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# Conflict and Diversity Associated with Four Generations in the Workforce

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Rodney Milligan

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

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2016

Abstract

Conflict and Diversity Associated With Four Generations in the Workforce

by

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## Abstract

Four generations of workers share the workforce for the first time in history. Business leaders' failure to address generational conflict may lead to low productivity, high turnover rates, employee frustration, and reduced profits. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experiences of business leaders, managers, and supervisors in leading a multigenerational workforce within their companies. The conceptual framework was based on McClelland's theory, identifying key motivators that drive characteristics of people, including affiliation. A purposive sample of 20 local employees, spanning 4 generations from the retail grocery industry in Hampton Roads, Virginia, were interviewed to explore general characteristics, attitudes, values, and behaviors at work. Transcribed interview data were divided into categories to find shared phenomenon and identify themes based on the participants' perceptions. The findings were categorized and coded, patterns were established, and themes were generated to answer the central research question. Trustworthiness of the interpretations was achieved through member checking. The findings from this study revealed that the employees perceived that business leaders, managers, and supervisors lacked sufficient knowledge to successfully communicate with their employees or peers from different generations in the workplace. The employees perceived that those communication failures and lack of interaction between the different generations generated conflict. The implications for positive social change include the potential to bridge the gap between younger and older workers and minimize conflict resulting from miscommunication among the different age groups.

## Dedication

My doctoral study is dedicated to my late mother, Florence Bland Milligan, a lifelong educator, (1934-1992). Thank you for teaching me all the tough lessons, and for believing in me. I will always love and cherish you. I also dedicate this study to my late wife Constance W. Milligan, (1957-2005).

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Modern business organizations often include four generations of employees with working ages up to and over 60 years (Hershatler & Epstein, 2012). The new millennium presents many challenges concerning workplace diversity as the result of four generations working side-by-side. The business world is growing increasingly complex. Potential conflict could arise because baby boomers are due to retire during the next decade and members of Generation Y, also known as the *millennial generation*, are set to enter the workforce.

Joshi, Dencker, Franz, and Martocchio (2011) asserted that business leaders' failure to address generational conflict may lead to low productivity, high turnover rates, employee frustration, and reduced profits. Zhu (2013) identified factors, including conflict that results from character traits, value systems, and behavioral patterns across generations in the workplace. My goal in this study was to fill gaps in the research and assist organizational leaders and managers in the retail grocery industry to increase their awareness of issues surrounding conflict resulting from generational differences in the workplace.

### **Background of the Problem**

Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak (2000) suggested conflicts in values, views, mindsets, and demographics of generations exist in the workplace. Cekada (2012) classified each generational personality. Cekada defined members of the (a) silent generation (born prior to 1942) classified as *adaptive*, (b) baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) are *idealist*, (c) members of Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980)

are reactive, and (d) members of Generation Y or the millennials (born after 1980) are *civic minded*. According to Minnotte (2012), potential sources of employee conflict among generations include differing behaviors, perceptions, values, and attitudes.

Previous researchers on multigenerational differences identified claims of employee conflict in multigenerational organizations and emphasized the difficulties of integrating multiple generations in the workforce (Ho, 2012). Schullery (2013) posited that to maintain a competitive advantage, organizational leaders must learn to adapt to the current needs of the evolving workforce. Results from this study may contribute to social change by providing organizational leaders with the necessary information to rethink assumptions about developing and managing a multigenerational workforce. The primary focus of this study is the retail grocery profession. This study was not restricted to retail grocery and extended into the realm of numerous organizations and leaders by applying an understanding of intergenerational conflict and diversity issues in any workplace.

### **Problem Statement**

Four generations of workers are in the current workforce. The differences in the age in the workforce lead to challenges for business leaders because of significant perceived generational differences (Lester, Standifer, Schultz, & Windsor, 2012). Labor force participation for the year 2012 included 7,676,000 members of the traditionalist generation representing 5% of the total labor force in the United States, the baby boomers 59,893,000 38%; Generation X 49,433,000 32% and Generation Y 31,927,000 25% U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, 2012). The general business problem is that each generation has its unique communication styles, principles, and distinctiveness; creating

workplace challenges for business leaders, managers, and supervisors (Lester et al., 2012). The specific business problem was that some business leaders, managers, and supervisors may lack sufficient information and guidance to lead and motivate a multigenerational workforce (Mencl & Lester, 2014).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore business leaders', managers', and supervisors' experiences in leading a multigenerational workforce within their companies, and how the experiences have affected their understanding of the leadership styles, strategies and processes for motivating their employees. The population consisted of retail grocery leaders, managers, and supervisors located in Hampton Roads, Virginia the southeast region of the United States, who had experience leading and managing multigenerational workforces. This population was appropriate for this study because researchers such as Mencl and Lester (2014) suggested the significance for employers to integrate generational characteristics in the recruitment process.

The implication for positive social change included the potential to bridge the gap between younger and older workers and minimize conflicts resulting from differences among age groups. The potential also existed to assist leaders, managers, and supervisors in reducing workplace conflict to maintain a productive workforce. Findings from this study could contribute to social change by enhancing community relations by identifying generational conflicts in the workplace and better understand generational differences to build lasting relationships among the generations.

### **Nature of the Study**

The significance of this qualitative research study was to explore the lived experiences of business leaders, managers, and supervisors within the retail grocery industry in Virginia to identify and characterize their perceptions and experiences relative to conflicts resulting from managing multiple generations in the workforce. The phenomenological research design enabled interactive data collection using in-depth conversations with open-ended questions to understand the lived experiences of the participants. The qualitative method research design was the most appropriate method for this study because qualitative researchers seek to understand the lived experiences and meaning of a real-world situation. Ali and Yusof (2011) noted characteristics of qualitative research: (a) the researcher is the primary instrument for analysis and collecting the data, (b) the research must have meaning, (c) the process must be inductive, and (d) the product must be rich and descriptive.

A quantitative methodology was not suitable for this study because quantitative methodologists examine the relationships and effects of variables as opposed to the lived experiences of research participants. According to Franklin (2012), quantitative researchers use statistical analysis to interpret the meaning of the data. Malina, Norreklit, and Selto (2011) asserted that mixed method research combines both the qualitative and quantitative methods. A mixed methods approach was not appropriate for this study because it would not adequately address the objective of this study. My data collection for this study included structured, open-ended questions as opposed to closed responses and numerical data. The qualitative method is not restrictive and enables the use of

multiple modes for collecting data. Franklin indicated that the flexibility of qualitative methodology allows for focusing the research problems as opposed to the design protocol.

Phenomenological researchers explore the perceptions, perspectives, and awareness of a specific phenomenon (Franklin, 2012). Although ethnographic is a similar design, ethnographers focus conducting research on a single group. The scope of this research was to explore a phenomenon (Lewis, 2010). Quantitative research design was not appropriate for this study because analysis of statistical data were not included. Mixed method research combines both qualitative and quantitative methods and was not appropriate for this study (Malina et al., 2011).

### **Research Question**

Maxwell (2011) noted the research question serves as the controlling piece for the study and was the touchstone to which all other components must conform. The focus of this study was to expand on existing research with an emphasis on the effect of four generations of workers on organizational leadership. The following is the research question for this study.

Based upon their experiences with multigenerational workforce conflicts, what strategies, processes and tools do business leaders need and use to motivate a multigenerational workforce?

### **Interview Questions**

1. How many years were you employed with this organization and please describe your job duties?

2. Please explain how your organization has prepared your leaders, managers and supervisors for managing issues involving workplace conflict relative to generational differences in the workplace.
3. What ways have your experiences with generational differences and conflicts influenced your perceptions and leadership style?
4. Please describe major differences you have noticed in preferred communication styles among multigenerational employees.
5. How have your experiences with multigenerational workforce conflicts affected your perceptions of how generational differences need to affect recruitment, retention, and development of employees?
6. Please describe, if any, what types organizational policies, and processes your organization has developed and implemented to reduce and manage employment issues resulting from generational differences in the workplace.
7. Please describe any conflict between you and members of another generation and how these issues were resolved.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study was Adair's (1973) action-centered leadership model for team leadership and management. Adair established action-centered leadership theories in the 1970s. The action-centered leadership model is a part of an integrated approach to managing and leading, with emphasis placed on applying these principles through training. Adair's theory was relevant to this study because, as Balda



and Mora (2011) contended, management and leadership scholars should conduct research focused on understanding the divisions among generations. For the first time in United States history, leaders, managers, and supervisors are responsible for managing and motivating four distinct generations (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). Hendricks and Cope (2012) posited that awareness of intergenerational differences, interest, and abilities by leaders, managers, supervisors, and followers creates an environment conducive to establishing positive intergroup relationships, thus reducing conflicts.

McClelland (1985) identified key motivators that drive characteristics of people, including affiliation, achievement, and power. Generational diversity in the workforce consists of employees with different character traits, behavioral patterns, and value systems. Individuals who seek acceptance from others and are usually effective performers, have affiliation needs and would prefer working in an environment that provides greater personal interaction (Hendricks & Cope, 2012). Organizational leaders need to retool strategies to incorporate various generations in the workforce and develop strategies for recruiting and retaining multigenerational employees. Successful organizational leaders must be prepared to understand generational differences and capitalize on the unique strengths and characteristics of each generation (Dwyer, 2009).

### **Definition of Terms**

*Baby boomers:* Born between 1946 and 1964 comprise approximately 44% of the population and represent the largest percentage of employees in the workplace (Eastman & Lui, 2012).

*Generation X*: Born between 1965 and approximately 1980, also referred to as the *latchkey generation*, the *slackers*, or the *Xers*, comprise approximately 34% of the population (Eastman & Lui, 2012).

*Generation Y*: Also called *millennials*, born between approximately 1980 and 2000, also referred to as *the next generation*, *millennials*, or *Gen Next*, comprise approximately 12% of the population (Barford & Hester, 2011).

*Traditionalists*: Born between approximately 1922 and 1945, also known as *veterans* or the *silent generation*, believe in conformity, authority, rules, logic, a sense of right and wrong, and loyalty. Silents exhibit some degree of resistance to technological changes within the workplace (Berkowitz & Schewe, 2011).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

#### **Assumptions**

Four basic assumptions were relevant to this study. The first assumption based on McClelland (1985) is the need for affiliation, achievement, and power are key motivators driving certain people, and these motivators vary among generations. The second assumption was that all participants answered the research questions truthfully and to the best of their ability to achieve research objectives (Applebaum, 2012). A third assumption was purposeful sampling method used for this study will result in relevant feedback to contributing factors related to generational conflict among multigenerational workers in the retail grocery profession. Finally, the qualitative phenomenological research design, as proposed by Cilesiz (2011), was the best method for researching the subject phenomenon, and addressing the research question.

**Limitations**

The following limitations applied to this study. I used only generational cohorts: the silent or traditionalist generation, baby boomers, Generation Xers, and millennials from the Hampton Roads, Virginia area. Bansal and Corley (2012) noted potential drawbacks to conducting a qualitative phenomenological study. The key limitations are the researcher may introduce biases into the interview process and participants may not recall and accurately articulate events as they occurred. The geographic location was a limitation because its size and demographics did not allow generalization to other populations with different demographics. Outcomes and findings from studies of other regions throughout the United States may differ from those that emerge from this study.

**Delimitations**

I selected a purposeful sample of a minimum of 20 participants from a pool of business leaders, managers, and supervisors in the local retail grocery industry in Hampton Roads, Virginia. The scope of this qualitative study was limited to perceptions of selected individuals from the selected region. The scope of the study and focus of the research was limited to demographics of the region and the participants. I conducted a pilot study to validate interview questions prior to the conduct of the primary research. Upon completing the pilot study and receiving approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB), I selected additional participants from the retail grocery industry in Hampton Roads, Virginia.

## **Significance of the Study**

### **Contribution to Business Practice**

The goal for this study was to add to scholarly research addressing four generations in the workforce in terms of conflict and differences between members of the silent generation, baby boomers, Generation Xers, and Generation Yers. Findings from this research have the potential to help corporate leaders, training professionals, and managers understand how training and various communication methods could increase knowledge, efficiency, and productivity by understanding the different generations. The overall significance of this study's findings, conclusions, and recommendations may facilitate the preparation, productivity, and effectiveness of individuals in the retail grocery workforce in Hampton Roads, Virginia resulting in increased knowledge of generational differences leading to a more productive workforce. Findings from this study may provide business managers, talent management, and human resource professionals the tools to recruit, engage, and retain workers. The findings from this study may also enhance the capability management to foster employee engagement, resolve conflict, and enhance retention.

Varied generations in the workforce have different expectations of leadership and that employers must understand these expectations to retain employees (Balda & Mora, 2011). Rapid changes in workforce demographics organizational managers and leaders encounter are increasing challenges in managing multigenerational cohorts effectively. Leaders and managers must gain understanding and knowledge of how generational

cohorts react differently to demographic influences within their organizations (Haynes, 2011).

In a 21st-century, organizational climate, leaders, managers, and supervisors must utilize their experiences and their organizations' missions to develop strategies for transformation, and to motivate employees to use their talents to support organizational strategic objectives (Dwyer, 2009). Balda and Mora (2011) provided general areas of conflict within the workforce are the results of opposing values of generational cohorts: (a) expectations, (b) perspectives, (c) work ethics, (d) deep-seated attitudes, and (e) motivations among generational cohorts. Demographic characteristics in the workplace, and the participants' experiences from the related conflicts, may identify potential strategies to minimize conflict in the workplace resulting from a multigenerational cultured workforce.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Researchers have supported the conclusion that varied generations in the workforce have different expectations of leadership. Employers must understand these expectations to retain employees (Feyrer, 2011). Leadership is pivotal in the resolution of workplace conflict; however, minimal information exists concerning leaders and managers experiences with generational conflicts and how the experiences have affected their leadership strategies and processes. Issues specific to workplace conflicts can result in low productivity, high turnover rates, employee frustration, and reduced profits (Sneltvedt & Sorlie, 2012). Business leaders, managers, and supervisors within the retail grocery industry in Hampton Roads, Virginia needs to develop strategies to retain

knowledge from older workers and transfer this knowledge successfully to younger employees to remain competitive or gain a strategic advantage (Hansen & Leuty, 2012). Results from the study may benefit employees in the retail grocery industry by (a) improving relationship with supervisors; (b) increasing employee engagement, advancement, and career opportunities within the organization; and (c) helping meet values, interest, and diverse needs (Schullery, 2013). The results from this study in understanding generational differences and workplace conflicts could help to enhance community relations and foster a greater knowledge, understanding, and acceptance among generations.

### **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to increase the acumen of business leaders, managers, and supervisors by offering an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of multigenerational employees in the current workforce. The goals and objectives for this research study addressed a need to understand the experiences of leaders, managers, and supervisors in Hampton Roads, Virginia and how the experiences have affected their leadership styles. I explored the lived experiences of leaders, managers, and supervisors within the retail grocery industry and their abilities to develop motivational strategies and processes to address factors involving multigenerational conflict among workers. The study was based on Adair's (1973) theory on action-centered leadership model and McClelland's (1985) key motivators that drive the characteristics of people.

The primary goal for this literature review was to identify and address sources for verifying and addressing the research question and to explore the obstacles and challenges previous researchers have identified to developing and maintaining effective leaders for the future within a multigenerational workforce. The literature review included information concerning the challenges organizational leaders, managers and supervisors encounter with four generations in the workplace. Conclusions from previous researchers Deal (2007) and Parry and Urwin (2011) raised concerns that conflicts do exist among generational cohorts in the workplace resulting in low productivity and high turnover rates. Findings from this literature review provided the background necessary for understanding key aspects of leadership within the multigenerational workplace. I synthesized, developed, and conveyed a clear understanding of the literature regarding the challenges organizational leaders encounter involving four different generational cohorts.

I explored the body of literature surrounding conflicts that occur because of generational differences in the workforce (Cogin, 2011). A need exists to develop a more effective relationship between leaders and workers based on an understanding of the generational differences (Balda & Mora, 2011). Findings from this study may determine how the experiences that leaders lived through in (a) handling generational conflict, (b) increasing team productivity, and (c) creating higher employee satisfaction affected their strategies, processes, and leadership styles. Findings from this literature review may validate the gap in relevant management studies to improve productivity by reducing conflicts among the four distinct generational cohorts. Stanley (2010) posited

organizational challenges that workplace conflict issues contribute to problems with (a) communication, (b) decision making, (c) teamwork, (d) and leadership.

In conducting the literature review, I used the following information sources: (a) peer-reviewed articles, (b) books, (c) dissertations, (d) and online data sources. The Walden University Online sources used included the Walden Library, ProQuest, EBSCOhost, and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. I used such search engines as Google Scholar, Yahoo, and Info.com for additional Internet searches. Search terms included *multigenerational workforce*, *generational differences*, *workplace conflict*, *four generations of workers*, *generational cohorts*, *generation Xers*, *millennials*, *generation Yers*, *baby boomers*, and *the silent generation*. The current literature review includes 152 sources of scholarly peer-reviewed and nonpeer-reviewed journal articles, including 130 sources 5 years older or less from my anticipated graduation date; 88% of the references and 140 articles consisted of journals and other sources, including 2% doctoral dissertations, 2% academic books, and 2% Internet articles. The literature contains a total of 86% peer-reviewed articles 5 years or newer from targeted year of 2016.

#### **Four Generational Cohorts in the Workforce**

Generational cohort theory defines the social construction of individuals' shared birth periods, and historic and social events differing from other generations (Lester et al., 2012; Strauss & Howe, 1991). Mannheim (1952) explored the early development theories of generational identity. According to Mannheim, sharing motivational needs, different work styles, and leadership preferences among individuals born during specific timeframes cultivates their levels of conscious awareness. Based on this information,



scholarly analysis involving generational differences in the workplace developed.

Mannheim suggested five characteristics for generational existence in society: (a) new participants emerging in the cultural process, (b) former participants continuing to disappear, (c) members of generations participating in limited sections of the historical process, (d) cultural and heritage needs transmitted, and (e) transition continuing from generation to generation.

Mannheim (1952) added that individuals sharing a birth year are not necessarily members of the same generation. Individuals must participate in shared life experiences to create a concrete bond between generational groups to share an identity and form common experiences. Mannheim identified two elements shared by members of a generation: (a) a common location in historical time, and (b) a consciousness of the historical position shaped by experiences and events.

Zemke et al. (2000) and Bernstein and Bhugra (2011) argued that experiences relating to what the member thinks and feels, and not only dates of birth, define a generation. Conversely, Park and Gursoy (2012) defined a generation as groups of individuals born during the same era and are shaped and influenced by that same time. Zemke et al. referred to other researchers who reached similar conclusions aligning cohort groups to macroevents during their teens and 20s. Jin and Rounds (2012) concluded that research using cross-sectional examination to measure cohort effects and generational differences is insufficient because it is not possible to determine the effects of age and generations by using such a method.

Park and Gursoy (2012) used a cross-sectional survey to determine generational values in the hospitality industry and revealed minimal outcomes of generational differences. However, results indicated the baby boomers regarded altruism and intellectual stimulation more highly than did members of Generations X and Y. Conversely, Generation Xers ranked higher in security and independence than did baby boomers and generation Yers. Members of Generation Y valued work environments more highly than baby boomers and generation Xers did. Similarly, Bristow, Amyx, Castleberry, and Cochran (2011) used a cross-sectional survey with participants from different generational cohorts. Generational cohorts responded differently to workplace outcomes related to commitment and job satisfaction. Given the content, cross-sectional studies finding differences across generations are problematic (Parry & Urwin, 2011).

While finding similar results regarding significant events, Deal (2007) and Zhang, Cao, and Tjosvold (2011) noted more variability within each cohort (intragroup differences) than between cohort groups (intergroup differences). According to Cogan (2011), historical and cultural events that people experience during formative years have an impact on individual values, personality, and worldviews. Deal acknowledged that recent findings indicated more similarities than differences exist between generational cohorts currently in the workforce, especially in terms of core values and beliefs, although the expression of those beliefs may differ. The values of respect, family, integrity, trust, credibility, and interest in continuous learning are common across the workforce.

Deal (2007) investigated differences in values among four generations of cohorts in the workplace and concluded that similar values existed across generations. Because of the complexity of the research problem, Deal assessed 3,000 participants across four generations in the corporate environment for a period of 7 years. The results of the study indicated cohort differences did exist in the areas of communication, rewards, recognition, and preferred learning methods for new information.

Twenge (2010) proposed that most research on this topic is cross-sectional. Researches addressing cohort and workplace issues negatively affecting the dynamics of an organization by Templer (2012) noted generational differences in work and attitude among cohorts. Disparity in work values and lack of understanding between cohorts contributes to potential conflict and tension between those cohorts.

Although the literature is not consistent concerning defining birth years of each generation, the characteristics of the cohort groups are similar. Maier (2011) and Zemke et al. (2000) proposed that general characteristics of generational cohorts were comparatively similar. Both Maier and Zemke et al. defined the silent generation (born prior to 1946), baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964), Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980), and Generation Y (born between 1981 and 2001).

### **Construct of Generational Cohorts**

**Matures.** Members of the mature generation, also known as the silent generation, traditionalists, and the veteran cohorts were born between 1900 and 1945. According to Wortham (2011), the eldest cohort in the workplace is the veteran generation. Lieber (2010) described this group as brick builders of corporate culture (p. 86). Traditionalists'

ages currently range from 62 to 85, and in the United States, more than 1 million workers are 75 or older (Lieber, 2010). Members of this cohort are loyal to their employers and demonstrate stability in the workforce. They demand respect but may have difficulty with younger supervisors (Srinivasan, 2012; Zemke et al., 2000). This cohort group tends to respect authority and follow the rules (Cekada, 2012). Lieber noted the life experiences of this generation relative to such events like World War II, the Great Depression, and the golden age of radio, the Korean War, and the rise of labor unions. Members of the veteran generation continue to be active in the current workforce in spite of diminishing numbers resulting from age (Chessaman & Downey, 2011; Dwyer, 2009).

The traditional cohort group of employees tends to exhibit levels of resistance toward rapid technological changes in the workplace. With a limited education shared by this cohort group, the notion of advanced technology consisted of the discovery of the television and telephone. Technology represents unpredictability to the structured manner to which traditional generational cohorts are accustomed (Gentry, Deal, Griggs, Mondore, & Cox, 2011; Tacchino, 2013). The next generation in the workplace is the baby boomer generation.

**Baby boomers.** The largest generation in the workforce consists of the baby boomers, born between 1946 and 1964. The baby boomers grew up during times of economic expansion in the 1950s and 1960s. Currently, baby boomers are the most talked about, studied, and analyzed of all the generations (Lieber, 2010). According to Hansen and Leuty (2012), Lieber (2010), and Costanza, Fraser, Badger, Severt, and Gade (2012), this cohort group is known to challenge the rules, value personal satisfaction, pursue high

achievements, and desire external recognition. This generation is significantly different from Generations X and Y in terms of valuing self-respect. The baby boomer generation experienced such events like the Civil Rights Movement, women's liberation, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Vietnam War, Woodstock, the rise of television, and the Kennedy assassination. Boomers continue to embrace spas, cosmetic surgery, and the latest fads in exercise. Boomers comprise a generational cohort that lives to work, according to Berkowitz and Schewe (2011). Boomers prefer face-to-face interactions and conventional mail methods but are open to other resources, such as online tools (Achenbaum, 2012).

Brown (2012) referred to the baby boomers as a generation that values accomplishment and self-respect. Deal (2007) and Andert (2011) agreed that boomers display higher levels of work ethics in all their dimensions. Researchers have indicated that baby boomers focus on long-term goals and have higher levels of loyalty to their organizations whereas members of Generations X and Y lack organizational loyalty and focus on short-term goals (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002). Benson and Brown (2011) argued that boomers believe the environment controls whatever happens; demonstrate lower levels of external control than do Generations X and Y. Feyrer (2011) supported these findings.

Baby boomers, according to Berkowitz and Schewe (2011), tend to have a strong work ethic. They are committed to reducing organizational costs, and boomers remain competitive within the workforce. The baby boomer generation embraced technological advances as this cohort witnessed the introduction of the first computers in the workplace. The baby boomer generation will remain productive and an integral part of

the existing labor force. Technological advances and mass media expansions define the next generation of workers.

**Generation X.** Generation X is also known as Gen X or the latch-key generation (Cogin, 2011). Other terms used to refer to this generation are slackers and Xers. Persons in this generation grew up in the 1970s and 1980s, during a period when both parents worked and divorce became more common. The members of this cohort spent a considerable amount of time at home alone (Berkowitz & Schewe, 2011). Often, observers perceive Generation X members as cynical, skeptical individuals who prefer an informal work climate, with weaker work ethics than those of the previous generations (Cho & Hu, 2011). Conversely, Generation X employees consider work-life balance an important characteristic of their success.

Haynes (2011) concluded the work attitude and lack of organizational commitment displayed by Generation X, influenced by perceived notions relating to stress endured by their parents in the workplace and the high cost they paid for success while sacrificing health and enduring family-related problems. Generation Xers desire responsibility and prefer a more informal communication style. Penney (2011) described Generation X workers as having higher levels of self-esteem and narcissism, less desire for social approval, and often being skeptical of hierarchical structure (Lancaster & Stillman, 2002) and desiring informality. Minimum research exists on Generation Y.

**Generation Y.** Millennials, Gen Y, or Nexters, born after 1982, appear to be comfortable with change in their lives. Millennials grew up in the age of technology and were proficient at multitasking (Balda & Mora, 2011). Millennials believe in paying their

dues. Employers need to understand more about the millennial generation, including how members view themselves, their values, and the way they think as they enter the current workforce (Deal, 2007). According to Hershatter and Epstein (2012) and Young and Hinelsy (2012), millennials value work-life balance, which is consistent with personal observation and societal shifts that focus more on family. Millennials prefer a workplace that offers the opportunity to participate in teams and provides assistance with continuing education.

Zemke et al. (2000) indicated that Generation Y members are normally trusting of organizations and have fewer negative views concerning hierarchical structure and organizational policies than the previous generation. The millennial cohort experienced the sacrifices made by their baby boomer parents to achieve corporate success; millennials seek meaningful work. They desire quick promotions and have clear expectations of ideal working environments (Aryfar & Ezzedeen, 2011; VanMeter, Grisaffe, Chonko, & Roberts, 2013). Millennials were often forced to spend long days in childcare or aftercare programs while parents worked corporate jobs that lacked flexibility. Balda and Mora (2011) argued that millennials desire autonomy and may lack loyalty; nonetheless, millennials place value on relationships with coworkers and managers.

Researchers investigating the millennial generation have indicated these individuals as (a) ambitious and career-minded, (b) were motivated by working long hours, (c) preferred more demanding targets and goals within the workplace, and (d) scored higher in areas of achievement-oriented traits than prior generations (Rice, 2012).

Becker (2012) determined that the millennial generation had higher needs for job security than baby boomers and Generation X workers. Millennials also displayed higher materialistic values and narcissistic attitudes with feelings of entitlement and weaker work ethics than previous generations. However, Lippincott (2012) and Ng and Gossett (2013) argued that millennials accept responsibility and work towards social change.

Strauss and Howe (1991) and Gursoy, Chi, and Karadag (2012) indicated the millennial generation has the same characteristics as the veteran generation, with each generation dedicated to both work and society. Contrary to those views, others have perceived the millennial generation as disconnected with a high sense of entitlement. Millennials are described as high maintenance compared to the previous generations; however, millennials are the most productive in the workforce (Kaifi, Nafei, Khanfar, & Kaifi, 2012). Millennials believe in the value of education and place the value of advanced degrees and continuing education over work experience (Sneltvedt & Sorlie, 2012). The current workforce is diverse as each generation has its unique characteristics.

### **Workplace Diversity**

For the purpose of this study, *workplace diversity* refers to differences between individual generations in the workplace who perceive others are different from themselves (Angeline, 2011). Kapoor and Madera (2011) indicated that diversity continues to evolve because the definition of diversity is fluid. Nevertheless, researchers have suggested that workplace diversity has become a global phenomenon for many organizations. The baby boomers are the largest generational group in current workplaces. Growing diversity has led to the emergence of different challenges for



management and resulted in strife and conflict in the workplace (Owoyemi, Elegbede, & Gbajumo-Sheriff, 2011).

The business world today has become more diverse than ever before. Gursoy et al. (2012) indicated that managers must understand generational differences and work to improve the effectiveness in the context of these differences. Organizations that understand and embrace issues surrounding diversity and employee satisfaction will have successful workforces (Gursoy et al., 2012). Organizational managers and leaders must recognize generational differences in the workplace attributed to individual backgrounds, perspectives, and skills if their organizations are to achieve a competitive advantage in the current complex business environment. Eastman and Liu (2012) argued that workforce diversity incorporates such factors as gender, religious, racial, ethnic, and age diversity. Owoyemi et al. (2011) added that distinct work ethics, deep-seated attitudes, and opposing perspectives are contributing factors to diversity in the workplace.

Researchers have examined the benefits and disadvantages of workplace diversity, identifying varying viewpoints on how organizational managers work with different individuals (Owoyemi et al., 2011). Most of the empirical researchers examining workplace diversity have focused on outcomes or the effects of having a diverse workforce. This focus has resulted in some gaps in the literature; therefore, additional research in this area should occur. Much debate has addressed defining diversity, with no agreement reached. Nevertheless, researchers do agree concerning the components of diversity, which include religion, national origin, sex, disability, and age, of which affect workplace relationships (Owoyemi et al., 2011).

Conventional wisdom has indicated that each generation's values influence attitudes and behaviors in the workplace. Hasen and Leuty (2012) indicated the values of diversity affect respect level, communication, and employee interaction, which influence organizational and individual performance. Corporate cultures must proactively respect diversity to sustain existing markets and enter new ones. Benson and Brown (2011) and Jin and Rounds (2012) explored the implications of the relationship between the baby boomers and Generation X in terms of job satisfaction, commitment to their organizations, and willingness to quit their jobs; boomers were more significantly satisfied with their jobs and less likely to quit than Generation X employees. Benson and Brown concluded that heterogeneity does exist within the workplace and that generational groupings are vital to understanding heterogeneity.

**Age diversity and perceived ageism.** The practice of excluding potential employees based solely on age constitutes ageism or age discrimination (Hendricks & Cope, 2012). The 1964 Civil Rights Act banned discrimination in the workplace based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin; however, age was not included. The United States Department of Labor added age to the list in 1967, with the introduction of the Age Discrimination Act designed to cover workers ages 40-65, congress extended the age 70 in 1978.

James, Mckechnie, and Swanberg (2011) determined that two-thirds of employees between the ages of 45 and 74 have experienced some age discrimination or age bias in the workplace. Organizations have developed deep preconceived notions or ideas regarding older workers in spite of existing legislation (James et al., 2011). Bennett and

Price (2012) indicated the number of adults 65 or older would double over the following 20 years, and as of January 2011, the first group of baby boomers turned 65.

The American workforce encounters major dilemmas attributed to age diversity in the workplace (Bruwer, Lesschaeva, & Campbell, 2012). Organizations struggle with retaining highly skilled workers as older employees continue to transition out of the workplace, and younger less qualified workers continue to enter the workforce. Scholars and practitioners have proposed to study work-related differences across the generations and different age groups to develop lifespan perspectives.

Barford and Hester (2011) examined motivational drivers and personality differences among generational cohorts and determined no significant differences. Berkowitz (2011) reported no differences exist in work values, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment among generational cohorts. Tang, Cunningham, Frauman, Ivy, and Perry (2012) suggested that older workers having longer tenure within an organization and having received improved positions display higher satisfaction with their jobs and higher levels of occupational commitment, thus justifying the retention of older employees in the organization. Murray, Toulson, and Legg (2011) and Schullery (2013) noted there are more similarities than differences between generations, with no clear or consistent evidence indicating characteristics unique to generational cohorts. However, not many studies have rigorously investigated four generational cohorts in the workplace.

Kapoor and Solomon (2011) and Minnotte (2012) examined the perceived relative age of older workers and the effect on the organization's workforce, work group

members, and immediate supervisors to suggest human resource practices tailored to older workers and older employees' sense of worth. Kapoor and Solomon (2011) indicated difficulties in retaining older employees when other members of the workforce, work group, and supervisors are predominantly younger.

According to Lieber (2010) and Deal et al. (2013), employee perceptions of employers are different based on age. Employee views regarding commitment, loyalty, and tenure reflect employee age differences. Lieber and Marshall (2011) suggested that traditional generation employees prefer long-term commitment and tenure because they are loyal to their organizations. Lieber observed that baby boomers display loyalty to their teams as opposed to organizational loyalty. However, Generation X employees display loyalty to supervisors and tend to place a priority on their professional career ladders. Generation Y employees are more loyal to peers than to their organizations (Balda & Mora, 2011).

Hershatter and Epstein (2012) reported the future success of business organizations depends on the ability of leaders to acknowledge various generations within the company, understand, and manage challenges and opportunities associated with a diverse workforce. According to Hershatter and Epstein, baby boomers, while now functioning at all levels of organizations' hierarchies, are increasingly becoming the focus of age discrimination in the workplace. Hansen and Leuty (2011) concluded the interaction of generation and age has complicated results found in studies on generational differences in the workplace.

Kunze, Boehm, and Bruch (2011) conducted a study to determine employees' perceptions of age discrimination and commitment at the company level. The findings indicated age diversity in a company climate favorable to age discrimination affects the company's performance negatively. Grima (2011) found negative relational consequences related to age discrimination in the workforce. Still, limited researchers have addressed how negative stereotypes of older workers affect performance and ability to cope in the workplace.

Hansen and Leuty (2012) agreed with findings that age discrimination is prevalent in the workforce and stereotypes portray older workers as the most dispensable group. Age discrimination is more widespread in the service sector, where employees' ages range between 55 and 64. Such employees experience age discrimination more than any other age group within the workplace. Employers are more reluctant to hire older employees because of stereotypes and beliefs that older employees are less productive in the workforce even though they receive higher wages than younger workers are (McGinnis, 2011).

According to Marshall (2011), the focus of age discrimination in the workforce is baby boomers, which now function at all levels of the hierarchy in organizations and hold positions of authority in the workforce. Baby boomers in the current workforce encounter ageism practices in various ways, resulting in false stereotypes of older workers, layoffs, and discriminatory hiring practices. Nevertheless, as boomers move into the preretirement process, problems with age discrimination will persist in spite of current legislation to combat these issues (Achenbaum, 2012).

Marshall (2011) concluded that baby boomers are not likely to suffer the effects of age-related discrimination quietly. They comprise the largest cohort and hold a tremendous amount of power within organizations. Consequently, the researchers suggested strategies to prevent ageism and maximize intergenerational effectiveness in organizations by using a team approach. Established teams should be intentionally diverse in terms of age, background, race, culture, and sex to develop skills training and education in the areas of diversity.

Retaining older workers benefits both the individual and the organization. Bristow et al. (2011) explored implications of employment-related discrimination charges filed under the American in Employment Act (ADEA) from 1993 to 2007. People hold negative and inaccurate beliefs regarding older workers and management's inability to accommodate effective workplace environment for aging workers leads to discrimination claims.

Rothenberg and Gardner (2011) explored the workplace dilemma of older qualified workers not advancing to higher positions because of age and unemployment status. Organizations tend to fill positions with younger workers who have continued employment status even though they are less qualified. No current laws are in place to protect the long-term unemployed. Many challenges remain because many of these unemployed workers are over age 40, resulting in hiring difficulties.

**Generational stereotypes and cohort differences.** The U.S. workforce currently presents numerous stereotypes based on popular literature regarding veterans, baby boomers, Generation Xers, and Generation Yers in the workplace (Eliasa, Smith, &

Barneya, 2012). Koenig (2011) noted the portrayal in popular literature is responsible for current opinion about generational cohorts, as opposed to empirical findings in research. Maier (2011) and Thang (2011) reported that U.S. employers practice ageism in the workplace, unlike other societies that respect the senior population. Researchers have suggested personal ageism reflects an individual's negative views, beliefs, and attitudes toward older workers, whereas institutional ageism defines organizations deliberately biased against older individuals and incorporates policies and procedures that force mandatory retirement of older workers. Rothe, Lindholm, Hyronen, and Nenonen (2011) argued that stereotypes associated with four generations of cohorts in the current workforce fail to motivate employees.

Using an in-depth cross-sectional qualitative study without a survey, James et al. (2011) examined generational characteristics of each generation and revealed common stereotypes across generations. Their findings indicated the baby boomers respect hierarchy and authority in the workplace, Generation X members enjoyed flexible work hours and independence, and Generation Y workers liked to keep their career options open. Gursoy et al. (2012) based their conclusions on data collected from 10 focus groups with 91 employee participants.

Jackson, Stoel, and Brantley (2011) found common misconceptions and stereotypes geared toward older workers held by younger workers in the workplace. Younger workers concluded that (a) older workers are less physically capable of doing the job, (b) older workers lack technological skills, (c) older workers are less flexible concerning change, (d) older workers lack the willingness to acquire the necessary skills,

(e) and older workers are assumed to be less effective on account of their age. Deal, Altman, and Rogelberg (2010) concluded tension existing among generations arises from a lack of empirical data and an over-reliance on ill-informed opinions. Deal's (2007) study, conducted at the Center for Creative Leadership, was one of the largest research studies on generations and the workforce. Deal surveyed 3,200 participants in U.S. workplaces, in 10 work-related areas to evaluate values, trust, and organizational politics. The results of the study indicated that workplace conflict typically stemmed from sources other than generational differences. Deal's findings did not indicate that generational differences exist.

De Meuse and Mlodzik (2010) conducted research to determine the relevance of popular media and press as compared to peer-reviewed empirical research to investigate commonly held views concerning generations. Their results indicated the popular press continued to identify vast differences among generational cohorts. The popular press contended the reasons for differing generational characteristics in the workplace arose from significant life experiences. De Meuse and Mlodzik examined 26 peer-reviewed studies; eight of the studies reported some evidence of generational differences existing in the workplace and 18 of the studies indicated no significant differences existed among generational cohorts. Empirical research data did not support popular media claims of workplace crisis resulting from vast generational differences and indicated that many more similarities than differences existed among generational cohorts.

Because of the complexity of exploring generational differences empirically, gaps exist in the literature, with many studies having investigated differences between two



generations of cohorts, as opposed to four generations (De Meuse & Mlodzik, 2010). Generational stereotypes in the workplace are both positive and negative. The veterans, the oldest generation in the workforce are, usually loyal employees and consistent performers, with strong work ethics, and conservative in their views of finance. Members of the veteran generation consider what is best for the organization or group before becoming concerned about individual success (Berkowitz & Schewe, 2011). Baby boomers are workaholics, often driven and idealistic, and willing to make personal sacrifices to obtain professional success (Brown, 2012). Boomers are excellent at networking, tend to be micromanagers, are political, and despise laziness (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011).

Penney (2011) suggested that Generation Xers do not trust organizations. Generation X employees tend to have issues with job security after witnessing how corporate downsizing affected their parents. In such cases, Generation X employees tend to pursue entrepreneurial careers because of the lack of meaning or purpose in their current jobs. Members of this generation tend to be poor networkers, skeptical of authority, and displaying strong feelings of pragmatism, alienation, and cynicism. In addition, Generation X workers considered independent, disloyal, and more likely to switch jobs in an effort to improve their skills for other opportunities (Smits, Dolan, Vorst, Wicherts, & Timmerman, 2011).

Differing theories exist defining the millennial generation's challenge to workplace norms. For example, millennials apparently believe that rules were made to be broken and they tend to question every rule and policy. Millennials are not flexible in

terms of standard workday norms; therefore, they have poor employee-supervisor relationships and seem to take electronic collaboration for granted. Brody and Rubin (2011) indicated that attitude differences in the workplace across generations of the same age are minimal and, applying this information, determined only small statistical differences among older and younger generations.

Agati (2011) argued that technology is the most significant and distinctive societal attribute used to define the millennial generation. Penney (2011) noted that millennials promote collegial relationships, value reinforcement and autonomy, and enjoy a fun and informal workplace. Deal et al. (2010) supported the notion that generational stereotypes contribute to assumptions about life stages, environmental factors, and the economy. Murray et al. (2011) argued that generational stereotypes involving veterans, baby boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y are commonplace in today's workforce and the media and popular press are responsible for fueling these generational cohort stereotypes and accentuating differences between generations.

Neither Murray et al. (2011) nor Ganz, Moerschel, Schletz, and Kicherer (2013) supported the perceptions of popular literature or academic literature involving generational characteristics and generational values in the workplace. They criticized the literature addressing generational characteristics as reliant on cross-sectional methods, using scales designed for other purposes and therefore confusing. Anecdotal and stereotypical literature, if blindly applied, would become dangerous and counterproductive when managing employees. Bucic, Harris, and Arli (2012) examined the personality traits of Generation Y compared to other generations, using archival data

in a cross-temporal meta-analysis. The results indicated members of Generation Y displayed increased levels of narcissism, depression, self-esteem, and anxiety. In addition, members of Generation Y had lower needs for self-approval and higher external locus than other generations.

The findings from the critical review of theoretical and empirical evidence supporting the popular practitioner idea of generational differences in work values (Parry & Urwin, 2011) are mixed. Some researchers indicated differences between generational work values while many studies indicated more areas of similarity (Beutell, 2013; Favero & Heath, 2012). According to Parry and Urwin (2011), managers may see marginal gain from observed differences in generational work values resulting from age, cohort generation, and period effects.

### **Communication and the Generations**

According to Madera (2011), generational differences and cultural differences influence how employees communicate in the workplace. In contrast, Hannay and Fretwell (2011) indicated that creativity and impersonal communication have an effect on generational differences in the workplace. Hartman and McCambridge (2011) explored the implications of applying the concepts of style typing and style flexing. Hartman and McCambridge emphasized the use of style typing and style flexing as effective communication tools to address issues with communication challenges presented by the millennial generation. Hartman and McCambridge indicated it is critical that managers develop effective communication strategies. Harman and McCambridge included participants from the millennial generation of university students. Hartman and

McCambridge's findings were consistent with those of Debevec, Schewe, Madden, and Diamond (2013) and Church and Rotolo (2013); millennials, although technologically sophisticated with the ability to multitask, lack oral, written, and interpersonal communication skills.

Hartman and McCambridge (2011) referred to style typing as a technique used to determine individuals' communication styles. Style flexing, often used as a follow-up and based solely on the reciprocity concept, is effective for allowing individuals to understand a communicated message relative to others. Hartman and McCambridge concluded that millennials could benefit from developing a broader understanding of multiple communication styles to become effective communicators. Hahn (2011) concluded that communication involves new and different ways of thinking. Multigenerational cohorts must respect and value differing points of views of different generations in the workplace, which involves both speaking and listening to solve problems and resolve conflict in the workplace.

Much of the current research is focused on the behavior of members of Generation Y in the workplace and the factors relating to the inability of millennials to communicate effectively. Islam, Teh Wee, Yusuf, and Desa (2011) conducted a study of the factors that influence the behavior of millennials in the workforce. Islam et al. explored Generation Y's dependency on technology and the diverse communication methods encountered by millennials while growing up. Millennials' expectation of the workplace is that organizations should have the latest technology methods available. Islam et al. indicated that smart businesses should embrace technology as an ongoing

source of communication in the 21st-century workforce and that employing millennials will give employers the advantage of their entire networks. More specifically, Islam et al. indicated that technology has had a significant effect on the behavior of millennials in the workplace, consistent with the finding that levels of productivity increase as creativity increases with the use of technology. Lancaster and Stillman (2002) determined that baby boomers desire high levels of communication have a need to exchange information, and place high value on feedback. Baby boomers are inclined toward formal feedback mechanisms and introduced annual performance reviews.

### **Leadership Theory and Generational Cohorts**

Current researchers have produced many theories about leadership, as the definition and concept of leadership is multifaceted. Balda and Mora (2011) conducted a study to identify gaps in the current literature defining the link between theory and practice and direct relationship between the effectiveness of leadership and emotional intelligence. Researchers have addressed participative leadership and the baby boomers lack of developmental skills in motivating, communicating, understanding, listening, and delegating necessary synergy to other cohorts (Cogin, 2011; Dwyer, 2009; Feyrer, 2011). In contrast, Balda and Mora (2011) connected the baby boomers' lack of leadership and management skills to their limited access to education.

The Generation X leadership style is dependent on expecting immediate results, is culturally progressive, and focused on fairness and competence (Eastman & Liu, 2012). The veteran generation appeared optimistic about the future; they trusted centralized authority and valued obedience, as opposed to individuality. Chessaman and Downey

(2011) and Bucic et al. (2012) used a cross-national study to rank the most admired leadership characteristics. Baby boomers and Generation Xers desired ambitious leaders while millennials preferred caring leaders and the veterans appreciated forward-looking leaders.

None of the generational cohorts indicated they preferred the traditional leadership characterized by control and authority. Lieber (2010) revealed the traditional generation of workers respect authority and the hierarchical leadership structure and tend to comply with the structure of the organization. Conversely, baby boomers challenge authority and form personal relationships with managers. Generation X workers are not impressed with authority and prefer informal relationships with supervisors. Lieber further indicated that Generation Y employees prefer to evaluate issues on an individual basis, as opposed to following organizational policies.

Emotional intelligence is a critical element needed for effective leadership. Sneltvedt and Sorlie (2012) and Derue, Nahrgang, Wellman, and Humphrey (2011) investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence, leadership style, and leadership effectiveness. The results indicated no relationship between a manager's emotional intelligence and leadership style. Just (2011) and Boerner and Gebert (2012) examined leadership styles across four generational cohorts as they related to organizational outcomes. These researchers used three leadership theories: transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and laissez-faire style leadership.

Just (2011) noted that transformational leadership had a positive effect on organizational culture, while the transactional style was not preferred by many

organizational leaders because it did not contribute as much to operational effectiveness. Laissez-faire leadership had a negative effect; it was the least effective method and had lower organizational outcomes. Leaders must make strategic hiring decisions and set work requirements, policies, and procedures using information pertaining to generational preferences and characteristics in the workplace (Balda & Mora, 2011). According to Park and Gursoy (2012), leaders with the ability to understand the advantages and disadvantages of generational diversity in the workplace and enlighten employees can bring about productivity within the organization.

Much of the current research is focused on transformational leadership in contrast to transactional leadership, in which specific rewards motivate employees to attain goals and accomplish the task. Balda and Mora (2011) contended transformational leaders motivate employees to perform beyond expectations and inspire them to transcend self-interest for higher collective purposes by activating employee motivation and increased commitment. Kapoor and Solomon (2011) concluded employers must identify characteristics of each generation and determine the impact of generational differences on economics.

Transactional leadership includes management by exception, both passive and active management, and contingent reward systems. For example, transactional leadership is contingent on meeting agreed-upon goals, with rewards depending on performance levels. Andert (2011) argued there is a trend toward such leadership theories as transcendental leadership, considered organic leadership structures, and viewed by many as typical pyramid-shaped structure within the organization. Laissez-faire

leadership style by negotiation involves no leadership factor, provides no feedback, no reward, minimal management involvement, and no attempt by management to satisfy employee needs, motivate employees, or recognize performance (James et al., 2011).

Researchers have suggested certain management styles fit different generations. Lieber (2010) concluded members of the traditional generation are micromanagers who managed employees by using command and control methods. Baby boomer managers and supervisors followed management theories and trends using the latest techniques. Baby boomers made decisions based on workplace policies and preferred more participative styles of management. However, Generation X managers are more in line with performance-based management styles with managers providing feedback and not giving orders. Generation Y managers tend to use personal approaches to encourage subordinates and termed *hyper-collaborative managers*.

### **Conflict Among the Four Generational Cohorts**

Current researchers who addressed workplace conflict have focused on four generational cohorts in the current American workforce. Tucker, Jimmieson, and Oei (2013), and Srinivasan (2012) determined that conflicts result from differences in worldviews, values, ethical behaviors, and decision-making among generational cohorts. Hahn (2011) developed five strategies for managers in the nursing industry to manage effectively multigenerational employees. Hahn encouraged managers to self-assess their own managerial styles and generational cohort. Hahn asserted that managers need to educate themselves about core values and characteristics of each generational cohort



being supervised and should embrace the commonalities, creating a culture of respect among generational cohorts, and bridging generational gaps.

Business leaders, when addressing generational differences to eliminate human capital gaps, should provide sound workforce development strategies to minimize potential conflict in the workplace (Hendricks & Cope, 2012). According to Zemke et al. (2000), bridging relationships across age groups within the workforce culture can minimize conflict. Joshi et al. (2011) indicated that up to 60% of employers observed that conflict issues between generational groups contributed to communication differences between generational cohorts.

Hershatter and Epstein (2012), who researched the nursing industry, indicated that differences involving workplace satisfaction exist between generational cohorts of nurses. The study's findings further indicated baby boomers generally dissatisfied with benefits while millennials voiced their concerns about pay. Members of both Generation X and Generation Y displayed some form of emotional exhaustion in the nursing industry. Baby boomers remained committed to their organizations, whereas Generation X employees were the least committed to the organizational workplace.

Despite the findings, Deal (2007) indicated that conflict does not arise from age or generation differences, but from a desire to attain or keep influence or power. In contrast, conflict between generational cohorts stems from one group believing it can make the rules and expects others to follow them. Jawahar, Kisamore, Stone, and Rahn (2012) and Deal asserted that conflict issues were fundamental differences rather than generational differences and contended generational differences were not the cause of conflict,

blaming the conflict on the failure of organizations to communicate to employees the issues concerning power in the workplace. Cugin (2011), and Gupta, Boyd, and Kuzmits (2011) revealed differing results concerning generational conflicts and challenges, with diversity being similar because cohort groups encountered challenges with adversity, experiences with the economy, complexities with technology, and acceptance of generational differences.

The varying viewpoints of researchers regarding generational differences being the basic cause of conflict in the workplace indicate all generations need to have similar trust levels for the organization and management. Healthy organizations treat each group of employees the same, regardless of generation. According to Deal (2007), each generation has concerns about the effect of organizational politics on their careers. Consequently, every employee, young or old, wants respect, trust, and credible organizational leaders willing to listen and encourage.

Many researchers in the early 21st century have focused on workplace victimization, which Kemp, Kopp, and Kemp (2013) defined as individuals' use of words or actions that cause physical or psychological harm to other individuals in the workplace. Balducci, Cecchin, and Fraccaroli (2012) indicated that having a target personality contributes to workplace victimization. Balducci et al. examined relationships between workplace interpersonal conflict and personality Bennett, Pitt, and Price (2012) agreed with these findings. It was also evident that initial interpersonal conflict among coworkers resulted in interpersonal conflict with supervisors (Gupta et al., 2011).

Although conclusions differ, Jaramillo, Mulki, and Boles (2011) determined that work overload and interpersonal conflict cause emotional exhaustion, poor job attitudes, and negative behaviors. This results in higher turnover and low performance within the organization. Employees who experience hostile interactions with coworkers and supervisors are more likely to be dissatisfied with their jobs and more often leave the organization.

Because of the complexity of exploring workplace conflict, Branch, Ramsay, and Baker (2013) measured the relationship between posttraumatic stress, workplace bullying, and organizational climate factors. Workplace bullying is a form of chronic stress in the workplace resulting from systematic exposure to negative acts targeted at groups or individuals incapable of defending themselves. Similarly, Boddy (2011), Mayo, Sanchez, Pastor, and Rodriguez (2012), and Soylu (2011) defined workplace bullying as behavior consisting of violence, threats, rudeness, sarcasm, or any other behavior designed to humiliate or belittle others in the workplace. It encompasses unethical or unfavorable treatment repeated by one worker toward another in the workplace. Bullying in today's workplace is an ethical issue widespread and unfair to employees (Soylu, 2011).

It remains critical for organizations to develop a strong psychosocial safety climate in the workplace (Sue Ling, Chang, & Lein Yin, 2012). Organizations should ensure that senior leaders and managers commit to creating practices and procedures and enact policies to protect the health and well-being of employees. In addition, organizational leaders should develop clear behavioral protocols and acceptable practices.

Finally, policies must stress the consequences associated with bullying, indicate interventions to reduce the severity, and provide psychological support for employees victimized by these actions (Branch et al., 2013).

According to Van Fleet and Van Fleet (2012), team performance has a beneficial effect on managing conflict in the workplace. For example, organizational teams could develop cooperative approaches to conflict. Team members could receive training in expressing their feelings, ideas, and positions without animus. They could work to resolve conflict issues benefitting everyone involved rather than just one person. Team-member participation enhances the decision-making process, provides active participation, and provides a sense of belonging, leading to a high level of team identification in the workplace.

Stanley (2010) indicated employers' approaches to improving support of a multigenerational workforce included training, coaching, and motivating generational cohorts. Stanley concluded that workforce conflict results from workplace issues involving leadership, problem solving, decision-making skills, communication, and teamwork skills. Another approach is to involve all employees by developing policies and procedures supporting the work environment. Stanley indicated that people seek involvement and want to feel valued regardless of age, generational group, or level of skills and experiences.

Deal (2007) and Deal et al. (2013) argued that differences in generational groups might not be the cause of conflict in the workplace. Instead, Deal blamed these conflict issues on fundamental failures of organizations. Deal et al. further suggested the lack of

communication within an organization and power issues could cause conflict in the workplace. Stanley (2010) and Effelsberg, Solga, and Gurt (2014) noted differing conclusions and suggested managers and leaders should consider the broader individual issues when addressing conflict. When managing multigenerational conflict issues, Stanley indicated organizations should consider five employee needs necessary for any generation of workers: opportunities to advance, benefits, improved work-life balance, respect, and recognition, and opportunities to learn and develop within the organization.

Marcinkus Murphy (2012) explored intergenerational interactions through social networking by applying social identity and social representations theories. Marcinkus Murphy identified intergenerational interactions as a critical element in social relations. Ilie, Penney, Ispas, and Iliescu (2012) determined that improved organizational outcomes rely on training managers to demonstrate behaviors necessary to interact in a diverse setting, and to espouse attitudes and values that support all forms of diversity. The researchers suggested the roles of all levels of management in an organization affect employee attitudes toward diversity and employee behaviors toward others. Zhu (2013) encouraged organizations to improve attitudes towards diversity, as this will gain positive results, including fewer turnovers and lawsuits, and a more productive workforce.

Exploring the dynamics of conflict management as it relates to teams in the workplace, Anner (2012) examined how task structure relates to conflict management styles and team performance. Brocado, Jelen, Schmidt, and Gold (2011) and Marcinkus Murphy (2012) indicated that higher levels of team identities and task independence positively affected the cooperative management style of conflict and fostered positive

team performance. Conversely, the researchers revealed competitive management styles and team conflict management fostered negative effects for task interdependence and team performance.

Stanley (2010) and Achenbaum (2012) explored generational differences and indicated that baby boomers expected respect while Generation X workers wanted equal treatment regardless of experience or status. Stanley (2010) and Haynes (2011) indicated that veteran generation described as out of touch and even old-fashioned while baby boomers considered workaholics; Generation X workers thought of as slackers and members of Generation Y characterized as impatient, disloyal to the organization, and demanding. The findings indicated that stereotyping and biases lead to conflict in the workplace, a stressful work environment, frustration, poor job satisfaction, and minimal career progression opportunities.

### **Transfer of Knowledge Between the Generations**

While the concept of knowledge management is difficult to define (Brosdahl & Carpenter, 2011; MacKie, 2014), multiple researchers agreed that retaining and transferring organizational knowledge present challenges for organizations in maintaining a productive workforce. Chessaman and Downey (2011) concluded that human knowledge depends on what individual employees know. Given the current aging workforce and the retirement of baby boomers from the workforce over the next decade, there exists a threat that knowledge in the workplace will be lost and not replaced (Brown, 2012). Hayes (2011) noted the need for business leaders to examine the attitudes

and work patterns of younger generations to cultivate future leaders within the organization.

Similarly, Hokanson, Sosa-Fey, and Vinaja (2011) addressed potential knowledge loss resulting from turnover, described as the perfect storm. Hokanson et al. determined that by building a knowledge-sharing culture, younger generations would benefit by learning from older generations who can impart valuable knowledge. MacKie (2014) and Bennett and Price (2012) explored the implications of current economic demands and changing workforce demographics that force companies to take action. Organizational leaders who manage multigenerational workforces have an opportunity to use knowledge management effectively to gain strategic advantages.

Haynes (2011) presented methods critical to business organizations to cultivate the successful transfer of knowledge: induction, counseling, employee rotation, training and development, and group learning. Technology is vital to business organizations building knowledge-transfer cultures for the younger generations of X and Y. Business leaders should capitalize on the technological capabilities of younger generations by allowing younger workers to build their desired methods for performing their job duties by using socially advanced technological practices that lead to increased job satisfaction and organizational loyalty (Hokanson et al., 2011).

Despite other researchers' differing conclusions, Bristow et al. (2011) argued that members of Generation Y encounter challenges when adapting to communication technologies and initiating cultural shifts; therefore, the need to increase training and development opportunities exists for organizations wanting to redesign their workplaces

effectively. Hayes (2011) determined that organizations could encounter added costs during a struggling and weak economy. Nevertheless, Hokanson et al. (2011) asserted using knowledge management would allow businesses to reduce turnover rates among younger employees and have a positive effect on the company's bottom line.

Twenge, Freeman, and Campbell (2011) indicated mentoring is a successful way of transferring knowledge through shared leadership by coaching and advising mentees, in formal or informal relationships, as baby boomers in senior-level positions pass on advice and wisdom to younger employees. Consequently, younger and older employees interact and develop trust and understanding in mentor and mentee relationships as biased perceptions diminish. Twenge et al. described upward mentoring as another form of mentoring in which members of Generation X or Generation Y could advise baby boomers in new technological applications. Using both types of mentoring in intergenerational organizations is a way to promote excellence within the workforce.

Successful organizations maintain competitive advantages by effectively transferring knowledge between generations in the workplace. According to Hokanson et al. (2011), organizations' inability to effectively address issues of transferring knowledge will lead to negative ramifications within the workforce. The largest generation in the workforce, the baby boomers, will retire over the next decade, and business organizations will not easily replace or recover their lost knowledge. Srinivasan (2012) indicated businesses would encounter unprecedented challenges in the workplace because of losing employees and the accumulated knowledge of those employees. Younger generation



employees are prone to higher turnover rates than older generations have been, thereby creating an additional need for organizations to capture and retain critical knowledge.

Sneltvedt and Sorlie (2012) explored the implications for business organizations recruiting top talent within the younger generations to fill the ongoing vacancies created by retiring baby boomers and the organizations' difficulties in finding the right talent. According to Sneltvedt and Sorlie, a lack of skilled employees remains, and many employees must delay retirement because of issues resulting from lack of qualified replacements. Hokanson et al. (2011) noted the need for organizations to mitigate turnover rates of younger generation employees by developing ways to retain knowledge investments by the company. Organizations must prepare to make investments in each new employee, including more time and money for training them. The inability to retain or transfer knowledge necessitates a shift in organizational culture. Hokanson et al. analyzed the differences in tenure between Generations X and Y and older generations of workers. Hokanson et al. concluded that knowledge intensity is a direct factor in employment tenure.

Parry and Urwin (2011) explored implications with the use of technology playing a major role in knowledge transfer and retention. The authors suggested that technology is important in retaining Generation Y workers because this generation needs active involvement in information sharing, such as text messaging and blogging, to remain interested. Business leaders must ensure technology programs correspond with employees' levels of technical abilities and capabilities within the operational systems.

### **Organizational Sustainability and Intergenerational Existence in the Workforce**

Many of the current researchers addressed organizations' ability to improve key components, such as employee attitudes, employee composition, and workplace environments. Organizations must identify key factors relevant to increasing profitability and productivity by understanding generational differences in the workplace. However, because business organizations experience widespread challenges associated with changing employee demographics (Bruwer et al., 2012), many organizational leaders are reluctant to address the issues of managing, communicating, and motivating multigenerational employees. Organizational leaders must develop ways to use employee composition and workplace environment to establish specific environmental characteristics and job descriptions and identify crucial benefits.

BLS (2010) indicated that employment has increased among workers 55 and older to 40.4%, which is an all-time high. The USCB (2010) data indicated that one third of the U.S. workforce will be 50 years of age or older by 2016 and by 2020, these numbers will increase. A growing number of workers remaining in the workforce are contributing to workforce demographic shifts, the rapid decline of entry-level workforce, and the retirement age increasing from 65 to 70 years of age (BLS, 2010).

Business organizations will experience significant decreases in profits because of costs associated with filling vacant positions. According to Cogan (2011), decades of organizational knowledge and key information will be lost as older workers leave the workplace. The knowledge loss could have a devastating effect on organizations. Similarly, Benson and Brown (2011) contended that, depending on skill requirements,

turnover could cost an organization 25 to 250% of the annual salaries for unfilled positions. Nevertheless, employers blame the high cost on higher wages for older workers and increased cost of health insurance. Employers have asserted that expenses associated with hiring and training older workers in new technologies would prove costly to the organization (Chessaman & Downey, 2011). Despite the findings, minimal empirical researchers have addressed the varying viewpoints concerning the effect of organizational knowledge loss in the workplace.

Feyrer (2011) noted negative stereotypes and beliefs exist among managers and employers. Negative stereotypes include the perspective that older workers lack flexibility or willingness to adapt to new technological skills, have a resistance to change, lack assertiveness, have physical limitations, and require higher costs in health insurance. In contrast, the Taskforce on aging revealed positive perceptions of older workers by managers, including (a) experience, (b) knowledge, (c) respect for authority, (d) temperament, (e) work attitudes, and (f) commitment to quality work.

Billett, Dymock, Johnson, and Martin (2011) argued that certain occupations score higher on job satisfaction than others, and workplace environment have an effect on job satisfaction. However, Barford and Hester (2011) concluded that each generation prefers job characteristics and occupations that meet the personal beliefs and attitudes of that generation. Few researchers have addressed generational differences having a significant effect on work environment and job satisfaction.

According to Hines (2011), organizations need to rethink current hiring and firing practices. Current workers prefer working to live rather than living to work. The new

generation of workers is less willing to place work first; therefore, organizations will need to personalize appeals to recruit top talent. Knowledge-based organizations are only as good as their talent, and more demand exists for talent than is available emerging in the future.

### **Workforce Planning**

Organizations encounter varying differences in the values, experiences, and ideas of four different generations in the workplace, affecting training, communication, and collaboration. According to Cekada (2012), the unique characteristics of each generation's core values, respect for others, and work ethics affect learning and communication in the workplace. Cekada noted key challenges managers need to understand to determine the best methods for training and managing a multigenerational workforce with differing learning styles, expectations, and values.

Older workers, the silent generation and baby boomers, rely on their experiences as a learning source. Thus, organizational trainers and managers should provide a setting with small classes or groups and include such activities as problem-solving exercises, case studies, and discussions based on experiences. Older generation workers want to understand the value of information learned to determine its usefulness in the workplace (Cekada, 2012). Kaplan (2012) and Bargagliotti (2012) indicated that organizational trainers and managers are encouraged to (a) provide clear explanations to older generational workers concerning the value of new information or technology being taught, (b) determine the information is clearly understood, (c) consider how it will affect profit and bottom-line, and (d) address how these learning methods will help them

perform workplace tasks effectively. Baby boomers, according to Berkowitz (2011), often view change as painful and inevitable, and because this cohort group has dominated the workplace for so many years, members are relaxed with the work culture they created.

The Internet and multimedia are the preferred methods of training for Generation X workers because they are more comfortable with technology than previous generations have been. Consequently, Generation X workers are comfortable with providing feedback to others and expect managers to provide continuous feedback to confirm their work. Additionally, Generation X employees are prone to learn in more casual and relaxed atmospheres and enjoy having fun while learning (Cekada, 2012). Organizational trainers and managers should use small-group discussions and incorporate teams because Generation X workers prefer responsiveness and sharing ideas with others.

Much of the current research has focused on Generation Y in the workplace. Members of this group prefer learning by discovery because they are skilled in the area of multitasking and using visual methods. Managers and trainers are encouraged to provide the fundamentals of the preferred topic and allow the groups to explore through role-playing, the Internet, and simulation to draw their conclusions. In addition, Generation X workers are social networkers and use varying communication tools, such as texting, blogging, wikis, and other social-networking means. According to Cekada (2012), trainers and managers should provide Generation X workers with training methods that address learning styles because they enjoy learning by doing. Generation X employees require immediate feedback and like receiving information in short snippets, being

provided with short breaks, and receiving rewards for answering questions correctly. Generation X workers require a clear understanding of knowledge learned so they can apply it immediately. Considering this information, organizational trainers, and managers could enhance today's workplace-training environment by learning to adapt to the traits of each generation.

While older workers bring long-term knowledge to the workplace and younger workers bring technological expertise, learning to recognize and adapt to generational differences would prevent workplace conflict and enhance energy and enthusiasm (Cekada, 2012). Ho (2012) demonstrated occupational preferences relates to generational differences. Leaders should be aware of these generational preferences and adapt job descriptions accordingly.

Haynes (2011) concluded that organizations should facilitate dialogue among the generations to raise awareness of the implications and effects of generational differences. Organizations can do so by implementing participant discussions to identify the effects of generational differences on productivity and identify the effects they have on specific groups. Identifying the effects may create predominant impressions on individuals, affecting their own perceptions of job satisfaction. Organizations are encouraged to use cross-generational teams to address organizational issues and to clarify related problems among generations to develop practical solutions.

### **Transition and Summary**

This literature review contained a critical overview of the effect of generational differences in today's business world. As workforce organizations become more diverse,

organizational leaders need to understand that challenges exist. Because of the complexities of having four different generations of workers in the workforce for the first time in history, organizational leaders must learn to address these issues. I addressed the characteristics of each of the four generations and provided an objective critique of the proposed relationships among generational cohorts. Findings from previous researchers indicated empirical evidence is necessary to form a strong basis for researchers to continue to explore generational differences, stereotypes, communication, and leadership styles and their effects on organizational success.

Section 2 includes a discussion of the research methodology used in this present study. I followed the qualitative research method design to obtain detailed information about how generational conflict in the workplace affect employee productivity and create turnover and identify themes to identify and describe the issues. I incorporated a phenomenological approach in generating and collecting data, identifying key issues, and providing recommendations for improving generational conflict in the workplace. Section 2 includes detailed descriptions for (a) conducting research, (b) the researcher's role in conducting the research, (c) sampling techniques, (d) participant selection, (e) and data collection and instrumentation.

Section 2 is also an explanation of the processes of (a) collecting, (b) transcribing, and (c) analyzing the qualitative data. Section 2 includes a clearer understanding on detailed information about the method and design, and the rationale for choosing the qualitative phenomenological method. Section 3 will be an explanation of the (a) research results, (b) presentation of data, (c) conclusions, and (d) recommendations for future

researchers. Section 3 also details the study's findings as they relate to implications for social change. Section 3 will conclude with a summary, conclusions, and reflections.

## Section 2: The Project

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and perception of retail grocery leaders, managers, and supervisors in Hampton Roads, Virginia. Organizational leaders face many challenges managing a workforce comprised of multigenerational employees with different expectations, values, and beliefs (Kapoor & Solomon, 2011; Parry & Urwin, 2011). Another objective for this phenomenological study was to provide detailed information and justification as to why the qualitative phenomenological design may help foster a greater understanding of generational differences and conflict in the workplace as it relates to issues with low productivity and high turnover. Section 2 includes the (a) study's purpose, (b) method and design (c) population (d) data collection and analysis process. Section 2 also contains the issues of ethical research and reliability and validity.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore business leaders, managers, and supervisors' experiences in leading a multigenerational workforce within their companies, and how the experiences have affected their understanding of the leadership styles, strategies and processes for motivating their employees. The population consists of retail grocery leaders, managers, and supervisors located in Hampton Roads, Virginia in the southeast region of the United States, who have experience leading and



managing multigenerational workforces. This population was appropriate for this study because researchers such as Mencl and Lester (2014) suggested it is significant for employers to integrate generational characteristics in the recruitment process. The implication for positive social change includes the potential to bridge the gap between younger and older workers and minimize conflicts resulting from differences among age groups. There is also potential to assist leaders, managers, and supervisors in reducing workplace conflict in order to maintain a productive workforce. Findings from this study could contribute to social change by enhancing community relations by identifying generational conflicts in the workplace and better understand generational differences in order to build lasting relationships among the generations.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of a researcher was critical in collecting, organizing, and interpreting data and results (Yin, 2012). The role of the researcher was to collect and analyze the data with minimum bias. Another role of the researcher was to describe and implement ethical guidelines for use in ongoing research and separate findings from personal experiences. According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), qualitative researchers approach an investigation from either a theoretical or a philosophical perspective. One specific role as researcher of this qualitative study was to eliminate or minimize any bias during the process. As a researcher, I strived to understand interpretations at particular points in time or terms of specific content and to eliminate any prejudices or biases that may affect the validity of the research findings, conclusions, and recommendations (Moustakas, 1994).

I obtained approval from Walden University and IRB to proceed with my research. The IRB approved my request to include 20 research participants who were retail grocery leaders, managers, and supervisors located in Hampton Roads, Virginia, in the southeast region of the United States, who have experience leading and managing multigenerational workforces with at least 5 years of experience. All participants received and signed informed consent forms that authorized participation in the project and confirmed confidentiality and ethical standards in conducting the study. The participants experienced no potential harm or danger during the interview process.

A unique characteristic of the qualitative researcher is to serve as the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing the data (Draper & Swift, 2011). Being the

human instrument enables a researcher to be responsive and adaptive when collecting and analyzing data. Qualitative researchers have the ability to expand their understanding through verbal and nonverbal communication. Qualitative researchers (a) process data immediately, (b) summarize it, (c) clarify it, and (d) check with participants for accuracy in exploring unanticipated responses.

### **Participants**

This phenomenological study occurred in the retail grocery industry in the Hampton Roads, Virginia area. The retail grocery industry was suitable for this study because of its geographic location and my accessibility to the participants. The retail grocery industry is one of the major employers in the Hampton Roads, Virginia area, employing workers from a diverse labor pool. Applebaum (2012) noted that an adequate number of participants are necessary to obtain sufficient data and for research to be successful. Draper and Swift (2011) stated that phenomenological studies might use as many as 25 participants and few as six participants. Additional participants could have been required to reach data saturation for the purpose of this phenomenological study.

I selected a purposeful sample of 20 participants who had specific knowledge and experience supervising multigenerational employees and resolving employee conflicts within the retail grocery industry in Hampton Roads, Virginia. As a retail management professional, I have established a professional working relationship with local retail industry management professionals. I included a copy of an organizational participation letter in Appendix D of this study. Selected participants for this study were required to

have the ability to make managerial decisions and directly supervise five or more employees in the retail grocery industry in Hampton Roads, Virginia.

Moustakas (1994) suggested a researcher select study participants carefully and ensure participants have experienced the subject phenomenon. Study participants provided feedback or insights on current organizational issues, policies, and practices relating to the research question. Purposeful sampling in this study allowed me to select a specific retail management population to obtain data for exploring lived experiences and perceptions from managing multigenerational workforce conflicts in the retail grocery industry in Hampton Roads, Virginia.

Selected participants for this study received informed consent forms located in Appendix B section to complete prior to beginning the interview process. Randles (2012) identified the signed consent form as being a prerequisite for qualified individuals to participate in the study. The letter of consent sample located in Appendix B should (a) explain the detail of the study, (b) outline the interview process, (c) list participant selection criteria, and (d) describe reporting of results.

All potential participants received a summary of the research project before the data collection process began letter of introduction located in Appendix C. The research summary included a withdrawal clause as participants informed that participation was voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time during the interview process (Applebaum, 2012). Interviews conducted on site occurred in areas designated by the employer. The letter of consent located in Appendix B contains written authorization for

private interviews if necessary. The letter authorizing representative agreement to gain access is located in Appendix D.

### **Research Method and Design**

A qualitative research method was appropriate for this study. I explored the lived experiences of leaders, managers, and supervisors in Hampton Roads, Virginia's local retail grocery industry experiencing employee conflicts and diversity issues leading a multigenerational workforce. By using a qualitative method, the scope of the research is broad, descriptive, comprehensive, and exploratory (Moustakas, 1994). I used semistructured interviews with open-ended questions, located in Appendix E, as my method for interviewing participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

James (2012) noted that qualitative researchers rely on the premise the world is holistic with no single reality. Qualitative research is interpretative, with personal values, biases, and judgments outlined and expressed. The phenomenological design enables researchers to understand the insights and meaning of participants' experiences. Franklin (2012) posited that understanding the participants' lived experiences allows a researcher to make a clear-cut separation between what is objective and what is subjective. The purpose of this study was to address the specific business problem and research question through exploring the existing gap in the literature, investigate implications, and capture in depth experiences of business leaders, managers, and supervisors' lack of sufficient information to manage a multigenerational workforce.

## **Method**

I selected a qualitative method to explore the experiences of a minimum of 20 business leaders, managers, and supervisors in the local retail grocery organizations in Hampton Roads, Virginia as they experience workplace conflict issues, among multigenerational workers resulting in productivity and high employee turnover. The qualitative research method enabled an in-depth and broad understanding of the phenomenon workplace conflicts associated with leading and managing four generations in the current workforce. The qualitative research method enables a researcher to explore the phenomenon in detail, and the findings are expected to increase understanding of the subject phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) noted that qualitative method provides a broader perspective of the problem, allowing a researcher to take a holistic approach to understanding the phenomenon. Moustakas noted that researchers employ qualitative methodology to explore different individuals' perspectives on particular issues and develop shared meanings, allowing a researcher to determine reasons that contribute to specific problems or issues from the study participants' perspectives.

Anosike, Ehrich, and Ahmed (2012) concluded qualitative methods could answer a variety of questions centered on lived experiences. Research can include exploratory questions relating to the interest of the population. Qualitative methods are helpful before developing applied intervention to determine what the population is more likely to accept rather than reject. Qualitative methods are capable of eliciting numerous stories reflecting the experience and the meaning of the experiences of the participants.

Qualitative methods allow greater in depth understanding about a small number of participants. According to Cilesiz (2011), qualitative research can identify new variables and new relationships among variables that otherwise would be impossible to identify. Qualitative methods enhance understanding of the meanings of the findings (White & Drew, 2011).

Rocha Pereira (2012) concluded that by using quantitative methods researchers can answer a number of questions about how much change may occur resulting from intervention. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) noted the emphasis on measuring and analyzing the casual relationship among variables are present in quantitative methods. Quantitative methods require a larger selection of participants to test the hypotheses and were not appropriate for this study (Bansal & Corley, 2012).

The rationale for using quantitative methods, according to Rocha Pereira (2012), is to obtain data for describing the characteristics of larger populations. Quantitative methods are more suitable for achieving an understanding of the extent and nature of relationships versus the depth and intricacies of relationships that qualitative research affords (Bansal & Corley, 2012). Quantitative methods are more systematic than qualitative or mixed methods, and quantitative findings are more easily replicable because quantitative methods focus on examining numerical relationships and differences among variables.

The qualitative research method was best suited for this study because it allows the researcher to explore learning experiences while providing systematic approaches for translating participants' lived experiences for in depth analysis (Applebaum, 2012).

According to Applebaum, qualitative research enables researchers to gather rich, first-hand data from lived experiences of persons in a holistic study. While the qualitative research method is suitable for exploring the phenomenon, it may be vulnerable to researcher bias. Maxwell (2011) posited the results of the study could reflect the opinion of a researcher and not that of the studied population; generalizations made from qualitative research findings must demonstrate the validity.

A quantitative research method would not provide an in depth understanding of the phenomenon. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) stated that quantitative methods lack an explanation in the statistical analysis, possibly making quantitative methodologies difficult to interpret. Researchers could struggle to determine why one conclusion is more appropriate than another.

Researchers can minimize potential flaws in both the qualitative and quantitative methods by using the mixed-methods approach. According to Yin (2012), using mixed-methods techniques could result in the collection of richer data. However, the disadvantage to using mixed-methods is the qualitative and the quantitative sections of the study receive equal attention. Consequently, the addition of the quantitative component would limit the ability to explore the phenomenon in depth. A qualitative phenomenological design was best to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of organizational leaders, managers, and supervisors in the Hampton Roads, Virginia retail grocery industry relating workforce conflicts stemming from multigenerational worker's differences.



## **Research Design**

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), research designs are the frameworks that allow researchers to draw inferences about the reliability and validity of their studies' findings and conclusions. Researchers may use a variety of designs requiring a variety of data collection and analysis methods. In the case of this study, I used a phenomenological design approach.

The phenomenological design for this study was appropriate to identify meanings of human experiences regarding a phenomenon lived by the study's participants (Wahyuni, 2012). Specifically, the phenomenological approach allowed me to explore and describe the experiences and how they affected business leaders and managers working in the retail grocery industry in Hampton Roads, Virginia. Other qualitative designs such as (a) ethnography, (b) grounded theory, (c) narrative, and (d) case study were not acceptable because of the nature of this study.

An ethnographic research design facilitates analysis or description of cultures or groups of individuals, allowing inferences about what may guide their behaviors or events (Moustakas, 1994). In studying cultural behaviors, the ethnographic design requires in-depth interviewing and continuous participant observation of the situation. Ethnographic research was not appropriate for this study because I would not be able to observe the phenomenon of failure or predict the occurrence of failure. Grounded theory designs involve developing a theory using data collected from the observation of groups (Moustakas, 1994) which is not the purpose for this envisioned study.

Licqurish and Seibold (2011) characterized grounded theory design as the most sophisticated and difficult form of qualitative research, incorporating systematic procedures that generate action or interaction among people. Multiple sampling must take place to develop a theory with various modifications taking place during the process. The grounded theory approach is not viable for use in this study. Grounded theory requires observation of the participants in their natural settings, making it more time consuming for a researcher.

The narrative design discloses an account of individuals' stories (Larsson & Sjöblom, 2010). The purpose of conducting this study was to understand individuals' experiences with a view to understanding the meaning the participants attribute to the phenomenon. This study's purpose was not to report individuals' stories. By contrast, a case study design would require investigating or analyzing single cases or numerous units bounded by time and activity (Yin, 2012). Pastore, Carr-Chellman, and Neal (2011) and Yin (2012) concluded case study design supports the in depth illustration of cases from multiple types of data, making it easier for both readers and researchers to understand the phenomenon under study. However, studying research participants' perceptions of multigenerational workplace conflict in Hampton Roads, Virginia, I focused this study on understanding how individuals who have experienced the phenomenon over time were affected by and utilized their experiences to identify and address implement strategies, processes, and tools for preventing and managing conflicts attributable to a multigenerational workforce. The case study design was determined not suitable for this study.

### **Population and Sampling**

The scope of the study was limited to a population of leaders, managers, and supervisors in the local retail grocery industries in Hampton Roads, Virginia. According to Applebaum (2012), most qualitative researchers are unable to identify any new information from transcripts obtained after an interview of 20 or more people. In other words, by this time, data and theme saturation are evident. For this study, I collected data through answers obtained in interviews of 20 participants selected from business leaders, managers, and supervisors from local retail grocery industries in Hampton Roads, Virginia. According to Kisely and Kendall (2011), no uniform opinion on sample size exists; however, factors to determine sample size sufficiency include (a) researcher constraints, (b) richness of data, (c) and level of analysis, and demonstrating data and theme saturation.

Applebaum (2012) suggested the number of participants cannot conclusively be determined during initial stages of qualitative research. All study participants must have at least 5 years of supervisory experience and have some knowledge of conflict and diversity within a multigenerational workforce. Bansal and Corley (2012) noted the research community has no consensus as to the exact size for sample when conducting phenomenological research. Applebaum studied therapist self-disclosure and began with 16 initial participants. However, it was determined that data saturation was reached with only nine participants. Phenomenological study researchers have used as few as six participants and as many as 25 participants to reach data saturation (Applebaum, 2012).

The 20 participants for this study represented four generations of leaders, managers, and supervisors because ages vary between selected generations. Kisely and Kendall (2011) noted that in purposeful sampling, participants must satisfy a specific purpose. The purposeful sample of participants for this study included five participants from the veteran generation (born 1900-1945), five participants from the baby boomer generation (born 1946-1964), five participants from Generation X (born 1965-1980), and five participants from Generation Y (born 1980-2000). All study participants were business leaders, managers, and supervisors from the retail grocery profession in Hampton Roads, Virginia.

I selected 20 participants for this study to obtain in depth interviews so each participant contributed fully his or her insights concerning managing multigenerational workers (Moustakas, 1994). The admission of specific study participants was dependent upon the candidates' capacity to understand and answer the interview questions. Franklin (2012) suggested that initial contacts could include potential participants who have knowledge of the sample network or meet the qualifications of the study. In addition, referrals for potential participants made within the network resulted in more referrals. Franklin warned that referrals at the outset might be divergent; however, at some point in the chain sampling process, referrals will eventually come together. Potential participants whose names emerged at the point of convergence were noteworthy sources. As the noteworthy sources emerge, purposeful sampling of participants commenced.

## **Ethical Research**

Ethical conduct within the research community is necessary to maintain the integrity of the research. Kisely and Kendall (2011) noted that researchers must be prepared to make correct decisions for assuring the integrity of both researcher and the research community. I began this study after I received approval from the Walden University IRB 07-22-15-0263242. Research involving the collection of data from human participants governed by federal guidelines (Silberman & Kahn, 2011). Upon receiving approval from Walden's IRB, whose members reviewed this research project for federal government compliance, I began the process of recruiting participants. Prior to initiating the research, each of the participants received informed consent forms (Appendix B) electronically or in person. Participants were encouraged to review the purpose and requirements of this study. According to Damainakis and Woodford (2012), prior to conducting interviews, participants' written consent forms (Appendix B) contains a copy of the participant consent form along with a letter of informed consent.

I explained to participants why they were not obligated to participate in the study and had the right to withdraw at any time during the process by rendering a verbal notice. To eliminate any potential ethical problems, I disclosed the nature of the study to all participants. I kept all personal information involving participants' names, background information, and responses confidential, storing all sensitive data, including files, transcripts, and audiotapes after receiving permission from participants to conduct recordings. The data will remain secured in a locked fireproof floor safe for 5 years, and only I will have access to the data. I did not offer participants any form of compensation

for their participation in the study (Appendix E). I also performed a pilot study with two selected management participants prior to beginning interview to help to determine the clarity and understandability of the interview questions. I had no prior personal knowledge of the selected management professionals used in the pilot study that would mitigate any personal bias in my research.

## **Data Collection**

### **Instruments**

I was the primary instrument for collecting all data for the purpose of this study. My objective as a research instrument was to extract as much information as possibly applicable to the purpose of the study. The interview instrument consisted of a typed list of 7 open-ended questions I developed to explore the phenomenon of retail leaders, managers, and supervisors in Hampton Roads, Virginia. The selected participants were representatives of four generations of workers.

The interview sessions were conducted using an Olympus recording device. I recorded all interview questions and responses of each participant. I transcribed the responses using Dragon Natural Speaking, a software to transcribe the data. I ensured member checking by allowing each participant to review the data transcription and confirm precise transcription of their responses.

I conducted semistructured interviews using open-ended questions. Moustakas (1994) noted that semistructured interviews including probing questions provide focus and allow for information based on lived experiences rather than opinions. Another

objective is to increase awareness of organizational leaders, managers, and supervisors in the retail grocery sector located in Hampton Roads, Virginia, to understand the phenomenon of generational conflict and diversity in the workplace. I chose a qualitative phenomenological design that included seven open-ended questions utilizing face-to-face or Skype technology software that provided video chats and voice calls over the Internet from computers and other devices. Franklin (2012) stated the selection of data collection method using semistructured interviews allows for flexibility and strengths in the interview approach.

Marshall and Rossman (2011) indicated a researcher is the primary instrument in phenomenological research. A researcher must have the skills to conduct effective interviews. A researcher should become familiar with appropriate interviewing techniques prior to conducting interview sessions. Certain skills are required that involve creating an environment in which participants feel relaxed and comfortable during the interview.

I accessed local retail grocery leaders, managers, and supervisors through professional databases Linked In and social databases like Facebook. I developed an interview protocol located in Appendix E of this study. Researchers also need to develop skills in asking initial primary questions and follow-up questions to gain rapport with the participants to encourage openness and willingness to share experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The Walden University course study for qualitative researchers requires students to conduct face-to-face interviews when using a phenomenological design, which was an excellent tool for developing my interview technique.

Neuman (2011) noted that in qualitative interviews a core description of the experience emerges from analyzing the evidence. Franklin (2012) described the qualitative interview as human interaction that produces scientific knowledge. Neuman noted interview questions should remain nonthreatening and salient; therefore, open-ended, nonleading probing questions were used to facilitate this study.

Draper and Swift (2011) noted that conducting data collection using face-to-face interviews has advantages and disadvantages. The advantages are the researcher can clarify misunderstandings during the process and maintain participants' privacy. The disadvantages of face-to-face interviews include (a) the cost of travel to conduct interviews, (b) interviewer bias because of the flexibility of personal interviews, and (c) if participants are not comfortable with the interviewer, the possibility of leaving sensitive questions unanswered. The most practical forms of data collection for this study included audio-recorded face-to-face interviews, and telephone interviews. Prior to recording participants' consent was provided by the selected participants to record and transcribe collected data.

Additional tools for conducting interviews for this study included the MQ9x 2GB pen recorder and the Olympus vn-8100PC digital voice recorder. Englander (2012) noted interviewing has become the primary source for data collecting in qualitative research, and all phenomenological research studies require interviews. Appendix E includes all interview protocol utilized for this research. All interview material, whether recorded or written, will remain in a secure environment while being analyzed in a private setting.



## **Data Collection Technique**

Applebaum (2012) advocated that researchers must bracket or put aside previously held beliefs, attitudes, and expectations that pertain to the research topic. The phenomenological research method allows a researcher to view the research question by using fresh perspectives. Collecting data for phenomenological research interviews is a common practice because it is not always possible to observe rich experiential elements of the phenomenon as it occurs (Damainakis & Wooford, 2012). Within this study, I incorporated interviewing as a primary method for collecting data. According to Applebaum, three methods commonly used for the purpose of data collection consist of observation, interviewing, and report writing.

After obtaining permission from the Walden University, I sent out e-mail invitations and scheduled meetings with participants to describe the purpose of this study. James (2012) suggested studying participants' behaviors in a natural setting, allowing observation of the investigated phenomena as they occur naturally.

The purposeful sampling method for selecting potential participants for this research includes e-mail and phone calls to contact participants to establish connections and participants' willingness to participate in the study. James (2012) posited the two most difficult procedures when conducting interviews are effectively conducting and analyzing interviews. After potential participants agreed to participate in the study and signed the consent forms, I contacted each person to determine availability. I obtained a minimum of 27 potential participants for this study and selected 20 qualified participants to answer seven open-ended questions. The questions for the interviews focused on

exploring lived experiences of organizational leaders, managers, and supervisors leading multigenerational workers in the workplace. To obtain both rich and robust responses from participants, a semistructured interview approach allowed participants to elaborate without any interruptions, and enable the discussion to move in many possible directions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Damainakis and Wooford (2012) noted that the role of the researcher in questioning is to listen attentively to what participants say and focus on their words. By establishing the importance of listening, a researcher allows bracketing to become an integral part of the participants' lived experiences. Researchers are encouraged to present a rich array of questioning styles that allow participants to explore greater depth of experiences.

### **Pilot Study**

I used a pilot study that included a template of interview questions for addressing the research question and purpose of this research. I used the pilot study to validate the interview questions. Sousa and Rojjanasrirat (2011) noted the advantage to using a pilot study reduces potential errors and helps the researcher avoid questions that confuse participants. The pilot study occurred prior to my initiating the primary phenomenological research interviews. The pilot study is a tool used to validate interview questions to ensure relevance and refine interview questions prior to the onset of the research (Applebaum, 2012). Pilot study participants met the same criteria used for research participants. Findings from the pilot study will determine if the interview

questions are acceptable or interview methods suitable for this study, and for assuring the efficacy of the interview protocol.

To ensure the interview questions' validity and reliability, I selected two retail management participants to test the interview questions. The pilot study participants helped me to determine the clarity and understandability of the interview questions. Findings from the pilot study could also help gauge the consistency of responses. I began the initial selection process by sending out letters to retail grocery leaders, managers, and supervisors in Hampton Roads, Virginia requesting possible interview (Appendix A). The letters contained a prequalification questionnaire to include characteristics relevant for study participation. Applebaum (2012) stated that potential participants require screening for suitability prior to selection. No modifications were necessary; I continued the data collection process by interviewing the remaining participants (Appendix A).

I asked all participants to respond to the following interview questions:

1. Please tell me how many years you were employed with this organization and please describe your job duties.
2. Please explain how your organization has prepared your leaders, managers, and supervisors for managing issues involving workplace conflicts relative to generational differences in the workplace.
3. What ways have your experiences with generational differences and conflicts influenced your perceptions and leadership style?
4. Please describe major differences you have noticed in preferred communication styles among multigenerational employees.

5. How have your experiences with multigenerational workforce conflicts affected your perceptions of how generational differences need to affect recruitment, retention, and development of employees?
6. Please describe, if any, what kind of organizational policies, and processes your organization has developed and implemented to reduce and manage employment issues resulting from resulting from generational differences in the workplace.
7. Please describe any conflict between you and members of another generation and how these issues were resolved.

### **Data Organization Techniques**

I created a simple filing system to include subtitles and dates for recorded material during the research process, and I protected the anonymity of all participants by being the only individual to code and transcribe the data. I created excel files to contain transcriptions from interviews, allowing searches only by participants' coded identities. I will continue to protect all data obtained for this study, including all copies, backup documents, consent forms, and recorded interviews, storing them in a fireproof safe for 5 years beyond the completion of the study.

### **Data Analysis**

Upon completion of collecting the data, I used a coding system Coding Analysis Toolkit (CAT) to organize the data and to ensure that I captured the true meaning and identified the principal themes within the data. White and Drew (2011) advocated that researchers perform qualitative data analysis through thematic analysis. Researchers

examine data for recurrent instances, systematically identified throughout the data set grouped by coding. James (2012) described coding as a procedure that disaggregates the data to categorize information and stratify the data into manageable segments.

Abhayawansa (2011) agreed that open coding allows for categorizing the data, stratifying the data, and examining the data to identify common themes and to identify differences.

Coding is the process of grouping evidence to reflect increasingly broader perspectives (Abhayawansa, 2011). I first divided the text into smaller units of passages, sentences, and phrases. In addition, I labeled the text by using exact words of the study participants. I then grouped the labeled units by observed similarities and differences among themes. I relabeled emergent themes by using a language closer to the theory of reference. Content categories interrelated with each other provide the basis for abstracting the text into a group of themes with new labels. Coding allowed for higher levels of abstraction reached in describing the data of the analyzed texts.

The research software used for this study was CAT, a free service of the Qualitative Data Analysis Program (QDAP) hosted by the University of Pittsburg and the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (Lu & Shulman, 2008). CAT is an open-source, cloud-computing platform, built on Microsoft's ASP.NET technology. The CAT software provides researchers with a means for assuring research findings are (a) transparent, (b) reliable, and (c) scalable (Lu & Shulman, 2008). The interview questions asked align with and answer the central research question: What strategies, processes and tools do business leaders need and use to motivate a multigenerational workforce?

The interview questions included semistructured, open-ended questions presented to 20 leaders, managers, and supervisors from the grocery store industry located in Hampton, Roads, Virginia. I relied upon data collected via a set of interview questions created specifically for the research. I conducted a pilot of all interview questions prior to the beginning of this study. I developed a pilot utilizing all interview questions with two management participants prior to initiating the study. The pilot test validated the interview questions prior to initiating the study to confirm relevance to the open-ended queries. I used three demographic questions as an introduction prior to the research questions.

1. This study identifies the four generations. Please identify which of these generations you are affiliated; what generation do you consider yourself a member?

Traditionalists: Born between approximately 1922 and 1945, also known as veterans or the silent generation, believe in conformity, authority, rules, logic, a sense of right and wrong, and loyalty. Silents exhibit some degree of resistance to technological changes within the workplace (Berkowitz & Schewe, 2011).

Baby boomers: Born between 1946 and 1964 comprise approximately 44% of the population and represent the largest percentage of employees in the workplace (Eastman & Lui, 2012).

Generation X: Born between 1965 and approximately 1980, also referred to as the latchkey generation, the slackers, or the Xers, comprise approximately 34% of the population (Eastman & Lui, 2012).

Generation Y: Also called millennials, born between approximately 1980 and 2000, also referred to as the next generation, millennials, or Gen Next, comprise approximately 12% of the population (Barford & Hester, 2011).

2. What are your total years of supervisory experience?
3. What is the total number of employees that you have supervised?

The research questions I inquired were the following:

1. How many years you were employed with this organization and please describe your job duties.
2. Please explain how your organization has prepared your leaders, managers, and supervisors for managing issues involving workplace conflict relative to generational differences in the workplace.
3. What ways have your experiences with generational differences and conflicts influenced your perceptions and leadership style?
4. Please describe major differences you have noticed in preferred communication styles among multigenerational employees.
5. How have your experiences with multigenerational workforce conflicts affected your perceptions of how generational differences need to affect recruitment, retention, and development of employees?
6. Please describe, if any, what types organizational policies, and processes your organization has developed and implemented to reduce and manage employment issues resulting from generational differences in the workplace.

7. Please describe any conflict between you and members of another generation and how these issues were resolved.

### **Reliability and Validity**

#### **Reliability**

Ali and Yusof (2011) noted that qualitative researchers use a variety of techniques to help assure the reliability and validity of their findings and conclusions. Researchers must record observations consistently with methods replicated. I assured consistency throughout the data collection process by repeating the same data collection process using an interview protocol (Appendix E), containing the same open-ended questions (Appendix A) and by allowing participants the opportunity to answer questions with clear and concise answers.

White and Drew (2011) concluded that the reliability of studies' findings depends on the ability of different observers to utilize the same data collection and analysis processes as those described in detail by the original researcher. In addition, opinions vary as to what degree of reliability occurs in qualitative studies (Ali & Yusof, 2011). Yin (2012) argued the concept of reliability in a qualitative study is misleading and, in qualitative studies if reliability is a criterion, then the study is flawed. Dependability in qualitative research closely corresponds to reliability when used in quantitative research.

Reliability in qualitative research applies to the processes for conducting the research. A technique for evaluating the reliability of qualitative studies involves determining the consistency of methods and procedures for the study. Bansal and Corley (2012) suggested reliability links a measure and a concept in qualitative studies as



concepts used in relation to questions of whether or not data collection processes are consistent. However, Bansal and Corley concluded that reliability occurs by applying standardized methods in writing field notes, properly transcribing interviews, and composing textual studies for qualitative research data. To ensure reliability remains important that qualitative researchers document procedures and reveal categories consistently to ensure research is reliable. I ensured consistency throughout the data collection process by using repeatable/replicable processes. The research methodology and design were constant throughout the study. A consistent sample size remained constant that represented a small population of retail grocery, leaders, managers, and supervisors representing Hampton Roads, Virginia. I explored the phenomenon utilizing one-on-one, recorded semistructured interviews. The interview questions were closely aligned to the central research question, and remained constant among all of the study's participants.

### **Validity**

James (2012) noted that assessing qualitative validity revolves around two criteria, credibility and transferability. James also explained that validity must be determined if the findings are believable and if they apply to other contexts. White and Drew (2011) maintained that (a) cumulative validation occurs in qualitative research when other studies support the findings, (b) communicative validation occurs when respondents evaluate findings, (c) argumentative validation occurs when researchers test conclusions, and (d) ecological validation occurs when respondents' lives and conditions of the respondents affect conclusions. Bansal and Corley (2012) argued that to achieve

validity in qualitative research, researchers must reduce the gap between reality and representation so the data and conclusions correspond. I rigorously translated the data and thematic synthesis to provide for transparency to developing descriptive and analytical themes (James, 2012).

Rocha Pereira (2012) identified two forms of validation for qualitative research: (a) triangulation, a means of comparing different types of data and methods, and (b) respondent validation, returning findings to participants for verification. The current study provides the assurance of valid data from interview sessions because I employed member checking, a validation technique enabling participants to review transcribed interview data to ensure that data are free from distortions or any misconstrued individual responses and the researcher's interpretations of the participants' responses (Hanson, Balmer, & Giardino, 2011). Rocha Pereira defined external validity as the degree to which the study's conclusion may apply to other situations. Rocha Pereira further indicated that incorrect conclusions threaten validity.

Thomas and Magilvy (2011) noted transferring research data from one group to another to determine the extent to which findings of a specific inquiry are applicable to other contents is called transferability. Thomas and Magilvy provided examples of replicated studies that used the same data collection methods with different groups. One example involved African American women and the same study using Hispanic women yielding the same results. The current study may, or may not, provide transferability for equivalent data inquiry involving (a) different populations, (b) demographics, or (c) geographic boundaries yielding similar results (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). I ensured

validity internally by using triangulation to identify inconsistencies of the raw data. All participants responded similar to the research questions with no spontaneous modifications for reliability. I incorporated member checking into this study to allow all 20 research participants to review their own transcribed interviews and ensure accuracy of the research questions.

### **Summary and Transition**

The principal goal for Section 2 was to provide a clearer understanding of, this study's design components. Section 2 was a detailed explanation of (a) the research process and discussed the purpose of the study, (b) the information regarding method and design, and (c) rationale for the selected qualitative phenomenological method. Section 2 included an explanation of the rationale for (a) using open-ended questions, (b) semistructured interview process, and (c) reliability and validity of the study process. Section 2 reaffirmed the purpose of the study and defined my role as researcher. Section 2 also provided comprehensive information on the targeted population and participants. Section detailed the sampling process, data collection and the analysis procedures. Section 2 included a rational and chronological list of the interview questions and incorporated measures to ensure validity and reliability.

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of a minimum of 20 organizational leaders, managers, and supervisors who are members of retail grocery industries geographically located in Hampton Roads, Virginia to understand how experiencing conflicts between generational cohorts in the workplaces affected understanding of the conflicts and identifying policies, procedures and tools to prevent or

manage future such conflicts. Mayo et al. (2012) posited organizational challenges from workforce conflict contribute to problems with communication, decision-making, teamwork, and leadership.

The final section in this study, Section 3, includes a presentation of research findings and recommendations for future studies. Section 3 will also include implications for social change, and my reflections on designing and implementing the study. Section 3 emphasizes an overview of the study's findings; the data analysis process; presentation of applications for professional practice, the study's implications for social change; my recommendations for further study; study reflections; and summary, and conclusions.

### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore policies what processes and tools do business leaders need and use to motivate a multigenerational workforce. The participants included local leaders, managers, and supervisors from Hampton Roads, Virginia, grocery industry with at least 5 years of experience. This section details the workplace characteristics of leaders, managers, and supervisors in the local retail grocery business. Section 3 presents the results of the research conducted to answer the central research question:

Based upon their experiences with multigenerational workforce conflicts, what strategies, processes and tools do business leaders need and use to motivate a multigenerational workforce?

Section 3 also offers data results, tables and charts, and presents the results of the research analyses. I make suggestions on how these findings may be applicable to professional practice, impact implications for social change. I also make recommendations for future study. The findings from this study may enhance the understanding of business professionals and improve workplace implications.

#### **Overview of Study**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to provide leaders, managers, and supervisors managing a multigenerational workplace strategic issues for improving productivity in the workplace. Through the results of the findings, I revealed that managers lacked the knowledge for leading multigenerational workers. Analysis of my findings discovered that some business organizations has failed to provide their

leaders, managers, and supervisors the tools to resolve generational conflict in the workplace.

Each generational cohort expressed conflict issues when addressing different generations in the workplace. My research findings suggested that some conflict do exist between the four generations working side-by-side in the workplace. The study's findings could help business leaders, managers, and supervisors helping leaders develop working relationships between the four generations in the current workforce. Reducing workplace conflict could lead to healthier work environments and more productive business organizations. The results also indicated that younger and older generations had problems with communicating, the use of technology, and work ethics.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

The study participants were comprised of 20 participants who are leaders, managers, and supervisors with at least 5 years of supervisory experience in the retail grocery industry in Hampton Roads, Virginia. All participants were issued and completed an informed consent form. All the participants were allowed to review the interview questions prior to meeting. Participants were asked three qualifying questions at the onset of the interview. I asked participants to identify which of the four generations they were affiliated or considered themselves members. I also asked the participants what was the total years of supervisory experience.

Once I collected all the data, I invited each of the 20 participants to take part in member checking by reviewing their own transcribed interviews to confirm an accurate response (Rocha Pereira, 2012). I analyzed the interview questions by developing codes

based on the frequency of the variable expressions. Some of the codes were paralleled and as a result were placed in shared categories of themes. Five themes emerged from the data analysis.

The five significant themes that emerged from the data correspondingly addressed the central research question. The developing themes were (a) how the organization prepared its leaders, managers, and supervisors to resolve generational conflict issues; (b) differences in the preferred communication styles among the generations in the workplace; (c) generational conflict and how it affects productivity in the workplace; (d) differences in workplace ethics among younger and older workers; and (e) the use of technology in the workplace. The research participants for this study represented the retail grocery industry in Hampton Roads, Virginia. All of the research participants were business leaders, managers, and supervisors in retail grocery stores. The average length of employment ranged from 5 to 52 years among the participants. Each of the participants said to have supervised between five and 500 employees.

I identified the study participants representing each generation and categorized them as (a) Veteran Generation PV1- PV5, (b) baby boomer PB1-PB5, (c) Generation X PX1-PX5, and (d) Generation Y M1-PM5. Five participants represented each of the four generations. The study's participants represented a diverse group of store directors, store managers, assistant store managers, customer service managers, market managers, deli-managers, grocery managers, and supervisors from the retail grocery industry located in Hampton Roads, Virginia.

### **Theme 1: Organizational Policies and Procedures**

The research data support Haynes's (2011) conclusions that organizations should facilitate dialogue among the generations to raise awareness of the implications and effects of generational differences. Participants' responses to Theme 1 was initiated from the Interview Questions 2 and 6 that explored how the organizations trained their management employees to address generational issues and what policies and procedures they have in place. The overall responses indicated that most management employees were unaware of any specific policies and/or procedures that address generational conflicts. Six (30%) of the 20 participants answered as follows:

PV1: Times are changing and we never had to deal with this sort of thing before. We do not have any specific policy that I know of to deal with this.

PM1: I don't think my organization has done nothing to deal with this problem you are the first person to ever mention this and I know we need to do something about it.

PM5: I really have never heard of this kind of policy.

PM3:

Well actually we have never dealt with anything specifically along generational lines not recently but in the pass we had workshops on conflict resolution and staying within the guidelines nothing specifically geared towards if you are this generation and dealing with the next generation but nothing specific.

The company's core values are respect, honesty, integrity, diversity, inclusion, and safety of self and others. Abide by all corporate policies and both state and federal laws. There is nothing specific to generations.



## **Theme 2: Communication Among Generations**

Participants' responses from Theme 2 largely generated from Interview Question 4, which asked participants to describe major differences observed in the preferred communication styles among multigenerational employees. Hahn (2011) concluded that communication involves new and different ways of thinking. The responses indicated that perceptions of communication barriers were prevalent. Eighty percent of the study participants suggested communication barriers do exist in the workplace.

The data support the findings from Church and Rotolo (2013) that millennials, although technologically sophisticated with the ability to multitask, lack oral, written, and interpersonal communication skills. Some participant responses to support the data were as follows:

PB4:

People that's older, they handle themselves as old school, very hard to change. Some of them do change, but most of them they are strict to what they were about back in the day, and it is hard for us to get them to change to what we want them to do.

PV1:

It is impossible to enforce the company's no cell phone policy anymore. If time you turn around the younger folks no matter what job they are doing they have their cell phones and they text message every chance they get.

PM1:

The older employees don't understand technology and constantly complain about the younger people on their phones. They don't understand that sometimes they use their phones to provide service for the customers by looking up things.

PM2:

The younger generations tend to enjoy working in teams the younger staff members often send text messages, tweets and instant messages to communicate, while older employees prefer phone calls, the fact that younger employees like to use abbreviations and informal language causes a breakdown in communication.

PM3:

Yes, texting is more of a preferred methods for the younger generation and mail for the next generation up but my generation hand them a piece of paper have them read it and sign it. The technology of it all is different and fascinating; that's is one of the things that I actually enjoy about having multiple generations.

PV2: I would say that there is limited communication between generations the older workers seem to stick together and the younger people when not working on their cell phones doing something.

PV3: Some younger team members see older members as being too self-absorbed and likely to sharing too much information overbearing and inflexible. The older teammates seem to think that the younger generation are spoiled and narcissistic.

PB1:

Communication is vital as older workers tend to think that younger workers just getting out of college and do not have experience and younger workers feel that because they have education and know more about the job experience versus education we have to have meetings to address these issues.

### **Theme 3: Generational Differences and Productivity**

Responses from Theme 3 originated from Interview Question 5, asked participants to describe their perception of how generational differences may affect productivity, recruitment, retention, and development of employees. Hershatter and Epstein (2012) reported the future success of business organizations depends on the ability of leaders to acknowledge various generations within the company, understand, and manage challenges and opportunities associated with a diverse workforce. Seven participants (35%) of the 20 participants of this study gave their perspectives claiming that generational differences and conflict in the workplace is relative to issues with low productivity and high turnover. Some participant's responses were as follows:

PB2:

My generation when you were told to do something you would do it. It appear to me that the millenniums are more sensitive therefore you have to be careful as to how you approach them and they speak a different language and you almost need to learn a different language to understand them.

PB3: I think we have to recruit the right person for the job no matter what generation they are from. I feel that conflict of any kind hinder productivity.

PB4: I think that mentoring is a good method for retaining our younger associates.

PX3:

We are beginning to go more in depth with our interviews watching their body languages, making good eye contact and really watching them a little closer before we actually hire them. We try and staff as best we can so we do not have to deal with these issues.

PM1:

Older associates take their jobs more seriously, they are always early for work and usually don't mind staying and working overtime to cover a shift if needed. Some younger associates like to call out or constantly come in to work late and get mad at the older associates for getting more hours.

PM2:

I think the problems comes from the older and younger generations not being able to understand each other, how to talk and communicate with one another this causes too much wasted time for managers to have to mediate conflict issues.

PX3:

Younger associates do not want the job to define who they are; therefore, they take time off from work right after they start a new job and don't seem to care whether or not they get paid for it. Older associates are more loyal, willing to work overtime, and resent the fact that younger associates seem to feel as though they are privileged.

**Theme 4: Work Conflicts**

Theme 4 relates to Interview Questions 3 and 7, and the participants' perspective on work-related conflict between coworkers being a member of different generations and how these issues were resolved. Hershatter and Epstein (2012) reported the future success of business organizations depends on the ability of leaders to acknowledge various generations within the company, understand, and manage challenges and opportunities associated with a diverse workforce. The study participants resulted in five participants (25%) of the 20 participants experienced conflict among themselves and a coworker being a member of another generation related to work ethics. Some participants' responses were as follows:

PV3:

I had a conflict with a younger team member that continued to try and belittle me in front of my other subrogates and to refer to me as old and not knowing what I was doing. I allowed the team member to state his case in a one-on-one meeting and explained that her actions were not only inordinate, but she was being stereotypical as well, and what this could lead if I chose to act on it. I had no other issues with this person.

PB2:

My cohorts, a new policy comes out and I present them with it, they just read it and go on however, the younger generation I have to explain why and then I almost feel that I have to bribe them to accept the policy. Don't get me wrong there are some good individuals across generations but these are some of the things I observed from the groups you mentioned.

PB4:

Well it could be anger management people who struggle with that as far as I am concerned it is people who approach me because they are angry because of something I tell them to do and they are acting out which makes it challenging for me to know how to react to it. That would be the biggest thing I encounter is the people who have anger problems. This would be older generation people because the younger generation seems just to don't care they have attitudes. The older generation tends to feel that they are not paid enough to do anything extra Therefore, they will probably wind up quitting because of these anger issues. In the process, they tend to damage other good associates throughout the store. That would be all that I have experienced.

PM4:

The only conflict experience had to be with an older staff member who is my subordinate that always want to talk down to me and make me feel as though because of his age I always need to prove myself to him as if I have to have his

approval to do my job. He crossed the line with me and I ended up issuing him a write up for insubordination and I have not had any further issues with him.

PM1:

I had a problem with a younger employee not wanting to follow the phone policy I had problems because of my age and some of the older managers and associates not taking me serious. I had to counsel some older associates and let them know my position and they had to respect me as they would any other supervisor in the store. I let them know that I respect them and that I expect the same.

### **Theme 5: Generations and the Use of Technology**

Responses from Theme 5 primarily originated from Interview Questions 5, asked participants to identify factors in preferred communication styles among multigenerational employees. Hannay and Fretwell (2011) indicated that creativity and impersonal communication have an effect on generational differences in the workplace. The responses indicated that perceptions regarding preferred communication styles in the workplace exist. Twenty-five percent of the 20 participants suggested that there were differences in the communication styles among the generational cohorts. PM5:

The older employees don't understand technology and constantly complain about the younger people on their phones. They don't understand that sometimes they use their phones to provide service for the customers by looking up things.

PM1: The older employees don't understand technology and constantly complain about the younger people on their phones.

PB2: I think that texting is an advantage however there are policies for not having your cell phones at work extremely difficult to enforce and has a negative impact on productivity.

PB4:

Cell phones are an ongoing problem for younger generations because of technology being the way it is now days the younger generations are open with it, and they don't hide it. They could be anywhere in the store and on their phones, and we have to deal with it. That is one of the things I pick and choose it depends on the situation.

Prior researchers explored the phenomenon of four generation in the workplace to discuss why conflict exist. Jackson, Stoel, and Brantley (2011) found common misconceptions and stereotypes geared toward older workers held by younger workers in the workplace. Younger workers concluded that (a) older workers are less physically capable of doing the job, (b) older workers lack technological skills, (c) older workers are less flexible concerning change, (d) older workers lack the willingness to acquire the necessary skills, (e) and older workers are assumed to be less effective on account of their age. Findings from Brody and Rubin (2011) indicated that attitude differences in the workplace across generations of the same age are minimal and, applying this information, determined only small statistical differences among older and younger generations.

By standing on the shoulders of earlier scholars, I revealed differing results concerning generational conflicts and challenges exist in the workplace. Furthermore, diversity was similar because cohort groups encountered challenges with adversity, experiences with the economy, complexities with technology, and acceptance of



generational differences. In the current study, I sought to understand varying viewpoints of researchers regarding generational differences being the basic cause of conflict in the workplace and all generations need to have similar trust levels for the organization and management. The results from this study revealed that differences in generational groups may or may not be the cause of conflict in the workplace (Deal et al., 2013).

The foundation of the conceptual framework established for this study was Adair's (1973) action-centered leadership theories. The action-centered leadership model is a part of an integrated approach to managing and leading, with emphasis placed on applying these principles through training. Business leaders must understand how to implement changes and strategies that could (a) increase retention of employees, (b) increase productivity, (c) and foster customer satisfaction. Successful organizational leaders must be prepared to understand generational differences and capitalize on the unique strengths and characteristics of each generation (Dwyer, 2009).

### **Findings Tied to Organizational Culture Theory**

The participants' answers supported the conceptual framework for this study, Adair's (1973) action-centered leadership model for team leadership and management. Adair established action-centered leadership theories in the 1970s. The action-centered leadership model is a part of an integrated approach to managing and leading, with emphasis placed on applying these principles through training. McClelland (1985) identified key motivators that drive characteristics of people, including affiliation, achievement, and power. Generational diversity in the workforce consists of employees with different character traits, behavioral patterns, and value systems. Individuals who

seek acceptance from others and are usually effective performers, have affiliation needs and would prefer working in an environment that provides greater personal interaction.

All 20 participants agreed that generational conflict affects the productivity of the organization. I have confirmed through this study conflicts do occur because of generational differences in the workforce (Cogin, 2011). A need exists to develop a more effective relationship between leaders and workers based on an understanding of the generational differences (Balda & Mora, 2011). Findings from this study support the challenges businesses organizations encounter with multigenerational workers. The results from this study revealed that organizational leaders, managers, and supervisors fail to successfully address conflict issues related to four generations within their organizations.

Participants' responses to the study's questions indicated that generational conflict affects productivity and profits. Kabungaidze, Mahlatshana, and Ngirande (2013) contended that productive organizations understand the needs of their employees. Participants of this study provided their own perspectives on generational conflict and how it affects productivity in the workplace. Barford and Hester (2011) concluded that each generation prefers job characteristics and occupations that meet the personal beliefs and attitudes of that generation to ensure a more productive and profitable environment. All 20 participants agreed that employee motivation and morale would increase if their own organizations were to address generational conflict issues.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

The differences in the age of employees lead to challenges for business leaders because of significant perceived generational differences (Lester, Standifer, Schulutz, & Windsor, 2012). Labor force participation for the year 2012 included 7,676,000 members of the traditionalist generation, representing 5% of the total labor force in the United States, the baby boomers 59,893,000 (38%); Generation X 49,433,000 (32%), and Generation Y 31,927,000 (25%), according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, 2012). This qualitative phenomenological study involved interviewing 20 participants who are leaders, managers, and supervisors with at least 5 years of supervisory experience in the retail grocery industry in Hampton Roads, Virginia. The objective of this study was to increase awareness of business leaders, managers, and supervisors that some conflict does exist among four generations of workers working side-by-side in the workplace.

Participants in the current study were business leaders, managers, and supervisors in retail grocery stores. The study participants identified some key factors that contributed to workplace conflict: (a) management personnel unaware of specific policies and/or procedures that address generational conflicts, (b) perceptions of communication barriers were prevalent, (c) and generational differences and conflict in the workplace is relative to issues with low productivity and high turnover.

This study enriched the body of knowledge by exploring issues that contributed to the theory that managers lack knowledge to lead multigenerational workers. The

participants revealed how some business leaders have failed to provide their leaders, managers, and supervisors the tools to resolve generational conflict in the workplace.

A search of the literature identified how growing diversity has led to the emergence of different challenges for management and resulted in strife and conflict in the workplace (Owoyemi et al., 2011). Gursoy et al. (2012) indicated that managers must understand generational differences and work to improve the effectiveness in the context of these differences. Organizational leaders who understand and embrace issues surrounding diversity and employee satisfaction will have successful workforces (Gursoy et al., 2012). Organizational managers and leaders must recognize generational differences in the workplace attributed to individual backgrounds, perspectives, and skills if their organizations are to achieve a competitive advantage in the current complex business environment.

The current study filled a gap in knowledge relating to future success of business organizations and the ability of business leaders, managers, and supervisors to acknowledge various generations within the company and understand and manage challenges and opportunities associated with a diverse workforce (Hershatter & Epstein, 2012). This study provided information for business leaders, when addressing generational differences to eliminate human capital gaps, should provide sound workforce development strategies to minimize potential conflict in the workplace (Hendricks & Cope, 2012). The research participants provided the following recommendations to increase performance results: (a) most management employees were unaware of any specific policies and/or procedures that address generational conflicts, (b)

communication barriers were prevalent, (c) generational differences and conflict in the workplace is relative to issues with low productivity and high turnover, (d) and the future success of business organizations depends on the ability of leaders to acknowledge various generations within the company, understand, and manage challenges and opportunities.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The findings include recommendations for change that will positively influence both the urban and rural business communities currently experiencing high employee turnovers and low productivity resulting from increased workplace conflict. I anticipate the data offered in this study will contribute to organizational leaders', managers', and supervisors' understanding (a) employee perspectives regarding four generations in the workplace; (b) how business organizations could remain productive by eliminating conflict; (c) and how to develop strategies that increase profitability in business, creating viable employment within the community. The intent of this study was to help identify how the workplace is affected by changing demographics of workers. The results of this study identified how employees' perceptions of other generations' influences on a productive organization. Finding ways to reduce generational conflict may increase both productivity and profits. Additionally, the community becomes a significant part of our globalized workforce.

### **Recommendations for Action**

The intent of this phenomenological study was to increase business leaders', managers', and supervisors' awareness of generational conflict in the workplace. The

results of these findings may help organizational leaders, managers, and supervisors to (a) implement workplace cooperation methods among employees to reduce or eliminate conflict between the generations in the workplace, and (b) take an active role to disseminate workforce diversity policies and provide training to all leaders, managers, and supervisors within their organizations.

Cekada (2012) presented characteristics of each generation's core values, respect for others, and work ethics affect learning and communication in the workplace. Cekada noted key challenges managers need to understand to determine the best methods for training and managing a multigenerational workforce with differing learning styles, expectations, and values. Organizational leaders, managers, and supervisors are encouraged to capitalize on generational characteristics in the workplace, which could lead to a competitive advantage for their organizations by increasing productivity, retaining employees, and improved customer service.

The study's findings may increase awareness of organizational leaders, managers, and supervisors in determining key factors relevant to supervising four generations of workers side-by-side in today's workplace. Dissemination of the findings from the research will include all study participants. All participants will receive a copy of the study that they may promulgate within their respective organizations. This study will be made published and available through ProQuest/UMI database. Furthermore, I will take any opportunity to present the results of my study's finding to business organizations and conferences.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

I focused on four generations of workers side-by-side in the workplace for the first time in history. I limited my research to 20 participants that were leaders, managers, and supervisors living and working in Hampton Roads, Virginia, who represented the local retail grocery industry. Conducting similar research utilizing larger sample size from larger demographics with a larger population exploring a larger segment may produce different results for this topic.

There are existing research studies on the causes of conflict between the generations in the workforce. However, little research has been conducted regarding how generational conflicts affect productivity and profitability in the workforce. Continued studies with a broader focus on generational issues should be explored. My recommendations for future research would include (a) how Generation X employees tend to have issues with job security after witnessing how corporate downsizing affected their parents; (b) how age discrimination is prevalent in the workforce and stereotypes portray older workers as the most dispensable group; (c) how Bullying in today's workplace is an ethical issue widespread and unfair to employees (Soylu, 2011); and (d) how workforce diversity incorporates such factors as gender, religious, racial, ethnic, and age diversity (Eastman & Liu, 2012). For future research, I would recommend a quantitative study focused on the perceptions of human resource managers to examine generational conflict and differences in the workplace.

### **Reflections**

I used a qualitative phenomenological study to explore four generations in the workforce and how conflict affects productivity in the workplace. My purpose for conducting this study was to learn how organizations are preparing their employees to deal with multiple generations working side-by-side. I developed seven open-ended interview questions to give study participants the opportunity to express themselves and present their responses in an unbiased fashion. My ultimate intentions were to identify potential conflict issues between the generations in the workplace and how this affects the productivity and profitability within the organization.

The study participants were 20 leaders, managers, and supervisors from the retail grocery industry located in the southeastern United States. I conducted this study utilizing audio recorded interviews using semistructured questions I asked open-ended questions to allow the participants to gain the participants' true responses and I remained unbiased throughout the process. By conducting face-to-face interviews with the participants, I was allowed to develop a good rapport with the participant and I also had the opportunity to listen to participants' concerns for the organization to take an active role in addressing issues that contribute to workplace conflict among generational employees. Conducting this research allowed me a clearer understanding as to how these workplace issues can have a negative impact on the profitability of a business organization.

### **Summary and Study Conclusions**

Successful organizations realize that being productive is vital in today's competitive market. Employee productivity is essential to the success of any business



organization. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological research study was to determine methods for leaders to manage a multigenerational workforce by exploring characteristics, attitudes, values, behaviors, and work ethics among 20 employees from a city in the State of Virginia workforce. The conceptual frameworks that guided my study were Adair's (1973) action-centered leadership model for team leadership and management and McClelland (1985) key motivators that drive characteristics of people, including affiliation, achievement, and power. Business organizations and its leaders are facing significant problems involving generational differences and potential conflict among the generations.

Section 3 included findings from the study. In addition, Section 3 included recommendations for actions, future studies, and social change. In Section 3, I presented reflections on the study and my own recommendations for future research on the topic. I presented the perceptions of 20 research participants that represented the grocery industry in Hampton Roads, Virginia supervising each of the four generations in the workforce. Eliminating the issues involving generational conflict in the workforce will not only benefit the organization, but will have a major impact on society and the generations. This study may have revealed business organizations and their leaders know very little on how to address generational differences and how to resolve conflict in the workplace. Unresolved conflict between generations could lead to low productivity and decreased profits.

I discovered that managers and supervisors lack sufficient knowledge to successfully communicate with their employees or peers from different generations in the

workplace. Communication failures and lack of interaction between the different generations generate conflict. Communication is vital to an organizations' success and its workers. The study's finding suggest that organization must begin to develop policies and procedures for dealing with conflict between generations in the workplace. Generational conflict between workers will not go away as older workers retire later and younger workers entering the workforce the problems will continue to grow. An organization's failure to develop ways to address conflict issues may lead to disaster.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Please tell me how many years you were employed with this organization and please describe your job duties.
2. Please explain how your organization has prepared your leaders, managers, and supervisors for managing issues involving workplace conflicts relative to generational differences in the workplace.
3. What ways have your experiences with generational differences and conflicts influenced your perceptions and leadership style?
4. Please describe major differences you have noticed in preferred communication styles among multigenerational employees.
5. How have your experiences with multigenerational workforce conflicts affected your perceptions of how generational differences need to affect recruitment, retention, and development of employees?
6. Please describe, if any, what kind of organizational policies, and processes your organization has developed and implemented to reduce and manage employment issues resulting from resulting from generational differences in the workplace.
7. Please describe any conflict between you and members of another generation and how these issues were resolved.

## Appendix B: Letter of Informed Consent

Dear Potential Participant,

I invite to take part in a research study on Exploring Conflict and Diversity Associated with Four Generations in the Workforce. The researcher is inviting organizational leaders, managers, and supervisors from Hampton Roads, Virginia Retail Grocery Industry participate in the study. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. The research will explore the many challenges concerning diversity in the workplace resulting in conflict from four generations working side-by-side. Findings from this study may impact and contribute to social change by introducing strategies that may assist organizational leaders and managers in understanding how to value and use various generational differences in the workplace.

Researcher Rodney S. Milligan, a Doctoral Candidate at Walden University, is conducting this study.

### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to explore the various factors involving generational conflicts in values, views, mindset, and demographics of generations exist in the workplace.

Businesses leaders failing to address generational conflict issues encounter low productivity, high turnover rates, and employee frustration, leading to reduced profits.

### **Procedures:**

If you agree to take part in this research study, the following will apply:

- Read consent form and ask questions (15 minutes)

- Participate in (1) one-on-one interview with the researcher, responding to questions related to your lived experiences as it pertains to your industry.
- You will reflect on your answers at the end of the question and answer session to ensure clarity throughout the process.
- Your total time commitment for this process is not exceed 1 hour.
- The researcher will conduct interviews in a private setting free of distraction.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is strictly voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. The researcher will not treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during or after the study. You may stop at any time.

**Risks Benefits of Being and in the Study:**

Your decision to participate in this study would not pose any risk to your safety or wellbeing. Any risk of injury or harm during the study interview is virtually nonexistent, and the duration of the interview session will be limited to 1 hour or less. You may feel nervousness initially about the participating in the study; however, I will provide a safe, secure, and comfortable environment free of distractions to relieve any stress and anxiety. No other person or animal will be present in the interview room. The researcher poses no threat of hurt, harm, or danger to you.

The interview is audiotaped upon receiving your permission to maintain the accuracy of all data collected. The potential benefits of participating in this study may provide value to business leaders experiencing issues with generational conflict in the current workplace.

**Payment:**

There will not be any payments rendered for participating in this study.

**Privacy:**

Any information you provide is kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. In addition, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. The privacy of all participants is protected with all sensitive data coded in place of source identification. Electronic data will remain in a secure, encrypted location accessible by password only. The researcher will be the only person to have access to the electronic data. All study protocol, collected data, and consent forms will be stored in a locked container for 5 years from completion of the study, as required by the university. The researcher will remove all personal, cultural, professional, and gender biases during the research.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Alternatively, if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via telephone or email [REDACTED] or [rodney.milligan@waldenu.edu](mailto:rodney.milligan@waldenu.edu). If you want to talk privately about your rights as a

participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 1-800-925-3368, Extension 1210.

Walden University's approval number for this study is:

**Please print or save this consent form for your records.**

**Statement of Consent:** I have read the above information, and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, "I consent," I understand that I hereby agree to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of consent: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Written Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Written Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C: Letter of Introduction

Hello,

My name is Rodney Milligan and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am working on completing my Doctor of Business Administration degree with a concentration in leadership. I am conducting a dissertation research study on how 4 generations in the workforce affect productivity.

***Leaders, managers, and supervisors are invited to participate in this study.***

I understand that your time is valuable. The questions will take approximately 30 minutes to answer. Your participation and experiences will be vital to the research being conducted.

You will receive a copy of your responses and a summary of the results to help you to understand how Multigenerations in the workplace affect productivity. All information will be confidential and protected.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me directly.

I look forward to talking with you further.

Thank you,

Rodney Milligan

## Appendix D: Authorizing Representative Agreement

Walden University

Conflict and Diversity Associated With Four Generations in the Workforce

{Organization Name}

{Organization Contact}

{Date}

Dear Authorizing Representative,

My name is Rodney Milligan and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am working on completing my Doctor of Business Administration degree with a concentration in leadership. I am conducting a dissertation research study on how 4 generations in the workforce affect productivity. My research will involve interviewing leaders, managers, and supervisors in the retail grocery industry who have experienced conflicts issues involving Multigenerations in the workplace. Therefore, I am contacting you to see if it would be possible to include employees from your organization.

I am requesting that you forward the attached invitation letter to your management team on my behalf. All employees may contact me directly to express interest in participation. All interviews will be conducted outside of work hours as to not disrupt your work day.

Sincerely,

Rodney Milligan

## Appendix E: Interview Protocol

## Walden University

## Conflict and Diversity Associated With Four Generations in the Workforce

Date:

Time:

Location:

Interviewee: (Name and Title)

Interviewer:

My name is Rodney Milligan and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am working on completing my Doctor of Business Administration degree with a concentration in leadership. I am conducting a dissertation research study on how 4 generations in the workforce affect productivity. I would like to know more about generational conflicts in the workplace and better understand generational differences in order to build lasting relationships among the generations and enhance community relationships.

Today, I would like to ask some questions about your perspective on supervising a multigenerational workplace. I will take notes of our discussion and I will also record our discussion using a digital voice recorder. By signing the consent form prior to the start of this interview you are authoring the use of this recording device for the purpose of this research. All information gathered will be treated as confidential and records of this interview will be kept in a secured locked safe for a period of 5 years as no personal identification information will be disclosed. If you decide not to participate in this study, you can still change your mind during or after the study. You may stop at any time. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you will not be paid to participate in this study.

Today, I will ask you a total of 7 open-ended interview questions that supports the research question what strategies, processes and tools do business leaders need and use to motivate a multigenerational workforce, in an effort to capture your lived experiences of the topic and should take approximately 30 minutes. Your participation is appreciated and will be vital to this research being conducted.

That will be all the questions I have for you and concludes this interview, thank you for your time and patience I will be in touch should anything come up and I may need expert



opinion. I will be available should you need to contact me for any reason concerning this interview. Thanks again for everything, and have a good day/evening.