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ROUND TABLE

Multi generations in the workforce: Building collaboration

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KEYWORDS
Generations;
India

Abstract Organisations the world over in today's rapid growth context are faced with the challenge of understanding a multi-generational workforce and devising policies and processes to build collaboration between them. In its first part, this article synthesises the literature on generational studies, with emphasis on the definition of generations and the characteristics of the generational cohorts. It emphasises that such studies are embedded in the socio-economic-cultural-context and India-specific scholarship must take into account the demographic and economic variations across the country. It then discusses the challenges of multi-generations in the Indian workforce, their impact on leadership styles and managerial practices, and the task of building inter-generational collaboration with an eminent panel of practitioners and researchers.
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Academic perspective

Generational diversity has received increased attention in the last two decades across the world. This interest has been triggered due to significant changes in the global demographics. A number of countries in the West are experiencing the reality of ageing while countries like India have a demographic dividend with the average age being 25.

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The demographics pose significant challenges for both domestic and multinational organisations in India because of the rapid growth context. Rapid-growth firms are 'those with a three-year compounded sales growth rate of 80% or above' or those with a growth in its employment by at least 15% per year (i.e. at least doubled their employment over five years) (Barringer, Jones, & Neubaum, 2005; pp 664). Rapid growth companies have also been defined as companies that grow at an average rate greater than 20% per year (in number of employees) for at least four or five years in a row (Kotter & Sathe, 1978). From a multi-generational perspective, the definition pertaining to increase in employee growth is a more appropriate one. Using this definition, as an illustration, Table 1 below provides a sample of firms that are experiencing rapid growth in the IT services sector as per the definition of employee growth. This phenomenon is also observed in other industries like retail, financial services and health care.

The research study on 'multiple generations in the workplace' is being done in collaboration with the SHRM India. The

Table 1 Trend in number of employees in major medium-sized IT companies in India from 2004 to 2010.

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	CAGR
IBM India	9000	25,000	41,000	55,000	75,000	76,000	75,000	42%
MphasiS	6278	8375	11,414	20,012	28,795	34,632	38,347	35%
Tech Mahindra (MBT)	4300	5617	10,493	19,749	22,884	24,972	33,524	41%
Oracle India	4200	6900	14,915	19,915	24,000	24,000	21,000	31%
CSC India	1497	2578	4701	7058	14,103	16,783	17,000	50%

(Compiled by Saurabh K Pandya: unpublished proposal).

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Most organisations in a rapid growth context add a large number of employees at the entry level which are usually customer facing individual contributor roles. Kotter and Sathe (1978) outlined some of the problems that face rapid employee growth organisations. One of the key problems is the speed at which decisions need to be made in such organisations. Since the time available for decision-making is limited and the entire process demands intellectual and emotional application, it tends to create enormous pressure, particularly among the new and young managers. Coupled with this, rapid growth puts pressure on the organisation structure and culture. The informal relationships that exist in the organisation are under stress because the organisation has hired a large number of new employees. Informal groups of 'old timers' have experienced significant critical events in the early stages of the organisation, and 'new recruits' who often come with higher qualification and skills are likely to be seen as 'outsiders'. This process could result in cohort based generations that the organisation had not experienced earlier. This in turn could breed mistrust and lack of communication among employees. All of this could impede the smooth flow of communication, collaboration and team work within the organisation.

Another problem with rapidly growing firms is expanding job demands. The inability of the key managers to change their attitudes and behaviours in keeping with the changing needs of the organisation poses a challenge. Expanding job demands would require different ways of managing through formal and informal structures, and managers would need to engage in greater degrees of delegation and development, which they are unable to do effectively since there are not enough experienced people within the organisation to delegate to. Since there are fewer older people to socialise the large numbers of newly hired employees, there is a great deal of diversity in the manner in which young recruits experience socialisation. It is likely that there could be employees from the same cohort receiving very different socialisation experiences. These in turn could result in very different life experiences which could lead to intra generational challenges within the cohort in the long run. It is quite clear that rapid growth contexts tend to accentuate the phenomena of inter generational differences within an organisation.

The objective of this note is to provide a brief overview of the research in this field, identify gaps in the literature, highlight why the current conceptualisations of generations may be inappropriate in the Indian context and argue for a socio culturally embedded perspective to the definition of generations, and finally propose the notion that inter generational co-operation and collaboration is a critical element of success for organisations in the rapid growth context.

Defining generations

'Generation' as a construct is elusive and attempts have been made by scholars in various disciplines to unbundle this phenomenon (Joshi, Dencker, Franz, & Martocchio, 2010). Some scholars like Giancola (2006) suggest that 'the generational approach may be more popular culture than social science' (p. 33). Yet, generational studies have a long and distinguished place in the social sciences, and scholars have attempted to search for the unique and distinctive characteristics of generations for several decades now. Generation is defined as an 'identifiable group that shares birth years, age location, and significant life events at critical developmental stages' (Kupperschmidt, 2000, p. 66).

Differences between generations are theorised to occur because of major influences in the environment within which early human socialisation occurs; influences that have an impact on the development of personality, values, beliefs and expectations that, once formed, are stable into adulthood. Of particular significance to the generational approach are major shifts in the socio-cultural environment over time; this includes highly salient events that one generation experiences but another either does not, or experiences them outside of their critical socialisation years (Noble & Schewe, 2003; Twenge & Campbell, 2008). These potential salient socio-cultural events are numerous indeed, including wars and the consequences of wars (Noble & Schewe, 2003), new technologies resulting in major life and work changes in the developed economies, and significant changes to family and work patterns of special significance are the socio-economic events resulting in either relative scarcity or security for a group of people (Egri & Ralston, 2004). As each generation matures through such events, each generation is purported to develop characteristics that differentiate it from those that precede and follow it; characteristics that are reflected in personality traits, work values, attitudes, and motivations to work in ways presumed to be important to managers. (Macky, Gardner, & Forsyth, 2008)

To date most research in this field has been conducted in the US, UK and Canada. These studies have used the widely accepted practitioner definition of generations (Kupperschmidt, 2000) comprising four groups: Veterans, Baby boomers, Gen X and Gen Y (Applebaum, Serena, & Shapiro, 2004; Benson & Brown, 2011; Chen & Choi, 2008;

Table 2 Categorisation of generations across Asian countries.

Japan							
Generations	1st baby boomer	Danso generation	Shinjinrui or Bubble generation	2nd baby boomer or Dankai generation	Post bubble	Shinjinrui Junior or Generation Z	Yutori
Time frame	(1946—1950)	(1951—1960)	(1961—1970)	(1971—1975)	(1976—1986)	(1987—1995)	(1996—2002)
Defining events	Post world war II, economic growth, leaders tried for war crimes, struggling with Hiroshima and Nagasaki bomb affects	Regains independence, reduction in military expenditure, infusions of American Aid	Student activism, became 2nd largest economic power	Economic impact of oil crises (1973), normalisation of relations with China	Economic impact of oil crises (1978)	Employment ice age, extreme changes to education system	Elections held against a background of bribery scandals and economic decline, earthquakes, recession, trade dispute with China
Characteristics	Possess great financial wealth, determined	Loyal,community spirit	Individualism,lack of requisite leadership skills required for their position	Spend thrifts, hardworking, adaptability	Individualistic, expressive	Bias towards stable corporate jobs	Lack of focus and discipline, individualism, technically competent
China							
Generations	Post-50s generation	Post-60s generation	Post-70s generation	Post-80s generation		Post-90s generation	
Time frame	(1950—1959)	(1960—1969)	(1970—1979)	(1980—1989)		(1990—1999)	
Defining events	Economic and political turmoil post People's Republican in 1949	Cultural Revolution	Economic reforms, market liberalisation	One child policy		Restructuring of State Owned Enterprises, Recruiting for MNC's	
Characteristics	Hardworking,patriotic	Traditional outlook	Western outlook, lack in creativity, reserved	High expectations and minimal competition for attention due to one child policy, individualistic, confident, self centred, rebellious, innovative, open minded, no respect for authority		Capitalist,personal growth,money, information,tech savvy,spiritual	
South Korea							
Generations	"475"generation			"386"generation		Gen X and Gen Y	
Time frame	(1950—1959)			(1960—1969)		(1970-onward)	
Defining events	Post Korean war (1950—1953), destitution of post-colonial Korea, lived in slums, involved in pro-democracy movements			Decline in poverty, democratic protests, establishment of industrial economy		Economic growth due to focus on exports and Chaebol conglomerates, representative democracy in 1998, IMF crisis, stable government	

Characteristics	Value hierarchy, tenure, responsibility, determined		Politically active, worry about social justice and environment protection, take economic growth for granted, live in dream world	Selective about careers, frequent job hoppers, optimistic, own decision making, no obligation to look after parents
Vietnam				
Generations	Post war cohort (1958—1967)	The trasition Cohort (1968—1973)	The open economy cohort (1974—1983)	The global cohort (1984—1991)
Time frame				
Defining events	End of war with Khmer Rouge and China, and Cold War	Price-salary-money reform, collapse of Soviet Union	Success of market economy, multilateral trade with US, accession to WTO, foreign policy marked by Vietnam joining ASEAN, increase in foreign investment, development of private sector	Bilateral trade with US, accession to WTO, increasing internet offices, home, cafes, popularity of online games, chats, improvement in economy
Characteristics	Not spend thrifts, careful	Save money	Optimistic, risk averse, comfortable using technology	High risk taking, comfortable with technology, work better in teams and cross cultural environment

Dulin, 2008; Fletcher et al., 2009; Gursoy, Maier, & Chic, 2008; Joshi et al., 2010; Karp & Sirias, 2001; Kim, 2008; McGuire, Todnem, & Hutchings, 2007; Meriac, Woehr, & Banister, 2010; Morgan & Ribbens, 2006; Murphy, Gibson, & Greenwood, 2010; Rood, 2011; Smola & Sutton, 2002; Wen, Jaska, Brown, & Dalby, 2010; Wong, Gardiner, Lang, & Coulon, 2008; Yu & Miller, 2005). The key characteristics of the different generations as identified in the above mentioned studies is provided below.

Veterans

Veterans are also referred to as the Adaptive generation, Loyalists, Traditionalists, pre-Baby boomers, Silent generation, Matures, Greatest generation, Builders, Industrialists, Depression babies, Radio babies and the GI Joe generation. There is little agreement on the years encompassing this generation and the period between 1920/22/25 to 1943/45 has been used as a cut off for this generation. This generation was influenced by the Great Depression, World War II, and also saw the rise of television networks and mass marketing. Veterans view education as a dream and leisure as a reward for hard work. They desire stability in life, a predicted career ladder and are loyal and consistent. They also place a high value on integrity (Kim, 2008) and are dedicated (Schaming, 2005), hardworking and respect authority (Rood, 2011). The primary motivators for this generation are security and status (Schaming, 2005).

Baby boomers

The forgotten generation, also known as the Woodstock generation, Sandwich generation and Vietnam generation (Murphy, 2007) has experienced the post-war stress and prosperity, was actively involved in radical social changes including the emergence of the Civil Rights movement, the Vietnam War, the women's movement (Egri, & Ralston, 2004; Smola & Sutton, 2002), witnessed President Kennedy's assassination (Morgan & Ribbens, 2006; Tolbize, 2008), the sexual revolution (Smola & Sutton, 2002) as well as rapid technology change. According to literature, the birth year of this generation ranges from 1940/42—46 to 1960/63—64. This generation mostly grew up in two-parent households, is idealistic, optimistic (Brennan, 2010: pp. 26—28; Notter, 2002) and looks for opportunity and progress (Chen & Choi, 2008).

This generation is often described as 'self-absorbed' (Notter, 2002). Boomers felt the pressure of caring for ageing parents and their own children. The generation has a lack of respect for loyalty, authority and social institutions (Kupperschmidt, 2000) and prefers self-gratification. The primary motivators for the employees of this generation are money, a corner office and self—realisation (Schaming, 2005).

Gen X

Gen Xers are also known as Baby busters (Tolbize, 2008; Yu & Miller, 2005), Post boomers, Slackers, the Shadow generation, Generation 2000 and the MTV generation. Their birth years range from 1961/64—65 to 1975—83. This era experienced periods of economic prosperity and also stress

due to the early 1980s recession (Krywulak & Roberts, 2009) and downsizing, family insecurity due to high divorce rates of parents, rapid change, great diversity and lack of solid traditions. While this generation supports social liberalism and environmentalism, they hold more conservative family values than the Baby boomers (Kupperschmidt, 2000). This cohort is realistic, self—reliant, entrepreneurial, independent, market savvy, fun loving and techno-literate (Rood, 2011); it seeks a balance between work and leisure (Chen & Choi, 2008). However, a few studies (Morgan & Ribbens, 2006) characterise Gen X as aimless and apathetic.

Gen Y

Gen Yers are also known as Millennials, Next generation, Generation me, Echo boomers, Nexters, the Boomlet, Digital generation, Dot com generation, Net Generation, N-Gens, Generation WWW, Digital natives, Ninetendo generation, Sunshine generation (Murphy, 2007), the Do or Die generation, the Wannabes, the Nothing is sacred generation, Cyberkids, the Feel good generation and Non-nuclear family generation. Their birth years range from 1977/79/81/82/84/94/97/2000 and are just beginning to enter the workforce.

Millennials have been brought up in the era of globalisation, employment outsourcing, foreign investments and a proliferation of information and communication technologies (Krywulak & Roberts, 2009), and have seen their parents in distrust situations like Gen X (Smola & Sutton, 2002). They have witnessed natural calamities like the tsunami and earthquakes, and terrorist attacks, including the 9/11 attack in America. They are more globally educated, view themselves with confidence, assertiveness and entitlement, are highly optimistic, goal oriented and idealistic (Chen & Choi, 2008). They like to voice their opinions and are work-oriented. They are connected 24*7 on social networking sites and are very technologically adept. They are perceived to be healthier and more economically secure than any earlier generation. They have high expectations of self and employers (Armour, 2005) and believe in work life balance.

What is common across the various definitions described above is an attempt to distinguish a group of people in a time frame into distinct subgroups based on certain significant external events/forces. Given the different characteristics exhibited by the generations, it is inevitable that the focus of the studies has been on inter-generational differences. Based on the review of the literature, five categories of variables related to work, employment and organisations are identified which appear to be significantly different across generations. The five categories are work and life related values; motivators; professional growth; attitudes to rules; authority and hierarchy; attitudes to learning, training and development, and work environment. Inter-generational differences are found to impact all aspects of people management – recruitment (Charrier, 2000), training and development (Berl, 2006; Tulgan, 1996); career development (Ansoorian, Good, & Samuelson, 2003; McDonald & Hite 2008), rewards and working arrangements (Carlson, 2004; Filipczak, 1994) and management style (Losyk, 1997; Tulgan, 1996). The differences have the potential to cause serious conflict within the workplace (Karp & Sirias, 2001).

Challenges in the conceptualisation of generations

As is evident from the above discussion, there is a great deal of variation in the manner in which the birth years have been used to identify generations. While the generational differences exist across the various studies, defining generations remains specific to a given society, as the differences in any society are shaped by political, socio-economic and cultural events (Hole, Zhong, & Schwartz, 2010).

Research in the Asian context has tended to use the same categorisation of generations mentioned by Western scholars, even though many of the significant events mentioned in the context of the developed countries are not relevant in Asia (Turner, Mitchell, Hastings, & Mitchell, 2011; Yu & Miller, 2005). Some scholars (Yu & Miller, 2005) have found that the projected differences across generations in the global literature do not hold true in the Asian context. The few Asian studies on multi-generational differences did not have the same birth years across generations. Egri & Ralston (2004) identified four distinct generation cohorts in the Chinese context: Republican (born 1930—1950), Consolidation (born 1951—1960), Cultural Revolution (born 1961—1970), and Social Reform (born 1971—1975). It was found that recent generations in both countries share less rather than more similarity in personal values, supporting the importance of the national context in the development of cohorts.

Hole et al. (2010) propose distinctively different generations for the emerging countries arising out of their political, historical and cultural aspects of the tradition. Table 2 illustrates the differences in the categorisation of generations across different Asian countries. The heterogeneity of generations in the Asian context requires further investigation. We would like to posit that given the unique socio-cultural context of India and its diversity, there is an urgent need to understand the Indian generations.

Embedding generations in the socio-cultural context of India

Most scholars have recognised that Indian culture is not unitary and homogenous. Several scholars refer to India as a composite culture (Parekh, 2007). In a composite culture, each group has its own separate but overlapping regional, religious and linguistic cultures which are respected by and interact with their shared culture. The socio economic and cultural diversity is well documented. With 28 states, 22 officially recognised languages, about 1.2bn population, and home to all the major religions of the world, India is one of the most diverse countries in the world. The regional variations across the country are also high.

According to census data, the population of India is 1210 million (2011). Out of this, 29.7% of the population is between 0 and 14 years of age, 64.9% between 15 and 64 years of age and 5.5% above 65 years (Census of India, 2011). It is estimated that by 2020, 50% of the Indian population will be below 25 years of age (SHRM report [1]) and

[1] (http://www.shrm.org/Research/Articles/Articles/Documents/090754%20India%20Talent%20Mindset%20Research%20Article-FNL.pdf.).

Table 3 Current age structure of Indian population.

- Age structure : 0—14 (highest)
  - Uttaranchal, AP, Meghalaya, Assam, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, MP
- Age structure : (Lowest)
  - Kerala, TN, Pondicherry, Andaman & Goa
- Age 15—34
  - AP, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Punjab, TN

Note: AP: Andhra Pradesh; MP: Madhya Pradesh; TN: Tamil Nadu
Source: Census of India, 2011.

that the talent pools of younger people, under age 30 will have a grown by 5.6%. Table 3 throws light on the inter-regional variations in the age structure of the Indian population, which will have a bearing on the future work force of the country.

After liberalisation in 1991, different states in India have shown economic development at a varying pace. Therefore, as Dreze & Sen (as cited in Bijapurkar, 2007, p.5) mention, out of the 28 states, some Indian states are worse off than sub Saharan Africa, while others are better than China. Rural and urban India are at different stages of evolution; even within rural India, often within the same state, there are oases of development poised to leapfrog and become more developed than urban India.

Given this background, it is evident that any generational definition in the Indian context needs to reflect the current diversity. Some authors have attempted to categorise generations using the global framework. Roongrerngsuke, 2010 and Erickson, 2009 refer to four generations in India as shown in Table 4.

Hole et al., 2010 in their article speak about three generations existing in India: the Traditional generation (1948—1968), the Non-traditional generation (1969—1980) and Gen Y (1981 onwards). Ghosh & Chaudhari, 2009, identified the three generations existing in India as the Conservatives, Integrators and Y2K, each having the birth years and characteristics depicted in Table 5.

With a plethora of categorisation of generations being provided in the Indian context, there is a need for a deeper and thorough understanding of the theme of multi-generations in the work place. None of the above definitions however take into consideration the differences that exist across states given their stage of economic development.

In a study done by Sinha et al. (1994), it was found that there were regional similarities and differences in people's beliefs, practices and preferences across different cities in India. Seven hundred and fifty three students from seven cities reported on their perception of what others believed and the extent to which they attached importance to their own/others opinions, desires and interests. Five values emerged as different to the Western literature — embeddedness in one's in-group, harmony and tolerance, duty in contrast to hedonism, preferences for personalised relationships and arranging persons, objects, ideas and relationships hierarchically. Three distinct clusters emerged out of the seven cities — Patna and Varanasi; Baroda, Lucknow and Kharagpur; and Chennai and Bangalore. Within cluster differences were small or non existent but across cluster differences were significant. In particular, in the context of this study, the values associated with work regarding taking time off from work to visit ailing relatives, entertaining friends in the workplace and direct reportees maintaining highly personalised relationships with their bosses differed significantly across the clusters. The common elements across the clusters were familial relationships, preference for hierarchy and maintenance of personalised relationships. All the three have implications at the workplace. (Sinha et al., 1994).

Apart from these cultural and sociological studies, the field of consumer research provides some valuable insights. In a report titled 'Inside Facebook Gold',[2] it was found that older users are becoming a relevant user group in India. While India's user base of Facebook between the age group of 18—25 years exceeds the average across the top 15 countries, the users in the age group of 35—44 grew by nearly 20% in the last year. The least active group in India is the age group 55—65. In the Juxt India Generations Study in 2010,[3] it was found that nearly 300 million individuals are in the age group of 19—24 and about the same numbers in the age group of 25—39. For nearly 76% of the youth in the age group of 19—24, money is their most important priority in life followed by fame and status. Forty five percent of the youth feel that the neighbourhood they live in determines their status in society.

Another study (DeSouza, Kumar & Shastri, 2009) found that youth from small towns and Dalit and tribal youth have higher aspirations in life as compared to those from metropolitan cities and other forward castes. The family remains a key institution in the life world of the Indian youth with 55% of the respondents mentioning that they would like to bring up their children in more or less the same way as they were brought up and over 60% accepting that the final decision on marriage should be taken by parents.

All of these are indicative of the presence of certain co-existing social and cultural factors that impact the manner in which Indian youths experience life. We believe that this world view held by the young generation will impact its relationships at the workplace with other generations. These continuing generational values pertaining to life are likely to spill over into the organisational context and impact the performance and effectiveness of the employee and the organisation. The effect of these behaviours in organisations could have positive and negative consequences for all generations in an organisation.

Impact on organisational processes

There is much practitioner literature on inter generational conflict (Dulin, 2008; Krywulak & Roberts, 2009; McGuire et al., 2007). When multi-generations are present in the work force, the work values of the generations are likely to be different and this could result in tensions in the work

[2] 2011; http://gold.insidenetwork.com/facebook/.
[3] http://www.scribd.com/doc/38059578/Snapshot-Juxt-Indian-Generations-2010-Study.

Table 4 The four generations in India (as identified by Roongrerngsuke, 2010 and Erickson, 2009).

	Traditionalists	Baby boomers	Gen X/Socialist	Gen Y
Birth years	1922—1943/1946 (or) 1940—1950	1943—1960/1964 (or) 1946—1960/1964	1960/1964—1980 (or) 961/1965—1979	1980—2000 (or) 1980—1995
Defining events/ influencers	British rule, British education system, food crisis, Mahatma Gandhi's non-violence, civil disobedience campaign for independence, the end of British Raj, Gandhi's assassination and the first Kashmir war, Indo — Pak war of 1947	Shift to socialist economic model under Indira Gandhi's leadership, nationalisation of industries, public works, social reforms, public investment in education, growth of political factions, split of Indian national Congress, Sino- Indian war, Indo- Pakistan war of 1965, 1971, liberalisation of rupee and devaluation of the same, Indian Emergency of 1975)	Indira Gandhi's assassination, reduction of stringent business regulations, lower restrictions on foreign investment/imports, reduced bureaucracy, expansion of telecommunication, software and IT sector, economic liberalisation, migration of IIT graduates to US, education taking over caste system	Development of large middle class, increased demand and production of consumer goods, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's economic liberalisation, reformed policies and growth, educational powerhouse, development of science and technology, communal violence, assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, respected source of IT talent, listing of Indian companies in Forbes global
Characteristics	Frustration, authority, hardship, social order and caste system, loyal to family and community	Pro-democracy, hardship, anxiety, fear, lack of trust and hierarchy, career options influenced by family and culture	Hardship, self-sufficient, belief in hierarchy and a socialist economy	Ambitious, emphasise financial reward, entrepreneurial, business savvy, technologically capable and adept

force. The work values gap also impacts communication processes, problem solving processes, knowledge sharing processes, interpersonal relationships, leadership behaviours and management styles. From an HRM point of view, organisations and their leaders need to recognise the presence of multi-generational diversity and thereby engage with it more proactively. It is expected that a technologically savvy generation is likely to put pressure on a technology illiterate or neo literate generation to acquire this competence. In healthy organisations, this can manifest in supportive behaviours by various generations but this could also lead to conflict where one generation views its proficiency as an advantage over another. Therefore, organisations need to focus more on socialisation, orientation and citizenship behaviours on the part of the various generations.

The compensation policies, in particular the reward and recognition policies, are likely to differ across generations. In various studies, it has emerged that the motivators differ across generations. Some generations prefer security and stability more than the others. In terms of engagement with the organisation and communication expected from the organisation, there could be generational differences.

Past, present and future sets of employees in the organisation can be thought of as 'generations' (Wade-Benzoni, 2002). Since senior leaders often make long term decisions on behalf of organisations, successive generations need to fulfil those obligations and commitments. This manner of conceptualising multi-generational relationships allows for a collaborative model within organisations. However, the spaces where collaboration occurs across multiple generations in organisations is unclear and under researched.

Conclusion

As is evident from the above discussions, multi generation as a construct requires re-conceptualisation from both a theoretical and a practitioner perspective. The academic perspective note raises numerous conceptual questions which have implications for practitioners. The round table discussion that follows aims to engage with practitioners and shed light on several of the key issues identified in the

Table 5 The three generations existing in India (as identified by Ghosh & Chaudhari, 2009).

	Conservatives	Integrators	Y2K
Birth years	1947—1969	1970—1984	1985—1995
Defining events/influencers	Post- independence, famines, rigid protectionism, government interference, bureaucratic set-up, corruption, large families, rigid caste system	Moved from economic and physical security towards self-expression and quality of life, economic liberalisation, free markets, middle class dominating the workforce, inter- class -religion marriages, migration from rural to urban India, globalisation, influence of western culture, increase in readership of English consumer magazines, increase in tech services	Rise in economic reforms since 1991, high end technologies, increase in engineering colleges, increase in competition
Characteristics	Socialist, shy, obedient, national pride, stressing social conformity, technophobic, avid savers	Less conservative, tech savvy, ambition of becoming rich, government jobs no longer attractive	Loan is not considered a liability and is taken on credit, tech savvy and adept, value work-life balance and profession, fearless of aspirations

note, particularly the conceptualisation of generations and their characteristics in the Indian workforce, the impact of multi-generations on leadership styles and managerial practices and the task of building collaboration across multi-generations in the work force.

Multi generations in the workforce: Building collaboration : Discussion

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Faculty and doctoral students from IIMB, and invited observers were part of the audience, and participated in the discussion.

Vasanthi Srinivasan

Welcome to the round table discussion on 'Multi generations in the workforce'. This round table is a part of a larger research project that I am engaged in with the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) India on 'multi-generations in the workforce'. This round table is particularly appropriate in the Indian context because in the last year alone there have been two conferences, the NHRD Conference and the ISTD Conference which had a significant focus on generations, in particular, increasing Gen Y in the workforce. The NHRD Network journal carried a special issue on Gen Y with numerous practitioners from India and the globe who wrote about this phenomenon. Many organisations have also begun to engage with this issue in their own way, whether it is creating opportunities for younger generations to speak up or reverse mentoring. Each of the participants in the round table discussion has been a part of these initiatives on multi-generations at the workplace. Their contribution has been as researchers, specialists and practitioners in the field of generational diversity. Sripada Chandrashekhar was the guest editor of the NHRD journal on Generations; Hardik and Prarthana presented their research findings at the NHRD Conference; Saundarya Rajesh ran a professional workshop at the Nasscom Diversity Conference and the NHRD Conference; Shrihari Udupa contributed a paper to the NHRD Network issue on Gen Y and with his vast experience in different sectors, manufacturing, IT services and consulting, engages with the question of motivation of generations.

The question of generational diversity has been addressed by a number of researchers from sociology, anthropology and economics. It is evident that generation as a construct is embedded in the socio-cultural-economic context and therefore any categorising of generations has to be located in a context.

Table 6 Inter-generational differences: An HR perspective.

- Inter-generational differences are found to impact all aspects of people management: recruitment (Charrier, 2000), training and development (Berl, 2006; Tulgan, 1996); career development (Ansoorian et al., 2003; McDonald & Hite, 2008), rewards and working arrangements (Filipczak 1994) management style (Losyk, 1997; Tulgan, 1996); having the potential to cause serious conflict within the workplace (Karp & Sirias 2001)
- Five broad variables where differences are recognised in literature — work and life related values, motivators; professional growth; attitudes to rules, authority and hierarchy; attitudes to learning, training and development and work environment
- Paucity of research in the field of how one generation adapts to the characteristics of another generation

Indian marketeers have made attempts to understand the consumer generations to grow their markets. Yet why is it that human resource (HR) professionals have not been looking at employee generations in the same manner to make a difference to the way people are managed? The scholarship in the field suggests that inter-generational differences impact all aspects of people management and has identified five broad variables. (See Table 6)

Following from the above, it would be useful to discuss the following sets of questions in the round table discussion:

- What characterises a generation in the Indian workforce context?
- What is the impact of multi-generations on leadership styles and managerial practices?
- What builds collaboration across multi-generations in organisations?

Career aspirations and attributes of Indian Gen Y at the workplace: Prarthana Alley and Hardik Shah

(Reports from a Research Study in partnership with Ikya Human Capital Solutions Ltd, MTHR Global and the Academy of HRD):

Generation Y or Gen Y could be defined as the generation born between 1981 and 1991, who are now between 20 and 30 years of age. The Indian Gen Y constitutes 25.47% of the world population (Census of India, 2011), but not all are 'employment ready'. While Gen Y professionals' skills and potential are crucial if economies are to move up in the value chain, one of the motivators of our study was the lack of validated Indian studies on Indian Gen Y population. Table 7 summarises the research design and methodology of our study.

Table 7 Research design and methodology.

The scope of our research study is limited to the working Gen Y professionals in India today. The Gen Y of our study are born between 1981-1991

Cross-sectional exploratory study

Urban locations of India, divided in 4 zones (North, South, East And West)

Mixed methodology

Two stage sampling: Judgmental and convenience sampling

Schein's (1985) [1] career orientation inventory , Udai Pareek's (1997) [2] extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and Sarupriya 's(1983) [3] value preference scales

Duration May'2011 to October'2011

Project Stage	Description
Stage1: Pre-Research work	Research design & planning, literature review, questionnaire design, pilot study, main study execution plan
Stage2: Qualitative & Quantitative Data Collection	1. Qualitative: Conducted 10 focus group discussions & 21 triad interviews with Gen Y and Gen X managers. Transcriptions of data and qualitative report generation. The sessions were conducted in Ahmedabad, Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore 2. Quantitative: Questionnaire analysis, Experts inputs incorporation, hosting the questionnaire online: http://survey.academyofhrd.org/. Also, distributed questionnaire in MTHRG's events in Pune & Mumbai; NHRDN's event in New Delhi
Stage 3 & Stage 4	Quantitative Data entry, transcriptions of qualitative data, Data Analysis, Report drafting & Report submission

We received a total of 707 responses from the online survey; however, only 378 were completed responses. The research findings are based on the quantitative data of 378 responses and the observations from conducting 10 focus group discussions and 21 triad interviews.

1. "Organization Managers: A Career Study" Alfred P. Sloan School of Management, pp.112 (dspace.mit.edu/bitstream/handle/1721.1/44247/09512754.pdf).
2. "Training Instruments In HRD and OD", 2002, Second Edition, Tata McGraw-Hill, pp.227 & 235.
3. "Training Instruments In HRD and OD", 2002, Second Edition, Tata McGraw-Hill, page no. 235.

Coming to the demographics of our sample, 61% of the Gen Yers were born between 1981 and 1985 and 35% between 1986 and 1991; 51% were male and 41% were female. Eighty percent of the sample had work experience of 5—11 years, while 20% had work experience of 0—5 years; 60% were post graduates and 29%, graduates. The inputs for these studies were given by the service sector and the manufacturing sector. Location wise, 42% of our respondents were from the western zone, 29% from the southern zone and 18% from the northern zone.

Findings from the study

If you look at Gen Y's career aspirations, motivations and values (Figs. 1 and 2), Gen Y aspire to serve and be dedicated to a cause, followed by managerial competence and occupational and organisational identity. Geographical stability has the lowest aspiration level. Chief among Gen Y's intrinsic motivators are: equitable pay, responsibility and independence, and achievement. Leading extrinsic motivators are: considerate and sympathetic supervisor, restricted hours of work and sound company policies and practices.

There are no marked gender differences in the career aspirations of Gen Y but females aspire more for geographical stability (78.4%) compared to their male counterparts (58.8%). Males aspire more than their female counterparts for managerial tasks, job stability and identity. When it comes to intrinsic motivators, males are more intrinsically motivated by advancement and equitable pay, while females are more intrinsically motivated by respect and recognition.

Diametric motivation

One of the key findings in our study is diametric motivation. Gen Y appears to be motivated by a series of tradeoffs between diametric motivational gratifications. Even as they need well defined order, they want risk and challenge; they desire responsibility as well as freedom; an emotional connect with the social order side by side with the need to walk their own path and pursue their passions; guidance and supervision as well as the desire 'to be a king at the age of a prince'; work-life balance as well as instant gratification; they are looking for companies that invest in them.

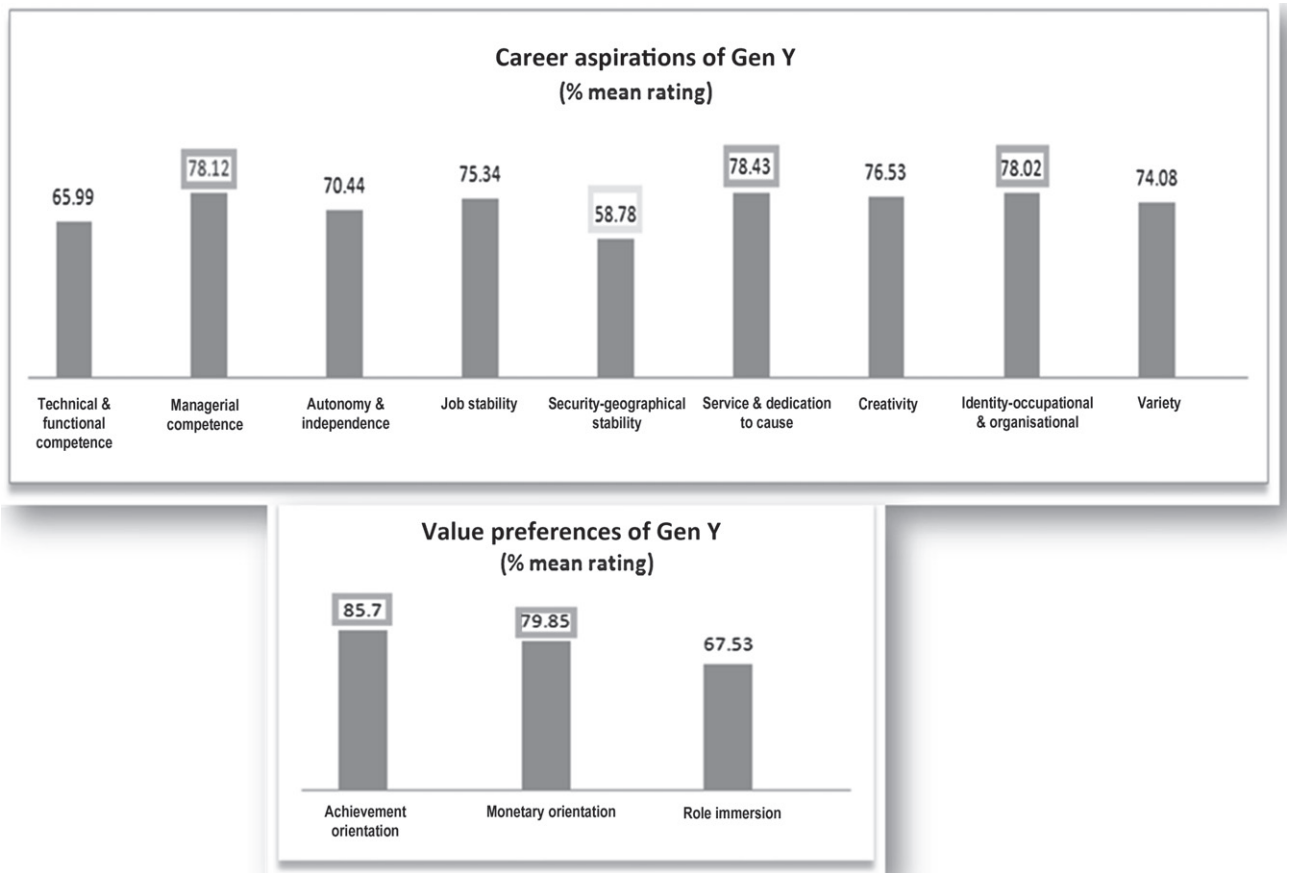

Figure 1 Findings: Characteristics of Gen Ys' career aspirations (CA), motivation and value.

While Gen Y is ready to participate in the social order, be grounded and sink roots in it, are keen onunderstanding the processes in their organisations, look for a clear enunciation of policy, description of their role and job, and transparent HR policies, at the same time they get demotivated by stringent rules and regulations, lack of clarity in or unethical organisation policies and processes, inequality in pay, gender biases and unclear communication. While they seek responsibility and decision-making power in the organisation, they also look for a tolerant organisational policy which enables them to explore, make mistakes and learn from them and flexible HR policies regarding working from home and accessing social media.

Fig. 3 contrasts the security concerns of Gen Y and Gen X. Gen Y looks for a company that invests in them by providing them with challenging learning opportunities on the job, training programmes and the latest technology, an informal organisational culture with a 'fun' working environment, supportive and approachable leaders, quick promotions and recognition of efforts, and early exposure to all that the job has to offer. In return, the career-oriented Gen Yer is ready to work hard, longer hours, but is committed to the work rather than the organisation. Some suggested HR interventions are, creating collaborative teams, flexible working hours, well defined organisational roles, job enrichment, and creating transparent and supportive organisational systems.

A different way of looking at generations: Shrihari M Udupa

I would like to share with you my perception of the subject based on my overall experience in the industry. My perception was triggered off by the initial question of whether there is a different way of looking at generations rather than widely from an age perspective. I have taken Maslow's theory of the needs of people to analyse this. In trying to understand what the major drivers of behaviour are, and what drives people's attitudes, if we are able to zero in on those specific characteristics and attitudes, then our level of response would be very different.

Based on Maslow's hierarchy, I have two propositions: 1. The definition of a generation depends on where one starts on Maslow's continuum. Consider a person like my grandfather, who belonged to the first generation trying to move out of his village because he didn't have anything to look forward to in the village. What were his drivers? There are people today who belong to Gen Y but who moved out for the first time from their villages/home towns, and may have illiterate parents. Their purpose, their drivers, would not be very different. Hence primary attitude and behaviour patterns would be similar. So, rather than looking at age, the more fundamental way of looking at it is to see where the person is on Maslow's continuum, which would determine the individual's philosophy, approach, attitude and drivers. 2. Where one starts on Maslow's continuum is

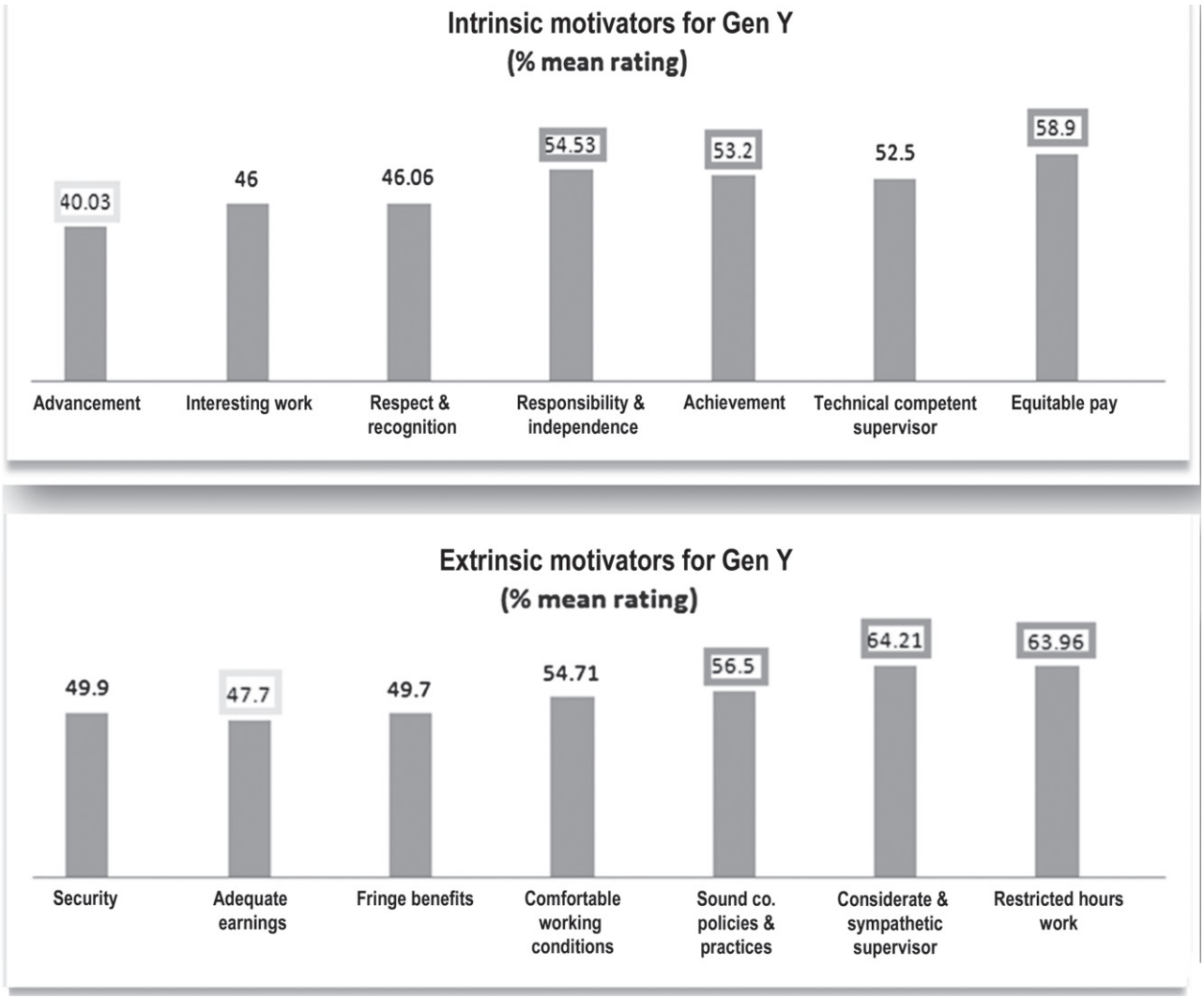

Figure 2 Intrinsic and extrinsic motivators of Gen Y.

independent of time and environment. Fig. 4 will help us understand how people in a given generation could be at different levels of meeting their hierarchical needs, and could behave very differently.

The 'environment' comprises of individual situation, family, community, socio-economic situation, health, technology, education, exposure and access to opportunities local and global. These are factors that influence the behaviour and the motivation of the individual irrespective of the age of the individual. To give you an example of how the environment would be influenced by the equation between an individual and his/her family, recently, I met a professor who had worked in four major universities in the US and has now come back to India. He is in a humble job, taking an Indian salary because of his family situation. So, irrespective of one's individual personality, due to one's needs, one may exhibit behaviour contrary to what one might expect of a person of one's age and generation. The movement in the continuum could be forward or in the reverse, depending on an individual's need. Individual choice, pace and direction of movement in the continuum will depend upon the environment which could be a constraint or an enabler.

Using the continuum example to look at intergenerational conflicts in organisations, conflicts may arise when a person higher on the continuum is in a position of higher authority and has control over those who are higher in age, but lower in the continuum. Challenges may arise from several directions. About 25—30 years ago, people would only look at seniority for promotions. Slowly, the selection criteria changed to seniority cum merit and today, merit is the major consideration. People within the organisation are looking at growth differently and that is proving to be a challenge. A feeling of deprivation is also an issue. A manager might feel deprived when he has taken eight to ten years to reach this position whereas, another person with just four years of experience has become a manager. This comparison internally creates tension for the organisation. Differences in thinking are bound to exist and we have to see how we can deal with those differences from an organisation perspective.

My primary proposition is that the basic needs (Maslow), drivers (Lawrence and Nohria, 2002) and motivators remain the same. However the equation between need, manifestation and gratification has undergone a change. Economic, social and cultural changes have multiplied the

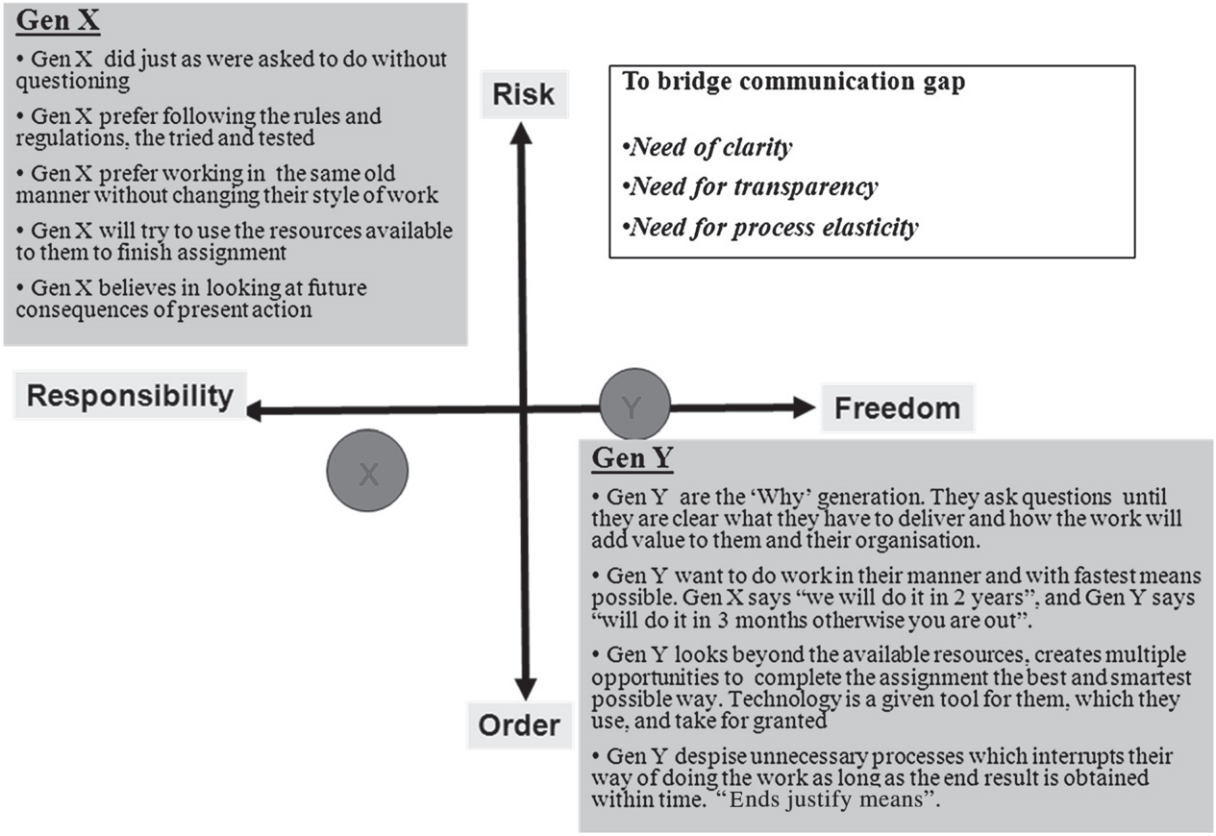

Figure 3 Gen X/Gen Y Security conflicts.

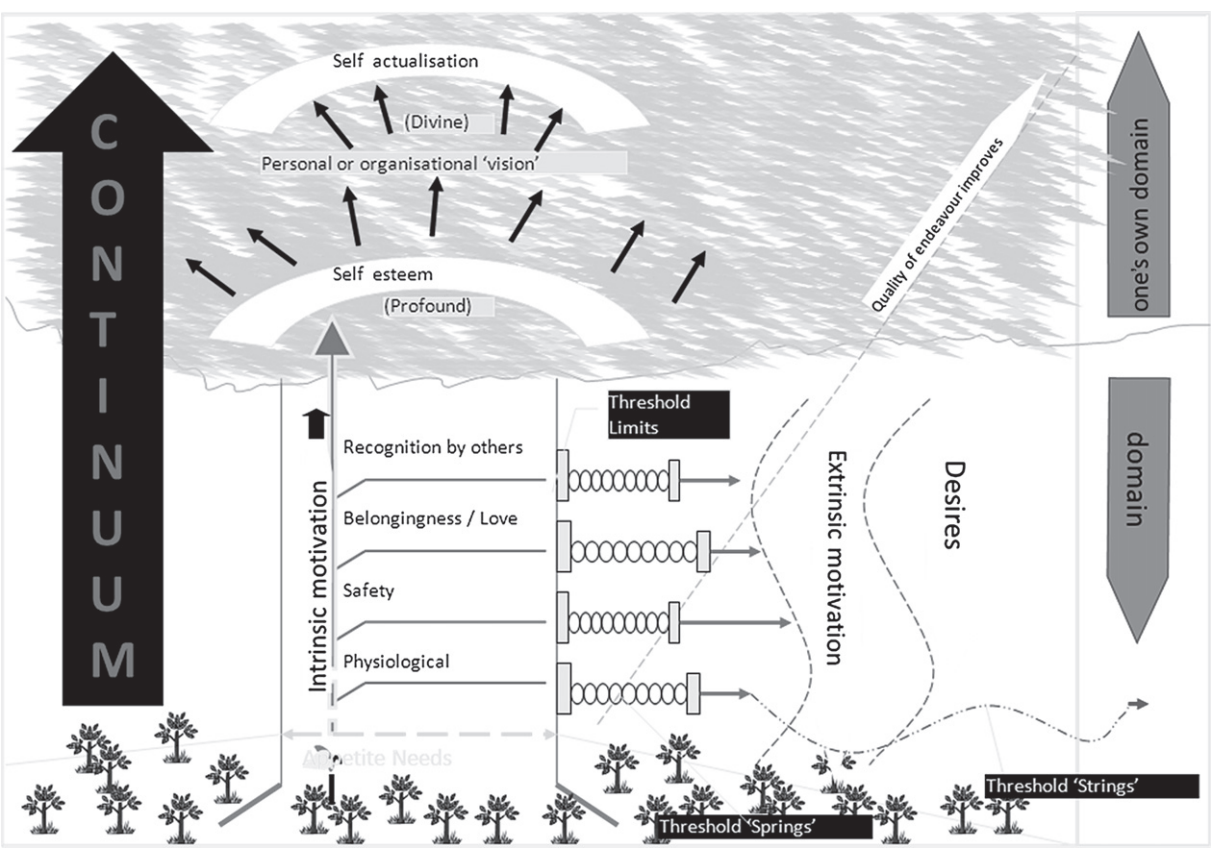

Figure 4 Meeting of hierarchical needs in a given generation. Source: Thresholds of Motivation, 1993, by VS Mahesh, Tata McGraw Hill.

manifestation of a particular need and created almost a geometric increase in the gratification options. The leadership and management therefore need to recognise the change, appreciate the appetites and tastes of the various generations, and respond to enhance engagement and maximise potential (Udupa S, 2011).

Looking at a multiple generation work force, how do we build collaboration? Firstly, decisions to deal with each person should be based on equity and fairness in relation to where the person is on the continuum and his environment. The key is in making people understand that different people bring different things to the table and hence the offerings need to be treated differently. Much of how this is achieved depends on the quality of the leadership. It starts with enlightened, value based leadership which is sensitive and aware of the possibility of such conflicts and creates appropriate policies. Leadership needs to create a culture based on values such as fairness, equity, transparency and openness. The organisation needs to put systems in place where issues could be addressed and confronted and justice meted out without fear of retribution. This enlightenment needs to percolate to all levels of leadership, hence the need for the focus on culture.

Vasanthi Srinivasan: You are saying that years of experience is one way of being able to categorise generations. I am trying to make a distinction in your presentation between individual differences and generational identity. So, how would you then categorise generations?

Shrihari Udupa: It depends upon how many people there are at that particular point in the continuum. The socio-economic profile of a person at the stage of entry would define where the generation is.

Sripada Chandrashekhar: Two people of different age groups but with the same socio-economic background, I would hypothesise, would react differently to things. Faced with job loss, I at my age would react differently from somebody aged 22. Those reactions to me define their generational characteristics and not the external triggers. So, generations are the psychological responses to similar external triggers. The perception of needs differs according to age.

Shrihari Udupa: If the need for the job for both the people for their survival remains the same, the manner in which they respond to the external stimulus of losing the job should be more or less similar. One needs to examine 1. the way US citizens reacted to migration of jobs to India in the last decade. This has not been very different from the reactions of Indian employees and unions at the time of introduction of automation/computers in Indian industry. Both groups of people reacted to the anxiety of possible loss of livelihood. 2. At a broader level, the need for freedom and self governance and the emotions attached to these needs during the Indian Freedom Movement and the Egyptian movement as reflected in Tahrir Square in Cairo, are not fundamentally different. The means of communication, and of influencing and driving transformation have changed due to changes in the environment and the options available. 3. At a more micro level, again, the reaction to the perceived lack of freedom to form a union has been the same, whether in the 70s or in Maruti Udyog in the latter half of 2011. Both resulted in prolonged strife, strikes and lockouts. However the approaches to organise the responses were different because the options/tools available are many more. 4. The generation which felt the need to 'move on' in 12—18 months in an assignment stayed longer and accepted reality when recession struck in 2008/9 and again now. All in all, my submission is that responses have a direct bearing on environment and market forces, demand/supply situation and options. If I have the same security as my children, I would take the same risks as my children do! One should therefore not standardise generational behaviour primarily on the basis of a generation defined by age.

Vasanthi Srinivasan: Both age and maturation affect how you actually respond when you are looking at a phenomenon like generations. In fact, one of the biggest challenges in research on multi-generations is there is only one study which uses longitudinal data over time to capture the age and maturation related effects. This is another aspect we have to investigate in the Indian context, especially when social mobility is occurring as we speak.

Generational competence: Saundarya Rajesh

My presentation reports on a study which is the result of practice and research, primarily based on client requests and interactions. The study spanned about three years, and the idea was to build two levels of competence i) 'generational competence' from the organisational perspective and engagement theories on how we engage with different cohorts and ii) 'interpersonal power', from a personal view point in terms of how one can become an effective member of a population or society/community/organisation by understanding the play of different generations around us.

The concept of generations today is no longer as linear and simple as it used to be. The complexity of today's environment has necessitated a relook at the issue. The concept of employee segmentation is to talent management what target marketing is to product management. The challenge is to understand the segments and what drives their behaviour. However, the perennial question of engagement research is, what lens do we use? When we look at a group, how do we predict its engagement models, attrition rate, leadership abilities and different levels of identity? In the generational cohort theory, the primary components are age, nationality, ethnicity, gender, health and so on and the secondary ones which could change are political preference, work, education, and so on. In case of chronological bifurcation, you can look at age and generation.

The generational cohort literature has already been dealt with at length by Prof Vasanthi. Table 8 shows the five generations that we have identified as being uniquely Indian and details the characteristics of each generation.

Table 8 Generational diversity in the Indian workplace.

Veterans	Free-Gens	Gen X	E-Gens	Gen Y
• Born: 1920—1945 • Pre-Independence cohort • Unsure and wary • Very rarely in active employment today	• Born: 1945—1960 • Post Independence cohort • Believe in concept of life-time employment • 20% of today's workforce • Interim seniors	• Born: 1961—1970 • Socialism-to-Liberalization transitionary cohort • Saw the upswing of economy and hastened to catch up with younger cohorts • Believe in the power of change • Account for about 25% of the workforce	• Born: 1971—1980 • 'Confident India' cohort • Comfortable with change — largest cause of attrition at the Indian workplace • Constitutes 29% of the workforce in India today • Has seen the sharpest trajectory of success, in spite of 2 large downturns	• Born: 1981—1990 • Constitutes about 26% of workforce • Feels less guilt in being an aggressive consumer • Has seen one significant big blip — the Recession of 2008

If you look at the work place today, the four cohorts — Free Gens, Gen X, E Gen and Gen Y – are very clearly present (Since the Veterans are not active in today's workforce, this presentation will concentrate on the other four cohorts). E Gens are playing a very dominant role in Indian organisations today and they have a unique personality and distinct characteristics; the other three cohorts are there in Western parlance, perhaps not with the same names, but with the same behaviour.

The Gen Ys are an international and multinational cohort. Their key milestones are truly global. Theirs is the story of how India has arrived at the global economic platform and the India image is a powerful and strong. They take a lot of pride in being in India and they also get frustrated at the pace of growth and progress. They have witnessed the outsourcing phenomenon, the Internet boom, economic liberalisation, and are fairly gender neutral. (However, some young people still hold male chauvinistic ideas and a few focused group interviews revealed that they still hold on to stereotypes.) However, as women are entering the work force in very large numbers and adding to the competitive atmosphere, there is a common feeling that women are no different from men. There is a common prevalence of flexibility in careers, and sexual preferences are extremely open– something that the three other cohorts have been shy of. Jobs are clearly looked at as disposables and they are suspicious of corporate lives because they have a very different ethic. When they look at a long corporate life, existential questions crop up, such as – What is this? Is this what I want to be right now?– even when they are in their early twenties.

Another aspect that separates the groups is the way technology has influenced and changed their lives, and the kind of products that each generation has seen and used. For the Free Gens the major technological milestones were the post & telegraph, radio — Akashavani, electrification, the train network and the gramophone; Gen X belongs to the era of the television, tape recorders, the telephone, scooters/motorcycle, photocopying and the fax.With E-Gens it was cars, satellite television, the mobile, Email, the Internet - Dialup connection, the desktop computer and the Dotcom boom. With Gen Y we find everything that is in use right now — the Internet - Broad Band, the laptop, Apple/IPod/Blackberry, DVDs, social networking/Web 2.0, Web-cam, and so on.

Our study reports on the work values of the different cohorts (Table 9) and we found these values echoing quite a few stereotypes. While Gen X sets store by flexibility and the work-life balance, E-Gens prefer customised careers (One of the reasons they are called E-Gens is because they are entrepreneurial, electronic, and efficient in terms of usage of time, technology and so on), while Gen Y value diversity, are techno brilliant, have a global mindset and they prefer portfolio careers.

Flexibility as a way of life and flexible careers will be the focus of the future. For our organisation, this aspect of career service is of interest as we are probing into how the organisation and the individual look at mutually beneficial flexible careers. We find that almost in all the cohorts excepting the Free Gens, flexibility, own time, work-life balance, portfolio careers, are all present in an accentuated manner. In the future, how we encourage employees to be accountable and responsible for what they do and also provide flexibility to them is going to be a major concern.[4]

Following are some of the trends that are expected in the workplace, with the emphasis on flexibility as a way of life.

- Increasing focus on 'My time is my own'
- Work-Life 'integration' as against 'balance'
- Work as only a component in the tapestry of time
- Identity is something beyond just work
- Moving from 'Zeus' profiles to 'Dionysius' profiles —(Charles Handy's 'Gods of Management')[5]

[4] A report on 'The Smart Workplace, 2030' by Johnson Controls (http://www.johnsoncontrols.com) provides interesting projections on the nature of employees and the workplace in the future.

[5] Charles Handy, in his 'Gods of Management', classified corporate culture according to the characteristics of the Greek gods Zeus, Apollo, Athena and Dionysus. According to him, the future will see corporate culture moving away from the Zeus or charismatic, dominating leader based culture to the Dionysus type culture based on individual specialists who are driven by their ends.

Table 9 Generational work values.

Generation	Year of birth	Entered work force	Work values	Work is...
Free Gens	1945—1960	1960s—1980s	Hard working, conservative, loyal	Inevitable
Gen X	1961—1970	1980s—1990s	Flexibility, job satisfaction, duty, work-life balance	A challenge
E Gens	1971—1980	1990s—2000s	Customised careers, entrepreneurial, own—time	Exciting
Gen Y	1981—1990	2000's—now	Value diversity, techno brilliant, global mindset, portfolio careers	A means to an end

Multi generations: Trends from advertising Sridhar Ramanujam

I have over 25 years' experience in marketing and advertising and I can say that advertising over the years reflects the times we live in and good advertising is based on a strong consumer insight or sharp understanding of prevailing and emerging consumer trends.

If you survey advertisements (ads) over the past twenty five years, we find that the simple, even simplistic advertising of yesteryears has today become complex. Coming to ads in the present day, the one thing representative of today's aspirational youth is that they are not satisfied with what they have, be it their education or their looks and this is something that marketers consistently feed on. One of the most successful advertisements of our times is one for a fairness cream, which despite containing a questionable social message was successful and the product was one of the best selling for the manufacturing MNC. (On the reverse, today's Gen Y also has a phenomenal sense of humour and they see many 'issue-based' ads as a piece of entertainment.)

Changing India, as reflected through advertisements, shows a space where women are increasingly becoming confident, speaking up and even dominating the household and the social scene. In an ad today for a leading brand of bags, we find girls taking the lead in relationships, which seems to be socially acceptable today. As reflected in other ads as well, the ghoonghat-wearing, silent woman is a thing of the past. Another important trend is the emergence of smaller towns and the aspirations of the young there, which match those of their counterparts in the big cities.

The young or Gen Y today are used to technology and are comfortable experimenting with new trends, as the plethora of playful ads for mobile telephones and technology reveal; they are also much more concerned about the environment and about the future of the country.

When you look at relations between generations as reflected in advertisements, it appears that Gen X and the generation before that are always worried about their children (and expect them to do their worst) but Gen Y knows how to handle its parents. The generation that is on the verge of retiring, that is people in their late 50s and 60s, are seen as wanting to have a close relationship with their children but to be financially independent.

The takeaways from marketing/advertising on generations are:

- Every eight years constitutes a generation, and a generation gap, when it comes to communication
- People are changing very fast; so fast that brands like Nike have something called 'street talk' to catch current buzz, the language of the street, to communicate with the young and the man on the street, so that they can engage better with the young consumer.
- There is a pre-occupation with youth in this country. Our entire focus seems to be on the young and people are classified either as young or young at heart, which is a complete over simplification, so we are still groping for the right communication mix.

Unlike the research community, we practitioners know whether our communication is working or not because the market reacts immediately. If the market rejects whatever we are trying to communicate (and that happens quite frequently) then we know that we are off the mark. The biggest challenge in marketing and advertising today is the age segmentation in the field — over 50% of our consumers are in the 20s, marketing mangers and vice presidents are in their 40s and managing directors are in their 50s. Their success is going to depend on how well they understand and relate to youth. While the advertising industry has succeeded in reaching out to the young and there are a lot of advertisements which resonate with the young, there is little syndicated research being carried out to understand trends.

Vasanthi Srinivasan: How do you look at pitching products for other sets of generations?

Sridhar Ramanujam: That is one of the largely neglected parts of advertising and marketing. To give you an example, I am 59 years old; several credit card companies, large clothing stores and others have my data. But when they look at my age, at best they send me a birthday card. None of them does any cross selling or sends an offering which is meant for a person of my age. There is data mining staring people in the face but unfortunately they are not doing it. As I said earlier, we are focussing on the young. In software, I have often heard the criticism that we have been going for low hanging fruit for so long that we are now struggling to reach the higher end of the value chain. I think that is happening in marketing as well.

Our understanding of women also seems to be very primitive from a marketing perspective.

Vasanthi Srinivasan: In marketing, is age a factor in categorising generations?

Sridhar Ramanujam: It is very common because most of the data is still the National Readership Survey data

which is classified along the age brackets of 15—23 or 24 or 25—34, 35—44, and so on. The data you get about the media is classified according to age, gender socio-economic and educational classifications, where they live — metros or mini metros, information about their television watching habits. So we get a lot of information than was available 20—30 years ago.

Saundarya Rajesh: My interest is primarily in women's groups. Is there any publicly available data on what kind of behaviour women exhibit in the market place or as consumers?

Sridhar Ramanujam: Not that I am aware of. What's happening is, product and marketing companies are doing specific research which they are not sharing. I am sure the cosmetics companies have a lot of data on the behaviour of urban women vis a vis rural women but a lot of such data is classified. There are no syndicated studies. Many of the 'insights' that ads are based on may not be based on research but on creative intuition.

Some thoughts on managing people: Sripada Chandrashekhar

Let me first react to some of the things that have come up in the previous presentations and then wear my hat as a person who is engaged in the task of managing people.

Going back to Table 3, it is clear that youth in India have a demographic advantage and dividend. However, the regional differences in the composition of the young (the fact that the young in Arunachal Pradesh would be the future youth rather than the young in Kerala) has a very powerful implication on where our future talent will come from. We have to look at what the aspirations of those youth are and how to engage with them and prepare them. A lot of research and thought leadership is possible in the area of inter-regional differences in India.

There is definitely an India story to how generations have evolved. We need to understand that it cannot be the global story, even with the more global Gen Y. My engagement with a book I edited recently on Gen Y leads me to believe that the Indian Gen Y has some characteristics different from the rest, for example, their relationship with their parents. The Indian Gen Y want to have the best of all — the best of tradition and modernity. So, on the positive side, it is very aspirational but on the negative side, it is very opportunistic. We have got to see how to balance the two sides.

Within generations, in India, there is a difference between women and men. I believe that the generational advantages are not yet equitable and this aspect needs to be investigated far more. I endorse the anecdotal point made earlier that Gen Y men still conform to male stereotypes. On the other hand, women have become far more assertive and are wondering about how to cope with this. This needs to be researched.

Coming to the workplace, one point that was made earlier is that consumers are being studied generationally and HR and marketing are coming up with generation-specific offerings. As head of HR for a company some time back, I myself have been part of an interesting experience of helping management define generation specific offerings and taking a lifecycle approach to the benefits programmes. We introduced allowances such as a dating allowance (this got a lot of media coverage back in the 1990s); a granny gratitude award (birthday gifts to grandmothers of employees stationed overseas); a honeymoon allowance; a wedding gift arrangement (extending a vehicle for family use during an employee's wedding) and so on. Interestingly, the longevity of such plans is low.

So, what we realised in HR was that while it was appealing to take a programmatic approach to compensation and benefits, people did not view them as sustainable motivators. The staples (for motivation) are still the old four — compensation, career advancement, competence or learning and care. All generations respond to these staples, though they may be coming across differently. Tata Steel in 1920 had a canteen and Infosys in 2000 started a food court, but they are both the same thing. All employees, irrespective of generation, must feel that these four 'staples' are being catered to, by the organisation. Life stage and age characteristics influence how you experience care. And that segment provides opportunities to companies to launch life-stage related programmes.

However, a company's ability to respond according to life stage is becoming very difficult and a for-profit corporation would invest where there is maximum return. Sometimes it is believed that if you understand generations and build work places that are compatible with the requirements of generations, you can probably handle issues like attrition. My belief is you cannot and my experience is that a lot of the attrition is a function of the market place. In India attrition has fallen this quarter because the market doesn't have the opportunities and not because we are not doing anything better than last quarter.

Generational research is important to handle inter-generational issues and not the discrete issues of each generation. Discrete issues are easier to understand and handle. Gender and generational issues are universal and are yet to be solved satisfactorily. Generational conflict is at the heart of organisational issues. Across the globe, one group seeks to protect its interest against the other group. The older group is protective of itself and has access to more resources but is being constantly challenged by the younger group that has both the advantage and the disadvantage of being young. This generational conflict slows down progress; a lot of ideas that young people can bring to the work place are cold shouldered because the older generation feels that the young have not paid their dues as yet. So, despite all the talk about meritocracy, the older generation still defines what merit is and often uses seniority to manage the traffic of aspirations. It would be interesting to know what companies are doing about this.

In my company, IBM, there is a very conscious attempt to address this issue. Of our initiatives, the most successful is **reverse mentoring**. This works differently in different countries. For example, for me in India it's about learning social media through youngsters. So, I have a mentor who is below the age of 25 and every month I spend two hours with him to understand the niceties of LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter. Similarly, the general managers in the company and all the key leaders have a programme called Blue IQ. Under this programme a process of mentoring by the younger employees is rigorously practised. In Europe, in

Switzerland, France and many other countries, the general managers or the top leaders are elderly but in Eastern Europe the IBMers in equivalent positions are much younger. Therefore there is a reverse mentoring happening between the younger generation of leaders and the older generation within Europe. There are many parts of IBM that are experimenting with reverse mentoring and have been very successful.

The second challenge in countries with older populations, and one that we will face soon, is the issue of dealing with older people. In countries like Australia and Japan we have the **retiree casual programme**, a programme to attract older employees to stay in work by providing several flexible options, not necessarily full-time or formal work. The 'get them back' programme involves re-inviting retirees or young women who have left the company for domestic reasons such as child rearing. These HR programmes are about reaching out to a talent pool that is scarce and not available easily. These innovations are a simple response to the demand-supply situation of talent, but they also address the issue of generations.

The third inter-generational issue we are facing concerns is in **knowledge management** because of the enormous loss of tacit knowledge that takes place when the older generation moves on. The older generation is not obliged to pass on the tacit knowledge that they have acquired. So, we are focussing on constructing programmes that obtain such tacit knowledge from older people. These programmes include pre-retirement documentation and debriefing sessions. Senior leaders of the major markets or the advanced markets, who have grown IBM products for a long time, are sent to growth markets to share their experiences.

The last aspect is **collaboration between generations**. In IBM we have introduced training modules which are trying to consciously build skills and perspectives between generations. In Kolkata and Delhi, we have constituted 'shadow boards' — comprising the senior leaders of IBM from older groups and their younger counterparts from the same role. They have periodic mandated meetings, where they tackle designated topics. For instance, they would discuss their different approaches to client handling — a position that takes years for a youngster to reach.

Finally, despite all attempts, as a professional and practitioner, I am not all that satisfied with the actual progress in the field in handling the generation issue. As with everything else there is a knowing-doing gap here as well. If research could move more in the direction of applied research, it would be very useful. For instance, if you took experimental groups of a company where a shadow team is working, if you could prove with data that reverse mentoring actually reduces the time taken for learning and improves productivity, if research could establish that one set of tools can bring inter-generational compatibility faster than another set, if I can use research to leverage, to take management decisions and investment decisions, I would encourage that research and it would find its place in the work place for real transformation. Otherwise, it will just satisfy intellectual curiosity.

Vasanthi Srinivasan: I invite the last set of comments on collaboration from any of you, from your personal experience of having led an organisation.

Saundarya Rajesh: One of things that we have done for some organisations is what we call 'generational competence'. This was particularly relevant for small organisations, say under 5000 people, which are hiring in large numbers. They often are not able to understand why people behave the way they do. Inter-generational bridge building and other kinds of collaboration can happen if generations stop being judgemental about each other and accept each other as they are. This would help people collaborate in common work scenarios.

Shrihari Udupa: Our challenges with shadow teams, reverse mentoring and other similar programmes has been with the aspect of sustaining momentum, continued interest and perceived utility among the participants of such programmes. Such programmes are most effective when some one seeks help voluntarily, occurrence of which is rare. These strategies work best when mutual interests are reflected. Further, getting people to share has always been a challenge. Most often, there is a gap in the enthusiasm reflected by the leadership that pushes for collaboration and the people who are involved in the process. For collaboration to be effective, the leadership needs to set the tone. Attitudes will not percolate within the organisation; they have to be a part of a culture that needs to be established and it begins at the top.

Audience: We need to bring a *mindful* attitude to our ways of thinking and behaving. If we can bring the mindset whereby we can be observant of self as well as others then there will be less evaluation of others and that would make it possible for us to relate with others. In our mindset of *becoming* and *being* we need to bring in the element of *being* because we are all trying to compete and *become* somebody. We need to create this mindset within the organisation so that we help people experience a little better *being* and as a result of which we will feel more comfortable with each other.

Hardik Shah: In terms of building collaboration, we found that having a 'sympathetic supervisor' is very important as a bridge to inter-generational teams. Building and nurturing 'trust' as the ethos is the key to developing collaborative teams. Organisations, while selecting team members for projects must ensure a sympathetic superior by mapping generation expectations and training supervisors on collaborative teams. This is more so when organisations have to build inter-generational teams. In some of the project teams, especially when roles are not well defined, Gen Yers often feel frustrated. They require clear direction and support to deliver high performance. These are some of the concerns of collaboration.

Vasanthi Srinivasan: On a last note I must share the preliminary findings of the work that I did at IBM. The key question I asked in the focus groups across generations was: What keeps generations together? All the respondents mentioned, the processes followed by the organisation, and the values that the organisation adhered to as aspects that fostered togetherness in the organisation. One of the interesting aspects that came

out is that people could not recall inter-generational conflicts in high performing teams, but in average performing teams they were able to see and characterise conflict situations and generational differences very clearly. This leaves us with a lot of food for thought.

Thank you all for providing us with your insights. I think all of us are taking away far more than we expected; you have made my research even more complex.

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