expectation of acknowledgment—this would not have been possible without you. Thank you for being part of my journey.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Communication or some closely related aspect of it is a key contributor to the success or failure of organizational change implementation (Dempsey et. al., 2022). The diversity in organizational membership as related to cultural, generational, and other forms add dimension to the importance of organizational communication, especially during periods of change implementation (Shrivastava et. al., 2022). When considering the multigenerational workforce, regardless of organization type, an additional layer of complexity is added for communication (Kalogiannidis, 2020).

The multigenerational workforce includes employees from different age groups, typically spanning several generations (Pitout & Hoque, 2022). There are currently at least 5 generations of workers represented in the workforce at present: Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, Millennials (Agrawal et al., 2023; Rai & Kulkarni, 2023; Wen et al., 2010). Researchers in management and leadership are beginning to focus on generational differences and their impact on all aspects of an organization including leadership, management, communication, employee engagement, and especially change (Agrawal et al., 2023; Pitout & Hoque, 2022; Rai & Kulkarni, 2023).

Current literature on the multigenerational workforce has spanned topics such as the communication of organizational vision and values to the multigenerational workforce (Freeburg, 2019; Peralta, 2021), the multigenerational workforce and perceptions of well-being (Cvenkel, 2020), leadership challenges with the multigenerational workforce (Alferjany & Alias, 2020; Iqbal, 2024; Pitout & Hoque,

2022), and multigenerational workforce reactions to organizational change (Johnson, 2023). However, there has been little to no specific focus on multigenerational employee perceptions on communication during periods of organizational change.

Rai and Kulkarni (2023) noted that effective communication is critical for the growth and sustainability of any business, and further that it is the foundation upon which other organizational activities are built. Zainab et al., (2021) identified that transparent communication supports trust building amongst organizational members which can positively influence openness to change implementation.

Though there is increased focus on generational differences in the workplace and their influence on organizational practices during period of change such as leadership, communication, and engagement there is limited research on how these concepts manifest in schools (DeNobile & Bilkin, 2022). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES; 2023) reported that there is currently a nation-wide teacher shortage. According to Bryner (2021), teachers decided to change professions due to a lack of competitive salaries, fear of personal safety, and a lack of support from education stakeholders. One obvious education stakeholder group is school administrators, responsible for implementing structures and processes that support achievement and growth, at all times, especially during periods of change.

According to Gilley et al. (2009), the most salient leader behaviors supporting change implementation are communication and motivation. DeNobile and Bilgin (2022) posited that in schools, there is a significant relationship between leader communication and job satisfaction for teachers and staff. While there is considerable literature at present

relating to change and change communication in private sector organizations (Dempsey et al., 2022; Shrivastava et al., 2022; Zainab et al., 2021), there is little information regarding change implementation or communication in schools (DeNobile & Bilgin, 2022). Further, there is an additional layer of complexity added when considering the diversity in schools as related to multigenerational teachers and staff. Research is needed to better understand how generational membership and change communication during periods of change in schools, intersect to mitigate teacher and staff attrition (Bryner, 2021). Through this learning, it is possible for school leaders to develop more effective communication strategies for the engagement teachers and staff during periods of change.

In this chapter, I provide a summary of the relevant literature on organizational change communication and multigenerational staff and acknowledge the gaps in knowledge as they relate to the current study and organizational change in schools. This chapter includes a statement of the research problem, an outline of the purpose of the study, a list of research questions, a summary of the theoretical framework, a rationale for the research method, a list of definitions, assumptions, delimitations and limitations, and implications for positive social change.

### **Background of the Study**

Communication is an integral part of organizational change and is a significant determinant of success or failure of change implementation (Gilley et al., 2009). With regard to change communication, the Oak Engage Change Report based on a survey of over 1,000 employees in the United Kingdom found that 29% of respondents reported a lack of clarity in change communication and 28% of respondents reported not receiving

information necessary to understand the change (Oak Engage, 2023). These findings support the critical nature of change communication for organizational employees at all levels. Organizational communication during periods of change is arguably the most critical in terms of successful or unsuccessful change implementation (Dempsey et al. 2022; Vrcjel, 2023). Dempsey et. al. (2022), in a review of literature on success and failure factors in organizational change implementation, identified that the three most prevalent failure factors identified had significant relationship to communication and employee engagement.

Employee perceptions and understanding of the what and the how of change is critical for successful change implementation, that understanding must come through organizational intent to reach all members effectively (Shrivastava et al. 2022). Though change literature is pervasive, there is much to learn about change, communication, and how both are experienced by multigenerational staff in schools. Pruaño et al., (2022) investigated multigenerational professional development and learning in schools, DeNobile and Bilgin (2022) investigated the impact of school leader communication on school staff job satisfaction, and Lancet et al., (2021) studied leadership as an implementation driver for organizational change in schools, yet there is a gap in understanding how multigenerational staff experience change communication. I explored how multigenerational teachers and staff experience and perceive change communication in schools, potentially influencing attrition and change outcomes for the organization. Through an understanding of how multigenerational teachers and staff experience change communication in schools, this research can offer strategies on how to improve change

communications in schools to more effectively engage and prepare change recipients at all stages of the implementation process and also mitigate communication breakdowns (see Rai & Kulkarni, 2023).

A search in key management and education databases resulted in literature regarding multigenerational workforces, perceptions of organizational communication and organizational change in schools. In the review of literature, themes emerged that were integral to the proposed study, and offered additional context for investigation. A synthesis of the literature was provided in Chapter 2.

### **Problem Statement**

Change is a constant in organizations, regardless of their discipline or nature of work. While theories of management, leadership, and organizational change are universally applicable, their implementation varies across organizational types. Schools, unlike manufacturing or sales organizations, are distinct in that their primary "product" is student outcomes. The general problem is that, according to Dwyer (2020), organizational communication has been the aim of a large body of empirical study, however in the majority of instances research has focused on business and corporate environments rather than schools.

The limited body of research made it difficult to gain in depth understanding of the organizational functioning of schools with regard to change communication and implementation. Further, how staff experience or perceive each of these is important to ensure retention of staff and reduce attrition. The current nationwide teacher shortage, as reported by NCES (2023), highlights the critical need for change communication tailored

to educational settings. Teacher shortages are influenced by various factors such as support, culture, and communication (Bryner, 2021). The quality of organizational communication regarding change can also be a strong influencer. Teacher and staff experiences and perceptions of communication during periods of organizational transition can significantly affect their decisions to remain or leave their roles. Without effective change communication strategies, teacher and staff shortages will continue to grow, jeopardizing student outcomes and school effectiveness (Beycioglu & Kondakci, 2020, p. 789).

The specific problem was that the lack of current literature on how multigenerational school staff experience communication regarding organizational change as recipients and implementers of change (see DeNobile & Bilgin, 2022). The intersection of change processes, change communication, and the multigenerational teachers and staff in schools was worthy of further investigation to explore strategies that school leaders can employ to ensure effective staff engagement for successful change implementation, increase staff retention, and support sustainability of the school for continued teaching and learning.

### **Purpose of the Study**

In this qualitative descriptive case study, I explored how multigenerational school staff experienced communication regarding organizational change as recipients and implementers of change. I aimed to identify communication strategies that align with the preferences and needs of school staff to support retention and reduce attrition. By addressing gaps in research and practice, I sought to contribute to the current literature

actionable insights into developing communication practices that mitigate the impact of organizational change communication on school staff attrition, ultimately improving teaching, learning, and organizational stability for staff as well as the students and families served.

### **Research Questions**

RQ: How do multigenerational school staff experience communication regarding organizational change as recipients and implementers of change?

Additional subquestions to explore the problem further included exploring multigenerational school staff preferences regarding communication methods during periods of organizational change, multigenerational school staff perceptions regarding quality of change communication and its impact on their perceptions of culture, stability, and support, as well as multigenerational school staff responses to change communication. Subquestions guiding this study were as follows:

SQ1: What are multigenerational teachers' and staff members' preferences regarding communication methods and strategies during times of organizational change?

SQ2: How does the quality of change communication affect multigenerational teachers' and staff members' perceptions of school culture, stability, and support?

SQ3: What communication practices can school leaders adopt to improve multigenerational teacher and staff retention during periods of change?

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The theoretical foundation for this research was social constructivism theory, which emphasizes the importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on these developed understandings (see Derry, 1999; McMahon, 1997). These processes, are pervasive through social life regardless of the nature or context for social interaction.

According to Matsumoto (2022), social constructivism was first discussed during the Enlightenment period of history. As a body of theory, it stems from the work of Mead and Durkheim; Bruner; and Piaget, Dewey, and Vygotsky. In particular, the work of Mead leading to the development of symbolic interactionism, has been considered a pathway to modern social constructivist theory (Matsumoto, 2022). Social constructivism embodies the study of how individuals gain knowledge and learn, given understandings that individual and group identifications in areas such as gender, ethnicity, and race are developed within a social structure that in turn influence how knowledge is acquired and the world is understood (Amineh & Asl, 2015). In short, the focus of this theory is the nature of knowledge and how it is created.

It is important to note that constructivist theories, according to Matsumoto (2022), do not discount object reality, yet the meaning given realities are achieved through collective meaning making specific to various cultures. As a body of theory, social constructivism evolved as academics sought to better understand, given the vastness of cultural and other forms of diversity world-wide, how people form world views and perceive reality. This theory was appropriate as a theoretical foundation for my study as

the cocreation of meaning between organizational leaders and staff in schools is integral to understanding staff experiences and perceptions of organizational communication through the lens of generational membership and shared interactions. Social constructivist theory as related to organizational interactions is discussed in further detail in Chapter 2.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Goffman's (1974) frame analysis was the conceptual framework used as the lens to explore how multigenerational school staff experience organizational change communication as recipients and agents of change. Goffman's frame analysis was published in 1974 by as an examination of the many ways by which human beings construct, organize, and differentiate among all the possible meanings of their experiences in any given situation (Goffman, 1974). The term "frame" is a concept defined as "principles of organization which govern social events and our subjective involvement in them" (Goffman, 1974, p. 10). The rationale of frame analysis provided a method for the sociological study of how situations are defined and experienced subjectively by individuals or groups (Sullivan, 2022).

Sullivan (2022) shared that concurrently, Goffman and Fillmore assigned meaning to the term frame, and that over time the two approaches became intertwined. The evolution of the combined body of theory is at times fragmented, and it is helpful to consider framing at different levels, language, thought, and communication which are referred to as semantic, cognitive, and communicative framing respectively (Sullivan, 2022).

Generally speaking, Fillmore and followers have focused on semantic and cognitive frames whereas Goffman and followers have been more interested in cognitive and communicative frames. Steen (2008) pointed out that individuals require the ability to think about things in order to communicate about them, and that language is central to communication, thus cognitive structures will develop communicative and linguistic counterparts. Of the three classifications of frames, semantic frames are the most defined and formalized as they rely on the semantic requirements of words (Sullivan, 2022). A given event or term for example, prompts the generation of related terms or concepts such as in use of the verb *kill*. In this instance, when an individual reads this verb, the killing frame is evoked and one would expect other terms such as killer or victim, and possibly a weapon to be involved to complete understanding (Sullivan, 2022).

According to Fillmore (1982), cognitive frames can be described as

“Any system of concepts related in such a way that to understand any one of them you have to understand the whole structure in which it fits; when one of the things in such a structure is introduced into a text or conversation, all of the others are automatically made available” (p. 111)

Andor (2010) further clarified this stating that “cognitive frames constitute background understandings needed to make sense of things that happen around us” (p. 158).

Essentially, cognitive frames are essential to language since they are used to understand words and groups of words.

Thoughts can be communicated through language, artifacts, or some other means. Communicative frames are the most complex type of frame because when shared, they

activate frames for others (Entman, 1993). They are enabled by both cognitive and semantic frames. Entman (1993) described communicative frames as “the selection of some aspect of a perceived reality and making it more salient through promotion of problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and or treatment recommendation for the item described” (p. 52). Factors influencing the communicative frames include but are not limited to social, historical or political context, the identity of participants, repetition of the frame, etc. (Sullivan, 2022).

Smith et al. (2022) used frame analysis in research regarding organizational innovation and related communication to employees when innovation does not achieve desired outcomes. Researchers found that the combination of the above referenced frames, semantic, cognitive, and communicative were relevant in facilitating discussions around innovation and change and in employee receptiveness to continued innovation after a failed effort.

Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) expounded on Goffman’s (1974) work in their application of Frame Theory to leadership and organizations. According to Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) framing is a mechanism for defining a situation in a particular way. Framing is a communicative action or set of actions comprised of language, thought, and forethought; and espouses a transmission view of communication as in social constructionist viewpoint that demands reciprocal relationship and co-creation of meaning between organizational leadership and members (Smith et al., 2020). Because frames influence individual perceptions, it is necessary to consider how the filter of generational membership is an influencer in the creation of meaning by staff in schools

regarding change communication. Researchers acknowledged the critical role of sense-making activities that enable organizational leader and staff member interpretations of information and the related reactions to information as shared (Gadelshina, 2020; Stark & Reif, 2021).

Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) suggested that it is the responsibility of leadership to understand that through communication, they are transmitting more than messages, they are employing a unique skill to craft, deliver and empower others toward a particular vision or course of action using language. Prendeville et al. (2022) suggested that frames can be seen as “deliberate strategy involving an approach to meaning and sensemaking intended to make complex social situations understandable and from which to develop actions” (p. 72). Goffman’s (1974) frame theory provided context through which a better understanding of multigenerational teachers and staff experiences and perceptions of organizational communication as recipients of and implementers of change could be developed (see Smith et al., 2020). The use of language, and the construction of meaning as language is shared are influenced by factors internal and external to employees which can prompt challenges with framing during periods of change (Dewulf & Bowen, 2012; Gadelshina, 2022; Sullivan, 2022). Generational membership is an influencer of values, attitudes, needs, etc. and each is relevant for consideration when strategizing organizational communication during periods of change in schools.

Through a deeper understanding of how employees perceived and experienced organizational communication, leaders are better able to strategize to ensure more purposeful, engaging and effective communication meeting the needs of the

multigenerational teachers and staff in hopes of positive change outcomes and retention (Shrivastava et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2023). Frame theory was well aligned with the study approach as qualitative inquiry aims at gaining a deep understanding of human experiences, perceptions, and meanings by exploring phenomena in their natural context (see Yin, 1993). The case study method, through data collection methods like interviews, observations, and document analysis, allows researchers to uncover rich, nuanced insights that may not be captured through quantitative methods alone; essentially, it aimed to explore the "why" and "how" behind behaviors and phenomena such as organizational change communication and staff experiences in schools rather than just measuring their frequency or prevalence (Hartley, 1994).

A charter school in the urban Midwest that recently implemented a planned change was the selected environment for the study. The participant pool were multigenerational teachers and staff employed in the school during the implementation of the planned change. There are currently at least five different generations represented in workforces at this time, Traditionalists (1925 – 1945), Baby Boomers (1946 – 1964), Generation X (1965 – 1980), Millennials (1981 – 2000), and Generation Z (2001 – 2020), participants in the study represented each of these generations.

### **Nature of the Study**

To answer research questions, the research design for this study was a descriptive qualitative case study. Developed by Sandelowski (2000), qualitative descriptive research is a methodological approach providing a comprehensive summary of events or experiences. This approach differs from other qualitative methods in that it focuses on the

‘who, what, and where’ of experiences (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024). Turale (2020) stated that though there are many qualitative approaches, qualitative description is well suited to investigations where there is the need to develop firsthand descriptions of the facts of a given phenomenon. She further suggested that this approach is relevant and appropriate for doctoral students having limited time or funding for research (Turale, 2020, p. 290). Bradshaw et al. (2017), in alignment with Turale (2020), suggested that “qualitative descriptive research studies are those that represent the characteristics of qualitative research rather than focusing on culture as does ethnography, the lived experience as in phenomenology or the building of theory as with grounded theory” (p. 1). With this approach, researchers aim to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved (Bradshaw et al., 2017). Hall and Liebenberg (2024) stated that qualitative descriptive research is “rooted in the direct and rich description of experiences as shared by participants themselves, maintaining close proximity to data without extensive theorization or abstraction” (p.1).

The philosophical aspects of qualitative descriptive approach further lend to its appropriateness for this study. Qualitative descriptive research is inductive, it describes a picture of the phenomena of study, supports the researcher in developing deeper understanding of the phenomena and can add to the related body of knowledge (Sullivan-Bolyai et al. (2005). Further, qualitative descriptive research supports the subjectivity in experience on the part of both participant and the researcher in the study (Bradshaw et al., 2020). Each individual has their own experience, and the experiences of all are relevant to the study of a given phenomenon. In this approach, the researcher is active in the

process as they speak directly to participants or observe behaviors in a naturalistic setting. The perspectives and words of participants are the starting point for understanding, with researcher subjectivity introduced at the point of analysis and interpretation (Bradshaw et. al., 2020). Sullivan-Bolyai et. al. (2005) also made a compelling argument for qualitative description in health care, education, and other domains of research because of its ability to provide clear information on how to improve practice. Findings from qualitative descriptive research can provide a foundation for more extensive research on a given topic or phenomenon.

A case study approach provides detailed rich descriptions of participant experiences as related to the focus of the study and aligns well with the qualitative descriptive approach (Islam & Aldaihani, 2022). Yin (2002) defined case as a “contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear and the researcher has little control over either” (p. 13). There is an assumption underlying the definition that other research strategies such as experiments or surveys are not capable for inquiry into the case of interest (Yazan, 2015). Given this assumption, according to Yin, case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates the case or cases conforming to the phenomenon of interest by addressing the ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions posed (Yazan, 2015). Yazan (2015) noted that this approach is particularly instrumental in instances of program evaluation and specific processes or strategies.

Stake (1995) agreed with Smith’s (1978) description that a case is a bounded system and that researchers should inquire into it as an object rather than a process (p. 2).

Further, according to Stake, a case is a “specific, complex, functioning thing”, “an integrated system” having boundaries and working parts and is purposive in social science and human services (p. 2). Stake suggested that case studies have four defining characteristics: holistic, empirical, interpretive, and empathic. Holistic refers to the considerations by researchers that there is an interrelationship between the phenomenon and context which is inseparable, this aligns with Yin’s (2002) defining the case. Empirical refers to researchers basing the study on field observations, spending time directly with participants sharing experiences. Interpretive refers to the researcher’s intuition regarding the researcher-subject interactions. And empathic means that researchers reflect the experiences of subjects in an emic stance (Yazan, 2015, p.139).

According to Merriam (1998), whose perspective was influenced by Miles and Huberman (1994), “the case is a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (p. 27). As long as researchers are able to specify the phenomenon of interest and draw its boundaries, they can name it a case. In order to differentiate case study research from other designs, Merriam stressed distinctive characteristics: particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. Particularistic refers to the fact that it focuses on a particular event, situation, program, or phenomenon. Descriptive refers to the fact that it offers a rich and thick description of the phenomenon under study, and heuristic refers to the potential of case study research to broaden the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Merriam, 1998, p. 27).

The perspectives of Yin (2002), Stake (1995), and Merriam (1998) on case study research align in advancing that case study is a legitimate research strategy to be

employed when the researcher aims to develop deeper understanding of a given phenomenon in response to ‘who’, ‘how’ and ‘where’ questions. As such the case study approach aligns well with the qualitative descriptive approach to research as related to a specific, bounded environment and context.

The research participants came from one of 13 schools, supported by a public sector educational management organization in the city of Chicago. The organization has implemented numerous large-scale change initiatives in the past 5 years. The site considered for selection was one that experienced radical disruptions during a recent change initiative. The teachers and staff represent multiple generations and could offer detailed descriptions of their experiences of the change implementation in response to the research questions that guided the study.

The experiences of the multigenerational teachers and staff were critical in understanding perceptions and preferences related to developing more effective organizational communication strategies in schools via a semistructured interview approach. This approach allowed more flexibility in actual data collection (i.e. recording for later consult to ensure accuracy, and relationship development with participants) which is limited with other methods such as surveys. This method allowed me to follow up with participants to ensure accurate analysis and coding for responses post interview completion.

Members of the multigenerational staff within the school site were recruited for individual participation in semistructured interviews, and participant responses were the data used for analysis. An interview guide was developed using literature on best

practices for developing semistructured questions designed to obtain participant experiences regarding organizational change, preferences for communication, and generational membership, as outlined by Knott et al. (2022).

I conducted semistructured virtual interviews with approximately 16 employees in total (each representing one of the generations currently present in the organization's workforce). Inclusion criteria for the study was membership in a given generation (Traditionalist, Baby Boomer, Generation X, Millennial, and Generation Z), over the age of 18, employment in the organization for at least 1 year, and not currently employed with the organization in a supervisory or leadership role.

The data collection instrument was the semistructured interviews to obtain information based on the research questions guiding the study. Questions were developed with guidance from literature on best practice for developing interview questions along with protocol development for the process of collecting data (see Islam & Aldaihani, 2022; Kakilla, 2021; Knott et al., 2022). Interview probes were developed in alignment with research problem and purpose to obtain information on participant experience and preference for organizational change communications.

The participant interview response data was analyzed using descriptive coding using first and second cycle coding, as recommended by Saldana (2021). This method of analysis provided a systematic process whereby the researcher was able to categorize information with codes and categories to identify themes that emerged from participant responses during interviews. This method was appropriate for the selected methodology

as it was a process, whereby each step for analysis built upon the other, contributing to the overall trustworthiness and rigor of this study.

I followed Saldaña's (2021) descriptive coding process for the data analysis and used first and second cycle coding. Descriptive coding is used to assign labels to words or phrases in the data. First and second cycle coding means that the data are reviewed more than once using one or more types of coding. Codes were categorized, which means synthesizing the codes into consolidated meaning. Categories were then moved into themes, which are phrases or sentences that describe a process derived from the categories. The analysis of data is described in further detail in Chapter 3.

### **Definitions**

The following terms were used throughout this study:

*Change communication:* Communication initiated by organizational leaders at all stages of the change implementation process directed at organizational members as recipients and implementers of a proposed change initiative (Dempsey et al, 2022).

*Generational characteristics:* The unique set of experiences, values, and attitudes possessed by members of a generational cohort that can influence perceptions of experiences in a given context (Iqbal, 2024).

*Intergenerational collaboration:* Individuals employed in a given organization, who are members of a social group (generation) working together to promote organizational success (Iqbal, 2024).

*Multigenerational staff:* Members of an organization consisting of or relating to more than one generation (Shrivastava et al., 2022).

### **Assumptions**

The participants for the study were multigenerational teachers and staff currently employed in an urban Midwestern charter school that recently implemented a planned organizational change. The first assumption was that the participants were able to provide accounts of their experiences of organizational communication during all stages of the change process and their perceptions of it. The second assumption was that participants had some opinion with regard to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of change communication as recipients and implementers of change. The third assumption was that generational membership had an influence on staff perceptions of change communication. An additional assumption was that because of their experiences with organizational communication during a planned change, multigenerational staff had emotional and behavioral reactions influencing the decision to remain or resign from the organization. An additional assumption was that participants would be open and honest in the sharing of their experiences. These assumptions were necessary to gain knowledge and a better understanding of multigenerational teacher and staff experiences of change related communication, their perceptions of communication effectiveness, and their preferences for communication during periods of change.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

In this qualitative descriptive case study, an exploration of multigenerational teacher and staff experiences of change related communication, their perceptions of communication effectiveness, and their preferences for communication during periods of change in a school organization was done. Data was collected from multigenerational

teachers and staff in a school organization, that were employed at the time of the planned change. I conducted a semistructured interview with each participant with probes related to the primary and subsequent research questions. The interviews were recorded to allow for member reflection and checking for accuracy prior to analysis and coding using the QDA Miner system.

Administrators and other school leadership roles were excluded from the study as the scope of the study was limited to the experiences of teachers and staff. Part-time employees, contract staff, and volunteers were also excluded from this study because they are sometimes not privy to the full measure of communications shared by school leadership. Other school stakeholders such as students and parents were also excluded from the study as their experiences and perceptions of change communication were outside of the scope of the study.

### **Limitations**

Limitations exist as potential weaknesses to any research. In the case of qualitative research, both validity and reliability were limitations due the occurrence of research in naturalistic settings replicability is extremely difficult (Wiersma, 2000). Similarly, key limitation of case study research is the limited generalizability of findings. This research was limited to the experiences of multigenerational teachers and staff regarding change related organizational communication in a school, their perceptions of communication effectiveness, and their preferences for organizational communication during periods of change in one specific school environment. It is possible that similar observations will be observed in a different school environment, however additional

research would have to be conducted. The sample population of the study impacted external validity. Approximately 16 teachers and staff of a particular school representing members of five generations in the workforce were interviewed. As such, findings are not relatable to the experiences of individuals outside of the case. The research questions were used to drive development of semistructured interview probes. Social constructivism theory and Frame Theory were lenses through which the exploration of accounts of experiences as shared by participants.

Creswell (2013) posited that validating the results is important because it helps to determine the accuracy or credibility of the finding of research. Validation was achieved through semistructured interviews being recorded, and transcribed. Participants reviewed their transcribed interview and summary to ensure that my personal views were not included. In addition, to ensure trustworthiness, each participant was asked to verify and validate the accuracy of their data once transcribed.

Researcher bias was addressed prior to the study through rigorous participant selection to ensure the selection of representative participants, exercising due diligence in the creation of semistructured interview probes, and member checking of interview transcripts prior to analysis.

### **Significance of the Study**

Change is a constant in organizations. The current literature on management and change is expansive for varied organizations yet is limited on the implementation of change and communication processes in schools specifically (Johnson, 2023; Peralta, 2021). Further, the majority of literature is from the leadership perspective rather than

that of staff as recipients or implementers of change. The multigenerational workforce remains a constant for most organizations as well. There is the need for organizational leaders to learn of and implement strategies that effectively engage all members through varied approaches to communication at all times, especially periods of change.

As such, research adding to the body of literature highlighting the intersections of change, multigenerational staff experiences, and organizational communication was vital.

This study was significant in that it addressed a gap in literature through exploring how a multigenerational teachers and staff experience change related organizational communication in a school, their perceptions of communication effectiveness, and their preferences for organizational communication during periods of change. The results of this case study provide guidance for school leaders in the use of language and strategy to develop communication that to effectively engage and prepare teachers and staff as recipients and implementers of organizational change and also reduce staff attrition.

### **Significance to Practice**

According to a recent World to Work (WTW, 2023) study on change, 70% of organizational change initiatives fail. Communication is an integral part of organizational change and is a significant determinant of success or failure of change implementation. With regard to change communication, the Oak Engage Change Report based on a survey of over 1,000 employees in the UK found that 29% of respondents reported a lack of clarity in change communication and 28% of respondents reported not receiving information necessary to understand the change (Oak Engage, 2023). These findings

support the critical nature of change communication for organizational employees at all levels.

The NCES (2023) reported that there is currently a nation-wide teacher shortage. Teacher shortages are influenced by various factors, including the quality of organizational communication. Diversity in the workplace adds dimension to the importance of organizational communication. The multigenerational workforce includes employees from different age groups, typically spanning several generations. Organizational behaviors have evolved accommodate the coexistence of these generations however there is still much to discover. More recently, researchers in management and leadership are beginning to focus on generational differences their impact on all aspects of organization including leadership, management, employee engagement, and especially change. Current literature on the multigenerational workforce has spanned topics such as the communication of organizational vision and values to the multigenerational workforce (Freeburg, 2019; Peralta, 2021), the multigenerational workforce and perceptions of well-being (Cvenkel, 2020), leadership challenges with the multigenerational workforce (Alferjany & Alias, 2020; Iqbal, 2024; Pitout & Hoque, 2022), and multigenerational workforce reactions to organizational change (Johnson, 2023). However, there has been little to no specific focus on multigenerational employee perceptions on communication during periods of organizational change. Further, there has been little investigation into organizational change communication in schools. Given the nuances in preferences for the multigenerational workforce, it remains critical for

school leaders to gain as much knowledge as possible with regard to effective engagement so as to maximize member interaction and organizational outcomes.

Organizational communication during periods of change is arguably the most critical in terms of successful or unsuccessful change implementation (Dempsey et al. 2022; Vrcjel, 2023). Dempsey et al. (2022), in a review of literature on success and failure factors in organizational change implementation, identified that the three most prevalent failure factors identified had significant relationship to communication and employee engagement. When considering the multigenerational workforce, an additional layer of complexity is added for communication (Kalogiannidis, 2020). Employee perceptions and understanding of the what and the how of change is critical for successful change implementation, that understanding must come through organizational intent to reach all members effectively. The research problem, question, and subquestions were aimed to address the current lack of literature on organizational communication in schools regarding change and the experiences of multigenerational staff as recipients and implementers of change.

### **Significance to Theory**

In exploring the experiences of multigenerational teachers and staff regarding organizational communication as recipients and implementers of change through the lens of social constructivism and frame theory, depth was added for their consideration in areas of investigation in management and leadership disciplines. Further, new dimension was offered for investigations focused on understanding the experiences of individuals or

groups in organizational and process contexts such as schools and change implementation.

### **Significance to Social Change**

I explored how multigenerational teachers and staff experienced and perceived change communication in schools, potentially influencing attrition and change outcomes for the organization. Through an understanding of how multigenerational teachers and staff experienced change communication in schools, I present strategies on how to improve change communications in schools to more effectively engage and prepare change recipients at all stages of the implementation process (see Rai & Kulkarni, 2023).

Collective teacher and staff experiences and reactions to change communication can influence retention and attrition, and should be intentionally considered when developing communication frames regarding the change (Freeburg, 2019; Vardaman et. al., 2021). Further, awareness of multigenerational teacher and staff perceptions could mitigate communication breakdowns and support strategic approaches to effective communication during all stages of change. Without effective change communication strategies in schools, teacher and staff shortages will continue to be influenced, adding yet another factor potentially jeopardizing student outcomes and school effectiveness.

Without efforts to focus on how to improve the change implementation process in schools specifically, there is the potential for disparate impact on broader communities as well as all groups present in school ecosystems: staff, students, families, etc. If schools are not successful in preparing students for the world they will enter upon matriculation,

communities and components of society will bear the brunt of ill-prepared youth and young adults.

### **Summary and Transition**

In this chapter, an introduction to the topic of this research as well as context for research were provided. A statement of the research problem, purpose of the study, and a list of research questions driving the investigation were provided. A brief discussion of both theoretical and conceptual frameworks was provided to preview the lens for analysis of data. The rationale for the research method, a list of definitions, assumptions, delimitations and limitations, and implications for positive social change were provided to support the appropriateness of the proposed research. In Chapter 2, a detailed review of the related literature surrounding the topic will be presented, as well as detailed discussions of the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that support the proposed research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this literature review, I provide a discussion of themes and topics relative to the current proposed research. The general problem under investigation was the limited body of research on organizational change and change communication in schools. According to Dwyer (2020), much of the empirical data on these topics had focused on business and corporate environments rather than schools. Employee diversity in the form of multigenerational membership added dimension to the importance of organizational communication (Kalogiannidis, 2020). An additional layer of complexity was added to organizational change processes and communication with the introduction of staff experiences and perceptions. The multigenerational workforce was present in literature on organizational practice, management and leadership, and added depth to discussions on each (Alferjany & Alias, 2020; Iqbal, 2024). This generational diversity in organizational members added dimension to the understanding of how change processes and change communication intersect to ensure effective staff engagement and organizational outcomes during periods of change. This gap in research and related literature created a gap in understanding not only for organizational change practitioners, but also for school leaders seeking to implement systemic change in a sustainable manner.

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore how multigenerational teachers and staff experience change communication as recipients and agents of change in schools. By addressing gaps in current research and practice aimed to provide guidance for school leaders in the development of communication practices that

will decrease negative experiences and perceptions of teachers and staff regarding change implementation in schools, thereby supporting teacher retention, teaching, learning, positive student outcomes and school stability.

In this chapter, I include a review of the literature search strategy used to develop this research, an in-depth review of both theoretical and conceptual frameworks guiding the study as well as a discussion of the use of each in related research. I also review literature on the topic of focus and related themes such as (a) the multigenerational workforce, (b) organizational change in schools, (c) the role of leadership during change, and (d) change communication strategies.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The literature search strategy consisted of words and or phrases relating to organizational change communication, the multigenerational workforce, member experiences and perceptions of organizational change, and organizational change implementation in schools. The Boolean search was used with multiple databases including Academic Search Complete, ABI/Inform, Business Source Complete, Communications and Mass Media Complete, Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), Education Source, Google Scholar, ProQuest Central, Sage, and Springer as provided through the Walden University Library.

Key phrases used to search in the above enumerated databases included *change management, change communication, change in schools, employee engagement, employee perception of change, generational differences, generation in the workforce, leader communication, multigenerational workforce, organizational change,*

*organizational commitment*, and *trust*. Terms were searched within each database and results were reviewed for relevance and inclusion within a specified date range, specifically 2021 to 2024. Librarian support was enlisted to identify relevant sources for review when limited sources were found using the term multigenerational workforce, and the recommendation was to include the term intergenerational workforce, which yielded more sources for review. In addition to reviewing sources resulting from database searches, reference entries for selected sources were reviewed for additional related content. Where applicable, these sources were located using either Google Scholar or ProQuest Central, reviewed and included as related to subtopics in this study as applicable.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

In the social sciences, the term “social constructivism” can be an umbrella term inclusive of several related theories that relates to the process of learning and the acquisition of knowledge (Mercadal, 2024). The theory is believed to have originated back in the time of Socrates, who suggested that individuals should engage in discourse to interpret information and construct meaning through probes or questions (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Constructivism as a school of thought came to be through the evolution of behaviorist and cognitive ideals.

Modern interpretations of constructivism stem from the work of Mead and Durkheim, Bruner, Piaget, Dewey, and Vygotsky. According to Amineh and Asl (2015), Mead’s work on symbolic interactionism could be considered impetus for theory evolution. Symbolic interactionism proposes that the individual self and identity are

social constructs, shaped by interactions with others. This theory embodies a range of concepts which seek to define the social and cultural processes that support the development of social and personal identities. Essentially, individuals' beliefs, expectations, and behaviors are the result of socially constructed systems, which in turn create the framework for daily operation (Mercadal, 2024). The framework includes information and practices understood to be knowledge.

Knowledge is not obtained by individuals through simple transmission, as if they are empty vessels to be filled, rather it is obtained through interaction with individuals and groups, wherein the information is commonly accepted and meaning created (Kim, 2001). Bourdieu was foundational constructivist thinker who built upon the work of Durkheim. Durkheim examined social structures imposed on individuals and their impact on the thought processes and beliefs of individuals (Mercadal, 2024).

In 1966, Bruner proposed the theory of constructivism (Saleem et. al, 2021). Core tenets of his proposal are that people learn to navigate the world through experience and reflection on their experiences, both of which are cognitive processes. Bruner's theory was built upon theories of cognition. Constructivism is a learning theory, psychological and philosophical perspective positing that knowledge is gained through the processes of reflection and active construction in the individual mind; individuals construct what they learn and understand based on their experiences (Brau, 2016; Matsumoto, 2022). This theoretical stance holds that learning is a process of constructing meaning; it is how people make sense of their experiences. Constructivism postulates that knowledge cannot exist outside of the individual mind; that truth is not absolute; and that knowledge is not

discovered but constructed by individuals (Amineh & Asl, 2015; Kim, 2001).

Constructions then, are true to individuals but not necessarily to others. Knowledge is temporary and ever evolving, as it is influenced by social and cultural factors rendering it nonobjective (Matsumoto, 2022).

Constructivism is split into two approaches: radical and social (Brau, 2016).

According to Brau (2016), radical constructivism posits that the construction of knowledge is dependent upon an individual's subjective interpretation of active experience. Social constructivism suggests that an "individual's development is situated socially and that knowledge construction stems from interaction with others" (Brau, 2016, p. 1). It is a theory of knowledge in both sociology and communication theories that examines knowledge and understandings of the world developed jointly by individuals.

Three foundational psychologists noted for the evolution of branches of constructivism are Piaget, Vygotsky and Dewey, whose influence has formed a cornerstone for the body of theory. Piaget's works support the radical constructivist lens, while Vygotsky's works support the social constructivist lens and Dewey supports a combination of both perspectives (Matsumoto, 2022). All three supported the belief that widely held and accepted learning theories of the time such as behaviorism, did not adequately represent the actual process of learning and knowledge acquisition (Brau, 2016). Vygotsky held that human development overall was influenced by interpersonal, cultural, historical and individual factors placing emphasis on socially meaningful activity (Brau 2016; Matsumoto, 2022).

The work of Vygotsky maintains a central focus on the social aspects of acquiring knowledge. The social interactions between individuals transform learning experiences and support alignment between behavior and cognition. Understanding, significance, and meaning are developed in the course of interactions with others. The core aspects of the theory are (a) the assumption that humans rationalize experiences by creating a model of the social world and the way it functions, and (b) the belief that language, signs, and symbols are the systems through which humans construct reality (Amineh & Asl, 2015).

Language, thought and their mediation by society are integral to Vygotsky's perspective as he posits that the process of knowing is affected by others and in turn mediated by community and culture also (Amineh & Asl, 2015, p.10). Kussmaul and Pirmann (2021) asserted that when individuals receive new knowledge they either reconcile it with prior beliefs or dismiss it as unimportant. In the course of reconciliation, individuals ask questions, investigate, and evaluate information. This process supports Vygotsky's sentiment that individuals create new knowledge in the course of interacting with their environment and individuals in their environment (Saleem et al., 2021).

According to Kim (2001), three core assumptions underlie the theory as related to reality, knowledge, and learning. Concerning reality, social constructivists believe that reality is constructed through human activity, it does not exist prior to its social invention (Kukla, 2000). As related to knowledge, it is a human product construction socially and culturally, as individuals create meaning through interactions with one another in a given environment (Gredler, 1997; Prat & Floden, 1994). According to McMahon (1997),

learning is a social process that results from meaning making when individuals are engaged in social activities (Kim, 2001, p. 3).

The intersubjectivity of social meanings relates to the shared understanding developed among individuals when interaction is based on common interests and assumptions that formulate the basis for their communication (Rogoff, 1990). Intersubjectivity is formed by cultural and historical factors relative to the group or community. As such, it not only provides the basis for communication according to Kim (2001), but it also supports in the extension of individual understandings to new information and activities received by members of a given group (p. 4).

Social constructivism's impact is significant as scholars and academics attempt to understand how individuals' worldviews and perceptions of reality are formed (Kim, 2001). It is used as a theoretical framework in research in varied disciplines including education, psychology, media effects and even perceptions of art. The theory has been used recently in research in the fields of management and education specifically.

Loftus and Higgs (2021) used social constructivism as the theoretical framework in their investigation of individual experiences in the workplace. They suggested that there has been a welcome and growing interest in the scholarship of the workplace and of how people are prepared for the world of work. With this has come a realization that new ways of conceptualizing and researching the workplace, and the workers in it, are needed in order to bring out and articulate the complexities of practice. Alvinus et al. (2023) used social constructivist theory as the theoretical foundation in their research on organizational vulnerability during periods of change. Researchers suggested that current

perspectives on organizational change render invisible employee perspectives and needs regarding work-life balance, given that change initiatives can impact work hours, location, and other areas that impact the employees' families as well. They further suggested that when making decisions regarding organizational change, factors impacting employee work-life balance should be considered in light of potential organizational vulnerabilities resulting from the proposed change (Alvinus et al., 2023, p. 1). Akella and Khoury (2022) used the social constructivist lens to investigate employee change resistance as agents of change. Findings from their research suggested that "rather than seeing resistance as a dysfunction associated with change, all organization members (change agents and recipients) through engaging in social interaction (collaborative awareness, discourse and sense-making) can transform resistance into organizational learning an impetus for positive change implementation" (Akella & Khoury, 2022, p. 303).

In the discipline of education, social constructivist theory has been applied and extended in considerations for instructional strategy such as problem-based learning, collaborative grouping, and blended instruction for students at all levels, as well as to build the capacity of teachers (Molise, 2024; Shawa, 2020).

### **Conceptual Framework**

Goffman's frame analysis provided the conceptual lens through which data was analyzed. The concept of framing was introduced by Bateson in 1955 and expounded upon by Goffman in 1974 (Zerubavel, 2024). Bateson (1972) suggested that frames work to shape the intersection of both speech content and the relationship between

communicators (Fairhurst, 2005). Another foundational scholar in this work was Simmel (1950), who noted that social situations that appear to be quite ordinary are never experienced differently by individuals due to “the definition of the situation”. According to Zerubavel (2024), Simmel and Bateson were both intrigued by the social mental processes that influence individuals’ perceptions and experiences of a given event or context (p. 528).

Schutz’s 1945 essay on multiple realities was largely influential to Goffman’s expansion of the theory. Schutz claimed that reality consisted of multiple experiential realms or “provinces of meaning” that are marked by distinctive cognitive styles (Zerubavel, 2024). Schutz has elevated that the difference between multiple realities is not one between the more or less real, but rather the multiple ways in which reality is experienced, all of which are subjectively valid.

Goffman first used the term “frame” in the sense that Bateson had used it in a 1961 essay “Fun in Games”, wherein he suggested that game play places a sort of ‘frame’ around events determining the type of ‘sense’ that will be accorded with everything in the frame (Zerubavel, 2024, p. 525). Through the use of language, situated within context influenced by culture, history, and the perceptions of others, meaning is attached to individual experiences. This notion of framing aligns well with the socioconstructivist worldview, as language, symbols, and context influence how individuals create meaning and gain knowledge collectively. Given early discussions of context as a strong influencer of individual perception, this theory has been applied widely in theater production and the arts, noting the creation of varied realities on the stage, in musical

composition, or art on canvas. Language, symbols, and context converge in each discipline to provide a subjective experience for an observer, which becomes an intersubjective experience in the social context when shared meanings result.

In a similar manner, shifting the discipline or context to organizational practices such as communication during periods of change, and the meaning associated with the communication by organizational members will be influenced by culture, history, previous experience (i.e. characteristics of generational membership). From the sociological perspective, Goffman's (1974) frames defined situations that produce meaning and organize experience which are as multidimensional and multilayered as past experiences allow (Fairhurst, 2005). Goffman's frame analysis has been applied to social interaction and meaning creation amongst individuals and groups in many disciplines such as healthcare communication (Guenther et.al., 2021), politics and social movements (Predneville et. al., 2022; Sadaba, 2021), and leadership (Fairhurst, 2005; Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996) and organizational practice (Smith et.al., 2020). It has also been applied in the discipline of education, specifically regarding policy implementation (Schuddle et al., 2025) and change processes (Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021; Durand et al., 2022).

Frame analysis as applied across disciplines has been situated within the body of communication science more recently. Guenther et. al. (2021) conducted a systematic review of literature to determine the prevalence of this theory in healthcare research and identified gaps in the definition and conceptualization of frames across disciplines. They posited that frames have at least four locations in the communication process: the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture (Entman, 1993, p. 52). While there

are varied definitions suggested as to what a frame is, those most widely accepted are those which suggest that framing focuses on certain aspects of reality and sends others into the background through processes of selection and salience. More specifically, according to Guenther et. al. (2021), “to frame is to select some aspect of perceived reality and make it more salient in communication in such a way as to promote problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (p. 892). Referred to as frame elements in research, each element provides a method of organization of information creating a package for interpretation.

Frames are more than topics, they represent the manner in which information is received, processed, and made meaningful in a given context. Sullivan (2023) suggested that through the sociological lens, Goffman posited that if activities or language could be framed as “play” or “theater” or “sport”, they could also be framed for other purposes such as manipulation, to generate humor, or to prompt specific action (p. 3). Frames are generally sociological or psychological in nature as represented in the healthcare field. In the sociological realm, framing communications are relatable to attributions of responsibility in a given domain (i.e. prevention, early detection, and treatment of disease). In the psychological realm, framing often takes the form of gain and loss, which emphasizes desirable consequence associated with compliance with or rejection of an advocated viewpoint. Frames have been observed to be employed in a similar dichotomy in grassroots social movements (attributions of responsibility) (Sebada, 2021), design theory (Prendeville et.al., 2022), and organizational change (gain and loss) (Smith et al., 2023).

Sullivan (2023), in reviewing literature on the evolution of theory, offered additional discourse on distinguishing frames: semantic (linguistic), cognitive, and communicative, each building upon one another. Semantic frames, according to Sullivan are the most formalized and represent a “script like conceptual structure describing a particular situation or event along with participants and props” (p. 6). An example of this would be a “killing frame” wherein roles such as perpetrator, victim, and weapons become related fillers and language used within the frame.

Cognitive frames exist as the ability to think is a prerequisite for language and communication, they must exist in order for semantic or communicative frames to exist (Sullivan, 2022). Cognitive frames are systems of concepts related in such a way that in order to understand one, a person has to understand the whole structure in which it fits. When one of the things in a structure is introduced in text or discourse, the others are automatically made available to support meaning-making and understanding (Sullivan, 2023, p. 7). In the previous example, the “killing frame”, concepts such as murder, crime, victim, and offender are made available to support the understanding of an event or situation. In essence, cognitive frames are the background understandings needed for making sense of things that occur around us.

Communicative frames are those which are the most complex, as they represent the aspects of perceived realities (Sullivan, 2022). When a cognitive frame is communicated to another individual, they also activate a cognitive frame which takes some aspect of perceived reality and makes it more salient for the purpose of problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and or treatment recommendation.

Thus, the communicative frame is the primary frame of concern for this study. The communicative frame relates to meaning creation in social contexts, that are in turn influenced by culture, history and experience on both the individual and collective group levels.

In terms of the application of frame analysis in the disciplines of management and leadership, it became apparent that there was a disconnect between academic and organizational views on communication. Specifically, there was the need to make more sense of information transmission and the management of meaning (Fairhurst, 2005). Tversky and Kahneman (1981) highlighted the impact of problem framing on decision making, which influenced negotiation scholars studying schematic and communicative aspects of framing in bargaining, conflict escalation, and negotiation strategies (Putnam & Holmer, 1992). Bartunek (1988) expanded Goffman's perspective to the role of framing in organizational change.

Fairhurst and Sarr's (1996) response was an attempt to see if organizational leaders could come to see their roles with respect to communication as managers of meaning and co-constructors of reality. They were individuals who could not control the seeming turbulence experienced in organizations, but they could control the context under which turbulence was seen. An added emphasis was placed on communication as a skill for organizational leaders and was embedded in activities such as active listening, giving and receiving feedback, problem solving, conflict resolution, and public speaking. While some veteran practitioners disregarded framing as they subscribed to positional

authority regarding organizational communication, others embraced the concept as they valued the role of communication especially during periods of organizational change.

According to Fairhurst (2005), the skill of framing in the leadership relationship is consistent with the perspective that power is never independent of its implementation (p. 168). The skill of framing is based on three key components: language, thought, and forethought. The Language component supports the focus on aspects of situations that are abstract at the point of introduction and through classification/categorization and remembering/retrieval understandings are made possible. The Thought component examines the role of mental models in decisions regarding what and how frames are chosen because according to Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) “leaders who understand their world can explain their world (p. 23). The Forethought component refers to efforts to exert control over spontaneous communication. Leaders are to be strategic and goal oriented while simultaneously being spontaneous and automatic, frames are enacted to manage meaning in one direction or another, to determine what words, symbols, etc. will be exchanged with another or others to achieve a particular goal. This perspective of framing as applied in organizational settings aligns with the notion shared by Fairhurst and Sarr that communication is predicated on the assumption that members exist in a shared world of real meanings, and that as one world of meanings has been conceived and framed that same world can be reconceived and reframed by the same members (p. 170).

Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) in addition to strong suggestions in favor of leadership embracing the concept of framing and its theoretical relevance in leadership and

management discourse, also posited that O'Keefe's (1988; 1991; 1992; 1997) theory of Message Design Logics offers a potential explanation for why leaders struggle with grasping framing (p. 173). O'Keefe's theory offered three design logics, each of which represents a means of reasoning from an individual's communication goals to messages: expressive, conventional, and rhetorical design logics. The expressive design logic supports the sentiment that communication is a process to express emotion. The conventional design logic supports the sentiment that communication is a cooperative game of sorts to be played within the parameters of socially conventional rules and procedures (O'Keefe, 1991). Language is viewed as an expression of self, based upon the social effects one desires to achieve rather than emotions or thoughts (O'Keefe, 1991). The rhetorical design logic is the construction and negotiation of social selves and individuals. In this design logic, language is used in a manner of heightened awareness and it is understood that its application may shape one definition of a given situation over another (O'Keefe, 1991). This is the optimal design logic as it acknowledges that the creation of meaning is situated within contexts and is socially negotiated amongst the individuals engaged in the interaction. Ideally, this would be the stance that organizational leaders and managers adopt when framing all communications, as they would be intentional in the use of language given understandings regarding social constructions of reality and the power of language to reorder social life in a particular context, such as a proposed organizational change.

As related to educational organizations (schools), frames are advanced as leaders attempt to make sense of complex interrelated components that ultimately influence

relational trust and communication (Durand et al., 2022). Bryk and Schneider (2002) emphasized the roles of trust and communication in schools, amongst leadership and staff. Relational trust acknowledges interdependencies and mutual understandings in school communities with regard to roles, responsibilities, and obligations and depends upon vulnerability, mutual respect, and competency building. It also facilitates improvement and innovation according to Bryk and Schneider, through functioning as a social glue connecting staff and leaders in common purpose, commitment, and engagement as change or improvement initiatives are advanced. Trust in leaders can lead to improved organizational change efforts (Durand et al., 2016), and for principals, trust-building is an ongoing collective process that is facilitated or constrained by the quality of relationships (Northfield, 2014). Communication, involving reciprocity, is an integral factor in staff sensemaking and subsequent performance in terms of the collective action required for organizational change or improvement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Language is powerful and communication serves multiple ends. In the course of organizational communication, Goffman's frame theory (1974) and its evolution over time presented a lens through which to explore and better understand staff perceptions of organizational change communication alongside social constructivist theory. Both acknowledged the social nature of learning, sensemaking and meaning making for individuals and groups, which are directly influenced by history, culture, and lived experiences (generational characteristics).

## **Literature Review**

The review of literature to follow explored themes related to the constructs of interest for the study: (a) definition of generation, characteristics of generational cohorts, and intergenerational dynamics in the workplace; (b) organizational change; and (c) leadership and communication strategies. The primary research question and sub-questions provided the foundation for the exploration of constructs and related constructs as they appeared in current literature and research. A discussion of the identified gap in literature representing an intersection of all three constructs was then provided to support the rationale for the proposed study.

### **The Multigenerational Workforce**

#### ***'Generation' Defined***

Defining the term 'generation' for purposes of analysis and deeper understanding has been met with challenge and two approaches have come to dominate the field of sociology (Gilleard, 2005). The first approach is associated primarily with the work of Karl Mannheim. This approach emphasizes the cultural distinctiveness of generations, which comprises two essential elements: a common location in historical time (generational location) and a distinct consciousness of that historical position shaped by the events and experiences of that time (generational style) (Gilleard, 2005, p.108). In Mannheim's approach, both location and consciousness must exist if the 'generation' is to function as a structuring process comparable to constructs observed vertically such as class or gender.

The second approach is associated with demographer Norman Ryder (1997) who argues that generational location is better represented through the more neutral construct 'cohort'. Ryder (1997) defines a cohort as "the aggregate of individuals who experienced the same event within the same time interval, where typically the defining event was birth" (p. 68). Academics over time challenged Ryder's position and mainstream literature and research have embraced Mannheim's approach more readily in studies of social change using this social construct (Gilleard, 2004, p.111).

Williams (1983) asserted that the modern understanding of generation, a distinct group of people or attitude, only fully developed in the mid-nineteenth century as a result of the new cultural and intellectual perspectives that were emergent. The term 'generation' had significance as both carrier of culture and the stage whereby new cultures would establish themselves (Gilleard, 2004). The consciousness existing within the collective became a social and political institution in itself, conscious of what it is and how it differs from others (White, 1992, p. 31). Gilleard (2004) noted that within the field of 'political' sociology that 'generational cohort analysis' has most flourished, with the emphasis upon drawing boundaries around birth cohort groups, linking them to external events, and examining secular changes in socio-political opinions (p. 111).

Corsten (1999) suggested that generations have a sense of collective identity within 'cultural circles' which he defines as common and distinct forms of social discourse and practice (p. 250). Becker (1991) argued that generation has replaced social class as the major dynamic of social change in the post-war period. The exposure to key events and occurrences that took place during each cohort's transition to adulthood

provides the boundaries for each generation. The event or occurrence bears an identity-generating meaning, translating historical events into a collective identity and a role to play with regard to social history (Gilleard, 2004, p. 112). Events noted by Becker having strong influence on post-war cohorts include the Depression, World War II, the post-World War II labor boom, the cultural revolution of the 1960's and the 1970's recession respectively (1991, pp .221–222). For purposes of this study, the concept of 'generation' as described above is embraced.

### ***Generational Cohorts and Characteristics***

Though values, attitudes, and beliefs are generally the functions of age and maturity, generational theory argues that changes across generations are defined by social events rather than biological processes (Alferjany & Alias, 2020). Members of a given generation generally share common viewpoints and perspectives that evolve or change as new generations come about. It is important to note that although considerable research exists on generations and generational studies, findings are not transferrable across global communities as generations are influenced by different events in different geographic regions and will result in different perspectives across Western or other societies (Alferjany & Alias, 2020, p. 1496). For purposes of this study, the following generational descriptions and attributes will be applied as shared in Alferjany & Alias, 2020; Iqbal, 2024; and Partin, 2023.

Traditionalists, also referred to as the silent generation, refers to individuals born 1928 to 1945 (Partin, 2023). Traditionalists grew up facing social and economic problems as they grew up just prior to World War II. This collective is observed to value

obedience, loyalty, rules and authority with preferences to follow logic and a sense of right and wrong. They are sometimes described as cautious, withdrawn and silent (Alferjany & Alias, 2020).

Baby Boomers, refers to individuals born 1946 – 1964 (Partin, 2023). These individuals were raised in a state of economic prosperity, educational growth, and the free expression of ideas that emerged after World War II (Iqbal, 2024). This generation was born and raised during the period where the television was invented, and as such were shaped by exposure to significant political, economic, and social changes in the world which mobilized them to fight for their rights (Iqbal, 2024). They are observed to value personal gratification, teamwork, and involvement.

Generation X refers to individuals born 1965 – 1980. According to Partin (2023) they are the fewest in number of the total population but will outnumber Baby Boomers by 2028 (p. 59). This generation is the children of Baby Boomers, and was raised in non-traditional family units, had both parents in the workforce, or single parent households during a period of rapid change and diversity that influenced familial, societal, and financial insecurities (Iqbal, 2024). As a result, they represent motivation in the face of adversity, a more open view of the world, and have tendencies toward individualistic rather than collective mentalities.

Generation Y also referred to as *millennials*, are individuals born 1981 – 1996 (Partin, 2023). This generation developed at a time of huge technological advances and economic prosperity in highly urbanized communities (Iqbal, 2024). Greater social interaction via virtual means was made possible during this generation. Millennials are

observed to place importance on diversity and ethical and societal value. These individuals value relationships and are motivated to succeed, have meaning and direction (Alferjany & Alias, 2020). Exposure to technology since birth supports their being technologically superior to earlier generations.

Generation Z refers to individuals born 1997 – 2012 (Partin, 2023). This collective was raised during a time of globalization, as such they are observed to be motivated intrinsically, thrive on recognition, and are inclined to social causes that help others (Iqbal, 2024). The consistent exposure to technology has made relationship building and interpersonal interactions challenging at times.

### ***Multigenerational Dynamics in the Workplace***

“Understanding generational values and attitudes in the workplace can be strategically advantageous for all members of an organization” (Alferjany & Alias, 2020, p. 1496). The term ‘multigenerational workforce’ refers to the current mix of different employees within an organization who are identified as members of different generational cohorts (Hisel, 2020). The mutual set of ideas, behaviors, attitudes, values and life experiences that are markers of each generation are also largely influential in the work lives of individuals in a given generation. According to researchers (Alferjany & Alias, 2020; Iqbal, 2024; Lang, 2020; and Partin, 2023), there are as many as five generations represented in the current workforce: Traditionalists individuals born before 1946, Baby Boomers individuals born between 1946 – 1964, Generation X individuals born 1965 – 1979, Generation Y (also referred to as Millennials) individuals born between 1980 – 1997, and Generation Z individuals born after 1997.

**Figure 1**

*Generational Distribution in the Workforce 2000, 2020, 2024*

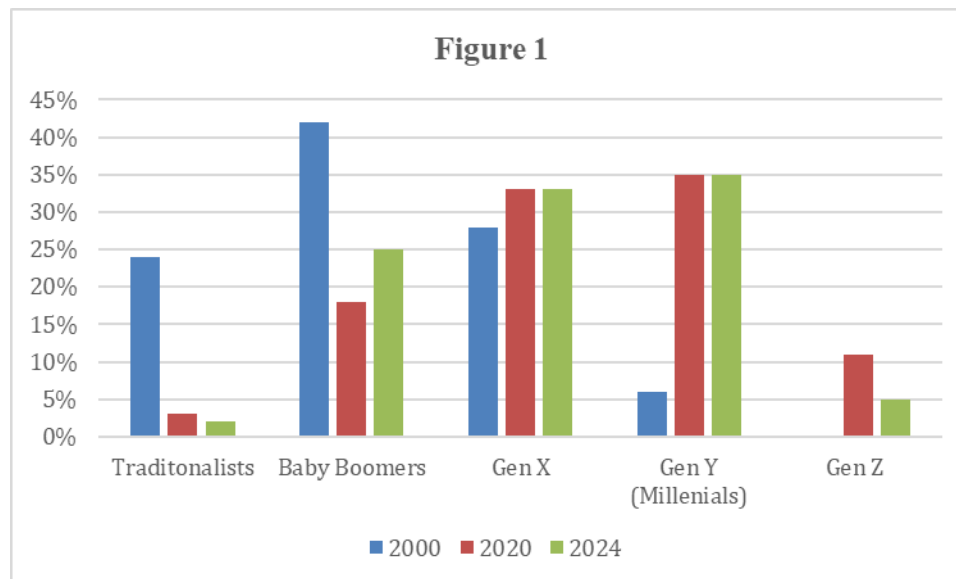


Figure 1 shows the generational distribution in the workplace in 2000, 2020, and 2024. As we can see from Figure 1, the Baby Boomers were the most represented generation in the workplace in the year 2000 with 42%, then Gen X 28%, then Traditionalists 24% and Gen Y (Millennials) 6%. Notable changes can be observed in the generational distributions in the years 2020 and 2024, Gen Y (Millennials) 35%, Gen X 33%, Baby Boomers 18 and 25%, and for the first time Gen Z is represented at 11% in 2020 and 5% in 2024 as most of them are in school.

The increasing diversity in the organizational workforce is attributable to Baby Boomers delaying retirement and Gen Z slowly emerging and establishing their presence. Intergenerational interaction and collaboration call for the understanding of the factors that influence communication, management, and organizational practice (Waldma, 2021).

The study of the multigenerational workforce is significant for a number of reasons. First, it is essential for organizations to achieve stated goals and maintain competitive advantage in a constantly changing global marketplace (Alferjany & Alias, 2020). Second, it promotes the recognition of value each generation brings to the organization, which supports higher levels of employee engagement and productivity (Partin, 2023). Third, it promotes social cohesion, development of mutual respect, and reduces ageism and other stereotypes. Finally, the understandings generated from the study of the multigenerational workforce promotes the opportunity for organizations to create inclusive work environments that value diversity, foster innovation, and creativity (Partin, 2023). While each of the above is true, it is necessary to better understand attributes of each generation with regard to work to support later analysis of perceptions and preferences regarding organizational communication (Agrawal et al., 2023, p. 896).

The Traditionalists (1928 – 1945) or silent generation represent the generation that has been in the workforce for the longest period of time, at present they often work part-time currently, and are hired by organizations because of their strong work ethic (Partin, 2023). Traditionalists may be slower to change professional habits or adapt to new processes and protocols as they tend to value experience over technological ability or education. They feel that workplace privilege should be based on seniority and tenure. They tend to keep work and personal lives separate, as they see work as an obligation. This generation is perceived as hard-working and as such can achieve great results (Iqbal, 2024).

The Baby Boomers (1946 – 1964) represent approximately 25% of the current workforce (Partin, 2024). Of those currently in the workforce, as many as 65% intend to work past the age of 65. Often referred to as the post-war generation, this generation witnessed significant social change in their formative years (Agrawal et al., 2023). Their strong work ethic is centered around entitlement, and they are loyal, dedicated workers. They value personal gratification, teamwork, involvement and work-life balance. Partin describes them as competitive, motivated, and driven as work is central to their lives and existence (2024, p. 59). Baby Boomers, according to Iqbal (2024) seek individual appreciation and recognition, as motivation is linked to promotion, wage increases and ultimately professional success. Additionally, having grown up with far less technological influence, communication norms reflect value in-person and face-to-face interaction. With regard to organizational structure, Agrawal et al. (2023) note preference for hierarchical structure (p. 897).

Generation X (1965 – 1980) makes up an estimated 33% of the current workforce (Partin, 2024). Frequently referred to as the “latchkey kids”, this generation emerged in an era where rapid familial change was present. Rising divorce rates and marked increase in maternal workforce participation were instrumental in shaping values and experiences. This generation is competent technologically and comfortable with diversity, change, multitasking, and competition (Partin, 2024). They are also observed to bring well-polished, practical approaches to problem solving and believe in emphasis on similarity rather than difference organizationally. Unlike their parents the Baby Boomers, members of Generation X are unlikely to remain with the same organization for the majority of

their work lives, they are open to exploring opportunities while maintaining a balance between the personal and the professional (Iqbal, 2024).

Generation Y (Millennials) (1981 – 1996) make up an estimated 35% of the current workforce (Partin, 2024). This generation came of age during a period of rapid technological advancement, prompting their ability and engagement with these advances. Around 15% of this generation reside at home with parents, and are content with moving between professional experiences for career advancement and opportunity. They are observed to be motivated by feedback, mentoring, and skills training (Agrawal et al., 2023). Generally, they have a can-do attitude and consider money to be the primary purpose for work and employment. They desire strong relationships with coworkers as well as collaborative, cohesive teamwork approaches (Iqbal, 2024). Agrawal et al. (2023) also note that Millennials value frequent feedback and seek flexible working arrangements (p. 897).

Generation Z (1997 – 2012) makes up about 5% of the current workforce due to many of them being students (Partin, 2024). Members of this generation prefer employ with larger corporations as this often translates to job security and financial stability. They prefer less formal and more relaxed work environments with their own personal workspaces. They desire mentoring and regular leadership interaction, while placing emphasis on having a life outside of work (Iqbal, 2024). Due to their relative youth as compared with previous generations, they generally have less work experience and have shorter spans of tenure on a particular job. Exposure to technology and immersion in advances causes them to struggle at times with face to face versus technology aided

media influencing social awkwardness, and they seem to prefer digital integration into all aspects of work. Agrawal et al. (2023) also noted a strong sense of social justice, and a keen awareness of diversity and inclusion for this generation.

The leadership awareness and understanding of generational characteristics is not about the perpetuation of stereotypes or generalizations, but rather the recognition of the uniqueness in experience and historical events that have shaped the worldviews and perspectives of members (Agrawal et al., 2023; Iqbal, 2024; Partin, 2024). In ensuring both awareness and seeking understanding, organizational leaders are better able to harness both skills and strengths that each generation contributes to the workplace. The failure to recognize generational characteristics and preferences in the workplace can be an influencer of negative organizational consequences such as ineffective communication, intergenerational conflict, decreases in morale and productivity, and less than optimal employee engagement (Agrawal et al., 2023). Each of these is critical for organizational functioning on a daily basis, and become especially crucial during periods of organizational change.

Regarding the multigenerational workforce in schools specifically, schools are also faced with complex challenges due to generational diversity. Trends observed on other professional organizations also apply to schools in terms of generational member representation. Schools with generationally diverse staff can be seen as more successful with more diverse expertise and knowledge according to Pruano et. al. (2022). According to Ingersoll et. al. (2022), the number of new teachers is growing in some countries and while some are young, a significant portion of them are older career changers. Of the

studies of multigenerational staff in schools, they appear to follow one of two trends: those that address things attributable to teachers/staff of a given generation (DeNobile and Bilgin, 2022; Lovely, 2012) and those that analyze the relationships between teachers/staff of various generations (Abrams & von Frank, 2014). The present proposed study continues in this line of research although it more broadly examines the influence of generational membership on teacher and staff professional experiences and preferences relating to organizational change communication specifically. As such, this research provides the opportunity to better understand the similarities and differences that exist among the five generations represented in the workforce currently.

### ***Challenges in Managing the Multigenerational Workforce***

Agrawal et al. (2023) noted that the modern workplace is fascinating due to richness in the diversity in backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of the multigenerational workforce. While this richness has the potential to better prepare organizations for enduring innovation and adaptation, there are also challenges which arise in the management of such diverse populations. Iqbal (2024) noted that there are both challenges and opportunities presented with the multigenerational workforce, given that each generation brings its own set of values, habits, preferences and expectations. He also noted that opportunities stem from the support of intergenerational collaboration amongst employees. Pitout and Hoque (2022) noted that while historical events are significant in the shaping of generational member values and interactions, there are also external factors which influence their organizational participation and engagement.

Family life is one example of an influential external factor according to Papa (2017), noting that depending on generational members, family (marital status, composition, caring for elderly parents or young children) may be a strong component in employee engagement, commitment, expectations and needs. Another external factor is societal conditions. Mirza (2021) noted the impact of the recent Covid-19 pandemic and the impact on employees representing all generations, and the resurgence of the employee health and well-being movement. Tough decisions had to be made by organizational leaders and employees rapidly to remain competitive and avoid becoming obsolete during that time, yet the health and well-being of employees remained top of mind given that the pandemic also prompted shifts in employee skill and capacity to maintain productivity. Other challenges noted in literature include maintaining multigenerational member engagement, continuous employee capacity building and skill development, ensuring effective employee onboarding and training for innovation and adaptability, technological fatigue, disciplinary approaches to low performance, and the navigation of organizational politics (Agrawal et al., 2023; Kulkarni & Rai, 2023; Mirza, 2021).

In response to these and other challenges presented with managing the multigenerational workforce, current literature offers several strategies. Agrawal et al. (2023) referred to 'bridging the leadership gap' in organizational leaders' adoption of strategies that promote collaboration, mutual respect, and productivity for the multigenerational workforce. Amongst those noted as most critical are strategies for effective communication, flexibility and adaptability, mentorship and continuous learning, recognition and rewards (Agrawal et al., 2023; Kulkarni & Rai, 2023).

Kulkarni & Rai (2023) cautioned that effective communication is critical for the growth and survival of any organization (p. 1519). In a study focusing on effective communication strategies for the multigenerational workforce, Wen et al. (2010) found that knowledge sharing that meets the needs of all generations represented can be a challenge because of the variations in how each generation approaches work. Communication is the process of exchanging information through various media. It can be done verbally or in writing, through symbolism, gestures, signs and behaviors (Kulkarni & Rai, 2023). Given these variations, language should be used deliberately to mitigate hindrances to productivity, achievement, learning and collaboration amongst generational members. Further, according to Rider (2020), managerial skills such as proficient communication, respecting individuals, avoiding ageism, and awareness of generational characteristics can be of tremendous value in organizations. Wen et al. (2010) suggested that understanding the variations in the choice of communication channels for each generational cohort will support organizational leaders in the cultivation of a more communicative culture.

### **Organizational Change**

Organizational change refers to the process of an organization altering its structure, culture, processes, or technology to adapt to internal or external forces and achieve its goals. There are variations in the literature on the types of organizational change, yet there is agreement on the fact that change is a constant, and that organizations must find ways to remain adaptable and relevant in the global marketplace (Montreuil, 2023; Ratana et al., 2020; Vrcelj, 2023). Change management theory is comprised of

numerous disciplines, offering a range of strategic approaches to navigating transitions to help companies adapt successfully. Kotter (2011) referred to change management as a set of tools or structures designed to control change implementation efforts. Moran & Brightman (2001) defined change management as the process of renewing an organization's direction, structure, and capacity to serve and meet the needs of continually evolving internal and external stakeholders. Other researchers describe change management as the attitudes and styles embraced by organizational leaders in the course of persuading members to adopt a direction or shift to successfully respond to changes in the market (Creasy, 2009). Passenheim (2011) offered that change management is the correct understanding of the organizations that need to be changed, correct understanding of the people who are willing to or being forced to change, and the effective realization of change and its dynamics. The effective management of change involves meticulously planning, communicating, and executing changes to minimize resistance, enhance employee buy-in, and ensure a smooth transition (Olalekan et al, 2021; Roman et al, 2024; Vrcelj, 2023). The successful management of change acknowledges the value of time, engagement, dedication and communication on the part of all organizational stakeholders.

### ***Prominent Theories of Organizational Change***

There are several prominent change theories discussed in literature, each seeming to expand upon the other. The reason for the impending change is a key factor in the selection of the approach to implementation. The need for an organizational change may come from within or outside, and implementation is impacted by internal and external

stakeholders. Over time, theories have evolved due to their seeming utility or practicality given such factors as the globalization of the marketplace, the complexity of organizations, and rapid advances in technology (Ratana et al., 2020; Vrclj, 2023). Change theories can be organized into broad categories as related to their focus or organizational impact. Early theories of change focused on organizational development, with a progression to focus on actual processes of change and contemporary theories focusing on the elements of change (Ratana, et al, 2020; Roman et al, 2024; Vrclj, 2023). There are commonalities and variations within each body of theory along with strengths and limitations as well. It is also important to note that change theory and organizational theory have evolved in tandem in response to societal, technological and political evolution.

According to Ratana et al., (2020), studies on organizational change began in the fields of industrial engineering and management when Frederick Taylor (1911) shared propositions for dealing with employees. Bueno and Salapa (2021) share that Taylor's (1911) theory of scientific management was seen as a mechanism for the organization of people and processes for efficiency and utility. Taylor (1911) proposed that scientific principles could be applied to both the organization and regulation of practice, people, and process to obtain the "highest degree of prosperity" as proposed by Max Weber. Theorists such as Juran (1920) and Shewart (1931) expounded on Taylor's (1911) propositions, still focusing on the developing organization and relative structures that support organizational adaptability. Juran (1920) an immigrant to the United States with his family from Romania in 1912, had many employment experiences that led to careers

in industrial spaces and prompted him to be a pioneer in quality management realms. His approaches enforced the ability of organizations to shift practices through management based on three principles: planning, control, and improvement (Phillips-Donaldson, 2004). Shewart (1931) expanded upon Juran's assertions and became a pioneer in the application of mathematics and statistics to production and quality during a time where industries struggled to improve (Ratana et al., 2020). The Industrial Revolution was a period in history where the focus of theory was largely to improve employee productivity and production without sacrificing quality of a given product.

Post revolution and with technological advances, theorists began to focus more on the process of change and how it was to be 'managed' effectively. Kurt Lewin (1951) offered a three-step approach to change, positing that effective change required detailed plans and projections by managers. This approach, unfreeze, move, freeze was believed viable as change was believed to be achieved successfully with detailed planned actions that would yield projectable results. Lewin's change theory gained ground in the field of change management over time, but was met with criticism. The first criticism was in its simplicity, given that change was considered to be more a continuous, open-ended endeavor rather than having a clear start and end point (Burnes, 2004). A second criticism was that the approach was only applicable to small-scale change and not relatable to larger scale initiatives. A third criticism was that Lewin's approach was more relatable to behavioral change rather than organizational processes, making it a more top-down or management driven approach (Ratana, et al., 2020; Roman et al., 2024; Vrcelj, 2023).

Several theorists, building upon Lewin's (1951) three-stage model, advanced variations involving additional steps in the change management process (Ratana et al., 2020). Judson (1991) introduced a five-step model suggesting the need to devise a controllable formula that acknowledged the limitations of middle management to confront change. Stages in this model include analysis and planning, communication, gaining acceptance, shift from current to desired state, and institutionalizing the new state (Al-Haddad, 2014). Simsek & Louis (1994) proposed a similar five-step model, with steps including normalcy, confronting anomalies, crisis, selection, and renewed normalcy respectively.

Kanter et al. (1992) proposed a 10-step approach in challenge to Lewin's 3-step model, that acknowledged additional required tasks of analyzing the organization and the need for change, developing and articulating a vision, creating a sense of urgency, mobilizing strong leadership and political sponsorship which were thought to be absent from Lewin's (1951) model. Kotter's (1996) 8-step model, remaining popular currently, embodies the same spirit as Kanter's model, with fewer steps. Hamel (2000) developed the Insurrection Method, also involving eight steps to change management. Hamel's method was also aligned with that of Kanter and Kotter, and introduced the notion of celebrating small wins consistently through the change process. Luecke (2003) shortly after introduced a seven-step change management model that was similar to previously introduced models, and added explicit guidance to begin preparation and implementation at the peripheries and allowing them to spread inward rather than pushing them from the top down.

While process theorists highlighted for practitioners and academics key processes to consider when proposing the implementation of change, application proved that the complexity of the change process itself made it difficult for managers to truly control (Ratana et al., 2020; Vrcelj, 2024). The variation in the number of steps in process models as well as the required rigidity in their application limited the freedom of managers and organization leaders to deal with emergent issues effectively. The ability or inability of a manager or leader to implement the steps in order led to confusion, frustration, and ultimately a failed change initiative (Ratana et al., 2020). The reflection upon and continued evaluation of this body of theory led to a third body of theory, focusing on the elements of change, those organizational factors or conditions that had to interact with one another at a given time to influence a desired result.

The contemporary change management theories focused much more on change elements: humans, technology, and strategy that had to align in order for successful change implementation. Wagner and Newell (2006) pointed to the critical need to understand change elements and their intersection in the change spectrum. Gardner & Ash (2003) were first to identify elements to consider when dealing with emergent change including: stakeholder goals, understanding of the business model and its objectives (strategy), the role of technology in the process. Additionally, Luecke (2003) highlighted that change tends to be more successful when staff understands the importance of it and see the proposed transformations as processes of development rather than a threat. Orlikowski and Yates (2006) also highlighted the importance of change elements citing them as relevant for making a system workable, dealing with materiality,

and focusing on practice. Their focus was on the importance of strategy that focuses on setting common goals for all organizational stakeholders, the ability to see technology as more than just tools, and focusing also on how people use available tools at various levels in the organization over time. Anderson and Anderson (2011) again reiterated the critical need to understand the interrelatedness of organizational content, people, and processes in the management of change.

Freeburg (2019) advanced the utility of The Knowing Model, as a mechanism for change implementation focusing on the effective engagement of individuals who are the recipients and implementers of change. Though not an all-encompassing approach to change implementation for organizations, it has been applied as a potentially initial step in the change management process, designed to prepare individuals with knowledge and awareness of the change, the benefits of shifting behaviors and the potential consequences for inaction (Freeburg, 2019, p. 653.) Vrcelj (2023) advanced that despite the prevalence of change, a significant number of initiatives fail due to lacking empirical evidence linking theory and practice for any of the popular change management theories which exist (p. 1). The 10F model has been proposed as one that addresses observed shortcomings and also leverages advantages of current theories at conceptual levels that enhance actions and decisions necessary for the successful implementation of all types of organizational change projects.

At present, available to organizational practitioners and academics is a body of theory that has evolved from considerations of production effectiveness, critical steps for implementation, and the key elements of an organization that are relevant when planning

for change implementation (Roman et al., 2024; Vrcelj, 2023). Though this research does not advance any particular theory of change implementation or management, it does support the evolution of theory that highlights key components of the study, namely communication, staff engagement, and their intersections.

### **Nature and Scope of Change in Schools**

Organizations, including schools, are consistently challenged with pressures from internal and external forces. According to Beycioglu and Kondacki (2020), social and demographic developments, new patterns of employment, technological advancements and globalization are among the factors prompting change in school environments (p. 789). In addition to these, Vancikova et. al (2023) noted that developments in research regarding teaching and learning are also contributors to change implementation in schools (p. 45). Change in schools is attempted often in response to the above societal and global conditions, as well as federal, state, and local initiatives prompting aimed improvement, restructuring or adjustments in processes and content in schools (Dimmock, 1996). Hargreaves et al. (2005) highlighted that change processes and initiatives in schools focus on the alteration or improvement of teaching and learning, yet Hoy & Sweetland (2001) suggested that change is in effort to innovate and remain competitive in light of internal and external pressures.

There is a debate at present, regarding organizational change in schools and viability of proposed models just as in the business sector (Beycioglu & Kondacki, 2020). Despite the numerous conceptual frameworks and implementation models, interventions in schools also fall short of intended and predefined objectives for a number of reasons.

Kim et al., (2011) noted that challenges to successful change implementation in schools is attributable to lacking managerial skill and organizational capacity, and deficits in organizational resources. Beycioglu and Kondakci (2020) offered additional explanations for consideration such as negative employee attitudes toward change, lack of organizational member engagement and participation in the proposed change, the top-down approach to change implementation, the lack of documentation or communication articulating the need for the change, and the perception of threat by organizational change recipients. In alignment with the challenges noted in the application of more traditional change approaches, school change scholars note that reciprocally, the more change initiatives fail, the number of proposed models increase yet there are no adjustments in mindset or thinking that produced previous models. According to Lawrence (2015), traditional planned change approaches reflective of the industrial age do not meet the needs of change in contemporary organizations, schools included, for several reasons.

First, Feldman (2000) and others (Orlikowski, 1996, Tsoukas & Chia, 2002) noted that a core issue in perceptions of change is that they imply static organizations and static states. The traditional episodic approach to change was based on assumptions of stable and predictable organizational contexts. Wolf (2011) pointed out that the environment of the organization is limited to its close environment, and ignores the influence of globalization and technological advancements. Second, the concept of the scale of change in traditional perspectives is a limitation given that change does not occur independent of ordinary organizational activity (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). Hakonsson et al. (2012) argued that change in the environment distorts the balance between the

organization and its environment, and attempts to address gaps decrease organizational performance. Thirdly, researchers Weick and Quinn (1999) pointed out that the dominant thinking about change, that the origin of the need to change rests with senior leaders and managers in top-down fashion limits the potential for collaboration or bottom-up perspectives to be seen as valuable, potentially impacting sustainability of the planned change. Lastly, the traditional approaches to change do not account for the instability created in organizations resulting from emergent developments internal and external to the organization even if the planned change was successful (Beycioglu & Kondackci, 2020, p. 795). According to Wolf (2011), planned change approaches have yielded little success in schools as well in organizations of different types and other approaches that acknowledge shifts in society, politics and the market are needed for sustainable success.

Educational practitioners proposed a that continuous change involving three key activities: sensemaking, learning, and improvisation for successful change implementation in schools (Beycioglu & Kondackci, 2020). According to Weick (2000), sensemaking refers to cognitive processes which support organizational members in the interpretation of activities and structures and their relative engagement as a result of interpretation. Lawrence (2015) suggested that sensemaking enables the development of shared meaning for organizational members around practices and systems. Learning, according to Weick & Quinn (1999), is the process of knowledge acquisition and interpretation. Flores et al. (2012) argued that this organizational learning is critical for continuous change as it includes retaining and sharing knowledge, adding a social aspect. Lastly, Orlikowski (1996) suggested that improvisation refers to the tendency of

organizational members to adjust or devise new ways of being in the absence of a pre-existing plan or program, and in response to stimuli from inside and outside of the organization.

According to Wolf (2011), the concepts of sensemaking, learning, and improvisation highlight the social nature of continuous change. Brown and Duguid (1991) noted that modifications in work practice made by individuals are shared with other members, typically in informal settings. Ford and Ford (1995) argued that change is generated and conveyed in interactions and conversations, prompting the creation of new meanings that facilitate change and development within organizations. Continuous change is concealed in interactions, and the interactions over time impact organizational practices. In this manner, change is not a discreet or moment-in-time practice, rather it is ongoing, pervasive and constant activities that emerge through the daily interactions and practices of organizational members (Beycioglu & Kondakci, 2020). As a result, contrary to top-down planned and emergent approaches, continuous change is a bottom-up process.

### ***Challenges of Implementing Change in Schools***

Fullan and Hargreaves are two often cited scholars, influential in the field of educational change (Burner, 2018). Both suggest three dimensions of educational change in schools: curricula or material changes, new teaching strategies, and changing the beliefs of people (Fullan, 2007). According to Burner (2015), educational change is not fully realized without addressing all three dimensions (p. 124). According to Fullan (2007) the history of intensive educational change goes back to the decade of the 1960's,

a period of large-scale reform socially and politically, but not educationally, which resulted in schools being somewhat neglected. With the release of the “Colman Report”, educational researchers learned that student backgrounds played a larger part in their overall school success than previously thought, which prompted the thinking that schools could do little to alleviate the social inequities challenging students. Focus thereafter shifted to innovative school models, yet the models were sparse, sporadically effective, and innovations were not sustainable (Burner, 2018). According to Fullan (2007), the 1980’s were marked with large scale accountability reforms with little thought on how to actually achieve change, and the 1990’s can be described as the “decade of pressure and support”, meaning that progress and achievement were expected and progress monitored as with the case of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy in England (Bruner, 2018). At the point of the millennium, the focus shifted to core content, critical instruction students needed in areas such as reading, math, science and the humanities. While nations were operating with centralized and decentralized curricula, Zhao (2011) argued that “education should be changing for diversity in a diverse world not sameness”, suggesting that the current educational systems through focusing on performance on standardized assessments, devalued student strengths and labeled some inadequate (Bruner, 2018, p. 126).

Trends and educational foci during these decades did little to provide guidance for administrators or teachers in how to go about implementing change or responding to social, political, market shifts (Bruner, 2018). In response to the first two types of change noted by Fullan (2007), material changes and new instructional strategies, school

administrators have called for more training and professional development. Action research also developed in support of educational change, beginning with practice, and then monitoring the resulting teacher and student outcomes over time based on a particular strategy. According to Bruner (2018), teacher leaders have also been effective in driving educational change, as they serve as “peer professional developers”. What has been absent, and impacting successful change in schools, is the practices of drawing teachers and staff into what interests them to support motivation to change, the reflection and collaborative approaches needed to provide relevance for the change. Researchers note that the lack of collective reflection and shared understanding of the need for change is a critical component, that when missing, hinders the third type of change, changing the beliefs of people (Fullan 2007; Hayward & Spencer, 2010). Few change efforts will be sustainable in schools without investment in systems and structures that support the questioning, challenging, and shifting of beliefs about teachers, students and their capabilities (Bruner, 2018).

Biesta (2010) noted that the misalignment between policy, practice, and research as a barrier to educational change as well. As policy is often developed in response to social or political perspectives, without insight or reflection from key stakeholders such as teachers, parent, and students, potential impact is underscored, which hinders effective change. Stech (2013) added that there should be strong reasons cited for educational change, as cultural values are at the foundation of education and shifts can have cultural, social, and economic consequences. Additionally, as policy informs practice, research should be ongoing to assess effectiveness on the targeted outcomes as professional

practice is the nature of a hypothesis, and thus has to be formed, developed, and tested continually (Biesta, 2010).

Vancikova et al. (2023) also noted that lack of effective teacher preparation and support in the face of bureaucratic pressure for improvement is another barrier to educational change (p. 57). Levin and Fullan (2008) noted that the omission of two-way communication with stakeholders about the perceived successes and challenges in the wake of change is a significant hindrance as well. Bruner (2018) noted that the relationship between people and education is mutual, reciprocal and circular rather than linear, and that those who are impacted by change are also integral to effective change implementation processes. Vancikova et al. (2023) noted that reform can be perceived as the relationship between action and reaction, which requires a number of things including stakeholder voice, communication, understanding and a willingness on the part of policy makers to reflect and learn lessons from previous mistakes.

### ***Impact of Change on Staff***

A wealth of literature is available on organizational change and its challenges, however according to Hubbart (2023) few studies address the challenge of change aversion in the course of discussing the change process. Change resistance and aversion are often referred to synonymously as related behaviors and solutions are similar, yet their origins are different. According to Hubbart change resistance is often thought of as reluctance to accept an imposed change, while change aversion may be thought of as the avoidance of a change where an individual has control. For purposes of this study, the

distinction is less important than the impact that each have on organizational change outcomes.

In the context of organizational change, resistance and aversion are normal and instinctive processes that can be mitigated through pre-emptive strategies supporting cultural acceptance at all stages of the change implementation process (Evans & Evans, 2018; Hubbart, 2023). Psychological, emotional, and social factors are strong influencers in individuals adapting to new situations, as they may fear the unknown and require reassurances that proposed changes are beneficial. The diversity present in organizations warrants better understanding of how effective communication can mitigate resistance and aversion in hopes of successful change implementation (Hubbart, 2023).

Current literature provides some leading explanations for individual and collective resistance or aversion. Endrejat (2021) offered the concept of comfort zone, stating that where they feel safety, security, and familiarity are compromised, individuals and groups can be resistant or unwilling to try something new. Singh (2012) noted the significance of individuals' professional expectations regarding new things, as the proposed change may upset expectations around perceived efficiency or productivity. Cognitive dissonance occurs when ideological conflicts create mental discomfort as individuals reflect on the old versus the proposed new. Caliskan and Gokalp (2020) noted that in determining whether to embrace the new or hold on to the familiar, the inability to reconcile thoughts and action lead to resistance or avoidance.

The relative preparedness of staff for all stages of the change process is very closely related to the ability of leaders to clearly communicate and build cultures of trust

openness, and transparency. Another influencer on staff response to change is perceptions of truth that impact member buy-in during periods of change. Researchers note that the acceptance of truth, the semantics of truth-telling, and buy-in are arguably the most significant obstacles to short- and long-term organizational change success (Hubbart, 2023; Kotter & Whitehead, 2010; Stokke, 2014). Leaders at all levels of an organization must deliver a unified truth in sharing the need for and approach for change if the outcome is to be successful. Hubbart (2023) warned that omission of the aspects of truth limits the ability of individuals and organizations to grow, change, develop and evolve (p. 4). The communication of truth can be difficult, as the need for change often requires the acceptance of a deficiency. Buy-in in the context of organizational change according to Hubbart (2023) could be considered an honest reciprocal agreement between leaders of an organization and stakeholders to work together towards successful change, and this is hindered when leaders are unwilling or unable to commit to honest reciprocal empathic discourse with stakeholders at all stages of the change process.

### **Leadership and Communication Strategies**

#### ***Role of School Leadership in Organizational Change***

Fernandez & Shaw (2020) noted that societal and other changes such as the Covid-19 Pandemic forced academic leaders to be immediately responsive, and demonstrate shared leadership, collaboration, agility and innovation. Their research and that of others (Lancet et al., 2023) noted that leadership is a key driver of change implementation in schools, and supports the proposition that continuous change approaches are more effective for schools (Beycioglu & Kondakci, 2020). Education

researchers have identified common features of successful supports needed to fully and effectively benefit all stakeholders to school communities referred to as “implementation drivers” (Blase et al., 2015). These drivers, competency, organization, and leadership respectively, can be leveraged to encourage, advance and sustain capacity of school staff in implementing innovations as needed and intended. Competency drivers are those mechanisms that develop, improve and sustain individual capacity to implement innovation and practices beneficial to key organizational constituents, the students (Blase et al., 2015). Organization drivers support the establishing and maintenance of systems within the school environment that facilitate effective teaching and learning (Blase et al., 2015). Lastly, according to Blase et al., (2015), leadership drivers are those strategic mechanisms that leaders employ to address challenges, make decisions, and support organizational functioning. These have been categorized by Blase et al., 2015 as technical and adaptive strategies.

According to Blase et al., (2015) technical challenges generally have clear pathways to solutions, and can be addressed with more traditional management approaches given the clarity in understanding of the problem and dimensions by stakeholders while adaptive challenges cannot, given differing stakeholder perspectives on the problem and potential solutions. Heifetz et al. (2009) noted that response to adaptive challenges, change, necessitates leadership on multiple levels, and identified six strategies involving awareness of the challenge; identification of potential challenges to organizational values, practices and relationships; the creation of safe spaces for members to challenge status quo; creating environments where all members can take greater

ownership for their work; and protecting all voices so that constructive disagreement can occur (p. 117). These strategies align with Kezar & Holcombe's (2017) proposition that institutions operating with shared leadership models have benefited from greater degrees of agility, innovation, and collaboration over those with outdated, inflexible hierarchical leadership paradigms.

### ***Effective Leadership for Navigating Change in Schools***

Leadership practices conducive to continuous change relate to the creation of organizational conditions that ensure the quality of employment relationships according to Kim et al. (2011). Given the bottom-up properties of continuous change, conditions such as control over one's work practices, empowerment, and social interactions are key variables that contribute to the quality of employment relationships. Kondakci et al. (2016) extended this discussion to include ensuring trust, facilitating knowledge sharing, and giving members power over their practice, as key variables also contributing to the quality of employment relationships.

Fernandez and Shaw (2020) noted that to effectively support schools in any sort of pivot or change, leaders must be aware of and implement strategies through intellectual stimulation, idealized influence, and inspiration combined with providing essential training and resources for staff needed to sustain the proposed shifts. Fernandez and Shaw also noted that school leaders who are goal-oriented, risk takers, and strategic long-term thinkers can create spirals of success and gain competitive advantage in the engagement of new and veteran staff in the redesign of educational environments (p. 41). Further, academic leaders are encouraged to be courageous in the disruption of patterns

of behavior, the challenging of opinions and organizational norms with flexibility and understanding given that the role and influence of the leader are magnified in times of change (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Vancikova et al., 2023).

Beycioglu and Kondacki (2020) suggested that claiming change to be embedded in the daily practices of organizational members does not devalue leadership as leaders have critical roles in bringing about continuous change (p. 799). Primary roles include the creation of an organizational culture nurturing continuous change and capitalizing on small-scale changes that will ultimately become repertoires of practice. Researchers have suggested that distributed leadership and that non-linear approaches to change management are compatible with continuous improvement approaches to change (Kondacki et al., 2016; Seashore, 2009). In addition, Harris (2010) noted that embracing a distributed leadership approach encourages the collaboration and inclusivity required for sustained change implementation. Gronn (2002) argued that leadership is a collective property of the organization, and that each member has the potential and responsibility for contributing to leadership processes aligning with distributive approaches.

As connecting with organizational members, establishing mutual trust, knowledge sharing and sensemaking are critical for the success of any change, effective communication is at the core of continuous improvement in schools (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Lancet et al., 2023; Vancikova et al., 2023). The what and how of communication are of most significance in creating conditions for continuous change.

## **Change Communication**

In a review of change management in over 400 organizations, Hiatt & Creasey (2003) identified the greatest contributors to effective change implementation were ongoing employee engagement at all levels, and clear and consistent communication through the life of the initiative (Olalekan et al, 2021). Lawrence (2015) reported that leadership has the role of clearly articulating and communicating for all organizational stakeholders, a necessary dialogue of change and of pioneering collective meaning making for change. Organizational leaders own the responsibility for awareness of organizational positioning, recognizing the need for change, and creating conditions to steer the organization toward the desired state (Olalekan et al, 2021). Leaders should not see themselves as initiators of change intervention, but rather creators of structures leading to continuous change: structural elements to achieve and sustain change and identification of systemic processes involved in building and destroying inertia (Hakonsson et al., 2012).

Change can be stressful and unsettling for organizational members at all levels. As such, connecting with people is critical for leader effectiveness, with accountability, trustworthiness, and integrity being closely related concepts that support continuous change in schools (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Lancet et al., 2023). Best practices for communication as enumerated by researchers include several elements.

Lance et al. (2023) suggested that leaders own the responsibility for developing and articulating a clear vision and strong sense of purpose for the organization (p. 121). Fernandez and Shaw (2020) agreed and stated that leaders should communicate clearly

and frequently with all stakeholders at all times, especially during periods of change. Further, leaders should be cognizant of not only the message, but also communication media chosen for delivery given stakeholder preferences. In this regard, Cowen (2020) suggests leaders find a balance in media as well as messaging, sharing hopes and silver linings along with current states and challenges, and being careful to not over or under communicate. Other aspects of communication include the fostering of a school-wide inclusive and welcoming culture, supporting leader's commitment to all stakeholder groups (Lance et al., 2023).

School leaders are also responsible for communicating in manners that create a safe environment embracing diversity of perspectives and value of all stakeholder voices (Beycioglu & Kondakci, 2021; Fernandez & Shaw, 2020; Lance et al., 2023). Safe organizational environments support the creation of shared meaning, shared ownership, and collaboration amongst all members and stakeholders. Member perceptions of being valued and heard supports morale building and engagement, especially during periods of adjustment or change. Levine and Cohen (2018) suggest that empathic listening skills are critical for leaders, as obtaining buy-in from stakeholders requires a collaborative rather than a describe-and-defend approach. There is the need for co-creation with stakeholders, which can involve discussion, debate, and equity in decision making, all of which point to stronger outcomes for the proposed initiative. Vancikova et al. (2023) noted that successful change and reform in schools stems from leaders' desires to hear and reflect on the voices of those who are impacted by changes and charged with implementing them (p. 50).

## Summary and Conclusions

The ability to adapt and respond to societal and global market shifts is arguably one of the most important characteristics for organizational sustainability, regardless of organization type. The diversity represented in current organizations presents challenges for leaders in a number of areas, especially in considerations in the preparation for and implementation of change. There are currently as many as five generations represented in the workforce at present (Partin, 2024). Researchers in leadership, management, and organizational change are beginning to focus on generational differences and their impact on all aspects of organization. Current literature on the multigenerational workforce has spanned such topics as communication of vision and values to the multigenerational workforce (Freeburg, 2019; Peralta, 2021); the multigenerational workforce and perceptions of well-being (Cvenkel, 2020); leadership challenges with the multigenerational workforce (Alferjany & Alias, 2020; Iqbal, 2024; Pitout & Hoque, 2022); and multigenerational workforce reactions to organizational change (Johnson, 2023), however there has been little to no specific focus on multigenerational employee perceptions of communication during periods of organizational change. According to Dwyer (2020), organizational communication has been the aim of a large body of empirical study, however in the majority of instances research has focused on business and corporate environments rather than schools.

Given the nuances in preferences for the multigenerational workforce, school leaders must gain as much as possible with regard to effective engagement so as to maximize member interaction and organizational outcomes. Dempsey et al. (2022) and

Vrcelj (2023) noted that organizational communication during periods of change is arguably the most critical in terms of successful or unsuccessful change implementation. Kalogiannidis (2020) noted that when considering the multigenerational workforce, an additional layer of complexity is added for communication. Employee perceptions and understanding of the what and how of change is critical, and that understanding comes through the meaning and sensemaking opportunities created by way of organizational conditions influenced by leaders. Shrivastava et al. (2022) noted increased consensus about the role of communication in preparing employees prior to and during change implementation, examined how cultural variations influenced the effectiveness of communication.

The theoretical framework of social constructivism and the conceptual framework of Goffman's Frame Analysis (1974) provide lenses through which to further explore the intersections between generational membership and change communication in schools. Framing is a communicative action or set of actions comprised of language, thought, and forethought (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996); and espouses a transmission view of communication aligned with the social constructivist perspective which demands co-creation of meaning between organizational leaders and members. As frames influence individual perceptions, it is imperative to better understand how the filter of generational membership is an influencer in the creation of meaning by organizational members.

To further explore the identified gap in literature, a qualitative descriptive case study was conducted in a school community with members representing multiple generations recently implementing a change initiative, to explore their experiences with

change communication as recipients and implementers of change. To follow in Chapter 3 is a detailed description of the research methodology and its appropriateness for the study.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore how multigenerational teachers and staff experience change communication as recipients and agents of change in schools. Change is a constant for organizations in all disciplines seeking to remain competitive and thrive. Organizational communication is critical at all times, especially during periods of change (Dempsey et. al.,2022; Freeburg, 2020; Kalogiannidis, 2020). Ensuring the effectiveness of change communication for organizational employees is a task that rests with organizational leaders; however, this becomes more challenging when considering the multigenerational workforce. There are at least five generations represented in the workforce at present, each with their own expectations for engagement and communication (Agrawal et. al., 2023, Alferjany & Alias, 2020; Iqbal, 2024). While there is considerable literature at present on organizational change implementation, there is little on change implementation in school organizations. I aimed to explore multigenerational teacher and staff experiences of organizational change communication in schools in effort to increase effective teacher/staff engagement during periods of change, lessen teacher/staff attrition during periods of change, and to better prepare schools for successful change implementation.

In this chapter, I provide a justification for the research design; discussion on the role of the researcher; and detailed discussion of the methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures for conducting research.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The following research question guided the study:

RQ: How do multigenerational teachers and staff experience organizational change communication as recipients and implementers of change in schools?

Subquestions guiding this study were as follows:

SQ1: What are multigenerational teachers' and staff members' preferences regarding communication methods and strategies during times of organizational change?

SQ2: How does the quality of change communication affect multigenerational teachers' and staff members' perceptions of school culture, stability, and support?

SQ3: What communication practices can school leaders adopt to improve multigenerational teacher and staff retention during periods of change?

The central concepts in this study were multigenerational teacher and staff experiences and perceptions regarding organizational change communication in a school environment. To better understand the experiences and perceptions of multigenerational teachers and staff in schools, a qualitative case study approach was used. The case study approach was appropriate as it allowed me to obtain detailed, rich descriptions of participant experiences as related to the focus of the study within in a specific school environment, the case (Denny & Weckesser, 2022; Islam & Aldaihani, 2022). According to Yin (1989, 1993), a case study is a research strategy characterized by studying a phenomena in its real context using several sources of evidence to explain the phenomena observed along with its complexity. In general, the case study represents one strategy for use when a researcher has a “how” or “why” question, when events are difficult to

control due to occurrence in real life settings. Further, they are also appropriate when researcher aim to answer “what” questions, regarding the experiences of individuals in a given case (Lavarda & Bellucci, 2022). The constructivist worldview suggests that things are subjective and relative to the individuals who experience them, as such the case study approach lends itself to the depth of learning and understanding to be gained from hearing from the individuals themselves. A quantitative approach, in this case would not be appropriate. This research did not aim to explore relationships or causality among variables, but rather the experiences of the individuals included in the case.

Lavarda and Bellucci (2022) suggested that the case study approach is appropriate to investigate strategy as practice within organizations which allows for the study of a given organizational phenomena and related dynamic social process, micro activities (routines), individual behavior, interactions, and processes (p. 539). In this case, the organizational phenomena was the development and dissemination of organizational communication during periods of change, which is also seen as organizational practice. The experiences and perceptions of multigenerational teachers and staff with regard to shared communication represent the resulting social processes, interactions, and behaviors to be understood in greater depth through study.

Dwyer (2020) has noted that while organizational communication has been the aim of a large body of empirical study, the majority of research has focused on business and corporate environments rather than schools. I focused on organizational communication as experienced by specified individuals in a specific school environment. Case study research is a popular approach for investigations in schools (Hart, 2024;

Morris et. al., 2023). Hart (2024) employed the case study approach to better understand teacher perspectives on inclusive classrooms and was able to learn much more about the influences on teacher perceptions using this approach. Morris et. al., (2023) employed the case study approach to gain in depth understanding of perceptions regarding the balance between school improvement implementation and workload pressures. Case study research has also been instrumental in understanding the complexities of the multigenerational workforce in terms of collaboration, conflict, and management strategies (DeJesus, 2020; DeNobile & Bilgin, 2022; Kulkarni & Rai, 2023; Pitout & Hoque, 2022).

### **Other Research Approaches**

Given the implementation of case study research as observed in literature in the disciplines of education and the multigenerational workforce, it was an appropriate methodology for my study. There are other qualitative approaches to inquiry such as ethnography, narrative, phenomenology, and grounded theory. Each one was worthy of initial consideration given their ability to meet the stated goals of a specific investigation. A brief discussion of each is to follow along with the rationale for why they were not selected.

#### ***Ethnography***

Ethnography is a qualitative approach that requires a researcher to become involved in the daily living and cultural exchanges of a participant's world socially (O'Reilly, 2009). There is a strong observational component to ethnographic research which contributes to the rigor of the study. An ethnographic approach was not

appropriate for this study, as participant social or cultural aspects of daily living were outside of the scope of my study.

### ***Phenomenology***

The phenomenological approach to research is an approach that consists of subjective perception and cognitive related strategies (Eberle, 2014). This approach is used for researchers to perceive and observe participants in depth using sensory and social awareness, memory, cognitive processes, and linguistics (Smith, 2013). Reported results are based on the subjective interpretations and analysis per the researcher. This approach did not align with the intended purpose of this study, as the focus of the investigation was not to understand participants' lived experiences with given phenomena.

### ***Narrative***

The narrative approach to research uses stories to learn about individuals and social change (Parks, 2023). This approach uses a complex frame structure as there are no clear starting or ending points. The investigation focuses on the manner in which stories are structured and shared. As such, this approach was not appropriate for my study as data was not shared in the form of narrated stories.

### ***Grounded theory***

Mills et. al., (2014) stated that grounded theory as an approach requires the collection of data based on a developing theory. The theory is then grounded in the data resulting from the implementation of research. This approach has been referred to a technique of interpretation done subjectively, wherein a researcher situates data

contextually that aims to explain the complexities of human social interaction. This approach was not appropriate for the proposed study as I did not intend to develop or advance a new theory.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In this qualitative study, I was the sole researcher and therefore the primary collection instrument. Data were collected using a semistructured interview protocol developed from guidance by several literature sources on semistructured interview development (see Aishath & Maslawati, 2024; Naz et. al., 2022; Roberts, 2020; Ruslin et. al., 2022). Mills et. al. (2009) suggested that human cognition is comprised of the processing of information using thought and reasoning. As such, was possible that during the course of conducting research, a researcher's bias could interfere with data collection, interpretation and analysis of data. Researchers are cautioned to be aware of subconscious thoughts or feelings that could taint or influence the data. A suggested way to manage the potential for bias is to employ the *epoché* technique.

The *epoché* technique is a process whereby a researcher is intentional in their refraining from imposing personal bias, judgement, or thoughts that may impair the quality of data during the collection process (Moustakas, 1994). This served to neutralize the researcher's inner voice and thoughts to ensure that at the point of analysis, only verbatim participant statements are considered and not influenced by any preconceived notions or ideas developed by the researcher as the participant shares. This practice allowed the researcher to receive and perceive information outside of self for a new

experience. While conducting semistructured interviews I employed this technique to focus solely on participant responses.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection Logic**

A target population is defined by Saunders et. al. (2019) as a “complete set of cases or group members that is the actual focus of the research inquiry, and from which a sample may be drawn” (p. 1). The target population for this research was multigenerational teachers and staff employed in the partner site during the recent implementation of a planned organizational change. For purposes of this study, employed referred to an individual actively on payroll and reporting to the partner site daily for a specific role or position. Administration or other members of school leadership were intentionally excluded, as much of the current literature on change perception is based on the perceptions of leadership rather than other employees as recipients and implementers of change (see Dwyer, 2020).

As qualitative approaches are primarily intended to gain depth versus breadth of understanding, the sampling technique employed should align with the aim of the study. There are many types of sampling designs, and within each there is the opportunity to compare and contrast similarities and differences in the phenomenon of interest. Purposive sampling, widely used in qualitative research, is a nonprobability sampling technique where a researcher deliberately selects participants based on specific characteristics, experiences, or knowledge relevant to the research question (Palinkas et. al. 2015) The aim is to gather rich and detailed information from individuals who can

provide valuable insights into the phenomenon under study. Participants are chosen "on purpose" rather than randomly, allowing the researcher to focus on specific groups or individuals with the most relevant information for their research goals (Palinkas et. al., 2015) Though it is widely used in qualitative and mixed methods research, there are challenges that can arise depending on the purposeful sampling design selected. For this reason, there should be clear intent by the researcher, on the aim to be achieved through the sampling design.

For this research, criterion sampling was selected as there were specific individuals appropriate for the study as well as those who were not, all of whom are employed at the partner site. As I aimed to gain in depth understanding of multigenerational teacher/staff perceptions of organizational communication during period of organizational change, only individuals meeting specified criterion were to be included.

Aside from current or past employment with the partner site, individuals selected for inclusion were over the age of 18, thus able to provide consent on their own. Potential participants must have been employed with the organization during the most recent period of organizational change, 2 years or more in this case, to have true first-hand experience of organizational change communication. They must have been a member of one of the five generations currently represented in the multigenerational workforce (Traditionalist, Baby Boomer, Generation X, Generation Y (Millennial), or Generation Z), and they must not currently or at the time of change implementation be in a role that

is considered administrative or supervisory, as this study is focusing solely on the perceptions of teachers and staff.

Potential participants were recruited via Facebook solicitation and email correspondence in the newsletter at the participant site. The purpose for the study and criterion for participation were outlined in the email. In both instances, a Google Form was developed for interested participants to complete and enter demographic as well as contact information. Questions in the Google Form addressed potential participant name, age, current or previous state of employment with the partner site and dates, as well as current or previous role or position held. Preferred method of contact, phone and email were requested also. All responses received in the Google Form were populated into a Google Sheets format for analysis and provided the opportunity for me to exclude any potential participant not meeting the established criteria outlined above. I did not have a specified number of participants to be included from each generational group however the estimate was that 10 individuals per generational group would be sufficient. In the event that data saturation occurred prior to the 10th participant in each generational cohort, no additional interviews were conducted for a given cohort. In the event that saturation was not achieved, the estimate of total interviews to be conducted would be 25, five from participants representing each of the five generational cohorts of focus in the study. As there were no members of the Traditionalist generation employed at the time of change implementation, no member was interviewed. There was a total of 16 participants representing the following generations: Baby Boomer, Generation X, Generation Y (Millennial), and Generation Z.

Potential participants meeting the established criteria were then contacted individually to provide more detailed information regarding the study, the format for data collection and consent for participation documentation. Upon receiving written consent from each potential participant, the interviews were scheduled using Google Calendar and the Google Meets virtual system. Google Meets was used due to the ability to record interviews and obtain print transcripts of the interview upon completion. This availability of the transcript allowed the researcher to focus fully on following the interview guide and the ordering of questions for consistency with each participant, and worry less about note taking during the interview. The semistructured interviews were scheduled for 60 minutes to allow for all questions and clarifying probes, as needed, to be asked by me and allow ample time for the participant to share. Upon conclusion of the interview, each participant was asked if they had any additional information they wished to share as related to the topic of study and the interview concluded. Upon receipt of the transcript from the recorded session, a copy of the transcript was shared with each participant prior to analysis, for confirmation of their responses. Upon confirmation from participants after reviewing the transcript, transcript data was reviewed by me for themes found in the responses. Themes were then be entered into a coding support database such as QDA Miner. QDA Miner is an advanced qualitative data analysis software, for tagging, coding, and analyzing data.

### **Instrumentation**

Naz et. al. (2022) suggested that in qualitative research, there is no one absolute reality, but rather multiple realities constructed by individuals within specific social and

cultural contexts . As such, there are multiple possible interpretations of a given event or experience in context. As qualitative research help researchers move beyond numbers to understand the perspectives of participants, the quality and trustworthiness of a study is largely impacted by the rigor in data collection procedures. Exploratory case studies are done to gather information specific to a given event or phenomena from experts directly, those who have experienced the event or phenomena first hand. In this research approach, data collection is often done in the form of interviews.

An interview is a dialogue between the researcher and research participants. This process requires a participant to make themselves available to answer a set of questions relevant to the focus of the study. The structure of interviews can vary between structured, semistructured, closed or open-ended. A structured interview is the most formal type, as research questions are framed around essential topics and cannot be framed in a different way to answer research questions. Semistructured interviews are flexible, unique to each participant, and based upon open-ended questions (Gilliam, 2000). The use of semistructured interviews was preferred over the structured interview as it allowed the interviewer to explore the opinions and ideas of participants and probe deeper for clarification especially when dealing with sensitive or complex subject matters. Questions were preplanned and probes were inserted as needed in the event more clarification was needed from a particular participant.

According to Naz et. al., (2022), semistructured interviews should adhere to three principles: specification, division, and tacit assumption (p. 44). Specification refers to the focus of the actual interview questions. Division refers to the wording and division of

questions into groupings or categories effectively. Tacit assumption refers to the fact that the researcher must discern the true meaning that is found within participant responses.

The researcher must take care in the design of research methodology as any oversights or flaws can distort results. Kallio et. al., (2016) suggest that researchers should follow five phases for the sound development of the semistructured interview for research: identify prerequisites, use previously acquired knowledge, formulate a preliminary guide, pilot test the guide, present the revised guide for research (p. 45). This researcher has determined that this was the best approach to develop the interview guide for this study.

### ***Data Collection Instrument***

The data collection instrument used with participants during the semistructured interviews was researcher developed. The semistructured interview questions (Appendix C) were developed with guidance from researchers in the field, after an extensive review of literature was performed on each of the topics and subtopics for the study (Naz et. al, 2022; Ruslin et. al., 2022). The review of literature informed key topics of focus for the development of the semistructured interview questions and guiding probes to elicit more information from participants during the course of the interview if needed.

Semistructured interviews were conducted with consenting participants after being scheduled via the Google Calendar. They were audio recorded and transcribed using the Google Meets virtual meeting platform. Upon conclusion of the semistructured interview with each participant, both the audio recording and the print transcription

document were stored on a storage device for confidentiality and security until such time as they were needed for analysis.

In qualitative research, "content validity" refers to the extent to which a research instrument, like an interview guide or thematic analysis framework, adequately captures all relevant aspects of the phenomenon being studied (Keely et. al., 2013). Ensuring that the data collected comprehensively reflects the full range of perspectives and experiences within the target population is critical for the quality of the study. Content validity essentially assesses whether the research tools are measuring what they are intended to measure by covering all important dimensions of the topic. Content validity was established for the research instrument on the basis of two outcomes: saturation and member checking.

Member checking occurred at two stages of the research. Immediately after the semistructured interview, participants were given a copy of their transcribed sharing to ensure accuracy of their statements. Secondly, participants received documentation reflecting initial findings of research to ensure their experiences were accurately captured.

Achieving "saturation" in qualitative data collection, where no new themes or insights emerge from further interviews, can be considered an indicator of good content validity, suggesting that the research has adequately captured the range of relevant information (Saunders et. al., 2018; Zamanzadeh, et. al., 2014). For this research, participants were interviewed until such time as saturation was achieved and also all eligible participants have been interviewed.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

For the main research study, data were collected from eligible participants at the selected participant site. The participant site selected for the study was a school that had recently implemented a large-scale change. The school underwent structural change that impacted staffing, curricula, and operations of the school. The researcher had a professional relationship with a member of the management team. The researcher did not have a direct relationship with the participants for the study. To that end, there was no conflict of interest such as a reporting relationship, contract, or any situation that may have created inherent bias in the study.

The researcher sent an email solicitation letter to the organizational leaders requesting permission to solicit participants for the study. Once permission was granted, the developed participant solicitation letter (Appendix B) was emailed to all potentially eligible staff members by the researcher based on a staff name list excluding employees in supervisory or administrative roles. Upon receiving responses from willing participants, the researcher developed Participant Informed Consent document which sent to them as a fillable PDF document. Once the consent document had been received from potential participants, the researcher reached out to each individual to schedule the semistructured interview. Interviews were scheduled in clusters of dates based on the generational membership of participants, which supported the assignment of unique source identifiers (USI) to be used at the point of analysis.

The researcher collected data from participants through semistructured interviews that were scheduled individually. The researcher used the interview protocol to ensure consistency in data collection with each participant. Interviews were scheduled with participants over a period of 1 month, each interview lasting approximately 1 hour. The researcher practiced interviewing with the protocol and guide prior to engaging with participants, as the quality of data collected was dependent upon the skills of the interviewer.

The semistructured interviews were recorded and transcribed through the Google Meets virtual meeting platform. Upon conclusion of the interview with each participant, debriefing took place to inform the participant of next steps and the need for them to review the transcript prior to analysis. Upon participant confirmation of accuracy for the transcript, the unique source identifier was added to a spreadsheet for tracking the progression toward interview completion for all participants. The USI was in numerical format, and represented the sequential order of the interviews along with the date the interview was conducted. For example, 01 represents the first interview and the date of July 5, 2025 was the date the interview was conducted, the USI would then be 0107052025. The first number increased sequentially to correspond with the number of interviews conducted on a given date. The process allowed for tracking of participant interviews and allowed for the removal of participant names or other individual identifiers at the point of data analysis.

In the event that recruitment yielded too few participants, additional follow up would have been done using the same recruitment process for those potentially eligible

that did not respond. This was not needed as there were enough participants to complete the study as proposed. Upon conclusion of each participant interview, data was stored on a removable drive and placed in a lockbox for security until they were needed for analysis.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Thematic analysis is a highly popular technique among qualitative researchers for analyzing qualitative data which generally consists of thick, rich, descriptive data (Naeem et. al., 2023). This technique was used to analyze participant responses using a step-by-step process called the Framework Method. The Framework Method has been used for data management and qualitative analysis (Gale et. al, 2013; Goldsmith, 2021; Naeem et. al., 2023). This method has been used in research in various disciplines such as education, sociology, psychology, medicine and the health sciences to effectively assist in the analysis of qualitative data (Lester et. al., 2020; Naeem et. al., 2023; Saldana, 2024).

The Framework Method as introduced by Ritchie & Spencer (1994) was implemented to assist with the analysis of participant data obtained from semistructured interviews, and to assist with generating answers to the predetermined research questions. This method supported the researcher in creating inferential descriptions and explanations from clusters of themes drawn from raw data. The data then became a table of codes that could be revisited by the researcher to draw conclusions from it. As data were encoded and added to the table, they became more manageable to work with during analysis. The Framework Method was used to prepare the data for analysis. This method is comprised of seven steps, and each step is built upon the previous step.

### *The Framework Method*

**Step 1: Transcription, Familiarization with the Data.** This is the initial phase of thematic analysis. It involves the transcription of data and familiarizing oneself with it after the conducting of interviews has concluded. The researcher will review the data in depth to identify initial themes and important sections. The research will select quotes from the participant statements that bring the data to life and represent the diverse views and patterns that are relative to the research objectives (Goldsmith, 2021; Naeem et. al., 2023). This begins with the researcher listening to the audio recorded interviews and the corresponding transcripts. None of the data were to be omitted or revised at this stage.

**Step 2: Selection of Keywords/Interview Familiarization.** This phase involves the close examination of the data by the researcher from interviews to identify recurring patterns, terms. These keywords capture participants' experiences and perceptions and are derived directly from the data.

**Step 3: Data Coding.** During this stage, short phrases or words known as codes are assigned to segments of data that capture the core message, significance or theme. Generating codes requires looking at notes made during the familiarization stage. Themes relating to generational member values, experiences, and communication preferences will be coded.

**Step 4: Theme Development/Analytical Framework Development.** This stage involves organizing codes into meaningful groups to identify patterns and relationships informing answers to the research questions for the study. This stage may require several iterations to find an exhaustive list of developed codes. Themes go beyond being

recurring elements because they correspond to meanings that will link the participant responses to the research questions.

**Step 5: Conceptualization Through Interpretation of Keywords, Codes, and Themes.** This step involves the understanding and defining concepts that emerge from the data. The researcher is to identify social patterns and refine them into definitions that align with research questions. Researchers often use visual tools like diagrams or models to identify and understand the relationships among identified concepts. The quality of definitions is determined based on clarity, accuracy, reliability, applicability, and the potential for contribution to theory and practice (Naeem et. al., 2023).

**Step 6: Development of a Conceptual Model/Framework Table.** The raw data support in the development of a conceptual model. This process involves the creation of a unique representation of the data and is often guided by existing theories. The model supports the answering of research questions and to explain the study's contribution to the existing body of research on the topic of the study. This step culminates the process of data analysis as it is inclusive of all of the findings and insights derived from the data.

**Step 7: Data Interpretation.** At this stage, differences between observed patterns are sought out. Discrepant cases are those that do not conform to the research goals, and there is always the possibility that researchers will exclude cases. The exclusion of cases is unethical and will disqualify the study report and findings. This study aims to document all interview discussions with participants, including those which may represent a discrepant case. None of the information will be excluded and, in the event, discrepant data emerges, an explanation for the discrepancy will be sought.

QDA Miner Lite qualitative analysis software will be used in the analysis of data for this research study.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches to research have terms that relate to the quality of findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The concepts of validity and reliability are associated with quantitative research whereas with qualitative research trustworthiness is the goal. Guba and Lincoln (1994) proposed a model to establish trustworthiness of qualitative research that has four key components: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility supports confidence in the truth of reported findings. Transferability supports that results can be replicated for other studies in similar contexts. Dependability supports consistency in the observed results. Confirmability supports the ability to authenticate that data collection was done in an unbiased manner (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Researchers have supported the trustworthiness model proposed by Lincoln and Guba, suggesting it establishes rigor in qualitative research through the creation of an audit trail. This approach is discussed below as related to the current proposed study.

#### **Credibility**

As previously stated, credibility establishes the truth regarding the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). To meet criteria of credibility in this study, this proposed that semistructured interviews will be conducted with 50 teachers and staff members representing the five generational cohorts currently employed in the school participant site who experienced the implementation of a change during their employ. They are

appropriate for the study as they have first-hand personal experience of the change as implemented in the school organization. The truth lies in the fact that the potential participants' experiences and perceptions are the target of the investigation. Their inclusion in the study is critical to ensure quality and credibility of the data collected.

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the extent to which a study can be transferred to a similar contextual situation. It helps to answer the question: *can the observed results be transferred to similar workplace settings (i.e. schools with multigenerational workforces implementing a change process)?* The criteria for the study as related to the target population, multigenerational teachers and staff, allows future researchers to determine if the results obtained in this study has application potential for similar situations. Burchett et. al., (2013) posited that transferability can be achieved with a researcher's ability to ask questions that elicit thick, rich, detail and thorough in-depth documentation of the process of research implementation for future researchers to consider.

### **Dependability**

Dependability is related to the confidence of the researcher that the truth of findings, the research design, participants and contextual information is effectively captured. Learning more about the change experiences and communication preferences of multigenerational teachers and staff as they describe them is a core component of the researcher's ability to find truth in the information disclosed. The researcher's understanding that there are multiple truths to be found in participant recounts of their experiences is critical. The use of a recording mechanism during interviews with

participants will allow for the researcher to capture truth as shared by participants and also allow the researcher to confirm understanding through review of the actual words shared by participants.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability is obtained with the accuracy of information as shared by participants during semistructured interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The researcher will ensure the accuracy of information shared by participants with a video recording and print transcription of each interview. After the interviews are concluded, the data analysis phase of research will involve returning to each of the recordings and the print transcriptions rather than relying on memory. This will also allow for future replication by other researchers.

### **Ethical Procedures**

This research was not conducted until permissions from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) were obtained. The researcher was bound to all guidelines for research as set forth by the University IRB, as well as federal guidelines and regulations concerning the use of human subjects in research including (a) participant selection, and (b) obtaining informed consent from participants prior to research.

Participants were briefed on the reasons for the study and screened via Google Form to ensure adherence to study criteria prior to inclusion in the study. Once it was determined that participants met study criteria, a link to an informed consent document was shared electronically. Once the document was completed and received by the

researcher from participants, the semistructured interview was scheduled via the Google Calendar and Meets platforms.

The informed consent form included the researcher's contact information (name, email address, and phone number) as well as the dissertation chair's contact information in the event they desired to verify the validity of the study. The electronic informed consent form was printed and archived as an artifact of the participant's voluntary willingness to participate in the research study. The print artifacts were stored on a flash drive and then locked in a document box to protect participant identity and maintain their confidentiality.

All of the research and study related materials, including consent forms, interview transcripts, field notes are stored in a document lock box for the required period of time after the completion of research as required by the Walden University IRB and government regulations. Audio recordings are stored on a media storage drive and remain secured in a document lock box for the required period of time after completion of the study. After the required period of time has passed, all artifacts of the research investigation will be destroyed using a document shredder, the audio recordings will be deleted from the storage device and the device itself will be destroyed.

The seeking of consent from all participants along with their option to participate or not was evidence that no coercion or undue influence was placed on participants. The informed consent document did not contain language that may have cause participants to waive any legal rights and did not eliminate the researcher's legal responsibility or

release the researcher, the sponsor, the university, or its agents from liability or negligence.

As the researcher, made me familiar with the Walden University IRB rules and regulations concerning research with human participants. I understood that the IRB must provide written permission for this research to begin. Written permissions and other related documents were included in the informed consent package for participant review before participation.

The confidentiality of participant information was maintained by assigning a numeric code to each participant and making note of the participant's name and assigned code in a spreadsheet for later reference. After the numeric code was assigned to each participant, their names or other identifying information were used in either the analysis of or reporting of data.

### **Summary**

This chapter reviewed the research methods and design protocols necessary to prepare for the study. The aim was to provide the method of inquiry as well as to provide justification for the selection of qualitative approach using case study design for this research. This chapter provided literature reinforcing the appropriateness of the case study approach for this research given the method of collecting data for case studies, the semistructured interview. By preparing a detailed overview of the data collection and analysis processes, a clear plan was provided in the event future researchers aim to replicate the study. To follow in Chapter 4 is the presentation of the analysis of the data resulting from the participant interviews.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore how multigenerational teachers and staff experience change communication as recipients and agents of change in schools. The researcher sought to identify communication strategies for school leaders to employ during periods of change implementation that are aligned with the needs and preferences of multigenerational teachers and staff to support retention, reduce attrition, and support successful change implementation in schools. This case study was guided by one research question:

RQ: How do multigenerational school staff experience communication regarding organizational change as recipients and implementers of change?

Three sub questions were generated to explore the problem further including identifying multigenerational school staff preferred communication methods, multigenerational staff perceptions regarding quality of change communication and its impact on school culture, stability, and organizational support as well as multigenerational staff work values. The importance of organizational change communications is amplified when considering activities associated with roles of recipients versus agents of change. Though not called out often as explicitly different roles, the effective recipient and agent of change will be prepared through activities and strategy implementation that are rooted in communication (Jacobs & Keegan, 2016).

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of the procedures described in Chapter 3. The results presented herein represent an analysis of the qualitative data collected through semistructured interviews with 16 participants employed in an urban

high school where a large-scale change was recently implemented. This study's purpose and findings are linked based on participant responses to the semistructured interview questions. Participants represented multigenerational teachers and staff employed in the school during change implementation, as administrators and individuals in supervisory roles were not a part of the study focus. In the paragraphs to follow, I discuss the setting where the study was completed, the time frame it occurred in, and the interview protocol used. I also provide information about participant demographics including generational membership and role. Data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and results are discussed as well. The chapter concludes with a summary and restatement of important points that were shared in the chapter.

### **Research Setting**

This study was conducted during a time when multigenerational teacher and staff employees of a school in the city of Chicago, Illinois were navigating and adjusting to a recent large-scale change implementation which may have influenced participants' perceptions of change communication. A criterion-based purposive sampling approach was used to identify potential multigenerational staff participants working at the school, and as I had a professional relationship with an administrator at one such school, the opportunity was presented to invite staff to participate in the study. No incentive was offered to potential participants with the invitation to participate. I crafted a preliminary email explaining the nature of the study and invited interested individuals to complete a Google Form that served as a screener, designed to ensure they met inclusion criteria for the study. Twenty-two potential participants completed the screener form and met

inclusion criteria for the study. Using email contact information provided by participants, semistructured interviews were scheduled via Google Calendar based on participant requested date and time. Interviews were scheduled for 16 participants that responded. Six of the potential 22 participants shared being unavailable for participation and no further contact was had with them and they were not interviewed as a result. No interview was conducted prior to my receipt of IRB approval from Walden University.

Upon sharing the email invitation to participate in the study along with the screener form, 22 potential participants responded. A total of 16 participants responded to the request to schedule an interview, and 16 were subsequently interviewed. Each interview lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. The interviews were scheduled and conducted according to the availability shared by participants, and took place between June 28, 2025 and July 5, 2025. During the interview, I reviewed their rights as participants to end the interview at any time based with any further questions being asked. I provided each participant with the opportunity to speak freely and ask questions throughout the interview. To ensure confidentiality, I encouraged participants to select a private location prior to joining the Google Meets session, and I also conducted the interviews in a private location to ensure additional participant confidentiality. Throughout the interviews, I reminded participants that they could share as openly as they desired as their responses would remain confidential. These measures helped me to increase participants' confidence, allowing them to share freely. As a result, each participant shared their lived experiences without reluctance or hesitation.

No personal or organizational conditions influencing participants or their experiences at the time of the study existed to influence interpretation of the study results. Personnel involved in the study were consistent as the researcher was the sole point of contact for all participants. Relatively few costs were incurred in preparation for this study (ink, paper for printing transcribed interviews), and no additional costs were incurred during the course of conducting or finalizing the study. Neither professional or personal trauma was noted by participants because of participating in the study, during the interview process or once the interviews were concluded.

The sample size for this study included 16 multigenerational teachers and staff employed in a particular school where a large-scale change had recently been implemented, whom the researcher interviewed from June 28, 2025 to July 5, 2025. The interviews lasted from approximately 30 to 45 minutes. The Google Meets platform was used to conduct interviews, as print transcripts of each interview were provided by the platform upon the conclusion of each. The interviews were conducted based on participant availability and requested date and time. Upon the conclusion of each interview, the researcher followed up with each participant to share the transcript and verify their responses for accuracy from their viewpoints and perspectives. This process ensured data accuracy and added rigor to the study. There were no significant deviations from the plan outlined in Chapter 3 to collect data.

The semistructured interview questions were divided into three parts. Part 1 of the semistructured interviews consisted of questions that generated work values data for the purpose of later reference to current literature on generational membership and workplace

attributes (see IQ 1-3). Part 2 consisted of questions that generated change communication experience data (see IQ 4), questions posed focused on experiences as recipients of change (see IQ 5, 8) and as agents of change (see IQ 6, 7). Lastly, Part 3 consisted of questions that generated organizational communication preferences data (see IQ 9-12). By separating the questions into three parts, I was able to focus on the data generated in a logical manner. This format also provided an opportunity for the participants to follow the progression of questions related to the study with ease and no additional support. The interview protocol can be found at Appendix B.

Following the interviews, the print transcript in Google doc (docx) format was obtained from the Google Meets platform, and saved on an external drive for later analysis. Each transcript was linked to the corresponding interview using the unique source identifier (USI) as the document name. The unique source identifier represents the chronological sequence of the interview and the numerical date the interview was conducted. For example, interview number one received the document name, Participant 106282025 (to indicate the first interview conducted on June 28, 2025). The subsequent transcripts were named and saved accordingly. The method of naming each transcript in this manner allowed the researcher to connect back with the participant after the interview was completed if necessary.

### **Demographics**

All 16 of the multigenerational staff members who participated in this study were employed at the research site at the time of the change implementation in roles excluding those of administration or supervisory positions. These demographics were related to the

purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study in wherein the researcher explored the change communication experiences of multigenerational teachers and staff as recipients and agents of change in schools. Table 1 shows a graphic display of the case study participants' year of birth and generational membership. The frequency represents the total number of participants within each generation. There were no participants representing the Traditionalist generation cohort, as a result, analysis was limited to those represented: Baby Boomer, Generation X, Millennial, and Generation Y respectively.

**Table 1**

*Participant Year of Birth and Generational Membership*

Year of birth	Generation	Frequency
1997, 1997	Generation Y	2
1983, 1984, 1987, 1989, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1996,	Millennial	9
1959, 1961, 1963	Baby Boomer	3
1972, 1980	Generation X	2

Table 2 represents participants' role or title at the time of organizational change implementation, showing no administrative or supervisory presence in participants. The frequency represents the number of individuals in a given role at the time of organizational change implementation. Both tables display the variations in participant generational membership and roles that align with experiences, perspectives, and preferences discussed later in the chapter.

**Table 2***Participant Role at Time of Change Implementation*

Role	Frequency
Teacher	8
Case manager	2
Social worker	1
Paraprofessional	3
Instructional coach	1
School nurse	1

**Data Collection**

This study was done virtually, and I conducted interviews via a Google Meets platform in a confidential location and also requested that participants join the session from a private location, as it allowed me to reach multigenerational teachers and staff at their individual levels of comfort and maintain confidentiality. Providing the virtual option for interviewing allowed participants the flexibility of scheduling interviews at their convenience, where they had complete autonomy over the location for participation. There was the possibility that I may not have been able to connect with participants with full confidentiality in an in-person setting. Many of the participants could relate to changes being implemented in schools and the impact of organizational communication on change outcomes for teachers and students/families. There were no challenges presented in conducting each of the interviews in this manner. The interview protocol was used as developed verbatim, and was not altered during the course of any participant interview.

### **Data Analysis**

The topic of interest in this qualitative descriptive single case study was the experiences of organizational change communication as recipients and agents of change by multigenerational school teachers and staff during a period of large-scale change. I used thematic analysis to identify themes from participants' responses as Naeem et al. (2023) noted this to be a popular technique for the analysis of qualitative data which generally consists of thick, rich, description. There were 16 interview transcripts. Using an in-vivo coding methodology eliminated researcher-specific biases when interacting with the data. I was able to maintain objectivity for the duration of the data analysis process by taking notes in a reflective journal while completing the coding process. The reflective journal allowed me to maintain a clear focus on the analysis process based solely on participant responses which helped to lessen researcher bias in results.

The framework method as shared by Ritchie and Spencer (1994) was used to analyze the data obtained from participant responses. This approach allowed me to immerse herself in the transcribed data so that I could gain in-depth insight as related to the work values, change communication experiences, and communication preferences of multigenerational teachers and staff employed in the school. This method supported me in creating inferential descriptions and explanations from clusters of raw data formulated into codes and categories and ultimately themes that represented answers to the predetermined research question and sub-questions.

The framework method was comprised of seven steps, wherein each step is built upon the other. The first step, transcription and familiarization with the data, involved the

review of the final transcripts upon completion of the interviews (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). I took the time to review each transcript and documented initial thoughts and perceptions in a reflective journal to check and address any biases that may have influenced analysis. I took each participant's interview transcript and uploaded them into the QDA Miner Lite database. These documents then became the database from which the analysis was conducted. Variables from participant demographics captured were generational membership and role during change implementation as these were aligned with the research question. Transcripts were reviewed on three separate occasions to ensure that researcher was clear on subtle and more explicit variations in multigenerational teacher and staff sharing as disaggregated by generational cohort.

The second step, selection of keywords/interview familiarization, involved the close examination of interview transcripts to identify recurring patterns and terms (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). These keywords capture participants' experiences and perceptions and were derived directly from the data. First, interview transcripts were separated into segments representing concepts related to the central phenomenon and guiding research question. Table 3 represents the segmentation of interview questions that supported identifying the response to the research question. The table also notes the specific interview questions that were directly connected to the research question.

**Table 3**

*Interview Questions to Understand Multigenerational Staff Experiences of Organizational Change Communication as Recipients and Agents of Change*

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Concept related to the

Interview question

central phenomena	
Work values	IQ 1-3 1. What your work values? 2. Which of these is most important and why? 3. How is this value reflected in your work?
Change communication experience	IQ 4-8 4. How would you describe your experience with the change implemented in the organization recently?
Recipient of change	5. Would you describe the organization's communication regarding the change as effective?
Agent of change	6. Do you feel that the organization's communication effectively prepared you for the change? 6. Was your approach to you work or the organization impacted as a result of The organization's change communication? 7. How did your perception of communication effectiveness influence your thoughts about school culture? School stability? Organizational support?
Org communication preferences	IQ 9 - 12 9. How do you prefer to communicate in the workplace? 10. What values influence the way you communicate in the workplace? 11. Would your preferences for workplace communication differ during a Period of organizational change? 12. What influences how you communicate with different people in the work Place?

By examining the transcripts multiple times in consulting the interview question segmentation, I was able to identify keywords and the frequency of their occurrence in participant responses. These keywords were integral in the development of codes. Table 4 represents keywords and their frequency in participant responses across generational cohorts.

**Table 4**

*Recurrent Keywords From Participant Responses by Interview Section*

Keywords/Phrases	Mentions	#Cases	% Codes
Part 1 : Change communication experience			37.5%
Challenging	10	5	
Ambiguity/uncertainty	8	4	
Lack of professional safety	10	5	
Part 2: Quality of change communication			56.25%
Lacking in transparency	9	6	

Caused shifts in school culture	9	6	
Skepticism	4	4	
No trust in organizational leadership	7	4	
Difficult to understand	10	5	
Absence of voice	1	1	
Lack of concern for students	10	8	
No preparation for implementation	5	4	
Lacking in clarity	8	4	
Part 3: Communication preferences			6.25%
Face to face	14	14	

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Table 4 represents the most frequently occurring words/phrases across multigenerational teacher and staff semistructured interview responses. These keywords became the codes which were categorized and consulted to identify emergent themes from participant responses. There were 16 frequently occurring codes across participant responses. Of the 16, six or 37.5% were in response to Part 2 of the semistructured interview questions, focusing on the change communication experience and related events. Nine of the 16 most frequently occurring codes were related to Part 2 of the semistructured interview questions focusing on the quality of change communication and impact on multigenerational teacher and staff responses. These represented 56.25% of the overall codes. Lastly, one of 16 codes were frequently represented in response to Part 3 of the semistructured interview questions relating to multigenerational teacher and staff preferences for workplace communication, which represented 6.25% of the overall codes. In total, these represent 100% of codes driving the response to the initial research question.

Step three, data coding, consisted of identifying short phrases or words known as codes (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). Codes were assigned to segments of data that captured

the core message or significance of the participant responses. Code generation required a review of the notes made during the data familiarization stage. Codes themselves can be categorized to support better understanding of the relationships that exist amongst them. The type of relationship applied to a given category or set of codes can be helpful in identifying themes later in the analysis phase. Causal codes/categories are those that depict influence. The existence of one potentially gives rise to another. For example, describing the change experience as difficult may give rise to perceptions that an individual's role is not valued in the organization. Hierarchical codes/categories are those that represent a primary and subordinate category, such as a participant being skeptical about change communication and also feeling a lack of professional safety. The lack of professional safety is how skepticism may present. Lastly, sequential codes/categories are those where one precedes another in process. For example, if an individual felt that communication did not effectively prepare them for the change implementation process, the ability of the same individual to communicate information effectively to colleagues, students, or families would be impacted. Categories were developed after reviewing codes and frequencies, and represented broader descriptions of the codes or units taken directly from participant responses. Table 5 represents the relationships, categories, and the most frequently occurring codes from participant semistructured interview responses. Also represented are the number of cases where the codes were identified, and the corresponding percentage as per the QDA Miner Lite software scan.

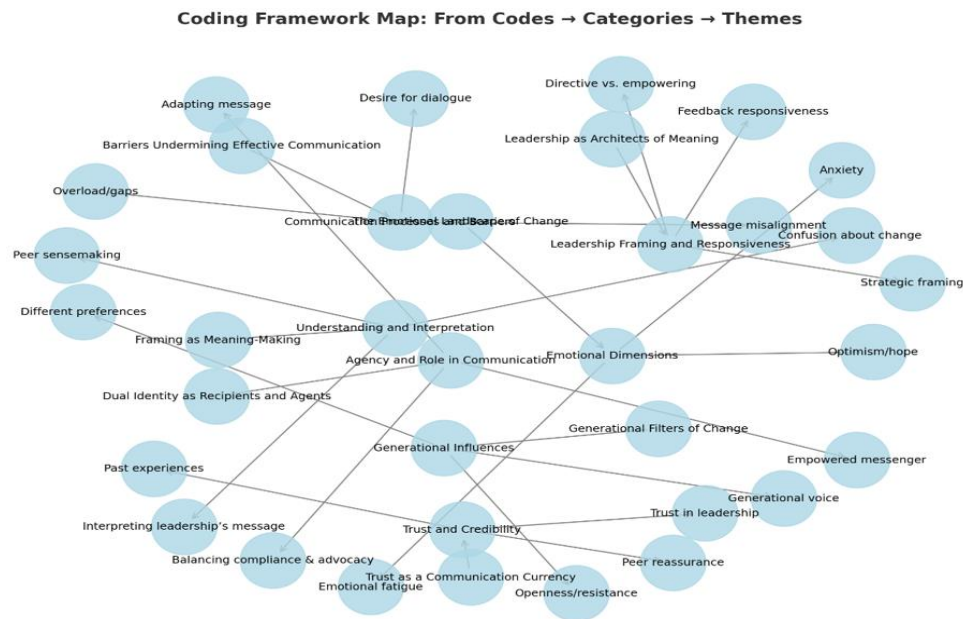
**Table 5***Type, Categories, Codes and Frequency From Software Scan*

Type/category & code	Count	% Codes	Cases	% Cases
<b>Causal</b>				
Change experience descriptor				
Difficult	10	7.1%	5	35.7%
Ambiguity/uncertainty	8	5.7%	4	28.6%
Perceptions/attitudes				
Skepticism	4	2.8%	4	28.6%
Lack of professional safety	10	7.1%	5	35.7%
Lacking in transparency	9	6.4%	6	42.9%
No org control over processes	3	2.1%	3	21.4%
Preferences for org communication				
Face-to-face	13	9.2%	14	78.6%
<b>Hierarchical</b>				
Relationship impact				
No preparation for implementation	5	3.5%	4	28.6%
Lack of care for students	10	7.1%	8	57.1%
<b>Sequential</b>				
Organization impact				
Org culture misalignment	6	4.3%	3	21.4%
Response to org comm				
No trust in organization	7	5.0%	4	28.6%
Environmental Conditions				
Caused shifts in school culture	9	6.4%	6	42.9%

Step 4, theme development, involved organizing codes into meaningful groups to identify patterns and relationships that inform answers to the overarching research question guiding the study (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). This stage required several iterations to ensure inclusion of the most and least represented yet still relevant developed codes. One observed pattern in the data was that regardless of generational membership, 16 of 16 participants described the change implementation experience as not positive. The word “difficult” appeared in 35.7% of participant responses (five cases) and the

words “ambiguity and uncertainty” appeared in 28.6% of participant responses (four cases) each were the most frequently shared descriptors of the change experience by participants. Six participants, 42.9% perceived change communication as lacking in transparency and five participants, 35.7%, perceived that their professional safety had been compromised. Lack of concern for students in change communication was shared 10 times by participants which was 57.1% of codes. Six participants noted that change communication impacted the organizational environment by causing shifts in school culture, this code was observed nine times in transcripts, representing 42.9%. Lastly, many participants, 78.6% shared a preference for face-to-face communication at all times, especially during a period of organizational change implementation.

Themes were developed using the frequently occurring codes as well as the structure of the semistructured interview questions, and required additional focus as they correspond to the meanings that will reflect the connection between participant responses and the research question. Figure 2 below is a visual depiction of the progression of qualitative data analysis from initial codes to categories and overarching themes. The framework map highlights how staff communication experiences, both as recipients and agents of organizational change, were interpreted and organized. Codes represent raw data segments drawn from interview transcripts, categories cluster the codes into broader concepts, and themes capture the deeper cross-cutting patterns of meaning. This visual demonstrates how themes emerged during analysis of verbatim participant responses.

**Figure 2***Coding Framework Map***Thematic Results**

Emergent themes developed from recurrent participant responses and their relationship to the research question guiding the study which was “How do multigenerational teachers and staff experience organizational change communication as recipients and agents of change in a school?” Observed themes based on participant responses include the following:

- Framing as meaning making: Staff are influenced by many factors in the interpretation of change communication and framing their perceptions.
- Dual identity as recipients and agents of change: Staff experience tensions between being targets of change and communicating the change to others.

- Relationships as communication capital: Relationships are integral for message delivery in terms of modality and content.
- The emotional landscape of change: Communication during change evokes strong emotional responses from recipients.
- Barriers undermining effective communication: Overload, lack of clarity, and misalignment between messages and realities are hindrances to effective change communications.
- Leaders as architects of meaning for environment: Pre-emptive framing strategies and responsiveness directly impact how staff co-construct meaning during change processes, impacts shaping of school environment.

### **Theme 1: Framing as Meaning Making**

This theme emerged in the review and analysis of participant responses to questions regarding the change experience, Part 2 of the interview guide (see IQ 4, 5). How staff understand, interpret, and give meaning to organizational change is influenced by both leader framing, professional experiences, and personal/generational filters. The absence of clarity in leader communications impacted staff ability to make sense of the change and prepare themselves for it effectively as recipients in real-time. Official communications received were noted to lack key information that staff could use in processing the why, what, and how of the change and caused individuals to refer back to previous organizational operations, using them as a point of comparison for their current experience. Additionally, as agents of change, frames and sense making support multigenerational school staff in supporting meaning and sense making for those they

serve, students, families, and other relevant stakeholders. Differences between “official” communication and participant lived experience also influenced their ability as recipients and agents of change, due to a lack of information congruence. For example, a Baby Boomer (1946-1964) participant, Participant 9, shared the following:

If they had been truthful up front, a lot of people would not have felt out of place or felt displaced. The organization just was not up front as they said they were going to be, they said what they were going to do but their actions were not aligned with what they told us.

Participant 8, another Baby Boomer, answered,

I felt like because of their lack of communication or the fact that you couldn't get clear answers or true answers from them the environment was unstable. I just felt like you would continue to be there and you were never going to get a clear answer or true answer from the people who were now in charge of the school.

Generation X (1965 – 1980) participants had similar perceptions. Participant 10 replied:

What was difficult was during transition there were things, there was the communication. We were limited because nothing was final until the summertime, you didn't really see the full scope of things and had no idea what it was going to look like, there were a lot of unknowns because nothing was final. I am not sure if they were being as transparent as they could be.

Participant 15 shared aligned perceptions as well:

It would have been better if they had communicated what they knew versus what they did not yet know, I could have felt better about that, but they were not even honest about that. How can I trust the organization I work for if the leadership cannot be fully transparent in difficult times or situations? I was really uncomfortable.

Generation Y/Millennial (1981-1996) participants highlighted discomfort with the lack of transparency in change communication. Participant 6 answered:

The transition has been stressful because communication has been less than what I've expected. Information is provided in bits and pieces, and that creates the feel that there's a lack of transparency. I've asked direct questions and do not receive direct answers. There have also been times where there's inconsistency in what is actually being verbalized

Participant 5 stated,

This experience has definitely changed how I see things. I feel like the people sharing the communication think they are being transparent and effective, but if from the perspective of the people receiving the communication, it's not effective or clear, or seems to be not true, then how are we to execute effectively?

Generation Z (1997-2012) participants noted a lack of transparency in communication and also noted concern for staff and students as a result. Participant 1 answered,

Communication from the new organization comes off as not authentic. The support seems real initially, but then in real time it feels like things are more for

leadership or organizational gain as opposed to actual gain for students and staff. I really don't think they realize that their communication is ineffective and that is unfortunate.

Participant 13 shared,

Because leaders lacked effective communication, I was less likely to lean on them for support. I wondered if there were systems or protocols in place that schools are to engage in when these kinds of drastic changes happen. I was most certainly distrustful and definitely not as compassionate as I probably should have been.

The reference to communicator perception versus recipient perception is directly aligned with the concept of frames, and highlights the absence of co-creation or meaning-making between both groups. If there is no effort made for understanding and alignment, processes will continue to unfold with perpetual misalignment.

## **Theme 2: Dual Identity as Recipients and Agents of Change**

The organizational change process creates the need for members to take on two roles: change recipient and change agent. They are both necessary for the successful implementation of any change initiative large or small, and the same individuals often occupy both roles during the change implementation process. The change recipient's role is to receive and make sense of framed communication, so as to understand the desired post-implementation organizational state and their role in realizing it. The change agent's role is the actual act of implementation, which often carries with it the responsibility of furthering communication regarding the change to colleagues as well as other organizational stakeholders. These roles are not interchangeable, and success as an agent

of change is contingent upon effective preparation as a recipient of change. The relative effectiveness of organizational communication for change recipients has the potential to empower members as agents of change in furtherance of the shared vision and desired post-implementation state for the organization.

The theme of dual identity as recipients and agents emerged as a result of participant shared tensions between being targets of change and also communicators of the change and its impact to others in response to questions in Part 2 of the interview guide (see IQ 5, 6). Related codes included “no preparation for implementation” which appeared five times across four cases (28.6%); “demonstrates lack of concern for students” which appeared ten times across eight cases (57.1%); and “organization has no control over processes” which appeared three times across three cases (21.7%) of the primary codes. For example, Baby Boomer (1946-1964) participants highlighted discrepancies in communication that potentially impacted their employment status, which directly impacted their ability to be effective agents of change Participant 8 shared,

There were too many discrepancies with no clear information, I felt as if they were trying to just move me out of the way, I did not feel welcome. I did not feel safe, and it was hard for me to make sure my students were going to be safe as well, there was no trust.

Participant 14 stated,

No, I was not prepared for the change or to implement anything because they were misleading. The communication to me is just terrible. There is a lot of back and forth with no real clarity, and last-minute things where we used to be

thoughtful about how and when. That doesn't happen now and its harmful to the staff and the students.

Generation X (1965-1980) participants noted that the lack of preparation by offered change communication was mitigated by the level of professional experience in a role prior to the change, and that due to the nature of the role, the change impact may not have been as significant as it may have been for other roles, Participant 15 shared,

I was working with a smaller group of students that were impacted less because of our program so I was able to protect them a little more, plus I knew my role and what I needed to do for students didn't change. I had to figure it out for myself because I didn't feel they were being truthful or transparent,

Participant 10 stated "I had to take on additional responsibilities after the change, and since I had seen my previous supervisor do things I knew how to do them. I was prepared not by the change communication but by previous leadership".

Generation Y (Millennial) (1981-1997) participants noted having to figure things out through self-reliance or drawing on colleagues for support to understand what was going on and how to move forward, as well as the importance for them in ensuring students remained a priority. For example, Participant 11 stated,

The communication did not prepare me. I just had to get out of the mud on my own or lean on other staff members on my team to make sense of it all. I felt that my voice was not being heard, they just pushed us to follow guidelines and protocols. I had to do what I needed to so that I followed the law regarding my students and to ensure they still grow and get what they need.

Additionally, participants noted that shared organizational communication did little to support their understanding of why the change was taking place, which hindered processing as recipients of change. Further, the need for them to transition with little time between the role of change recipient and the role of change agent, to support students, families and other relevant stakeholders with information regarding the change or its impact, left them feeling disempowered. The absence of their voices in the “how” of implementation signaled a disconnect between theirs and perceived leader concern for themselves or those they aim to serve daily.

### **Theme 3: Relationships as Communication Capital**

The theme of relationships as communication capital emerged as a result of participant sharing in response to Part 2 of the interview guide, which focused on the change communication experience (see IQ 5, 8). Several multigenerational teachers and staff explicitly named the lack of relationship they had with new organizational leaders which was a factor in their ability to trust and find shared information credible. They also named concern over new leadership not “knowing” them or taking the time to understand relational and cultural aspects of the pre-change organizational state. Additionally, participants shared the sentiment that new leadership was not invested in learning about pre-existing relationships or “ways of being”, which impacted their perceptions regarding the quality of shared information and communication processes. Participants also noted disruptions to school culture which is developed through social interaction, processes, and structures- all of which have relationships at the core. Cultural misalignment was mentioned six times by three participants making up 21.4% of codes in the Change

Communication Experience questions. Baby Boomer (1946-1964) participants noted a disruption in school culture, which prompted affective responses. Participant 14 shared,

The school culture was impacted all the way around because it wasn't just ineffective with the staff, it trickled down to the students and how the whole school is run. I feel like everything that was built by previous leaders, everything that was built and I've seen grow was being destroyed.

Participant 8 stated,

As far as the school culture, it felt like there was a lack of communication. It was a lack of integrity. I didn't trust anything they said. I felt like when it came to communicating, they told you what they wanted you to know, and they didn't answer my questions. I didn't like that, because I expected a direct answer to my questions and that is not what I was getting.

Participant 9 shared,

It's a cliché. You are as what your leader is, and so if you're giving miscommunication as leaders how would your staff be able to follow through with the communication? Staff can't even communicate to the children on how their learning will be or to the parents. Everything falls out of order. I believe the school is not as stable as it had been in prior years, it now feels like some other type of business rather than an educational institution.

Generation X (1965 – 1980) participant responses were similar to those of the previous generation regarding the impact of communication on school culture, stability, and

organizational support, each of which have strong foundations in relationships.

Participant 10 noted,

I think the kind of culture the school had adopted over the years did not align with the new organization's culture, and there are things that came to light after the change. I think the past culture was very punitive and the new organization's approach is not. It's definitely a work in progress, and unfortunately in some instances we have maintained the bad parts.

This response adds additional dimension to staff behavioral responses and role execution after receiving change communication. Participant 15 stated,

The culture of the school has been turned upside down and it's impacted all relationships in the building from adults to students to parents. I'm not sure what it will take to make the culture stronger if you continue to feel that you are being lied to or you keep seeing inconsistencies in communication by the new leadership.

Generation Y/Millennial (1981-1996) participant responses also expressed concern over the change communication and its impact on school culture, stability and organizational support. Participant 7 stated,

My personal thoughts are there is much work to be done. Strides have been made in some areas and in others there is lack. Regarding school stability, if we cannot effectively communicate or work together to adjust to the changes we are going through, our students are going to be directly impacted as well. What I see with

my own eyes tells me that ineffective communication has a direct effect and that it could be more harmful to students than anything,

while Participant 2 stated,

As far as the culture, I feel this experience has shown me that there needs to be human interaction rather than just email communication. Things being communicated are significant and you can't just spring that information on people, that's a culture destroyer to deliver messages and not be receptive to or seeking any feedback or not concerned that people are uneasy about whatever is happening.

Participant 5 shared,

I can honestly say that my passion for kids is what keeps me going, but I am saddened by things in the field of education. What I have experienced here, seeing how some teachers respond to kids because of their frustration with what is going on...it's like a domino effect and all of that is falling on the kids and their success. I feel like the messengers feel their communication is clear, but it's not for the people who are supposed to be executing effectively. This has damaged culture tremendously.

Generation Z (1997 – 2012) participant responses were again in alignment with perceptions of colleagues in other generational cohorts. For example, Participant 13 shared,

Yeah, I think because of relationships I had with past administration, and the fact I had no relationships with new administrators, that's necessary in education,

that's how you build culture. I definitely felt a lack of trust because there was no transparency in the communication about what was happening or what things would look like in real life day-to-day so that definitely impacted the culture.

There was a level of distrust created amongst teachers, staff, and administrators.

Similarly, Participant 1 stated,

I feel like our culture went down the drain because of the expectations, which there's nothing wrong with having high expectations, but after the change expectations were unrealistic and the communication comes off as inauthentic and as if new leadership made no effort to learn about the culture prior to the change.

And as far as school stability, seeing so many staff members leave, you just see that both staff and student retention have decreased, it seems to be a revolving door and yes, I feel it's because of the communication.

#### **Theme 4: The Emotional Landscape of Change**

Organizational members are human first. As such they experience a range of emotion in response to organization events, especially large-scale change implementation. The emotion that organizational members experience may be mitigated or exacerbated by organizational change communications before, during, and post implementation. It is also important to note that emotions are tied to member roles as recipients and agents of change, and may influence how members show up in both spaces.

The theme of the emotional landscape of change emerged from participant responses to Part 2 of the semistructured interview questions, focusing on the overall

change communication experience and how their perceptions of communication impacted their approach to work (see IQ 4, 7). Related codes include “difficult” which appeared ten times across five cases (35.7%), “ambiguity/uncertainty” which appeared eight times across four cases (28.6%) and “skepticism” which appeared four times across four cases (28.6%). Further, participants shared affective responses to the communication experience that informed perceptions and ways of being, and the approach to work as a result of the communication experienced. For example, Baby Boomer (1946-1964) participants shared “It was confusing” (Participant 9), “It was very controlling, there was no autonomy to be the teachers we are” (Participant 14). Generation X (1965 – 1980) participants stated, “The change was difficult, and as much as people feel they are being transparent, there’s always some skepticism there” (Participant 10), and Participant 15 shared “I was confused, I didn’t understand why we were doing this or how it would impact me or my students and families”. Generation Y (Millennial) (1981- 1996) stated “I would say that it has been challenging, challenging because the communication has not been effective” (Participant 5), Participant 6 shared “It has been stressful because the communication rollout was far less than what I would have expected”, and Participant 11 shared “I would describe it as unexpected and hard. Hard because you have to adapt to new practices, new learning, a new way of going about things”. Generation Z (1997- 2012) participants stated, “It was a struggle due to the change being so sudden, I don’t really feel like a lot of support was given” (Participant 1), while Participant 13 shared “It was the opposite of what I would expect. It was very disorganized especially as related to communication”. The emotion that recipients experienced had a direct impact on their

approach to work and the organization which in turn impacted how individuals were able to transition into the role of change agent.

Also worthy of inclusion when discussing emotion are the shifts or pivots in ways of being for multigenerational teachers and staff as a result of the emotions triggered by the change communication experience. Part 2 of the interview guide, question #7 specifically, addressed shifts in multigenerational teacher and staff approach to work or the organization as a result of communication perceptions. Participants noted the need to shift practice, or having to orient themselves a different way as a result of ineffective communication. These shifts in practice and approaches to work are integral to the role of change agent, and can hinder multigenerational teacher and staff empowerment when executing related tasks and activities. Additionally, concerns raised varied by generational cohort, with Baby Boomers (1946-1964) raising employment security concerns, for example Participant 9 shared “I wasn’t sure what I was going to do. I felt I was left in limbo not knowing what to do because of the lack of clarity. It wasn’t my intention to consider leaving, but I felt like I was scrambling to understand what was happening and what my next move was going to be”, Participant 14 shared “I tried to not be pessimistic in front of everyone, I had to learn to accept things because this was not going away and I need my job so I conform, whether I agree or not I’m going to do what is asked of me”. Generation X (1965-1979) participant shared a perceived increase in value for their role post change implementation which was discussed further in the discrepant cases section of the chapter. Generation Y (Millennial) (1980 – 1996) participants noted the impact on their approach to work, for example Participant 6 stated,

I was told one thing, and that things would be one way, and then when it came time to implement something like ordering supplies there was no clarity. I had to make sure I understood the process to ensure we had what we needed for the year because I received conflicting guidance from different individuals, Participant 5 stated “That is what has made this such a challenge, because it’s a constant adjustment due to how things are communicated and those things not being effective”. Generation Z (1997-2012) participants shared concerns about how communication effectiveness impacted perceptions of organizational priorities and concern for students and families. For example, Participant 1 stated “Initially my approach was the same, but then over time it changed because I became disengaged due to all of the changes. It made me feel uncomfortable because systems that worked previously were disrupted and they were trying to change them” and Participant 13 shared,

Yeah, I think it’s hard for it not to change because even though we are in this work for students, we also need a sense of security in the work and also know that we are valued for our work. When this does not happen, it leads to insecurity which makes people put less of themselves into it as if they are not invested, that negatively impacts students and families.

### **Theme 5: Barriers Undermining Effective Communication**

The theme barriers undermining effective communication emerged from participant responses to Parts 2 and 3 of the semistructured interview questions, designed to elicit responses about multigenerational staff member change communication experiences and preferences for workplace communication (see IQ 5, 9-12). As listed in

Table 5, 14 of the 16 participants indicated a preference for face to face communications and the code appeared with a frequency of 78.6% across all cases. Participants also shared a desire for print artifacts to be provided after in-person sessions, for later reference and accountability purposes. Baby Boomer (1946-1964) Participant 8 stated,

In person with email follow up is the most effective way to communicate, and that is what I prefer. This way you have who you are communicating with, what was said and there is no denying what was said or what the response was. The email follow-up keeps people a little bit more honest.

Generation X (1965-1980) Participant 10 expressed,

I prefer face to face communication but for important conversations a follow-up email to provide something in writing. It could be an email with a face to face follow up so that questions can be asked. Sometimes things can be difficult depending on context, so sometimes smaller group sharing is better because some people don't feel comfortable asking questions in large groups. I would never ask a question in a large group setting, that is just not who I am.

Participant 15 stated, "I prefer face to face communication. I just think it's more effective and more personal. The relationship building part is important with face to face interactions". Generation Y/Millennial (1981-1996) participants shared preferences for face to face communications as well. "I prefer definitely in person, or over the phone if not so that things are not being misconstrued. It also helps to be able to see a person's face and body language in person" (Participant 2), "In the workplace I prefer communication to be tactful, and we should be modeling behaviors we want to see from

our students. Communication may not always be easy and some topics can be challenging, but they should be face to face empathic, compassionate and done with integrity” (Participant 7), “I like communicating face to face. I feel very comfortable talking to staff and colleagues that I know being professional and just being a leader in this community” (Participant 11). Participant 3 shared “I like hands on. I prefer to be in person. I do believe in putting things in black and white, just to have a paper trail but I also firmly believe in in-person communication”. Generation Z (1997-2012) participants shared similar preferences as the majority of respondents. “I prefer in person communication. I think it’s important to have interpersonal relationships with staff members because when you communicate electronically it can come off a certain way that really may not be the intent” (Participant 1), “I prefer that communication is face to face and that an agenda should be provided, and there should be the opportunity to close with questions and address concerns” (Participant 13).

Sub-questions in this section also inquired of participants if their preferences for workplace communication would be altered in any way during a period of organizational change. 100% of participants indicated that their preferences would remain intact, and that periods of change definitely warrant in person, face to face communications from organizational leaders. Additionally, participants named several aspects of social interaction such as non-verbal influencers (body language, movement, facial expressions) and para-verbal influencers (pitch, tone, cadence), as well as the frequency of communication, and scaffolds for communication as influencers of how they as individuals communicate with others in the workplace. This sharing highlights the

characteristics of communication that are significant to receivers of communication, but may not receive as much attention to deliverers of content giving rise to misconception or misunderstanding. The absence of in-person, face to face sharing of change communication created barriers for multigenerational teacher and staff processing of information as recipients and ultimately as agents of change as well.

### **Theme 6: Leadership as Architects of Meaning for the Environment**

The theme, leadership as architects of meaning emerged as a result of participant responses to Part 2 of the interview guide, focusing on the change communication experience and its impact on their perceptions of school culture, school stability, and organizational support (see IQ 5, 7, 8). Organizational leaders' implementation and use of framing strategies to communicate are integral to members' perceptions of effectiveness. Leaders play a critical role in ensuring that organizational communications are transparent and clear regarding the why, what, and how of change implementation so that staff are empowered as agents of change. Additionally, where gaps exist, leaders bear the responsibility of responsiveness and feedback to member questions and concerns which supports obtaining member buy-in as recipients of change and furthers effective communication with stakeholders as agents of change. It is social interaction through framing that leaders communicate all things relating to organizational values, systems, processes and operations. Essentially, leaders are the "architects" of what it means to work for a given organization. The absence of transparency, responsiveness, or related characteristics in leader communication can negatively impact the members of the

organization, which ultimately impacts the morale, culture, and well-being of the organization at all times- especially during periods of change implementation.

The intention to separate service was shared by two participants in response to the question, which represents 14.3% of frequency in codes. Though not a majority, the response is directly aligned with the purpose of the study, to lessen staff attrition and increase retention through more effective change communication. Participant 5 from the Generation Y/Millennial (1981-1996) cohort did not share the intent to separate service, but indicated lower morale,

Communication not being effective means staff is not executing effectively. It makes me wonder and question how many people in higher positions are really thinking about what's best for kids, and it saddens me that the people under them do not speak up to say Hey, this is not working for the kids- lets come up with something that will work”.

Participant 13 from the Generation Z (1997-2012) cohort shared “Because of the lack of effective communication, I was less likely to lean on administration for support during the transition period. And then, I eventually began to look elsewhere outside of the organization for a different position”. Participant 8 from the Baby Boomer (1946-1964) cohort expressed dissatisfaction with the overall change and related communication,

I felt like when the change came, it didn't have the teachers or students' best interests at heart. I feel that the change was more for new leadership. They did not take into consideration the people who had been there for years, and who had established relationships with students and parents. They came in and did things

their way and there were a lot of untruths told so I was not happy with it at all.

Prior to the change everything was done for the students, we were invested in the students and after the change I don't think that same investment was there. I feel like a lot of us saw that and that caused a lot of us to decide that we did not want to be there, it just wasn't a good fit anymore.

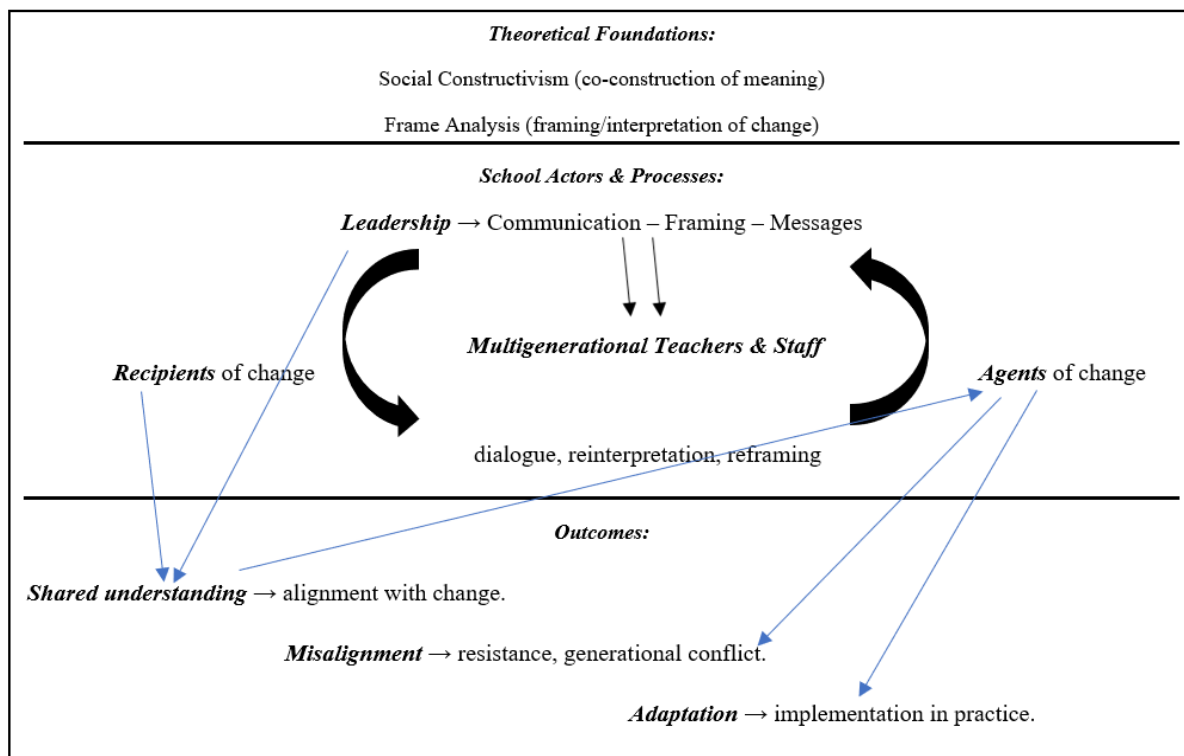
The lack of effective change communication seemingly presented a challenge for multigenerational teachers and staff in preparing to move forward, and in fully understanding how the change would impact them as individuals in their roles, significant in both instances as recipients and agents of change.

Step five, Conceptualization, involved the understanding of defining concepts that emerged from the data. The researcher was tasked with the identification of social patterns and the refining of them into definitions that aligned with the research question. Often, researchers use visual tools like diagrams or models to identify and understand the relationships among identified concepts.

Step 6, Development of a Conceptual Model/Framework Table involved consultation with the raw data to support in the development of a conceptual model. This process according to the method, was relative to the creation of a unique representation of the model which was guided by existing theories. The model supported the answering of research question, and supported explaining this study's contribution to the existing body of research on the topic of study. This step culminated the data analysis process as it was inclusive of all of the findings and the insights derived from review of the data. Figure 3 below is an artifact supporting Steps 5 and 6 with supporting narrative to follow.

**Figure 3**

*Conceptual Model of Social Constructivism/Frame Analysis of Organizational Change in Schools*



This model illustrates how social constructivism and frame analysis inform the communication of organizational change in schools. At the theoretical level, social constructivism emphasizes the co-construction of meaning, while frame analysis highlights how individuals and groups define and interpret change. Within schools, leaders act as framers of change messages, while multigenerational staff both receive and reframe these messages, influenced by their generational lenses, experiences, and values. Change initiatives are mediated through this communicative process, with staff simultaneously positioned as recipients and agents of change. The outcomes of these

interactions include the development of shared vision and alignment, the emergence of resistance or conflict when frames clash, and the adaptation or implementation of change in practice. The model emphasizes that organizational change communication in schools is dynamic, reciprocal, and socially constructed.

Step 7, Data Interpretation, challenged the researcher to seek out observed patterns and discrepant cases. Discrepant cases are those that did not conform to the research goals and per Ritchie & Spencer (2012) there is always the possibility that researchers will exclude cases, however none were excluded at the analysis phase as they are integral to the identified themes. There were two such discrepant cases, wherein participant responses were not aligned with those of the majority of participants. For interview questions relating to organizational change communication as agents of change, Participants 7 and 10 perceived communication as ineffective in preparing them for the change, yet noted that post change implementation they felt more valued in their respective roles, which was in contrast to experiences recounted by all other participants regardless of generational membership. In response to question #2: Would you describe the organization's communication regarding the change as effective? Participant 7 stated,

I feel my experience as a paraprofessional, although my role is important, it wasn't made a priority. Paraprofessionals are not taken into consideration for a lot. I would say that this is the first year I was kind of thrown with a kid versus intentionally paired with one. They didn't know our kids and so that interruption is what I feel was kind of an issue. I feel there have been a lot of growing pains associated with that, and they have been reverberating still to this day. On the

surface everything appears to be like they're being transparent but then as you learn more, you begin to realize that you've only been getting a glimpse of the picture and sometimes it feels like it's not the real picture so I would say for me effectiveness, no. Some days are better than others but there have been a lot of breakdowns in communication and that has broken down also our ability to be effective with each other as well as with our kids.

Participant 10 stated,

Somewhat yes, but I feel there's a level of skepticism there. I mean they say things but are they going to follow through with it? And sometimes they choose their communication carefully so you need to be able to read through it and really truly know. Sometimes when communication is sent out in an email or written form, it's kind of more difficult. In my position as social worker, I wasn't even sure if I would be valued.

However, in response to question #3: Do you feel that the organization's communication effectively prepared you for the change? Participant 7 shared,

To be fair, the organization has put us through several different PDs, and some of them to be honest and fair, were actually really good. I would say that as someone who has experience, someone who has worked with kids and people before and knows the job it was effective, but if I were someone brand new in this role, no, I would absolutely not feel like I had enough preparation.

Participant 10 recounted,

I was fortunate that with this recent change they really did value and pour into their social workers. With the new organization I was moved onto the leadership team and I had a lot more responsibilities added on. I feel like the only reason I was prepared for the change was because a lot of the tasks and things that I had to pick up doing were things I had already been exposed to previously. But if I had not had that and was new coming in I would definitely feel like it would be difficult, I would not have been prepared.

In both instances, the caveat to effective preparation for the change was not so much the organization's communication, but the prior experience in the role that added value to their work post change implementation. These cases are discrepant as they are different from the experiences shared by all other participants in response to the two questions named above. They are factored into the analysis and not excluded as they add dimension to considerations for organizational change communication. Though not an explicit part of this research study, organizational member work experience could be seen as an influencing factor in perceptions of change communication effectiveness and whether or not organizational communication prepares members for post implementation activities.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

In Chapter 3, I emphasized the importance of measures used to support trustworthiness. To establish trustworthiness, I was guided by four principles: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

## **Credibility**

Credibility establishes the truth regarding the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). To meet the criteria of credibility in this study semistructured interviews were conducted with 16 teachers and staff representing four of the five generational cohorts currently employed in the school participant site who experienced the implementation of change during their employ. They were appropriate for the study as they had first-hand experience of the change as implemented in the school organization. The truth lies in the fact that participants' experiences and perceptions were the focus of the investigation, and captured verbatim in transcript form at the conclusion of each participant interview. Credibility was enhanced through the triangulation of data sources (e.g. participant statements and coding approach). Participant responses were compared across transcripts, which supports triangulation. Findings were reported directly from participant statements taken from their transcripts, which minimized bias by the researcher according to Chenail (2011). Another step taken was examining and identifying recurring patterns observed during the coding process. The computer-based qualitative analysis software was used for each of the 16 multigenerational teacher and staff participant transcripts. I examined each transcript prior to entry into the analysis software, and QDA Miner Lite helped me in clarifying codes, developing categories and identifying common themes. These identified themes lessened the possibility of biased results, and added to the study's thoroughness, credibility and trustworthiness.

**Transferability**

As stated in earlier chapters, transferability refers to the extent to which a study can be transferred to a similar contextual situation. It helps to answer the question: can the observed results be transferred to similar workplace settings (i.e. schools with multigenerational workforces implementing a change)? The criteria for the study as related to the target population, multigenerational teachers and staff, allows future researchers to determine if the results obtained in this study are applicable in similar situations. Burchett et. al., (2013) posited that transferability can be achieved through a researcher asking questions that elicit thick, rich, detail and providing thorough in-depth documentation of the process of research implementation for future researchers to consider. A research log was maintained and served as an audit trail for all actions taken during the study that could be used in a peer review process. Transferability was also obtained in ensuring semistructured interview questions were aligned to yield responses that answered the research question guiding the study.

**Dependability**

Dependability is related to the confidence of the researcher that the truth of the findings, the research design, participants and contextual information is effectively captured. Learning more about the change experiences and communication preferences as shared directly by multigenerational school staff provided a critical component of the researcher's ability to find truth in their sharing. I expected that the data collected from semistructured interviews would answer my research question because of actions taken to ensure alignment prior to implementation. The researcher understood that there were

multiple truths to be found in participant recounts of their experiences. The use of the Google Meets platform to audio record semistructured interviews and provide print transcriptions of the interviews allowed the researcher to capture truth in real time as shared. The researcher was also able to confirm understanding during the analysis of participant responses by reviewing the actual words as shared in transcripts. As each participant was employed with the research site during the change implementation, the researcher was able to depend on their real experiences as shared during semistructured interviews.

Semistructured interviews were conducted in identical manner for each participant as per the developed interview protocol and guide. No adjustments were needed in the implementation of the data collection process as a result of either researcher or participant need. There were no complications with technical resources used in the implementation of data collection. To further ensure dependability, I documented all stages of data collection and analysis in a reflective journal as outlined in Chapter 3.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability was obtained with the accuracy of information as shared by participants during semistructured interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The researcher ensured accuracy of the information shared by participants with the audio recording and print transcription of each interview. After each interview was conducted, the data analysis phase of research involved a detailed and systematic review of each of the transcripts rather than reliance on memory of what was shared by participants. The semistructured interview guide and analysis processes allow for future replication by

other researchers. There was no deviation from the interview guide for any participant, questions were asked sequentially as designed consistently for each of the 16 participants. Member checking was done after each interview, as the researcher shared the print transcript with each participant and asked that they confirm their responses and advise in the event an error was identified. Each of the 16 participants confirmed that their responses were accurate in the interview transcripts, and none noted omissions or errors. Confirmability was also supported with the use of direct quotes from participants to support findings. Reflective journaling supported checking researcher bias and my maintaining objectivity at all stages of the analysis process and also held me accountable to elevating participant voice and experiences as related to the research question guiding the study.

Word choice and descriptors though varied, expressed similar ideas and expectations across generational cohorts. There was consistency in participant sharing that their experiences with recent change communication were not optimal or as expected given the circumstances at the time, and prompted negative affect such as disappointment, surprise, or mistrust which hindered their ability to be effective as agents of change. These findings revealed experiences of organizational change communication and multigenerational staff preferences that if reviewed and addressed by organizational leaders could potentially lead to positive outcomes for the benefit of the organization's culture, student outcomes, as well as for the participants during periods of change. Participant responses also supported the proposition that multigenerational teacher and staff perceptions of organizational change communication may be an influence on staff

retention and attrition, as some noted the desire to separate service due to the ineffective change communication experienced. The evidence presented in the sections above demonstrate that findings emerged resulting from interviews conducted with participants.

### **Summary**

The research question for this study was: How do multigenerational teachers and staff experience organizational change communication as recipients and agents of change in schools? I used the qualitative descriptive case study research inquiry to explore multigenerational teacher and staff responses to semistructured interview questions about work values, the experience of change communication as recipients and agents of organizational change, communication preferences, and influences on communication in the workplace. The participant respondents addressed the change communication experience by providing clear and concise perspectives about the change communication experience as recipients and agents of change. Using QDA Miner Lite, a qualitative analysis computer-based program to code evaluate the interview transcripts, six themes emerged. I provided evidence of trustworthiness during the data analysis process as outlined in discussions of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In Chapter 5, I will interpret these findings within the context of existing literature and discuss their implications for policy and practice. Additionally, I will highlight the limitations of this study, propose recommendations for future research, and explore how these findings can contribute to meaningful social change, particularly for multigenerational teachers and staff navigating organizational change in schools.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In this qualitative descriptive case study, I aimed to understand the experiences of multigenerational teachers and staff with organizational change communication as recipients and agents of change in a Chicago school where a large-scale change was recently implemented. Previous studies that explored aspects of management such as leadership, change implementation, and change communication focused mainly on private sector organizations and frequently offered leader perspectives rather than those of organizational members impacted as recipients and agents of the change (e.g., Dempsey et al., 2022; Shrivastava et al., 2022; Zainab et al., 2021). DeNobile and Bilgin (2022) noted that there is little information regarding change implementation in schools, and Bryner (2021) noted that there is a need to better understand how generational membership and change communication during periods of change in schools intersect so as to mitigate teacher and staff attrition. These gaps were the impetus for the present study.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

My findings aligned with much of the literature on change processes, change communication, and leadership as well as the literature on the challenges of change implementation in schools. Dempsey et al. (2022) noted that communication or some related aspect is a major contributor to the success or failure of change implementation in organizations, despite the type of organization. As I focused on the experience of change communication by multigenerational teachers and staff as recipients and agents of change in a school, participant accounts of their experiences were key in better understanding the

phenomena. All organizations, including schools, are populated by members of the multigenerational workforce, which warrants more depth in understanding how the multigenerational workforce's needs intersect with all aspects of management, leadership, communication, and change processes. Six key themes emerged during the data analysis phase to answer the research question guiding the study: framing as meaning making, dual identity as recipients and agents of change, relationships as communication capital, the emotional landscape of change, barriers undermining effective communication, and leaders as architects of meaning for the environment. These emergent themes answer the research question by highlighting contributors to the experience of organizational change communication in schools by multigenerational teachers and staff.

Staff are influenced by many factors in the interpretation of change communication and framing their perceptions. Frames exist as a mechanism to support sense making of a given event or occurrence on the part of an individual or group and call forth related concepts to support understanding. The organizational change frame brings relevance to related concepts such as communication, engagement, and preparation, which support sense making and cocreation of meaning within the broader frame of organizational change. The awareness of related concepts supported participant expectation that related concepts would be "present" in the existing frame to varying degrees. The relative perceived absence of these related concepts impacted multigenerational teacher and staff sense making as recipients of change in the organization. Participants emphasized that the desired clarity or transparency were

lacking in organizational change communication which made it difficult for them to fully understand what was happening or how the change would impact themselves or other key stakeholders such as students and families served by the school.

As Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) have emphasized in their work on leadership communication, which extends Goffman's work to leadership and management disciplines, the skill of framing in the leadership relationship is consistent with the perspective that power is never independent of its implementation (p. 168). As noted in Chapter 2, the skill of framing is based on three key components: language, thought, and forethought, which ultimately inform leader communications given considerations for intent, audience, and modality. The perspective of framing as applied in organizational settings aligns with the notion shared by Fairhurst and Sarr that communication is predicated upon the assumption that members exist in a shared world of real meanings, and that as one world of meanings has been conceived and framed that same world can be reconceived and reframed by the same members (p. 170).

As related to schools, frames are continually advanced as leaders attempt to make sense of complex interrelated components (Durant et al., 2022). Within the organizational change frame, consideration is to be given to the intersections of multigenerational membership and the requisite actions required for successful implementation as the effective management of change involves critical activity such as planning, communicating, and executing to mitigate challenges and maximize positive outcomes.

The duality of multigenerational teacher and staff identities as recipients and agents of change extends the discussion on frames, language, thought and forethought in

that communication from leadership must acknowledge both roles in communications. The multigenerational teacher and staff perceptions of effective leader communications left them ill-prepared to support one another and key organizational stakeholders in the implementation of change as agents. Thus, leader communications must consider not only the overarching frame enacted with initial change communication, but they must also consider that there are differences in need for individuals as recipients and agents of change. Effective leader change communication should acknowledge these and tailor communications accordingly to meet the knowledge sharing needs of recipients and requisite implementation details needed by organizational members as agents. These leader actions support leader-member relationships and align with the theme of relationships as communication capital.

Through effective communication and engagement, the relational aspects of organization are amplified through systems and structures developed to provide the essential training and preparation needed for staff to sustain the proposed changes (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020). Relationships are integral for message delivery in terms of modality and content for organizational members as recipients and agents of change. The ability to communicate effectively is a core component of multigenerational teacher and staff relationships with key stakeholders, and is an influencer of how they experience the change process. Leader practices that prioritize connecting with organizational members, establishing mutual trust, and effective communication are at the core of leaders creating processes and structures for sharing the why, what, and how of the proposed change with members and stakeholders at all stages of the change process (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020;

Lancet et al., 2023, Vancikova et al., 2023). The absence of this prioritization is a direct impact on leader-member relationships which are crucial during the organizational change process. Organizational leaders should strive to leverage existing relationships during times of change to strengthen them through selected or preferred communication channels, rather than delivering “one-size-fits-all” messaging to members.

The duality of roles as change recipients and agents, as well as the importance of relationships in the communication process give rise to the consideration of the range of emotions experienced by multigenerational teachers and staff during the change implementation process. Change is difficult for all individuals regardless of context, and the emotional responses to communication experiences for individuals can inform sense-making and subsequent actions. Of importance to note as well, is that participants in this study had emotional reactions regarding themselves and stakeholders. These reactions were primarily driven by the experienced change communication, its perceived ineffectiveness, and the frames existing prior to the notification of impending change implementation.

The above are examples that support the theme of barriers undermining effective communication. Aside from more tangible or quantifiable barriers such as frequency, message misalignment, and modality of communication as noted by participants, the lack of leader understanding of the duality of member roles and the damage to leader-member relationships due to ineffective communication also serve as barriers to effective communication. The impact on member perceptions of trust in messengers and transparency in messaging are barriers to effective communication as well.

All five previously discussed themes align with or give rise to the final theme that organizational leaders are architects of meaning for the environment. Through communication in any modality, leaders enact frames that trigger sense-making and meaning-making for organizational members. These processes are not to be done in a siloed fashion, as once frames are presented, the communication and engagement processes support cocreation and meaning making between leaders and organizational members that give rise to the culture of the environment, systems, processes, and ways of being in the organization. These are the foundation of the organization, and should not be disrupted or compromised with the need for change. Rather, they should be acknowledged through the enacting of the change frame, via the core components: language, thought, and forethought.

Regarding the communication experience, Kulkarni and Rai (2023) warned of the critical nature of effective organizational communication for the growth and survival of any organization. Current prominent theories of organizational change emphasize the need for effective communication in several forms. Regarding change in schools, the study reflects the desire for strong culture and limited disruption to the school community as a result of the change. They also highlighted the intersections of relationships and communication during periods of organizational change. Scholars noted the importance of understanding the multigenerational workforce for several reasons. Alferjany and Alias (2020) noted the need for organizations to remain agile and competitive in a dynamic global marketplace, Waldma (2021) noted the value in intergenerational collaboration and in understanding its intersection with communication, management,

and organizational practice, and Partin (2023) noted that leader understanding may support the creation of conditions that foster social cohesion, higher levels of employee engagement and productivity. The importance of effective organizational change communication is reinforced through this study, and the social constructivist and frame theories were appropriate as lenses through which to view participant experiences as both recipients and agents of change.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Limitations for this study included the decision to use a qualitative case study as it is not a comparative approach that allowed for producing an outcome generalizable to all populations (see Thomas, 2011). Trustworthiness was addressed regarding credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability based on the target population of multigenerational teachers and staff experiencing recent organizational change communication because the procedures outlined in Chapter 3 provided validity and reliability to the data and findings (see Stahl & King, 2020). That said, the participating multigenerational teacher and staff respondents from one Chicago school that recently implemented a large-scale change had limitations because their experiences may not reflect those of multigenerational teachers and staff from other Chicago schools that recently implemented a large-scale change. I attempted to address credibility; however, this was limited to multigenerational teachers and staff without consideration for other professionals, students or families also potentially impacted by organizational change communication. Transferability within the framework of this study was addressed according to procedures listed in Chapter 3, yet limitations occurred with the exclusion of

multigenerational administrators that may yield insight into the development and sharing of change communication experienced in schools.

Dependability was addressed when participants were given the transcripts after semistructured interview completion to review and provide insight in the event there were errors or inaccuracies in their transcripts. The limitation exists in that participants were multigenerational teachers and staff only. Excluding multigenerational administration or other roles impacts the scope of this study's findings as there is no insight offered from groups experiencing change communication in schools other than teachers and staff.

Confirmation was addressed in the use of a reflective journal as mentioned in Chapter 3, wherein I took notes after each interview, during the coding processes and theme development. Notes were also taken during the revisions and edits to this document to bring about trustworthiness and support reliance solely upon participant responses. The use of the reflective research journal supported the management of researcher bias in this study.

### **Recommendations**

This study offers insight into the experiences of multigenerational teachers and staff with change communication as recipients and agents of change in a Chicago school that recently implemented a large-scale change. While the research focused on a single school, the findings may be applicable to other urban schools facing similar challenges with change communication during the implementation of a similar scale of change. This study's limitations include its sample size, geographic scope, and the exclusion of multigenerational administrators, all of which influence its generalizability. Future

research could benefit from exploring the experiences of multigenerational school administrators in developing and disseminating organizational change communication at all stages of change implementation. Additionally, studies incorporating the perspectives of other school stakeholders impacted by organizational change communication could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing organizational change communications in schools and their impact.

The social and contextual nature of the phenomenon of organizational change support the utilization of social constructivism theory and frame analysis to facilitate growth and further development in management contexts, especially when subjected to rigorous examination by researchers. Social constructivism theory stresses the importance of culture and context in understanding events and the construction of knowledge based on the developed understandings (Derry, 1999; McMahon, 1997). The creation of meaning by multigenerational staff members through the experience of leader change communications as recipients and agents of change in schools is critical as related to successful or unsuccessful change implementation. Goffman (1961) suggested that a sort of “frame” exists around events, influencing the sensemaking process that will take place within the frame. Language, symbols, and context converge to provide a subjective experience for an observer, which becomes an intersubjective experience in the social context when shared meanings result. Organizational practices such as communication during periods of change, and the meaning associated with the communication by organizational members will be influenced by culture, history, previous experience (i.e. characteristics of generational membership).

Bryk and Schneider (2002) emphasized the roles of trust and communication in schools, amongst leadership and staff as relational trust acknowledges interdependencies and mutual understandings within the school community with regard to roles, responsibilities, and obligations and is reliant upon vulnerability, mutual respect and competency building. Trust in leaders can lead to improved organizational change efforts (Durand et al., 2016), and for school leaders trust-building is an ongoing collective process that is can be facilitated or constrained by the quality of relationships. Communication, including reciprocity is an integral factor in school staff sensemaking and subsequent performance in terms of the collective action required by them as both recipients and agents of organizational change or improvement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Additionally, insights on the multigenerational workforce as offered by scholars (Agrawal et al., 2023; Iqbal, 2024; Partin, 2024) that school leadership awareness and understanding of generational characteristics supports the acknowledgement of the uniqueness in experiences and historical events influencing perspectives and experiences of members to leverage the skills and attributes that each generation contributes to the workplace. Pruano et al., (2022) noted that schools with generationally diverse staff can be seen as more successful with more diverse knowledge and expertise, yet Iqbal (2024) noted that there are also challenges presented with the multigenerational workforce given the variations diversity presents. Kulkarni and Rai (2023) cautioned that effective communication is integral for the growth and survival of all organizations, especially during periods of change (p. 1519). Wen et al. (2010) noted that approaches to

knowledge sharing that meet the needs of all generations can be challenging because of the variations in how generational cohorts approach work.

The research question focused on the experiences of multigenerational teachers and staff with change communication as recipients and agents of change in schools. Related sub-questions included multigenerational teacher and staff preferences for communication during periods of change, multigenerational teacher and staff perceptions of the quality of change communication and its impact on school culture, stability, and support, and practices to improve multigenerational teacher and staff retention during periods of change. The six themes that emerged: framing as meaning-making, dual identity as recipients and agents of change, relationships as communication capital, the emotional landscape of change, barriers undermining effective communication, and leadership as architects of meaning respectively, offered answers to the research and sub-questions, highlighting unique participant perspectives of the change communication experience as both recipients and agents of change in a school.

The utilization of Goffman's (1974) Frame Analysis and social constructivism theory as conceptual and theoretical foundations for this study, supported findings from this study and were validated by participant responses. The results of this research suggest that leadership style and actions, as well as efforts toward employee engagement via communication, are integral for multigenerational teacher and staff morale and retention during periods of organizational change in schools.

## **Implications**

While this study focused on the change communication experiences of multigenerational teachers and staff as recipients and agents of change in one Chicago school implementing a large-scale change, the insights gained may apply to multigenerational teachers and staff navigating large-scale change in any school. Further research is needed to explore these findings in broader contexts. Organizational leaders in schools, when considering large-scale change implementation are encouraged to step back, and first consider organizational membership, their values, needs, and preferences for communication and information sharing as well as what the roles of change recipient and change agent will require of members. Being aware of these things at all times will drive leader intentionality in structuring communication and knowledge sharing, in embedding scaffolds that support professional safety and inclusion for all stakeholders, and support the development of strong organizational culture that serves as leverage during times of change or challenge.

Schools like other organizations are consistently challenged by pressures from forces internal and external to them. They are also human intensive communities, wherein socialization and interaction, sense-making and co-creation of meaning are required to realize both vision and mission, the observation of student learning and growth. Organizational and school leaders can consider Goffman's (1974) frame analysis with Fairhurst & Sarr's (1996) extension of theory to understand the importance of language, thought, and forethought in organizational communications. The awareness of "frames" as well as how meaning is influenced by values, history, and previous

experiences of the recipients of information is key for school leaders. Current participant's voices highlighted the overall importance of member engagement at all stages of the change implementation process, from initial ideation to planning to achieving stability post implementation. Their voices also highlighted the importance of ensuring that those served by schools, students and families and other stakeholders, are given voice and consideration in change implementation to lessen the potential disruption to both teaching and learning that is so critical for students' futures. These are key aspects of effective organizational change communication's impact on social change.

School teachers and staff deserve to feel valued as stakeholders of school communities as much as students, families, and external collaborators do. Schools where change is implemented without strong considerations for communication and information sharing in alignment with member preferences may experience disruption and unsuccessful change implementation, which may translate to lack of teacher and staff growth, collaboration, and co-creation of a safe environment for themselves and students. Further, these schools may experience higher attrition rates and leaders may experience difficulty in retaining teachers and staff due to the relational and emotional components of the change communication experience for teachers and staff.

This study laid the foundation for future studies to include multigenerational staff in organizational change communication discussions, as well as for future studies on organizational change in schools. The foundation has also been laid to extend the application of social constructivism and frame analysis to change implementation processes within currently existing organizational change models. Additionally, this

study adds dimension for investigations in management and leadership disciplines focusing on gaining better understanding of the experiences of individuals and groups in organizational and process contexts such as school environments and change implementation. Given the current climate of education, school leaders are being challenged to do more with less funding which will require significant shifts in practice in some cases. Ensuring that the why, what, and how of these shifts is effectively communicated in ways that honor school staff as both recipients of and agents of change is critical for sustainable change implementation and lessening potential disruption to teaching and learning that results with ineffective communication. It is also critical to support the development and sustaining of strong school organizational cultures that support inclusion, voice, and the co-creation of meaning on the part of all community members. These practices demonstrate organizational embodiment of the values of its members, which can empower school teachers and staff to be active participants in discussions that impact the trajectory of the school, its practices, and outcomes.

Lastly, collective organizational member experiences and reactions to organizational change communication can influence retention, attrition, and the attracting of potential new employees to the organization. The failure of organizational leaders to embrace and apply effective change communication strategies in schools, current teacher and staff shortages will continue to be exacerbated adding an additional layer to factors that potentially jeopardize student outcomes and school effectiveness. Though not explicitly stated, there is an underlying emotion being memorialized through participant voice in this study, and that is hurt. Organizational leaders must be keenly aware of the

emotional impact of their communications and actions on multigenerational staff members as trauma impairs individuals, and impacts their abilities to perform at optimal levels. This ultimately impacts the processes of both teaching and learning, and potentially compromises overall outcomes for the school. Focused efforts to improve the change communication and implementation processes in schools can also potentially lessen the potential negative impact on broader communities of ill-prepared youth and young adults to be served by schools. Implications for positive social change include the potential for organizational leaders to amplify teacher and staff voices regarding change communication's impact on attrition and retention, strengthen leader-member relationships, preserve school culture, and advance quality teaching and learning outcomes.

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive case study was to explore how multigenerational teachers and staff experience change communication as recipients and agents of change in schools. The six themes that emerged supported in the identification of communication strategies that support and potentially align with the needs and preferences of multigenerational school teachers and staff to support retention and reduce attrition during periods of large-scale change implementation in a school. This study was conducted in response to gaps in current literature on change communication in school organizations staffed by multigenerational teachers and staff specifically. This research, through conducting semistructured interviews with 16 multigenerational teachers and staff regarding their recent experiences of organizational change communication as

recipients and agents of change, is significant in that it gave voice to a group that expressed having no real voice or agency in the change process, which is invaluable for member buy-in, productivity, organizational sustainability and growth. Through the data analysis process, six themes emerged from participant responses: framing as meaning-making, dual identity as recipients and agents, relationships as communication currency, the emotional landscape of change, barriers undermining effective communication, and leadership as architects of meaning.

The emergent themes reinforce the importance of effective multigenerational staff member engagement at all stages of the change implementation process. The multigenerational staff participant sharing in this study amplify the challenges faced by organizational leaders and confirm literature advanced by scholars in management, leadership, and organizational change disciplines and also highlight the critical need for effective communication as members play dual roles as recipients and agents of change. Participant experiences and perceptions influence sense-making and meaning creation. Organizational members are key influencers of the sustainability of change and whether or not implementation efforts will be successful or fail regardless of the type of organization. Further, recommended strategies as a result of this investigation will serve to strengthen leader-member relationships in schools and serve to reinforce strong school culture where agency and empowerment support co-creation of meaning, teaching and learning can flourish, and students can thrive- the ultimate goals of change implementation in schools. School leader capacity building is also possible with learning

from this study, highlighting strategies to strengthen communication practices at all times for the organization, most notably during periods of change.

Much of the current change literature is shared from the perspective of organizational leaders and managers in top down fashion, which hinders practitioners in the gaining of comprehensive understanding of change processes from all stakeholder perspectives. This potentially limits the expansion of the change and change management disciplines that contribute to research on best practices, such as the increased importance placed on more bottom up or inclusive approaches. Organizational member agency is an integral part of successful change implementation. As stated in the introduction to this study, the intersection of change processes, change communication, and organizational member experiences were worthy of this and future investigations to learn more about viable strategies school organization leaders can employ to ensure effective engagement for all staff toward successful change implementation, increased staff retention, and supported sustainability of schools for continued quality teaching and learning that students deserve.

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## Appendix A: Participant Invitation Letter

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for this opportunity to introduce myself. My name is Chrystal Fields. I am a doctoral student conducting research to deepen our understanding of the experiences of multigenerational teachers and staff of organizational change in schools, and their perceptions regarding organizational communication. You have been referred to me as an ideal participant for this study because you are currently a member of the multigenerational workforce and currently serve in a non-administrative role at this organization. Your involvement would entail participating with me in a 45- 60-minute interview to discuss your experiences with organizational change communication and communication preferences in the workplace. All the information you provide in this interview, including your name, names of individuals, and the name of the organization will be kept confidential. Each interview will be assigned identifying codes that will ensure individual and organizational identifiers will not be revealed in the research findings.

I would greatly appreciate your consideration of my request for your participation in this research study. Study findings will provide organizational leaders with an understanding of the experiences and communication preferences of the multigenerational teachers and staff currently employed. Such information might be of interest to the organizational management team when they consider how to approach change implementation, dissemination of change communication, and effective staff preparation for change and or inform their decision-making processes about change communication in the future. This study is performed as partial fulfillment of requirements for my Ph.D. degree in Management with a specialization in Leadership and Organizational Change from Walden University under the supervision of Dr. Lisa Barrow.

Due to the narrow timeframe allotted for this research project, it would be greatly appreciated if you would please respond to this email before \_\_\_\_\_. We will also arrange for a phone call to provide an opportunity to further explain your important role in this research and to answer any questions you might have. Thank you in advance for your thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

Chrystal L. Fields

## Appendix B: Email Invitation to Participate in a Doctoral Research Study

You are invited to share your views for a study titled:

### Multigenerational Staff Experiences, Perceptions, and Preferences: Organizational Change Communication in Schools

Participation includes:

- One 45-60-minute interview that will be audio recorded (no video recording).
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you.
- Interviews will take place during June 2025.
- Volunteers must meet the following requirements:
  - 18 years of age or older
  - Employed in the organization during the period of recent change implementation SY22-23
  - Served in non-administrative or supervisory role during change implementation

Please click on the hyperlink below to complete the Google Form Participant Screener:  
<https://forms.gle/6cq8cvjYg422kVTD6> (Case Study Participant Screener).

## Appendix C: Semistructured Interview Questions

### **Generic probes to expand upon participant responses if needed:**

1. Why is that?
2. What does that mean to you?
3. Can you say more about that?

### **Part 1 of 3: Questions that generate *values* specific data:**

1. What are your work values?
2. Which of your values is most important? Why?
3. How is this value reflected in your work?

### **Part 2 of 3: Questions that generate *change communication experience* specific data:**

1. How would you describe your experience with the change implemented in the organization recently?
2. Would you describe the organization's communication regarding the change as effective?
3. Do you feel that the organization's communication effectively prepared you for the change?
4. Was your approach to your work or the organization impacted as a result of the organization's change communication?
5. How did your perception of communication effectiveness influence your thoughts regarding:
  - a. School culture?
  - b. School stability?
  - c. Organizational support?

### **Part 3 of 3: Questions that generate *organizational communication preferences* specific data:**

1. How do you prefer to communicate in the workplace?
2. What values influence the way you communicate in the workplace?
3. Would your preferences for workplace communication differ during a period of organizational change?
4. What influences how you communicate with different people in the workplace?

### **Closing question:**

1. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?