


2016

# Generational Differences among Social Security Administration Employees and Their Perception of Value

Joyce Moses Jones  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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2016

Abstract

Generational Differences among Social Security Employees and Their Perception of

Value

by

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MPA, California State University, Hayward, 1987

BS, California State University, Hayward, 1981

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Public Administration

Walden University

November 2016

## Abstract

Social Security Administration (SSA) managers and leaders are facing an unprecedented challenge to understand 3 to 5 generations of employees, and value the diversity of each group (Glass, 2007). Perceived lack of recognition has resulted in low morale and job satisfaction, leaving employees not feeling valued. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to explore, identify, and examine the lived experiences and perceptions of SSA employees to determine how managers and leaders can contribute to employee valuation. The central question and subquestions were designed to determine whether generational theory accurately described the lived experiences and perceptions of the subjects' value to the organization. Data collection included in-depth interviews with 15 employees of SSA, 5 from each of the most represented generational groups: Baby Boomers, Generation Xs, and Generation Ys. Key findings of a thematic analysis were that employees of differing generations feel valued in different ways. It was found that appreciation for each generation should be shown in a way that is meaningful to that generation, and does not reflect discrimination of another group. The results of this study contribute to positive social change by clarifying the relationship between generational differences and perception of value and provides specific recommendations to SSA managers and leaders. This guidance is an important contribution to the existing literature and will enhance social change initiatives through valuing all employees for the skills and talents they bring to the organization irrespective of age.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family; my husband, Reverend Dr. J. B. Jones; and my children, Jessica, Joshua and Jeremy for your utmost support throughout this journey.

I also dedicate this dissertation in memory of beloved parents; my father, Andrew Jessie Moses, and my mother, Ruth Hannah Moses, who were always proud of me, and encouraged me to be a life-long learner.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Background of the Study**

The American workforce, including the federal government, now spans four generations (Jora & Khan, 2014). The four groups are the Veterans, also referred to as the Traditionalists or Silent generation, born from 1925 to 1942; the Baby Boomers (or Boomers), born from 1943 to 1960; Generation X (or Gen X), born from 1961 to 1981; and the Millennials (also known as Generation Y or Gen Y), born from 1982 to 2002 (Glass, 2007). The three generations most represented in the workplace are the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and the Millennials (Deyoe & Fox, 2012). In order to manage effectively, leaders must try to understand the mindsets of different generations, understand how each group sees the world based on their experiences, and have an appreciation of the skills, capabilities, and experiences of each group (Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak).

As organizations are confronted with an aging workforce on the verge of retirement, the concern of organizational leaders is over the retirements of knowledgeable personnel and the lack of transfer of valuable knowledge before they leave (Green & Roberts, 2012). Research on the phenomena of a multigenerational workforce suggests employees are not being recognized for their contributions to the organization. Older employees are not being recognized for their institutional knowledge and younger employees are not being recognized for being technologically savvy (Hannan & Yordi, 2011). Managers who are familiar with the unique characteristics of each group can more effectively motivate its members, helping to keep all employees fully engaged (Hannan

& Yordi, 2011). The challenge to leaders managing a multigenerational work force is to recognize and understand its diversity (Al-Asfour & Lettau, 2014).

Potential workplace strife related to coexisting age groups and their differences in backgrounds and life experiences is due to differing expectations, work ethics, attitudes, perspectives, and motivators (Deyoe & Fox, 2012). Research suggests that although the differences might be a source of stress and conflict, a better understanding of them could result in these differences being a source of creative strength and a source of opportunity for the organization (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak). The human capital model of the past will not work with such diverse cohorts in the workforce and a more flexible model, where all employees are valued for the skills and talents they bring to the organization irrespective of age, is needed (Hannan & Yordi, 2011).

In this study, I investigated the lived experiences of 15 Social Security Administration (SSA) employees across multiple generations. The results of this study provide evidence about the relationship between generational differences and perceptions of organizational value. Chapter 1 includes the background, problem statement, and purpose of the study, followed by a discussion of the research method and design and the intent of this research. The Chapter also includes the research question, an examination of the theoretical framework, a discussion of the nature of the study, and provides definitions of key terms. The final section of Chapter 1 addresses assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations applicable to the research study, as well as the research study significance. Chapter 1 concludes with a summary of the main points in the research study.

Generational theory specifically addresses differences in age (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Since its emergence, Jurkiewicz and Brown have shown that each generation brings a different perspective to the workplace (Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998). Generational differences in the workplace bring with them differences in work organization, as well as cohort preferences for acquiring, digesting, organizing, and distilling information (Hernaus & Poloski, 2014). Baby boomers have a wealth of institutional knowledge that should be valued, developed, and managed (Kaur & Verma, 2014). Typically, Boomers would eagerly mentor younger workers (Glass, 2007). However, Generation X and Y are masters of technology more concerned with their employability than the acquisition of knowledge, and are thus challenging human resource development (Bogdanowicz & Bailey, 2002). Other differences among generations involve psychological differences, which can have a large influence on work place behavior. (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). Baby Boomers are idealistic and driven (Glass, 2007). Gen X is more skeptical and less loyal (Glass, 2007). Gen Y demonstrates the highest level of self-esteem and narcissism (Lyon & Kuron, 2014).

While each generation brings value to the workforce, they value different things at work (Bennett, Pitt, & Brice, 2012). To a Boomer, work and personal sacrifice equal financial success; Gen X value work and life balance; and Gen Y value having responsibility and less supervision (Glass, 2007). Gen X feel a continuing struggle for balance and that all they do is work, and would pick a lower paying job if it promised the life/work balance they are seeking (Glass, 2007). There are no significant differences in the desire for challenge between Boomers and Gen X; Gen X are significantly more

likely than Boomers to have a higher need for authenticity and desire greater balance (Sullivan, Forret, Carraher, & Mainiero, 2009). Boomers want to be recognized for their experience and Yers look for results and want to be on the fast track and recognized and rewarded for their contributions (Glass, 2007).

Based on the existing literature, we know that each generation values different things at work (Bennett, Pitt, & Brice, 2012). We also know, from large surveys such as the Office of Personnel Management's Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS), that lack of recognition cuts across all generations. Perceived lack of recognition results in low employee morale and job satisfaction (Hannan & Yordi, 2011). Recognizing and rewarding workers on the basis of their generational preferences is another way to increase employee engagement (Hannan & Yordi, 2011).

Generational stereotypes affect the workplace. Although many of the generational stereotypes have been addressed and disproven in the literature, many employers still believe them (Kaur & Verma, 2011). Age stereotypes among the multigenerational workforce are a source of generational conflict (Smith & Nichols, 2011).

Generational differences exist among employees and result in potential for misunderstandings, miscommunications, and mixed signals (Stark & Farmer, 2015). Research on generational differences in work values are limited and additional work is needed (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010). It behooves managers to be familiar with the differences among generations and to seek to understand generational traits and styles. Review of existing literature revealed a gap specific to generational differences in the work place in the United States and employee perceived worth to the



organization. The results of this study provide greater depth to what we already know from current research and survey studies, and further closes the gap in current research about the influence of multigenerational groups in the work place and employee perceptions of value to the organization in the United States.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Social Security Administration (SSA) managers and leaders are facing an unprecedented challenge in understanding three to five generations of employees, and understanding the value of the diversity of each group (Glass, 2007). Each generation brings value to the workforce while valuing different things (Bennett, Pitt, & Brice, 2012). Perceived lack of recognition has resulted in low employee morale and job satisfaction, leaving employees not feeling valued. According to the Partnership for Public Service (PPS) 2013 annual Best Places to Work in the Federal Government survey, the average job satisfaction and commitment rating among SSA employees fell for the third straight year. The survey also revealed that only 54.2% of the employees agree that their talents are used well in the workplace. When employees do not feel like they are being effectively utilized, morale and productivity suffer. The data strongly suggest that more needs to be done to capitalize on the strengths of the workforce.

Not only is morale among employees low, people under 30 are avoiding working for the federal government, and comprise only about 6.6% of the federal workforce. In the federal workforce, the Millennial generation feels most unappreciated, with 60 percent saying that their boss does not give them enough recognition or praise (Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, 2010). Little is known about how the SSA can support an

age diverse workforce, so that each member can contribute to their maximum potential, and be fully valued. Understanding and appreciating the uniqueness of each generation in the work place can more effectively motivate its members and help keep all employees fully engaged (Hannan & Yordi, 2011).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to investigate the lived experiences of 15 Social Security Administration (SSA) employees across multiple generations. The results of this study provide evidence about the relationship between generational differences and perceptions of organizational value. Generational theory was helpful to assess data about generational differences. The study was designed to provide rich insight into the lived experiences of SSA employees and their perceptions of value to the organization.

In this study, information was gathered about SSA experiences and perceptions to benefit managers and leaders managing a multigenerational workforce. This information will be beneficial to the body of management research by informing managers and leaders about the relationship between generational differences and employee perception of value to the organization.

### **Research Questions**

In this study, the experiences related to the SSA employees' perception of value to the organization were examined as well as the influence of generational differences on those perceptions was investigated.

The central research question and subquestions are as follows:

**RQ:** Do generational differences in the workplace influence the SSA employees' perceptions of their value to the organization?

**Subquestion(s):**

1. What are the core lived experiences of SSA employees that have impacted their perception of value to the organization?
2. Does generation theory provide useful insight on employee value perceptions?

The central question and subquestions chosen for this study provided the context for more clarity on the topic of SSA employees' perceptions of value to the organization.

**Theoretical Framework**

Generational theory and diversity theory were used in this study as a theoretical lens. Generational theory is specific to differences in age (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Diversity theory encompasses gender, age, cultural, and racial differences (Cox, 1991). The focus of this study was to gain deep information on generational diversity. Diversity theory is mentioned in this study solely because generational diversity is an outgrowth of our understanding of workplace diversity.

Strauss & Howe (1991) note that, "generations come in cycles. Just as history produces generations, so too do generations produce history" (p. 35). Within each cycle, a new generation is born with distinctive characteristics. With this distinction comes a change in how they feel about themselves, the culture, the nation, and the future (Strauss & Howe, 1997).

Diversity theory emerged in the 1980s, as a result of the increasing diversity of the workforce. Taylor Cox recognized the trend in workforce demographics and increasing globalization in the 1990s, which necessitated a change in management practices (Cox, 1991). He addresses a change process toward creating a multicultural organization to capitalize on the benefits of diversity while minimizing potential costs and makes assertions regarding the multicultural organization (Cox, 1991). A more detailed explanation of diversity theory is in Chapter 2.

As a conceptual framework, Cox uses an adaptation of the seven dimension societal-integration model developed by Milton Gordon in his work on assimilation in the United States. Cox identifies certain characteristics in an organization that will create an environment that each member could contribute to their maximum potential and be fully valued (Cox, 1991).

Cox's theory of diversity is foundational to the study of differences (i.e. gender, age, culture, and race) in the work place. His assertions can be used as a conceptual framework with regard to diversity among age groups in the workplace. Cox provides a conceptual model designed to explain effects of diversity applicable to cultural identities, including job function, religion, age, and physical ability based on relevant literature and his own research, consulting, and teaching experience (Cox, 1991). He suggests a person's group affiliations can be and should be examined on three levels: individual, group/intergroup, and organizational for a full understanding of the impact of cultural diversity on the organization (Cox, 1991).

The generational and diversity theories presented established a framework for this investigation within the context of relevant studies, articles, and books. These theories serve as a lens through which the study was designed and interpreted.

### **Nature of the study**

In this qualitative phenomenological research study, I investigated the lived experiences of 15 SSA employees across multiple generations. Interviews using a series of open-ended questions were conducted with the participants related to age differences, perceptions, and human capital valuation. Open-ended questions allowed the participants room to speak from their own lived experiences.

Moustakas (1994) stated that a phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their experiences of a phenomenon, and then reduces individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence. Investigated in this study is the relationship between generational differences and the SSA employees' perceptions of their value to the organization, the central phenomenon being age category (Boomers, Gen Xs, and Gen Ys). Because this study sought a deeper truth to generational differences in the workplace and the perceptions of employee value to the organization, a phenomenological approach was appropriate.

The population of interest for this study included SSA employees. There are approximately 62,000 SSA employees nationwide. A purposeful sampling of 15 SSA employees from the three generations most represented in the workplace (the Baby Boomers, Generation Xs, and Generation Ys) was studied.

Interviews posed open-ended questions to the participants related to age differences (including bias), perceptions, and human capital valuation. Patton (2002) stated that information-rich cases using purposeful sampling illuminates the questions under study. This sample consisted of five employees from each of the three groups, providing information rich cases. Open-ended questions allowed the participants room to speak from their own lived experiences. Data were collected via in-person and telephone interviews.

### **Definitions**

*Baby Boomers:* Baby Boomers were born between 1943 and 1960. The historical occurrences Boomers were affected by include the civil rights and women's movement, the Vietnam war, and the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. and Watergate (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010). Boomers want to be recognized for their experience and would eagerly mentor younger workers (Glass, 2007).

*Generation X or Gen Xs:* Generation X or Gen Xs, born 1961-1981, grew up during the economic ward of the 1970s and 1980s, were influenced by the post Vietnam-Watergate era; and grew up among soaring divorce rates (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak). As a result, they are skeptical, self-reliant, seek a sense of family, and want balance (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak).

*Generation Y or Millennials:* Generation Y, also known as the Millennials, were born between 1982 and 2002. Defining moments of the Millennial Generation: the

terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the subsequent war on terror, the Persian Gulf wars, widespread use of technology, and natural disasters including the Asian tsunami and Hurricane Katrina (Downing, 2006). Gen Y is referred to as the technology savvy, multi-tasking generation (Yeaton, 2008).

*Generational cohort:* Generational cohorts are groups that share birth years and significant life events (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Combinations of historical, political and social events influence each generation's attitudes, values, and perspectives (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

*Silent or traditional generation:* The Silent Generation, also referred to as the Matures, Traditionalists, or Veterans Generation, was born between 1925-1942 (Glass, 2007). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, they account for about 5 percent of the work population, and this number is dwindling as they age and retire. This group grew up in the 1920s and 1930s during The Great Depression and World War II. Because of the time of their upbringing, they know hard times, hard work, and how to do without (Glass, 2007).

### **Assumptions**

The first assumption is that the purposive sampling method used to select 15 SSA employees to interview would be unbiased with regard to myself (as I am also an SSA employee). Another assumption is that the group of employees selected would provide information regarding the perceptions of value to the organization and that there would be consistencies in responses among generational groups. Lastly, the study assumes that I conducted this study objectively and presented an unbiased report.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The purpose of this study was to seek deep information on generational diversity, and therefore did not explore other kinds of diversity such as race, gender, or economic status. The population involved is SSA employees. Nationally, there are approximately 62,000 SSA employees. Patton (2002) suggests some consideration be given to convenience and cost in determining how to get the most information from the limited number of cases sampled. Therefore, a small sample size was selected.

Patton (2002) stated that data collection and analysis of a small sample of great diversity will yield high-quality detailed descriptions of each case. A sample size of fifteen SSA employees from the three generations most represented in the workplace (the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y) was studied. Patton (2002) stated that these descriptions are useful for documenting uniqueness as well as important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity.

This sample consisted of five employees from the three generations from different interagency components. As suggested by Patton (2002), for planning and budgetary purposes, a specified minimum expected sample size, as well as criteria that would alert me to inadequacies in the original sampling approach and/or size, was determined.

Patton (2002) stated that the underlying principle that is common among sampling strategies is selecting information-rich cases from which one can learn a great deal about matters of importance and worthy of in-depth study. The decision to use maximum variation (heterogeneity) sampling strategy and selecting a sample size of 15 SSA



employees from the three generations most represented in the workplace (the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y) are justified to answer the research questions. The maximum variation sampling strategy documented unique or diverse variations in the employees' perception of their value to the organization that have emerged as a result of generational differences. The information richness of the selected sample size of 15 provided credible responses to the research questions, and the investigation of this number could be reasonably completed with available time and resources. Patton (2002) suggests that the sampling strategy and sample size be selected to fit the purpose of the study, the resources available, the questions being asked, and the constraints being faced. The sample began with 15 and did not change as information emerged. As suggested by Patton (2002), sampling procedures and decisions are fully described, explained, and justified so that information users and peer reviewers have the appropriate context for judging the sample.

### **Limitations**

Potential design and/or methodological weaknesses of the study included bias and sampling strategy. The drawback to qualitative research is that it may include bias without the researcher acknowledging it. Maxwell (2005) states the necessity of the researcher to be aware of their personal goals and concerns and how they may be shaping the research. Rather than concealing my aim and personal concerns surrounding this study, I have been transparent about my history with SSA. As stated by Maxwell (2005), validity in qualitative research is not the result of indifference, but of integrity and any view shaped by the location and perspective of the observer.

Maxwell (2005) stated that the major problem with purposeful sampling is that the sample (informants) may not be representative of the larger group. However, a purposeful sampling size of 15 offers information-rich cases for study in depth. Creswell (2007) stated that additional strategies should be included to ensure quality of data collection. Therefore, I included spending ample time in the field to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, discussed contrary information as it emerged, enlisted a peer for debriefing to ensure research made sense to others, and met the Institutional Review Board (IRB) standards.

### **Significance of the Study's Findings**

The results of this study are significant to the body of public administration research because, based on the literature review, there is little research on the influence of a multigenerational workforce and employee perception of value to the organization. Perceived lack of recognition results in low employee morale and job satisfaction (Hannan & Yordi, 2011). One of the top factors correlated to high employee engagement is recognizing and rewarding high performance (Hannan & Yordi, 2011). Understanding generational differences will go long way in not only promoting harmony in the workplace, but also improving job satisfaction. Managers may create a work environment that encourages productivity and engagement by paying attention to younger employees' need for recognition (Hannan & Yordi, 2011). Reciprocal appreciation for the technological skills brought by the younger generation and the historical knowledge of the older generation can go a long way in promoting the success of the organization, as well as promoting perceived value to the organization. Managers who know the unique

characteristics of each generation can more effectively motivate the organization's members (Hannan & Yordi, 2011).

Morale among federal employees is low, and people under the age of 30 are avoiding federal employment. SSA has little knowledge about how to support an age-diverse workforce so that each member can contribute to their maximum potential, and be fully valued. Understanding and appreciating the uniqueness of each generation in the workplace can more effectively motivate its members and help keep all employees fully engaged (Hannan & Yordi, 2011). Rudestam & Newton (2007) stated that a dissertation topic should make an original contribution to the field of study. The topic of generational differences in the work place has the potential to make an original contribution to the field of leadership and management.

Although the emphasis of this study was on SSA employees, the results of this study provide further data on generational differences and perceptions of organizational value among those in both the public and private sector. Reciprocal appreciation for the technological skills brought by the younger generation and the historical knowledge of the older generation is beneficial to society as a whole. Hannan & Yordi (2011) assert: "The homogenous human capital model of the past simply will not work with such diverse cohorts in the workforce. ... It is time to throw out the one-size-fits-all model of talent management and embrace a more flexible model" where all employees are valued for the skills and talents they bring to the organization irrespective of age (p. 8).

## Summary

Managers and leaders are challenged to understand three to five generations of employees and value the diversity of each group. The millennial generation feels most unappreciated; 60 percent say their boss does not give them enough recognition or praise (Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, 2010). Gen Xs and Baby Boomers observe that Millennials hunger for praise. Yet the Millennials see it very differently, observing that most Baby Boomers and Gen Xs rarely praise anyone for anything (Howe, 2010). Research is needed to determine how managers and leaders can be best equipped to understand generational differences and appreciate the diversity of each generation.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to investigate the lived experiences of 15 Social Security Administration (SSA) employees across multiple generations. The results of this study provide evidence about the relationship between generational differences and perceptions of organizational value. The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of 15 SSA employees across multigenerational lines. The results of this study provide evidence about the relationship between generational differences and perceptions of organizational value and document an emerging phenomenon Chapter 1 presented the problem this dissertation sought to solve. It also included background, problem statement, the purpose of the study, methodology, theoretical framework, definitions of key terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations applicable to the research study, and the research study significance.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

The American workplace, including the federal government, is undergoing a significant transition that includes a multigenerational workforce that now spans four generations (Hannan & Yordi, 2011). The three generations most represented in the workplace are the Baby Boomers (or Boomers), born from 1943 to 1960; Generation X (or Gen X), born from 1961 to 1981; and the Millennials (also known as Generation Y or Gen Y), born from 1982 to 2002, (Glass, 2007). Understanding and appreciating the uniqueness of each generation in the work place can more effectively motivate its members and keep all employees fully engaged (Hannan & Yordi, 2011).

There is a lack of recognition in the workplace for older employees' institutional knowledge and younger employees' technological savvy. (Hannan & Yordi, 2011). The challenge to leaders managing a multigenerational work force is to recognize and understand its diversity (Al-Asfour & Lettau, 2014). The literature review addresses generational cohorts and current generational studies that may assist in promoting an understanding of generational differences and an appreciation of the skills, capabilities and experiences of each group.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The research included an extensive search of peer-reviewed articles, scholarly journals and books, and business articles. Database searches included EBSCO host and Internet search engine Google Scholar.

**Key word search and survey of literature sources**

The key subject areas included (a) age diversity, (b) diversity theory, (c) generational theory, (d) multigenerational workforce, (e) multigenerational managing, (f) generational differences, (g) generational values, (h) Traditionalists, (i) Baby Boomers, (j) Generation X (Gen X), (k) Generation Y (Gen Y), and (l) Millennials. The majority of the literature was published between 2007 and 2011. However, this literature search also includes sources published within the last 5 years (2011 or later). Some foundational literature older than 5 years provided a theoretical background for the literature review. In particular, the writing of Strauss and Howe (1991) on generational theory and Cox (1991) on diversity theory provided background.

**Dissertation search**

A search of dissertations specific to a multigenerational workforce and employee perceived value of worth to organizations in the United States from 2005 to 2011 yielded no studies from the Walden University and ProQuest Dissertation and Thesis databases. However, a search of dissertations related to a multigenerational workforce and theories of diversity yielded five relevant studies of interest. Allah (2011) conducted a dissertation study entitled, “The influence of multigenerational cohorts on organizational leadership: A phenomenological study.” The findings of this study suggest additional research in managing a multigenerational organization is needed. Bragg (2011) conducted a dissertation study entitled, “Knowledge transfers in multigenerational organizations.” This research looked at the effectiveness of knowledge transfer in multigenerational organizations and the benefits of effective knowledge transfer. Bolton (2010) conducted

a dissertation study entitled, “Career motivation theory: Generational differences and their impact on organizations.” This quantitative descriptive study, using motivational theory as a framework, focused on job security and job satisfaction between four generational cohorts. Kappel (2012) conducted a dissertation study entitled, “Generational cohort as a moderator of the relationship between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction.” The research quest involved understanding whether generational cohort membership moderates the relationship between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and job satisfaction. Janssens (2003) conducted a dissertation study entitled, “Theories of diversity within organization studies: Debates and future trajectories.” Janssens reviewed the existing studies on diversity identifying their main purposes, current debates in the field, and possible future directions.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

#### **Generational theory**

Strauss and Howe proposed that American society has been subject to a cycle in which society experiences fluctuation between institutional changes and ideological changes. The cycle determines the generational changes in values and attitudes that are distinctive from those of its parental generation (Strauss & Howe, 1991). They credit their theory to the merging of the *generations approach* (pioneered by Karl Mannheim, Jose Ortega y Gasset and others) and *age location* perspective on history (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Mannheim's work identified generations as agents of social change in that generations as a collective are historically and socially aware of their location in time (Joshi, Dencker, & Franz, 2011). Historical events examined by age location gives a

perspective on how personalities of different age groups according to their phase of life are shaped and how these differing age groups retain their distinct personalities with age (Strauss & Howe). The concept of cohort-group, the link between age and events, is central to their theory (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Strauss & Howe (1991) note “a generation is defined as a special cohort-group whose length approximately matches that of a basic phase of life, or about twenty-two years over the last three centuries” (p. 34).

Strauss & Howe (1991) note “generations come in cycles. Just as history produces generations, so too do generations produce history” (p. 35). Strauss & Howe (1997) credit the cyclical perspective on American history to Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. They refer to the cycles of history, roughly the length of a long human life, as *saeculums* (first given this name by the Romans) (Strauss & Howe, 1997). The saeculum divides into four phases called *turnings*. Within each turning, a new generation is born, with distinctive characteristics. With this distinction comes a change in how they feel about themselves, the culture, the nation, and the future (Strauss & Howe, 1997).

In the First Turning (a High) of the cycle, expansion and growth occur societally, the atmosphere for children is secure and they are encouraged to explore social values (Strauss & Howe, 1997). The Second Turning (an Awakening) begins in an atmosphere of spiritual upheaval in which basic values and institutions are challenged and children are left to themselves as adults seek self-discovery (Strauss & Howe, 1997). In an atmosphere of social and civic decay, the Third Turning (an Unraveling) begins, children are raised during a time of strict codes and judgments from elders (Strauss & Howe,



1997). The Fourth Turning (a Crisis) is the phase of secular upheaval in which new values emerge (Strauss & Howe, 1997).

### **Diversity theory**

Diversity theory emerged in the 1980s as a result of the increasing diversity of the workforce. Taylor Cox recognized the trend in workforce demographics and increasing globalization in the 1990s, which necessitated a change in management practices (Cox, 1991). He addressed a change process toward creating a multicultural organization to capitalize on the benefits of diversity while minimizing potential costs, and makes assertions regarding the multicultural organization (Cox, 1991).

As a conceptual framework, Cox used an adaptation of the seven dimension societal-integration model developed by Milton Gordon in his work on assimilation in the United States. Cox identified certain characteristics in an organization that will create an environment that each member could contribute to their maximum potential and be fully valued (Cox, 1991). Cox's theory of diversity is foundational to the study of differences (i.e. gender, age, culture, and race) in the work place. His assertions can be used as a conceptual framework with regard to diversity among age groups in the workplace. Cox provided a conceptual model designed to explain effects of diversity applicable to cultural identities, including job function, religion, age, and physical ability based on relevant literature and his own research, consulting, and teaching experience (Cox, 1991).

Literature on diversity tends to deal with discriminatory practices in the work place, particularly with regard to race and gender, as well as stereotypes and effects of diversity on work outcomes (Cox). There is not much literature related to the study of

age diversity (Al-Asfour & Lettau, 2014). However, generational differences (age diversity) are a valid and important form of diversity and should be recognized as such by organizations (Lyon & Kuron, 2014).

The environment of the organization would be such that each member could contribute to their maximum potential, and be fully valued. Age equality is open to the same flexibility in terms of its definition and meaning, as was found in general studies of diversity (Riach, 2009). As stated in Chapter 1, the focus of this study is on generational diversity. Diversity theory is mentioned in this study because generational diversity is an outgrowth of our understanding of workplace diversity.

## **Literature Review**

### **Generational Cohorts**

Generational cohorts are groups that share birth years and significant life events (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Combinations of historical, political, and social events influence each generation's attitudes, values, and perspectives (Howe & Strauss, 2000). The results of these influences are differing generational specific attitudes and values about work and the work environment (Parry & Urwin, 2011). Most research on generational differences uses the concept of generations as cohorts defined by shared influences (Costanza, Badger, Fraser, Severt, & Grade, 2012). The generational framework illustrated in Table 1 provides a framework for the four generational cohorts of employees identified in the workplace and outlines generations, influences, and personal experiences for each group. The four cohorts are the Veterans, also referred to as the Traditionalists or Silent generation born from 1925 to 1942; the Baby Boomers (or

Boomers) born from 1943 to 1960; Generation X (or Gen X) born from 1961 to 1981; and the Millennials (also known as Generation Y or Gen Y) born from 1982 to 2002 (Glass, 2007). The three generations most represented in the workplace are the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and the Millennials (Glass, 2007).

There is some disagreement among demographers as to the birth year ranges used and year limits of the generational borders (Parry & Urwin, 2011). The strongest argument made for the birth year ranges is to define generations (cohorts) in terms of a historical sense (Howe & Strauss, 2000). In describing the characteristics of a generation, three attributes are identified: (a) perceived membership in a common generation, (b) common beliefs and behaviors, and (c) a common location in history (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Perceived membership or generational self-perceptions begins to emerge during adolescence, and continues to develop during and proceeding collegiate, military, marriage, or initial work experience (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Due to the vast amounts of data available, common beliefs and behaviors among birth cohorts can be tracked (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Every generation defines itself among a common location in history (Howe & Strauss, 2000). The generational-cohort perspective is one explanation for preferences for personal recognition compared to other perspectives (Stark & Farner, 2015).

Table 1

*Generational framework*

Generational Cohort	Influences	Personal Experiences
Born 1925-1942 (Glass, 2007) Silent or Traditionalists	Great Depression and World War II	Parents unemployed and difficulty finding jobs
Born 1943-1960 (Glass, 2007) Baby Boomers	Vietnam War, Watergate, Television and the Contraceptive	Cynical about leadership and suspicious of authority
Born 1961-1981 (Glass, 2007) Generation X	Ronald Reagan, Personal computer, Dot.com boom, and massive layoffs	Raised in two-income households, high parental divorce rates, downsizing deprived of a traditional family setting
Born 1982-2002 (Glass, 2007) Millennials or Generation Y	Sons and daughters of Baby Boomers, a successful Gulf War, Technology savvy, and teamwork	Unprecedented economic growth, unlimited expansion in personal wealth, more women in middle and senior management

**Silent or traditionalist generation**

The Veterans, also referred to as the Matures, Traditionalists, or Silent generation was born 1925-1942 (Glass, 2007). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, they account for about 5 percent of the work population, and this number is dwindling as they age and retire. However, some choose to continue to work and earn a living (Beckman, 2011).

This group grew up in the 1920s and 1930s during The Great Depression and World War II. Because of the terrible economic time of their upbringing, they know hard times, hard work, and how to do without (Beekman, 2011). They are a loyal, disciplined, and a law and order generation (Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak).

Traditionalists' method of doing business is hierarchical, heavily influenced by the style to run armies and manufacturing (Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak). They grew up valuing obedience over individualism in the work place (Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak). Traditionalists prefer to keep work and life separate (Beckman, 2011). They believe in hard work and sacrifice. Traditionalists can become mentors to the X and Yers (Kaur & Verma, 2011).

Traditionalists expect to be the voice of authority (Ferri-Reed, 2013). Knowing that their age and experience will be considered assets is a motivator (Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak). Because of their appreciation for symbols of loyalty, they can be motivated by plaques, certificates, or other tokens of recognition (Beckman, 2011).

## **Baby Boomers**

The Baby Boomers were born between 1943 and 1960 (Glass, 2007). This generation was named as a result of the increased birthrate after troops returned from World War II (Gentry, Deal, Griggs, Mondore, Cox, 2011). Baby Boomers grew up in an era of social change (Gentry et al, 2011). The historical occurrences Boomers were affected by include the civil rights and Women's movement, the Vietnam war, the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. and Watergate (Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak). For the first time in American history, many grew up with modern utilities (such as running water), household appliances, televisions, and some automobiles (Gentry et al, 2011).

Boomers want to be recognized for their experience and would eagerly mentor younger workers (Glass, 2007). As workers age, their meaning and purpose for work changes (Green & Roberts, 2012). One of those stages is a need to become a guider or contributor to succeeding generations (Calo, 2007). Boomers can become mentors to the Xs and Ys (Cates, 2010). Baby Boomers need success (Ferri-Reed, 2013). Boomers offer insights as they have competed with themselves as well as watched Gen Xs and their own children proceed through the schooling system (Hill, 2002).

Boomers, because of their job tenure, are knowledgeable personnel and the lack of transfer of knowledge before they retire is as risk (Calo, 2007). The Baby Boomers are aging and there are too few people at younger ages to replace them. It is estimated that there is a potential workforce loss of 40 to 50 percent in the next few years. A knowledgeable workforce is described by this writer as having experience and judgment

gained from those experiences. The loss of these experienced workers will require re-training of the remaining workforce as well as training of the new hires (Klyonaga, 2004). The experiences of older workers are a mixture of the experience and the wisdom gained from the experience. In order to maximize the benefit of having older workers managers should seek to understand their needs and motivations.

Boomers were more satisfied than Xs with work and with life and have been found to value challenging work that can be accomplished over several days while working regularly scheduled hours (Beutel & Wittig-Berman, 2008). Baby Boomers are continually searching for ways to better understand themselves (Cates, 2010). Many Boomers continue to work to meet financial needs and find personal meaning (Eversole, Venneberg, & Crowder, 2012).

Frankel & Picascia offer these recommendations for maximizing productivity and return on boomer investment: 1) create a Baby Boomer liaison; 2) communicate company values and social consciousness; 3) create a Baby Boomer executive advisory committee; and 4) all Baby Boomers to help manage the workforce. This will: 1) ensure people with 5 years to retirement are given meaningful work; 2) taps Baby Boomers to spend time with constituents, customers, etc. to build company reputation and communication; 3) provide valuable feedback on company processes and services; and 4) Baby Boomers can be utilized as models and developers of disciplined ways of working (Frankel & Picascia, 2008).

Baby Boomers tend to have a limited view of technology's role in optimizing workplace efficiency, given they did not grow up with computers (Al-Asfour & Lettau,

2014). Growing numbers over 55 are using social media tools (Childs, Gingrich, & Piller, 2010). Computers/technology are a major source of job dissatisfaction among Boomers; are more likely to change jobs than their elders; and view organizations as having a social responsibility (Wesner & Miller, 2008).

### **Generation X or Gen X**

Gen Xs, born 1961-1981, grew up during the economic ward of the 1970s and 1980s; influenced by the post-Vietnam-Watergate era; and among soaring divorce rates (Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak). As a result, they are skeptical; self-reliant; seek a sense of family; and want balance (Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak).

Gen Xs feel a continuing challenge to balance work and social or family life (Bennett et al, 2012). They would pick a lower paying job if it promised the life/work balance they are seeking (Glass, 2007). Gen Xs are more concerned with their employability than the acquisition of knowledge (Bogdanowicz & Bailey, 2002). And, Gen Xs are most concerned about work/life balance; have higher marital satisfaction than boomers and want challenging work that can be accomplished in a single day working flexible hours (Beutel & Wittig-Berman, 2008). They have been labeled as “slackers”, though they are willing to work hard at the right work (Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak).

Gen Xs are self-reliant and like structure and direction (Cates, 2010). They need autonomy (Lieber, 2010). They demand more of a role in decision making; and to switch jobs more frequently than prior generations (Yang & Guy, 2006).

Gen Xs use technology to support lifestyle needs as well (Simons, 2010). Gen Xs can share and impart their knowledge of technology to the Matures and Boomers (Cates,



2010). Xers are uniquely suited to help Boomer managers be successful (O'Bannon, 2001). Their approach to authority is casual (Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak).

### **Generation Y, Gen Y, or Millenials**

Millenials were born between 1978 and 2001. Defining moments of the Millenial Generation: terrorists attacks of 9/11 and subsequent war on terror; Persian Gulf wars; widespread use of technology; natural disasters including Asian tsunami and Hurricane Katrina (Ferri-Reed, 2013). Millenials are technology savvy. Characteristics of the group: cell phones; blog writing; highly involved parents; medicated generation; Internet usage in many facets of their life (Ferri-Reed, 2013). Gen Ys look for results at any cost. They want to be on the fast track and recognized and rewarded for their contributions (Glass, 2007). Gen Y needs validation (Lieber, 2010). The 21<sup>st</sup> century work force is more nurturing and less competitive, focusing on an environment that promotes contribution (Kaifi, Nafei, Khanfer, & Kaifi, 2012). Millenials bring great value to the team; and are loyal to people, not companies (Cates, 2010). To motivate this generation it is suggested that managers focus on informal, immediate and fast communication (Jora & Khan, 2014). Gen Y demonstrates the highest level of self-esteem and narcissism (Lyon & Kuron, 2014).

Gen Y is referred to as the technology savvy, multi-tasking generation (Kaifi et al, 2012). Technology will play a major role in retention and engagement of Gen Y (Hokanson, Sosa-Fey, & Vinaja, 2011). Millenials can share and impart their knowledge of technology to the Matures and Boomers (Cates, 2010).

Gen Y is a larger generation than the Baby Boomers (VanMeter, R., Grisaffe, D., Chonko, L., & Roberts, J., 2013). Gen Ys are characterized as having a strong sense of morality and are civic-minded (Hahn, 2011). They are more ethnically diverse and one-third is raised in single-parent household. Also having grown up with computers and computer games, they are goal oriented and expect a strong web presence; they value intelligence and innovation; value work/family balance; and are adept at work in groups. Recruiting as well as managing strategies are needed to adopt to this group. (Yeaton, 2008).

Gen Ys are sociable and eager to engage with others, especially their managers. Gen Ys look for “direct, ongoing supervision and guidance from authority figures”, rank salary as the top consideration in deciding on a job offer; want to make a contribution to their employers in return for career development; want challenging assignments; place a high value on personal interactions with co-workers; and desire balance with work and personal obligations (McDonald, 2008).

Some of the expectations of Gen Y include equally competing ideas; sincere and self-less contributions over hard-earned credentials; leaders are expected to serve rather than preside; and the expectation that power comes from not having knowledge, but sharing it (D’Aprix, 2009).

They prefer leaders that provide a working environment that is conducive to individual fulfillment, rather than those focused on task and organizational success (Lyon & Kuron, 2014). Gen Y works well in teams. They want to be engaged and valued. Multi-tasking is second nature and they are willing to take on more responsibility. The

line between work and home doesn't exist. They want to spend their time in meaningful and useful ways. Salary, a friendly casual work environment and growth and development opportunities attract Gen Y (Lowe, et al, 2008).

Gen Ys have a unique familiarity with technology that vastly exceeds their predecessors (Simons, 2010). Gen Y understands the importance of widespread communication and use blogging and social networks (Childs, Gingrich, & Piller, 2010). Effective use of technology is important to prospective Millennial employees. Also, work-life balance and quick company impact is important (Downing, 2006).

Millennials are not the best educated generation to enter the workforce; are mobile; and continually search for meaningful work (Wesner & Miller, 2008). The newest generation to join the workforce will embrace fun at work (Lamm & Meeks, 2009). Millennials want to make a difference (Beekman, 2011).

### **Generational Differences**

Many researchers point out that there is little difference between the generations in today's workforce (Smith & Nichols, 2015). However, even small effect sizes associated with these differences are still meaningful (Twenge, 2010). Each generation brings its own unique values and views to the work place (Al-Asfour & Letta, 2014). Generational differences existing among employees can result in potential for misunderstandings, miscommunications, and mixed signals (Deyoe & Fox, 2012). Areas of potential workplace strife related to coexisting age groups and their differences in backgrounds and life experiences include differing expectations, work ethics, attitudes, perspectives, and motivators (Glass, 2007). Therefore, effective leaders should continue

to seek the best ways of leading people based on their generation and other diversity factors (Al-Asfour & Letta, 2014).

### **Work Values, Motivators, and Recognition**

Over half of the American workforce is now unsatisfied with their work (Hannan & Yorbi, 2011). Although the youngest workers are the least satisfied, older workers have the lowest satisfaction rates in two decades (Hannan & Yorbi, 2011). Work values can be conceptualized in different ways, four broad categories include: intrinsic, extrinsic, social and prestige (Jin & Rounds, 2012). At the core of workplace generational conflict, appears to involve values (Stark, E., & Farner, S., 2015). While each generation brings value to the workforce, they also value different things at work (Glass, 2007). Boomers rate intrinsic values significantly higher than Millennials (Schullery, 2013). Gen X rates extrinsic values significantly higher than both Boomers and Millennials (Schullery, 2013). Millennials may be perceived as having an attitude of entitlement, as they value both leisure and extrinsic rewards highly (Schullery, 2013). Research on generational differences in work values are limited and additional work is needed (Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010).

Age related changes in motivational variables, rather than chronological age or cognitive abilities, play a key role in successful work outcomes for middle-aged and older workers (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004). Two motives that older workers have indicated as important in influencing their decision to continue to work are financial necessity and fulfillment (Shah & Gregar, 2014). Older employees are more bonded and socialized to other employees and these attachments are more meaningful than career opportunities

(Bright, 2010). Some other intrinsic motivators include a desire to maintain a positive self-concept and to mentor others, increase with age; however, achievement motivation decreases with age (Calo, Patterson, & Decker, 2014). Older workers are differently motivated, rather than less motivated (Calo, et al, 2014). Younger employees, at lower levels of the organization are motivated by potential career advancement, leadership and economic well-being (Bright, 2010). Job and career design should encompass work motivation differences inherent in generational differences (Calo, 2007). Different generational cohorts respond differently to workplace fun with job satisfaction, task performance, and OCB (organizational citizenship behavior) (Lamm & Meeks, 2009).

There is no empirical evidence that there are any differences among generations in altruistic values. Millennials (Gen Y) were higher in individualistic traits (positive for greater extroversion, conscientiousness and self-esteem; and negative traits including neuroticism and narcissism) (Lyon & Kuron, 2014). There is no significant generation difference in job hopping (Twenge, 2010). Mature workers are more likely to have longer tenure (Hokanson, et al, 2011).

Lack of recognition is endemic to the workplace, cutting across all types of workers and all generations (Hannan & Yorbi, 2011). Managers can most effectively engage Millennials by looking at their desire for praise as a desire to make sure they are on track, doing what their managers want, and contributing to the organization (Hannan & Yorbi, 2011). Employee recognition can take many forms; from supervisors, peers, team-based or organization-wide (Solnet, Kralj, & Kandampully, 2012).

### **Work-Life Balance and Benefits**

With new entrants into the work environment, come new attitudes about work-family interface (Heraty, Morley, & Cleveland, 2008). Gen X led the movement toward flexibility, which has become increasingly important in the last few years as the Millennials enter the workforce. However, Boomers too are beginning to seek more flexibility as they find themselves “sandwiched” between caring for children and elderly parents, or as they consider working beyond a traditional retirement age (Hannan & Yorbi, 2011). The benefits packages created for Baby Boomers are now obsolete because the following generations have been influenced by different societal factors and have different values. The XY generations are looking for benefits that promote work/life balance, for instance flex-time, job sharing, virtual offices, part-time work schedules, child care, special work accommodations, and more (Clark, 2007). Gen Ys look for a combination of rewards in or their efforts at work. For example, opportunities for engage in socially responsible actions (Solnet, Kralj, & Kandampully, 2012). Overall, more work-life flexibility is being sought by all four generations, for different reasons (Hannan & Yorbi, 2011).

### **Learning Styles**

It behooves managers to be familiar with the differences among generations and seek to understand generational traits and styles. Generational differences in the workplace bring with them differences in work organization; cohort preferences for acquiring, digesting, organizing, and distilling information (Hernaus & Poloski, 2014). The desire to learn new things decreases with age (Calo, et al, 2014). Older learners like

to see the value in what they are learning (Cekada, 2012). Older generations were typically sent to formal training classes outside of the workplace; are independent; expert or instructor led; goal-oriented; competitive; and tech latecomers (Hannan & Yorbi, 2011). Younger workers increasingly expect that learning will take place within the workplace; Gen Xs are individualists and also collaborative; peer-to-peer; and tech-adept; Gen Ys need to see context and value; search and explore with each other, online, in their time, in their place; and are tech-savvy (Hannan & Yorbi, 2011). Once this is clearly understood, these learners often can become interested in learning the new technology or content because it will help them better perform their tasks or handle routine workplace problems (Quinney, Smith, & Galbraith, 2010). Older adults have learned via traditional learning methods, they rely on their experience as a source of learning (Cekada, 2012). Gen Xs learn best in a casual, relaxed and comfortable environment, and they like to have fun doing it (Cekada, 2012). Gen Ys are multitaskers and prefer to learn by discovery (Cekada, 2012). When training a multigenerational group various techniques, and being flexible and ready to adapt are important (Cekada, 2012).

### **Skill Set**

Organizations are confronted with an aging workforce on the verge of retirement. The public sector is at a high risk of loss of knowledge based on public sector employee job tenure. Generations view technology differently (Houck, 2011). The older generation is less focused on technology, but excel in planning and verbal abilities (Kelly, Elizabeth, Bharat & Jitendra, 2016). Younger people may be better at adopting the latest technologies (Kelly, Elizabeth, Bharat & Jitendra, 2016). A mentoring relationship can

build respect among generations while increasing the skill set of both parties (Houck, 2011). Millennials' intimate knowledge of social media and technological trends, can be used for special projects and focus groups for a fresh perspective (Miah & Buckner, 2013).

Millennials have proven to be exceptional team players, collaborative, respectful of opinions of authority figures, and very eager to learn (Hannan & Yorbi, 2011). Mentoring provides the perfect opportunity for Boomers to pass on institutional knowledge, and provides alternative development and engagement opportunities for Gen Y employees (Solnet, Kralj, & Kandampully, 2012). Knowledge transfer needs to be varied due to age diversity and thus diversity of learning styles among generations (Stevens, 2010). The relationship can be formal or informal, according to the best fit for both the mentor and mentee (Solnet, Kralj, & Kandampully, 2012). The process should be seen by both as a reciprocal one; Gen Ys can teach their older mentor, improved information technology skills (Solnet, Kralj, & Kandampully, 2012).

### **Psychological/ Psychological Contract**

Other differences among generations involve psychological differences (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). Generational differences in the workplace go beyond technological differences, but also psychological (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). Generation Y has increased self-esteem, narcissism, anxiety and depression, lower need for self-approval and a more external locus of control than other generations (Twenge & Campbell, 2008). However, there are few meaningful differences (Wong, Gardiner, Lang, & Coulon, 2008).



A psychological contract is characterized by employee outlook on expectations in relation to their work. (Lub, Nije, Matthijs, Blomme, & Schalk, 2012). There are generational differences in the psychological contract that employees hold with their organization (Lub et al, 2012). The psychological contract is at the heart of commitment to the organization (Lub et al, 2012). The youngest generations tends to be less committed to their organization, and are more likely to leave if their needs are not fulfilled (Lub et al, 2012).

### **Leadership and Authority**

Different leadership styles are required when leading a multi-generational work force (Al-Asfour & Lettau, 2014). A diverse and inclusive workplace requires an awareness of generational differences, embracing new approaches, and communicating in a way that engages all employees (Hannan & Yorbi, 2011). If an organization recognizes and manages generational difference, employees will be more engaged (Simons, 2010). Human Resources Department of any organization needs to understand and manage the challenges created by generational diversity (Macon & Artley, 2009). It is suggested that managerial time is best spent considering employee needs relating to maturity, life-cycle and career stage differences than developing generationally specific management policies and practices (Macky, Gardner, & Forsyth, 2008). Leaders in each generational cohort have similar gaps in Leading Employees, Change Management, and Building and Mending Relationships (Gentry, Griggs, Deal, Mondore, & Cox, 2011). These gaps suggests the focus should be on enhancing these competencies, rather than focusing on generational differences (Gentry, et al, 2011).

Congruence between leader and direct report depends on shared perceptions (Haeger & Lingham, 2013). One way to manage generational differences in the work place is to look for differences and address them; and, look for similarities and commonality (Jora & Khan, 2014). Making the most of generational diversity, leaders should create an environment that forms constructive employee interactions (Al-Asfour & Lettau, 2014). Leaders working with young employees is an investment in the next generation of leaders (Miah & Buckner, 2013). It is important for a multigenerational group working together to achieve goals, to innovate, and to problem solve to embrace their differences and recognize them as strengths rather than as challenges to overcome (Lester, Standifer, Schultz, & Windsor, 2012).

### **Stereotypes**

Although many of the generational stereotypes have been disproven in the literature, many employers still believe them (Kur & Verma, 2011). Numerous self-perceptions are diagnosed as a result of stereotypes workers held toward themselves (Mauer, Barbcite, Weissee, & Lippstreu, 2008). Age stereotypes are a source of generational conflict (Smith & Nichols, 2011). Prevailing stereotypes suggest: 1) older workers experience greater fatigue and have less energy; 2) more resistive to change, less interested in training and gaining knowledge; and 3) less knowledgeable regarding technical aspects of the job (Stark, 2009). Also, younger generations were more likely to believe that older generations downplay work-related issues, such as flexibility, technology, and fun (Lester, Standifer, Schultz, & Windsor, 2012). On the other hand, older generations perceive younger workers as valuing professionalism, involvement,

formal authority, face-to-face communication, and continuous learning to a significantly lesser extent (Lester, et al, 2012). Other misconceptions held are that older workers are rigid and inflexible and younger workers are irresponsible and entitled (Lester, et al, 2012). The workers in the middle are misunderstood by both younger and older generations (Lester, et al, 2012).

Generation-based stereotypes held by managers have the potential to generate perceptions of injustice and create divisiveness in organizations (Davis, Pawlowski, & Houston, 2006). Stereotypes can result in age discrimination. People are more negative toward older people (Stark, 2009). Older workers (those over 50) suffered termination, harassment, and exclusion from hiring (Santora & Seaton, 2008). Stereotypes about older workers can result in age discrimination litigation and act as barriers to employment opportunities (Posthuma & Campion, 2009).

It is suggested that organizations extinguish the labels such Baby Boomers, and Gen Xs and focus on helping employees of every generation (Renn, 2008). Due to the rapidly changing work environment retraining and retooling has no age barriers and education should be viewed as a lifelong journey (Bockman & Sirotnik, 2000). Managers are urged to make time to understand individual needs; abandon generational labels to describe behavior; be flexible; and be attentive to not only the work of the team, but also team members (Wagner, 2002).

Other ways to dispel age stereotypes toward older workers are to ignore them; recognize the value of job knowledge of Baby Boomers working past retirement age; change attitudes toward older workers; and seize the opportunity to make the work place

more harmonious (Stark, 2009). There needs to be a change of attitude toward older workers; and a realization that older workers do not accept age discrimination (Santora & Seaton, 2008).

### **Summary**

In summary, Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature which addresses generational cohorts, a multiple generations workforce, and diversity. Research on age diversity is much less developed (Shore et al, 2009). Understanding generational cohort characteristic differences is fundamental to understanding and appreciating the diversity of each group and overcoming stereotypes. A fully realized organization would be characterized by pluralism, full integration of each group, and the nonexistence of prejudice and discrimination (Cox, 1991). The goal of managing diversity is to maximize the ability of all employees to contribute to organizational goals and to achieve their full potential unhindered by group identities such as age (Cox).

The literature review revealed a gap in the literature specific to generational differences in the work place in the United States and employee perceived worth to the organization. Although this study involved SSA employees, it could help close the gap in current research about the influence of multigenerational groups in the work place and employee perceptions of value to the organization in the United States.

### **Conclusion**

The literature review provides a foundation for this dissertation research. This chapter presents a literature gap in the existing body of knowledge relative to the relationship between generational differences in the work place and perceived value of

employees to the organization. Further research is needed to determine how managers and leaders can be best equipped to understand generational differences and appreciate the diversity of each generation and avert age stereotyping.

The literature review also provided a foundation upon which new knowledge about the phenomena of and understanding generational differences can be built. Managers are encouraged to take advantage of the distinct talents and strengths of each generation while supporting and encouraging intergenerational understanding and cooperation (Njoroge & Yazdanifard, 2014).

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine generational differences among SSA employees in the workplace and the perceptions of employee value to the organization. The goal of the study was to determine if employee perceptions of their value to the organization is related to their belonging to a particular generation. In this chapter, I describe the qualitative research paradigm for this study, the methodology for this study, how I selected participants, my role as the researcher, and ethical issues. This chapter also includes explanations of the data collection tools, how I collected and analyzed the data, and threats to data quality.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

This is a qualitative phenomenological research study using purposive sampling that explored responses to generational differences among 15 SSA employees including five from each of the most represented generational groups: Baby Boomers, Generation Xs, and Generation Ys. In this study, I explored the relationship between generational differences and the SSA employees' perceptions of their value to the organization. Moustakas (1994) stated that a phenomenological study involves a return to the experience to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide a basis for analysis, and that its aim is to interpret the description of the experience. Therefore, my selection of a phenomenological research approach sought a deeper understanding, through a greater depth of analysis, of generational differences among SSA employees and their perception of employee value to the organization. Patton (2002) stated that phenomenological

research is the lived experience of the phenomenon. Therefore, interviews posed open-ended questions to the participants related to age differences (including bias), perceptions, and human capital valuation. Moustakas (1994) stated that the problem, purpose, and questions of the study seek to reveal the essences and meaning of the lived experience; and that every perception counts. Therefore, open-ended questions were chosen to allow the participants room to speak from their own lived experiences.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher is the instrument in qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002). As Patton (2002) suggests, immersion in the data generates insights. Therefore, I conducted my own interviews and most of my transcriptions. I enlisted the aid of a graduate student to assist with transcriptions. Maxwell (2005) suggests that a researcher can maintain credibility in the data collection process by knowing his bias. Therefore, I noted my own bias and annotated in my notes as I reviewed transcriptions. As a SSA employee in a quasi-managerial position, none of the participants involved in the study were under my direct authority. As suggested by Maxwell (2005), personal goals and concerns cannot be excluded from the design of research. Therefore, I, considered my personal goals and concerns and how they shape your research. The research protocol constructed ensured reliable sources were analyzed, and data was adequately captured. This included ensuring that the structure of the experience was based on reflection and interpretation of study participants, and to delve deeper into the general meanings that they provided, as suggested by Moustakas (1994).

## **Methodology**

### **Population**

SSA runs one of the largest entitlement programs in the United States: the Retirement, Survivors, and Disability Insurance program. SSA also administers the Supplemental Security Income program, which provides financial support for aged, blind, or disabled adults and children with limited income and resources. Combined, SSA pays 60 million individuals almost \$650 billion in benefits annually. The majority of the agency's 62,000 employees delivers direct service to the public or directly support services provided by front-line workers. Additionally, SSA depends on the work of about 15,000 individuals employed by State Disability Determination Services, who help to process the disability workload.

This purposive sample consisted of 15 (5 from each of the most represented cohorts) SSA employees across multiple generations. Employees participating in the study were from various locations in the organization.

### **Sampling**

Sampling strategies, including sample size, depends on prior decisions about the appropriate unit of analysis to study (Patton, 2002). The starting point in selecting a sampling strategy as well as determining a sample size is choosing the unit of analysis.

In this study, the experiences related to the SSA employees' perception of value to the organization were examined as well as the influence of generational differences on those perceptions was investigated.

The central research question and subquestions are as follows:



**RQ:** Do generational differences in the workplace influence the SSA employees' perceptions of their value to the organization?

**Subquestion(s):**

3. What are the core lived experiences of SSA employees that have impacted their perception of value to the organization?
4. Does generation theory provide useful insight on employee value perceptions?

The central question and subquestions chosen for this study provided the context for more clarity on the topic of SSA employees' perceptions of value to the organization.

Purposeful sampling was used for this study. Patton (2002) stated that the focus of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases that will illuminate the questions under study. Patton (2002), also stated that this strategy aimed at capturing and describing the central themes that cut across a great deal of variation. Therefore, selection of a maximum variation (heterogeneity) sampling strategy was the sampling strategy that best supported this study. The maximum variation sampling strategy documented unique or diverse variations in the employees' perceptions of their value to the organization that emerged as a result of generational differences.

Patton (2002) stated that sample size is dependent on what a researcher wants to know, the purpose of inquiry, what is useful and credible, and what can be done with available time and resources. Therefore, a sample size of 15 was selected. Patton (2002) stated that in-depth information from a small number of people can be very valuable. This was also a guiding factor in sample size selection.

A sample size of 15 SSA employees from the three generations most represented in the workplace (the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y) was studied. Patton (2002) stated that a small sample selection of great diversity, the data collection and analysis should yield high-quality, detailed descriptions of each case, which will be useful for documenting uniqueness, and important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity. Therefore, I selected a diverse sample. This sample consisted of five employees from each of the three cohorts from three different interagency components. Patton (2002) suggests that a rationale for minimum sample size be established. Therefore, for planning and budgetary purposes, a minimum expected sample size was selected, as well as criteria that would alert any inadequacies in the original sampling approach and/or size.

The underlying principle that is common among sampling strategies is selecting information-rich cases that can contribute a great deal of information about matters of importance and are worthy of in-depth study (Patton, 2002). My decision to use maximum variation (heterogeneity) sampling strategy and selecting a sample size of 15 SSA employees from the three generations most represented in the workplace (the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y) was justified to answer my research question. The maximum variation sampling strategy will document unique or diverse variations in the employees' perceptions of their value to the organization that have emerged as a result of generational differences.

The information richness of the selected sample size of 15 participants provided credible responses to what I wanted to know and was done with available time and

resources. Patton (2002) stated that the sampling strategy and sample size should be selected to fit the purpose of the study, the resources available, the questions asked, and the constraints faced. The sample began with fifteen, and no changes were needed. Patton (2002) stated sample size is adequate once achieving redundancy and is also subject to peer review, consensual validation, and judgment. Sampling procedures and decisions are fully described, explained, and justified so that information users and peer reviewers have the appropriate context for judging the sample.

### **Participant criterion**

After I received approval from the Walden University Internal Review Board ([IRB] approval number: 11-05-14-0173535), participant selection, with the criteria that participants be employees of the SSA, was conducted in accordance with consultation with the Region IX Office of the General Counsel (OGC). Upon clearance to proceed, I made personal contact with SSA employees in four different interagency components for possible participation in the study.

### **Instrumentation**

Moustakas (1994) stated that the basic purpose of phenomenology is to determine what an experience means for the persons who experienced it and reduce it to a description of the universal essence. The data collection instrument was designed to connect responses to the research questions.

Interviews posed open-ended questions to the participants related to age differences (including bias), perceptions, and human capital valuation. Open-ended questions allowed the participants room to speak from their own lived experiences. Data

was collected one on one via in-person and telephone interviews. I explained the purpose of the interview, how the information might be used, the process of the interview, and the time frame needed to complete the interview. Before the initiation of each interview, a consent form was secured. For in-person interviews, I read the consent form along with the participant, and then the participant signed the form. For phone interviews, I read the consent form along with the participant and then participant emailed the form back with an electronic signature. For in-person interviews, I established a relaxed atmosphere, took notes when appropriate, observed the interviewee's body language and used appropriate body language. During in-person interviews I asked open-ended questions and follow-up probes, remained neutral, and conducted myself in a courteous and professional manner. I asked if the interviewee had any questions before we began. At the close of the interview, I recapped the responses to ensure that I had accurately captured their responses and asked if the interviewee had anything to add. Patton (2002) suggests note taking consisting primarily of key phrases and major points made by the respondent. Therefore, I took notes according to what the respondent considered to be a major point.

The central research question was:

**RQ:** Do generational differences in the workplace influence the SSA employees' perceptions of their value to the organization?

**Subquestion(s):**

1. What are the core lived experiences of SSA employees that have impacted their perception of value to the organization?

2. Does generation theory provide useful insight on employee value perceptions?

As previously stated, I investigated in this study the relationship between generational differences and the employees' perceptions of their value to the organization, the central phenomenon being age category (Boomers, Gen Xs, and Gen Ys).

#### **For researcher-developed instruments**

The United States Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) 2008-2013 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) suggests an overall decline in job satisfaction amid a time of governmental budget reductions, pay freezes, and furloughs among federal employees.

This phenomenological study further explored the responses to some of the questions on the FEVS as related to employee satisfaction and engagement, and investigated whether or not generational differences account for differences in perceptions of value to the organization. Moustakas (1994) stated that a phenomenological approach relies primarily on interviews as data, and focuses on the perceptions of participants as the primary source of knowledge. In this study, interviews posed open-ended questions to the participants related to age differences (including bias), perceptions, and human capital valuation. Open-ended questions allowed the participants room to speak from their own lived experiences. Patton (2002) stated that there is value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon for any common

patterns that emerge. In this study, the resulting evaluation describes the uniqueness of each generation, it also looks for common themes across generations.

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

I collected and recorded the data via one on one in-person and telephone interviews using a digital recorder. During the in-person interviews, I also took notes noting body language. Frequency of data collection was dependent upon availability of myself and participants. Data collection spanned a 9 month period. Potential participant contact was made via email (electronic contact), phone call, or physical contact. I posted a solicitation of interest to a Facebook page of a group of SSA employees. An explanation was provided concerning the study, stating that participation was not an organizational requirement, that participation in the study would be a voluntary activity, that participation would also be confidential, and how I could be contacted (via my personal email, Facebook private messenger, or phone). I also canvassed areas near SSA employment (not on SSA premises), and I requested referrals from SSA employees. The recruitment process took longer than expected due to my availability to physically canvass and my ability to connect with younger employees.

Once the interviews were secured, I explained the purpose of the interview, how the information might be used, how the process would flow, and the time frame needed to complete the interview. Consent forms were reviewed prior to the start of each interview and delivered (hand carried or emailed) to each participant. Interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder. During in-person interviews, I established a relaxed atmosphere; took notes, when appropriate; observed the interviewee's body language and

used appropriate body language, during in-person interviews; asked open-ended questions and follow-up probes; remained neutral, and conducted myself in a courteous and professional manner. I asked if the interviewee had any questions before we began. At the close of the interview, I recapped the responses to ensure that I had accurately captured their responses and asked if the interviewee had anything to add. Patton (2002) suggests note taking consisting primarily of key phrases and major points made by the respondent. Therefore, I took notes according to what the respondent considered to be a major point.

I interviewed eleven participants in-person. However, four of the five Gen Ys were interviewed via telephone (due to proximity). Recordings were uploaded and saved in a secure database on my private computer. Each interview was transcribed and stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Identifying information was kept separate from the transcripts.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Patton (2002) stated that before analysis of the data can take place, it must be organized to get a sense of the data and check out the quality of the information collected. Therefore, tape recordings were transcribed verbatim. I conducted my own interviews and most of the transcriptions. I enlisted a graduate student to assist in verbatim transcriptions. As stated by Patton (2002), getting immersed in the data generates

insights. Data collected and transcribed was copied and contained in a secure location to protect confidentiality.

Because the focus of the data analysis and interpretation of qualitative research is on the participant's meaning, coding was used for content analysis. Data analysis was performed through a multi-step process. The following modified model of van Kaams' strategy to data analysis (Moustakas, 1994) was helpful to frame the data analysis approach:

1. Listing and preliminary grouping;
2. Reduction and elimination;
3. Clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents;
4. Final identification of the invariant constituents and themes (validation);
5. Construct individual textural descriptions;
6. Construct individual structural descriptions; and finally
7. Construct a combination of textural and structural descriptions.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Creswell (2009) suggests incorporating numerous validity strategies into a study especially when an inside investigator is involved. In assessing the validity of my research, I clarified my potential bias as a researcher, as it relates to the study; spent ample time in the field to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon; discussed contrary information as it emerged; enlisted a peer for debriefing, to ensure my research makes sense to others; and met the Institutional Review Board (IRB) standards.



Potential design and/or methodological weaknesses of the study include bias and sampling strategy. The negative in qualitative research is to have a bias and not acknowledge it. At the onset, I thought it was very important that I remained neutral to my topic. Maxwell (2005) stated that a view from any perspective is shaped by the location and lens of the observer. It is incredibly important for me to know my view on the topic and make it known, as such, in the study. To the qualitative researcher, bias is not a negative. What would be bias in statistical sampling, and therefore a weakness, becomes intended focus in qualitative sampling, and therefore a strength. Knowing your bias and annotating it in notes or in a journal as you review the data will assist in maintaining credibility in the data collection process. To address the issue dependability, the processes within the study were reported in detail.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Ethical norms reinforced by the scientific community include: validity of research, competency of the researcher, beneficence of research, special populations, and informed consent (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). The potential to negatively impact a participant's standing in their job is a common type of risk for social science research (Endicott, 2010). As a SSA employee, in a quasi-managerial position (as a program leader), the Institutional Review Board (IRB) ensured that none of the participants were in my direct line of authority.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I described the research methodology used for this study; how participants were selected, the researcher's role, and ethical issues; explanations of the data collection tools, how the data was collected and analyzed, and threats to data quality.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the analysis of the data used to answer the research questions. The primary research question and the subquestions are as follows:

**RQ:** Do generational differences in the workplace influence the SSA employees' perceptions of their value to the organization?

**Sub question(s):**

a) What are the core lived experiences of SSA employees that have impacted their perception of value to the organization?

b) Does generation theory provide useful insight on employee value perceptions?

This qualitative phenomenological research study explored responses to generational differences among 15 SSA employees, including five participants from each of the most represented generational groups: Baby Boomers, Generation Xs, and Generation Ys. Data from this study contribute to the existing literature regarding a multigenerational workplace.

This chapter presents a more comprehensive discussion of the study process and provides qualitative data results that were gathered and analyzed. Interviews posed open-ended questions to the participants related to age differences (including bias), perceptions, and human capital valuation I designed six open-ended questions (Appendix B) for the inquiry in order to answer the core research questions and to stimulate conversations with the interviewees, allowing the participants room to speak from their

own lived experiences. This chapter will end with a summary of the data presented and analyzed.

### **Demographic Information**

The 15 participants involved in the study were SSA employees from varying parts of the organization. These 15 participants served as representative employees to answer the core research question about the influence of generational differences in the employees' perception of their value to the organization. Demographic data were collected from each of the participants for analytical and informational purposes. The generational cohort data were used to coordinate and evaluate the purposive sample. Other informational data includes gender, organizational location and the grade schedule level of the employee. Table 2 is a summary of the demographic information for each participant in the research study.

Table 2

*Demographic Summary of participants*

Participant	Cohort	Gender	Organizational Location	Grade Schedule (GS) Level (Informational)
P1	Gen X	F	Program Service Center/SF Region	7
P2	Gen X	F	Program Service Center/SF Region	11
P3	Gen X	M	Office of Quality Review/AIP/SF Region	12
P4	Gen X	F	Program Service Center/SF Region	12
P5	Gen X	F	Office of Quality Review/AIP/SF Region	13
P6	Baby Boomer	F	Program Service Center/SF Region	9
P7	Baby Boomer	F	Program Service Center/SF Region	12
P8	Baby Boomer	F	Program Service Center/SF Region	11
P9	Baby Boomer	M	Regional Office/SF Region	13
P10	Baby Boomer	F	Office of Quality Review/Chicago Region	13
P11	Gen Y	F	Program Service Center/SF Region	11
P12	Gen Y	M	Office of Quality Review/NY Region	12
P13	Gen Y	F	Office of Quality Review/NY Region	12
P14	Gen Y	M	Office of Quality Review/NY Region	12
P15	Gen Y	F	Field Office/FL	7

**Data Collection and Storage**

The recruitment process implemented, according to Chapter 3 and the IRB application, I made contact with potential participants by personal contact via email

(electronic contact), phone call, or physical contact. I posted a solicitation of interest to a Facebook page of a group of SSA employees. Providing participants an explanation concerning the study stating that participation was not an organizational requirement; that participation in the study would be a voluntary activity; that participation would also be confidential; and how to be contacted (via my personal email, Facebook private messenger, or phone). I also canvassed areas near SSA employment (not on SSA premises), and I requested referrals from SSA employees. The recruitment process took longer than expected due to my availability to canvass local offices and my ability to connect with younger employees.

I interviewed eleven participants in-person. However, four of the five Gen Ys were interviewed via telephone (due to proximity). Consent forms were reviewed before the start of each interview and hand carried or emailed to each participant. Interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder. Recordings were uploaded and saved in a secure database on my private computer. Each interview was transcribed and stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Identifying information was kept separate from the transcripts. Providing participants an explanation concerning the study stating that participation was not an organizational requirement; that participation in the study would be a voluntary activity; that participation would also be confidential; and how to be contacted (via my personal email, Facebook private messenger, or phone). I also canvassed areas near SSA employment (not on SSA premises), and I requested referrals from SSA employees. The recruitment process took longer than expected due to my availability to canvass local offices and my ability to connect with younger employees.

### **Data Analysis**

For the data analysis, I used a modification of van Kaam's strategy to list and group, reduce and eliminate, cluster and thematize, and validate the data collected. Moustakas (1994) stated that the purpose of the analysis of the raw data is to determine the significant, relevant, invariant meanings that provide highlights of the lived experiences. Therefore, in addition, hand coding methods were used for data analysis, enabling organized collection of interview information into themes and trends. This allowed for possible synthesis and understanding of the primary phenomena and core essence of the participants' lived experiences. Because the focus of the data analysis and interpretation of qualitative research is on the participant's understanding of meaning, coding was used for content analysis. Data analysis was performed through a multistep process. Interviews were all tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Interview transcriptions were printed. Each was read thoroughly several times, and included notes in the margins.

### **Data Coding**

Patton (2002) stated that inductive analysis allows for immersion in the details and specifics of the data to discover important patterns, themes, and interrelationships. Therefore, I chose to hand code the data. Utilizing a coding process allowed for the placement of interview question responses in an organized manner for review and data analysis. This was achievable by assigning headings to the interview questions and then assigning the responses to the appropriate heading. Responses were further dissected through the use of the key terms related to each issue to draw out the main points from

the interview prompts and capture emerging themes. Thematic data coding enabled analysis to ensure theme emergence was identifiable. As new themes emerged, review of previous transcripts was made to ensure all key points were captured for deeper analysis. Themes emerged from each interview question. I reviewed content in the responses and highlighted those statements that had specific relevance to the research questions. This helped me to explore the complex phenomena hidden in the textual data. As other themes emerged, I assigned subtheme categories. This method guided the data analysis, assisted in providing a better understanding of the phenomenon, and developed the emerging themes and patterns associated with the lived experiences of the participants.

### **Themes Identified**

During the data collection, 15 participants responded to six open-ended interview questions posed to generate responses to the research questions. The interview questions constitute the major themes and from participants' response patterns subthemes emerged. In the analysis, the six themes identified established the following thematic categories:

1. Presence of recognition by the organization.
2. Feelings associated with skills and talents being used by the organization.
3. Presence of respect of supervisors.
4. Individuals being treated differently by the organization, due to age.
5. Appreciation for skills and knowledge.
6. What feeling valued would look like.



**Theme 1: Presence of recognition by the organization.**

The first thematic category, presence of recognition by the organization, was derived from the study participant's responses to the first interview question about how well they perceive they are recognized by the organization for their work. Participants described their experiences poignantly. Twelve of the fifteen participants felt that their work was recognized by the organization. There was a sense of excitement and pride in each of the twelve as they responded to the question and elaborated on how they knew that their work was recognized by the organization. Recognition by the organization was reflected in awards, appraisals, praise, being asked to participate in special project/take on extra work, and by getting respect from co-workers/peers.

P1 (Gen X) shared, with a smile on her face:

I feel recognized by the organization for the work that I do. We are complimented for the work that we do. I have been complimented on how I handle customers on the phone in setting up payment plans for overpayments.

P6 (Baby Boomer) indicated that she was not recognized, specifically because of age. There were expressions of resignation, anger, and hostility as P6 (Baby Boomer) shared:

I don't think I'm recognized at all. Well, I guess I would say that I don't feel that I'm recognized because of the age that I am now. I don't feel like there is a place for older people in the workplace here at Social Security anymore. I don't think they appreciate us as much as the newer people. It seems like the push is more on getting in the younger generation.

P2 (Gen X) also stated that she was not recognized by the organization for her work. P2 stated:

I do not feel recognized at all, it's not very well. I've worked, this year will be 25 years 2015 and I've had at least I can say minimum of six different positions. I worked above beyond. I've trained, I've mentored. I've never gotten past 4.5 in my PACs. I've never gotten any type of Commissioner's award, regional award. I've always gone above and beyond...the more I do, I can never get there.

P8 (Baby Boomer) indicated she was not recognized well enough. She felt that employees were recognized for production. And, since she was not a high producer, she did not receive recognition for the quality of work produced.

**Theme 2: Skills and talents being used by the organization.**

The second thematic category revealed how employees felt as a result of their skills and talents being used well in the workplace. The second interview question elicited a yes or no response, leading to the second part of the question relevant to the theme of feelings. Two of the participants (P1 & P2, both Gen Xs) felt that their skills and talents were not used well by the organization. As a result, they did not feel good about their jobs. P1 indicated that she understood it was the nature of the position. However, P2 expressed feelings of despondency. It is my conjecture that her feelings might have been overshadowed because her husband was dying. The remaining 13 participants felt that their skills and talents were used well by the organization. Other responses included: P7 (Baby Boomer) stated "I feel very happy to come to work every

day,” P4 (Gen X) stated that they felt “proud, excited,” P14 (Gen Y) stated “ I feel like I’m part of the team...gives you a little more inspiration and drive”.

**Theme 3: Presence of respect by supervisors.**

The third thematic category focused on whether the participant felt that they were being respected by their superiors. The third interview question also elicited a yes or no response, leading to the second part of the question, which was an invitation to explain. P2 (Gen X) felt that they were not respected by their supervisors. The same participant did not feel recognized by the organization for the work that they do. As a result of not feeling recognized, the participant did not feel good about her job. She responded with a tone of anger. The remaining fourteen participants felt that they were respected by their supervisors. Respect from their supervisors was reflected by: not being micromanaged, being greeted, being asked personal questions, receiving inquiries about their needs from their supervisors, supervisors being willing to offer assistance/support with training, respects point of view; more adult environment, able to handle things in a professional manner; respected as an older woman, speaks highly of, have an understanding, kinship, mutual respect. The fourteen were very specific about the way that their supervisors showed them respect.

**Theme 4: Individuals are treated differently by the organization, due to age.**

The fourth thematic category highlighted the various ways in which the individuals perceived that they were treated differently by the organization due to age. Perceptions of other generations is a subtheme which emerged. Twelve participants felt that individuals were treated differently by the organization due to age. Three participants

(one Baby Boomer and two Gen Xs) felt younger employees with degrees get the promotions.

P2 (Gen X) articulated:

A lot of people who are near retiring learn that with new people if you don't have a degree, you been there for years they are swept under the rug at this point. So, I really feel I'm like jaded...if you your younger they're saying well we're gonna make you this manager, make you what not...I'm kinda like in the middle too young to retire, but not the youngest.

P 4 (Gen X) delivered her response in a very reflective manner. She indicated:

I think there is a difference. You would have to be blind not to see that. People that have been here 30 to 40 years see younger employees with a degree get the promotion.

Two participants (both Baby Boomers) felt the organization wanted them to retire. Both participants have over 25 years of service. They exhibited expressions of disappointment. Three participants (all Baby Boomers) felt promotions and details go to younger people. One of those three, P10, added it was "because the older employees did not want to do things". P7 (Baby Boomer) had been discriminated against due to age (she was told by the selecting official that she wanted someone younger). She filed an age discrimination complaint and was promoted. P9 (Baby Boomer) thought older employees were treated with reverence. He appreciated the respect and felt, humbly, that he had earned it. P11 (Gen Y) did not perceive being treated differently was a bad thing, as long as promotions or detail selections were based on skill set. Other responses given attributed to the

perception that employees are treated differently by the organization due to age were: older employees are set in their ways (not expected to change); younger employees are expected to learn; without a college degree, you're swept under the rug; if your younger, management expects you'll be here longer, and they can do more with them; younger employees with degrees get the promo; favoritism based on how long they've been here; don't recognize older people; think our ideas are passé; discriminated against, based on age (she wanted someone younger); older employees, they want us to move on, get out, retire; older employees work by procedure and some of the older things; experienced people don't feel valued as much because they want the younger people to come in here and just whip stuff out; older employees get passed over; promotions and details go to younger people; younger employees are looked upon as trying to acquire grades and then we move on; older employees are treated with reverence; and younger have a tougher time, and they have to prove themselves. Three participants (two Gen Xs and one Gen Y) felt individuals were treated no differently by the organization due to age and that individuals were valued according to the skills that they "brought to the table". P3 (Gen X) indicated "if you're good, you're treated well regardless of age."

Other responses that emerged as a result of the discussion of employees being treated differently due to age included responses that suggested perceptions of other generations. The responses suggested perceptions of other generations. They were that: younger employees have a sense of entitlement; younger employees are ambitious; younger, faster; older, more accurate; older, aren't as proficient as younger (computer skills); younger employees move up quickly; younger employees don't spend time

learning the job; younger employees don't understand the work (reliance on automation); part of older generation mock Millennials; looking at young people as the vehicle to move the agency forward (regardless of skills); and older workers get the promotions and big awards.

**Theme 5: Appreciation for skills and knowledge.**

The fifth thematic category highlights the participants feeling appreciated for the skills and knowledge they bring to the work place. The fifth interview question elicited a yes or no response, requesting a follow-up explanation. Nine of the participants (three Baby Boomers, four Gen Xs, and two Gen Ys) felt that they were appreciated for the skills and knowledge they bring to the work place. One participant (Gen X) did not feel appreciated for the skills and knowledge they bring to the work place; two participants (one Gen X, one Baby Boomer) felt appreciated by some; and one (Baby Boomer) did not feel appreciated for the skills and knowledge they bring to the workplace always. P6 (Baby Boomer) remarked "...that I've accumulated you know over the years, I do not". P8 (Baby Boomer) stated "I want to train, I want to move". P6 and P8 both expressed frustration for not being appreciated for the skills and knowledge they had acquired over the years. P8 still has aspirations to do different things in the organization, given the opportunity. One (Gen Y) felt they had not been given the opportunity to show what they could do.

**Theme 6: Strategies to increase employees' perception of value to the organization.**

The sixth thematic category addressed opinions about strategies to increase employees' perception of value to the organization. Four participants (one Baby Boomer and three Gen Xs) felt valued. The dominant theme among Baby Boomer responses is the desire to be valued for their experience, skills, and opinions. Gen Xs desire more money. Gen Ys desire more individual verbal recognition. The remaining twelve participants had this to say with regard to what being valued by the organization would look like to: acknowledge the hard work that I do; higher grade details; more money; appreciate skill set; be promoted; rely on self to be valued; a fair appraisal; people seek my opinion; respect my point of view, agree or not; more verbal recognition; feedback from peers/supervisors; show in evaluation; employee of the month/certificate; and doing what's expected of me.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Creswell (2009) suggests incorporating numerous validity strategies into a study especially when an inside investigator is involved. In assessing the validity of my research, I clarified my potential bias as a researcher, as it relates to the study; spent ample time in the field to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon; discussed contrary information as it emerged; enlisted a peer for debriefing, to ensure my research makes sense to others; and met the Institutional Review Board (IRB) standards.

### **Summary**

The intent of this study was to investigate generational differences in the workplace and the perception of employee value to the organization and to determine if there is a relationship between generational differences and the employees' perception of

their value to the organization, the central phenomenon being age category (Boomers, Gen Xs, and Gen Ys). The results of this study revealed that employees (among all generational cohorts) perceive that individuals are treated differently due to age. Particularly, Baby Boomers and Gen Ys feel that their skills and talents are being used by the organization; and that they are recognized by the organization for the work that they do. But neither of these groups feel they are recognized in a way that they feel valued by the organization. The Baby Boomers desire more recognition for their skills, experience and opinions. Gen Ys desire more individual verbal recognition. Overall, Gen Xs perceive they are recognized for the work that they do; perceive that their skills and abilities are being used by the organization; they feel respected by their supervisors; they feel appreciated for the skills and knowledge that they bring to the organization; and they feel valued, but desire more money as an expression of that value. Chapter 5 concludes this dissertation research by addressing interpretations of the findings, limitations of the research, recommendations, and implications.



## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### Summary of the study

According to existing research, managers and leaders are challenged to understand multiple generations of employees, and value the diversity of each group. However, there remains an important gap in the current literature regarding the relationship between generational differences in the workplace and perceived value of employees to the organization. In this study, I investigated generational differences in among SSA employees the workplace, and investigated the relationship between generational differences and the employees' perceptions of their value to the organization.

This qualitative phenomenological research study explored the experiences of 15 SSA employees across multiple generations (Baby Boomers, Gen Xs, and Gen Ys) to investigate the relationship between generational differences and the employees' perceptions of their value to the organization. The results derived from this study provide deeper information on generational diversity and the employees' perceptions of organizational value, and documents an emerging phenomenon. The central research question was:

**RQ:** Do generational differences in the workplace influence the SSA employees' perceptions of their value to the organization?

Subquestion(s):

1. What are the core lived experiences of SSA employees that have impacted their perception of value to the organization?

2. Does generation theory provide useful insight on employee value perceptions?

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The results of this study provide evidence about the relationship between generational differences and perceptions of organizational value and further documents an emerging phenomenon. Consistent with prior research the three generations most represented in the SSA workplace are the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and the Millennials (Glass, 2007).

In addressing the research question concerning what the core lived experiences of SSA employees that have impacted their perception of value to the organization are, the findings revealed that although there are generational differences in the workplace, there are also similarities among employees of all age groups. Despite occupying different generational cohorts, all of the participants perceived that individuals are treated differently because of age. However, their assumptions of why this is the case, were different.

For example, Baby Boomers and Gen Ys feel that their skills and talents were being used by the organization and that they are recognized by the organization for the work that they do. But neither of these groups felt they were recognized in a way that made them feel valued by the organization. While each generation brings value to the workforce, they also feel valued differently.

The Office of Personnel Management Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey [FEVS] 2014 revealed an overall drop in employee satisfaction. Questions concerning meaningful recognition based on various levels of employee performance, and fairness of promotions, had the lowest percentage of positive responses [FEVS, 2014]. While the FEVS is a valuable resource for gauging job satisfaction and morale, the FEVS does not detail why people give certain ratings. This study begins to tackle why different generations give different responses.

Several themes emerged from the research question: what are the core lived experiences of SSA employees that have impacted their perception of value to the organization? For example, in general, SSA employees felt valued when they were acknowledged for hard work, were offered higher grade details, were respected for their point of view, or were recognized with a certificate. However, it was discovered that each generation feels valued differently. The findings of this study are somewhat consistent with previous research on generational differences.

Existing research shows that Baby Boomers want to be recognized for their experience and would eagerly mentor younger workers (Glass, 2007). SSA Baby Boomers are no different. They desire more recognition for their skills, experience, and opinions.

Extant research regarding Gen X, indicates they work more for intrinsic rewards (Glass, 2007). On the contrary, SSA Gen Xs indicated they would feel valued if they received more money. Prior research indicates Gen X has been labeled as “slackers,” though they are willing to work hard at the right work (Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak).

Apparently, SSA is the right work because SSA Gen Xs are willing to work hard and perceive that they are recognized for the work that they do. They also perceive that their skills and abilities are being used by the organization, feel respected by their supervisors, feel appreciated for the skills and knowledge that they bring to the organization, and feel valued, but desire more money. SSA Gen Xs would feel more valued if they received more money, for example in the form of higher grade details. Overall, SSA Gen Xs were the most satisfied group. This may be because they are midcareer, usually educated, and have plenty of growth opportunities available.

Consistent with prior research, SSA Gen Ys want to be on the fast track and recognized and rewarded for their contributions (Glass, 2007). Also consistent with prior research, SSA Gen Ys need validation (Lieber, 2010). SSA Gen Ys desire more individual verbal recognition as a means of feeling valued by the organization. The experiences investigated in this study are an important contribution to the existing literature, as they provide insight in the way employees in different generational cohorts feel valued. It also dispels generational stereotypes.

### **Limitations of the study**

As explained in Chapter 1, there were three potential design and/or methodological weaknesses of the study, including bias and sampling strategy. Selection of generational differences in the workplace as a dissertation topic comes from an interesting observation that I made at my workplace. Because I am a SSA employee, there is a potential for bias. To eliminate this bias, I am disclosing my opinion on the topic.

As a Baby Boomer entering my 34th year with the SSA, with tentative plans to retire in 8 years, I noticed the age differences among my peers. The notable differences among employees are in the grasp of technology and differences in work values. I thought these differences might be attributed to differences in generations. My interest in generational differences in the workplace among SSA employees was sparked on two levels. I noticed that most of my colleagues had not been in federal service for long. I had been promoted through the ranks over several years from a General Schedule Pay Scale (GS)-4 to a General Schedule Pay Scale (GS)-13. My motivation had been to learn as much as I could in each position, so that I would be able to move freely throughout the organization. However, most of my younger colleagues had been hired as GS-12s. With very few higher GS level positions locally available, what would be their motivation to remain in the unit and the agency? Secondly, when town hall conference calls were held by our organizational leaders, there was generally an older employee who expressed a feeling of being left behind when it came to promotional opportunities. Thus, the issue of value to the organization became intriguing to me. Although I am an older employee, I have never felt disadvantaged or advantaged due to age. I believe that my promotability has been a result of my talents, skills, abilities, and experience.

The second potential limitation of this study was the selected sampling strategy. Purposeful sampling was used for this study. The major problem with purposeful sampling is that the sample (informants) may not be representative of the larger group (Maxwell, 2005). There are approximately 62,000 SSA employees and my sample size consists of 15. I am very pleased with the variety of participants in this study; they are

from varied components, varied GS levels, and varied parts of the country within the organization.

Although the focus of this study is generational differences, gender is a known factor in influencing job satisfaction [FEVS, 2014]. The third potential limitation of this study is the ratio of male to female participants among both the Boomers and Gen Xs. The lack of gender balance among these groups is a sampling strategy weakness.

### **Recommendations**

SSA's current acting commissioner repeatedly acknowledges employees as her number one priority. Unfortunately, as this study indicates, the message has not resonated throughout the organization that all employees are valued. I offer three recommendations to increase SSA employees' perceptions of their value to the organization:

1. Understanding generational differences and how to enhance an employee's perceptions of their value to the organization should be part of the SSA manager's/team leader's basic training. All managers and leaders should be trained to be best equipped to understand multiple generations of employees, and value the diversity of every generation. In addition to the basic training, training materials and current articles should be made available online for later reference and easy access.
2. In this volatile period of budget cuts, managers need to be more creative and efficient to retain talented employees. There should be an ongoing dialogue within the agency, to seek to determine what will motivate Gen Xs and Ys to continue with the agency for the long haul.

3. Lastly, engagement of and among all generations should be fostered. All voices should be heard, with the intent of gaining knowledge of what each cohort brings to the workplace and to dispel stereotypes.

## **Implications**

### **Social Change**

Although SSA employees were investigated in this study, the topic of generational differences in the workplace and the employees' perceived value to the organization has the potential to make an original contribution to the field and has many applications for all areas of society. The importance of recognizing and valuing an employee is a factor correlated to employee engagement. Managers can more effectively motivate and engage their staff if they are aware of their unique differences (Hannan & Yordi, 2011). By valuing Baby Boomers for their skills, experience and opinions; providing promotional opportunities to Gen Xs; and by paying closer attention to Gen Ys need for recognition, managers create a work environment that encourages productivity and engagement (Hannan & Yordi, 2011). Understanding generational differences and dispelling stereotypes promotes reciprocal appreciation, harmony in the workplace, and job satisfaction. All employees should be and feel valued for the skills, talents, experiences, and opinions that they bring to the organization irrespective of age.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Literature on diversity tends to deal with discriminatory practices in the work place, particularly with regard to race and gender, stereotypes, and the effects of diversity on work outcomes (Cox, 1993). There are not many studies concerned with age diversity

(Share et al., 2009). Cox's research (1993) showed that if an employee believes that he or she is undervalued, regardless of what the organization says, then the employee's work performance will be affected. Generational theory proposes that American society has been subject to a cycle in which society experiences fluctuation between institutional changes and ideological changes. The cycle determines the generational changes in values and attitudes which are distinctive from those of its parental generation (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Review of existing literature revealed a gap specific to generational differences in the work place and employee perceived value to the organization. The results of this study provides greater depth to what we already know from current research and survey studies; and further closes the gap about the influence of multigenerational groups in the work place and employee perceptions of value to the organization.

### **Conclusion**

We know from large surveys such as the Office of Personnel Management's FEVS, that lack of recognition cuts across all generations. While each generation brings value to the workforce, they also feel valued in different ways and for different reasons. It behooves managers to know what those differences are and seek to understand generational traits, characteristics, and styles. It is also beneficial in valuing employees, that managers show an appreciation for each employee in a way that is meaningful to their generation. For example, from the study we know that Baby Boomers desire to be valued for their experience, skills, and opinions; Gen Xs desire more money; and Gen Ys desire more individual verbal recognition. Equally as important as showing appreciation



for each generation in a way that is meaningful to that generation, is to show value to employees of different age groups without discrimination.

If an employee believes that he or she is undervalued, then the employee's work performance will be affected. The results of this study, which show that employees of different generations feel valued for and in different ways, contribute to the existing literature and enhance social change initiatives through valuing all employees for the skills and talents they bring to the organization irrespective of age.

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## Appendix A: Letter to Participant

Date:

Name of Participant  
Address

Dear (Name),

My name is Joyce Jones and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. You may already know me as a Program Leader in the Office of Quality Review, but this research is separate from that role. I am speaking from a personal capacity and not for the agency; the agency has not approved or endorsed what I say or present; and the views or conclusions expressed are personal. Information gathered is specifically for academic purposes only.

I am conducting dissertation research on generational differences among Social Security employees and their perception of value to the organization. There are four generations represented in the workplace. Managers and leads are challenged to understand multi-generations of employees and value the diversity of each group.

I realize that your time is important to you and I appreciate your consideration to participate in this study. In order to fully understand your experience we need to meet for approximately one hour, with a possible follow-up meeting. Meetings can be held at a location of your choosing and will not require you to do anything you don't feel comfortable doing. The meetings are designed to simply to determine if there is a relationship between generational differences and the employees' perception of their value to the organization. All information gathered during our meetings will be kept strictly confidential.

Joyce Jones  
Doctoral Candidate  
Walden University

Appendix B: Recruitment Brochure

**ABOUT THE STUDY**

The Social Security Administration (SSA), as many other federal agencies, continues a widening generational gap between its managers and leaders in its workforce. The challenge is to understand those in the generations of employees, and value the diversity of each group.

The intent of this study is to investigate generational differences in the workplace and to determine if there is a relationship between generational differences and the employees' perception of their value to the organization.



**ABOUT THE RESEARCHER**

This study is being conducted by Joyce Jones, Doctoral Candidate at Walden University. You may already know me as a Program Leader in the Office of Quality Review, but this research is separate from that role. I am speaking from a personal capacity and not for the agency; the agency has not approved or endorsed what I say or present, and the views or conclusions expressed are personal. Information gathered is specifically for academic purposes only.

Regarding confidentiality, I am the only one who will access the raw data. No names or identities will be placed in the final research report. All data will be stored in a confidential manner.

The Research Participant Advocate at Walden University is Dr. Lillian Endicott; you may contact her at 612-312-1240 or email at [lr@waldenu.edu](mailto:lr@waldenu.edu) if you have questions about your participation in this study.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT THE RESEARCHER**  
 Joyce Moses Jones  
 Walden University  
 Phone: 510 965 7888  
 Email: [joyce.jones@waldenu.edu](mailto:joyce.jones@waldenu.edu)  
 888-811-05-14-0173335



**VOLUNTEER PARTICIPANTS ARE NEEDED**

FOR A DOCTORAL RESEARCH STUDY

**GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES AMONG SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION EMPLOYEES AND THEIR PERCEPTION OF VALUE TO THE ORGANIZATION**

Generational

BOOMERS

? X-GENERS

MILLENNIALS

Differences

**VOLUNTEER PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR INTERVIEW**

Are you a Social Security Administration employee born 1943-1996?

Do you live in the Bay Area?

Participants are asked to:

- Provide informed consent;
- Meet at an agreed upon place for interview;
- Participate in a confidential 30-60 minute 1-person interview;
- Be audio taped during interview;
- Share your perceptions about age differences in the work place.

**NOTE:** Participants should not be an acquaintance of the researcher or in Office of Quality Review/Disability Quality Branch.

**DISCLAIMER:**  
 Participation is voluntary, there is no compensation, you are participating in your own personal capacity (not your work time, using your own resources). This activity is not an agency study or activity; you are not speaking in your official capacity or on behalf of the agency; your contact will remain confidential. Information gathered through your participation with the agency; office obligations will apply.

If you have any questions regarding office obligations or regulations, you may contact the Region's office attorney, who are Janet Moore at 415-671-3673 and Elizabeth Berry at 415-671-4072.

## Appendix C: Data Collection Tool

*Thank you for participating in my class assignment. I want to assure you of confidentiality of your responses.*

*Please use as much space as needed to adequately respond to the questions and note that I may need to follow-up on your responses for clarification.*

**Questions:**

**What year were you born?**

- 1) How well do you think you are recognized by your organization for the work that you do?**
  
- 2) Do you think your skills and talents are used well in the workplace? How does this make you feel?**
  
- 3) Do you feel respected by your superiors? Please explain.**
  
- 4) Do you think that individuals are treated differently (*i.e. younger employees favored for their computer skills, older employees favored for their institutional knowledge or younger employees less favored due to lack of institutional knowledge, older employees less favored due to lack of their computer skills*) by the organization due to age? Please explain.**
  
- 5) Do you feel appreciated for the skills and knowledge that you bring to the work place? Please explain.**
  
- 6) In order to feel valued, what would that look like?**

## Appendix D: IQ1/ Presence of recognition by the organization

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Responses

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Awards

Appraisals

Praise

Asked to participate in special project/take extra work

Get respect from Co-workers/peers

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## Appendix E: IQ2/Skills and talents being used by the organization.

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Responses

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I feel ok/neutral

Well satisfied

Feels good/great

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## Appendix F: IQ3/Presence of respect by supervisors.

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Responses

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Not micromanaged

Greeted

Asked personal questions

Inquiries about needs

Willing to assist with training

Respects point of view

More adult environment

Able to handle things in a professional manner

Respected as an older woman

Speaks highly of

Have an understanding, kindship, mutual respect

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Appendix G: IQ4/Individuals being treated differently by the organization, due to age. .

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Responses

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Older, set in ways (not expected to change)  
Younger, expected to learn  
No degree, swept under the rug  
If younger, be here longer, can do more with them  
Younger employees with degrees get the promo  
Favoritism based on how long they've been here  
Don't recognize older people  
Think our ideas are passé  
Discriminated against, based on age (she wanted someone younger)  
Older employees, they want us to move on, get out, retire  
Older employees work by procedure and some of the older things  
Experienced people don't feel valued as much because they want the  
Younger people to come in here and just whip stuff out  
Older get passed over  
Promotions and details go to younger people  
Younger looked upon as trying to acquire grades and then we move on  
Older treated with reverence  
Younger have a tougher time, they have to prove themselves

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## Appendix H: IQ5/Appreciation for skills and knowledge.

Sub-theme - Perceptions of other generations

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Responses

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Younger employees have a sense of entitlement

Younger employees are ambitious

Younger, faster

Older, more accurate

Older, aren't as proficient as younger (computer skills)

Younger employees move up quickly

Younger employees don't spend time learning the job

Younger employees don't understand the work (reliance on automation)

Part of older generation mock Millennials

Looking at young people as the vehicle to move the agency forward (regardless of skills)

Older workers get the promotions and big awards

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Appendix I: IQ6/Strategies to increase employees' perception of value to the organization.

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Responses

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Acknowledge the hard work that I do  
Higher grade details  
More money  
Appreciate skill set  
Be promoted  
Rely on self to be valued  
Fair appraisal  
People seek my opinion  
Respect my point of view, agree or not  
More verbal recognition  
Feedback from peers/supervisors  
Show in evaluation  
Employee of the month/certificate  
Doing what's expected of me

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