

DISSERTATION

*STUCK IN THE MIDDLE: GENERATION XERS LIVED EXPERIENCES IN THE
WORKFORCE WHILE NAVIGATING BETWEEN BABY BOOMERS AND
MILLENNIALS, AND PERCEIVED IMPACT ON THEIR JOB SATISFACTION*

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ABSTRACT

STUCK IN THE MIDDLE: GENERATION XERS LIVED EXPERIENCES IN THE WORKFORCE WHILE NAVIGATING BETWEEN BABY BOOMERS AND MILLENNIALS, AND PERCEIVED IMPACT ON THEIR JOB SATISFACTON

Generation Xers are defined as those individuals born between the years of 1965-1980, and represent between 46-49 Million in the U.S. population, and are considered a much smaller cohort than Boomers (80 Million) and Millennials (78 Million). Gen Xers argue that they are overshadowed by the notable influence of the Boomers and a perceived anticipation of the Millennials to become “the next great generation” in the workforce and as such, describe themselves as “stuck in the middle” while waiting for Boomers to retire so they may advance in their careers. However, pronounced demographic trends may have exacerbated Gen Xers’ perceptions of neglect and being *stuck in the middle*. These demographic trends include Boomers continuing to work and Millennials entering the workforce and bringing with them vastly different work preferences, values and expectations than the proceeding generational cohorts. These two dimensions --Boomers continuing to work, and Millennials entering and beginning to influence the workforce--suggest a potentially enigmatic challenge for the smaller but still relevant cohort of Gen Xers with the potential impact on Gen Xers being relatively unknown.

This exploratory study was to examine the unique workforce experiences of Gen Xers as it related to being stuck between the Baby Boomers and Millennials and thereby, gain understanding of the perceived impact to their job satisfaction. To describe, understand and find meaning in the participants co-constructed findings, a hermeneutic phenomenology methodology was utilized that was grounded in a constructivist paradigm. The findings from this study

represent the individual, shared and co-constructions of six participants which resulted in twelve global themes. The twelve themes include: 1: “Stuck in the middle” is experienced and expressed differently by Gen Xers; 2: Gen Xers have anxiety about their professional future; 3: There are challenges unique to Gen Xers; 4: Gen Xers have perceptions about themselves and their work role; 5: There are generational similarities and differences; 6: Unique work culture impacts generational issues; 7: There may be economic influences on their career; 8: Historical context shapes who Gen Xers are as adults; 9: Baby Boomer influences contribute to job dissatisfaction; 10: Extrinsic motivators; 11: Intrinsic motivators; 12: Job satisfaction or dissatisfaction can carry over to life. The global themes are further comprised of organizing and basic themes to provide additional breadth and depth of understanding of this phenomenon.

The study concludes by acknowledging that the voices of the Generation X participants have been heard through the compilation of their personal stories. It is noted that their stories and experiences were largely influenced by three primary factors which include recognition of the individuality of Gen Xers, lack of mutual exclusivity between generational cohorts, and the significance of context in understanding one’s lived experience. Finally, drawing from the findings, recommendations are provide to inform research, theory and practice.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my children, Ava and Ben, so it may inspire you to always believe in yourself, pursue your dreams and embrace the love of learning.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The 21st century workforce is undergoing a transformation. Macroeconomic forces such as globalization, networked economies, workforce diversity, and the ubiquitous nature of technology, have profoundly altered the way North Americans do business and the way they perceive their roles within business. One such change has been in the demographics of this workforce. A 2006 survey conducted by IBM and the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) found that 43% of companies surveyed recognized changing demographics as posing a significant impact on their organizations. *Generational diversity* is one dimension of these changing workforce demographics—a dimension and area that has received increasing attention in both academic and popular management literature over the past decade. Many feel this demographic dimension represents a legitimate organizational issue for the 21st century workforce (Arsenault, 2004; Glass, 2007; Wey Smola & Sutton, 2002).

Despite this increased awareness and attention many employers struggle to know how to respond to this dimension of the changing workforce (Lesser & Rivera, 2006). While generational diversity is not a new demographic dimension of the North American workforce history, employers are, for the first time, faced with the realities of four different generations working side by side--Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials—each of whom have different expectations about the nature of work, motivational needs, and career goals (Macky, Gardner, & Forsyth, 2008; Short, 2006; Wong, Gardiner, Lang, & Coulon, 2008).

This dissertation will focus on three of these four generations (Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials) as most of the Traditionalists have reached retirement age and represent a sharply declining percentage of the workforce (Dychtwald, Erickson, & Morison, 2006). The remaining workforce will have potentially dissimilar value systems and work

preferences (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003; Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance, 2010). As this generational diversity increases, understanding the implications for and of each generational cohort bears significance to employers as they attempt to navigate through the complexities of these workforce dynamics.

One significant factor in developing this understanding is an employee's job satisfaction, and what factors influence their job satisfaction or dissatisfaction. For nearly a century, scholars and practitioners have sought to better understand this workforce construct and its impact on organizational outcomes such as turnover and productivity (Hoppock & Odom, 1940; Iaffaldano & Muchinsky, 1985; Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001; Kornhauser & Sharp, 1932). Despite extant literature and a distinct focus on job satisfaction, there has been notably little focus on job satisfaction as it relates to generational cohort diversity in the workforce (Benson & Brown, 2011; Kowske, Rasch, & Wiley, 2010). It is therefore the purpose of this study to begin to address this gap. It will do so by extending our understanding of the nature and meaning of the lived experiences of one particular generational cohort, namely, Gen Xers, within the context of the 21st century workforce, and, how they perceive and describe related experiences affecting their job satisfaction.

Background of the Problem

Although there is no universally agreed boundary of birth years for defining a generational cohort (Chen & Choi, 2008), most informing literature positions Generation X (also termed *Gen Xers* or *Xers*) as those individuals who were born between the years of 1965-1980 (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003; Lyons, Duxbury, & Higgins, 2007b; Macky et al., 2008), representing somewhere between 46-49 Million in the U.S. population (Klie, 2012; Lancaster & Stillman, 2003). Thought to be substantially different from the previous cohort (Baby Boomers),

Gen Xers have been characterized as cynical, lazy and lacking in ambition (Corley, 1999; Klie, 2012; Kupperschmidt, 2000). They also represent a much smaller cohort than Boomers (80 million) and Millennials (approximately 78 million) (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003) . As such, Gen Xers tend to argue that they are an ignored generation: that they are being overshadowed by the notable influence of Boomers, and, a perceived anticipation for Millennials to become “the next great generation” in the workforce (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 5) . Gen Xers, who describe themselves as being “stuck in the middle” (Frontiera, 2010; Klie, 2012, p. 24), will argue that they have played by the Boomer rules, paid their dues, and are waiting in the background to succeed the Boomers to those senior level coveted roles. As they enter their mid-thirties to forties, they are ready for that next career move that will provide them with a larger role and more challenging responsibilities. However, research shows us that as much as 90% of the world’s top 200 companies are still led by Boomers (or even traditionalist) (Erickson, 2010).

Pronounced demographic trends may have exacerbated Gen Xers’ perceptions of neglect and being *stuck in the middle*, or sometimes referred to as “*feeling sandwiched*”. Recent changes in retirement trends, personal economics, and social trends have altered the retirement plans of many Boomers (Mermin, Johnson, & Murphy, 2007). Indeed, reports indicated that most Baby Boomers intend to continue to work well into their retirement (Brown, 2008). Furthermore, a 2008 survey by McKinsey Quarterly suggested that 85% of Boomers were at least somewhat likely to work past traditional retirement age (Beinhocker, Farrell, & Greenberg, 2008b).

Although Baby Boomers--those individuals born between the years 1946-1964 (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003), and a generation ahead of the Gen Xers in the workforce--are now entering traditional retirement age many are choosing to delay their retirement and so are continuing to fulfill and hold those coveted senior leadership roles and positions. As a result, these Boomers

are challenging historic paradigms on retirement age and the concept of aging itself. They are therefore reinventing what work means for an older population, and employers are being forced to take note. One possible implication of these workforce changes for Gen Xers--who are waiting in the wings for that next big job--is that because many senior level jobs are not being vacated, they are experiencing a stalled career trajectory (Benson & Brown, 2011).

While an aging workforce is certainly one 21st century demographic trend that Gen Xers face, another is the growing number of Millennials, also referred to as Generation Y, in the workforce. These Millennials—those born between the years of 1981-2000 (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003)—are now entering the workforce and bringing with them vastly different work preferences, values and expectations than the preceding generational cohorts (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010). Described by some as the *next greatest generation* (Howe & Strauss, 2000), and paradoxically as a generation of whiners by others (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010), Millennials are becoming an increasingly frequently studied group and workforce cohort, and are already recognized influencing politics, commerce, education and organizational practices (Dannar, 2013; Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). Extant literature clearly defines attitudes and sets of behaviors associated with this cohort—whom many believe will shape the organizational landscape in the years to come. For example, Millennials are said to be self-directed learners who want challenging roles that provide opportunities to enable immediate impact on an organization's success (Downing, 2006). Although also described as highly personable and adaptable, Millennials are perceived to like to be entertained and stimulated, and can get bored easily without such stimulation (Schwarz, 2008). Moreover, it has been reported that Millennials have supersized career expectations that do not align with reality (Terjesen, Vinnicombe, & Freeman, 2007). Millennials thus display unique workforce characteristics, and fancy very

different organizational attributes to those desired by the Boomers and Gen Xers (Terjesen et al., 2007).

Given the divergence in thought and practice among members of this Millennial cohort, one expert on generational cohorts in the workforce argues that traditional work practices that were once defined by Boomers will become obsolete as more Millennials enter the workforce bringing their unique perspectives on work with them (Tulgan, 2009). Given their size, Millennials can be expected to have the potential to significantly influence workforce dynamics—and in many ways. As such, employers are sitting up, taking notice, and beginning to rethink their human resources practices to ensure that they accommodate the emergent, new, and increasingly diverse needs of this young cohort now entering the workforce.

The two dimensions presented previously-- Boomers continuing to work, and Millennials entering and beginning to influence the workforce-- suggest a potentially enigmatic challenge for the smaller but still relevant cohort of Gen Xers. Gen Xers not only continue to be very much present in organizations, but find themselves *stuck* between these two rather larger cohorts, both of whom are influencing workforce demographic trends in noted ways. Given these trends, the implications of generational diversity in the 21st century workforce is less than predictable, and the potential impact on the Gen Xers is relatively unknown. Furthermore, relating understanding these generational diversity differences to how Gen Xers experience them in the workforce and how they, as a result, perceive differences to impact their job satisfaction, provokes (among others) two potentially compelling questions: What do Gen Xers experience, as it relates to their professional lives of being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials, in the generationally diverse U.S. workforce? Secondly, how do Generation Xers perceive the experience of being

stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials in the generationally diverse U.S. workforce as impacting their job satisfaction?

Job satisfaction, historically, has been one way in which employers have been able to measure employee's attitudes about their job and working environment. Defined as a "pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job as achieving or facilitating one's job values" (Locke, 1969, p. 317), organizations have had a fascination with job satisfaction and have studied it extensively since the mid-20th century (Lawler III & Porter, 1967). Intuitively, social scientists assumed that a relationship existed between job satisfaction and job performance (Lawler III & Porter, 1967; Locke, 1969) and, thus, it continued to be a construct of interest for scholars and practitioners throughout most of the 20th century (Judge et al., 2001).

Although the results have been mixed, previous research has linked job satisfaction to a number of outcome variables such as absenteeism, retention, and higher performance levels (Irvine & Evans, 1995; Tett & Meyer, 1993; Wilson, Squires, Widger, Cranley, & Tourangeau, 2008). Studies emerged in the mid-20th century that suggested job satisfaction might lead to higher performance levels (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959; Judge et al., 2001; Katzell, Barrett, & Parker, 1961; Lawler III & Porter, 1967). Understanding this relationship has been critically important to practice, as it has been seen as a way to drive towards greater levels of organizational outcomes. More contemporary research in the 21st century has suggested that "job satisfaction is a predictor of contextual performance" (Muse & Stamper, 2007, p. 550).

Research has also shown that job satisfaction has been linked to employee retention (Irvine & Evans, 1995; Tett & Meyer, 1993; Tourangeau & Cranley, 2006), while Scott and Taylor's 1985 study finds a stronger case for a relationship between job satisfaction and absenteeism.

Specifically, the findings suggested that the “strongest associations are between (1) employee absenteeism, measured by both absence frequency and absence duration, and satisfaction with the work itself; (2) absence frequency and satisfaction with co-workers; and (3) absence frequency and overall satisfaction” (Scott & Taylor, 1985, p. 608) .

Given the positive findings of a relationship between job satisfaction and multiple outcome variables, an effort to promote higher job satisfaction has utility for an employer—and, indeed, for an employee! For example, Generation Xers, as a result of being *stuck* between the Boomers and Millennials, may experience diminished job satisfaction resulting in reduced productivity, disengagement in the workforce, and increased turnover. These research-evidenced presumptions can be assumed to have relevance for employers as they come to terms with a more generationally diverse and demanding workforce and struggle to architect and fill key roles needed by tomorrow’s workforce.

Statement of the Problem

Throughout the 20th century research on job satisfaction has generally supported the notion that a relationship exists between job satisfaction and age (Janson & Martin, 1982). In the late 1950’s, Herzberg and his colleagues suggested that the relationship is linear and thus, as you get older, your job satisfaction increases (Herzberg et al., 1959). Subsequent research refuted this finding suggesting that the relationship between job satisfaction and age is U shaped (Clark, Oswald, & Warr, 2011)—meaning that at the beginning and end stages of your career, you are most likely to have greater job satisfaction. This research therefore suggests that of the Boomer, Gen Xers, and Millennial generational cohorts in the U.S. workforce, the Baby Boomers would be expected to have the highest since they are at the end of their careers, the Millennials would

have the next highest as they are beginning their careers, and the Gen Xers the lowest level of job satisfaction since they are mid-career.

Historically, however, there is very limited research that fully examines the essence of job satisfaction as it relates to different generational cohorts (Benson & Brown, 2011; Kowske et al., 2010). Moreover, for the few studies that do exist, researchers recognize the limitations of their designs as they tend to be cross-sectional and, thus, make it difficult to ascertain if differences are due to generations or age/career stage (Twenge, 2010). These outcomes are problematic for Gen Xers who indeed may have lower job satisfaction than their Boomer counterparts; yet it remains unclear if this difference can be attributed to an age or generational phenomenon in the workforce.

Representing 46-49 Million of the U.S. population (Klie, 2012; Lancaster & Stillman, 2003) Gen Xers are considered the smallest but a still influential workforce cohort. While positioned to be the keepers of the corporate knowledge when Boomers eventually retire, and to serve in coveted corporate leadership roles, speculation that Gen Xers are retention risks due to their feeling *stuck* and faced with limited career opportunities has increased. The 2004 Society for Human Resource Management Generational Differences Survey Report asked HR survey participants if retention was an issue for Gen Xers. The findings suggested that 42% of respondents agreed that career advancement is an issue for Gen Xers—and that attrition, due to Boomers holding the high level positions in the company, is an issue for this cohort (Burke, 2004).

Job satisfaction has been consistently correlated with employee retention (Irvine & Evans, 1995; Mrayyan, 2005; Tett & Meyer, 1993). Although the research findings have been mixed, many scholars have found evidence for a relationship between job satisfaction and other

organizational outcomes such as absenteeism (Scott & Taylor, 1985) and performance (Herzberg et al., 1959; Judge et al., 2001). Given the potential impact one's job satisfaction may have on organizational outcomes, an imperative for employers is to begin the process of understanding relationships with generational diversity issues. Ultimately, when employers don't understand the unique needs of a particular generation-related cohort, job satisfaction has the potential to decline, which may, in turn, impact a variety of organizational outcomes—as mentioned previously (Kupperschmidt, 2000). Examining the unique workforce experiences of Gen Xers related to generational diversity helps to inform a clearer and deeper understanding of this workforce environment and its experienced impact on Gen Xers and their reported job satisfaction. This understanding in turn, provides a more comprehensive picture of this complex and multifaceted dynamic occurring within organizations—at least from the lived experience of one selected generational cohort, the Gen Xers. Such an understanding would prove invaluable to informing similar studies of other generational cohorts in the US workforce—and other ways to develop a deeper understanding of generational diversity in the workforce, and how organizations might respond to the similar issues for other cohorts.

Purpose Statement

Given the background and nature of the research problem described, it was the purpose of this study—a hermeneutic phenomenological one—to examine lived experiences of Gen Xers as one, but stuck in the middle, cohort in the generationally diverse U.S. workforce. While such study was local and focused, it provided thick description and better understanding of how members of this cohort experience this generation-based phenomenon of being stuck in the middle between the Baby Boomers and Millennials, and as a result, how they perceived the

impact of this *being stuck* on their job satisfaction. Figure 1 has been created to provide the reader with a visual overview of this study's focus.

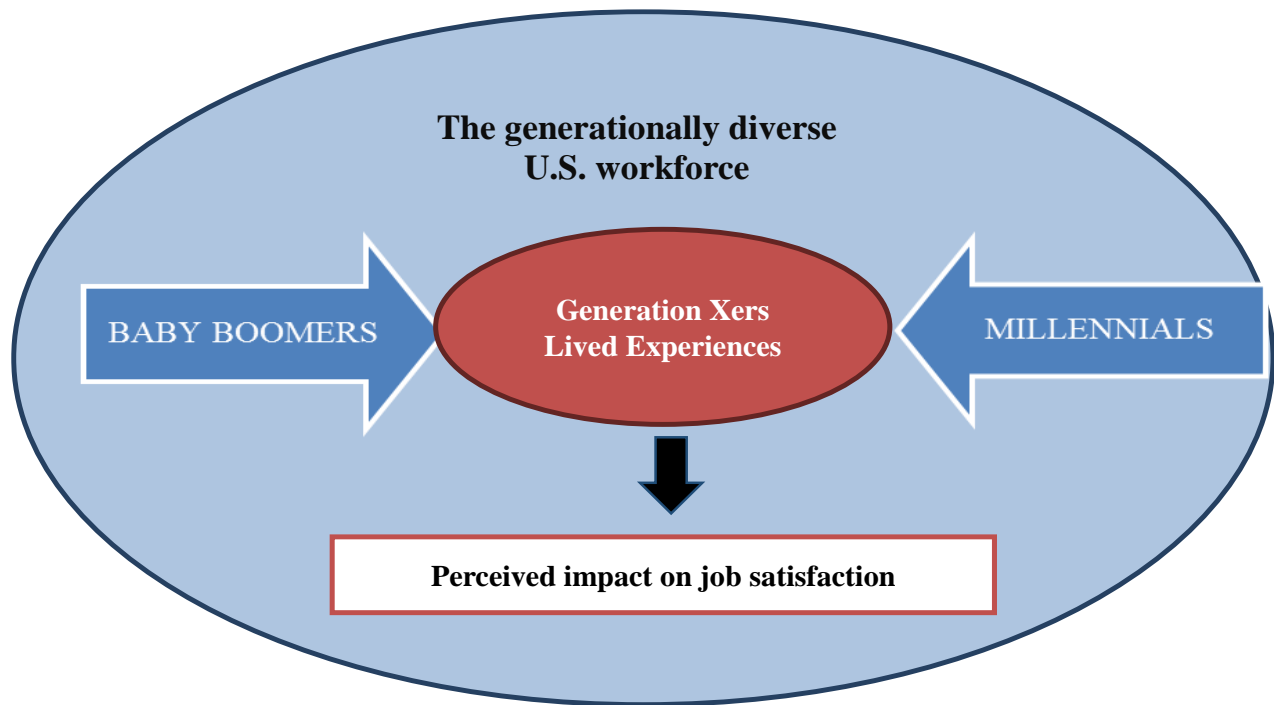


Figure 1. Conceptual Overview of Research Study

Research Questions

The intent of this study was to understand the lived experience of Gen Xers in the context of the workforce and being stuck between the Baby Boomers and Millennials, and, to thereby gain a better understanding of how they perceived those experiences affecting their job satisfaction. It has been suggested that researchers, in a qualitative study, develop the central question and state it as broadly as possible (Creswell, 2009). The questions should be asked in such a way that they become working guidelines rather than conventional truths. With these descriptors in mind, the overarching question was:

1. What do Gen Xers experience, as it relates to their professional lives of being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials, in the generationally diverse U.S. workforce?

A subordinate question was:

2. How do Gen Xers perceive the experience of being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials in the generationally diverse U.S. workforce as impacting their job satisfaction?

Methodology and Methods

The methodology section describes in detail how the study was conducted (Roberts, 2010) and why this approach was well suited to the problem of focus. Methodology is a “...particular social scientific discourse (a way of acting, thinking and speaking) that occupies a middle ground between discussions of methods (procedures, techniques) and discussions of issues in the philosophy of social science” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 193). For this study, the intent was to begin to understand the lived experiences of Gen Xers, in the U.S. workforce, as they navigate the dynamics of being stuck between the Baby Boomers and Millennials. Given these dynamics, I was primarily interested in understanding the lived experiences of Gen Xers and how Gen Xers perceive the impact of this experience on their job satisfaction. To achieve this objective, the study followed a constructivist design strategy to better understand the views of the participants (Creswell, 2009). Constructivist, or also called *naturalistic* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), inquiry views knowledge as “...contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). A constructivist approach to research

is appropriate when there is an existence of multiple realities and a belief that those realities are subjectively co-created through our personal lived experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The constructivist philosophy builds knowledge by capturing the voices of participants and understanding their opinions, values, biases and experiences (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). For this study, this philosophy was particularly appropriate as I sought to understand multiple realities of the experienced phenomenon from the participants' perspectives. Figure 2, and the section following, provides a representation and description, respectively, of the alignment between the philosophical underpinnings, selected methodological traditions, and accompanying methods used to inform and guide the conduct of the study. This paradigm-methodology-methods description is greatly expanded upon in Chapter Three.

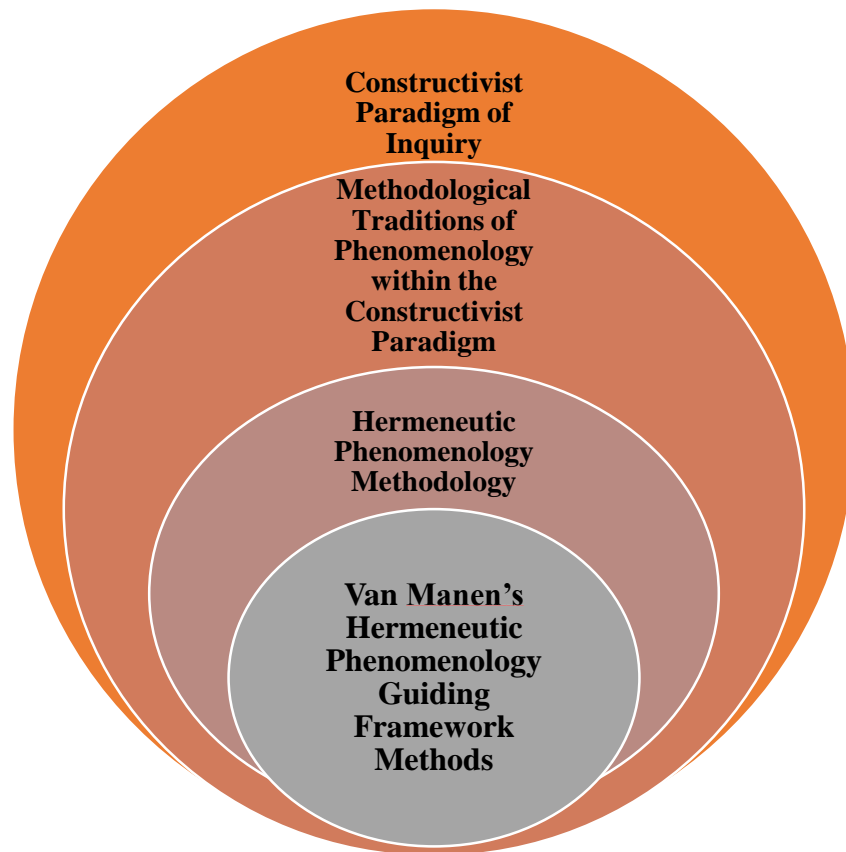


Figure 2. Philosophical-Methodological-Methods Alignment for Proposed Research Study.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology seeks to discover the essence of a phenomenon--to understand the lived experiences of the participants as well as understand the nature of meaning in one's everyday life (Van Manen, 1990). It represents the "...totality of what lies before us in the light of day" and thus, the maxim of phenomenology is "...to the things themselves" (as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). Phenomenology is located within the constructivist paradigm as it is predicated on the beliefs that multiple realities exist and are contextually bound (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Racher & Robinson, 2003; Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). It is also considered a methodology/methodological tradition (Crotty, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological tradition is systematic and rigorous with a focus on description (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Primary features of this methodological tradition are intentional analysis and epoche (or bracketing). Pure essences are derived from an intentional analysis of an object as perceived and as experienced (Moustakas, 1994; Sanders, 1982). This intentionality has been characterized as consciousness and has been referred to as the total meaning of an object (Sanders, 1982).

Fundamental to phenomenology is the notion that researchers are burdened with their mental baggage of biases and assumptions that they may bring to a research endeavor. Phenomenologists believe that a researcher must "bracket" or suspend their personal biases, beliefs or assumptions in order to get to the unencumbered vision of what it is the researcher is trying to study (Sanders, 1982, p. 355). This feature has been described as epoche or bracketing and is a widely accepted principle/tradition in the conduct of phenomenology (Ehrich, 1999).

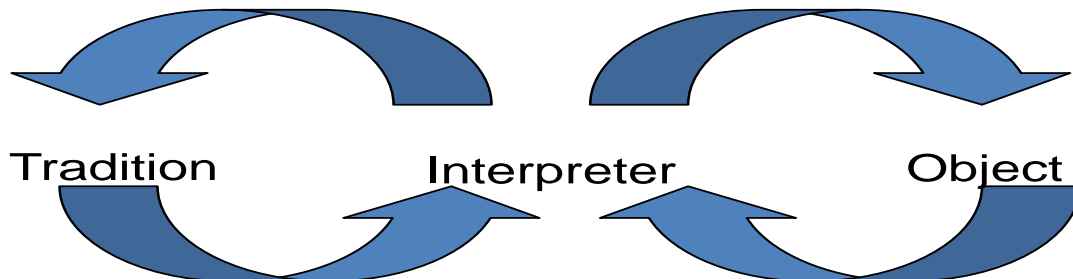
Hermeneutic Phenomenology

The chosen research methodology—within the context of the constructivist paradigm and methodological tradition of phenomenology—is hermeneutic phenomenology.

Hermeneutics, deriving from the Greek word *hermeneuein*, means to interpret or to understand (Crotty, 1998). Hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with human experiences as it is lived with the goal of creating meaning and achieving a broader sense of understanding (Laverly, 2008). Hermeneutic phenomenology takes the phenomenological tradition one step further by not only providing rich description but also by seeking to provide interpretation that elucidates meaning and informs understanding and ultimately action for improved human condition (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Manen, 1990).

There are two primary characteristics central to the practice of hermeneutic phenomenology: the hermeneutic circle, and fusing of horizons (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). The hermeneutic circle "...refers to the process in which people come to develop an understanding of something" through a reflexive and ongoing cycle (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005, p. 101). The circle essentially represents a metaphor for the continued iterative and emergent process that results in ongoing consideration, interpretation and co-construction of the stories of lived experience presented by the participants. Additionally, instead of bracketing one's views, the researcher embeds him/herself fully in the process through this iterative cycle, as depicted in Figure 3 below.

The **ontological**



Heidegger and Gadamer: Circularity of interpretation is an essential feature of all knowledge and understanding; all efforts to interpret always take place within some background that cannot be interpreted.

The interpreter is bound to a tradition and history on the one hand and to the particular object of interpretation on the other.

Figure 3. An Interpretation of the Hermeneutic Circle. Schwandt (2007, pp. 133-134) adapted by S.A. Lynham (2009). Lecture 3: The Making of a Constructivist.

The concept of horizons originated from Gadamer (1989) who posited that individuals have a horizon of understanding which is the totality of all influences that make an individual who they are (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). This experience base includes social, historical and political contexts which makes integrating this methodology with the study of generations especially meaningful. Generational studies focus on a person's location in a socio-historical structure and the influences on that generation as a result of a collective historical consciousness (Pilcher, 1994). Thus, studying Gen Xers through this lens will help to more fully understand the range of possibilities that exist across multiple lived contexts.

Guiding Process for the Methods Choices and Use in the Study

I used Van Manen's (1990) inquiry process and framework as a guide to the hermeneutic phenomenological study. His process provided a general framework that is emergent and non-linear, while recognizing that all research activities need to be intertwined to fully understand the phenomenon[a] being studied. As such, Van Manen proposed six methods-informing activities to develop rigor and relevance in the conduct of this type of research:

1. turning to phenomenon[a] which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
2. investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
3. reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon[a];
4. describing the phenomenon[a] through the art of writing and rewriting;
5. maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon[a];
6. balancing the research context by considering parts and the whole. (pp. 30-31)

The outcome of such inquiry, for Van Manen, is a piece of writing that fully "... explicates the meaning of the human phenomena and helps to understand the lived structures of meaning" (as cited in Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 5). Thus, this outcome was not only descriptive of the lived experiences, but also elucidates the meanings of those experiences. Van Manen's process—further detailed in Chapter Three—provided a framework for this research study and related methods choices that will allow for understanding and meaning of Gen Xers lived experiences in the U.S. workforce to be heard.

Participant Selection. Purposeful sampling was used--a way of intentionally seeking participants-- helped fully understand the issue, (Creswell, 2009). The goal of purposive sampling is to select participants because of their 'lived' qualities that are relevant to the research

agenda (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) . Lincoln and Guba (1985) provided the following characteristics of purposeful sampling that will serve as guidelines for participant selection:

1. The sampling design cannot be defined in advance but rather emergent to the contextual factors reflected in the study.
2. Serial selection of sampling units to augment information from the previous interview.
3. Refinement of the sample, as needed, as insights and information accumulate that may lead the researcher to a particular focus.
4. Termination of sampling at the point where no new information is forthcoming (p. 202).

Drawing from the recommended approach as outlined above, participant selection was members of the Generation X cohort. For this study, Generation X is defined as individuals who are born between the years of 1965-1980 (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003). Using birth year as a way of defining the Generation X cohort eliminated an individual who was born prior to 1965 or after 1980. Additionally, participant selection was based on participants who were currently working full-time (as defined by 32 hours per week) as an internal (to an organization) employee within the U.S. workforce. They “pre-qualified” for the study based on their responses to a series of questions that identified them as having experiences with multiple generations within their current work environments. Finally, they had to be willing to fully participate in the interview process, including successive rounds of member checking, which is a process used to help establishing trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data collection and analysis. From the perspective of constructivist inquiry, the human instrument is the primary source of the data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As such, I conducted interviews with the participants to fully explore the participants’ experiences within the workforce and the perceived impact of those experiences on their job satisfaction. This method entailed successive rounds of interviews using a semi structured format with open ended

questions. The initial interviews were face-to-face and the subsequent interviews were conducted via phone. Moreover, interviews that followed the initial interview were more open in nature to allow for member checking from the participant's perspective to be fully heard and understood.

Data analysis methods (or data explication methods) that enable the application of Van Manen's thematic analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Van Manen, 1990) was used. For Van Manen, themes are a way for the researcher to "...unearth something meaningful in the various experiential accounts" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 86). The process required a continuous loop (reflecting the hermeneutic circle) of data collection, thematic analysis, and member and peer checking of co-constructions, to allow the descriptions and subsequent meaning of the lived experiences to be heard. Gaining insight into the essence of this phenomenon therefore required the researcher, as the instrument of inquiry, to make explicit the structure of meaning of those experiences (Van Manen, 1990).

Key Issues of Quality

There are two essential features that must be addressed to fully satisfy the key issues of quality within a constructivist study, namely, authenticity and trustworthiness. Both features are critical components within this type of study as it attempts to provide an answer to the question why a reader should regard this study as important and/or worth reading. Authenticity seeks to reflect a genuine understanding of people's experiences (Schwandt, 2007). Embedded within the tradition of phenomenology, authenticity refers to the notion of being connected rather than disconnected from our human experiences. For Lincoln and Guba (1985), authenticity is demonstrated if researchers can show that they have represented a range of different realities (Seale, 1999, p. 469). Lincoln and Guba established five states that are foundational to the feature of authenticity: fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic

authenticity, tactical authenticity (Lincoln, 2005). Each state will be further explored and expanded upon in Chapter Three.

Trustworthiness lies at the heart of what is conventionally known as validity and reliability in a post-positivist research study (Seale, 1999). It helps the researcher to design and acknowledge the level of rigor associated with the study (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). As with the issue of authenticity, Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified four states necessary for the satisfaction of the issue of trustworthiness in a constructivist study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In addition to Lincoln and Guba’s four states necessary for trustworthiness, consideration was also given to voice of the researcher and ethics as defined in the table below. Drawing from the work of these authors, Table 1 provides an overview of these elements together with a brief description of how each was attended to and *satisfied* in the conduct of this study. Further details on trustworthiness are provided in Chapter Three.

Table 1
Summary of Key Issues of Quality for Proposed Study

Quality Criteria	Brief Definition	How will be Satisfied in the Study
Credibility	In contrast to the concept of internal validity in a quantitative study, credibility requires that the study is conducted in such a way so that the findings are found to be believable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).	The following three techniques were applied in the study to this end: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member checking • Prolonged Engagement • Peer Debriefing
Transferability	In contrast to the concept of external validity in a quantitative study,	Thick description of the participants’ lived

(continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Quality Criteria	Brief Definition	How will be Satisfied in the Study
Dependability	<p>transferability suggests that the researcher provides a thick description of the findings so that a reader can make a determination on transfer to their unique context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) .</p> <p>In contrast to the concept of reliability in a quantitative study, I worked towards a rigorous process that allows for verification of the researcher’s steps (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).</p>	<p>experiences, together with the contextuality of those experiences, were provided from the data analyses.</p> <p>An audit trail of the entire study was maintained.</p>
Confirmability	<p>In contrast to the concept of objectivity in a quantitative study, confirmability is in relationship to the data as ensuring that the data can be confirmed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).</p>	<p>While the audit trail also informed the satisfaction of this criterion, co-construction and member and peer checking of thematic outcomes were also completed.</p>
Voice	<p>The voice of this study needs to reflect the researcher, myself, as a passionate participant and co-constructor of the resulting thematic narrative (Guba & Lincoln, 1994)</p>	<p>As a researcher, I integrated the process of reflexivity to the Self as a member of Gen Xers and served as a <i>passionate participant</i> to allow for co-construction of the participant’s lived experiences to be heard. I subjectively interacted with the participants to understand their experiences.</p>
Ethics	<p>recognition that the process will involve human action about human experiences, requires that I anticipate ethical issues associated with.</p>	<p>As a researcher, I evaluated the potential ethical issues associated with the proposed study. Through my process, I sought to establish trust with</p>

(continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Quality Criteria	Brief Definition	How will be Satisfied in the Study
	<p>R this study. This issues may involve rules and standard code of conduct applied to the collection, analysis and dissemination of information about research participants.(Schwandt, 2007). As such, I needed to protect the participants, develop a trust with them, promote the integrity of the research and guard against misconduct (Creswell, 2009).</p>	<p>the participants and ensure integrity of the process. Moreover, ethical issues associated with data collection and analysis such as Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, informed consent, impact of the interview process, confidentiality, data retention, ownership of the data and interpretation was evaluated and addressed throughout the study (Creswell, 2009).</p>

Summary

In summary, the type of constructivist located methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology was ideally suited to this type of study. It was so because, first, it enabled participants’ voices to be heard in the form of their lived experiences of being stuck between the Baby Boomers and Millennials in the U.S. workforce, and the subsequent effect they perceived these experiences to have had on their job satisfaction. Second, this particular qualitative research strategy allowed for the inductive capture and description of multiple perspectives from the participants. And, finally, the constructivist philosophical paradigm and hermeneutic phenomenological methodological traditions were well suited to answer the research questions. They enabled me to provide the thick description necessary to more fully understand the targeted Gen Xers experiences and perceptions, and to use this understanding to inform improved action and employee conditions.

Significance of the Study

The current study has relevance and importance for scholars and practitioners in the field of organizational studies. Specifically, recent research suggests beginning awareness from employers as to the potential dilemma currently facing Gen Xers in the workforce. A 2004 Society of Human Resources Management report recognized that Gen Xers were a retention risk because of mounting frustration over their inability to advance in their careers because Boomers held those high level positions (Burke, 2004). Paradoxically, however, HR professionals also recognize that knowledge transfer from Boomers to other generational cohorts is a critical imperative for organizational success (Lesser & Rivera, 2006). Although scholars and practitioners are aware of the growing trends mentioned above, there is very little research, either quantitative or qualitative, that examines the experiences of the Gen Xers within this context and to this end (Benson & Brown, 2011; Kowske et al., 2010). Given the anticipated labor shortfall in terms of workers and skills (Dychtwald et al., 2006), employers will need to utilize diverse strategies to retain and motivate a multigenerational workforce. Better understanding the unique, and workforce generation difference/diversity based job satisfiers and dissatisfiers for Gen Xers informs the development, by employers, of solutions that could be used to enhance this cohort's overall work experience, job satisfaction, and organizational impact.

Furthermore, although job satisfaction has been abundantly studied allowing scholars to understand the predictive nature of job satisfaction to organizational variables such as retention, commitment and absenteeism (Hulin & Judge, 2003; Iaffaldano & Muchinsky, 1985; Judge et al., 2001), the research on generations and job satisfaction remains ambiguous (Jurkiewicz, 2000). The results from his study, through thick description and ensuing deeper understanding, shed some light on this ambiguity. It also informs the subsequent study of variables associated

with this cohort's job satisfaction and potential workforce performance. Ultimately, the current study contributes to academic research in that it fills a gap and continues to augment the understanding between job satisfaction and generations, namely Generation X, within the workforce.

Informing Theoretical Frameworks

Theoretical frameworks provide the "...philosophical stance [that informs] the [selected] methodology and [thereby provides] a context for the [inquiry] process and [the] grounding [of] its logic and criteria" (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). This research study was grounded in two areas of social science theory: human generations in the workforce; and job satisfaction. Karl Mannheim's germinal theory of generations underpins the framework for this research as many scholars believe his work to be one of the most fully developed and comprehensive examinations of generations (Pilcher, 1994). Second, although there are numerous job satisfaction and motivational theories, the study was primarily guided by Herzberg's Hygiene and Motivator theory, also commonly referred to as Two-Factor Theory, which has been one of the most influential and researched theories on job satisfaction and continues to have appeal for the world of practice (Miner, 2005).

Mannheim's Generational Theory

Karl Mannheim was the first scholar to develop a theoretical framework for the study of generations. The *Problem of Generations* (1923, 1952) study was an attempt to outline generations from a sociological perspective (Pilcher, 1994). Mannheim's (1952) essay evaluated generations from a positivist as well as a romantic-historical perspective, recognizing that both views represent "...two antagonistic types of attitudes towards reality, and the different ways in which they approach the problem reflect this contrast of basic attitudes" (Mannheim, 1952, p.

276). Central to his theory, Mannheim believed that people are significantly influenced by their socio-historical environment and thus, experiencing similar historical events collectively shapes a cohort (Mannheim, 1952). This so-called *stratification*, described within the theory, shows up on three levels. First, *generational location* is defined as all the people who are born in a certain time period and is considered a key factor in the determination of knowledge (Corsten, 1999). Specifically, generational location accounts for “...certain definite modes of behavior, feeling and thought” (Mannheim, 1952, p. 291), and furthermore, formative experiences from one’s youth are highlighted as a key period where social generations are formed (Pilcher, 1994). Second, *generational actuality* is the way in which the experiences of a generation are connected by interpretation (Corsten, 1999). *Generational units* or sub-groups recognize that individuals will have unique and specific responses to situations (Dunham, 1998). Given the different levels of stratification within a generational grouping, members may have collective thoughts, behaviors and feelings. Finally, Mannheim (1952) suggested that the collective power of a generation has the ability to shape social and political change (Mannheim, 1952). Figure 4 provides a conceptual model of Mannheim’s Theory of Generations.

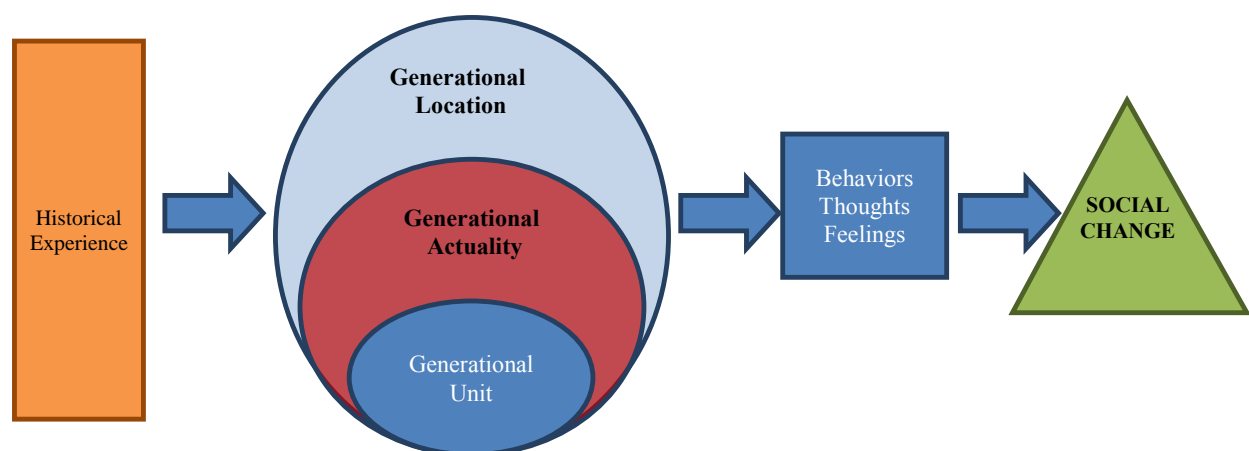


Figure 4. Conceptual Model of Mannheim’s Theory of Generations

Mannheim's theory has had broad application to contemporary thoughts about current generations such as Baby Boomers and Gen Xers. For example, given the dramatic events of the past, such as WWII, Civil Rights Movement, 9/11, how have these events shaped a particular cohort? Drawing from Mannheim's theory of generations, I sought to understand the contextual lived experiences of Gen Xers in the U.S. workforce as being stuck between Boomers and Millennials. The process of describing and understanding those experiences gives insight into collective patterns for this generation and how those patterns might influence subsequent feelings, thoughts and behaviors.

Herzberg's Hygiene-Motivator Theory of Job Satisfaction

In the late 1950's, Herzberg conducted a study to examine employee's attitudes at work with intent to look at the complex interplay of external and internal factors that may influence a person's attitude toward work. Out of this study, Herzberg developed the Hygiene-Motivator Theory that proposed that there were two factors influencing one's job satisfaction: hygiene factors; and motivation factors. His theory suggested that there are distinct factors that influence job satisfaction (motivators) and a separate set of factors that influence job dissatisfaction (hygiene) (Herzberg, 1987; Herzberg et al., 1959). Thus, this theory challenged a dominant theoretical assumption that satisfaction and dissatisfaction operated on two sides of a continuum. For Herzberg, the opposite of satisfaction was not dissatisfaction but rather no satisfaction; and conversely, the opposite of dissatisfaction was not satisfaction, but no dissatisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). The implication of this finding was the identification of two different sets of needs.

Hygiene factors, which are those factors external to the human being, are ones such as pay, benefits, working conditions, and supervision. When hygiene factors are absent, they can lead to a source of dissatisfaction. The other set of needs, motivators, are intrinsic to the job and

are unique human characteristics that allow one to experience psychological growth (Herzberg, 1987; Herzberg et al., 1959). Motivator factors can be classified as achievement, verbal recognition, challenging work, responsibility and promotion. As such, when the motivator factors are present, an employee may experience high job satisfaction. Figure 5 provides a conceptual model to represent the divergent needs that promote either job satisfaction or job dissatisfaction.

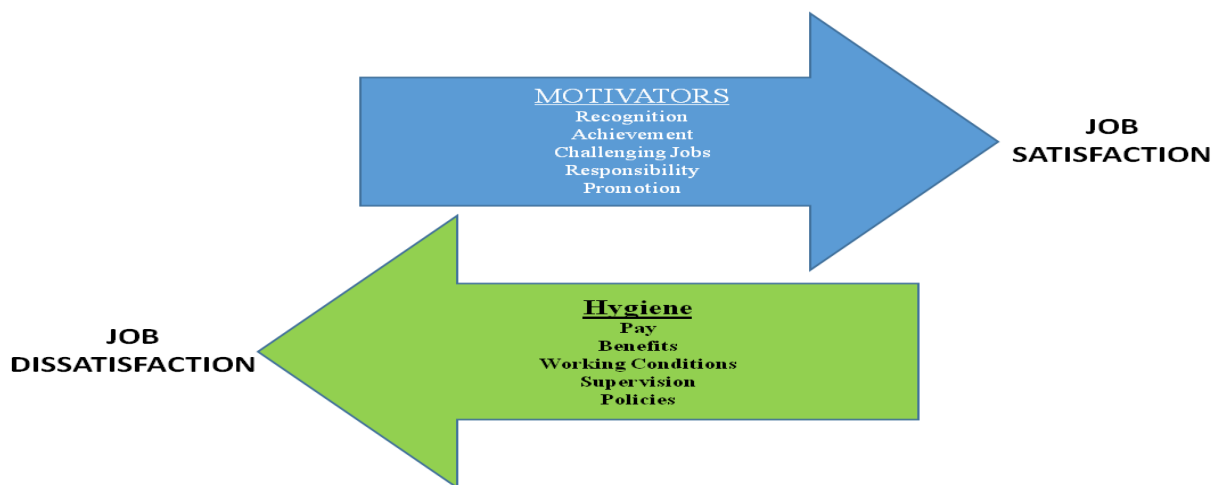


Figure 5. Conceptual Model of Job Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction highlighted in Herzberg's Theory of Motivation

Herzberg's theory of motivation has relevance for this study as I sought to understand the nature and meaning of the lived experiences of one particular generational cohort, namely, Gen Xers, within the context of the 21st century workforce, and, how they perceived and described related experiences affecting their job satisfaction. According to Herzberg, understanding the factors that lead to satisfaction (i.e. motivators) helps practitioners and scholars identify what employee's want from their jobs. This insight provided conceptual framework to better understand Gen Xers' experiences, as being stuck between the Boomers and Millennials, and how those experiences impact their perceptions of satisfaction in the workforce. To summarize,

Figure 6 provides a conceptual overview as to how the informing theoretical frameworks will be used to guide the overarching study.

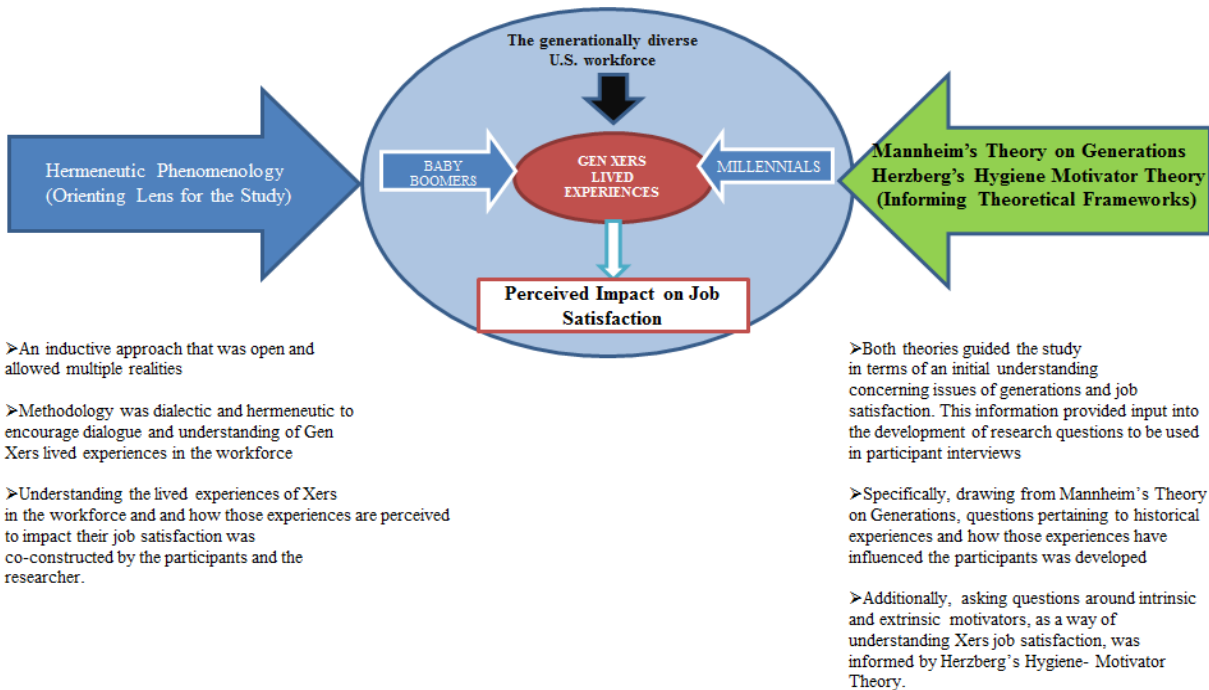


Figure 6. Informing Theoretical Frameworks to Overall Research Study

Researcher's Perspective

A unique aspect of constructivist inquiry is that the researcher and participant co-construct meaning (Laverty, 2008; Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). As the data collection instrument, the researcher must always be aware that their “interpretation of participant’s stories is always mediated and influenced by one’s own experiences” (Wilding & Whiteford, 2005, p. 101). As such, a major element of phenomenological research is that the researcher has a solid understanding of self and their own interpretations of a construct and should give considerable thought to what is being studied and how their experiences relate to the issues being researched.

With an understanding of the phenomenological philosophy that guides this study, I offer my perspective on Generation X and perceptions of job satisfaction. Having been born in 1967, by most accounts, I am considered a Gen Xer. Second, I was born on the cusp of the Baby

Boomer generation (1964) and therefore, I identify with many of the characteristics of that cohort, as well. I've seen drastic organizational trends that have had broad implications on the workforce. As this new workforce trend of generational diversity receives greater attention, I am increasingly aware of the complexities of working in a generationally diverse environment. Moreover, having worked with over 100 U.S. based corporations over the past twenty years, in various roles, it is clear to me that these issues are not receiving focus and employers are not as aware of the implications of this dynamic.

Secondly, this notion of feeling *stuck* in one's role is all too common in corporate America. Our corporate environments promote hierarchy and human resource practices that focus on the top layers which result in employees feeling neglected with limited opportunities. Personally, in my career options, I, too, have experienced feeling stuck. Although I'm an external consultant now, I hear the frustrations in my colleague's voices, as they sit in corporate environments and wait for that next big role. I see this dynamic occurring, Gen Xers being compressed between Boomers and Millennials, and I recognize that voices of Gen Xers are not being heard—at least not from the perspective of their experience. For these reasons, I've chosen the research perspective presented in this study description as I believe the true essence of this phenomenon can best be understood through studying these lived experiences of Generation X in the U.S. workforce and the stories that describe them.

Operational Definitions

The following definitions are intended to provide a working context for the study. They are informed by related literature.

Baby Boomers. Those persons born between the years of January 1, 1946-December 31, 1964. They have been characterized as optimistic, competitive and ambitious (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003).

Constructivism. Pertaining to the construction of knowledge as human beings construct knowledge through their experiences. A philosophy that seeks to explain how knowledge is constructed in human beings (Schwandt, 2007).

Generation X. Those persons born between the years of January 1, 1965-December 31, 1980. They have been characterized as skeptical, independent and entrepreneurial (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003).

Generational Cohort. Those individuals who share historical or social life experiences. (C. L. Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998). For this study, the cohorts include Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1980) and Millennials (1981-2000) (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003).

Generational Differences. Pertaining to the differences in behaviors, thoughts and feelings associated from one generational grouping to another generational grouping. Generational differences have been associated in academic and popular literature with workplace conflicts and transmission of values (Schaie, Labouvie, & Buech, 1973).

Generations. An identifiable group that shares birth years, age location, and significant life events at critical developmental stages. Those who share historical or social life experiences that remain relatively stable over time (Kupperschmidt, 2000).

Hermeneutic Phenomenology. It is a research methodology aimed at producing rich textual descriptions, of the experiencing of selected phenomena in the life world of individuals, that are able to connect with the experience of all of us collectively (Smith, 1997). The goal of

this methodology and ensuing methods is to produce rich meaning of the essence of lived experiences (Laverty, 2008).

Job Satisfaction. “A pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job as achieving or facilitating one’s job values” (Locke, 1969, p. 317). “A global feeling about the job or as a related constellation of attitudes about various aspects or facets of the job” (Spector, 1997, p. 2)

Millennials. Those persons born between the years of 1981 and 2000, also referred to as the Next Great Generation, Generation Y, and GenNext. They have been characterized as being realistic, collaborative and technologically savvy (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003).

Open Research Questions. Research questions that guide the study. Generally, open ended research questions are used in qualitative research where multiple responses are accepted that contain a participants thoughts and feelings (Roberts, 2010).

Traditionalist. Those persons born between the years of 1900-1945, also referred to as seniors or veterans. They have been characterized by loyalty, patriotism and working together to get things done (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003).

Delimitations and Ensuing Limitations

Given that part of my objective in conducting a study is to, as comprehensively as possible, communicate the problem and its significance, it is important to clearly explicate the delimitations and ensuing limitations of the proposed study. Doing so helps to clarify, for the reader, the potential boundaries of the study and factors that may be outside of the researcher’s control but which have been evaluated as part of the overall design and analysis. Delimitations refer to study parameters that were under the researcher’s control yet still have the potential to impact the study (Roberts, 2010). The following four delimitations are associated with this study.

1. The study participants were delimited to those individuals who were born during the years of 1965-1980 and were working in an internal capacity within the U.S. workforce.
2. The study participants were delimited to English speakers who worked in U.S.-based organizations.
3. A further delimiting factor was a reliance on study participants who were willing to take part in an audio-taped, semi/un-structured interviews based on their lived experiences.
4. Recognizing that as a constructivist researcher, I was the human instrument for data collection and thus, realize that being a novice researcher, my abilities to effectively interview, analyze the data and identify themes could be seen as a delimitation as it could have impacted the overall findings.

The delimitations also inform a number of ensuing limitations. Limitations are defined as study parameters that were not controlled by the researcher yet have the potential to impact the study (Roberts, 2010). There were two limitations as identified below:

1. The intent of this study was to provide thick description so the reader may translate to their unique context rather than attempting to generalize across populations; as a constructivist study recognizes the concept of locality for the reader is of relevance. It is relevant to note, however, that the delimitations cited above (e.g. participants meeting specific criteria and willingness of the participants) may restrict the transferability of the findings.
2. A reliance on previously published literature on the topic that surfaced through the database searches from a major Western U.S. research institution posed as a limitation on the knowledge that could be obtained to inform the study, particularly the data analysis and interpretation. The delimitation regarding the capability of the constructivist

researcher informs this limitation as it may impact my data obtained and subsequent analysis and interpretation of the themes. The result may impact the thick description provided for the reader which can influence transferability.

Assumptions

Assumptions help the researcher to clearly identify what is taken for granted in the study (Roberts, 2010). There were several assumptions that informed the conduct of this research study, as identified below.

1. Developing a deep understanding of the lived experiences of Generation X, as focused on in this study, was best obtained through a constructivist inquiry paradigm and hermeneutic phenomenology methodological tradition—as they allow for thick description and co-construction of multiple, and a spectrum of, views.
2. The largely *open* (minimally to unstructured) research questions, within a constructivist approach, facilitated the dialogue in such a way that the real lived experiences of the participants will be describable and interpretable.
3. The participants provided open and honest responses to the questions asked which informed thicker description and further understanding of the phenomenon being studied.
4. Each generational cohort (Traditionals, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials) has unique characteristics, values and work preferences that are not represented in the other cohorts. Thus, there are key, discernible differences among the cohorts.
5. A belief that this study had the potential to benefit both the participant and myself as both parties comes to understand their context specific situation in the workforce and their job satisfaction.

6. And finally, the generational diversity related factors influencing Gen Xers job satisfaction was discernibly different from those that might influence the same in other generational cohorts.

Organization for the Remainder of the Study

This dissertation contains five chapters. Chapter One (this chapter) provides an introduction to the topic and overview for the dissertation. Chapter Two offers a review of the informing theoretical frameworks, extant literature on generations, and job satisfaction. Further research in this chapter includes generational profiles of Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials to include the trends that have impacted all three generational cohorts as well as similarities and differences among the three cohorts. The chapter concludes with a review of the literature on job satisfaction. Chapter Three provides an in depth understanding of the methodology and methods utilized for this study, and the paradigm in which it is located. This chapter also details a discussion around the relevant key issues of practice and quality when conducting a hermeneutic phenomenological study. Chapter Four presents the data analysis and findings. The study concludes, in Chapter Five, with conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further research, and related theory and practice. It also offers Researcher Reflections as an enactment of the notion of the *researcher as human instrument* highlighted by Guba and Lincoln (1985), and so pivotal to a study of this nature.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The intent of this chapter is to provide the foundational theories and a review of significant literature in the field of generational studies and job satisfaction. This task, in and of itself, could be a Herculean effort. The literature on generations and job satisfaction is broad and deep. They are topics that have been extensively studied and researched for both academic and practitioner based publications. To focus this literature review, it will have the following objectives as visually depicted in Figure 7: (a) define and provide the theoretical underpinnings of generations; (b) characterize the three primary generational cohorts for this study - Baby Boomers, Gen Xers and Millennials - and highlight current organizational trends that may be impacting Gen Xers lived experiences in the workforce; (c) discuss similarities and differences between the generations; (d) define and provide the theoretical underpinnings of job satisfaction as well as its relationship to organizational performance; and (e) summarize the literature.

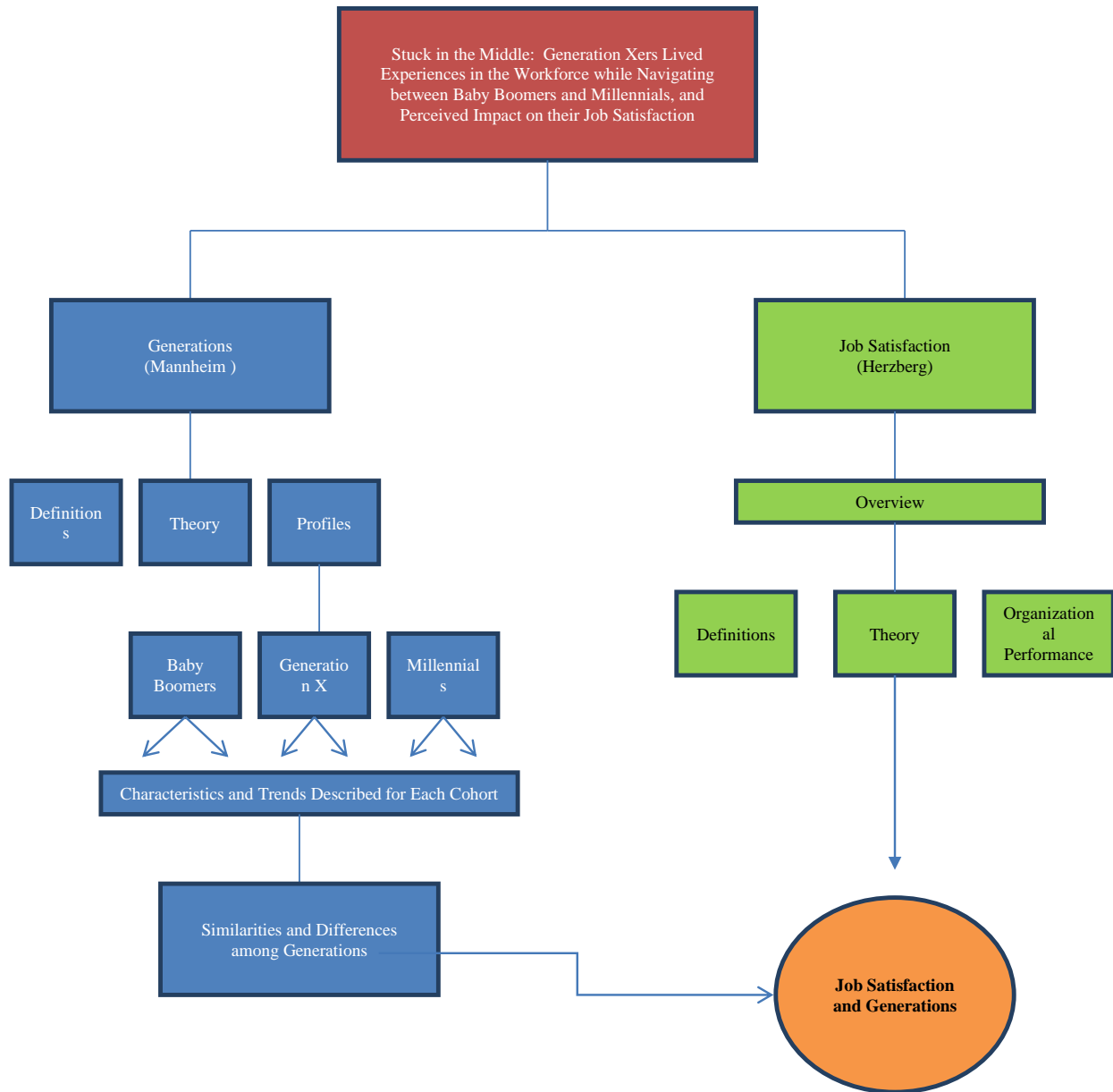


Figure 7. Visual Overview of Literature Review Content

Methodology

Informed by Torracco’s *Writing Integrative Literature Review: Guidelines and Examples* (2005), a literature study was undertaken to review, critique, and synthesize representative literature on the topics of generations, job satisfaction and phenomenology. An “integrative literature review is a distinctive form of research that generates new knowledge” about a mature

or emerging topic (Torraco, 2005, p. 356). Although the constructs of job satisfaction and generation have depth in terms of academic research, there is very limited knowledge when examining generations and job satisfaction (Benson & Brown, 2011). Since a literature review is by necessity a process that requires sampling (Yorks, 2008), the sampling criteria for the database searches needed to be determined first. As such, primary data sources were obtained from the library at a major Western research university. Databases included the fields of psychology, business, human resource development and education to include Business Source Premier, Academic Source Premier, PsycINFO and ERIC.

Description of Literature Searches

The research was obtained through an extensive search of scholarly, peer-reviewed journals, historical texts and contemporary business readings. The key subject areas included (a) generations; (b) Baby Boomers; (c) Gen Xers; (d) Millennials; (e) generational differences/similarities; (f) job satisfaction; (g) job satisfaction and generations; (h) phenomenology; and (i) hermeneutic phenomenology. For the generation searches, most of the literature was recent, defined as being published within the past ten years (2003-2013). Job satisfaction research was utilized from the past fifty years because much of the salient job satisfaction research occurred during the years of 1950 to 1980. Many of those studies, such as Herzberg's theory of the job satisfaction and performance relationship, had relevance to this study and, therefore, were included in the literature review.

There were several academic and business publications that augmented the database searches. These texts were foundational to my understanding of these constructs and are included in the literature summary. Specifically, for a historical and theoretical understanding of generations, the seminal works of Karl Mannheim's *Theory of Generations* (1952) and Strauss

and Howe's *Generations* (1992) were used. Herzberg's *The Motivation to Work* (1959) formed the foundation for understanding his motivator-hygiene theory on job satisfaction. Finally, *Researching Lived Experiences* by Van Manen (1990) provided the hermeneutic phenomenology methodology that was utilized for this study.

Analysis and Synthesis of Selected Literature

Given that literature reviews are concept centric, a thoughtful approach to analysis and synthesis of the selected articles is critical (Webster J. & Watson, 2002). A particular piece of literature was selected for inclusion if it provided for a greater understanding of the topic being researched. Specifically, a journal article was selected if it enhanced the understanding of Gen Xers in the workforce and their job satisfaction. Articles were also selected if they helped provide a better understanding of the trends that may be impacting Gen Xers lived experiences in the workforce. Generally speaking, literature was excluded if it involved contexts other than the work environment. Moreover, as the focus for this study is participants in American based organizations, the selected literature was primarily filtered by this dimension to reflect this perspective. From this filtering process, abstracts were screened for relevancy to the core objectives for this study. This process, known as a staged review, allowed for a complete analysis of the abstracts regarding relevance. Then, relevant articles were selected for an in-depth review (Torraco, 2005).

Defining Generations

Philosophers and scholars have attempted to explain the phenomenon of generations for thousands of years (Marias, 1967). Indeed, the first origins of generational thought can be traced back to ancient Greek philosophers and poets. In *The Iliad*, Homer describes his characters in terms of generational standards depicting a generation broader than the narrow bounds of family

with a historical reference based on battle (Nash, 1978). Moreover, Biblical references suggesting that “all things shall come upon this generation” (Mathew 23:26 New Revised Standard Version) and to more contemporary literature that is infiltrating the shelves in bookstores such as Strauss and Howe’s *Generations* (1991) to Brokaw’s *The Greatest Generation* (2004) highlight the ubiquitous nature of generations. Yet, despite this long and rich history of writing concerning generations, there is still little agreement on what defines a generation (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007; Macky et al., 2008; Markert, 2004; Wey Smola & Sutton, 2002). Many scholars argue that generations as a construct is elusive resulting in multiple ways of understanding generations (Biggs, 2007; Joshi, Dencker, Franz, & Martocchio, 2010). Generations, therefore, can be considered a “crossroads phenomenon that links a number of different fields and levels of analysis” (Biggs, 2007, p. 695). The resulting pluralism suggests that there are many different ways to know and understand the concept of generations for scholars and practitioners. More importantly, this lack of consensus makes it difficult for practitioners who are trying to embrace a new world and new way of working with a diverse workforce. Scholarly and popular literature now speaks to the issue of an expanding definition of diversity with the knowledge of four generations are working side by side for the first time in U.S. history (Downing, 2006; Williams & O’Reilly, 1998). Practically speaking, the lack of consensus definition for practitioners makes it difficult to reconcile these differences to provide relevant and meaningful organizational solutions for issues concerning generations.

Mannheim (1952) defined a generation as sharing the same year of birth with a common location in history. Strauss and Howe (1991) defined a generation as “a cohort-group whose length approximates the span of a phase of life and whose boundaries are fixed by peer personality” (p. 60). A more contemporary definition is “...an identifiable group (cohorts) that

shares birth years, age location, and significant life events at critical development stages (times) divided by 5-7 years into first wave, core group and last wave” (Kupperschmidt, 2000, p. 66). A generation assumes placement of individuals within a common location based on historical and social context. Therefore, it is often suggested that these individuals are predisposed to common behaviors, characteristics and values based on these similar life experiences (Sessa, Kabacoff, Deal, & Brown, 2007). Moreover, it is suggested that the effects of these life experiences remain fairly stable over time and can distinguish one generation from another (Jurkiewicz, Jr, & Brown, 1998).

The literature acknowledges several pertinent issues when defining generations. First, there is terminology confusion as scholars and practitioners use labels and definitions inconsistently (Papenhausen, 2006; Wey Smola & Sutton, 2002). This issue is most evident in the various ways we tend to label a generation. Although Baby Boomers is fairly consistently applied, many label Gen Xers with alternative labels such as Baby Bust, Slacker Generation, and Thirteenth Generation (Markert, 2004; Strauss & Howe, 1992). Millennials face a similar label confusion that includes Generation Y, Generation Me, and nGen (Twenge et al., 2010).

A second dilemma facing those who study generations is navigating through the wide variability of dates that are used to define a generational cohort. This variability can result in confusion and inconsistent approaches in this field of study. Moreover, it impacts researchers’ and practitioners’ conceptual and operational understanding as well as the outcomes being analyzed. Thus, understanding and defining generations is not an exact science (Markert, 2004; Sessa et al., 2007). The problem is not that scholars cannot categorize groups who share the same common historical orientation but rather that scholars have difficulty agreeing on exactly who comprises a generation (Markert, 2004). The most frequent method for grouping people into a

particular cohort has been by birth year (Markert, 2004). Wellner (2004) suggests that this is because demographers find birth year as the easiest way to define a generation. A second way that generational cohorts are defined is through historical context, a connection to world events that may have occurred during a generation's formative years (Strauss & Howe, 1992; Wellner, 2000). Sessa, et al. (2007) define six characteristics to help determine the scope of a generation: (a) a traumatic or formative event, such as a war, (b) a dramatic shift in demography that influences the distribution of resources in society, (c) an interval that connects a generation to success or failure (e.g., the Great Depression), (d) the creation of a "sacred space" that sustains a collective memory (e.g., Woodstock), (e) mentors or heroes that give voice to a movement by their work (e.g., Martin Luther King), and (f) people who know and support each other (p. 49). Finally, one common typology of generations, from the work of Strauss & Howe (1991), uses demographic and historical data to define a generation as "a special cohort-group whose length approximately matches that of a basic phase of life, or about twenty-two years" (p. 34). In the end, most scholars and practitioner writers tend to agree that the ranges determined for a particular cohort are just guidelines (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003). Table 2 highlights the significant variability in birth years for each cohort from both academic and business publications. For this study, the range of birth years for Generation X was determined by what was most commonly used within the literature. Therefore, Generation X is defined as persons who were born between the years of 1965 and 1980.

Table 2

Birth Years by Generational Cohort

Source	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Millennials
Lyons, Duxbury, & Higgins (2007)	1945-1964	1965-1979	1980 and beyond
Strauss & Howe (1991)	1943-1960	1961-1981	1982 and beyond
Lancaster & Stillman (2002)	1946-1964	1965-1980	1981-1999
Cennamo & Gardner (2008)	1946-1961	1962-1979	1980-2000
Dries, Pepermans & De Kerpel (2008)	1946-1964	1965-1980	1981-2001
Glass (2007)	1941-1960	1961-1976	1977-1992
Smola & Sutton (2002)	1946-1964	1960-1978	1979-1994
Sullivan, Forret, Carraher & Mainiero (2009)	1946-1964	1965-1983	1984-2002
Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, & Lance (2010)	1946-1964	1965-1981	1982-1999
Westerman & Yamamura (2006)	1946-1964	1965-1994	
Wilson, Squires, Widger, Cranley & Tourangeau (2008)	1940-1959	1960-1974	1975 and beyond
Wong, Gardiner, Lang & Coulon (2008)	1945-1964	1965-1981	1982-2000
Tulgan (2003)	1945-1964	1965-1977	1978-1986
Society of Human Resources Management (2004)	1945-1964	1965-1980	Born after 1980

Generational Theory

As previously mentioned, evidence of generational thought can be found in writings as old as the Bible. Historically, the meaning of generation was a biological-genealogical-one that suggested descendants of a common ancestor take thirty years to marry and have children (Jaeger, 1985). The concern with generations, then, was succession between the parents and their offspring. The social and historical manifestation of generation emerged around the nineteenth century with the work of August Comte, one of the first to scientifically study generations in the context of history (Jaeger, 1985). Generations, he posited, are the “moving force in historical

progress” and change can only be determined by the tempo of generational change (Jaeger, 1985, p. 275).

Jose Ortega y Gasset, a Spanish philosopher, approached the study of generations with recognition that the power of generational analysis is the compromise between self and group (Wyld, 1996). He asserted that a historical generation consisted of all individuals born within specified dates, which caused them to share common experiences and a common historical location. Philosophically he believed that history has the potential, through underlying patterns, to become prophetic and, as such, can provide sense making to what otherwise might be known as random (Wyld, 1996).

Mannheim’s Theory of Generations

Karl Mannheim was the earliest twentieth century philosopher to systematically develop a theory of generations. Mannheim’s 1923 essay *The Problem of Generations* is considered the seminal theoretical work in our understanding of generations (Pilcher, 1994). Although Mannheim was primarily influenced from a positivist lens, he acknowledged the reality of a “multiplicity of points of view” (Mannheim, 1952, p. 287). He acknowledged that the positivist understanding of generations largely ignores the social factor. As a result, his theory is predicated on a principle that “any biological rhythm must work itself out through the medium of social events” (Mannheim, 1952, p. 287).

Fundamental to Mannheim’s theory was the notion that belonging to a specific generation gives individuals “a common location in the social and historical process, and thereby limit(s) them to a specific range of potential experience, predisposing them for a certain characteristic type of historically relevant action” (Mannheim, 1952, p. 291). For Mannheim, then, generations are primarily historically determined rather than demographically determined.

It is suggested that this common location predisposes them to certain modes of thoughts and actions. This is a foundational premise of Mannheim's work - that generational location is a key aspect of determination of knowledge (Pilcher, 1994) and this location predisposes a person to "definite modes of behavior, feeling and thought" (Mannheim, 1952).

The concept of generations was further stratified by Mannheim, who described cohorts that form into sub-groups, which he called "generational units" (Dunham, 1998; Pilcher, 1994). Although individuals may belong to the same generation and experience the same historical events, individuals may have unique and specific responses to those situations. Mannheim refers to these responses as developing a common consciousness that causes them to form a separate group or unit (Dunham, 1998).

Contemporary Perspectives on Generational Theory

It is not surprising that Mannheim's original work had a profound effect on the continued understanding of generational cohorts, which can be seen in the contemporary perspective on generational theory. Marias (1967) believed that membership in a historical generation affects individuals in all aspects of their lives as age location influences one's life. Marias (1967) was interested in the total human condition. Although he recognized the relevance of history to one's place in a generation, he acknowledged the difficulty of trying to define historical boundaries. This idea was further discussed by Strauss and Howe (1991) in the latter part of the twentieth century.

Although scholars acknowledged the historical influences on a generational cohort, contemporary thought also recognizes that context matters. For example, generation groupings can exist within nations but not across them. Strauss and Howe's (1991) contemporary theory on generations acknowledge this issue of context in their seminal work on generations in American

history. Through their work, they offered several assumptions to guide understanding of generations within America. First, they suggested that generational cohorts' social behavior is governed by a well-defined, unchanging lifecycle (Papenhausen, 2006). Each person has four lifecycles as follows: 1) Elders, ages 66-87, 2) Midlife Adults, ages 44-65, 3) Rising Adults, ages 22-43 and 4) Youth, ages 0-21 (Strauss & Howe, 1992). All persons in their lifetimes will experience a social moment (e.g., a major war or assignation) and that social moment will affect an individual differently according to one's lifecycle phase (Papenhausen, 2006). Strauss and Howe (1992) go on to suggest that the social moment not only shapes personality but helps to develop an identity for each generational cohort. Generational theory, in summary, suggests that thoughts, behaviors and feelings are specific to each generation based on social, political and economic events that they experience through various stages of their lives (Mannheim, 1952).

Generational Profiles

In this section, the three generations that are the focus of this study, Baby Boomers, Gen Xers and Millennials, are briefly discussed to highlight generational differences in characterization, values and work preferences as seen in academic and popular literature. The intent of this section is not to validate the stereotypes presented but rather to showcase the popular (mis)conceptions of each cohort. Further empirical analysis, from qualitative and quantitative studies, is presented later in the literature review to summarize the research on differences and similarities of each cohort.

Although the goal of this section is to highlight general characterizations of each cohort, two issues blur the dividing lines. First, people who are born on the cusp of each generation, either at the beginning or end, might identify with historical events, values and preferences from two separate generational cohorts (Strauss & Howe, 1992). As an example, "Generation Jones"

defines generational members of the second wave of Baby Boomers and Gen Xers who live on the cusp of Baby Boomers as a group of individuals who might not fit exclusively into one cohort (Wellner, 2000, p. 54). Second, there is a potential “crossover effect” which comes from “especially significant events that affect every generation, such as John F. Kennedy’s assassination or the Challenger incident” (Strauss & Howe, 1992, p. 126). Although it seems counter to previously suggested assumptions regarding generations and differences, some consideration should be given to a blurring of the generations and their values and work preferences. In summary, Table 3 has been designed to provide a general overview of the generational characteristics with the details to follow within this section.

Table 3

Summary of Generational Cohorts

	Major Influences	Characteristics	Values	Motivators	Trends
Baby Boomers (1964-1984)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vietnam War ▪ King and Kennedy Assassinations ▪ Civil Rights Movement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Competitive ▪ Hard Working ▪ Reliable ▪ Confident ▪ Ambitious 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Optimistic ▪ Extrinsic values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Money and prestige 	Boomers are continuing to work due to political, economic and social reasons.
Generation X (1965-1980)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Corporate Downsizing ▪ AIDS ▪ Challenger Disaster ▪ Dual Income Families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Individualism ▪ Hard working ▪ Well Educated ▪ Skeptical/Cynical ▪ Flexible ▪ Technologically savvy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mobility and balance ▪ Non-traditional authority 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Autonomy and freedom 	Gen Gen Xers, as a smaller generational cohort, are feeling sandwiched between the Baby Boomer and Millennials, both of who are substantially larger cohorts. This is seen as impacting their options within the workforce.
Millennials (1981-1999)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Iraq wars, 9/11 and Columbine ▪ Information technology ▪ Social Media ▪ 1st Black president 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Team Oriented ▪ Self-absorbed ▪ Confident ▪ Assertive ▪ Receptive to change and diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Constant feedback ▪ Teamwork ▪ Diversity ▪ Ethics and Civic Minded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meaningful work ▪ Opportunity for advancement 	Millennials are now entering the workforce with projections that they will be the largest cohort as early as 2014.

Baby Boomers

Baby Boomers, for purposes of this study defined as those individuals who were born between the years of 1946 and 1964, represent approximately 80 million of the current labor force (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003). Boomers are considered the largest group of employees, at 52% of the workforce, and represent most of the middle- and upper-level executive positions (Nelson, 2007; Wong et al., 2008). Due to their large size, Boomers have wielded extensive influence over economic and organizational changes and, thus, tend to define themselves as special (Westerman & Yamamura, 2007). However, Boomers have also had a large cohort to compete with in everything from the high school football team to college acceptance, to key positions within organizations.

Boomers grew up in a historical timeframe where there was a strong work ethic, collective spirit and economic prosperity. Salient events that helped shape Boomers' beliefs about the world include the Kennedy and King assassinations, the Vietnam War, and the social revolution. Boomers saw the social and political injustice in the world and felt their role was to change it (Erickson, 2009). As such, they also tend to have more traditional beliefs about the role of government and expect government support and intervention when necessary (Dychtwald et al., 2006).

Baby Boomer Characteristics

Boomers tend to characterize themselves as hard-working, reliable, confident and high-achieving (Dychtwald et al., 2006). In fact, as their name suggests, Boomers were born in a time of optimism, in the post-World War II era, when the economy was booming and anything was possible (N. Howe & Strauss, 1992; Lancaster & Stillman, 2003). During their formative years, some of their major influencers were John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Gloria

Steinham, who expressed sentiments of social change, optimism and idealism (Erickson, 2009; Lancaster & Stillman, 2003). Boomers were raised to always strive to do better than their parents as part of the fulfillment of the American dream and, consequently, they tend to value extrinsic rewards such as money, title, and the corner office (Erickson, 2009; Lancaster & Stillman, 2003). However, there is some evidence that these values are changing as Baby Boomers age, with a greater emphasis now being placed on workforce flexibility and volunteer opportunities (Hewlett, Sherbin, & Sumberg, 2009).

As noted earlier, given the large cohort size, Boomers have always had to be competitive in order to succeed. This competitive nature has translated into workforce behavior where Boomers are characterized as “highly competitive micromanagers who disdain laziness” (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007, p. 353). Boomers strive to excel at their careers, and it has been suggested that they live to work (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003; Sullivan, Forret, Carraher, & Mainiero, 2009). They are highly motivated by what they can accomplish at work and how they are extrinsically rewarded for those accomplishments (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007; Lancaster & Stillman, 2003; Wey Smola & Sutton, 2002). Given their ambition and need for extrinsic rewards, they are the most prosperous generational cohort with the least amount of money saved (Beinhocker et al., 2008b). This will be further explored in the current trends section below.

Current Trends for Baby Boomers

At the turn of the twenty-first century, there was great concern within the United States regarding the potential impact on the economy of the aging of the American people. Experts speculated that as Boomers reached retirement age, around the turn of the twenty-first century, the impact on our economy and organizations would be enormous (Davis, Pawlowski, &

Houston, 2006). Demography was destiny, as we were told. Social security actuaries predicted that the number of workers per retiree, once the Boomers retired, would decrease from 3.3 to 2.2 and, thus, the Social Security system would begin to run a deficit in 2017 (Mermin et al., 2007). Projections for overall economic growth were expected to decrease with the average annual growth rate falling from 2.1% to .3% over the next two decades (Mermin et al., 2007). It was also predicted that organizations would have significant gaps in talent due to the impending retirement of Boomers resulting in a war for talent and a shortfall of about ten million workers in the United States (Dychtwald et al., 2006; Kaihla, 2003). The basis for the concern, for many economists, was that Boomers represented the largest segment of the working population and, once they exited, a much smaller cohort demographic was available to fill their shoes (Benson & Brown, 2011).

The reality, however, has been that many economic, social and political changes have occurred in the last decade that has made it difficult for Boomers to retire. Consequently, within the U.S. workforce, Boomers have continued working well into their typical retirement years. The AARP has found that 68% of older workers intend to work into retirement (as cited in Mermin et al., 2007). Other sources also suggest that Boomers want to continue to work (Beinhocker et al., 2008b).

The reasons for continuing to work are varied and complex. Through review of the literature, it appears that there have been three forces (economic, political and social) at play during the last decade that has influenced Boomers to continue to work. Economically speaking, the twenty-first century has been a difficult one for the American worker. First, globalization, technology advances and fierce competition have changed the way organizations are doing work. Many employees, Boomers included, saw their jobs eliminated due to outsourcing or

downsizing. Organizations began to eliminate defined benefit pension programs that guaranteed compensation for life. For a Boomer who grew up with a belief that your employer would take care of you, this change has been significant. Second, it has been reported that Boomers have spent more and saved less than the previous generation (Beinhocker et al., 2008b) making them financially unprepared for retirement. Inflated stock markets and soaring home pricings during the latter part of the twentieth century gave Boomers a false sense of security and less urgency to save (Beinhocker et al., 2008b). The financial crash in 2008 depleted most of their accrued savings and they have a reduced timeframe to recoup their investments. The end result is a generation that is financially unprepared to retire (Beinhocker et al., 2008b).

Politically, there have been two primary changes that have directly impacted the Boomers' ability to retire. First, as a result of social security reform in 1983, the full payout age was raised from age 65 to age 67 (Dychtwald et al., 2006). Although the reform provides a grandfathering process based on birth year, most Boomers will see some impact to their retirement benefits if they choose to retire at age 65. Second, changes to employer-provided pensions are encouraging employees to remain working (Mermin et al., 2007). These types of programs are moving toward defined contributions, rather than defined benefits, that incentivize employees to keep working so they can continue to make contributions while they work. Finally, employer-provided retiree health benefits, that are used to buffer the gap between early retirement and the year that Medicare kicks in, are not as prevalent due to rising health care costs (Mermin et al., 2007). The above examples demonstrate that there are several ways in which retirement financially disadvantages workers.

A final factor driving Boomers to continue to work are social reasons such as wanting to do meaningful work and a need to keep active. The AARP conducted a work and career study in

2002 which found that workers between the ages of 50 and 75 had non-financial reasons for wanting to continue to work (as cited in Montenegro, Fisher, & Remez, 2002). In the study, 84% said that they would continue to work even if they were financially set (Montenegro et al., 2002). As Boomers age, they tend to place value on the intangible aspects of employment, such as having a purpose, being productive or making a contribution to the world (Hewlett et al., 2009). These factors are highly motivating for many Boomers, prompting this cohort to continue to work.

Generation X

Generation X, a term that originated in Douglas Coupland's 1991 novel, was originally meant to stereotype the generation's random and ambiguous approach to life (Gordinier, 2008; Stephey, 2008a). Written as a response to being in the shadows of Boomers, Coupland declared that the book was an attempt to help people understand about Generation X. Gen Xers, the smallest generation (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007) represent about 46 million individuals who, for purposes of this study, were born between the years of 1965 and 1980 (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003) and approximately 26% of the workforce (Nelson, 2007). Gen Xers' childhood can be characterized as unstable. They grew up in an environment of great change, economic instability and job insecurity. Moreover, they were the first generation where both parents worked or in households where only one parent resided due to the increased divorce rate (Erickson, 2009; Strauss & Howe, 1992). Consequently, many of these children were labeled as "latchkey kids" they would come home to empty houses after school (Erickson, 2009). This reality for Gen Xers led to a stronger identification with individualism versus collectivism (Jurkiewicz et al., 1998; Wey Smola & Sutton, 2002) as many were taking care of themselves.

As a result of the environmental context during this timeframe, Gen Xers became weary of a negative society and thus developed a fierce independence.

Gen Xers' beliefs about the world have been influenced by historic events that occurred in their lifetime such as the Cold War, the Challenger Disaster, the AIDS epidemic and the progress of technology (Erickson, 2009). They are considered as a whole much better educated than the Boomers, which may be another factor influencing their beliefs and behaviors in the workforce (Yang & Guy, 2006). Gen Xers are the first true "tech savvy" generation having grown up with computers, the internet and video games (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003; Yang & Guy, 2006).

Generation X Characteristics

If society tends to think of Boomers as influential and optimistic, Gen Xers are often seen as disappointing and skeptical (Kupperschmidt, 2000). They grew up in times where every major American institution was being called out for crimes and/or morality issues (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003). That, combined with the events described above (increased divorce rate, etc.) has produced a cohort that tends to be cynical and guarded (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003). They tend to have less loyalty to a company and place more value in family/work life balance. Gen Xers have received a great deal of negative press given their own unique approach to the workforce. Stereotyped as being lazy or unwilling to commit to their jobs, Gen Xers learned to evaluate employment through a very different lens than previous cohorts.

Work preferences, for Gen X, tend to stress fun and balance with a tendency to reject traditional views of authority and work (Kupperschmidt, 2000). They want flexibility and freedom as well as learning opportunities to promote themselves in the marketplace (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007; Dries, Pepermans, & De Kerpel, 2008; Yang & Guy, 2006). They grew up

in an environment where the traditional employment contract was changing and, as a result, they do not expect job security or a pension (Jurkiewicz, 2000). Moreover, Gen Xers tend to reject traditional concepts of leadership (Losyk, 1997), having grown up without many adult role models around and outside of typical chain and command environments. In summary, Gen Xers can best be characterized as a self-reliant, skeptical cohort that seeks balance, autonomy and freedom in their work and personal relationships. They tend to view life as living each day to the fullest as no one knows what the future may hold. They prioritize fun and family and do not live to work. Despite this non-traditional view of work, Gen Xers bring tremendous strengths to the workforce including an ability to embrace change, be flexible and problem solve (Erickson, 2010).

Current Trends for Generation X

I (a Gen Xer) think of it as being second strings quarterback to the Boomers when the job opportunities were not there. Then, just before the first-string guy retires, they draft a promising youth who garners all the accolades and attention. (as cited in Erickson, 2009, p. 25)

I feel sandwiched in between the two demographic classes. It's as if the Boomers still don't take us seriously, and the Gen Y's look down at us for being too old. (as cited in Erickson, 2009, p. 26)

The above sentiments, as expressed by two Gen Xers, capture the essence of the dilemma that is currently facing this generation. By 2019, Generation X will have spent nearly two decades bumping against a gray ceiling of Baby Boomers who have continued to remain in coveted senior roles (Fisher, 2009) The gray ceiling is considered a function of mathematics as Gen Xers were born at a time when birthrates hit a quarter-century low and are considered the smallest generational cohort (Fisher, 2009). Boomers and Millennials were born during a time period where there was a proliferation of births and have very large numbers within their respective cohorts. Millennials are expected to continue to enter the workforce in large numbers

and, ironically, will be fully represented in the American workforce around the time that experts project Boomers will have retired (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). The end result, for Gen Xers, is the feeling of being sandwiched between these two large generational cohorts, which influences their perceptions of work and their career options.

Exacerbating this notion of feeling *stuck*, many Gen Xers' careers got off to a slow start as most of them entered the workforce during the 1980's, a time when the U.S. economy was depressed with high unemployment (Erickson, 2009). From the start, Gen Xers had to compete with the Boomers, who had the competitive advantage due to the sheer size of that cohort. For those Gen Xers who did find jobs, many were taking jobs that had reduced starting salaries, compared to the Baby Boomers, yet the Gen Xers had the highest college related debt than any other generational cohort up to that time in our nation's history (Erickson, 2009).

During the past two decades, the challenges have continued for Gen Xers. Gen Xers bought their first homes during the height of the market, navigated through the dot-com bust (Erickson, 2009) and, most recently, were impacted by the financial crisis of the past five years. For many Gen Xers who married late and had children in the thirties, they are now facing another type of sandwiching as they are caretakers for their young children and their aging parents. All of the above-mentioned factors aggravate Gen Xers' perceptions of feeling stuck, whether within the context of their work or the even greater context of their lives. Gen Xers are now at a crossroads in their careers having to face the reality of the past economic circumstances with the current situation of Boomers who continue to work and Millennials now entering the workforce.

Millennials

Often referred to as Generation Y, Echo Boom, Net Generation or Millennials, this cohort represents approximately 71 million individuals who, for purposes of this study, were born between the years of 1981 and 2000 (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003). The first wave of Millennials, the term used for this paper, entered the workforce in 2004 and is considered the fastest growing cohort in the workforce (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). Given their large size and labels such as *the next great generation*, Millennials are expected to have great influence on the workplace and have been watched with great anticipation (Erickson, 2009; Hershatter & Epstein, 2010; Howe & Strauss, 2000). Yet, others are not quite as optimistic about the impact of this new generation. Millennials have been depicted as self-absorbed, unmotivated and highly narcissistic (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Twenge, 2010). Some scholars describe Millennials as “generation me” as they have grown up in a world where they were told that they could do anything and were given inflated self-concepts (Twenge, 2010). It has been suggested that Millennials have an attitude problem, within the workforce, and are often considered high maintenance (B. Tulgan, 2009). They have been raised by helicopter parents who tend to micromanage the lives of their children but still encourage open communication and participative decision making between themselves and their children (Downing, 2006). Despite these traits, it is generally accepted that Millennials are coming up strong and ready to conquer the world.

As with any other generational cohort, this generation has experienced defining world events that profoundly influence their character and values. They have grown up in a world of tremendously unpredictable and random acts of violence. The terrorist attacks on September 11th, the War on Terrorism, Columbine, globalization and the widespread use of technology have been key childhood experiences for Millennials. The result of this historical context has made this

cohort pragmatic, open to change and receptive to diversity (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010; Lancaster & Stillman, 2003). In contrast to the unpredictability of the external world, Millennials have had great stability in their home lives. They grew up in a pro-child culture where more humanistic approaches to parenting were encouraged (Erickson, 2009). As such, they tend to have a strong connection with their parents, many of whom are Baby Boomers, having similar interests and preferences (Erickson, 2009). As Strauss and Howe reflect “these children are not being raised to explore the inner world, but instead to achieve and excel at the outer” (Strauss & Howe, 1992, p. 342), again reinforcing the notion that this generation is special and destined for greatness.

Millennial Characteristics

Millennials are said to be team-oriented, ambitious and civic-minded (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007). Compared to other cohorts at the same age, Millennials are more confident, assertive and yet more narcissistic (Downing, 2006). Their work preferences include emphasis on work/life balance, but with meaningful work and prospects for rapid advancement (Ng et al., 2010). They prefer group working environments with less formal leadership, a strong focus on results, and collaboration (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007; Dries et al., 2008). Given their upbringing in diverse environments, Millennials have been described as having multi-cultural ease (Hewlett et al., 2009). They are comfortable with diversity and fully expect to work with people who are different and may think differently. Finally, Millennials are the most technological competent generation in the workforce today. They are the first generation to be born into a world that was already wired with technology ubiquitous (Erickson, 2009).

Current Trends for Millennials

Popular magazine articles with titles such as “Brace Yourself Here Comes Generation Y” and “What Gen Y Really Wants” help us get a glimpse into the media fascination with Millennials. Millennials, possibly *the next greatest generation*, are now entering the workforce as a powerful force (Alch, 2000). Scholars suggest that by the year 2014, Millennials will account for nearly half the employees in the world and will be the largest cohort in the workforce (Meister & Willyerd, 2010). As Baby Boomers leave the workforce, Millennials must be poised to assume a greater role given the sheer number of workforce entrants from this cohort and their diverse range of talents. Millennials, however, have been described as wanting it all and wanting it now in terms of rapid advancement, work/life balance and interesting/challenging work (Ng et al., 2010). A study conducted in 2010 that examined the career expectations of Millennials confirmed that they did want rapid advancement, balance and meaningful work (Ng et al., 2010). Employers, concerned about talent shortages, are taking notice and adapting their human resources practices to accommodate this young cohort. An executive briefing released by Boston College suggests that a number of leading organizations are developing unique workforce solutions to accommodate the Millennials (Rikleen, 2011). Deloitte, for example, has designed a Gen Y council that serves to advise senior leadership on major organization initiatives (Rikleen, 2011). Sodexo offers an i-Gen employee network group and Johnson & Johnson has developed the first generational affinity group called Millennials to provide understanding and support for generational issues (Rikleen, 2011).

In the twentieth-first century, Millennials are entering the workforce in large numbers with lofty expectations for their future. They are not buying into the same linear path of paying your dues and moving up slowly that many of the previous generations have experienced. They

have different historical and social experiences and, as mentioned above, bring unique characteristics to the workplace. Consequently, Millennials are influencing the workforce landscape and have the potential to impact Gen Xers, as well.

Similarities and Differences among Generations

Much has been written in popular management literature about the differences between the generations and the ways employers can navigate those differences as a means of better understanding each cohort (Glass, 2007; Lancaster & Stillman, 2003; Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 1999). A fundamental working theory in much of the literature is that differences do exist between generations and those differences have the potential to impede a manager's ability to effectively manage his/her workforce. As we have seen with other constructs (employee engagement, change management), learning how to manage generational diversity has become a basic solution offering for many HR/management consulting firms and has received much attention from the media and business community. Despite this increased interest from the practitioner side, empirical data to support the notion of generational differences has been mixed (Arsenault, 2004; Benson & Brown, 2011; Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Macky et al., 2008; Twenge, 2010; Westerman & Yamamura, 2007).

With this in mind, the academic literature was reviewed on generational differences to determine whether or not the empirical data supports the notion of generational differences and to identify what domain those differences apply to for each generation.

Generally speaking, there are two schools of thought with respect to generational differences. Mannheim's (1952) theory suggests that each cohort is unique given their place in history and experience of historic events during their formative years (Mannheim, 1952). Consequently, each generation would have differences as they each have their own unique

experiences. Other scholars, who represent the second school of thought, argue that no such generational differences exist. A dilemma facing all scholars who study generational differences is that there are limitations on how to disentangle the confounding effects of generation, age and life-cycle. Of the studies reviewed, the majority of the studies were cross-sectional, which collects data on workers of different ages at one point in time. Thus, this blurs the findings of generational differences because it is hard to distinguish whether the difference results from age or generational cohort (Costanza, Badger, Fraser, Severt, & Gade, 2012; Twenge, 2010). Other questions in generational research are also debated such as if there are differences, how big those differences are and what effect they have on organizational outcomes. Table 4 highlights the academic articles that were reviewed as part of this process.

Table 4

Academic Studies Examining Similarities and Differences between Generational Cohorts

Study	Construct	Method	Findings
Costanza, Badger, Fraser, Severt, Gade (2012)	Job Satisfaction Organizational Commitment Intent to Turnover	Quantitative	Differences
Twenge (2010)	Work Values	Meta Analysis	Differences
Arsenault (2003)	Leadership Political and Cultural Experiences	Quantitative	Differences
Twenge and Campbell (2008)	Psychological Traits	Quantitative	Differences

(continued)

Table 4. (Continued)

Study	Construct	Method	Findings
Lyons, Duxbury, Higgins (2007)	Values	Quantitative	Differences
Cennamo and Gardner (2008)	Work values Job Satisfaction Affective Organizational Commitment and Intention to Leave	Quantitative	Differences
Smola and Sutton (2002)	Work Values	Quantitative	Differences
Benson and Brown (2011)	Job Satisfaction Organizational Commitment Willingness to Quit	Quantitative	Differences
Sullivan, Forret, Carraher, and Mainiero (2009)	Authenticity Balance and Challenge Needs	Quantitative	Differences
Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman, Lance (2010)	Work Values	Quantitative	Differences
Wong, Gardiner, Lang, and Coulon (2008)	Personality and Motivation	Quantitative	Differences
Yang and Guy (2006)	Work Motivation Factors	Quantitative	Similarities

(continued)

Table 4. Continued

Study	Construct	Method	Findings
Murray, Toulson, Legg (2011)	Characteristic differences to determine what each cohort valued from their job	Qualitative	Similarities
Kowske, Rasch, Wiley (2010)	Work Attitudes	Quantitative	Similarities
Dries, Pepermans, and De Kerpel (2008)	Career Beliefs Satisfaction	Quantitative	Differences
Westerman & Yamamura (2006)	Environmental Fit	Quantitative	Differences
Chen & Choi	Work Values	Quantitative	Differences

As reflected from Table 4, the majority of the studies demonstrated some level of differences between the generations. However, of those studies, many found mixed results. For example, Westerman and Yamamura (2007) found that goal orientation and work environment fit was of greater importance to the younger generations than the older ones. An inherent problem with this study, however, was that the researchers combined Gen Xers and Millennials into the sample, blending findings for those two cohorts (Westerman & Yamamura, 2007). Cennamo and Gardner (2008) found differences between Millennials and other cohorts on status and freedom values but no differences were found in job satisfaction between the three cohorts. Both similarities and differences were found in another study that examined work values within

the hospitality workforce (Gursoy, Maier, & Chi, 2008). Sullivan et al. (2009) provided evidence that members of Generation X had higher needs for authenticity and balance than Boomers. However, there were no statistical differences found between Boomers and Gen Xers on needs for challenge in their work roles (Sullivan et al., 2009).

Analysis examining intrinsic and extrinsic motivators is especially relevant as Herzberg's theory of motivator-hygiene factors underpins this study. Again, his theory suggests that there are different extrinsic and intrinsic factors that drive satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Twenge (2010) summarized the findings on this domain by suggesting that intrinsic motivators appear to be relatively consistent across generations. For extrinsic values, the meta-analytic findings suggest that Gen Xers are more likely to value money, status and prestige than Baby Boomers or Millennials (Twenge, 2010). This finding may be meaningful as the study seeks to understand the experiences of Gen Xers in the workforce and the impact of those experiences on their job satisfaction.

Finally, Costanza et al. (2012) meta-analysis examined generational differences on three domains: job satisfaction, commitment, and intent to turnover. Their overall findings suggest that there is not a substantive difference between generations and work-related outcomes. Of the studies that did show a correlation, the researchers suggest that extant research offers explanations other than generational membership that may be contributing to those results (Costanza et al., 2012). The overall findings from this study appear to conflict with the findings that are presented the preceding chart as that suggests differences between the generations do exist and thus, make it difficult to draw any reliable conclusions.

Through the literature review process, I was able to locate four studies that controlled for age and time-period effects. All four of the studies showed small to moderate differences

between generations (Benson & Brown, 2011; Kowske et al., 2010; Twenge et al., 2010; Wey Smola & Sutton, 2002). These studies may account for some of the inconsistencies that are observed in other studies on generations as the time-lag approach can control for age or time-period variables (Costanza et al., 2012; Twenge, 2010). For example, previous reports have not shown a statistically significant difference between generational cohorts and job satisfaction (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Dries et al., 2008; Murray, Toulson, & Legg, 2011). Kowske et al. (2010) controlled for time period and age, which provided evidence that Millennials are more satisfied than Gen Xers. Another time-lag study confirmed similar findings, suggesting that Boomers had significantly higher levels of job satisfaction than Gen Xers (Benson & Brown, 2011). Finally, two studies examining work values, that also controlled for age and time period, found significant differences between the generations in terms of values and work outcomes (Twenge et al., 2010; Wey Smola & Sutton, 2002). This may provide a more reliable finding given that the researchers in these two studies controlled for the confounding effects of age with generation.

In summary, although the findings are somewhat conflicting, it appears that small to moderate differences do exist between the generations in the workforce. Controlling for age and time-period variables may provide even stronger results. It is important to note, however, that the findings provide differences on average and should not be interpreted as applying equally to all members of a certain generation. One researcher argued that people perceive that generational differences are larger than they actually are due to the human tendency to generalize (Twenge, 2010). Nonetheless, some level of meaningful difference in generations may exist. Designing interventions and programs aimed to address those differences has the potential to yield a positive outcome for employers, as well as employees.

Job Satisfaction

Scholars and practitioners have been seeking to understand and measure employee attitudes throughout the better part of the 20th century (Brayfield & Crockett, 1955; Herzberg et al., 1959; Locke, 1969). Job satisfaction has been the primary focal employee attitude for both researchers and practitioners who have recognized the critical role that job satisfaction plays in the practical application to one's life (Judge & Klinger, 2008). Largely seen as an outgrowth of the Human Relations Movement, researchers began stressing a greater concern for workers and sought to fully understand their psychological state (Fournet, Distefano Jr, & Pryer, 1966). This emphasis on job satisfaction gained momentum in the 20th century following the Hawthorne Studies, which suggested a causal relationship between satisfied employees and production (Fournet et al., 1966; Weisbord, 1987). Although the Hawthorne Studies garnered criticism in the years that followed, as some suggested other variables accounted for the change in productivity (Tett & Meyer, 1993), there continued to be an intuitive belief that satisfied employees would be more productive. Thus, job satisfaction became one of the most researched topics in organizational research (Spector, 1997).

Job Satisfaction Defined

Early studies, such as Kornhauser and Sharp (1931) and Brayfield and Crockett (1955), examined the concept of work attitudes by focusing on the affective dimensions of attitudes (Hulin & Judge, 2003; Wright, 2006). Weiss (2002) referred to attitudes dimensions as “evaluative judgment made with regard to an attitudinal object” (p. 173) and to affective as emotional responses towards one's job (Cranny, Smith, & Stone, 1992). One of the earliest formal definitions of job satisfaction was from Hoppock (1935) who defined job satisfaction as being any number of psychological, physiological, and environmental circumstances that lead a

person to express satisfaction with a job. In his influential work on job satisfaction, Locke defined job satisfaction as “the pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job as achieving or facilitating the achievement of one’s job values” (1969, p. 316), combining both cognitive and affective dimensions. A consensus definition is “an affective (emotional) reaction to one’s job, resulting from the incumbent’s comparison of actual outcomes with those that are desired” (Cranny et al., 1992, p. 1). Thus, any consideration of job satisfaction must look at both affect and cognition.

Although most academics agree that the primary definitional focus (and subsequent measurement) of job satisfaction includes cognition and affect (Brief & Weiss, 2002), other scholars have recognized a tripartite definition of job satisfaction, which adds behavioral elements to affect and cognition. (Hulin & Judge, 2003). In other words, job satisfaction refers to an internal cognitive and affective state that is realized by a behavioral response (Hulin & Judge, 2003). Hulin and Judge (2003) contend, however, that the “tripartite definition of attitudes comprising cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements has eroded in industrial and organizational psychology until we are left with assessments of attitudes as cognitive attitudes” (pg. 256). The resulting impact has been empirical research that has predominantly defined job satisfaction in terms of the cognitive and affective dimensions.

Job Satisfaction and Performance

One of the most controversial, elusive debates in organization research is the relationship between job satisfaction and performance (Petty, McGee, & Cavender, 1984). Throughout the twentieth century, there has been considerable empirical research conducted to unravel the mystery behind this relationship, but the results are conflicting.

Many scholars credit Kornhauser and Sharp's study (1932) with initiating the satisfaction-performance debate. They examined employee attitudes and productivity in an industrial setting, finding only a moderate relationship between these two constructs (Kornhauser & Sharp, 1932). Since that time, a number of studies have been published that examine the satisfaction-performance link. For example, Brayfield and Crockett (1955) conducted an extensive review of the literature to examine employee attitudes in relationship to employee performance with the intent of inferring overall job satisfaction from employee attitudes. After examining the available studies, the authors concluded that: "there is little evidence in the available literature that employee attitudes of the type usually measured in morale surveys bear any simple-relationship to performance on the job" (p. 408).

In the 1950's, Herzberg and his colleagues conducted a study to examine job attitudes at work. One intention of the study design was to measure the effects of job satisfaction on several outcome variables, including job performance (Herzberg et al., 1959). The results highlighted a positive relationship between job satisfaction and performance as defined by personal accounts from the participants (Herzberg et al., 1959). Following the work of Herzberg, a number of studies were conducted in an attempt to mirror his results. For example, Katzell, Barrett, and Parker (1961) identified a positive relationship between satisfaction and performance when controlling for specific domains such as unionization and wage rate. Also, Lawler and Porter (1967) investigated the impact of job performance, as measured by peer and superior ranking, on job satisfaction and found a positive relationship.

In 1964, Vroom conducted a landmark review of 20 studies that examined the job satisfaction-performance link and found those studies had a very modest correlation (median correlation of .14) between job satisfaction and performance (Petty et al., 1984). Iaffaldano and

Muchinsky (1985) attempted to extend these findings through a later meta-analysis study. These researchers analyzed 74 published studies and found a correlation between satisfaction and performance (.146) that was almost identical to the correlations that Vroom found nearly 20 years earlier (Iaffaldano & Muchinsky, 1985). Judge et al. (2001) provided an updated meta-analysis of this literature, which addressed potential problems with the earlier study, and found a slightly better correlation of .30. Despite Judge et al.'s work, the findings from Iaffaldano and Muchinsky seemed to have a chilling effect on subsequent research examining the relationship between job satisfaction and performance (Judge et al., 2001) and led to a general consensus amongst scholars that the impact of job satisfaction on performance is minimal.

Job Satisfaction Theory

Generally speaking, theories of job satisfaction can be categorized into content or process theories (Miner, 2005). Content theories tend to focus on the needs, drivers and goals of an individual to obtain a level of job satisfaction. Examples of content theories include Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg's Hygiene-Motivator Theory and McClelland Needs-Achievement Theory. Process theories focus on the cognitive processes that occur within the minds of individuals and how they might influence behavior. This type of theory is more concerned with how motivation takes place. Examples of process theories include Equity Theory, Vroom's Expectancy Theory, Porter/Lawler's Expectancy Model and Job Characteristics Model. For this current study, Herzberg's Hygiene-Motivator Theory, considered a content theory of motivation, will be further explored below as it provides the conceptual framework to better understand Gen Xers employee satisfaction within the U.S. workforce.

Herzberg's Hygiene-Motivator Theory of Job Satisfaction

In the 1950's, Herzberg and his colleagues conducted a series of interviews using a critical incident technique to better understand what motivated employees within the workforce (Bassett-Jones & Lloyd, 2005; Herzberg et al., 1959; Smerek & Peterson, 2007). The researchers asked engineers and accountants to describe positive feelings about their jobs, which included feelings of satisfaction, and to explain how that had affected their performance. After researching within 12 comparable organizations and 1,685 participants, Herzberg built a theory of motivation that is known as the Hygiene-Motivator theory (Herzberg et al., 1959). Herzberg's theory, sometimes referred to as the Two-Factor Theory, assumes a "more complex interaction between both internal and external factors" (Bassett-Jones & Lloyd, 2005, p. 930). There are specific elements that influence job satisfaction and a distinctly different set of elements that influence job dissatisfaction, hence the dual nature of the theory. Those specific elements are characterized as motivator and hygiene factors (Bassett-Jones & Lloyd, 2005; Herzberg, 1987; Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1993; Smerek & Peterson, 2007). Motivator factors can be classified as achievement, verbal recognition, challenging work, responsibility and promotion. When these factors are present, the theory suggests that a person's basic intrinsic needs have been met and, consequently, a person's satisfaction at work is improved.

Job dissatisfaction is identified by a different set of factors that Herzberg coined hygiene factors (Herzberg et al., 1959). Hygiene factors, which are determined by the context in which the work is performed, include supervision, pay, benefits, company policies, and administrative rules. Herzberg's premise was that hygiene factors can be improved to remove dissatisfaction in the workforce; however it will not lead to job satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). According to Herzberg, job satisfaction can only be obtained through a focus on the motivator factors

(Herzberg et al., 1959). Thus, while hygiene factors are relevant, they will only move an employee to a neutral state and then the focus must shift to more intrinsic motivators.

Herzberg argued that for an employee to move towards satisfaction, both hygiene and motivator factors must be addressed (Herzberg et al., 1959). He recognized that job content (motivator) and job environment (hygiene) can affect job satisfaction (Herzberg, 1987). More specifically, Herzberg recognized that for full satisfaction to occur, jobs must be enriched to include addressing an employee's psychological growth (Herzberg, 1987). For Herzberg, job enrichment was a continuous management function that required assessment and job alignment. Job enrichment, according to Herzberg, was the intentional introduction of motivators into an employee's work (Miner, 1980). Examples of job enrichment might include direct feedback on an employee's performance that was non-evaluative or the opportunity for individuals to feel that they have meaningful work (Miner, 1980). Ultimately, Herzberg argued that job enrichment was a way to move an employee's role to higher levels of motivators, which would result in higher levels of job satisfaction.

The publication of *The Motivation to Work* in 1959 stirred controversy because the theory introduced was in direct opposition to the traditional idea that job satisfaction functions along a continuum (Behling, Labovitz, & Kosmo, 1968). A number of researchers criticized Herzberg stating that the study utilized too narrow of a range of jobs and used only one measure of job attitudes (Ewen, Smith, & Hulin, 1966). Vroom (1964) criticized Herzberg's approach as he said it allowed people to make themselves look good through stories attributed to intrinsic factors whereas they attributed negative experiences to external factors (as cited in Smerek & Peterson, 2007). During the next two decades, a number of researchers, both qualitative and quantitative, attempted to replicate Herzberg's findings. Although a number of studies using the same critical

incident approach were able to duplicate the results, other quantitative studies showed conflicting findings. In fact, of the fifteen reported studies using quantitative methods, the only constant was that the results conflicted with Herzberg's initial findings (Behling et al., 1968). Given this outcome, critics argued that "Herzberg's (1959, 1966) results appear to be method bound and conclusions appear to pivot on method variance rather than true content or scale variance" (as cited in Behling et al., 1968, p. 105).

Despite the controversy, Herzberg's theory of motivation is regarded as one of the most influential frameworks for studying job attitudes and has endured throughout the past 50 years. Bassett-Jones & Lloyd (2005) specifically sought to examine the durability of this theory for contemporary application. Through a quantitative methodology, the researchers surveyed 3200 participants to better understand the key drivers for satisfaction. The results supported Herzberg's Hygiene-Motivator Theory by suggesting that intrinsic factors play a stronger role in motivating employees than extrinsic factors (Bassett-Jones & Lloyd, 2005). The basic premise of Herzberg's theory, that motivators are more important as determinants of job satisfaction, continues to resonate in contemporary thought leaders, such as Daniel Pink's *Drive*, as well as current Human Resource Development practices, such as designing high performance work teams. As this research seeks to understand the lived experiences of Gen Xers in the U.S. workforce and how those experiences impact their job satisfaction, examining the intrinsic and extrinsic motivators for these participants will be included as part of the study design.

Job Satisfaction and Generations

Many scholars have researched the relationship between age and job satisfaction with most of those studies suggesting that job satisfaction increases with age (Wright & Hamilton, 1978). Early findings coming out of the Motivation to Work study found that employees have

positive morale at job entry, but then job satisfaction tends to decrease within the first years of employment hitting a low point for employees in their thirties (Herzberg et al., 1959). Job satisfaction then begins to climb with age, resulting in older workers having the highest level of job satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). One of the earliest and most comprehensive studies was the 1969-1970 Survey of Working Conditions, which examined job satisfaction by age and found evidence of differences in intrinsic and extrinsic motivators by age (Taylor & Thompson, 1976). A more contemporary study validated Herzberg's early findings that older employees tend to have higher satisfaction than younger employees (Clark et al., 2011).

The dilemma for empirical research that examines the potential link between job satisfaction and age is the inherent entanglement with other variables such as generational effects and/or life-cycle effects. For example, are the results attributed to a simple age effect such as a change in one's value system as they age? Or, do the differences occur because of a generational influence that suggests a cohort shares a common set of characteristics, values and/or beliefs? Finally, there may be a life-cycle effect influencing the results because employees who are further in their careers have greater responsibility and, thus, are more satisfied. These are the potential barriers for researchers who study age/job satisfaction and the same may hold true for cross sectional design studies that focus on generations and job satisfaction, as well.

Drawing from the early studies on job satisfaction and age, it would be reasonable to conclude that similar findings might occur for studies on job satisfaction and generation. Specifically, that the older generations (Traditionalists and Boomers) would have greater job satisfaction than Gen Xers and Millennials, who would have the lowest, job satisfaction. One might expect this type of finding even while not fully understanding it (age effect, generation or life cycle). Stereotypes for a particular generation might also influence expectations about the

findings for generations and job satisfaction. For example, given the generational characterization of Gen Xers as being non-traditional and not willing to sacrifice for their career, it might seem intuitive that they would have less job satisfaction in a traditional corporate work environment. Furthermore, drawing from Herzberg's theory of motivation (that it is the intrinsic factors that fuel motivation) would lead to the belief that older workers who have greater responsibility, enriched jobs, and meaningful work would have greater job satisfaction. This would suggest not only that Boomers might be more satisfied than Gen Xers, but also that Gen Xers, who are further in their careers, would have greater job satisfaction than Millennials. Finally, there are other scholars who argue that job satisfaction is a function of a congruence between generalized purpose and current job realities (Page & Wiseman, 1993). If so, then given the incongruence between the current realities for Gen Xers, as presented in this paper, and the desired purposes and goals of this cohort, we again would be led to believe that Gen Xers would have a low job satisfaction. Given all this conjecture about the relationship between job satisfaction and generational cohort, this literature review attempted to detail the existing empirical studies that examined this topic as a way of making sense of the complex and multifaceted dynamic between generations and job satisfaction.

Empirical studies of generational differences associated with varied work attitudes (commitment, job satisfaction, job involvement) have been limited with mixed findings (Kowske et al., 2010). More specifically, there are even fewer empirical studies examining the impact of generational differences on work specific domain, namely job satisfaction (Benson & Brown, 2011). A handful of studies assessed differences between the generational cohorts and their levels of job satisfaction with very contradictory findings. The inconsistent findings make it confusing for scholars and even more confusing for practitioners who are attempting to find

solutions for the workforce. Even for the studies that control for age effect, there are conflicting results as to which generational cohort is more satisfied. Given the sparse informing literature of generations and job satisfaction, how one can make sense of the seemingly conflicting results?

Table 5 highlights the relevant literature regarding generations and job satisfaction.

Table 5

Summary of current literature examining generations and job satisfaction.

Study	Generation Cohort	Findings	Study Design
Kowske, Rasch, & Wiley (2010)	Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials	Millennials were slightly more satisfied than Boomers or Gen Xers	Controlled for age
Cennamo & Gardner (2008)	Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials	No significant differences in job satisfaction between the three cohorts	Cross Sectional
Westerman & Yamamura (2007)	Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials	No significant differences in job satisfaction between the three cohorts	Cross Sectional
Benson & Brown (2011)	Baby Boomers and Generation X	Baby Boomers had higher levels of job satisfaction	Controlled for age
Apostolidis & Polifroni (2006)	Baby Boomers and Generation X	Differences in satisfaction levels between the two cohorts on intrinsic and extrinsic factors	Cross Sectional
Wilson, Squires, Widger, Cranley & Tourangeau (2008)	Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials	Baby Boomers were significantly more satisfied than Gen Xers or Millennials	Cross Sectional
Eaton (2008)	Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials	Small differences in facet measures of job satisfaction with Millennials having higher job satisfaction with promotion and operating procedures and Gen Xers have higher satisfaction with promotion	Cross Sectional

First, five out of the seven studies showed slight differences between the generations with Gen Xers being less satisfied than the other cohorts. The mixed results suggest that both Millennials and Boomers are more satisfied than Gen Xers, which might support the U Shaped Theory of job satisfaction/age that was previously discussed. Two of the studies that specifically controlled for the age effect found a difference in job satisfaction (Benson & Brown, 2011; Kowske et al., 2010) and as suggested, these time-lag studies may demonstrate more rigor as they control for some of the entanglement issues such as age or life cycle effect. As the process of a literature review is to synthesize and analyze relevant literature, what conclusions can be drawn about the nature of job satisfaction and generations? First, given the limited research in this area, it is not abundantly clear if differences in job satisfaction can be attributed to a generational effect. Part of the reason for this gap is due to the study design limitations that were discussed previously. Moreover, as a result of the limited understanding of the relationship between generations and job satisfaction, there is little support for practitioners who need to understand the effects of generational diversity in their work environments. Currently, the literature does not help address this question with respect to generations and job satisfaction.

Second, the literature review revealed a gap in research on generations and satisfaction. This gap is reflected in both quantitative studies and, most certainly, in constructivist studies that have the potential to enhance our understanding of the experiences and meaning for each particular cohort. The dynamics that are occurring in today's workforce are complex, multi-dimensional and require an understanding of multiple interacting parts. This is the nature of what I am seeking to understand through the proposed study. Conversely, the studies that have examined generations and job satisfaction have done so under a post-positivist lens, such that much of the essence of the phenomenon gets lost. More research under a constructivist lens will

help to provide depth of understanding of this cohort and the factors that are influencing them. This understanding may be used to help the reader obtain a more comprehensive view of Gen Xers at least in terms of their perspective of their experiences in the workforce and how those experiences impact their job satisfaction.

Summary

Despite the long history in the study of generations, there has been little understanding of generations in the context of knowledge and its application (Marias, 1967). The problem of the multiplicity of views that Mannheim alluded to in his essay *The Problem of Generations* still holds true today. Notwithstanding two thousand years of contributions to our historical understanding on the essence of generations from a biological and historical perspective, there continues to be inconsistencies and pluralistic views on the topic. As mentioned above, there is wide variability in the definitions of generation, generational grouping, as well as the characteristics of generational cohorts. This variability holds true in the context of job satisfaction research too, with debates reaching back to the 1930's with the Hawthorne Studies.

The literature review is an attempt to try to synthesize the relevant information on generations and job satisfaction and sort out the many views, inconsistencies and gaps. Despite both constructs being significantly studied for decades, there still appears to be a dearth of information concerning the relationship between generations and their perceptions of job satisfaction. As one scholar noted, “most of the arguments concerning generational differences have been the product of anecdotal evidence and not been based on rigorous empirical research” (Benson & Brown, 2011, p. 1847). Job satisfaction has been and continues to be an important and relevant construct for the twenty-first century. Not only do researchers and practitioners want to better understand job satisfaction for its relationship to organizational outcomes, but also

because of the connection of job satisfaction to greater life satisfaction. Understanding job satisfaction from the perspective of different generational cohorts is significant for today's workforce. The current study will help to fill the gap in the generations-job satisfaction research by focusing on one generational cohort, Gen Xers, and their lived experiences in the U.S. workforce and perceptions on their job satisfaction.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The purpose of defining a methodology is to detail a template of my thinking about how to work through the proposed study and come to know the phenomenon of interest (Gibson & Brown, 2009a). The study is a constructivist located study that seeks to extend our understanding of the nature and meaning of the lived experiences of one particular generational cohort, namely, Generation Xers, within the context of the twenty-first century U.S. workforce; and, how they perceive and describe related experiences, particularly that of being stuck between the generational cohorts immediately ‘above’ and below them, as impacting their job satisfaction. The overall, guiding research question was:

1. What do Gen Xers experience, as it relates to their professional lives of being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials, in the generationally diverse U.S. workforce?

A subordinate question was:

2. How do Gen Xers perceive the experience of being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials in the generationally diverse U.S. workforce as impacting their job satisfaction?

The methodology section describes in detail how the study was constructed and conducted (Roberts, 2010). Specifically, this chapter includes the methodological framework for both phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology. Next, the chapter provides information on the guiding process used for methods choices that details Van Manen’s (1990) research activities for conducting a hermeneutic phenomenology study. Participant selection, data collection, sites, data analysis, and write-up/dissemination methods will be fully detailed in alignment within the hermeneutic phenomenology. Finally, key issues of quality to include trustworthiness and authenticity criteria will be discussed.

Methodological Framework

The study was nested within a constructivist paradigm that believes "...realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific, dependent for their form and content on the persons who hold them" (Guba, 1990, p. 27). The paradox for myself who is conducting a constructivist study is that a naturalistic approach must emerge, develop and recognize context as opposed to being fully prescribed on the front end; yet the prescribed intent of this chapter is to detail the my thinking as to the methodology and methods to be so employed. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest: "...the design specifications of the conventional paradigm form a procrustean bed of such a nature as to make it impossible for the naturalist to lie in it-not only uncomfortably, but at all" (p. 225). Given this inherent paradox in constructivist research, how does one go about designing a constructivist inquiry? Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest ten elements that form the foundation for this chapter: (1) determining a focus for the inquiry; (2) determining fit of paradigm to focus; (3) determining the "fit" of the inquiry paradigm to the substantive theory (theoretical framework) selected to guide the inquiry; (4) determining where and from whom data will be collected; (5) determining successive phases of the inquiry; (6) determining instrumentation; (7) planning data collection and recording modes; (8) planning data analysis procedures; (9) planning the logistics; and, (10) planning for trustworthiness (pp. 226-247).

The aim of this study was to understand the lived experiences of Gen Xers of being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials in the generationally diverse U.S. workforce. This aim required an analysis of multiple constructs that have not yet been fully explored in the scholarly literature. Thus, I was searching to understand the phenomenon inductively. This gap suggested a bottom up approach to fully understand Gen Xers' perspectives and experiences. To begin the

process of delineating the design strategy for this study, it was necessary to begin with my own philosophical posture and relate it to and within the context of this study.

A paradigm creates the context in which the theoretical elements are situated. Guba defines a paradigm as “...a basic set of beliefs that guide action, whether of the everyday garden variety or action taken in connection with a disciplined inquiry” (Guba, 1990, p. 17). A paradigm is characterized by its ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (the relationship between the knower and the known), and methodology (method by which one acquires knowledge). For the purposes of this study, I borrowed from a constructivist paradigm as I was examining multiple perspectives from Generation X participants. The constructivist paradigm provided a perspective that supports research in complex environments where knowledge is essentially the outcome of human expression. This outcome was dynamic and contingent upon the worldviews, experiences, and perspectives of the participants. Thus, the inquiry aim of this study was a greater understanding of the lived experiences of Gen Xers who are stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials within the generationally diverse U.S. workforce. I am making a theoretical claim that a constructivist lens was the most appropriate paradigm to fully understand the phenomena central to this study.

An essential element of communicating my design strategy is to clearly articulate the alignment between the philosophical underpinnings and chosen methodology (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Phenomenology, which explores meanings and essence of human experiences, is frequently used for studies that seek to unearth understanding and meaning within the realm of human sciences (Lopez & Willis, 2004). As such—and given that the aim of this study was to understand the lived experiences of Gen Xers within the generationally diverse U.S. workforce and how they perceive those experiences impacting their job satisfaction—a methodology

grounded in the fundamental tenants of phenomenology seems most appropriate. However, there is more than one school of phenomenology. Understanding the similarities and differences between phenomenological schools is a necessary step to ensure that the appropriate methodology is selected. Through review of the literature, it appears that there are two primary philosophical schools within phenomenology (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Phenomenology as largely influenced by Husserl and with a focus on description, and Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology with a focus on interpretation is reviewed next.

Phenomenology

The purpose for a phenomenological research study is to understand the nature of meaning in one's everyday life (Manen, 1990). It is the study of lived experiences that seeks to get straight to the pure, unencumbered vision of what an experience essentially is (Lavery, 2008; Sanders, 1982). Phenomenology ask us to "...lay aside, as best we can, the prevailing understandings of those phenomena and revisit our immediate experience of them, possibilities for new meaning emerge for us or we witness at least an authentication and enhancement of former meaning" (Crotty, 1998, p. 78). It is the study of "...the life world—the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize or reflect on it" (Van Manen, 1997, p. 9).

Phenomenology is most often located within the constructivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Racher & Robinson, 2003; Wilding & Whiteford, 2005). Its philosophical foundations are predicated on an ontology that suggests the existence of multiple realities that are contextually bound. Its underpinnings recognize that

Understanding is more powerful than explanation for predication in the human sciences because it stands more fully in the human world of self-understandings, meanings, skills, and tradition. Prediction is possible only in limited ways for human beings who are self-

interpreting and subject to change by the very interpretations offered by research. (as cited in Racher & Robinson, 2003, p. 475)

In summary, the paradigmatic location of this study within the constructivist paradigm limns well with the methodological tradition of phenomenology.

Drawing from the German philosophical tradition, phenomenology surfaced as a way to challenge the dominant views of the nature of truth (Dowling, 2007). Phenomenology offered the promise of a new science that focused on the realm of being through personal experience as opposed to a Cartesian science that focused on the truth apart from the individual (Lavery, 2008). Although early influences came from Franz Brentano, who utilized the phrase of descriptive phenomenology, it was Edmund Husserl who is often considered to be the father of phenomenology (Dowling, 2007; Lavery, 2008). Husserl focused on creating a philosophy that recognized experience as a central feature of life (Ehrich, 1999). The essence of what Husserl was trying to achieve was to develop essential/universal knowledge that could be realized (Jennings, 1986).

It has been suggested that Husserl's phenomenological goals were heavily weighted towards epistemology as he regarded experiences as the fundamental source of all knowledge (Racher & Robinson, 2003). His goal was to study things in an unbiased way, free of subjective interpretations and as they appeared. Therefore, the ultimate goal was to describe the phenomenon as it presented itself. Within the Husserlian tradition, four key concepts have been delineated as the *characteristics of phenomenology* (Giorgi, 1997). They are consciousness, experience, phenomenon, and intentionality.

Consciousness refers to the totality of lived experiences (Giorgi, 1997) and can best be understood as "...co-constituted dialogue between a person and the world" (Lavery, 2008, p. 23). It is suggested that consciousness is ever present as it cannot be avoided. Consciousness

presents objects to us as a function of intuition (Giorgi, 1997). As the researcher, therefore, it is advisable to acknowledge the presence of consciousness rather than ignore it as it may be significantly relevant as one considers the role that consciousness plays in the meaning of objects in the abstract sense. In comparison, *experience* is the intuition of the more tangible objects such as an office or table. For Husserl, therefore, experience refers to a narrower range of presences that carry reality with them (Giorgi, 1997). The distinction between intuition and experience is an important one for phenomenological research as most human science research will tend to focus on intangible, abstract phenomena that are crucial to our understanding. *Phenomenon*, in phenomenology, refers to the presence of something as it is experienced (Giorgi, 1997). The focus is always the meaning of the object as it is given based on the experiences of the participants. In phenomenological studies of lived experiences, the experiences, as defined by all the participants, are taken into account as given regardless of how marginal that experience may be.

Intentionality, as a fundamental concept for Husserl, allows for greater understanding and clarifying conscious acts. Intentionality refers to "...the correlation between the object and the appearance of the object to consciousness" (Sanders, 1982, p. 354). Essentially, Husserl characterized intentionality as consciousness, which allowed one to describe the whole stream of consciousness or total meaning of an object (Sanders, 1982). Thus, this total meaning is always greater than the perspective or experiences of one participant. In this study, the participants lived experiences, as Gen Xers, as bestowed with meaning, is intentionality as intended by Husserlian phenomenology.

From a methods perspective, phenomenology is seen as an inductive, descriptive inquiry approach and strategy. Its goal is to produce accurate descriptions of the phenomenon being

studied. The phenomenological method is a way of putting in place standards as a way of limiting the researcher's own biases. As such, phenomenological research encompasses three essential elements of method: reduction, description and search for essences (Giorgi, 1997). A fundamental strategy for Husserl was phenomenological *reduction* which allows one to be led back to the source of original meaning (Giorgi, 1997). Through the process of reduction the researcher is able to examine the phenomenon in a fresh and open way (Moustakas, 1994). Central to the process of reduction is bracketing (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl devised the notion of reduction or bracketing which requires the researcher to "...hold subjective private perspectives and theoretical constructs in abeyance and allow the essence of the phenomena to emerge" (Racher & Robinson, 2003, p. 471). As a researcher, bracketing refers to a researcher examining their own biases and prejudices surrounding the topic with the intent of setting those aside to allow for a more robust process of knowing.

Description is the process of giving "linguistic expression" to the intentional objects of consciousness from within the perspective of phenomenological reduction (Giorgi, 1997, p. 6). For phenomenologist, to describe is to articulate the given as it is. Thus, if a participant indicates that they feel overwhelmed, phenomenology does not try to interpret the meaning of what the participant said. Rather, it simply describes what the participant said with the intent that the full expression from multiple participants will give rich description to provide an intrinsic account of a particular phenomenon.

The final strategy of method of a phenomenological research study is to search for the *essence* of the phenomenon. Husserl suggested that to achieve this objective imaginative variation must be used. Imaginative variation has been suggested as a technique to remove one theme, then another theme, and so to determine in the process which themes are essential and

which are not essential (Giorgi, 1997; Moustakas, 1994). It is a way to freely change aspects of the phenomenon to see the impact. Essentially, this is a way to awaken the possibilities so what is essential for consciousness becomes evident through the process of imaginative variation (Giorgi, 1997).

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

The historical roots of hermeneutics was in context of biblical studies and Greek literature as a way of reading and interpreting texts (Crotty, 1998). Within the scholarly tradition, the philosophical underpinnings for hermeneutic phenomenology were established through the works of Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Similar to phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with the human lived experiences (Lavery, 2008) as well as providing a scientific approach that is non-reductionistic and non-linear and holistic (Dahlberg, 1995). At the core, hermeneutic phenomenology is about knowing, learning and understanding the meaning of one's everyday experiences. "Consciousness is not separate from the world but is a formation of historically lived experiences" (as cited in Lavery, 2008, p. 24). Heidegger's thoughts included emphasis on understanding one's history or how one becomes situated in the world. It is through the social, historical and cultural contexts that one develops an understanding of the world. Essentially, for Heidegger, nothing could be fully understood without acknowledgement of one's background (Lavery, 2008). Kohn (1995) described one's background as "an indissoluble unity between a person and the world" (p. 831). Another characteristic of hermeneutic phenomenology is the concept of co-constitutionality. The person and their world co-constitute each other, which provide a way of understanding and creating meanings of the phenomena we study. Other philosophers describe hermeneutic phenomenology as a "...philosophy of the personal, the individual, which we pursue against the background of an

understanding of the evasive character of the logos of other, the whole, the communal or the social” (Van Manen, 1997, p. 7)

Interpretation, within the realm of understanding, is a critical part of the hermeneutic phenomenological process. Heidegger stressed that “...every encounter involves an interpretation influenced by an individual’s background or historicity” (Lavery, 2008, p. 24). It is seen as both descriptive and interpretative (Van Manen, 1997). A hermeneutic phenomenologist seeks to provide descriptions that capture the essence of lived experiences and then provide interpretation of those experiences through rich textural descriptions.

A core concept for hermeneutic phenomenology is the hermeneutic circle where the interpretative process is fully realized. Heidegger proposed this concept to illustrate reciprocity and so recognize that our knowledge is a function of historical experiences and being in the world (Koch, 1995). The hermeneutic circle is essentially a metaphor as a circular process occurs and one moves from the whole to parts and then back again to the whole. A person brings his/her social and historical knowledge into a research study. That knowledge is defined as “pre-understanding” and cannot be eliminated only corrected or modified (Koch, 1995). This pre-understanding is a necessary condition to move through the hermeneutic circle and thus, bring an understanding of the whole, which provides a coherent and meaningful knowledge of the phenomenon being studied. As new knowledge is acquired, that knowledge is brought into the hermeneutic circle, which suggests that understanding and interpretation continue to evolve (Debesay, Nåden, & Slettebø, 2008). This circularity is seen as a positive process that allows the individual to not necessarily understand better but rather “understand in...different ways” (as cited in Debesay et al., 2008, p. 58).

Gadamer advanced the work of Heidegger with greater focus on the concepts of horizons of meaning and universality. For Gadamer, understanding and interpretation are bound together and represent a continuously evolving process (Lavery, 2008). Gadamer developed the concept of horizon, which he defined as a range of vision that included everything that can be seen from someone's vantage point. Interpretation, therefore, is a fusion of horizons where a dialectic interaction occurs between the participants and the text (Lavery, 2008). Central to this concept is the recognition that we all have "historically-effected consciousness," as our horizon is determined by our historically-determined situatedness (Crotty, 1998). This concept has particular relevance for a study on generations in the workforce as generational theory informs us that generational location may be a key aspect of existential determination of knowledge (Mannheim, 1952).

For Gadamer, the concept of universality recognizes that the persons who express themselves and the persons who understand (such as the participant and the researcher) are connected by a common human consciousness (Dowling, 2007). Given that the participant and researcher are explicitly linked, Gadamer rejected the notion of bracketing. A person cannot leave or set aside one's prejudices but rather must integrate those pre-judgments into their interpretive process that permeates all activities (Lavery, 2008). Table 6 provides a summary of the ontological, epistemological and methodological differences between phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology.

Table 6

Differences between Phenomenology and Hermeneutic Phenomenology

DESCRIPTION	PHENOMENOLOGY	HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY
Philosophy/ Metaphysics	Epistemologically focused on experiences as the fundamental source of all knowledge (Racher & Robinson, 2003).	Ontologically focused on the nature of reality and <i>being</i> in the world (Racher & Robinson, 2003).
Paradigmatic Location	Although phenomenology originated in reaction to the scientific view, it is heavily influenced by post positivism in its focus on objectivity and neutrality of the researcher (Ehrich, 1999).	Constructivist underpinnings as the process is emergent, the participants are self-interpreting/co-creating and context is relevant (Lavery, 2003).
Methodology	Data analysis involves working towards meaning through a structured process that ultimately provides an integrated statement about the lived experiences (Giorgi, 1997).	Data analysis involves co-construction of the data as both researcher and participant engage in the hermeneutic circle of understanding through description and co-construction (Debesay, Naden, & Slettebo, 2007).
Inquiry Aim	The aim of phenomenological (Husserlian) research is a rigorous, unbiased description of things as they appear or are given through one's consciousness (Ehrich, 2005; Dowling, 2007; Lavery, 2003)	The aim of hermeneutic phenomenology is to go beyond description of lived experiences by providing interpretation that seeks to reveal meaning (Ehrich, 2005; Lopez & Willis, 2004; Van Manen, 1997)
Inquirer Posture	Bracketing one's biases as a way to ensure that the researcher can engage the experience without preconceived notions (Dowling, 2007; Lavery, 2003; Moustakas, 1994).	Biases and pre-understanding from the researcher are embedded in and essential to the interpretive process (Lavery, 2003).

(continued)

Table 6. Continued

DESCRIPTION	PHENOMENOLOGY	HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY
Quality Criteria of Trustworthiness	Bracketing is one method that is central to issues of rigor and can facilitate evidence of reliability and validity (Lavery, 2003).	The iterative process of interpretation and ongoing discussions between the participant and researcher regarding the data help to demonstrate issues of trustworthiness (Lavery, 2003).
Context	Universal essences or experiences that can be abstracted from the lived experiences without consideration to context (Lopez & Willis, 2004)	Experiences can only be known by understanding the social, political and historical context as humans are inextricably linked to their context (Lopez & Willis, 2003)

Given the above description and explanation, hermeneutic phenomenology was selected as the primary methodology for this study for several reasons. First, the study required that unique consideration be given to a participant’s social and historical context, underscoring that generational location matters. Hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to capture historical reference in one’s lived experience by recognizing that it is impossible to separate a person from their past. Second, hermeneutic phenomenology does more than just describe a person’s lived experience. It seeks to understand the whole person existence as co-constituted by a person and their world—in the case of this study, as a Gen Xer stuck in a generationally diverse workforce. Moreover, this approach goes beyond mere description by providing interpretation of one’s experiences that Heidegger would suggest cannot be fully realized through description alone. Hermeneutic phenomenology’s emphasis on interpretation “...provides the richness to understand the human condition in the changing yet continuous social-historical reality in which we find ourselves” (Ray, 1994, p. 122). Finally, the methodological traditions and corresponding framework of

hermeneutic phenomenology provided methods that are congruent with the research objectives and the constructivist philosophy/paradigm in which it is situated. Through the dialectic, inductive process of this approach, themes cumulate where multiple voices can be heard and experiences can be interpreted. As such, hermeneutic phenomenology was well suited to this study as it allows for "...understanding unique individuals and their meanings and interactions with others and their environment" reflecting my intent to richly explore the focused lived experiences of Gen Xers in the generationally diverse U.S. workforce.

Guiding Process for the Methods Choices and Use in the Study

Within constructivist research, there are a number of approaches and processes that constructivist researchers have developed through the years to guide me throughout their journey. For this study, I assessed various approaches and then chose an approach that ensured alignment to the purpose and goals sought for this particular study. A summary of three approaches to constructivist research is highlighted below.

The first is the approach to phenomenological research guided by Moustakas (1994), which recommends a series of methods and procedures to provide an organized and systematic approach to one's study. The approach is constituted by the following seven steps:

1. Discovering a topic and question rooted in autobiographical meanings and values, as well as involving social meanings and significance;
2. Conducting a comprehensive review of the professional and research literature;
3. Constructing a set of criteria to locate appropriate co-researchers;
4. Providing co-researchers with instructions on the nature and purpose of the investigation, and developing an agreement that includes obtaining informed consent, insuring

confidentiality, and delineating the responsibilities of the primary researcher and research participant, consistent with ethical principles of research;

5. Developing a set of questions or topics to guide the interview process;
6. Conducting and recording a lengthy person-to-person interview that focuses on bracketed topic and question. A follow-up interview may also be needed;
7. Organizing and analyzing the data to facilitate development of individual and textural and structural descriptions, a composite textural description and a synthesis of textural and structural meanings and essences (Moustakas, 1994, p. 104).

In a second approach Giorgi (1997) suggests five steps that are considered necessary of the scientific phenomenological method. These steps are: (1) collection of verbal data; (2) reading of the data; (3) breaking of the data into some kind of parts; (4) organization and expression of the data from a disciplinary perspective; and (5) synthesis or summary of the data for purposes of communication to the scholarly community (Giorgi, 1997, p. 9).

And finally, a third approach is offered by Van Manen (1997) who introduced a phenomenological process of reflection and analysis which can be used as a guide for conducting phenomenological research. As previously noted, this was not intended to be used in a linear, mechanistic manner as that would be counter-intuitive to the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology. Rather, this approach allows the research to experience "...the dynamic interplay of the six research activities" reviewed below (Van Manen, 1997, p. 30):

1. Turning to the nature of lived experience. As a researcher, this activity is predicated on a commitment to dedicating oneself to the inquiry. It is about understanding that this is a study about real people's lived experiences in social, political and historical context (Van Manen, 1997). As the primary researcher for the study proposed, this activity required that I contemplate

my own experiences, biases, and pre-understandings as they pertain to Gen Xers in the U.S. workforce and weave my personal understandings into this reflection.

2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it. Inherent within the hermeneutic phenomenological approach is an understanding that the researcher investigates experiences as they are lived to collect data from the participants. For this study, I identified understanding the lived experiences of Gen Xers in the U.S. workforce as they navigate between the Baby Boomers and Millennials as well as understanding how those experiences impacted their job satisfaction. Thus, the focus was on Gen Xers' experiences and I, as the researcher, worked towards orienting myself on this topic to fully capture the essence of those experiences.

3. Reflecting on the essential themes that characterize the phenomenon. The aim of hermeneutical phenomenological reflection is to "...grasp the essential meaning of something" through a process of reflection, clarifying and identifying the structure of meaning of one's lived experiences (Van Manen, 1997, p. 77). Development of the themes is a critical component to this research approach as it provides interpretation and a structuring of the experiences (Van Manen, 1997). This process was incorporated into this study to fully capture the focused experiences of Gen Xers in the generationally diverse U.S. workforce.

4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting. At the core of hermeneutics is writing and interpreting historical texts such as the Bible and Greek literature (Crotty, 1998). For Van Manen (1997), human science research is a form of writing and text is the essential goal of the research process. Writing is a continuous and iterative process for hermeneutic phenomenological research. This approach was taken in this study as writing allows

for “...some aspect of our lived world, of our lived experience, reflectively understandable and intelligible” (Van Manen, 1997, p. 125).

5. Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon. As a research approach, Van Manen recognizes the task placed upon the researcher to maintain their focus and strength towards the topic being researched. The researcher’s focus allows for rich and deep descriptions and interpretations of the lived experiences to be as fully described as possible.

6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole, individually and together. As the research study unfolds, it is easy to get lost in the parts and lose sight of the overall design/goals. Van Manen cautions the researcher to balance the parts to the whole and be mindful of contextual givens throughout the entire study (Van Manen, 1997). Conceptually, this process is similar to the Hermeneutic Circle as referenced in Figure 3.

Notable among these three approaches are both similarities and differences important to informing the subsequent study implementation choices made. These contrasting characteristics are presented in Table 7 as shown below. Within the Table, similarities are visually depicted when text is inserted in the cell which aligns horizontally with another Constructivist research approach. As an example, in the first row, Moustakas research approach of discovering a topic aligns to Van Manen’s turning to a phenomenon. Given that the first cell is empty, under Giorgi, implies a difference.

Table 7

Similarities and Differences among Three Constructivist Research Approaches

Concrete Steps of the Phenomenological Method (Giorgi, 1997)	Methods for Phenomenological Research (Moustakas, 1994)	Six Necessary Research Activities of Hermeneutic Phenomenology Inquiry (Van Manen, 1990)
Collection of the data.	<p>Discovering a topic and question rooted in autobiographical meanings and values, as well as involving social meanings and significance.</p> <p>Conducting a comprehensive review of the professional and research literature.</p> <p>Constructing a set of criteria to locate appropriate co-researchers.</p> <p>Providing co-researchers with instructions on the nature and purpose of the investigation, and developing an agreement.</p> <p>Developing a set of questions or topics to guide the interview process.</p> <p>Conducting and recording a lengthy person-to-person interview that focuses on bracketed topic and question. A follow-up interview may also be needed.</p>	<p>Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world.</p> <p>Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it.</p>
Reading of the data.		<p>Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon.</p> <p>Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon.</p>
Breaking the data into some kind of parts.		

(continued)

Table 7. Continued

Concrete Steps of the Phenomenological Method (Giorgi, 1997)	Methods for Phenomenological Research (Moustakas, 1994)	Six Necessary Research Activities of Hermeneutic Phenomenology Inquiry (Van Manen, 1990)
Organization and expression of the data from a disciplinary perspective.	Organizing and analyzing the data to facilitate development of individual and textural and structural descriptions, a composite textural description and a synthesis of textural and structural meanings and essences.	Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting.
Synthesis or summary of the data for purposes of communication to the scholarly community.		Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.

Although there are clear similarities between the three approaches described above, Van Manen’s (1990) hermeneutic phenomenology best aligned with the study’s goal of understanding the lived experiences of Gen Xers being stuck in between the Baby Boomers and Millennials in the generationally diverse U.S. workforce, and consequent perceived impact on their job satisfaction. Fundamental to the framework and accompanying methods outlined by Van Manen, this approach facilitated rich description of the participant’s lived experiences, as ultimately Van Manen’s (1997) approach recognizes that the research participants are the central focus of phenomenology. Using both interpretative and descriptive hermeneutic phenomenology he places emphasis on the lived experiences and brings them to life through interpretation and rich description. This emphasis was a critical component for this study as fully understanding the targeted Gen Xers lived experiences and subsequent perceptions of impact on their job satisfaction was complex and multi-dimensional. Its final outcome, therefore, is to explicate the meaning of a human phenomenon that helps the readers understand the lived, constructed human experience.

Participant Selection

Purposeful sampling was used in this study. Within a constructivist approach, the use of purposeful sampling, as opposed to random or representative sampling, allows for a full scope of multiple, experienced realities to be constructed. Inherent within the notion of purposeful sampling is the idea that information and context guide the sampling strategy. Starting with some purpose in mind and then allowing the resulting qualitative data and understanding to guide my results in a continuous refocusing of the sample, and probing of the boundaries of the phenomenon being studied. Lincoln and Guba point out four characteristics that frame purposeful sampling:

1. Emergent sampling design, which suggests that it cannot be finalized in advance. The data will guide the researcher into decisions concerning sample selection and size.
2. Serial selection of sample units refers to a researcher selecting subsequent samples only after the previous sample has been taped and analyzed. Successor participants are chosen to extend information that has already been obtained.
3. Continuous adjustment or “focusing” of the sample is essential in an emergent design as more insights about the phenomenon may provide a new focus.
4. Selection to the point of redundancy, which refers to maximizing information where there is no new information being obtained (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 201).

Along with these characteristics cited above, the sampling strategy was augmented by snowball sampling which refers to a method that expands the sample through a process of asking participants to nominate people for the study who they think meet the selection criteria. The intent of this approach allows for the “...broadest range of information possible” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 233). This process is continued until saturation occurs, referring to the point

where no new data is being realized. At this point, therefore, there is not a preconceived idea of the sample size needed for this type of study. Rather, it will be considered sufficient when "...the amount of new information provided per unit of added resource expenditure has reached the point of diminishing returns" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 234).

Although participant's occupations and employers will vary, all of the participants who were selected met the following five separate criteria:

- All participants were part of the Generation X cohort as defined by individuals born between the years of 1965-1980 (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003).
- They were employed full-time, defined as 32 hours per week, in an internal capacity with the U.S. workforce.
- They "pre-qualified" for the study based on their responses to a series of questions that identify them having experiences with a generationally diverse workforce in their current work environments (see Appendix A).
- They were willing to fully participate with in-depth interviews (Moustakas, 1994).
- Participants agreed to member checking, which is a process for fully establishing trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

For each potential participant, I contacted them by phone or email in addition to providing them with an invitation to participate in the study (this invitation describes the study, as presented in Appendix B). They were also given a consent form, as approved by the Colorado State University Institutional Review Board (IRB), which was signed before the data collection process could begin. All participants' names were kept confidential throughout the study.

Data Collection

In constructivist situated studies, the human instrument is the source of data collection (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, if a researcher has poor listening skills or asks questions that lead to limit responses then the quality of the data may suffer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Moreover, it is an imperative that the researcher, as the human instrument, must be able to demonstrate trustworthiness as well as show an ability to be adaptable to an indeterminate situation (Lincoln & Guba, 2001). This notion will be further explored later in this section.

I conducted successive rounds of interviews using a semi structured format with open ended questions. The initial interviews were face-to-face and the subsequent interviews were conducted via phone. Moreover, interviews that followed the initial interview were more open in nature to allow for member checking from the participant's perspective to be fully heard and understood. The questions were created based on an in-depth review of the literature (see Appendix C). The questions were designed based on the fundamental principle that in phenomenological research, the researcher designs questions that open up and keep opening up responses to allow for all possibilities to be heard (Van Manen, 1997). In a constructivist research paradigm, the interview presents itself more like a conversation than a formal event (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). The goal is to provide an environment where the participants feels comfortable to express themselves freely and structure the dialogue as they need so that their views can be expressed and heard. The advantages of interviews of this kind are that large amounts of data can be obtained very quickly and that the researcher has the opportunity to fully understand the meanings and perceptions that people hold (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Concomitant disadvantages have to do more with the capability of the interviewer.

Sites

In the constructivist research paradigm, the researcher selects sites and participants based on their ability to provide insight into the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2009), as well as find a setting where the participant feels safe to fully express themselves without repercussion. The location for the interviews was mutually agreed upon by the researcher and participant.

Data Analysis

The goal of this section is to transform the data obtained through co-construction and interpretation that illuminates the essences of the phenomenon being studied. One key element that is critical within this process is that explication of the data must begin with the initial phases of data collection in efforts to support an emergent research design. Therefore, such inquiry is a continuous, ongoing process that involves immersion in the data, continual reflection and asking analytical questions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2010). A guiding principle in the analysis is openness to the data. Van Manen (1990) explains:

It may be less important to write a detailed methodological excursus of the study until after the actual study has been completed. A certain openness is required in human science research that allows for choosing directions and exploring techniques, procedures and sources that are not always foreseeable at the outset of a research project. (p. 162)

As such, the data collection-analysis followed a continuous cycle of data collection and analysis while maintaining openness to the hermeneutic process. The goal of this study was to more deeply understand the lived experiences of Gen Xers being stuck between the Baby Boomers and Millennials within the generationally diverse U.S. workforce as well as understand the perceived impact to their job satisfaction. The interviews provided a window of opportunity for participants to share their narratives with me. The participants were asked to describe their related experiences of being stuck between the Baby Boomers and Millennials, as well as provide insight into how they perceived this experience as impacting their job satisfaction. These

narratives were analyzed for themes that helped the reader to understand the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants. Figure 8 provides an image of the cyclical nature and necessary elements of the data analysis phase of the study.

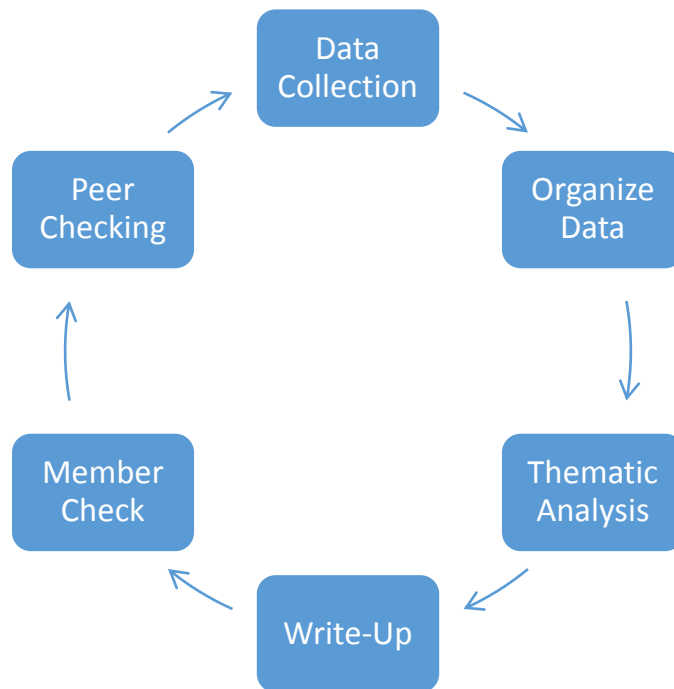


Figure 8: Van Manan's (1990) iterative process of data collection and analysis

Although Marshall and Rossman (2010) recognize that qualitative data analysis is not linear and can be extremely complex, they offer six phases to complete the process: (a) organizing the data; (b) generating categories, themes and patterns; (c) coding the data; (d) testing the emergent understandings; (e) searching for alternative explanations; and (f) writing the report (p. 152). The goal of their approach is to provide a process by which large amounts of data can be grouped so that I can begin to interpret and bring meaning to the words.

Hycner's (1999) process is another approach to understanding the data.

This process consists of the following five steps or phases:

1. Bracketing and phenomenological reduction.
2. Delineating units of meaning.

3. Clustering of units of meaning to form themes.
4. Summarizing each interview, validating it and where necessary modifying it.
5. Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary.

Similar to the approach taken by Marshall and Rossman, the five steps identified above are to help me make sense of very large amounts of data as well as provide a rigorous approach to ensure trustworthiness of the interpretations (Hycner, 1985). For the proposed study, the research analysis followed Van Manen's (1990) methods and steps outlined in Figure 8 above.

A critical component of both approaches above is thematic analysis, the process of analyzing data and forming relationships, which can take many different forms (Gibson & Brown, 2009b). For Van Manen (1990), a *theme* is defined as (1) the experience of focus, of meaning, of point (2) a simplification, (3) intransitive, and (4) the form of capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand (p.87). To construct themes, Van Manen recommends either taking a holistic approach, selective approach, or detailed approach (Van Manen, 1997). For this study, I utilized a detailed approach, which required that I examine the transcript texts multiple times and examine every single sentence to unearth what that sentence said about the phenomenon being studied. Furthermore, to augment the detailed approach, I determined if a theme was essential or incidental in nature. This process is a critical component to themeing as it underscores whether a theme is essential to understanding the true essence of the phenomenon being studied—in my case of Gen Xers experiences of being stuck between the Baby Boomers and Millennials, and resulting perceptions of impact on their job satisfaction. As mentioned above, once the themes were initially constructed, the process was iterative and dialectical,

which suggests a back and forth process between myself and participants to fully co-construct the meaning of the lived experiences being studied (see Figure 3).

As part of the analytic process, the themes were analyzed based on the hermeneutic spectrum, a concept developed by Lynham and Coates, 2014. As previously noted, the intention of a hermeneutic phenomenology research design is to understand the essence of the shared experiences of the participants, collectively. Given this collective understanding, the hermeneutic spectrum helps to fully describe the depth and breadth of the shared experience. It is represented by the breadth or range which is determined by the number of sub-themes (organizing themes as defined in Chapter Four) as well as depth (levels) of interpretations which is represented by the themes, sub-themes and sub-sub themes (global, organizing and basic themes as defined in Chapter Four). As fully described in Chapter Four, it is important to note that the hermeneutic spectrum is largely informed by the unique contexts of the participants as well as their socio-historical location. This will be further explored in Chapter Four along with detailed descriptions of the hermeneutic spectrum for each theme.

Saturation of Participants

Saturation is defined as a process that entails bringing “new participants continually into the study until the data set is complete, as indicated by data replication or redundancy. In other words, saturation is reached when I gathered data to the point of diminishing returns, when nothing new is being added (Bowen, 2008, p. 140). As part of the analytic process, I was continually evaluating the themes/categories that are being defined to identify the point at which completeness has occurred. Moreover, I was seeking the point where the categories are well established and no additional information is heard and thus, it signals an end the data collection process. The sample size recommendation from experts in constructivist inquiry varies

significantly with most scholars suggesting that sample size is largely a matter of judgment and experience in evaluating the quality of the data collected (Sandelowski, 1995). Other researchers suggest that at least five to six participants are recommended to reach saturation (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). For this study, a hermeneutic phenomenology one, the goal was to provide thick description as a result of the in-depth, multiple interviews that I conducted which resulted in information rich data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It was determined that saturation would be evaluated at the Global Theme level, the theme that represents the most level of abstraction. As such, I determined that the point where “no new information is forthcoming from newly sampled units” was following my sixth participant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 202).

Write Up and Dissemination

Writing about qualitative data cannot be separated from the analytical process. In fact, it is central to that process, for in the choice of particular words to summarize and reflect the complexity of the data, the researcher is engaging in the interpretive act, shape and form-meaning-to massive amounts of raw data. (Marshall & Rossman, 2010, p. 158)

As the quote above suggests, the task of writing up findings in a constructivist located research study is a critical component, as the researcher wants to be mindful of accurately characterizing the study findings. To achieve this objective, Marshall and Rossman (2010) suggest identifying the modality that the researcher will be using at the proposal stage. Some writing strategies, as identified by Creswell (2009) and that might be considered in this write up are:

- Use quotes and vary the length.
- Report the conversations in different languages.
- Present text information in different tabular forms such as matrices and comparison.
- Use the exact wording from participants to form the codes and themes.

- Mix quotations with the researcher’s interpretations.
- Use special formatting of the manuscript to call special attention to quotes from participants.
- Use the first person “I” or collective “we” in the narrative form.
- Use metaphors.
- Use the narrative approach.
- Describe how the narrative outcome will be compared with the general literature and/or theories.

In general, and for the purpose of this study, the findings were presented in a descriptive, narrative format that provides a “thick description” of the phenomenon being studied. Such description is necessary for transferability to the reader’s unique context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ensuring the Address of Key Issues of Quality

There are two inherent issues of quality within a constructivist located study that are necessary to establish. These include trustworthiness and authenticity. Each is expanded upon below.

Trustworthiness

Nested within our traditional paradigms, we design studies with the intent of ensuring reliability and validity. Does the study have rigor? Can we generalize the results? Is the researcher being objective? While these questions have merit for a quantitative, positivist/post-positivist paradigmatic approach, they are incongruent to our thinking within the constructivist paradigm. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that the trustworthiness of a research study is central to the issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability. Trustworthiness refers to the

methodological elements of a study such as how the data were collected and analyzed. For constructivist studies, trustworthiness ensures that the data analyzed are truthful and accurate (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Under a post-positivist/quantitative lens, researchers typically thought of issues of reliability and validity as measures of trustworthiness. Under a constructivist lens, and as a substitute for conventional thought around issues of reliability and validity, Lincoln and Guba offer credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability) and confirmability (objectivity) as their equivalents. Moreover, others reinforce this suggestion indicating "...trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability" (Seale, 1999, p. 266). This study establishes trustworthiness within each of these areas identified by Lincoln and Guba.

A constructivist researcher wants to ensure that his/her results are *credible*. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that the most crucial technique for establishing credibility is through member checks. Essentially, this can be an informal and formal gut check process for the researcher to make sure that he/she is capturing the full essence of the participant's voice. The researcher's analysis, categories, interpretations and final conclusion are reviewed with the participants to ensure that his/her reconstructions are adequate representations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this study, a member checking process was integrated for all participants interviewed. This process allowed the participants to verify the analysis and correct/help reconstruct any misinterpretations.

A second technique for ensuring credibility is prolonged engagement with the participants and the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this study, the goal of prolonged engagement was achieved through the iterative and ongoing interview and member checking process with the participants. The final criterion for credibility that was used for this study is

peer debriefing. Peer debriefing refers to the process of providing an external check with a disinterested party as this person(s) can provide input on the researcher's working hypothesis/es, design, concluded meanings, as well as provide emotional grounding . For this study, peer debriefing was conducted with my advisor as well as with fellow PhD students conducting constructivist studies in the same field.

For *transferability*, Lincoln and Guba (1985) are very clear that it is not the role of the constructivist researcher to provide a study that can be transferred to other contexts. Indeed, the nature of a constructivist study is that it is unique and bounded to the social phenomena being studied. A constructivist researcher's role is to provide a 'thick description' or richness of what is happening so a reader can draw their own conclusions on the possibility of transferability to their own unique situation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Chapter four provided thick description of the results from this study that helped to satisfy the transferability requirement of a Constructivist study.

Dependability is seen as an alternative view for reliability. For qualitative studies, of a constructivist nature, the way a researcher thinks about dependability is very different than the concept of reliability in a post-positivist/quantitative study. As opposed to striving for consistency (as is the goal in such a quantitative study) the constructivist researcher wants a rigorous process that is logical, traceable and documented (Schwandt, 2007). Audit trails are so detailed that they allow for verification of the researchers' steps taken through the study. To this end, I created an audit trail of the entire study from the initial acceptance of the design through to the end product. Research memos and journaling augmented the process to ensure rigor of the process. The salient actions of the audit trail included:

- Submitted and received IRB approval on June 25, 2013

- Conducted first participant interview on July 13, 2013
- Transcribed, unitized and themed first participant interview on July 20, 2013
- Conducted second participant interview on August 6, 2013
- Transcribed, unitized and themed second participant interview on August 15, 2013
- Revised participant interview questions on August 19, 2013
- Conducted third participant interview on August 28, 2013
- Transcribed, unitized and themed third participant interview on September 12, 2013
- Cross-themed initial three interviews on October 3, 2013
- Conducted fourth participant interview on October 17, 2013
- Transcribed, unitized and themed fourth participant interview on October 27, 2014
- Conducted fifth participant interview on November 3, 2014
- Transcribed, unitized and themed fifth participant interview on November 20, 2014
- Conducted sixth participant interview on December 4, 2014
- Transcribed, unitized and themed sixth participant interview on December 13, 2014
- Cross-themed analysis for all six participants
- Completed member checking process for all six participants in January/February 2014
- Integrated member checking themes into cross-theme analysis in February 2014

- Further analysis to develop Global, Organizing and Basic Themes in March 2014
- Peer Review Checking on April 7, 2014
- Submitted and received additional approval from IRB on May 19, 2014

Confirmability is another trustworthiness criterion that is used in constructivist research – as a way of checking the process of the inquiry. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend the audit trail as the primary method by which a researcher can establish confirmability. Through the process of keeping detailed accounts of how the data were collected, organized and analyzed, the reader has a clear picture into the thoughts of the researcher. As mentioned above, the audit trail was a primary approach to ensure both dependability and confirmability. Reflexive journaling was incorporated throughout the study as it provides “broad-ranging application” for all areas of establishing trustworthiness and can provide a foundation for the researcher as they evaluate and make decisions during the process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 327).

Authenticity

In 1989, Lincoln and Guba added another dimension to their philosophy on trustworthiness. It was suggested that a fifth criterion, authenticity, be added that reflected a demonstration of “...a range of different realities” (Seale, 1999, p. 469). As such, five states or criterion were established that are foundational to the concept of authenticity: fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity (Lincoln, 2005). *Fairness* represents the concept of balance suggesting that all participants’ views are represented in the text. *Educational authenticity* is defined as “...the increased awareness and appreciation of the constructions of other stakeholders” (Lincoln, 2005, p. 72). *Ontological authenticity* refers to a heightened awareness of one’s own assumptions and constructions (as researcher and participant). *Catalytic authenticity* is defined as “...a criterion

that is judged by the prompt to action generated by inquiry efforts” (Lincoln, 2005, p. 72).

Finally, the criterion of *tactical authenticity* is defined as “...the ability to take action, to engage the political arena on behalf of oneself or one’s referent stakeholder or participant group”

(Lincoln, 2005, p. 72). Table 8 describes how the authenticity criterion was satisfied.

Table 8

Description of Five Quality States of Being for Trustworthy Criterion of Authenticity

States of Being	Description	Criteria Satisfaction
Fairness	Balanced View	Process allowed all participants’ stories to be heard.
Ontological Authentication	Increased awareness of one’s own assumptions.	Participants had a greater awareness of their personal reality in the workforce as being stuck between Boomers and Millennials and the perceived impact on job satisfaction.
Educative Authentication	Increased understanding of expressed constructions	Participants had a greater understanding and appreciation of the constructions of the lived experiences of Gen Xers, who are stuck in the workforce.
Catalytic Authentication	Stimulate action generated by inquiry efforts	Call to action for employers to recognize generational diversity within their workforce and Gen Xers unique experiences.
Tactical Authentication	Empowering others to take action	Gen Xers, who are stuck, will feel empowered to change their unique circumstances to achieve more meaning and job satisfaction in the workforce.

Voice

Voice is a multilayered problem in constructivist located inquiries, as described by Lincoln and Guba (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Given the emergence of more constructivist research in the context of today, voice refers to something very different than in other types of studies. For a constructivist located inquiry, voice refers to the researcher as a *passionate participant* where the researcher and participant are co-creating a narrative. It is recognizing that the researcher is the instrument and thus, the researcher's voice is inescapable in the process. For this study, I detailed Gen Xers narratives while recognizing and bringing awareness, through the process of reflexivity, to the Self as a member of this generational cohort.

Ethics

Being a constructivist researcher requires being sensitive to the ethical considerations that are inherent in studies that require human participation. Some may argue that conducting this type of research depends on the interpersonal skills of the researcher and the ability to firmly establish trust with the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). Creswell (2009) identifies a number of ethical issues within key stages (data collection, data analysis and interpretation and writing and dissemination) of the research study that should be considered as part of the overall study design. As an example, one of the initial ethical considerations at the data collection stage is receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board. Table 9 highlights the relevant ethical considerations that need to be addressed in this constructivist located study within the three stages identified below:

Table 9.

Ethical Considerations within Key Stages of the Research for a Constructivist Located Study.

Data Collection	Data Analysis and Interpretation	Writing and Dissemination
<p>Informed consent forms were given to participants and signed off prior to collecting data. Informed consent forms were given to all participants within this study.</p>	<p>It is recommended that analyzed data be retained for 5-10 years so it will be the intent to keep all collected data, analysis and write up for this period of time.</p>	<p>Being cognizant to the language used in the study has ethical considerations. For example, using the term participants rather than subjects is appropriate for this type of design as it recognizes the inseparable nature of our experiences to being human.</p>
<p>Being respectful to site is not a consideration given that the site location will be mutually agreed upon by the participant and myself.</p>	<p>Ownership of the data is a key consideration for a research study. For this purpose, the ownership of the data will lie with me and my advisor with the intent to share the data with any involved participants.</p>	<p>Ensuring that the writing does not suppress, falsify or invent findings to meet a researcher's need. For this study, co-constructing the findings and integrating member checking ensured trustworthiness of the data.</p>
<p>Being cognizant to the benefits for the participants is an ethical consideration. It is an assumption of this study that through this process</p>	<p>Interpretation of the data is important to provide an accurate and ethical account of the information. Leveraging the strategies of trustworthiness and authenticity, as defined above, ensured that this ethical consideration is addressed.</p>	<p>Release of the study details to include detailed methodological traditions and procedures were given. Moreover, I confirmed that I will not duplicate previously published research with the same data, discussion and conclusions.</p>
<p>Confidentiality was achieved in this study by assigning participants an alias rather than using their real name.</p>		

(continued)

Table 9. Continued

Data Collection	Data Analysis and Interpretation	Writing and Dissemination
<p>of self-reflection, description, and interpretation, both the participants and myself benefitted--as they were able to contemplate their own unique workforce experiences as Gen Xers and related impact on their perceived job satisfaction.</p> <p>Researchers should anticipate the potential of intimate information being revealed during the interview. I worked to protect the privacy of the participants and conveyed this intention up front.</p>		

Conclusion

In closing, the goal of this hermeneutic phenomenology study was to provide thick description of the lived experiences of Gen Xers of being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials in the generationally diverse U.S. workforce, and their perceived impact of this experience on their job satisfaction. This ontological target was achieved through a constructively located hermeneutic process that allowed me to investigate Gen Xers experiences as they live them, reflect on those experiences, and then provide thick description that fully interprets, co-constructs and re-presents those experiences (Van Manen, 1997). Figure 9 provides a representation of the alignment between the philosophical underpinnings, selected methodological traditions, and accompanying methods used to inform and guide the conduct of

the study that has been fully defined within Chapter Three-Methodology and Methods. The chosen methods were designed in alignment with the overall hermeneutic philosophy as described in the data collection and data analysis sections. Furthermore, the study's quality was pursued through following the requirements of trustworthiness and authenticity proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Each element of trustworthiness and authenticity was satisfied as visually depicted in Figure 9 below.

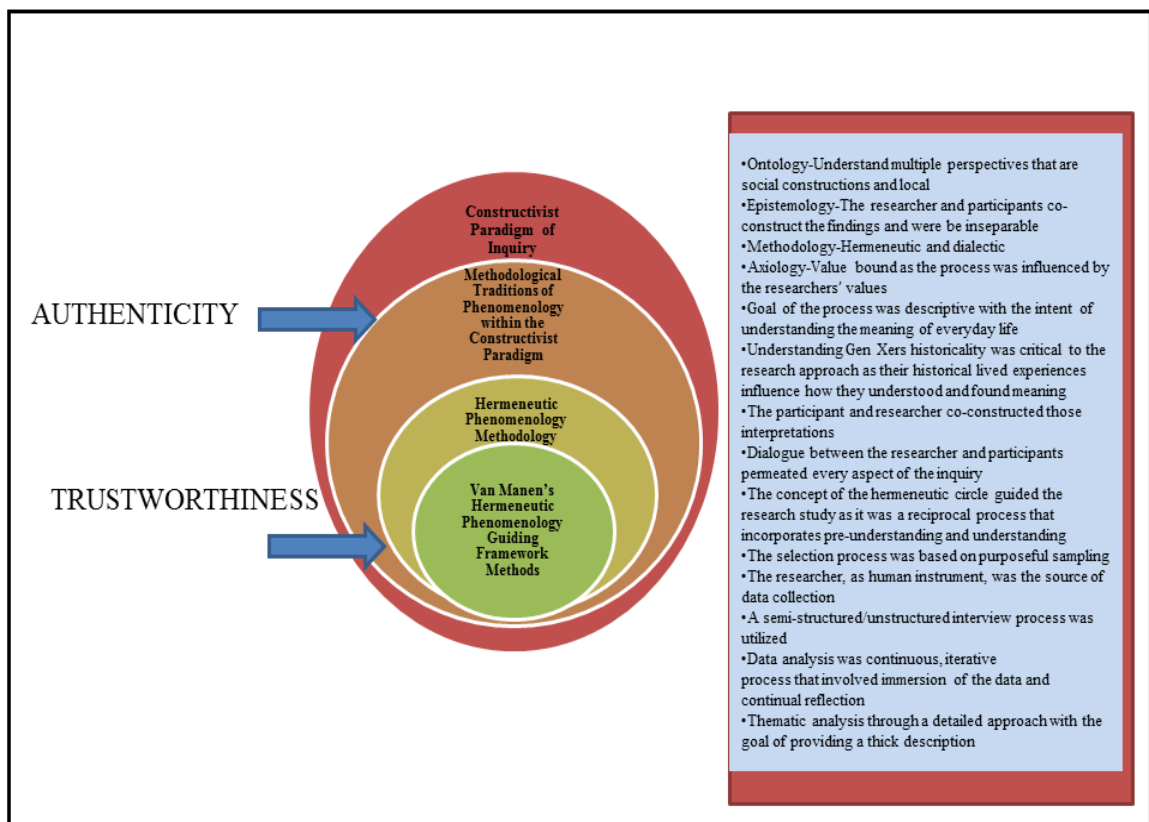


Figure 9. Philosophical-Methodological-Methods Alignment for Proposed Research Study

In Chapter Four, it was the intent to provide a report on the findings of the study. Specifically, Chapter Four is organized into three parts. Part I provides the participant profiles. Part II fully describes the lived experiences of each participant's individual, shared and co-

constructed constructions. Finally, Part III concludes the chapter and provides insight into Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FOUR: REPORT ON FINDINGS

The intent of this study was to understand the lived experience of Generation Xers in the context of the workforce as being stuck between the Baby Boomers and Millennials, and, to thereby gain a better understanding of how they perceive those experiences affecting their job satisfaction. Thus, the study was driven by the following research questions:

1. What do Gen Xers experience, as it relates to their professional lives of being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials, in the generationally diverse U.S. workforce?
2. How do Generation Xers perceive the experience of being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials in the generationally diverse U.S. workforce as impacting their job satisfaction?

To answer these questions, a hermeneutic phenomenology approach was utilized that allowed me to fully capture the participants' experiences of the phenomena under study. Twelve themes were constructed utilizing a dialectic process, meaning an iterative process between the participants and myself (Van Manen, 1990). Following each semi structured interview, the interviews were transcribed. The transcribed interview was then read several times with the intent of identifying units of data. The outcome of this process was a set of unitized cards for each interview that would be used for analysis of the data. Drawing from a constant comparison method, the unitized cards were analyzed and grouped into categories. This process encouraged thoughtful analysis of the data that ultimately led to descriptive themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Over a period of six months, six interviews were conducted resulting in within case analysis of all six interviews and subsequently, a between case analysis was completed. During that time, I moved from data collection to data analysis, which allowed me to follow an inductive driven

process of data analysis. As part of my quality criteria, I employed member checking with all six participants.

Drawing from van Manen's thematic analysis and hermeneutic phenomenological method, themes were developed that represented "the structures of experience" for the study participants (Manen, 1990, p. 79). Additionally, Moustakas' (2004) suggestion "... to determine what experience means for the persons who have had the experiences and, are able to provide a comprehensive description of it ..." (p. 13) was considered as part of the data analysis process. I found this process especially meaningful when I asked my participants what does the experience of being stuck mean for them as the aim of the study was not only to describe the experiences of the Generation X participants, but to fully understand the meaning of their lived experiences.

Thematic analysis provided a starting point, a portal by which I was able to begin to fully explore the participants' depth of lived experiences. Recognizing the significance of the thematic analytic process (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002) as well as understanding the daunting task of trying to make sense of voluminous amounts of data (Attride-Stirling, 2001), I chose to incorporate thematic network analysis to augment my process. Where thematic analysis seeks to "unearth the themes salient in a text at different levels, thematic networks analysis aims to facilitate the structuring and depiction of these themes" (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 387). Thematic network analysis shares common features with hermeneutic analysis, but adds a way to visually see the organizing principals used in the analysis of one's data (Attride-Stirling, 2001). This visual representation of themes is depicted on three levels: global themes, organizing themes, and basic themes. The three classes of themes are described as follows:

- **Global Themes:** Each global theme provides the core of a thematic network. They represent the superordinate themes that encompass the overarching categories from the data as a whole. Additionally, they are macro themes that summarize and make sense of clusters of lower-order themes abstracted from and supported by the data.
- **Organizing Themes:** These are middle-order themes that serve to enhance the meaning and significance of a broader, global theme. They also serve as a unifier of the main ideas proposed by several basic themes, and help to dissect the main assumptions underlying a broader, global theme.
- **Basic Themes:** This is considered the lowest order theme that represents characteristics of the data; on their own they say very little about the overall interview/text as a whole. In order for basic themes to make sense, they need to be read within the context of the organizing and global themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 389).

This chapter provides the 12 global themes that were co-constructed with the six Generation Xers who participated in this study. These themes were developed to address the overarching research questions for this study. The 12 global themes include: *1: “Stuck in the middle” is experienced and expressed differently by Gen Xers; 2: Gen Xers have anxiety about their professional future; 3: There are challenges unique to Gen Xers; 4: Gen Xers have perceptions about themselves and their work role; 5: There are generational similarities and differences; 6: Unique work culture impacts generational issues; 7: There may be economic influences on their career; 8: Historical context shapes who Gen Xers are as adults; 9: Baby Boomer influences contribute to job dissatisfaction; 10: Extrinsic motivators; 11: Intrinsic motivators; 12: Job satisfaction or dissatisfaction can carry over to life.*

All 12 global themes include organizing themes and 9 out of the 12 themes contain basic themes. Those global themes which contain basic themes are: 1: “*Stuck in the middle*” is experienced and expressed differently by Gen Xers; 2: Gen Xers have anxiety about their professional future; 3: There are challenges unique to Gen Xers; 4: Gen Xers have perceptions about themselves and their work role; 5: There are generational similarities and differences; 8: Historical context shapes who Gen Xers are as adults; 10: Extrinsic motivators 11: Intrinsic motivators; 12: Job satisfaction or dissatisfaction can carry over to life. Table 10 presents the 12 global, organizing, and basic themes. Figure 10 presents the global themes using a Mind map format.

Table 10

The 12 global themes and corresponding organizing and basic themes to describe the lived experiences of Gen Xers as being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials in the generationally diverse U.S. workforce and perceived impact on their job satisfaction

Global Themes	Corresponding Organizing Themes	Corresponding Basic Themes
1: “ <i>Stuck in the middle</i> ” is experienced and expressed differently by Gen Xers	1.1: Gen Xers are stuck in their careers 1.2: Gen Xers are being ignored 1.3: Gen Xers being stuck in the middle is pervasive	1.1.1: Baby Boomers blocking Gen Xers career options 1.1.2: Gen Xers are being bypassed by Millennials 1.1.3: Gen Xers are stuck due to limited and obsolete skill set 1.3.1: Gen Xers awareness is high 1.3.2: Millennials are unaware 1.3.3: Baby Boomers are too close to retirement to care

(continued)

Table 10. Continued

Global Themes	Corresponding Organizing Themes	Corresponding Basic Themes
2: Gen Xers have anxiety about their professional future	1.4: Ways to cope with being stuck	1.4.1: Waiting for Boomers to retire 1.4.2: Recognizing that change is slow
	1.5: Being in the middle is a positive	1.5.1: Boomers aren't blocking opportunities 1.5.2: Gen Xers can embrace positive traits of Boomers and Millennials 1.5.3: Working with other generations is rewarding 1.5.4: Gen Xers don't have concerns about being bypassed
	1.6: Gen Xers don't perceive that there is a generational factor	2.1.1: Millennials taking Gen Xers jobs 2.1.2: Having their jobs outsourced 2.2.1: Not having challenging work 2.2.2: Not having opportunities
3: There are challenges unique to Gen Xers	2.2: Being professionally stuck in their career	
	2.3: Not being able to keep up	
	2.4: Not having meaningful work	
	3.1: Lack of organizational commitment 3.2: Anticipated changes in government entitlements 3.3: Struggles of dual career families	3.3.1: Being a working mom impacts your career 3.3.2: Different realities for families with a stay at home spouse
	3.4: Limited ability to influence the workplace	

(continued)

Table 10. Continued

Global Themes	Corresponding Organizing Themes	Corresponding Basic Themes
4: Gen Xers have perceptions about themselves and their work role	3.5: Navigating through workplace diversity	3.5.1: Boomers haven't experienced as much workplace diversity 3.5.2: Gen Xers had to figure out diversity issues on their own 3.5.3: Diversity is all Millennials have known 3.5.4: Baby Boomers still hold gender biases
	4.1: Gen Xers live in both worlds	4.1.1: Adopts best of each generation
	4.2: Gen Xers need a dynamic career strategy	4.2.1: Focused career search is at professional level 4.2.2: Tries to stay relevant and flexible
	4.3: Gen Xers have a defined leadership style	4.3.1: Necessity of teams 4.3.2: Fosters employee development
	4.4: Gen Xers are influenced by life stage factors	4.4.1: Impacts career decisions 4.4.2: Economic factors are more relevant than life stage
5: There are generational similarities and differences	5. 1: Positive traits for Baby Boomers	5.1.1: Affecting social change 5.1.2: Influential 5.1.3: Loyal 5.1.4: Knowledgeable
	5.2: Negative traits for Baby Boomers	5.2.1: Resistant to change 5.2.2: Poor quality work 5.2.3: Limited productivity 5.2.4: Too traditional 5.2.5: Self-absorbed
	5.3: Positive traits that are shared by Boomers/Gen Xers	5.3.1: Work ethic

(continued)

Table 10. Continued

Global Themes	Corresponding Organizing Themes	Corresponding Basic Themes
	5.4: Negative traits that are shared by both Boomers/Gen Xers	5.4.1: Workaholics 5.4.2: Unrealistic expectations 5.4.3: Materialistic
	5.5: Positive traits for Gen Xers	5.5.1: Well educated 5.5.2: Autonomous 5.5.3: Collaborative
	5.6: Negative traits for Gen Xers	5.6.1: Resentful 5.6.2: Increased divorce rate 5.6.3: Helicopter parenting
	5.7: Positive traits that are shared by both Gen Xers and Millennials.	5.7.1: Adaptable 5.7.2: Technologically savvy
	5.8: Positive traits for Millennials	5.8.1: Fearless 5.8.2: Life balance 5.8.3: Not materialistic
	5.9: Negative traits for Millennials	5.9.1: Needy 5.9.2: Entitled 5.9.3: Lack of social skills 5.9.4: Lacks sound judgment
	5.10: Positive traits that are shared by Baby Boomers, Gen Xers and Millennials	5.10.1: Innovative
6: Unique work culture impacts generational issues	6.1: Performance based culture minimizes generational impact 6.2: Talent management strategies focus on Millennials	

(continued)

Table 10. Continued

Global Themes	Corresponding Organizing Themes	Corresponding Basic Themes
7: There may be economic influences on their career	6.3: Positive workplace culture reinforces Gen Xers satisfaction 6.4: Culture reinforces hiring and accommodating Baby Boomers 7.1: The economy hasn't been a factor to their career success 7.2: The economy has been a factor to their limited career success	
8: Historical context shapes who Gen Xers are as adults	8.1: There are collective historical events in the minds of Gen Xers 8.2: Gen Xers aren't aware of historical events 8.3: There are parental influences from our upbringing 8.4: Childhood experiences have shaped them as an adult	8.1.1: AIDS 8.1.2: Berlin Wall 8.1.3: The Challenger Disaster 8.1.4: Assassination attempt on Reagan 8.1.5: Economic hardships in the 1970's 8.3.1: Parents provided a positive upbringing 8.3.2: Father influenced career choices 8.3.3: Parents can't understand their world 8.4.1: Experiencing death 8.4.2: Feeling like an only child 8.4.3: Moved around a lot influenced world view 8.4.4: Family struggles provided a positive impact 8.4.5: Painful lessons

(continued)

Table 10. Continued

Global Themes	Corresponding Organizing Themes	Corresponding Basic Themes
9: Baby Boomer influences contribute to job dissatisfaction	9.1: Baby Boomers imposed value system 9.2: Feeling equalized with Baby Boomers 9.3: Baby Boomers dominance in the workplace 9.4: Hand holding Baby Boomers	8.4.6: Tough economic conditions for family
10: Extrinsic motivators	10.1: Status 10.2: Money 10.3: Job security 10.4: Supervision 10.5: Relationships with peers	
11: Intrinsic motivators	11.1: Meaningful work 11.2: Challenging work 11.3: Having autonomy 11.4: Advancement and growth 11.5: Achievement 11.6: Recognition	11.2.1: Unchallenging work can be dissatisfying 11.3.1: Not having autonomy can be dissatisfying 11.4.1: Not having a career path can be dissatisfying
12: Job satisfaction or dissatisfaction can carry over to life	12. 1: Negative events at work impact their well-being 12. 2: Life balance leads to life satisfaction	

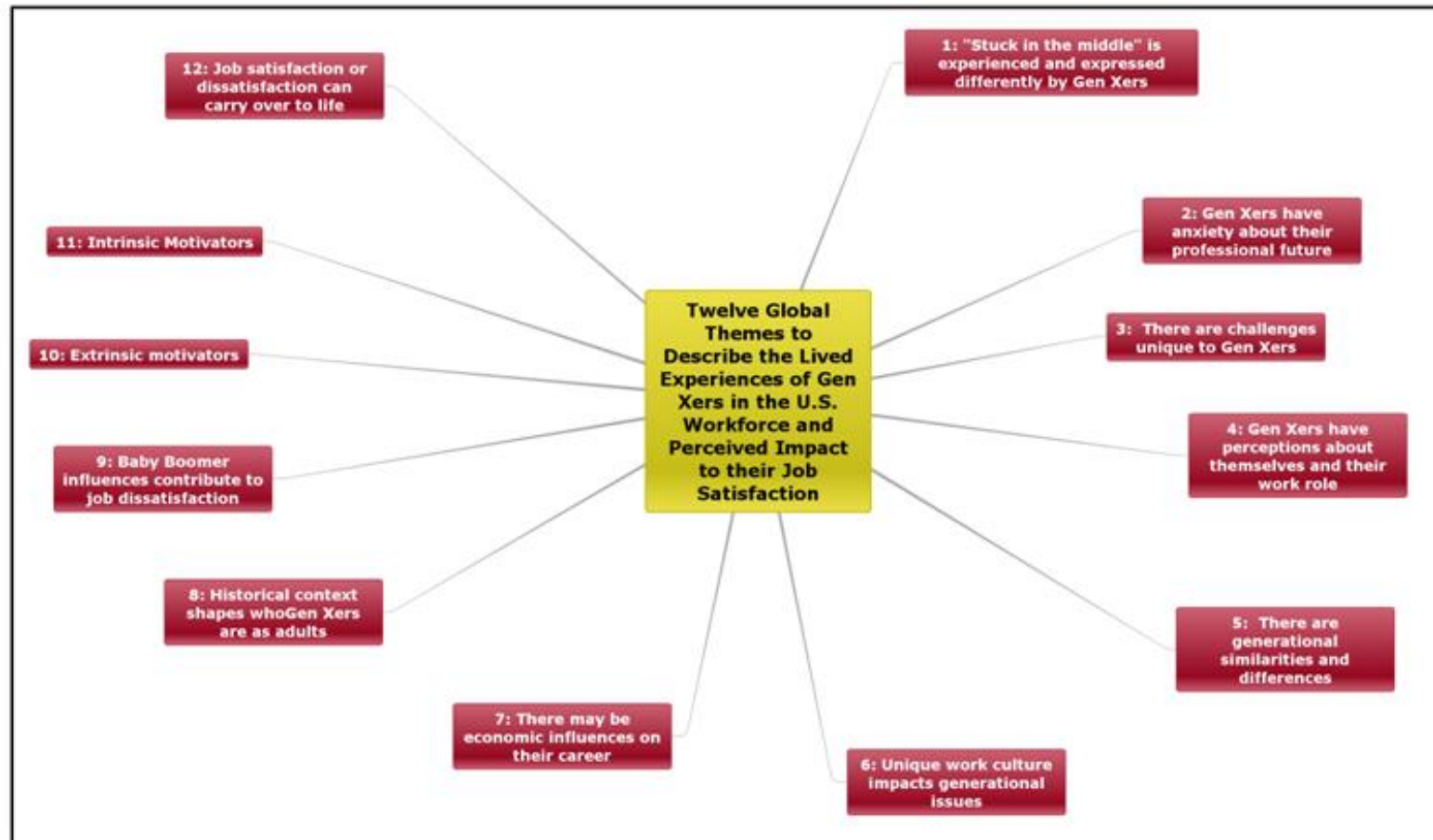


Figure 10. A visual representation of the 12 global themes for the lived experiences of Generation X participants as being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials in the generationally diverse U.S. workforce and perceived impact to their job satisfaction

The thematic analysis is to richly represent (through description) the essential lived experiences of Gen Xers in the workplace. The themes, or categories as they are often referred to, are abstractions of the data and seek to capture many unitized examples from the participants (Merriam, 1998). As such, the themes should not be considered a full representation of the essence of the lived experience as they cannot do justice to the entirety or fullness of the life of a phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990). To fully make sense of the data and to provide thick description of the participants' lived experiences, the analysis included varying dimensions of depth and breadth that takes the reader from a participant's concrete experiences to abstraction concerning the overall themes. This full understanding of depth and breadth of a particular theme constitutes the hermeneutic spectrum (Lynham & Coates, 2014). The level of analysis is one dimension used to fully understand and describe the essence of Gen Xers' lived experiences in the workplace as well as inform the hermeneutic spectrum. Level of analysis, as described by Merriam (1998), provides a systematic way of analyzing the depth of data and aides in the interpretation of a core theme (p. 178). As previously described, a thematic network analysis provides a way of visually organizing and presenting the data. Within the level of analysis, global themes, organizing themes, and basic themes essentially represent depth of descriptive construction and interpretation. Global themes are the first level of analysis. Organizing themes represent the second level of analysis. Finally, basic themes represent the third level of analysis. Figure 11 provides a visual example of level of analysis. Of the 12 global themes identified in this study, nine are comprised of these three levels. The global themes with three levels would be considered to have more depth/thickness of construction. Three global themes were comprised of two levels--global and organizing themes--which suggest these particular themes did not have as much depth/thickness of construction. In this study, there were no *only global* themes.

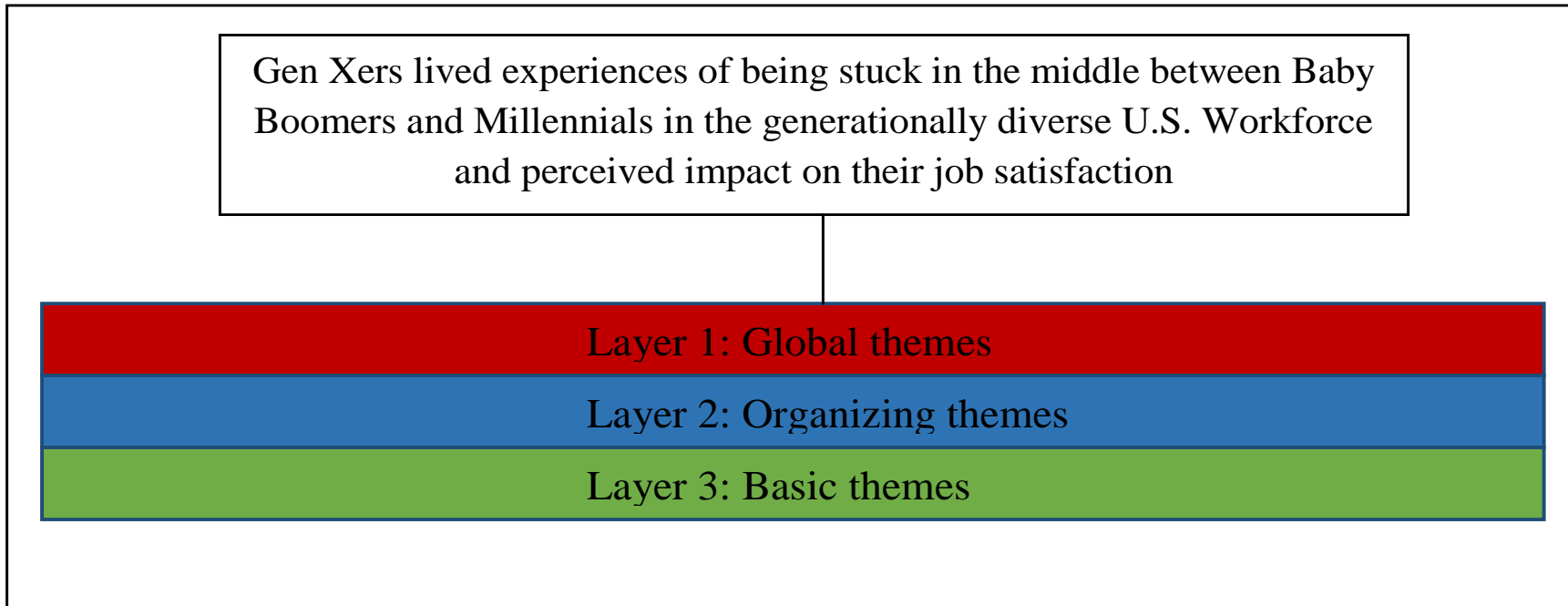


Figure 11. Representation of level/layer of analysis (Depth) for Gen Xers lived experiences

Hermeneutic spectrum, the analysis which results from a participant's continuous engagement in the hermeneutic process, is a term defined by Lynham and Coates (2014). It is essentially the outcome of the hermeneutic circle process (as cited in Coates, 2014). The concept of hermeneutic spectrum resulted from Tabitha Coates' study and should be considered a new construct in the area of constructivist inquiry. It is being further defined and described in a co-authored piece by Lynham and Coates (in progress).

As described in Chapter Three, the hermeneutic circle is a cyclical process that occurs where a participant moves from the whole to parts and then back again to the whole. A person brings his/her social and historical knowledge into a research study, which allows movement through the circle and ultimately leads to greater understanding of the phenomenon under study. This process allows for greater depth of understanding and meaning of the participant's individual and shared constructions. The hermeneutic spectrum provides a "spectrum that illuminates the depth, range, and specificity of the individual, shared and co-constructed findings that create the essence of a complex phenomenon" (Coates, 2014, p. 116). The hermeneutic spectrum is considered the range of meaning for each theme (Lynham & Coates, 2014) which informs the analysis, descriptive construction and interpretation of each global theme. The layers/levels (depth) and breadth/range (spread) must be analyzed together to fully understand the hermeneutic spectrum (Lynham & Coates, 2014).

The hermeneutic spectrum suggests an analysis and description range of narrow, moderate, and broad. The assessment of hermeneutic spectrum is based on the interpretation from myself, as the researcher, and inputs from the participants' constructions. For this study, I determined that a global theme had a narrow hermeneutic spectrum when individual constructions and descriptions varied less and as such, the lived experiences were more similar

than dissimilar for that particular theme. A moderate hermeneutic spectrum has some degree of breadth of construction and descriptions suggesting more varied shared experiences with two or more levels of analysis. A broad range signified quite highly varied individual construction and descriptions, suggesting a looser spread of experience and ways of knowing for a particular theme with three levels of analysis. The hermeneutic spectrum, in its full analysis, is comprised of the layers/depth as well as the spread/breadth of description and construction of the lived experience under study. For this particular study, the global themes ranged from a narrow, moderate to broad, hermeneutic spread, with a corresponding depth of description ranging from one to three levels of analysis. See Figures 12, 13 and 14 for visual representation.

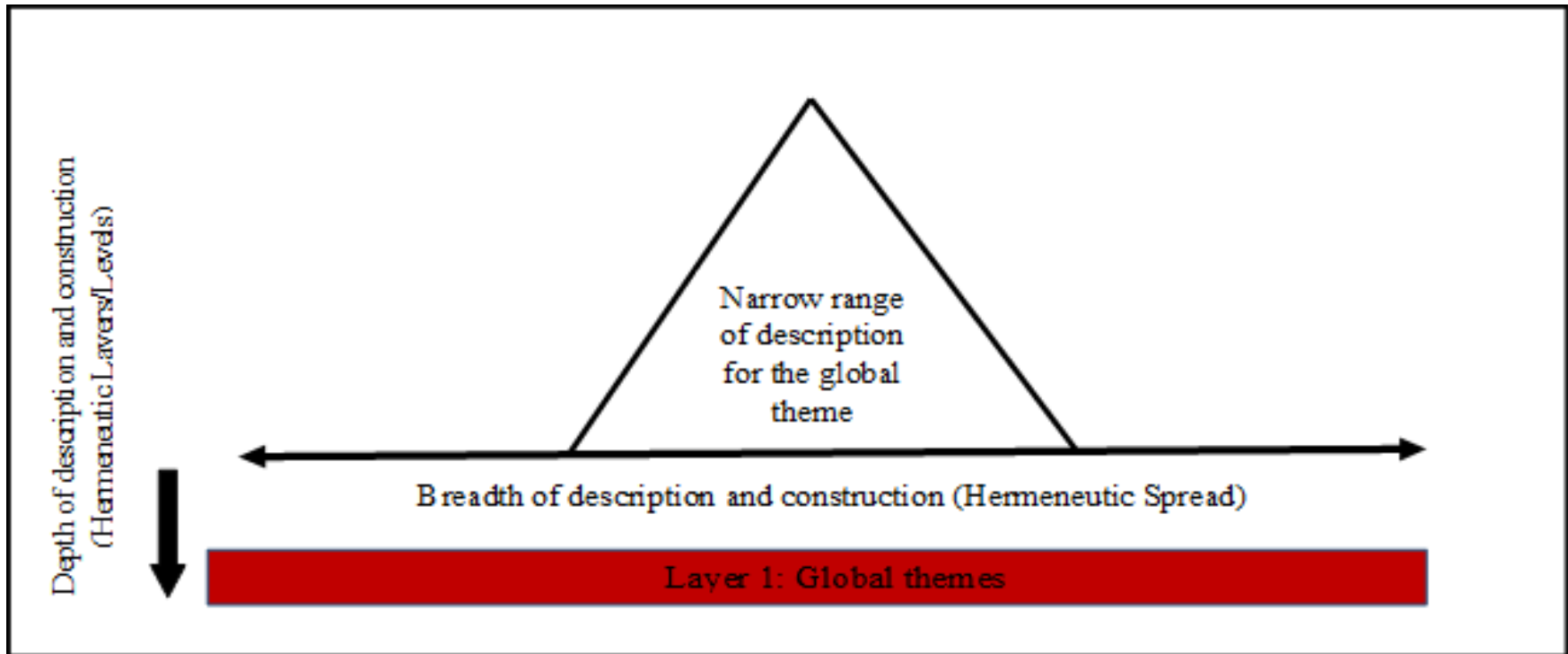


Figure 12. Hermeneutic Spectrum with a Narrow Range/Spread and Shallow Depth of Description and Construction

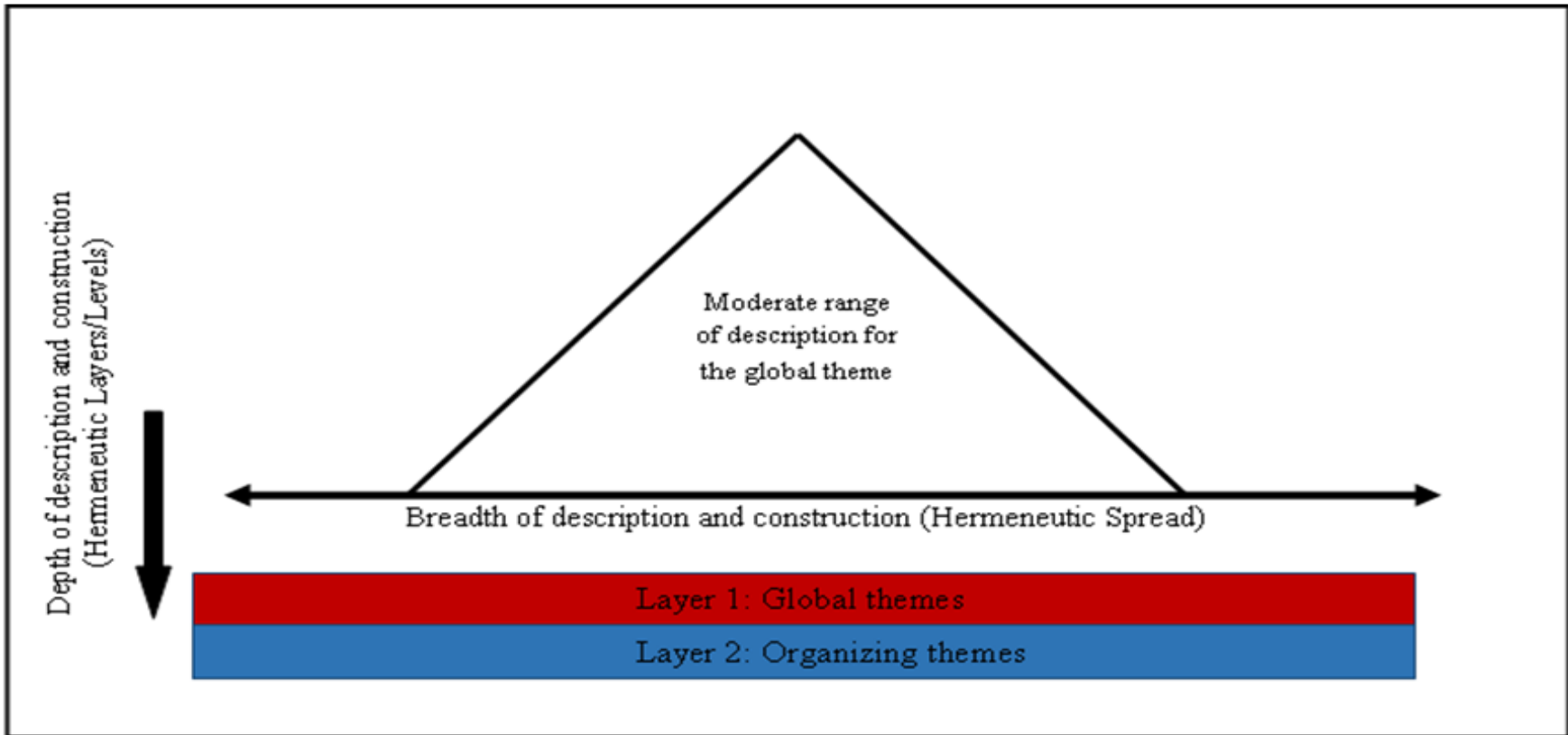


Figure 13. Hermeneutic Spectrum with a Moderate Range/Spread and Mid-Depth of Description and Construction

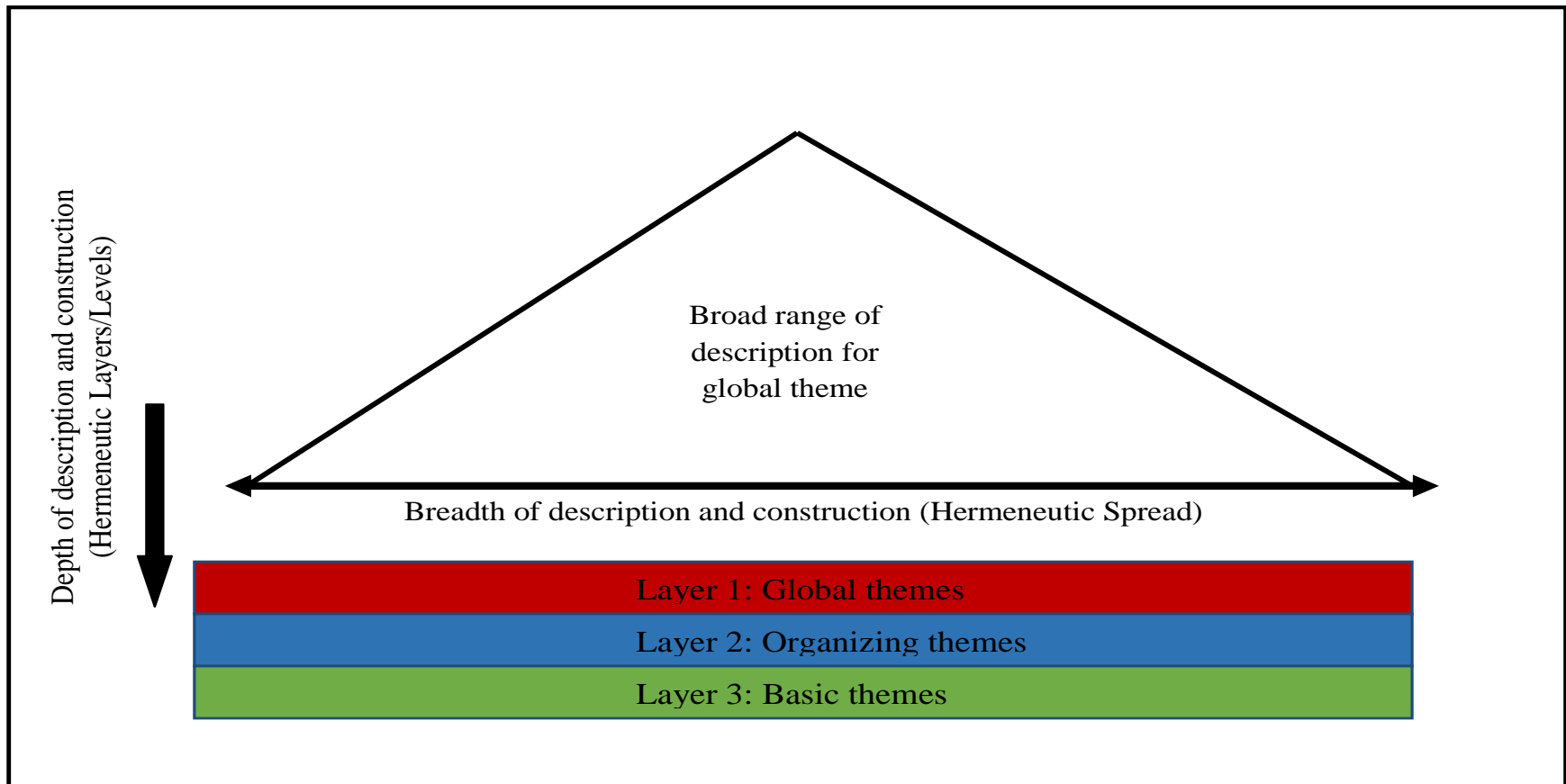


Figure 14. Hermeneutic Spectrum with a Broad Range/Spread and Deep Depth of Description and Construction

The chapter is organized into three parts. Part I will provide participant profiles that help to fully describe each participant's socio-historical position as it relates to the topic. Part II fully describes the lived experiences of each participant's individual, shared, and co-created constructions. As part of the trustworthy consideration for this study, thick description is used to fully capture the essence of those experiences. Thick description is depicted by drawing from quotes by the participants, my input, and supporting literature. Each global, organizing, and basic theme is described to provide deep understanding of these lived experiences. In each, the stories that were told of the participants' experiences will be given rich and thick textual descriptions so that the reader may gain a sense of the depth of their collective experiences. Finally, each global theme will be summarized by examining its hermeneutic spectrum (depth/thickness and spread/range of descriptive construction) spectrum and key points from the participants and supporting literature. Part III concludes the chapter by providing a summary of Chapter Four and giving insight into the discussion for Chapter Five.

Part I: Generation X Participant Profiles

Given the complexities of our world and certainly of the human condition, how we come to obtain knowledge and how we approach getting to know the vast unknown is a "central epistemological question, not only of formal academic inquiry but of life" (Lincoln, 2005, p. 223). When we seek to unearth the deep understanding of one's lived experiences, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach provides a means to begin that inquiry. Where the participants' begin their journey, from a socio-historical context, allows insight into the constructions that reveal their worldviews, which ultimately may influence their beliefs and behaviors as adults. Acknowledging Gadamer's notion of historically-effected consciousness (Gadamer, 2004), the participant profiles provide insight into their unique context and history.

Using the selection criteria noted in Chapter Three, purposeful and snowball sampling was utilized to secure participants for the study. Following each interview, the participant was asked to give me names of potential participants who may have interest in the study and fit the selection criteria. This process continued until data saturation occurred. Saturation was fully realized as an outcome of understanding the hermeneutic spectrum (Lynham & Coates, 2014, in progress). As an example, each theme was evaluated for spread as well as depth or thickness of descriptive construction. As each participant moved through the hermeneutic circle, the themes were evaluated for the spread and depth to the point where no more variation was apparent. Saturation occurred following the sixth participant and each participant met the criteria previously described in Chapter Three. Each participant was interviewed twice, once for the initial interview and then again for member checking. All of participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity. As such, the participants were identified as Catherine, Paul, Michelle, Edward, Elisa, and John. The following profiles are provided to give insight into their unique contexts.

Catherine

Catherine was born in 1977. She described her upbringing as one where they moved around a lot and related those experiences as a positive as it “played well in terms of my spatial and societal awareness and it was really important in terms of becoming adaptable in new situations” (IP1, 2013, p. 4). During our conversation, she discussed the impact of moving from a large city on the West coast to a very small town across the country and what a culture shock that was for her. Specifically, she remembers the outbreak of AIDS and how surprised she was by the negative reaction from the people in her small town. She attributed that reaction to her

perception of how “ignorance plays a huge role in the inability to sympathize with others” (IP1, 2013, p. 5).

Another formative experience was seeing her father earn his master’s degree and how that accomplishment made a positive impact on her family. She was able to recognize, even at a young age, that his degree opened doors, but still required that he work hard to work his way up the career ladder. Catherine modeled her father’s educational choices by continuing her education and eventually received her master’s degree. As an adult, she has held seven full-time jobs in various states including Illinois and Colorado. At the time of this interview, she worked for a government agency in Northern Colorado. This job was considered a temporary position and she has been actively looking for employment that more closely aligns with her master’s degree in Human Resources Development (HRD).

Despite Catherine’s advanced education and 13 years in the workforce, she has had difficulty advancing in her career and this has been a source of frustration for her. She expresses her fear and frustration as:

Because I’ve been lumped in with this group of Baby Boomers at an administrative level, for my entire career, [I’m concerned] that no one else is going to give me the chance to do something more and I will always be seen as administrative. [I see this lack of advancement as a result of] people that wouldn’t leave or because of that fairness factor that wouldn’t allow me to be given a higher level job than who were previously my peers, but are older than me with more work experience. So, that’s fear number one. (IP1, 2013, p. 13)

Through a series of successive jobs in her twenties and early thirties, Catherine has been relegated to administrative roles that makes her resentful as she knows she is “capable of doing so much more and yet, [employers] won’t let me do it full-time, for even a pittance of salary” (IP1, 2013, p. 22). In one of her most recent jobs at a large university, she was a finalist for a more senior position. Although there were four openings (and six applicants), Catherine was not

offered the promotion. She described this experience as a defining moment in her career and one that produced a tremendous amount of dissatisfaction in her job.

During our interview, she expressed fear of being “equalized” with Baby Boomers suggesting “that it wouldn’t be fair if I were moved up, as opposed to one of those peers with all those years of experience” (IP1, 2013, p. 8), despite the fact that she has more education than the Boomers in senior organizational roles. Boomers, for Catherine, did influence her perception of being stuck as they were still holding roles within the company that she coveted and yet was unable to move into. Her vision of her future was aligned with much of what Gen Xers were told in the media and popular management literature. Specifically, the notion that Baby Boomers would be retiring and opportunities would be plentiful for Gen Xers. Given that her expectations have not met her reality, Catherine has experienced dissatisfaction and frustration with her career progression:

Well, 13 years later, they still haven’t left. They’re now saying again, it’s another five to 10 years before they actually retire. That’s what persuaded me to go to grad school. (IP1, 2013, p. 14)

The interview with Catherine was tremendously inspiring for me. She was a person who clearly thought deeply about generational issues and had very interesting perspectives. Additionally, she was the youngest participant and offered a unique perspective about the influence of Millennials on younger Gen Xers. She expressed fear that she “may be completely bypassed by the Millennials, by the time Baby Boomers actually leave” (IP1, 2013, p. 14). Catherine sits on the cusp of the Millennial/Generation X boundary and thus may have more reason to feel concern over Millennials than the older Generation X participants. As expressed by another participant, who is 10 years older than Catherine, “you can’t take away 15-20 years of experience. I mean the Millennials don’t have that” (IP2, 2013, p. 22). Her

perceived threat of the Millennials may be more apparent given that she is saddled next to that generation. This concept known as the Generation Jones effect, originally mentioned in Chapter Two, will be further explored in Chapter Five.

Paul

Paul was born in 1970 in the northern part of the United States. Paul described his upbringing as one where he lived in a small town with a blue collar family. His father was a dispatcher for an electrical company and his mother was a homemaker. Although he had two older brothers, he considered himself almost as an only child because they were so much older than him. A formative childhood experience for him was losing three grandparents in one year. The deaths of his grandparents occurred around the same time as the Challenger disaster so they were his first memorable experiences with separation and death.

Paul was the first person in his family to receive a college degree. He went directly on to graduate school and received a Master's in Labor and Industrial Relations from a large research university in the Northeast. He has worked in the U.S. workforce for 19 years primarily in various human resources roles. Currently, he works as an HR advisor for a large oil and gas company with a client base that includes employees from all generations. He described his current organization as operating as a "bi-modal workforce" as they "have lots of Baby Boomers and lots of young people but not a lot of mid-career people" (IP2, 2013, p. 6). Paul brought a unique perspective to the conversation about Gen Xers and generational issues because not only is he a Gen Xer, but he also is in the position of navigating and mediating through these generational issues in his HR role. He described himself as an intermediary as he navigates between Millennials coming in with lofty demands and needs, and Baby Boomers who currently

hold many of the leadership roles within his organization. In Paul's current HR role, he recognized that there are potential blockers to Gen Xers advancement:

Yes I mean there's a lot of blockers right, so at the vice president director level, there's just not a lot of movement because they're still working and I don't see it changing a whole lot. Our leaders are not that old per se. (IP2, 2013, p. 15)

But, Paul also recognized the organizational commitment to their Millennial population as a whole:

Yes and so I think it's been challenging for Baby Boomers to, so much energy to keep the Millennials engaged and happy. And they, it's really hard for them [Baby Boomers] because they're used to the pat on the back which is all they need. But there's a perception that the Millennials need so much more, they need flexibility, they need promotions, they need technology, they need to save the world, it's just so much energy. (IP2, 2013, p. 17)

Although Paul recognizes the organizational impact of the Baby Boomers and Millennials, in terms of feeling stuck and/or stuck as described in this study, Paul did not perceive this reality as a negative for himself:

So, I've always felt very good about it, you know, and I also am still kind of waiting for all this Baby Boomer attrition to fall out then maybe there would be advancement opportunities for a Gen Xer like myself, maybe a higher position in a different company. But how it's affected my career, I don't know. I feel pretty good about my career. I don't have any regrets or can't really point to any negative effects. Yes, I mean if it's truly 80 million [Millennials] to 49 million [Gen Xers], to me, that's great opportunity. (IP2, 2013, p. 15)

Although Paul was optimistic about his future and options, irrespective of the presence of Boomers in desired roles or Millennials on his heels, he did express frustration due to influences from Baby Boomers within his organization. His perception of being stuck pertains to dissatisfaction due to influences from the Baby Boomers who hold the senior leadership positions in his company. He noted:

So, I've never felt stuck, but I definitely have looked to Baby Boomers and felt dissatisfaction in that, I think many of the Gen Xers are sort of mid-manager level; you don't have a ton of say in really large strategy decisions, right? (IP2, 2013, p. 23)

Paul continued reflecting on the Boomers within his organization suggesting that many Boomers do not share his value system. Specifically, Paul was referring to this notion of working a traditional schedule and not being flexible for dual career families. Expressing frustration, he related a recent experience at his organization where a Baby Boomer executive suggested that the leadership team started walking around at 5:00 to see who was still present and working, suggesting this might be a true measure of an employee's productivity. For Boomers, Paul suggested, the notion of "face time" or the traditional way work is structured is a badge of honor, but for Paul, his belief is that the Boomers "are white males who have somebody at home to take care of all their stuff and that model of work is slowly changing" (IP2, 2013, p. 24).

Paul, like so many other Gen Xers, is in a mid-career stage with significant life stage factors to consider. Coming from a dual career family with two young sons, Paul struggles with the busy nature of his life and the intention of trying to find work-life balance. He reflected:

It's all work life balance. So this is definitely a Gen X attitude: [what] I think is I am 43 years old, I've got what 10 or 15 more years to work, do I want to just kind of coast it through, or do I want to push for the next level (IP2, 2013, p. 31)

He acknowledged that he is in a stage of life right now where factors outside of work are of greater priority, a stage that is influencing his motivation to move up in his career.

Michelle

Michelle was born in 1968 in Colorado. She has lived in the area her entire life. She has been working full-time for 21 years and currently works for a large consulting company. Her role, within this organization, is as a training lead and she has worked in this capacity for the consulting company for the past seven years. Michelle holds a master's degree and envisions going on for a Ph.D.

Michelle characterized her childhood as being normal. Although she described her parents as traditionalist, her mom has been the primary breadwinner for most of their 51-year marriage. She and her sister were latchkey kids, a term coined for the Gen Xers as so many of their parents worked and the kids came home from school to an empty household. She credits growing up in an environment where her mother was not always home as promoting independence. She believes this value system that she learned as a child still holds true to today:

We still continue to provide for ourselves. We don't rely in anybody else, except maybe our parents a little bit sometimes. I think that there is also a sense of work ethic with both of them and continuing to work. Again, my mom is working at 70 so my sister and I will probably ... I can't even think about retiring at 55. (IP3, 2013, p. 3)

Michelle remembered as a child the differences between her parents where her mother was “studious, logical thinker and my sister and I probably get that from her” (IP3, 2013, p. 4) where as her father was more about fun and games. Michelle describes her parents as providing “a really good balance” (IP3, 2013, p.4).

Michelle described her current work environment as being a very generationally diverse workforce. Although she acknowledged generational differences, her perception was that the culture of her current work environment negates any generational factor that may impinge on her career progression. She described her culture as “up or out” meaning that she has three to five years to get promoted or she will need to leave the organization. The company's focus is highly performance oriented, so the decisions to promote are based on an employee's performance success rather than any generational factor. Michelle does not find this approach to her work intimidating: “I am not concerned at all. There are opportunities at my work and it doesn't matter what your age is. It's how you perform” (IP3, 2013, 13).

Although Michelle did not express concerns about career advancement given the performance-based culture, she did express fear about being able to keep up:

Keeping up with technology. If I ever left this company, I know that there are a gazillion Millennials that I think could probably take my job for a less amount of pay and can probably do [it] quicker and faster, like [a] robotic. (IP3, 2013, p. 10)

Overwhelmingly, however, Michelle offered a positive glimpse into her experiences with both Baby Boomers and Millennials. She perceived it as enhancing and offering wisdom to work with different generations. Her relationships with coworkers was a significant driver to her job satisfaction and so having the opportunity to work with generationally diverse team members was considered challenging and rewarding for her. She described herself as being very satisfied at her job, which she largely attributed to her relationships with her coworkers and being able to show an output from her efforts:

I was working with people I knew and respected and trusted. I was helping with process design, so figuring out how to get from point A to point B but having that support system behind you. I'm trying to get down to why I like that. I think it again is with the people. I also think there was a tangible end where OD sometimes is hard because it's not tangible. (IP3, 2013, p. 17)

Edward

Edward was born in 1971 in a large Midwest City. He has lived his entire life in that city and now lives with his wife and five children. He said that he has worked “all his adult life,” which amounted to 24 years (IP4, 2013, p. 3). He is the only participant who did not go to college and yet, he was the most senior person interviewed in terms of organizational level. He was also the only participant who lives in another state.

Edward was very open and articulate in describing what it was like for him growing up. He described having a “traditional American lifestyle” where his parents were “together forever” (IP4, 2013, p. 5). He is the youngest of five children and all of his siblings live in the same city with their families. One of Edward’s more impactful childhood experiences was when he found out his dad was an alcoholic. He described this time in his life as having “a lot of awakening, a

lot of awareness” and being “an influence on my teenage years, a positive, extremely positive influence” (IP4 2013, p. 3). His historical memories of events are around the Alcoholics Anonymous movement and the anti-drug movement of the 80s; he referred to this era as the self-help movement era and thus, the world that he lived in during his formative teenage years.

Other pivotal experiences in Edwards’ childhood were his exposure to technology and his parents’ encouragement to do something different. As such, it was his father’s view that technology would provide many career avenues for Edward and opportunities to avoid the traditional “nine-to-five, red tape crap world” that his father knew all too well (IP4, 2014, p. 8):

I grew up in the generation where, like I said I went to a huge high school, our high school was the first high school anywhere around to have a computer lab. I grew up in technology. My first jobs, I was light years ahead of guys that were 10, 20 years my senior in technology because they didn’t have any experience in it and I did. Early into my career I found finding a job, being in demand, being sought after as just commonplace. I never had to go looking for a job (IP4, 2013, p. 6)

Edward’s career has been solely in the area of Information Technology. He has worked as both an external consultant and as an internal employee. Currently, he works as VP, Information Security.

Edward has always worked with very diverse workforces and attributes that to being in the technology field. In his current role, he has 19 direct reports with an age span of 24 to 65 years old. He openly recognizes the generational diversity and believes open communication is key to navigating through those differences. He also pointed out that one of the significant differences between himself, as a leader, and his Boomer colleagues, has been his awareness of how diversity has increased in every dimension of the workforce, and the necessity for him to learn how to manage those differences.

During our interview, I was very much struck by Edward's positive disposition towards his career and in general, life. His views on being stuck as a Gen Xer who has been in the workforce for quite a while, were overwhelmingly positive:

Whether that's 20 years ago looking for my first job or looking for mid-career or looking for retirement or whatever else it is, it is a good time to be at the forefront of technology and also in the dip in terms of number of people in the work force. I view it as nothing but positive. I never experienced it [being stuck]. I've never experienced the negatives associated with it because I think there're fewer of us that are willing to do some of the back fill or leadership. You're either looking ahead of the people or getting out of your way in terms of job spots, or looking behind you to people that theoretically want to jump in your coattails and be led. Hopefully, there're a few of them out there that want to be led. It's a good place to be. I don't think I would've wanted to have been a Boomer. I sure as heck would not have wanted to be a Millennial without a whole lot of guidance. (IP4, 2013, p. 19)

Edward has had success with his career and feels he has reached a point in his life where he has a good quality of life, which for him is a balanced perspective. He describes his personal definition of job satisfaction as having "quality of life," which he believes is a combination of many factors (IP4, 2013, p. 21). Edward has designed a life style that he perceives resembles many of the Baby Boomer values. His wife is a stay at home mom and for him that has greatly contributed to his quality of life:

I always joke that we live in the 50s. We were meant to be a family that lived in the 50s. That definitely enhances my job satisfaction. It does. I have peers that are constantly dealing with the kid is sick, daycare won't take them, so I have to go home because my wife did it last week. I have an at-home mom. That doesn't affect my ... that I view as my wife loves the fact, so she say this, mostly, she loves the fact that she can stay at home. We have found a way that financially we can wing it. There're trade-offs for that. I love the fact that she stays at home because it does allow me to focus on my career, and I think overall it allows me to focus on my family once I leave here. We worked really hard to try to carve that out. Am I protective of that? Hell yes. I spend a lot of time making sure that what I've built here doesn't get tinkered with too much. (IP4, 2014, p. 23)

Elisa

Elisa was born in 1969 in Colorado. Although she has lived in Colorado most of her life, she did leave to attend college and graduate school in the northern United States. Additionally, she has worked in various Fortune 500 companies that required her to move to multiple cities during her twenties. She came back to Front Range Colorado 11 years ago with her husband and two sons. Elisa received a master's degree in the mid-1990s in the area of human resources and has been working primarily in that functional area. Her current role is a Human Resources Business Partner with a large company in the local area.

Growing up in Colorado, Elisa describes her childhood as pretty traditional in that her father was the primary breadwinner and her mother left the workforce once she had children. During our conversation, she reflected on having vivid memories of the Challenger Disaster and knowing exactly where she was at the time she heard the news. She remembers that as being one of the first events in her life where she realized that “everything doesn't go right in the world” (IP5, 2013, p. 5). She had similar thoughts and memories about the Reagan assassination attempt. Thoughtful in her reflection, Elisa remembers her formative years as having both successes and failures and realizing how those experiences impacted her self-esteem:

I was just listening to something at NPR the other day about bullying and is it increased or decreased since we were younger, and I do remember some bullying incidents when I was about eight grader. It's a fairly horrendous year, I think just from a peer standpoint and being a girl. (IP5, 2013, p. 6)

At the time of our conversation, Elisa had worked for 17 years in a full-time capacity in Human Resources (HR). Given that HR has been her functional focus area, Elisa has had experiences with demographic issues and generations. Similar to the other participants, she felt that Boomers would be retiring and many of those coveted top jobs would be opening up. She

indicated that she has not seen that happening. Moreover, because the Boomers continue to hold many of the senior leadership roles, it has influenced the work culture. Specifically, she reflected on what it has been like being a Gen Xer in the workforce and characterized a large percentage of her experiences, both past and present, as being dominated by the Baby Boomer generation:

I think what has not maybe changed is the dominance of the Baby Boomer generation. Being in HR, I understand demographics a little bit. Certainly before 2008, there was this panic, maybe not panic. There were these alarmists that were saying a bunch of people are going to retire and we're going to have nobody to fill their seats. Well, that didn't happen. In some ways, maybe for some people that were career-minded, they're like maybe not crying ... maybe kind of looking forward to that day, that some of those seats would open up because I think it would create some opportunities and it might ... I mean, opportunities not only for promotion and career advancement, but opportunities to change some cultural things. That has not happened, I don't believe. (IP5, 2013, p. 9)

For Elisa, this notion of dominance has primarily been manifested in Boomers' influence on the culture. Baby Boomers, Elisa contends, reinforce a value system that rewards "face time," meaning that an employee has to be at work long hours regardless of whether they produce or not, rather than rewarding performance results. Elisa describes this philosophy as a Baby Boomer legacy that has significantly impeded her job satisfaction:

I still remember him, one of my mentors. Anyway, he was the assistant plant manager at this place where I first started working and he was so funny. His idea of getting ahead was make sure that he was in the plant before the plant manager. Then we used to tease him because the minute the plant manager walked out, he'd do a fast follow 30 seconds afterwards, and it was this big joke, playing this game of, "I will work longer than her even if she doesn't know that I walked out 30 seconds after she did." (IP5, 2013, p. 9)

The cultural expectation of face time has been exceptionally difficult for Elisa given that both she and her Gen X husband work and have two young sons. She spoke quite candidly about being in a dual career family and the implications of those choices. Specifically, she recognized early on in her career that they both could not go for the top job. Moreover, the daily challenges of trying to balance jobs with raising children while managing competing priorities was tremendously stressful. From her perspective, it has been rare to see Baby Boomers or

Millennials who are encountering the same challenges. Baby Boomers typically follow a more traditional lifestyle where the wife has chosen to stay at home and Millennials are not at a life stage where they have children. The challenges of being in a dual career family with children coupled with Boomers' expectations of working long hours have resulted in resentment, frustration and an overall sense of not being understood.

Elisa is the one study participant who is a working mother. It was enlightening to have her perspective as it resonated with my own experiences. She spoke quite candidly about the challenges of being a working mom and trying to navigate through a system, not only of Baby Boomers, but also of male leadership:

I think it's both. I mean, I think it's having ... women just have these constraints, which are still there even though our husbands do a lot more maybe than our fathers did. Then I just think there're some basic gender biases. (IP5, 2013, p. 29)

Elisa's comments speak to the entangled nature of generational and gender issues in the workforce.

Elisa is still searching for the day when she begins to feel relief from the pressure of not having a work/life balance. Her frustration and feelings of a generalized lack of sympathy has mounted to the point where she asks the question, "when will things change"? In discussing her observations about Gen Xers and the need for change, Eliza summarized her current philosophy and approach to this situation as one where she feels that she wants to give up as the pace of change has been slow and the result is exhausting.

John

John was born in 1969 in rural Colorado. He spent his first 22 years in Colorado and then left, living in various cities during his career, following his graduation from college. He indicated that he has held many different Engineering/IT roles during the past 22 years of full-

time employment. Additionally, he also continued his education by receiving a Master's in Business Administration. John married in 2002, had two children, and returned to Colorado in 2009. Upon returning to Colorado, John has worked as a software developer with a large defense contractor.

John grew up on a farm in Colorado and characterizes his upbringing as good. His parents were traditional in that his father was the primary breadwinner, working as a farmer, and his mother worked part-time as a nurse. Although John had two sisters, they were much older than him so he describes his childhood as almost growing up as an only child.

Economic factors significantly influenced his family and John still holds a similar view that the economy has influenced his career. He described how inflation in the 70s significantly affected his family due to interest rates on land prices and loans. Families, who were farmers, were negatively impacted by the economy during the 1970s and 1980s, which John described:

Yes. I was in junior high and high school when that happened. I know that when I actually went to college, my parents were still ... This was even in the late '80s, but the effects of that were still happening, the ramifications of it. They were struggling, and it might have been for other reasons as well, but they had no income. They were independent. They weren't salaried, so they didn't pay themselves salary, so we didn't have a lot of money at that point. (IP6, 2013, p. 4)

As a result of these tough times, John learned that he needed to work hard and get a good job. His parents would reinforce this value to him by stressing that if you put your head down and work hard, you will be rewarded. Given that he was good at math and science, John went on to college studying engineering. After graduating, he went into the Navy where he went through officer candidate school and eventually worked his way up to lieutenant commander. Over the years, John gravitated to the technology field. It has been from this vantage point, as an IT professional, that has provided him with a unique perspective on generational differences.

During our interview, one perspective that John expressed was that being stuck between Boomers and Millennials is a positive due to the fact that he is able to adopt the best practices from the Boomers and the best practices from the Millennials. For technology, John believes that Gen Xers have “been right on the cusp of a lot of this stuff, whereas the Baby Boomers were kind of not involved with it, and the Millennials were very involved with it” (IP6, 2013, p. 5). As such, similar to the Millennials, John emphasized that he has been able to garner superior technical skills. Conversely, John acknowledged that while Boomers lack technology skills, he believes they have the social skills that he perceives missing from the Millennials. As a Gen Xer, he has been able to model the Boomers’ social skills. Thus, being placed between these two cohorts allows him to take the best from both generations. In his own words, this is how John described being stuck for him:

Yes, I believe we're in a sandwich between Baby Boomers and Millennials. It [technology] was just beginning when we were graduating from high school, but the Millennials are probably better placed for that, but maybe lack some of the people skills that Baby Boomers possess are good but [Boomers] are not ready for the technology but yet have the people skills. We're sandwiched in between both of those. (IP6, 2013, p. 14)

This acknowledgement, however, of the polarity of Boomers social competence and Millennials technical competence also defines the pressures that John feels of being stuck. This polarity speaks to the tension and subsequent pressure on John, regarding the social and technical competencies in the organization. It is not only frustrating to John but frightening, as well. He characterizes his interactions with Baby Boomers as frustrating and provides a source of conflict for him in his daily life at work. One of John’s frustrations, from a generational standpoint, is that his workplace culture overly accommodates the Baby Boomers. Given Boomers’ limited skill set with technology, John spends a great deal of his day helping the Boomers with basic computer skills. The impact on John has been an increased work load that dilutes his focus from

what he wants to be doing, which is software development. John's supervisor, and indeed the company culture, reinforces the expectation that John assists the Baby Boomers with their technology needs:

A lot of the stuff I deal with, yeah, it's frustrating because I feel like in some senses, I have to know very technical things that it would be very difficult to know, but yet I'm having to go help people do very basic stuff that anybody, really, I believe should know how to do if you work with computers. (IP6, 2013, p. 7)

As the only participant who is a software developer, John provided a unique perspective. He expressed concern about his role being outsourced, and also about Millennials who are entering the workforce with highly technical skill sets. He does feel a certain level of fear that the Millennials are more competent at the newer technologies. John's fear is that his current technical skill set is becoming obsolete and/or being outsourced and the Millennials, who are now entering the workforce, have a more updated technical skill set. As such, the anxiety and fear that he is feeling is from below, meaning Millennials entrance in the workforce:

For John, the meaning of feeling stuck is reflected in an environment that requires him to spend the majority of his role by hand holding Boomers with their basic technology needs without effective management of prioritization of need:

Yeah, a lot of these requests, they turn out to be one-time deals where you work a long time to create some report or something for them. They end up not using it more than once or twice, and there's no priority given to a lot of things. (IP6, 2013, p. 11)

Additionally, John feels stuck because there is no career path for him, which exacerbates the issue that his current role requires him to spend so much of his time with Boomers and their technology needs:

There's no opportunity for career advancement, so that's my biggest frustration. (IP6, 2013, p. 8)

Conclusion

Foundationally, this study is about studying human beings in their humanness (Van Manen, 1990) and to thereby gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences in their life world (Koch, 1995; Van Manen, 1990). The generational profiles detailed above give the reader insight into the participants' experiences in their unique life world and give context for the individual and shared constructions that follow in Part II.

Part II: The Lived Experiences of Gen Xers

Twelve global themes were co-constructed using an inductive process that required iterative movement between data collection and data analysis. The themes represent the participants' individual and shared experiences as Gen Xers in the workplace as well as how those experiences are perceived to impact their job satisfaction. The 12 global themes include: *1: "Stuck in the middle" is experienced and expressed differently by Gen Xers; 2: Gen Xers have anxiety about their professional future; 3: There are challenges unique to Gen Xers; 4: Gen Xers have perceptions about themselves and their work role; 5: There are generational similarities and differences; 6: Unique work culture impacts generational issues; 7: There may be economic influences on their career; 8: Historical context shapes who Gen Xers are as adults; 9: Baby Boomer influences contribute to job dissatisfaction; 10: Extrinsic motivators; 11: Intrinsic motivators; 12: Job satisfaction or dissatisfaction can carry over to life.*

This section provides thick description of each global theme, and its organizing, and basic themes, if applicable. A corresponding mind map for each theme reflects a visual representation of the depth and breadth of analysis. Additionally, this summary description for each theme includes representation and interpretation of the level of analysis as well as the

hermeneutic spectrum. Finally, a summary analysis is included that provides key points from the participants' interviews and relevant supporting literature for global and organizing themes.

Global Theme 1: “*Stuck in the Middle*” is Experienced and Expressed Differently by Gen Xers

The concept of being *stuck in the middle*, or sandwiching as it is sometimes referred to in popular literature, refers to this notion that Gen Xers workers are in the middle of two large generational labor cohorts—thus the sandwiching analogy. Through the interview process, the participants provided individual and shared constructions that suggest that there are many ways of knowing and interpreting this phenomenon. The participants were encouraged to freely express what being stuck meant to them in their lives. The participants expressed a wide spectrum of perceptions about this concept. Some participants had experiences similar to what is described in the popular media and literature and which is predominantly negative (Klie, 2012), while others had very different perceptions that gave a positive meaning to the notion of being stuck or sandwiched.

The breadth and richness of the participants' experiences help the reader to understand and vicariously experience how the Gen Xer participants in this study perceive being *stuck in the middle*. This broad spectrum in how Gen Xers describe and experience this phenomenon is not surprising given that popular and academic literature characterize Gen Xers as being highly individualistic (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003; Zemke et al., 1999). Twenge (2010) found that Gen Xers were significantly more likely to represent individualistic traits and value autonomy and individualism. Thus, through acknowledgement of relevant literature, one might suggest that the participants' would have vastly different experiences and opinions about this topic and in fact, that was the case. The global theme of “*Stuck in the middle...*” is experienced and expressed differently by Gen Xers is comprised of six organizing themes. Of those six organizing themes,

four have a total of 12 basic themes, discussed, respectively, in the sub- and sub-sub-sections following. Figure 15 provides a visual representation of the organizing and basic themes associated with this first global theme.

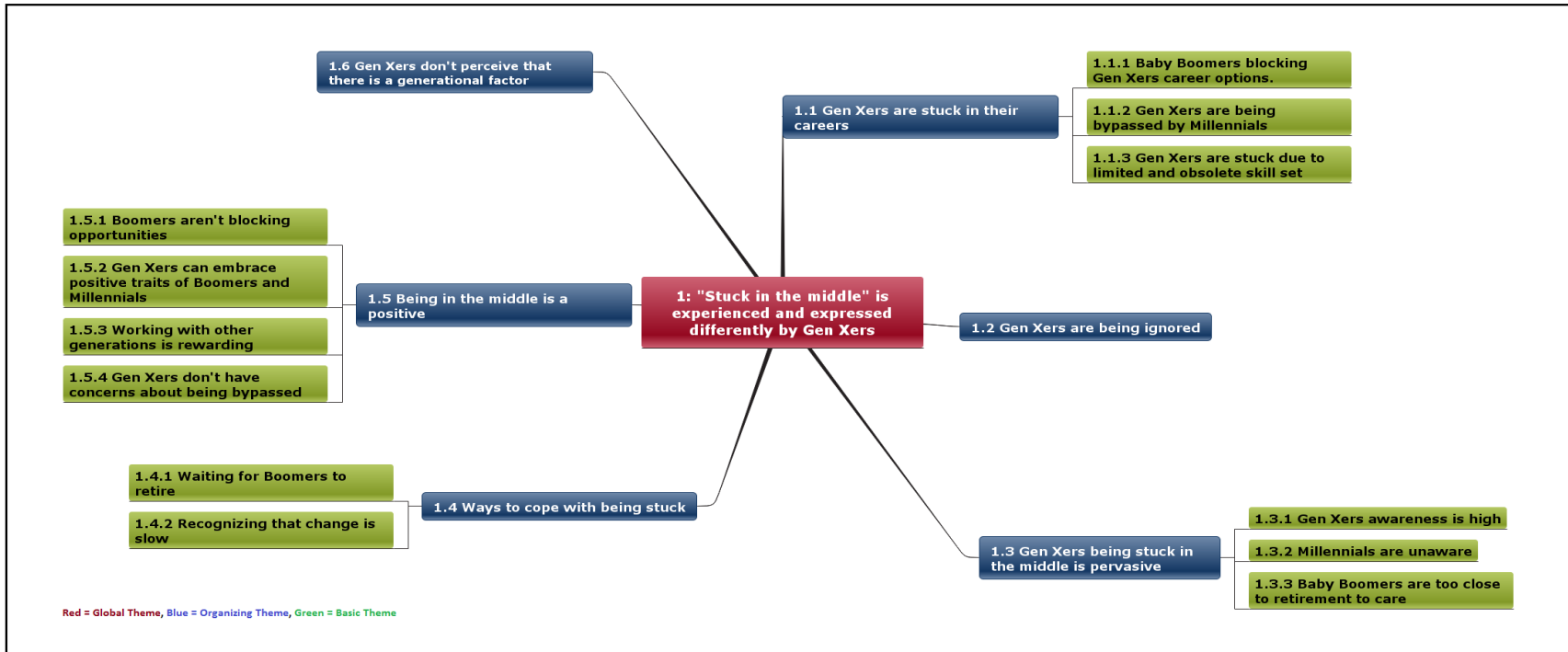


Figure 15. Global theme of “stuck in the middle” is experienced and expressed differently by Gen Xers

Organizing theme 1.1: Gen Xers are stuck in their careers. This first organizing theme is descriptively encapsulated by the six participants in three basic themes. The first is Baby Boomers are blocking Gen Xers' career options, the second that Gen Xers are being bypassed by Millennials, and the third that Gen Xers are stuck due to limited and obsolete skill sets. Each basic theme is more fully described below.

Basic theme 1.1.1: Baby Boomers blocking Gen Xers' career options. Despite a belief that Boomers would be retiring around the turn of the 21st century, they continue to work in large numbers in the U.S. workforce (Beinhocker, Farrell, & Greenberg, 2008a). This continued presence of Boomers in the workforce has resulted in a perception by Gen Xers that those coveted senior roles are not opening up. Indeed, Paul, who is a HR Business Partner, sees this problem in his current environment. During our conversation, he noted that "there's a lot of blockers right, so at the vice president or director level, there's just not a lot of movement because they're still working and I don't see it changing a whole lot" (IP2, 2013, p. 15).

Catherine, who works in an individual contributor role, expressed great frustration because she has been working under the assumption that Boomers would be leaving, thus giving her more employment opportunities:

I mean, when I was an undergrad in the late 90s, I was working towards this idea that within five to ten years then, Baby Boomers would be exiting and there would be massive opportunities for us. So, I'm thinking okay, I get out of school, I work for five years or so, maybe a few more, find my niche, run with it, and I can be a director or a leader or a manager of something that I'm very passionate about. (IP1, 2013, p. 14)

Catherine's experience reinforces this notion that Boomers may be blocking opportunities for Gen Xers. Concomitant research shows that 90% of the world's top 200 companies are still led by Boomers (Erickson, 2010). Additionally, the study participants noted that their individual organizations are led primarily by Boomers. Given that Boomers continue to work, many of the

leadership roles may still be held by that generation, thus limiting the career mobility of Gen Xers.

Basic theme 1.1.2: Gen Xers are being bypassed by Millennials. Millennials represent about 78 million of the U.S. population and will be fully represented within the workforce by 2019 (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). Although the literature did not support the belief that Millennials are taking Gen Xers jobs, it has been substantiated that Gen Xers are now reporting to younger managers (Burke, 2004). A few of the study's participants had concerns about being bypassed by Millennials. Potentially, Millennials presence in the workforce may be perceived as a greater threat once the Boomers actually retire. Catherine discussed this concern when we talked about her perceptions of being stuck:

I am afraid that by the time the Baby Boomers leave, the Millennials will be where I am professionally and be given those opportunities because they might be more technologically savvy or because of that, maybe they are, I don't know how to say this, or maybe that sense of entitlement will be seen as drive, as opposed to entitlement. (IP1, 2013, p. 9)

Michelle seemed to echo similar sentiments, recognizing the potential impact of a large Millennial population:

If I ever left this company, I know that there are a gazillion Millennials that I think could probably take my job, for a less amount of pay, and can probably do it quicker and faster, like a robot. (IP3, 2013, p. 10)

The threat of the Millennial population may be somewhat entangled with where a person sits in the generational span, also commonly referred to as the Generation Jones Effect. For example, Catherine is one of the youngest participants and thus, closer to the Millennial cohort.

Additionally, she is relatively junior in her career so a Millennial might pose more of a threat for her than an older participant who has more overall work experience. Catherine came to a similar

conclusion, as a result of the member checking process, when she saw another participant's descriptive quote. When asked about the concept of life stage, she had this to offer:

Well, I'm glad you asked because there was one descriptive quote that really, really stuck out to me to this point. It was the one where there was no fear of being surpassed by Millennials because you cannot compete with 10 to 20 years of experience. When I read that, I thought, well that's true. That person is at a different life point in their careers than someone like myself. I feel like my 10 years in the workforce could be surpassed because of the level of position I've had to this point. It started making me wonder about what kind of position that person has had for the last 10 to 20 years. If it's at a higher level, well they're probably correct in that they don't need to be threatened by a recent graduate or a new-to-the-workforce Millennial. (IP1, 2014, p.4)

Basic theme 1.1.3: Gen Xers are stuck due to limited and obsolete skill set. Although Gen Xers are characterized as being the most educated cohort in our history (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003), Paul noted that Gen Xers within his organization have limited education and skills in petroleum engineering, which are required for advancement. He added that it has been difficult finding mid-career Gen X technical people:

Petroleum engineering, right? Yes, and so it's a little bit just I mean the Gen Xers are a smaller cohort and there weren't as many engineering degrees being produced. (IP2, 2013, p. 13)

John, who works in the field of Information Technology, acknowledged that his technical skills are becoming obsolete as compared to Millennials. John's perception is that Millennials "don't even want to embrace the technology work that I do now because they see the future elsewhere" (IP6, 2013, p. 7).

Organizing theme 1.2: Gen Xers are being ignored. The essence of this theme is that Gen Xers feel ignored in the workforce. Indeed, popular news articles, with titles such as *Gen X: The Ignored Generation*, reinforce this concept (Stephey, 2008b). Douglas Copeland's highly regarded novel that examines the lives of Gen Xers, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*, sheds light on the often overlooked generation. This feeling of being ignored was

noticeably shared by the study participants, many of whom felt that they were ignored within our society. This experience ultimately transferred into feeling ignored within their workplaces.

From a societal perspective, the participants questioned whether people truly understand what Gen Xers are about:

Even if you look at the demographic data, I mean, I think people understand Baby Boomers and either you are a Baby Boomer or they've had direct experience with them a lot in the workforce and so the concept kind of makes sense to them. Maybe there's been a lot of media attention or whatever around Millennials. If you ask somebody what a Gen Xer is, I think they wouldn't have a clue in some ways, besides maybe 80s music. Big hair. But how they have impacted the culture or the workforce, I think that might be harder for people to articulate and maybe...so I understand what you're saying about the sandwich generation and maybe it gets back to influence. (IP5, 2013, p. 20)

Other participants also suggested that Gen Xers are neglected and ignored within the workforce as Gen Xers represent a smaller percentage of the workforce than Boomers or Millennials (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003). As Paul noted, "there is no strategy for Gen Xers so there's an ignored component there and I think it's just because we're just so small" (IP2, 2013, p. 16). Some researchers argue that given the sheer size of the Boomers and Millennials, these two cohorts can overly influence the workplace dynamics and draw greater media attention. This may add to the participants feeling that they are overlooked within the workforce, which may serve to be a great source of frustration:

I think ... and maybe it's like almost being ignored, like we've been screaming about this work-life balance, or we're not getting ahead in the workforce and nothing's happened. It gets sort of exhausting. They're like, "Oh, I'll just wait till they leave and then it'll be better, right?" It's almost like giving up." (IP5, 2013, p. 20)

Organizing theme 1.3: Gen Xers being stuck in the middle is pervasive. The organizing theme of Gen Xers being *stuck in the middle* is pervasive is described by the six participants as Gen Xers awareness is high, Millennials are unaware, and Baby Boomers are too close to retirement to care. Further detail is described below.

Basic theme 1.3.1: Gen Xers awareness is high. Catherine had expressed a sense that the phenomenon of being stuck is one typically shared by her Gen X peers:

You know, interestingly, yes, but I have perpetuated the conversation through my advanced education, because the more I was bettering my language surrounding what it was that was causing my frustrations, by having to do like case studies of my workplace and really looking at it through a very narrow lens, I was starting conversations with other Xers and finding they were feeling the same thing I was. (IP1, 2013, p. 18)

Elisa agreed that the concept of seeing an organization through a generational lens is more common than one might think. She expressed that recognizing generational diversity and labeling these differences is very prevalent:

I don't know if it's called out like that, but I would say it's pretty pervasive. Maybe it's subtle or maybe people aren't calling it out for what it is. I think it impacts a lot of interactions or perceptions or how people communicate or how people see things or ... yeah. I think it's pretty ubiquitous or whatever. (IP5, 2013, p. 18)

Heightened awareness of these generational issues has profoundly impacted one participant's approach to finding her next job. Catherine indicated that this awareness has given her insight into what to look for in her next employer:

So the one thing that it's done in terms of shaping my preemptive awareness, before I accept positions now, is I do ask about the culture and I ask about the demographics of the office, so that I have a better idea of what I'm getting into and how far I can potentially go, because I know if people have worked there for 20 years, that to me when I was younger sounded like oh, this place must have something going for it, if someone's going to stay 20 years. (IP1, 2013, p. 12)

Basic theme 1.3.2: Millennials are unaware. In contrast to Gen Xers' heightened awareness, the participants did not feel that Millennials were aware of these generational issues in the workplace. Specifically, Catherine did not feel there was awareness because of Millennials' limited time in the workforce:

I don't think that they (Millennials) are aware of it, because they haven't been in the workforce long enough to see how the different generations affect their own career path. (IP1, 2013, p. 18)

Catherine also noted that Millennials may just be presenting naïve optimism about generational dynamics:

Millennials, I think, want to pretend that it's not there, I think too many times I have gotten into conversations with Millennials about the workplace and I almost feel like I've burst their bubble, that I've painted this picture of reality which bursts their bubbles. (IP1, 2013, p. 18)

The notion that Millennials might be unaware of the plight of others parallels popular perceptions of Millennials that they are self-absorbed (Twenge, 2006). Being defined as a generation of whiners and highly focused on their next career move, studies have sought to further understand Millennials' value systems. As such, research has found that Millennials do show a slightly greater need for career advancement and promotion than the other generations (Kowske et al., 2010).

Basic theme 1.3.3: Baby Boomers are too close to retirement to care. For Boomers who are close to retirement and holding the key leadership positions, understanding generational diversity may not be a high priority. As Catherine notes, "I don't think Boomers care" (IP1, 2013, p. 12). She goes on to mention that Boomers are probably aware of generational issues, but do not place a high priority on these issues given that they are so close to retirement:

I think Boomers are also significantly aware of it. They see one more group of kids coming in and know it's one more headache for them, because now they're competing against kids that are just getting started and they see them as like go-getters and probably do have a degree or maybe two under their belt, coming in, to do the same job they've done for a long period of time. They like almost eye role, three more years, five more years, you know, until I can retire. So it's been pretty interesting. (IP1, 2013, p. 12)

As highlighted in prior sections, the trend has been that Baby Boomers are remaining in their roles with little indication of retiring anytime soon. Many economists report that the most significant growth in the labor market is projected amongst individuals aged 55 to 64 (Collins, 2003). Not only does the literature suggest that Boomers are continuing to work, it also suggests

that they continue to hold most of the leadership roles within organizations (Erickson, 2010). One plausible reason why Gen Xers may feel that Boomers do not care about generational issues could be due to the fact that the Boomers are senior in the organization and are less impacted by these generational issues.

Organizing theme 1.4: Ways to cope with being stuck. The organizing theme of ways to cope with being stuck is described by the six participants by way of two basic themes: waiting for Boomers to retire, and recognizing that change is slow.

Basic theme 1.4.1: Waiting for Boomers to retire. “You almost just have to wait another 10 years” (IP5, 2013, p. 7) is the way Elisa tends to think about how she will cope with the dynamics of the Boomers in her workplace. For Elisa, she described the Boomers as overly dominating her workforce in terms of employment practices, which has ultimately impacted her job satisfaction. She continues this line of thought:

And I think that maybe the thing that we’re waiting ... maybe it’s like we’re sitting here, waiting for Baby Boomers to retire because I think maybe we’ve expressed ourselves or tried to show that there are other ways to do it and it just hasn’t happened so we’re like, Okay. We’ll just wait for the Baby Boomers to retire. (IP5, 2013, p. 10)

During our conversation, Elisa had a clear understanding of the demographics and that Americans expected the Boomers to have retired by 2014. This has not happened and the literature supports the idea that Boomers will continue to work well through retirement age (Mermin et al., 2007). In John’s organization, Boomers are retiring, but then they are being brought back as a contractor, which baffles him:

Some people come back in their roles as contractors after they retire. They’re retired from whatever, and they got hired back on as contractors. I’m asking myself, why are we hiring these people? Why don’t we bring in new people? You could probably pay them less and they’d possibly do a better job. (IP6, 2013, p. 8)

From the experiences of the study participants, it appears that Boomers do continue to be in the workforce, and continue to hold influential positions. There is not clear evidence as to when to expect Boomers to retire from the U.S. workforce and as such, Elisa's approach is just to sit and wait.

Basic theme 1.4.2: Recognizing that change is slow. Introducing change into organizations is difficult and trying to change the organizational culture is even more challenging. What Elisa brings to question is how the culture will change from one dominated by Boomers' beliefs and value systems, to one that embraces all generational cohorts? Edward Schein (1990) defines culture as being represented within three levels: artifacts, espoused beliefs, and values and underlying assumptions (Schein, 1990). During the interview with Elisa, she spoke quite extensively about the Baby Boomer belief system that valued organizational practices such as "face time" and/or working long hours without regard to work/life balance. Elisa has been in the workforce for quite some time and has not seen "hard, concrete changes" in the organizational culture of her respective organizations (IP5, 2013, p. 8).

Schein argues that leaders have the influence and responsibility to create, manage, and change the culture (Schein, 1990). As part of the culture change process, organizations must unlearn their set of shared assumptions that have been created over time and relearn in efforts to instill transformative change. From Elisa's perspective, those in leadership roles do not have incentive to change the culture because it aligns with their value systems. As such, change is very slow to almost nonexistent and Gen Xers have limited influence because of their small size and reduced positional power. Elisa finalized the second interview with these concluding thoughts:

One thing that I would say ... I don't think I mentioned and I don't know if it's here ... it's kind of this idea, if there is this concept of sandwiching or work/life balance, where is the

relief going to come from? Is it going to come from companies and organizations needing to compete for labor and so, therefore, they will put in place things that are going to attract and retain people? I may be speaking off the cuff, but there may be some evidence that professional women are dropping out of the workforce at certain places, and businesses are going to say, "Hold on, we can't lose these educated, highly qualified individuals." Or is it something that's going to come from government, changes in MFLA. Those kinds of things or is it a combination of those couple things? I guess, and maybe I would characterize it as feeling sort of impatient with the fact that things continue to be the same, and either through government programs and/or capitalist competition for labor, some things would change. Maybe after going through a recession in '08, that threw everything back four or five years. That's interesting, but maybe that's not in here about the solution to some of these challenges. (IP5, 2013, p. 5)

Organizing theme 1.5: Being in the middle is a positive. A recent popular magazine article entitled *Get Ready for Generation X to take the Reins* suggested that the Millennial crazed media seems to have forgotten who our next leaders are (Brown, 2014). The article continued to speculate on our nation's next political leaders, who all fall within the Generation X cohort.

Edward, one of the study's participants, agreed that his generational position provides opportunities:

It's nothing but opportunities. I view it as only positive. Yeah. I think that's it. It is snarky to say but it's less competition in my world and where I'm at in my life. Whether that's 20 years ago looking for my first job or looking for mid-career or looking for retirement or whatever else it is, it is a good time to be [at the] forefront of technology and also in the dip in terms of number of people in the workforce. I view it as nothing but positive. (IP4, 2013, p. 19)

Although this organizing theme might seem to present a negative case as it contradicts or challenges the prior arguments and participant experiences as described in the proceeding sections (Schwandt, 2007), Gen Xers, as a cohort, value individualism and as such, represent multiple ways of knowing and thinking about a concept. The organizing theme of being in the middle is seen as a positive and is individually and collectively constructed through four basic themes. These basic themes are: Boomers are not blocking opportunities, Gen Xers can embrace

positive traits of Boomers and Millennials, working with other generations is rewarding, and Gen Xers do not have concerns about being bypassed.

Basic Theme 1.5.1: Boomers aren't blocking opportunities. While some participants expressed concerns that Baby Boomers are blocking opportunities to advancements, several of the study participants did not. On the contrary, these participants chose to look at the demographics of a smaller cohort and see these as presenting opportunities, as Paul describes:

Part of me wants to say I don't really feel it, but now that I think about it more being a Gen Xer and how it affects my career, I've always felt that because we are a smaller demographic group that there would just be more opportunities because there's less of us, right? (IP, 2013, p.15)

Edward, who has an extensive career in the IT field and currently serves in a leadership capacity, has not felt that the large Boomer population has inhibited his career options. He indicated that "it's nothing but opportunities; I view it only as a positive" (IP4, 2013, p. 19). When Elisa was asked directly if she felt there were any limitations for her career advancement, she offered this as a response:

I shouldn't say there wouldn't be any [advancement]. Of course I've got personal quirks and behavioral and personality things that come into play. I think if I went all [out], not holding back anything, and maybe being willing to play some political stuff, which I'm not willing to do, maybe ... yeah. I don't think I would necessarily see...constraints. (IP5, 2013, p. 28)

As our conversation continued, we talked about the notion of Baby Boomers blocking her career advancement. She indicated that she did not experience this effect, nor did she feel it was a concern.

Basic theme 1.5.2: Gen Xers can embrace positive traits of Boomers and Millennials. John's experience and expression of being in the middle was one that offered a positive and unique perspective. John, who has been in the software development field for most of his career, expressed being in the middle as a positive because he believes he is well positioned to model

the positive qualities from both the Baby Boomers and the Millennials. This is how he describes his positive feelings regarding his cohort position:

Let's see what else. Yeah, in some senses, Gen Xers, as I was reading through a lot of this, I think we are stuck in between what definitely is technology versus the rapid growth of the influence of technology just over the last 5-10 years with the Internet, mobile devices, everything is computerized. We're sandwich between, I don't know if we're best to handle that. It was just beginning when we were graduating from high school, but the Millennials are probably better placed for that, but maybe lack some of the people skills versus the Baby Boomers are not ready for the technology but have the people skills. We're stuck in between both of those. (IP6, 2013, p. 3)

For John, being an Gen Xer meant that he was right on the cusp of a lot of the technology changes that were emerging in the latter part of the 20th century. John expressed the positives of being able to live in such an environment:

I think it's an accurate term, stuck, because I think at least from my standpoint, being kind of on the cusp of a lot of big technology changes means that we kind of had our hands or feet, or we had a little of both worlds before and after, which gives you an advantage. (IP6, 2013, p. 14)

Moreover, John describes the Baby Boomers as having good social skills, which he believes are missing in the Millennial generation. John equates the lack of social skills for Millennials as a direct influence from video games and an environment that reinforces individualism rather than team work. In summary, John's vision is that he has been able to sit in the middle and embrace the positive characteristics of both generations: Baby Boomers' social skills and Millennials' technological excellence.

Basic theme 1.5.3: Working with other generations is rewarding. The literature regarding multigenerational workforces suggests that working in generationally diverse environments is a positive because it promotes intergenerational learning (Newman & Hatton-Yeo, 2008) as well as workplace flexibility and engagement (Pitt-Catsoupes & Matz-Costa, 2008). One study found that 51% of the respondents felt that the generations work effectively

together (Burke, 2004). Thirty-one percent said that they frequently see workers from different generations learning from one another, and 27% indicated that they frequently see a better quality of work due to a variety of generational perspectives (Burke, 2004).

The participants of this study expressed a similar belief by suggesting working with different generations is rewarding, interesting and enhancing. Michelle commented that: “the enhancing part is the wisdom, the experience working with different generations” (IP2, 2013, p. 15). She continued, reflecting on the potentially positive and negative aspects of her experiences with generations:

I think it’s positive if both generations look at each other and recognize each other’s differences and similarities, and try to come together to bring some...whether trustworthiness or good motivation or good practice or something like that. But if both parties are not willing to do that, it’s like any relationship; then, I think that the generations can be a negative thing. (IP3, 2013, p .5)

Similarly, Edward, who manages a large number of Millennials, describes them as “energizer bunnies” and feels that with guidance Millennials represent great potential (IP4, 2013, p. 19).

Basic theme 1.5.4: Gen Xers do not have concerns about being bypassed. Some of the study participants expressed concerns about being surpassed by Millennials. The logic is that the large Millennial workforce population will eventually bypass the Gen Xers and assume the leadership roles. Many other study participants did not express that concern and, to the contrary, felt no sense that this would occur in their future. For example, Paul commented:

I think I’ve mentioned before I don’t feel it as a liability, you know crunched between two generations... and I haven’t felt the Millennials kind of come into my space yet because I feel protected from you know, you can’t take away 15-20 years of experience. (IP2, 2013, p. 22)

Edward also commented on whether or not he felt Millennials posed a threat:

I don’t have a sense that they’re going to take my job. I don’t have a sense that they represent a threat. (IP4, 2013, p. 19)

Elisa, who works in HR with a number of Millennials, sees their ambition and entitled expectations, but does not perceive them as a threat:

It's not like you feel threatened, but just be patient and wait. Wait your turn, right? (IP5, 2013, p. 20).

Organizing theme 1.6: Gen Xers do not perceive that there is a generational factor.

Contrary to the working hypothesis of this study, Gen Xers feel *stuck* between Baby Boomers and Millennials in the workplace, some participants actually felt that there was not a generational factor at play in the workforce. In general, these participants tended to believe that the diverse generations in the workforce were not problematic:

On the other hand, I'm working with some Gen Xers that probably have similar expectations as I do, but I still find ... These politics and I think its politics and social styles that divide us. I don't necessarily know that, for me that the generation is dividing. (IP3, 2013, p. 11)

Other participants noted that the Gen Xers were seeing career growth in their roles, and because much of the work environment is predicated on performance this suggested that Gen Xers should have the same opportunity:

Gen Xers are actually getting some more opportunities because we just had some movement and it could happen at any time it just happens to be now. (IP2, 2013, p. 22)

Summary of global theme. This sub-section presents a visual of the ensuing hermeneutic spectrum for the global theme of "*Stuck in the middle*" is experienced and expressed differently by Gen Xers—how this global theme is experienced and expressed similarly and differently by Gen Xers. A summary is also provided in the form of a table of the global, organizing and basic themes together with selective clarifying and supporting points from the participants and literature.

Hermeneutic spectrum. This global theme represents one of the broadest ranges/spread of description in the study. The participants' individual constructions on how they perceived and

experienced being *stuck in the middle* resulted in six organizing themes, all but two of which were supported by 12 basic themes. “Being *stuck in the middle*” varied from those participants who felt truly stuck in their roles, as a result of generational issues, to those participants who did not feel that there were generational issues in their workplace. This variation highlights the importance of the unique individual context for the study participants. It also provides insight into this study as the hermeneutic spread (which is judged as broad) begins to portray a picture of the highly individualistic nature of (and thus variation among) the Gen X cohort. As such, this global theme portrays a hermeneutic spectrum of descriptive construction that is both broad in range/spread and deep in layers/levels--as illustrated in Figure 16 following.

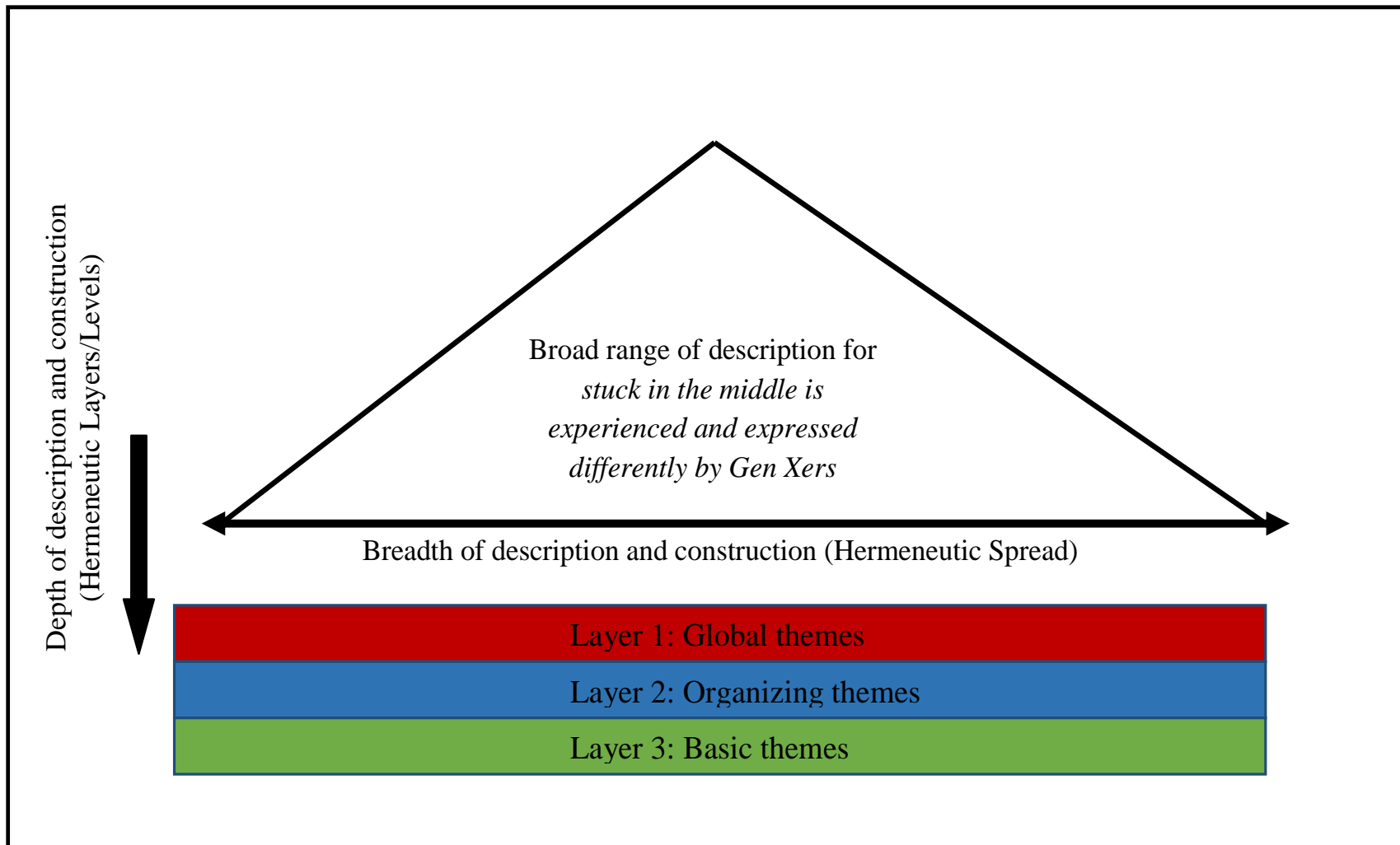


Figure 16. A broad/wide and deep/thick hermeneutic spectrum for “*stuck in the middle*” is experienced and expressed differently by Gen Xers

Key points from participants and supporting literature. For the study participants, *stuck in the middle* has different meanings and experiences. For some participants, *being stuck* is a reflection of the other generations impinging on their career options; for others it is seen as a positive with many opportunities. This global theme is constructed by the participants as *Gen Xers are stuck in their careers; Gen Xers are being ignored; Gen Xers being stuck in the middle is pervasive; ways to cope with being stuck; being in the middle is a positive; and Gen Xers do not perceive that there is a generational factor*. Table 11 summarizes the organizing and basic themes by providing clarifying key points from the participants and then aligning supporting literature.

Table 11

Summary of supporting and clarifying points from participants and informing literature for the global theme of “Stuck in the Middle” is Experienced and Expressed Differently by Gen Xers

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
1.1: Gen Xers are stuck in their career	1.1.1: Baby Boomers blocking Gen Xers’ career options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, I mean there’s a lot of blockers, right? • I was working towards this idea that within five to ten years then, Baby Boomers would be exiting and there would be massive opportunities for us. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gen Xers are stuck in the middle (Klie, 2012). • Baby Boomers continue to work within the U.S. workforce in large numbers. • 90% of top 200 U.S companies are still led by Boomers (Erickson, 2010).

(continued)

Table 11. Continued

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
	1.1.2: Gen Xers are being bypassed by Millennials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So, I'm afraid of being bypassed by them into those positions I'm waiting for Baby Boomers to leave. • If I ever left this company, I know that there are a gazillion Millennials that I think could probably take my job for a less amount of pay. 	Millennials represent about 78 Million of the U.S. population and will be fully represented within the workforce by 2019 (Hershat, 2010).
1.2: Gen Xers are being ignored	1.1.3: Gen Xers are stuck due to limited and obsolete skill set	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We just can't find mid-career Gen X technical people. • There is no strategy for Gen Xers so there's an ignored component. • I think...and maybe it's like almost being ignored. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although Gen Xers are considered the most educated cohort (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003), they still have gaps in key skills for particular organizations. • Popular literature reinforces the notion that Xers are an ignored generation (Stephey, 2008b). • Gen Xers represent a much smaller percentage of the U.S. workforce (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003).

(continued)

Table 11. Continued

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
1.3: Gen Xers being stuck in the middle is pervasive.	1.3.1: Gen Xers awareness is high.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think it [Gen Xers feeling stuck] is pervasive. • I was starting conversations with other Xers and finding that they were feeling the same thing [stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials]. 	
	1.3.2: Millennials are unaware.	I don't think that Millennials are aware of it [Gen Xers feeling of being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials].	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Millennials show slightly increased need for career advancement and promotion from other generations (Kowske et al., 2010).
	1.3.3: Baby Boomers are too close to retirement to care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't think Boomers care. • I think it's more about just a paycheck for them at this point. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The most significant growth in the labor market is projected amongst individuals age 55 to 64 (Collins, 2003), that is, among the Baby Boomers.
1.4: Ways to cope with being stuck	1.4.1: Waiting for Boomers to retire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • And I think that maybe the thing that we're waiting-maybe it's like we're sitting here waiting for Boomers to retire. 	Boomers will continue to work well into retirement (Mermin et al., 2007).

(continued)

Table 11. Continued

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
	1.4.2: Recognizing that change is slow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where is the relief going to come from? • Feeling sort of impatient with the fact that things continue to be the same. 	Changing culture is slow and difficult; leadership has the responsibility to influence change (Schein, 1990).
1.5: Being in the middle is a positive	1.5.1: Boomers aren't blocking opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's nothing but opportunities. • I've always felt that because we are a lower demographic group that there would just be more opportunities. 	
	1.5.2: Gen Xers can embrace positive traits of Boomers and Millennials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We're right on the cusp of a lot of this stuff where Boomers were kind of not involved with it and the Millennials were very involved with it [change]. 	
	1.5.3: Working with other generations is rewarding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think the enhancing part is the wisdom; the experience working with different generations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes intergenerational learning (Newman & Hatton-Yeo, 2008). • Promotes a flexible and engaged workforce (Pitt-Catsouphes & Matz-Costa, 2008).

(continued)

Table 11. Continued

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
1.6: Gen Xers don't perceive that there is a generational factor in the workplace	1.5.4: Xers don't have concerns about being surpassed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't feel it as a liability. • It's not like you feel threatened, but just be patient and wait. • No, I don't see any generational factor. 	

The essences of Global theme 1 are recognition of the many ways to experience *being stuck* within the U.S. workforce. The participants offered detailed descriptions resulting in a broad hermeneutic spectrum. Global theme 2 describes how Gen Xers are experiencing anxiety as a result of internal and external organizational issues.

Global Theme 2: Gen Xers Have Anxiety about Their Professional Future

The participants provided individual and collected constructions that suggested there is anxiety and uncertainty about their future. As one participant expressed, “I am afraid of so many things, pertaining to my career path, as a Gen Xer” (IP1, 2013, p. 9). Anxiety is considered an emotion and defined as the diffuse apprehension most often associated with feelings of uncertainty and helplessness (May, 1996). It is suggested that anxiety is extremely common, with some reports suggesting that between 30-40% of the population has suffered from anxiety (Baumeister & Tice, 1990). Discussed within the literature is the notion that employees can feel anxiety for a number of different reasons and it is largely based on the individual’s perception of the experience rather than the experience itself (Baumeister & Tice, 1990).

Inherent to anxiety is a sense of uncertainty a feeling that one's career future is threatened might exist as well. Because of this uncertainty, people may not know what the future holds in terms of their future career and how they will be able to cope with potential situations. Comments made by the participants such as "what am I going to do next"? (IP3, 2013, p. 5) and "I have no one to take care of me when I grow old" (IP3, 2013, p. 10) provide insight into the anxiety currently experienced by the participants of this generational cohort.

Encompassed in this global theme are four supporting organizing themes and four basic themes as shown in Figure 17. It should be noted that several of the organizing and basic themes align with the related themes (challenging work, meaningful work, job security) in extrinsic/intrinsic motivators (Global Themes 10 and 11). For example, within this theme, not having meaningful work was seen as being anxiety producing and within the global theme of Intrinsic Motivators (11), having meaningful work was seen as an intrinsic motivator that supported job satisfaction. Similarly, challenging work was described as an intrinsic motivator for the participants and discussed in global theme 11 but it was also described as producing anxiety when a participant felt stuck in their career without challenging work.

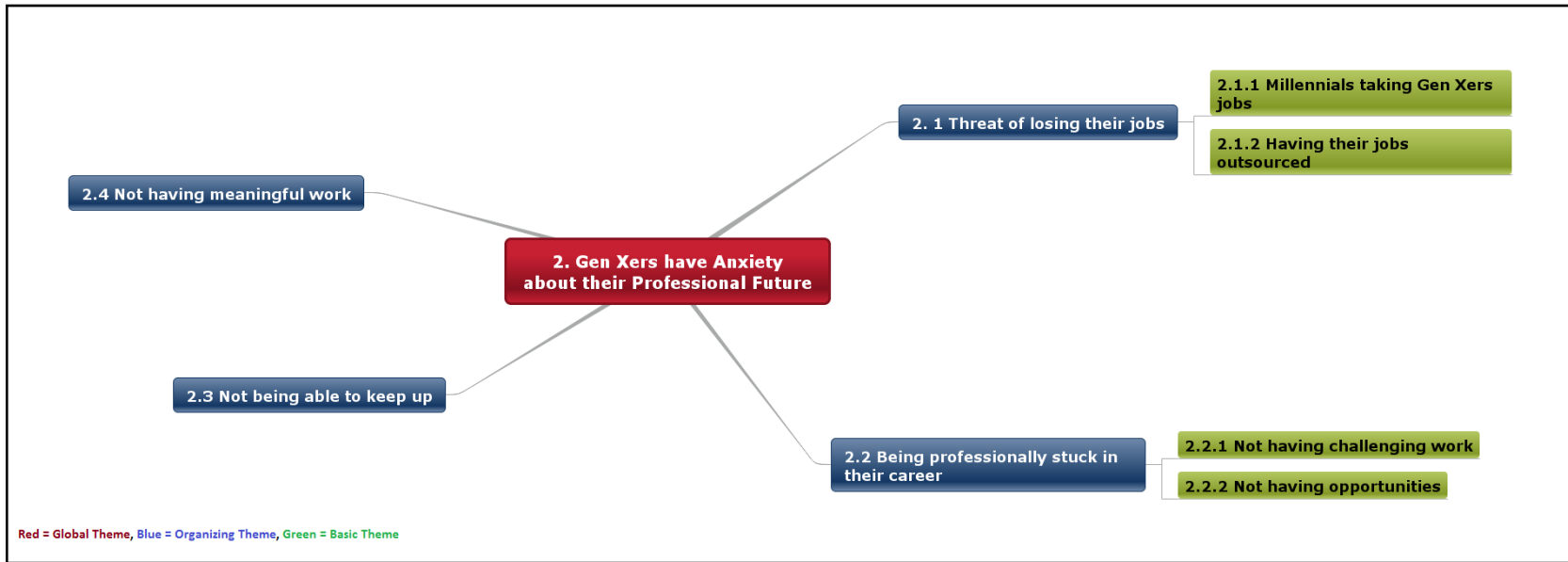


Figure 17. Global theme of Gen Xers have anxiety about their professional future

Organizing Theme 2.1: Threat of losing their jobs. Job insecurity is well researched in the academic literature and defined as a real and justified fear of potential losing what one has, or being transferred to an undesirable situation (Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995). Job insecurity is a subjective phenomenon based on an individual's perceptions and interpretation of their own work environment (Sverke & Hellgren, 2002). Job insecurity has intensified as a result of the tumultuous nature of the past several decades, which have typically included downsizing, outsourcing and automation in attempts to reduce labor costs and increase profits. The resulting impact has been feelings of job insecurity for workers (Sverke & Hellgren, 2002). Job security is defined within this study as an extrinsic motivator with the potential of promoting job satisfaction. Conversely, if a person does not feel secure about one's job then feelings of dissatisfaction may result. The study participants expressed job insecurity as promoting both anxieties in their lives as well as feelings of job dissatisfaction in their current roles. The following describes Gen Xers' individual constructions of their anxieties with the potential of Millennials taking their jobs and over having their jobs outsourced. This organizing theme is illuminated by the participants through two basic themes: *Millennials taking Gen Xers' jobs* and *having their jobs outsourced*.

Basic Theme 2.1.1: Millennials taking Gen Xers' jobs. Several of the participants expressed concerns that Millennials may be well positioned to take their current jobs or potentially bypass the Gen Xers and move into the Baby Boomers' roles once the Baby Boomers retire. First, the participants expressed insecurity around Millennials being able to move into their current roles. Michelle recognized that if she ever left her current job there would be a number of Millennials who could step into the role and do it for less pay and more efficiently.

Other participants also expressed concerns that they will be bypassed by the Millennials. Given Millennials' large numbers and ambitious nature towards seeking advancement and career opportunities (Kowske et al., 2010), this concern expressed by Gen Xers is certainly understandable. Catherine has concerns that the Millennials will take those jobs that are currently being held by the Baby Boomers:

So, I'm afraid of being bypassed by them into those positions I'm waiting for Baby Boomers to leave. (IP1, 2013, p. 6)

Basic theme 2.1.2: Having their jobs outsourced. Outsourcing is defined as a process where a company can use other firms to perform value creating activities that were previously performed in house (Dess, Lumpkin, & Eisner, 2010). Beginning in the late 1980s, the United States began to see a significant increase in outsourcing of U.S. manufacturing to foreign companies and the associated loss of blue-collar jobs (Bardhan & Kroll, 2003). Companies in the United States started realizing the benefit of outsourcing to less developed countries such as South Korea, Taiwan, and Malaysia as their labor costs were less expensive yet they possessed existing production and supply infrastructure to support United States production needs.

The second wave of outsourcing in white collar jobs began a decade later and was first felt in the software sector (Bardhan & Kroll, 2003). Proliferation of the Internet and technology capabilities around the world led to this expansion. India, for example, is considered one of the primary destinations for IT outsourcing and now employs more than 200,000 people with \$2.3 billion in exports, of which 70% are to the U.S. (Bardhan & Kroll, 2003). The impact of this increased outsourcing in IT related industries is a diminishing employment in the U.S, resulting in job loss for Americans (Bardhan & Kroll, 2003). According to Bardhan and Kroll (2003), outsourcing has been a contributing factor to job loss within the IT profession; it has also impacted wage scales, which now are lower given the global competition.

John and Edward, both from the IT world in this study, lament that outsourcing is definitely a concern. For John, not only is he feeling upward pressure from Millennials who are coming into the workplace with state of the art technology skills, he now recognizes that “it’s not only that age thing, but it’s the outsourcing thing that has the potential to affect me, as well” (IP6, 2013, p. 10). Thus, John suggests that his skills are becoming obsolete and that threat is increasing with the potential that it could limit his career options moving forward. These influences from the external environment are impacting generations differently as those participants who do not have this functional focus aren’t feeling this threat at this time.

John continued our conversation around his anxiety about IT jobs being outsourced. He clearly recognized that the combination of factors, changing technology, and increased ability to outsource the type of work that he does makes it a precarious situation for him:

It’s the outsourcing thing that has affected me a lot, too. (IP6, 2013, p. 10)

Organizing Theme 2.2: Being professionally stuck in their career. Contrary to popular myths about Gen Xers being cynical and disinterested in their careers, recent studies show that Gen Xers desire similar opportunities to be challenged, grow, and develop in their work environments as other cohorts (Jurkiewicz, 2000; Lyons, Duxbury, & Higgins, 2007a). The nature of this organizing theme is described by the participants by way of two basic themes: *not having challenging work*; and *not having opportunities*.

Basic Theme 2.2.1: Not having challenging work. The participants described their concerns and anxieties about not having challenging work as Catherine notes:

And I think that that’s almost like the bad habit of being stagnant at work, stagnant becomes, your known... and so breaking out of that gets more difficult, scarier, and you don’t want to jump from the frying pan into the fire. And, especially when you’re being reflective about your decisions and you’re questioning your decisions, then you’re almost afraid to make another bad decision.... (IP1, 2013, p. 27)

Michelle describes how she feels stuck in her current work as she feels is not very motivating:

I probably could have worked on it last night, but I just don't want to work that hard for something that's probably not going to bring me a lot of pleasure. (IP3, 2013, p. 25)

When asked for clarification on what she was doing, Michelle indicated that she was doing “training and development which is not going to bring me much job satisfaction” (IP3, 2013, p.25). Her role required her to learn and then train others on PeopleSoft, which is neither particularly interesting nor challenging for Michelle. For some of the participants, when they did not have challenging work, it resulted in an increase in their level of anxiety.

Other participants described the notion of having challenging work as being integral to their job satisfaction. Participants discussed the idea of having challenging work as being highly correlated to their increased job satisfaction. As such, challenging work also aligns with the global theme regarding Intrinsic Motivators (11). Herzberg defines the work itself to be a source of satisfaction where participants talked about their work being challenging, varied, or creative (Herzberg et al., 1959). Within this study, participants provided examples as to how challenging work has contributed to their job satisfaction (to be further revisited in Global Theme 11)

Basic Theme 2.2.2: Not having opportunities. The Society of Human Resources Management Generational Differences Survey reported that Human Resource professionals are challenged to retain their Gen Xer population (Burke, 2004). According to the study, Gen Xers feel stuck in their roles due to limited opportunities for advancement due to Baby Boomers not leaving the workforce. Although Gen Xers have typically been described as a cohort that works to live, studies have revealed that they value extrinsic rewards such as promotion, advancement and pay (Gursoy et al., 2008). In fact, studies have confirmed that Gen Xers value extrinsic motivators, specifically promotion, more than the other generations (Twenge et al., 2010; Wey Smola & Sutton, 2002).

For several participants, the lack of career options significantly impacted their job satisfaction as well as created a source of anxiety. Catherine, who has worked in a number of entry level jobs since graduating from college, expressed frustration with her inability to reach that next level job:

So I knew that my college degree could always get me an admin level job. I never thought in the early 2000s or even the mid to now late 2000s, that it would only get me an admin job (IP1, 2013, p. 24)

As a Gen Xer who is entering her midcareer stage, Catherine has concerns that she will not advance to that next level. John, who is in a midcareer stage as well, indicated that the lack of career opportunities at his current company is one of the biggest dissatisfactions in his life right now: There's no career progression. (IP6, 2013, p. 17).

John's is a technical expert in the area of software development, so he does not aspire to go into a management career track. As such, he has limited options for career advancement in his current role. Tammy Erickson (2009), an expert in the field of generations in the workplace, characterized the issue for Gen Xers as a narrowing career path. Specifically, a narrowing career path refers to fewer options for the next possible step, especially for those Gen Xers who work in corporate environments. Erickson believes that the future career path for many Gen Xers involves branching out to alternative workplaces and portfolio careers. As an example, she suggested that Gen Xers might consider moving to smaller companies and independent arrangements, which could allow Gen Xers to move up in responsibility and reward. A portfolio career gives Gen Xers several back-up options that they can "keep in play" (p. 182). Many Gen Xers look at alternative career options as a means of self-preservation. Growing up in an environment where there was an erosion of the employment contract has resulted in Gen Xers

being cautious and pragmatic about their future. As such, Gen Xers need to stay relevant, as underscored by Edward:

That said, I think there are three things that are going to affect your job search. One, your career experience, what you did at your job, the bullet points that you put on your resume. I think the second thing that's going to affect your job search is your career path, what certs you have, what technical certs, what degrees, what aptitudes you've had, what you have learned from an academic perspective. The third thing is not what you know but who you know, it's your social network (IP4, 2013, p. 10)

This heightened need for career options aligns with the next organizing theme of not being able to keep up and thus, potentially not being desirable to the external job market.

Organizing theme 2.3: Not being able to keep up. *Job* demands are defined as psychological, social, or organizational aspects of one's job that require sustained effort or skills to maintain (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). These authors proposed a job demands resource model that suggested stress is the response to the imbalance between job demands on the individual and the resources that she/he has to deal with those demands (Demerouti et al., 2001). Certainly, in an increasingly more dynamic and complex world, the work demands are also increasing and having an impact on employees. Studies have shown that employees are feeling overwhelmed by too much work and an implicit requirement from employers to be completely absorbed in their roles (Jacobs & Gerson, 2001). Other academic scholars have acknowledged "role overload," which simply means having too much to do and not enough time to do it (Duxbury, Lyons, & Higgins, 2008). For Michelle, job demands signify an increased expectation to keep up on the functional and technical aspects of her job:

Well, yesterday, I was working on a presentation because I'm trying to align a methodology with the proposal. The research that I've found was how you can incorporate social media into a change strategy. I was thinking, What? There's one more thing I have to think of. Can it just stay the same so I can just focus on what I know? It's keeping up? Keeping up with that is still there. (IP3, 2013, p. 11)

John expressed genuine concern about the being able to keep up with the pace of technology advancements.

As Gen Xers, the participants felt an anxiety about being able to keep up with what they are supposed to keep up with in today's dynamic work environment. With the exception of one participant, they have been out of college for a number of years and working in their respective functional areas. They recognize that things are changing and also recognize that they need to keep up. In summary, the participants identified both internal and external pressures on the need to keep up. The internal pressures included influences from the tech-savvy Millennial population who are raising the bar on performance. External pressures in a highly competitive global environment include the possibility of our jobs being outsourced and employers demanding up to date expertise. Given these macro influences, it would seem reasonable that the pressures are applicable to more than just one generation. Employees within the U.S. workforces are seeing pressures to update skills and do more in our competitive world.

Organizing Theme 2.4: Not having meaningful work. Meaningful work has been shown to be important for individuals (King & Napa, 1998) as well as being viewed as positively impacting one's general well-being (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway, & McKee, 2007). For generational comparisons, anecdotal reports have long suggested that Gen Xers and Millennials value meaning in their work more than the older cohorts (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003; B. Tulgan, 2009). As a standalone organizing theme, not having meaningful work was of concern to the study participants. Catherine, who has struggled to find her path and who openly expressed her anxieties about her future, described her biggest challenge as knowing "when will what I've done with my work life matter?" (IP1, 2013, p. 15). And, similarly, Michelle expressed concerns that her current role does not allow her to feel like she makes a difference. These sentiments

were expressed by the participants as contributing to their overall job satisfaction or dissatisfaction, as well—which will be further explored in the discussion of Global Theme 11 on Intrinsic Motivators.

Employees who feel that their work is meaningful also report higher levels of job satisfaction (Kamdron, 2005; Steger, Dik, & Duffy, 2012). As such, the participants described the lack of meaningful work in their current work environments as not only resulting in anxiety, but also contributing to their job dissatisfaction.

Summary of global theme. This sub-section presents a visual of the ensuing hermeneutic spectrum for the global theme of *Gen Xers have anxiety about their professional futures*—how this global theme is experienced and expressed similarly and differently by Gen Xers. A summary is also provided in the form of a table of the global, organizing and basic themes together with selective clarifying and supporting points from the participants and literature.

Hermeneutic spectrum. With respect to the hermeneutic spectrum, this global theme has a moderate range of description. Although there were three levels of analysis (global, organizing, and basic themes), the variation within the organizing theme contained only two basic themes for two of the organizing themes. Moreover, the other two organizing themes contained no basic themes. Half of the participants described the anxiety they experienced due to being stuck. Other participants expressed that they did not consider being stuck as anxiety producing or creating fear. As such, participants expressed divergent views as half of the participants indicated that anxiety and/or fear was not something that resonated with neither them nor what they thought about when reflecting on their lived experiences as Gen Xers within the workplace. Interestingly, the differences that the participants conveyed with respect to feeling anxious about their career

future largely align with the research regarding prevalence of anxiety within the general population. The research suggests that about 50% of the population experience some type of generalized anxiety (Baumeister & Tice, 1990). This disparity in participant's understanding and experiencing anxiety within their workplaces speak to the issue of depth and breadth of description. For those participants who were experiencing anxiety as a result of their current careers, there was relatively little variation in how that anxiety was experienced and perceived. As such, the hermeneutic spectrum was evaluated to be a moderate hermeneutic spectrum with some degree of breadth of descriptions suggesting less common experiences with two or more levels of analysis.

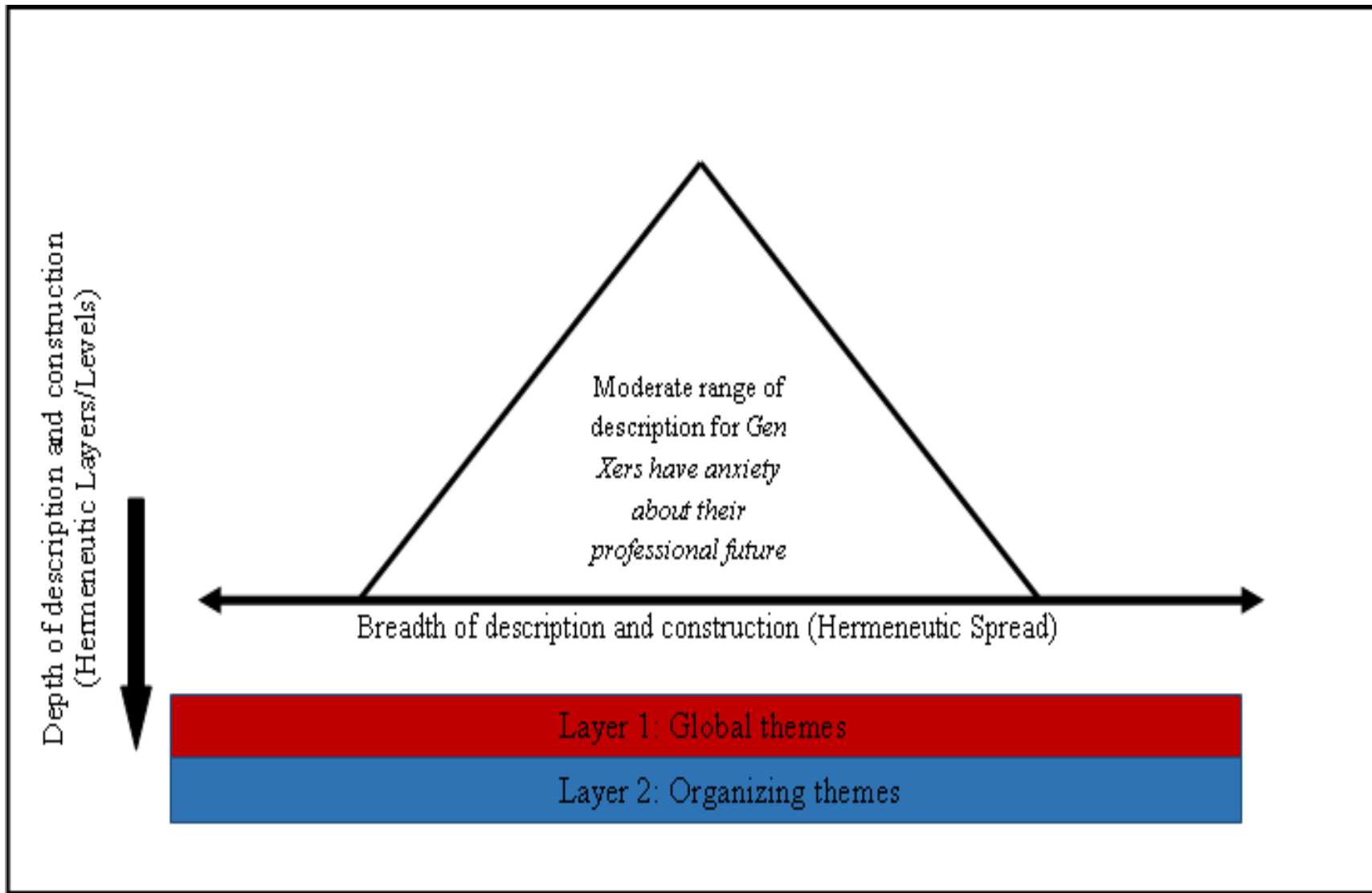


Figure 18. A moderate range and mid-depth/thick hermeneutic spectrum for *Gen Xers have anxiety about their professional future*

Selected supporting and clarifying points from participants and supporting literature.

For those participants experiencing anxiety in their roles, the primary drivers were a perceived threat of losing one’s job, not being able to continue to develop professionally, not being able to keep up, and not having meaningful work. One might suggest that the participants in this study who experienced anxiety about their roles were more susceptible to job loss or outsourcing than the other study participants. This was especially evident with the participant’s who were in IT roles. A person in a dual career family has more security if they were to lose their job and those participants also not in IT roles meaning that they didn’t express fear of having their jobs outsourced. The moderate number of organizing and basic themes speaks to less common experiences amongst the participants. Table 12 summarizes the organizing and basic sub-themes by providing selected supporting and clarifying points from the participants and concomitant supporting literature.

Table 12

Summary of supporting and clarifying points from participants and informing literature for the global theme of Gen Xers have Anxiety about their Professional Future

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
2.1: Threat of losing their jobs.	2.1.1: Millennials taking Gen Xers jobs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are a gazillion Millennials who could probably take my job. • I’m afraid of being bypassed by them into those positions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job insecurity is a fear of potentially losing what one has (Dekker & Schaufeli, 1995). • Downsizing, outsourcing and automation has left employees.

(continued)

Table 12. Continued

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
		I'm waiting for Baby Boomers to leave.	<p>with feelings of job insecurity (Sverke & Hellgren, 2002)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • Millennials are ambitious and seek quick advancement (Kowske et al., 2010).
	2.1.2: Having their jobs outsourced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A lot of the jobs are being outsourced, so there's a lot of stress in lots of different areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outsourcing is a process where organizations use other firms to perform value added activities once performed internally (Dess et al., 2010). • In the U.S., outsourcing began with manufacturing in the late 1980's and moved to white collar jobs a decade later (Bardhan & Kroll, 2003). • Outsourcing has been a contributing factor for IT job loss within the U.S. (Bardhan & Kroll, 2003).

(continued)

Table 12. Continued

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
2.2: Being professionally stuck in their career	2.2.1: Not having challenging work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stagnant becomes your known and then so breaking out of that gets more difficult. • I'm doing training and development, which is not going to bring me much joy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outsourcing puts stress on workforce to keep up with the latest skills (Bardhan & Kroll, 2003) • Gen Xers value opportunities to be challenged in their work (Lyons et al., 2007a). • Herzberg defines challenging work as an intrinsic motivator that promotes job satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959).
	2.2.2: Not having opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What am I going to do next? • What I'm most frustrated with is there's not really a future career path. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retention of Gen Xers is a challenge as they are feeling lack of opportunities given Boomers continued presence in the workforce (Burke, 2004).

(continued)

Table 12. Continued

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
2.3: Not being able to keep up		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have to catch up. • Fear of keeping up with what it is we're supposed to keep up with. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gen Xers value extrinsic rewards such as pay, title and promotion (Gursoy et al., 2008; Wey Smola & Sutton, 2002). • Employees are feeling too much work from implicit requirements from their employers (Jacobs & Gerson, 2001). • Role overload is having too much to do and not enough time to do it (Duxbury et al., 2008).
2.4: Not having meaningful work		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actually make a difference. • When will what I've done with my work life matter? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaningfulness is important to individuals (King & Napa, 1998). • Gen Xers and Millennials place more value on having meaningful work than older cohorts (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003).

The essence of Global theme 2 is an expression by the participants that they are experiencing fear and anxiety as a result of generational experiences in the workplace. These experiences range from a perception that their skills are becoming obsolete and impending fear that their roles may be outsourced to a generalized fear of not having meaningful work. These constructions from the participants have resulted in a moderate hermeneutic spread. Global theme 3 speaks to the unique challenges that the study participants have experienced directly associated to being a Gen Xer.

Global Theme 3: There are Challenges Unique to Gen Xers

Strauss and Howe's (1992) groundbreaking work on generations, from a historical understanding, frames each generational cohort as a series of unique experiences based on their situation in history (Strauss & Howe, 1992). As an example, Strauss and Howe suggest that the Silent Generation (1925-1942) had challenges similar to Gen Xers of being the "generational stuffings of a sandwich between the get-it-done G.I. and the self-absorbed Boomers" (Strauss & Howe, 1992, p. 281). Conversely, they argue that the Boomers' challenge was the intensity of the competition that they felt given the large size of this cohort (Strauss & Howe, 1992). For this study, however, the context is the lived experiences of Gen Xers. All participants were able to share unique experiences and challenges that they perceive as a result of being a Gen Xer in the U.S. workforce. This global theme is the shared constructions of the six participants. It consists of five organizing themes and six basic themes. The organizing themes are: *lack of organizational commitment, anticipated changes in government entitlements, dual career family, limited ability to influence the workplace, and navigating through workplace diversity*. Two of the organizing themes—*dual career families and navigating through workplace diversity*—are supported by basic themes. Figure 19 is a visual representation of this global theme.

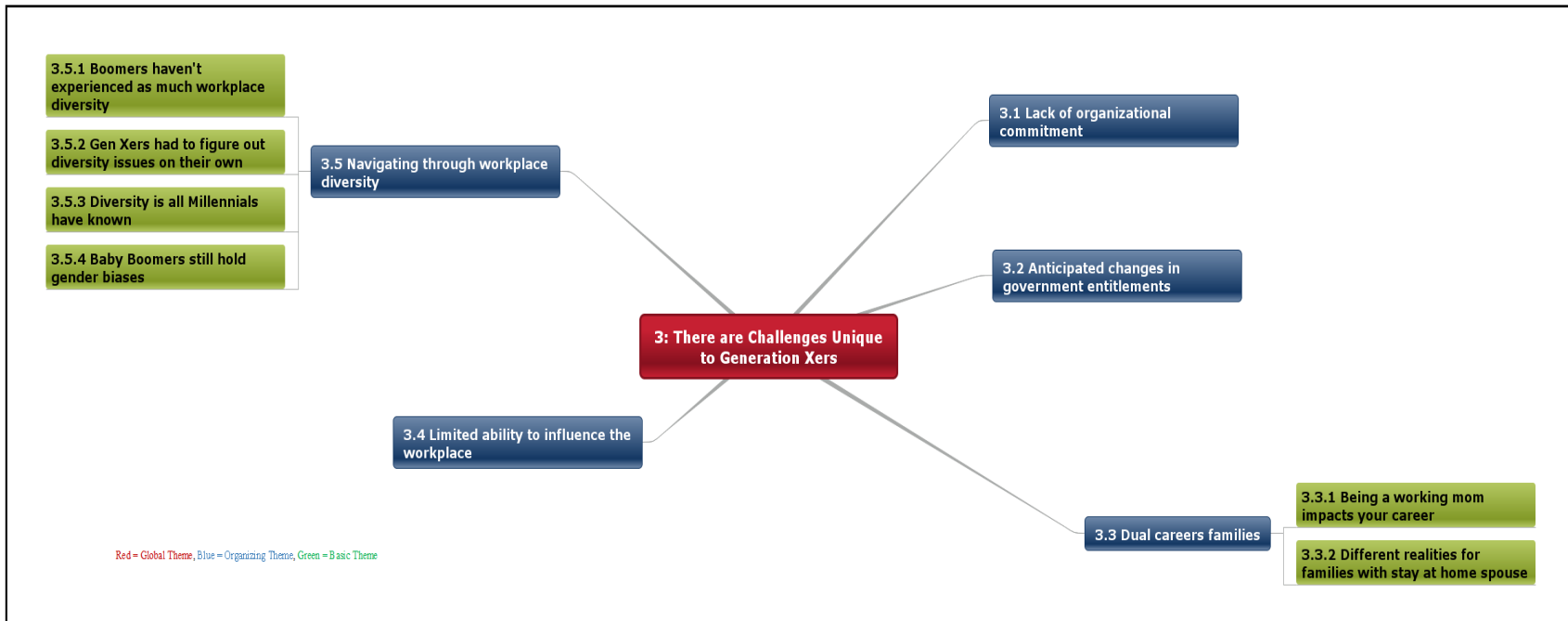


Figure 19. Global theme of *there are challenges unique to Gen Xers*

Organizing Theme 3.1: Lack of organizational commitment. Stereotypically, Gen Xers are believed to be less loyal, more independent, cynical, and lazy (Benson & Brown, 2011; Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007). Benson and Brown (2011) found that Gen Xers were more likely to quit and had lower job satisfaction. Others have characterized Gen Xers as the “slacker generation” because they place less emphasis on work and work to live rather than live to work (Sullivan et al., 2009). This idea was tested in a 2008 qualitative study that found that Gen Xers place more emphasis on their personal life than their work life as compared to Boomers (Gursoy et al., 2008). Given these perceptions about Gen Xers, there have been a number of academic studies that examine the generational differences in organizational commitment and psychological contract towards their respective organizations. Organizational commitment measures an employee’s willingness to quit, while psychological contracts examine the relationship between an employee and their organization (Hess & Jepsen, 2009). Research supports the notion that Gen Xers have lower organizational commitment than other generational cohorts (Hess & Jepsen, 2009; Westerman & Yamamura, 2007). One participant summed up the issue of Gen Xers and organizational commitment by stating: “So, one of the difficulties is with Gen Xers and I’m guilty of this too, is that we leave” (IP1, 2013, p. 9).

Understanding the antecedents to organizational commitment may help explain why Gen Xers may be more willing to quit. Gen Xers seek highly engaging, stimulating work environments that give them autonomy to successfully perform in their roles. Recent Gallup data shows that 44% of U.S. jobs are occupied by Generation X. Of those currently holding these positions, 53% are not engaged and another 19% are so actively disengaged that they’re making it harder for those around them to do their jobs (Garman, 2013). Catherine’s experiences support an overall need to feel valued while continuing to be rewarded for her efforts:

We give you a year or two of service and we work above and beyond what we're asked, because we want to be contributing and we want to prove ourselves. (IP1, 2013, p. 9)

She recognized that "one of our negatives is it's harder for us to stay the course where there is no work and no reward" (IP1, 2013, p. 9). This idea is reinforced in the literature that Gen Xers value extrinsic motivators (Gursoy et al., 2008; Wey Smola & Sutton, 2002).

Organizing theme 3.2: Anticipated changes in government entitlements. Given an increased life expectancy in the U.S., and the looming need from the large Boomer population for social security benefits, the current program of government entitlements is not sustainable (Firey, 2012). Historically, Social Security and Medicare have been defined as benefit for all U.S. citizens who have paid into the program throughout their working years. The premise has been that one generation pays for another generation's entitlement for these programs. Unfortunately, the government is realizing that model does not work.

Gen Xers have been forced to face the reality of their future and social security. At the turn of the century, a survey found that Gen Xers believe that social security can only be a secondary source of retirement income with 48% of Gen Xers believing that there will be no money to pay any benefits when they are eligible (The Future of Social Security for this Generation and the Next, 1997). Several factors influence Gen Xers' perceptions regarding availability of benefits for their retirement. First, the retirement age to receive full benefits has changed to 67 for persons born after 1960, which impacts the majority of Gen Xers (Social Security Administration, 2014). Secondly, some argue that the large number of Boomers will bankrupt the Social Security system, leaving Gen Xers with limited resources. Gen Xers have paid 12.4 % of earnings to Social Security (FICA and payroll tax) throughout their working adult years, while the Boomers started at 6.5% of earnings, eventually increasing to 12.4 % in 1990 (Firey, 2012). Yet, despite Gen Xers contribution, it appears that by 2037, when Gen Xers are

reaching retirement age, Social Security will be drained and benefits will be reduced to 75% (Firey, 2012). Edward expressed similar concerns:

I think a lot of them might have some pretty strong opinions about what's happening politically in terms of their entitlements or perceived entitlements. When I entered the work force basically everyone said don't even think about counting on your social security. I don't think that was true for the generation ahead of me. Xers complained about how big the boomers were and they felt the generation [Traditionalist] before them had a free ride. The generation [Millennials] behind them never counted on them, but our generation is seeing the initial impact. (IP4, 2013, p. 9)

Organizing theme 3.3: Struggles of dual career families. The following quote from Elisa clearly articulates the struggle she faces as being part of a dual career family:

I was just thinking about some of our senior leadership team members and I don't know all their situations, but if they have kids either they're out of the house or if they're young they have a spouse that stays home with them, so they don't have to deal with soccer carpools and sick kids. Maybe that's sort of a gender thing as well. Maybe being a Gen Xer, and maybe this is just the life stage that we're at, is Baby Boomers failing to recognize how hard this is to balance these two things and not really providing a workplace or benefits or whatever that help with that. Then, Millennials, who probably don't have kids yet, can't relate either. Maybe it's just this point where we're at in our 40s, and maybe that was my other point about sandwich generation, really and that we've got aging parents. Then we've got these little kids still. (IP5, 2013, p. 21)

The quote demonstrates how confounded this issue is and how difficult it is to discern if Elisa's challenges are related to generational location, life stage, or gender. A defining trend of the first part of the 21st century was the increased diversity in the workplace from the perspective of both fathers and mothers working. Organizations saw a shift from the traditional arrangement of father as the primary breadwinner and mother as the homemaker to both parents in the workforce. This trend has steadily increased for the past several decades (Percheski, 2008). Despite the fact that there is now more parity with respect to men and women in the workforce, women disproportionally still maintain the largest burden of the child care and household responsibilities (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). In fact, in a review of the literature on dual-career

families, much of the emphasis is on research that focuses on the challenges as a woman's problem as she now has to balance work and family (Spain & Bianchi, 1996).

For Elisa, as a working mother whose husband also works, the challenges are significant and it was clearly a theme throughout the interview. She expressed her frustration and resentment that she felt towards the Baby Boomers, as she perceives that most Baby Boomers do not have both spouses working:

Maybe that causes some resentment a little bit of like take a minute to walk in my shoes and see what that is like, or see how miraculous it is the things that are still able to get done with all this distraction. (IP5, 2013, p. 22)

Erickson (2010) reported that there was evidence to suggest that more Generation X women with families are in the workforce than women from the Boomer cohort. In 1975, 60% of women from the Boomer generation with children between the ages of 6-17 participated in the workforce compared to 2000 when 80% of Gen Xer women in the same category participated in the workforce (Erickson, 2009).

Basic theme 3.3.1: Being a working mom impacts your career. Public media has depicted today's professional women as the "opt out" generation, suggesting that they are leaving the workforce to stay home with children (Belkin, 2003). However, several research studies find that the reasons women leave the workforce are varied and include: changing career focus, barriers to career advancement, and seeking greater life balance (Cabrera, 2007). More notably, the study also found that family responsibilities presented a major barrier for women in the workforce (Cabrera, 2007), which aligns with the participants' construction of this basic theme.

For working women with children, the challenges are significant. One scholar concluded that one of the obstacles to women's advancement at work is the gender inequality in home

responsibilities (Wirth, 2001). Women are still responsible for the majority of family work, which lends itself to time scarcity issues that ultimately results in time that cannot be spent at work (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Wirth, 2001). This, of course, can be exacerbated if families have children. Many women also believe that family responsibilities pose a barrier to their advancement (Liff & Ward, 2001). A recent study employing a mixed methods approach found that family responsibilities and work discontinuity were barriers to advancement for women with children (Metz, 2005). In response to these challenges, some working moms do “opt out” of the workforce while others strive to find unique career options. The Pew Research Group found that 60% of working moms find part-time employment to be ideal (Taylor, Funk, & Clark, 2007). In 1989, a new term was introduced “mommytrack” to refer to an alternative career path that allows a mother flexible or reduced work hours, but at the same time tends to slow or block advancement (Schwartz, 1989).

For Elisa, whose husband works outside the home as well, she commented on her challenges having a dual career family and being a working mother. She discovered early on that decisions would have to be made that would impact her career if she decided to have children:

And I think the gender role has come into play. I had one business partner say to me once , and this is not that long ago, I mean, within the last five to seven years, said, “You or your husband need to decide whose career is more important.” (IP5, 2013, p. 19)

Elisa talked about her perceptions of being stuck as a Gen Xer, which clearly impacted her career trajectory:

I’m sure some people did it, but I think having dual incomes, which was hard and maybe not always understood or embraced or supported. Then having kids, I think for both my husband and I, we felt like we couldn’t shoot for the top job. I mean, that was a choice that we made. If career was the most important priority, then probably we wouldn’t have had kids or one of us would have needed to just stay home. It’s like we kind of split the baby, right? (IP5, 2013, p. 18)

She also recognized that being a mom and being an employee has taken an emotional toll and often leaves her feeling guilty:

A little bit, because there's a little bit of that either guilt of I'm not being the mother I should be, nor am I being the employee that I should be. There's that pressure. (IP5, 2013, p. 27)

Studies have found that dual career families develop strategies for coping with the balance of work and family. which include placing limits on work, having one breadwinner who was career focused and one person who had a job and was not career focused, and making tradeoffs (Becker & Moen, 1999). Moreover, the findings suggested that two-thirds of the women compared to one-third of the men reported embracing these strategies to maintain a balance and ultimately, more women than men opted out of career advancements for the same reason (Becker & Moen, 1999).

Basic theme 3.3.2: Different realities for families with stay at home spouse. Some of the participants' perceptions were that Baby Boomers have stay at home spouses, which makes it difficult for a Baby Boomer to understand the challenges of a dual career family:

And I see a lot of Baby Boomers whose wives stay at home, sorry it's just a stereotype, but wives stay home and to me it really taints their view of how they interact with the other generations because their mindset is it's just me, I can do anything I want, you know I could be here until midnight if you want. (IP2, 2013, p. 16)

Two of the study participants come from a dual career family where both the husband and wife work outside the home. Paul's comments above reflect the belief that the experiences of a dual career family cannot be understood by a Baby Boomer who has a wife at home. Edward, however, decided that having one spouse stay at home was the right solution for their family. This is how he describes that decision and how the choice has impacted him:

We made the either brilliant move or painful move, depending on how you see it, that when we had our first 13 years ago my wife got out of the working for a company and

went to work for herself as a mom. She has been at home, so we've had that kind of lifestyle (IP4, 2013, p. 23)

During our conversation, Edward described himself as traditional and closely aligned to a Baby Boomer's value system. He and his wife have five children and he suggested that having her as stay at home spouse has been difficult financially, but they have made it work. More importantly, he knows that having his wife stay at home has greatly enhanced his job satisfaction as he can stay focused on his career.

Organizing theme 3.4: Limited ability to influence the workplace. A recent article in popular management literature expresses the sentiment that Baby Boomers have long insisted on having their presence felt and heard in the world, while Gen Xers felt that no one was listening to them (Asghar, 2014). Gen Xers, within this study, have also expressed their frustrations about Boomer dominance and Boomer influence in their value systems (see Theme 9). Many Gen Xers expressed individual and shared constructions that suggested how hard it is to influence the workplace given the cohort's small size and their lack of positional power. Elisa expressed the dynamic at hand:

We're not in positional power. I'm noticing more and more people in their career are moving up the ladder slowly, but until some of those Boomers tend to retire more/ exit ... I don't know if we have positional or numerical power, or do we vote and have enough blocks to change that kind of stuff. (IP5, 2013, p. 6)

Representing 46 to 49 million of the U.S. population (Klie, 2012; Lancaster & Stillman, 2003), Gen Xers are considered the smallest workforce cohort as compared to the Baby Boomers at 80 million and Millennials at approximately 78 million (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003). Many of the study participants have experienced feeling "smaller" than the other generations. For Paul, his organization refers to a bimodal workforce and this is how he describes it:

So you know the big lumps on each side and then there's a valley for the Gen Xers and I call them sort of mid-career people, because whatever ages they are, that's kind of where we're at. (IP2, 2013, p. 5)

Catherine acknowledged that there are fewer people of her age where she works. Edward acknowledged that he was the younger one on his leadership team as most of the organizational leaders are Baby Boomers. Many of the participants recognized an inability to influence Human Resources Development policies and practices in the workplace. As Elisa summarized her thoughts around Gen Xers' influences she noted that "there just aren't as many of us" (IP5, 2013, p. 10) resulting in her feeling that "we're not going to influence that but we'll just wait" (IP5, 2013, p. 29).

Organizing theme 3.5: Navigating through workplace diversity. An influential report from the Hudson Institute suggested that the 21st century workforce would be more diverse, with only 15% of the new entrants to the labor force being white males as compared to 47% at the time of the publication (Johnston & Packer, 1987). At the turn of the century, managers began to voice concerns over how to manage the incoming diversity, but it appears that change has been slow. Despite these concerns, actions to understand and manage workplace diversity were largely superficial in the beginning of the 21st century (Jackson, 1992).

For each generational cohort, their exposure to diversity has steadily increased over the past century. As one generational author writes, "If you had asked a Traditionalist engineer in the early 1950s about diversity in his workplace, he might have said, "Hey, we're diverse. We have two former Army sergeants in our department, one Navy commander, and even an Air Force pilot!" The diversity equation was as simple as black and white. Actually, it was even simpler: they were mostly all white and they were 99.9 percent male" (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003, p. 320). Historically, politically, and organizationally, the United States has made increased efforts

towards diversity inclusion. For example, the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s and the Women's Rights movement in the 1970s, government influences such as NAFTA and equal employment legislation, globalization and competition are all major influences on cultural diversity work environment. The 21st century presents another inflection point in that journey as more and more organizations are becoming increasingly more global.

For Gen Xers, the world that they have grown up in has been vastly different than that of the Baby Boomers. As Lancaster and Stillman (2003) note, "Having watched thousands of hours of television and spent a lot of time in day care and after-school programs, Gen Xers experienced more diversity than any of the previous generations" (p. 321). This has been the experience of Edward in his senior leadership role in Chicago:

Yeah, and maybe it's because I work in technology which is very diverse - because you run into folks of Asian descent or you ran into folks of Indian descent. Half of our development here at work is Russian, and they come from Russian background—I mean I told you in my team of 13 I have six religions. I have six religions on my team! (IP4, 2013, p. 7)

The organizing theme of navigating through workplace diversity has been constructed by the participants with four basic themes: *Boomers haven't experienced as much workforce diversity, Gen Xers had to figure out diversity issues on their own, diversity is all Millennials have known, and Baby Boomers still hold gender biases.*

Basic theme 3.5.1: Boomers haven't experienced as much workforce diversity. As Lancaster and Stillman (2003) suggest, workplace diversity was not front and center for many Baby Boomers for the majority of their careers. It is projected that white non-Hispanic workforce percentages will shrink from 76% in 1995 to 68% by the year 2020 (Judy & D'Amico, 1997). The change represents an increasingly diverse population of workers—Hispanics, Asian, and Indian employees—who are now part of the U.S. workforce. Given that his Boomer colleagues

are in senior leadership roles, most of their direct reports are in management as well, which has less diversity and thus Edward's perception is that they do not share the same challenges as Edward, who does manage an incredibly diverse team:

On my team, I have six different religions including an atheist. I guarantee you there's not a boomer that had to deal with that. When you talk about boomers they're all middle America, apple pie people. Talk about my generation, all of a sudden you get different ethnic backgrounds, maybe a little bit different culture. (IP4, 2013, p. 18)

Basic theme 3.5.2: Gen Xers had to figure out diversity issues on their own. Given that the Boomers have been somewhat removed from the 21st trend of increased diversity within the workplace, Gen Xers, who are primarily in midcareer roles, have been the ones to navigate through this new, uncharted territory. During the interview, Edward describes how he had to figure out where to hold team lunches given the diverse eating requirements on his team:

Yeah, the Millennials never answer by it. My roommate in college was an Indian, and he got me into vegetarian food. They don't eat pork, they know all these social rules. The older folks, and the generation ahead of us, feel like, "I don't care about any of that stuff. I don't go to team lunches anymore," right?. So we had to figure out about diversity without guidance. No guidance, no help. We just figured it out. And some of us didn't. (IP4, 2013, p. 7)

Edward questions why there are not more training programs for or emphasis on helping managers figure out how to navigate in a diverse workforce:

So your whole thing—now I don't want to go too far with it because your whole generations right? And I get that, and the things that are based upon a person's age. I just kind of bring in the diversity theme a little bit because I think that we don't focus on diversity- and there were all kinds of corporate training classes on how to deal with negative personalities, or how to motivate people, or how to organize, or project management this, or six sigma that, whatever you want to do, there was never a class that said, "You have five different religions on your team." And how do you navigate that background thing? How do you schedule a team lunch at a steakhouse when two of the people in your team are vegetarians for religious reasons, but won't say anything because they're in the lower rank? (IP4, 2013, p. 6)

Basic theme 3.5.3: Diversity is all Millennials have known. Differences are considered a positive for Millennials. Tulgan (2009) suggests that Millennials shape our understanding of

what may be considered unique. Millennials grew up experiencing more daily interaction with different ethnicities and cultures than any other cohort in history (Raines, 2002). Moreover, the Millennial cohort is more likely to be diverse. They are more likely to come from a biracial or multiracial parent and they are more likely to come from immigrant parents (Broido, 2004). Given Millennials' exposure and direct interaction with diversity, their attitudes toward diversity issues are substantially different than the previous two generations. Broido (2004) suggested that Millennials have a broader conceptualization of race that extends beyond "black and white." Moreover, they tend to hold more egalitarian views towards women than the Gen Xers, and are certainly more egalitarian than the Boomer generation (Broido, 2004). Edward's experiences with Millennials and diversity suggest that Millennials do have a greater tolerance and understanding towards issues of diversity:

Talk about my generation, all of a sudden you get different ethnic backgrounds, maybe a little bit different culture. You talk about Millennials and the cultural mixing pot is unbelievably more diverse-on every level that you can possibility imagine. (IP4, 2013, p. 17)

Basic theme 3.5.4: Baby Boomers still hold gender biases. Gender issues in the workplace are complex and multidimensional. It is estimated that women now make up half of the U.S. workforce, yet tend to still hold lower level positions with less formal power and authority than their male counterparts (Shenbaum, 2000). Additionally, they tend to hold a very small percentage (14.6%) of corporate officer positions in Fortune 500 companies (Catalyst, 2014). In addition to being underrepresented in more influential positions, women continue to experience unique challenges and gender bias in the workforce. Some of these factors include a perceived lack of opportunity for advancement, discrimination, harassment, or a prevailing culture that is hostile to women (Feyerherm & Vick, 2005).

More recently, researchers have been trying to understand more modern forms of discrimination in an attempt to explain the continued and persistent gender inequalities within the U.S. One of these new forms is selective incivility, which suggests that women may be selectively targeted to be “on the receiving end” of behaviors that may seem inconsequential, but violate conventional norms of workplace conduct (Kabat-Farr & Cortina, 2012). These behaviors might include colleagues using a condescending tone, ignoring or interrupting a colleague, or belittling a coworker’s contribution (Kabat-Farr, 2012). Furthermore, research suggests an organization and its leaders may openly condemn sexism and endorse an egalitarian environment, but the prevailing culture and implicit beliefs of these leaders are sexist and as such, they may discriminate in various inconspicuous ways (Kabat-Farr & Cortina, 2012). Elisa’s comment speaks to the issue of selective incivility as she experienced a Boomer speaking condescendingly to her female supervisor:

Then I just think there are some basic gender biases. I mean, just this week there was probably an older boomer who made a comment to my female boss about seeing if she was following the conversation in a very condescending way. I think the older Boomer generation doesn’t recognize women as equals. (IP5, 2013, p. 29)

Similarly, Edward acknowledged that Boomers on his leadership team still think it is funny to tell “blonde” jokes, which suggests that the culture allows for gender bias:

That’s where my challenges come into. It’s just cultural demands and every aspect of that. You get, forgive me, I’m going to be a little bit literal here, you have older white males on the team that still thinks it’s funny to tell blonde jokes. (IP4, 2013, p. 18)

Feyerherm and Vick (2005) examined Generation X women in the workforce. Their intent was to examine the unique needs of Generation X women who are in midcareer and leadership positions as well as to examine the relationship that these women have with their work. Within this phenomenological study, all women expressed the belief that the male dominated culture continued to be a barrier to their success (Feyerherm & Vick, 2005).

Moreover, the participants felt that this discrimination has gone underground so that it goes unnoticed (Feyerherm & Vick, 2005). As such, the participants felt undervalued, stereotyped, underutilized, and in need of seeking alternative employment opportunities. Elisa summarizes her thoughts about gender biases in the workplace:

Or what their role is or whatever, or that they can't be in leadership positions and such. I think some of it is just deep down sexism, absolutely. Anyway, I think maybe that kind of thing is either direct or it's pervasive. (IP5, 2013, p. 29)

Summary of global theme. This sub-section presents a visual of the ensuing hermeneutic spectrum for the global theme of *there are challenges unique to Gen Xers*—how this global theme is experienced and expressed similarly and differently by Gen Xers. A summary is also provided in the form of a table of the global, organizing and basic themes together with selective clarifying and supporting points from the participants and literature.

Hermeneutic spectrum. This global theme has a broad range of description. A broad range signified highly varied individual constructions and descriptions which provides insight into a looser spread of experience and ways of knowing. While all participants constructed unique challenges in their lives as Gen Xers in the workplace, those challenges were, again, highly contextual and thus, variable. This variance in terms of ways of knowing would suggest recognition of the individual diversity amongst the study participants as well as their unique life stage and circumstance. For example, Elisa, who works as part of a dual career family, has significant challenges that are unique to being in a dual career family. She has young children at home, which speaks to her life stage, and struggles to meet all the competing agendas in her life. The level of variation, specifically for this theme, underscores the relevance for context to fully understand the breadth for this phenomenon. The range of description for this global theme is presented in Figure 20.

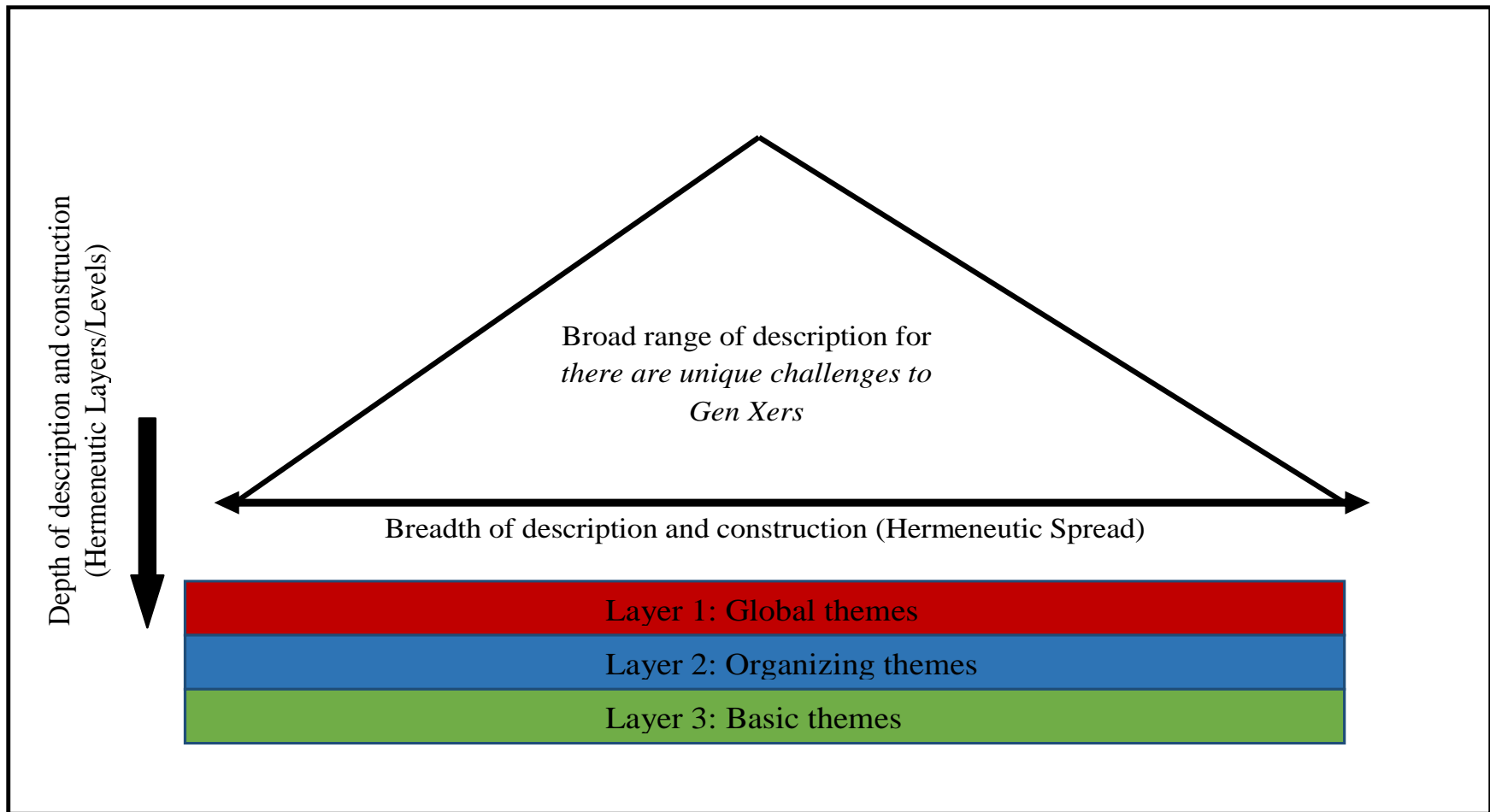


Figure 20. A broad/wide and deep/thick hermeneutic spectrum for *there are unique challenges to Gen Xers*

Key points from participants and supporting literature. In summary, for the six study participants, they have co-constructed that *there are unique challenges to Gen Xers* and as mentioned above, the constructions are highly contextual. The organization themes include: *lack of organizational commitment, anticipated changes in government entitlements, dual career families, and limited ability to influence the workplace*. Table 13 summarizes the organizing and basic themes by summarizing key points from the participants and then aligning supporting literature.

Table 13

Summary of supporting and clarifying points from participants and informing literature for the global theme of There are Challenges Unique to Gen Xers

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
3.1: Lack of organizational commitment		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There's a lot of exiting. • One of our negatives is it's harder for us to stay the course. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gen Xers tend to be less loyal and independent (Benson & Brown, 2011; Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007). • Gen Xers work to live as opposed to Boomers who live to work (Gursoy et al., 2008).
3.2: Anticipated changes in government entitlements		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think a lot of them might have some pretty strong opinions about what's happening politically in terms of their entitlements or 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 50% of Gen Xers perceive that there will be a reduction in social security benefits (Pew Research Center, 2014).

(continued)

Table 13. Continued

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
3.3: Struggles of dual career families	3.3.1: Being a working mom impacts your career	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> perceived entitlements. • We're the ones getting affected. • I think Gen Xers have more dual career families. • • I think there's this conflict of just reality of outside pressures and choices to have a family and work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social security benefits will be drained and benefits will be reduced to 75% (Firey, 2012). • Trend is to have both parents working (Percheski, 2008). • Women disproportionately maintain the largest burden of the child care and household responsibilities (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010).
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think for both my husband and I, we felt like we couldn't shoot for the opt job. I mean that was a choice that we made. • There's a little bit of that either guilt of I'm not being the mother I should be, nor am I being the employee that I should be. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family responsibilities presented a major barrier for women in the workforce (Cabrera, 2007). • Women's career advancement is hindered by gender inequality in home responsibilities (Wirth, 2001). 	

(continued)

Table 13. Continued

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
	3.3.2: Different realities for families with stay at home spouse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It really taints their view of how they interact with the other generations because their mindset is it's just me. • I love the fact that she stays at home because it does allow me to focus on my career. 	
3.4: Limited ability to influence the workplace		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maybe there just aren't as many of us. • We just haven't had the political power in order to be known. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Popular management literature reinforces the notion that Gen Xers perceive that no one is listening to them (Asghar, 2014). • Gen Xers represent a much smaller cohort (Klie, 2012; Lancaster & Stillman, 2003).
3.5: Navigating through workplace diversity		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I told you in my team of thirteen, I have six religions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21st century workforce would be substantially more diverse (Johnston & Packer, 1987)

(continued)

Table 13. Continued

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
	3.5.1: Boomers haven't experienced as much workplace diversity	Political background, sexual orientations, cultural, country of origin, language of origin, none of that stuff exists when you talk about the Boomers.	White non-Hispanic workforce percentages will shrink from 75% to 68% by the year 2020 (Judy & D'Amico, 1997).
	3.5.2: Gen Xers had to figure out diversity issues on their own	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We had to figure out how to do it. • It's a little bit awkward to talk about, but man it's challenging. • How do you schedule a team lunch at a steakhouse when two of the people in your team are vegetarians for religious reasons? 	
	3.5.3: Diversity is all Millennials have known	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have Millennials that just sit there and blink and can't even believe that the words are coming out on the table. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Millennials grew up in an environment with more daily interaction with different ethnicities and culture than any

(continued)

Table 13. Continued

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The folks behind us just assume it. 	<p>other cohort in history (Raines, 2002).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Millennials have a broader conceptualization of race and more egalitarian views towards women (Broido, 2004).
	3.5.4: Baby Boomers still hold gender biases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You have older white males on the team that still thinks it's funny to tell blonde jokes. I think some of it is just deep down sexism. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women still experience unique challenges and gender bias in the workforce and modern (Feyerherm & Vick, 2005). Modern sexism is where an organization may openly condemn sexism but the organization still discriminates in various inconspicuous ways (Kabat-Farr & Cortina, 2012).

The essence of Global theme 3 is a symbolic representation by the participants to their unique contextual environments and experiences which again underscores the highly contextual nature of a constructivist study. These experiences range from having environments where the

participant had to navigate through generational diversity to dealing with the implications of being part of a dual career family. As a result of the varied ways of knowing, it was determined that this theme had a broad hermeneutic spectrum. Global theme 4 identifies the perceptions that Gen Xers have about themselves and their role within the workplace.

Global Theme 4: Gen Xers have Perceptions about Themselves and Their Work Role

All the study participants were able to describe unique aspects about themselves, as Gen Xers, and their work role. The global theme includes four organizing themes and eight basic themes. The organizing themes are: *Gen Xers live in both worlds*, *Gen Xers need a dynamic career strategy*, *Gen Xers have a defined leadership style*, and *Gen Xers are influenced by life stage factors*. A visual representation of the global theme, organizing themes, and basic themes is displayed in Figure 21.

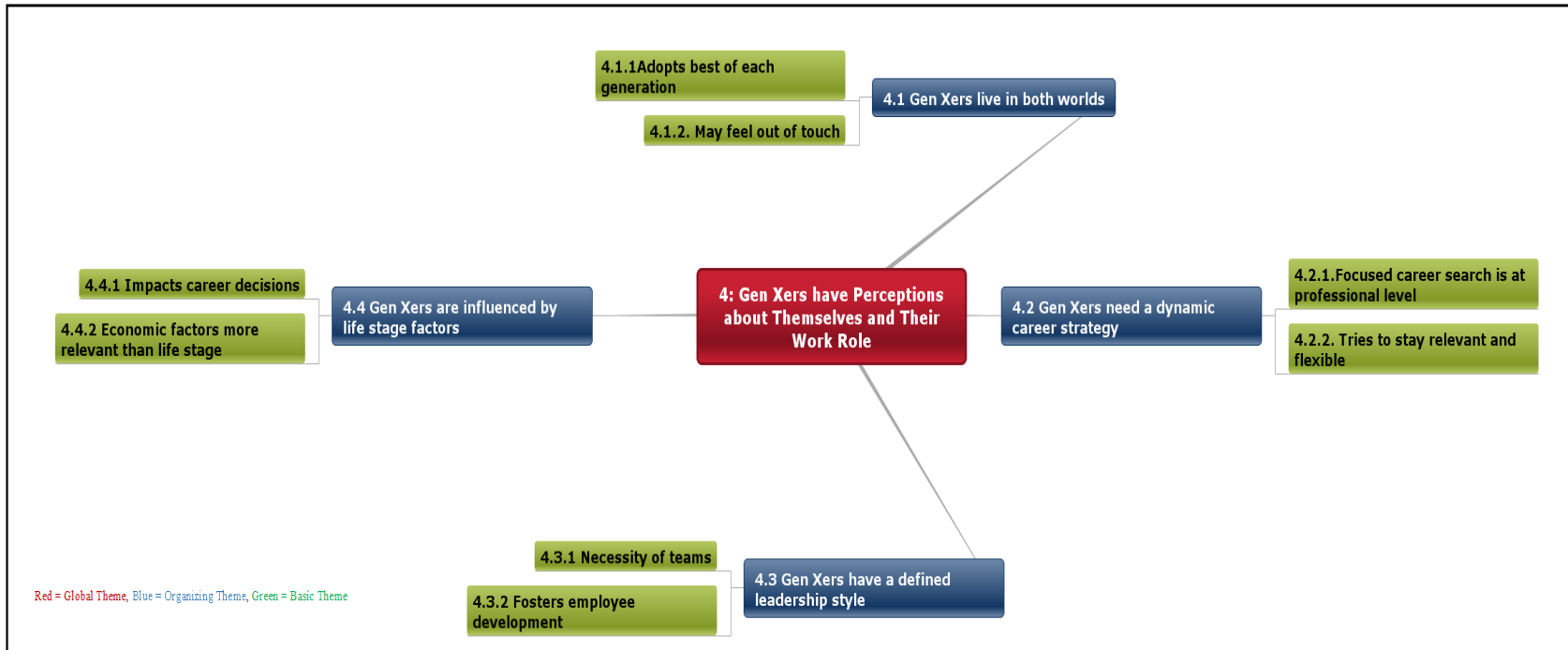


Figure 21. Global theme of Gen Xers have perceptions about themselves and their work role

Organizing theme 4.1: They live in both worlds. Paul, an HR business partner, describes himself as living in both worlds. He noted that he has to be aware with what the Millennials are asking for and also what the Baby Boomers need and want. This organizing theme was individually and co-constructed by the participants *as adopts best of each generation and may feel out of touch.*

Basic theme 4.1.1: Adopts best of each generation. Described in popular management literature as the generation “stuck in the middle,” this perception has carried with it a negative connotation (Klie, 2012). However, for many of the study participants, being in the middle has its advantages:

In the political spectrum, have you ever heard someone describe themselves as half Democratic, half Republican? Maybe they’ll say I’m fiscally a Republican and socially I’m a Democrat or something like that where they try to take the best of both worlds, they end up not in the middle but this third leg off to the right? I kind of view myself as a manager that way. (IP4, 2013, p. 14)

Recognizing their cohort position, several participants mentioned that they take advantage of where they sit by adopting the best of all generations. For example, Edward, who holds a management position and works extensively with Boomers, Gen Xers and Millennials, recognizes and embraces the positive aspects of Baby Boomers and Millennials. For Edward this has been key to his success and has provided a competitive advantage:

I perform in a high performance team and demonstrating that I can do the same thing for 10 years that nobody else in my generation wants to do. I like that; I’ve just differentiated myself by keeping some of the good from the younger generation, some of the good from the older generation and mixing it together. I’m not stereotypical, hopefully. Hopefully, that’s how I would be described. (IP4, 2013, p. 16)

Similar to Edward, John has worked with significant generational diversity throughout his career. Although this has presented many challenges for him, he was also able to recognize

the strengths of Boomers and Millennials that could be advantageous to his career. For John, Baby Boomers possess the social skills that he knows are important for the workplace and Millennials provide expertise with technology. During the interview, John emphasized that he tries to model the positive traits of both of these cohorts. He believes that because of where he sits, as a Gen Xer stuck between these two cohorts, he can embrace traits of both Millennials and Baby Boomers. This is how John describes it:

I think I do live in both worlds to some extent, and I look at it from a technology and non-technology aspect. (IP6, 2013, p. 6)

Basic theme 4.1.2: *May feel of out touch.* For Paul, whose role is to serve as an HR advisor for all generations, admitted that at times he feels out of touch. This may be the cornerstone of the generational debate within popular management literature. Specifically, scholars and practitioners recognize that each generation has its unique needs and behaviors who may find it difficult to be effective with other generations as they, too, feel “out of touch” with other generations. Sometimes, one generation may feel “out of touch” with the experiences and needs of another generation as those preferences may be vastly different. Many popular generational publications attempt to help business practitioners understand the different generational motivators, work styles, and characteristics so employees can gain an appreciation and understanding for those unique differences. Academic literature suggests that generational differences can impact employee retention and motivation and thereby, recommend organization’s rethink their existing human resource practices to mitigate those differences (Glass, 2007). Paul recognizes that he does not have the insight to fully understand Millennials and Baby Boomers:

And then to be frank with you, I don't know what it's like to be 55 and have those issues as well. Like I don't know what it's like to be a student, I don't know what it's like to be 21, you know? I mean I read a lot, I feel informed about the topics and the issues, but

you know seeing it play out in the workforce, it's kind of a case by case thing. (IP2, 2013, p. 6)

Organizing theme 4.2: Gen Xers need a dynamic career strategy. As midcareer professionals, Gen Xers are in an interesting position. Although the short term prospects may be bleak due to Boomers remaining in their roles, the long term outlook for work is very promising. Erickson (2010) defined a simple way for individuals to think about this long term equation. She wrote “many economies around the globe are reaching sizes that provide the capacity to create more jobs than the projected working age population can fill” (Erickson, 2009, p. 97). Erickson (2009) recommended a dynamic career strategy for Gen Xers to take advantage of the future potential by incorporating three key components of continued education, creating breadth of knowledge, and networking. This organizing theme is individually and co-constructed with two basic themes: focused career search is at professional level and tries to stay relevant and flexible.

Basic theme 4.2.1: Focused career search is at professional level. During the interview, Catherine spoke about her frustrations regarding her career. Primarily, Catherine has worked in entry level and administrative roles with the intention from her employers that she would be given advancement opportunities and more challenging work. This is how she described her career philosophy:

I'll get started, I'll work my way up. I started every single position with that mentality, I would get the job, I'll do it for a couple years and then I'll work my way up and there was never an up. I never knew anyone in my graduating class in 2000 that was recruited out of college into a role. It seems like that went away at some point. (IP1, 2013, p. 14)

After repeated experiences of this not happening, Catherine has been rethinking her career strategy:

I refuse to start so low because too often what's happened is my strengths and characteristics have been recognized by my supervisors and been highlighted to a point, but never to a promotion. So I refuse to work beneath my work level anymore, because it won't go anywhere. (IP1, 2013, p. 15)

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Gen Xers are motivated by challenging, meaningful work; they are also motivated by extrinsic motivators such as pay, title, and career advancement.

Catherine indicated during her interview that neither aspect is present within her current role. As such, she recognizes that she needs to approach her career from a different lens. For Catherine, this means a focused career search that targets professional level jobs only.

Basic theme 4.2.2: Tries to stay relevant and flexible. Gen Xers career objective has been to gain as many skills and experiences as possible in order to maintain a strategic advantage (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003). The management literature reinforces this concept and recommends that Gen Xers develop a breadth of knowledge and skills (Erickson, 2009). Having grown up in an era where traditional jobs were eroding and contracts between employer and employee are almost nonexistent, Gen Xers have different views concerning their value to employers and their sense of loyalty (Brousseau, Driver, Eneroth, & Larson, 1996). Gen Xers have been taught to think of their careers in terms of career resiliency, where the objective is continuous learning and being adaptable to changing organizational needs (Brousseau et al., 1996). With the idea of resiliency in mind, it makes sense that Edward conceived of his career with this objective:

When I say that I think it has to do with maintaining relevancy. You have to maintain your edge. For me, when I talk about keeping a job it has to do with staying relevant, representing values, still working hard, not being a head case, not being a problem, and basically thinking about the things that we don't like about boomers and thinking about the things that we don't like about the generation behind me and feeling not so safe. (IP4, 2013, p. 10)

Michelle, whose work environment is focused on performance, echoed similar sentiments:

Yep, you've got to keep up on your skills, which are true with really anything, but I think we see it more prevalent today than maybe we did fifty years ago. (IP3, 2013, p. 7)

Organizing theme 4.3: Gen Xers have a defined leadership style. Traditional leadership paradigms, such as command and control leadership, no longer fit in today's modern workplace. Gen Xers and Millennials, who are considered highly educated and value growth and development, require different leadership styles than other generations (Tulgan, 1996). One working hypothesis has been that the migration to the knowledge economy has forced this new way of more collaborative leading (Yu & Miller, 2005). The organizing theme of Gen Xers have a defined leadership style is constructed with two basic themes: *necessity of teams and fosters employee development.*

Basic theme 4.3.1: Necessity of teams. Gen Xers have a strong capacity to be collaborative in their leadership styles (Erickson, 2010). Erickson (2010) suggested that this generation has had an accelerated exposure to the real world and the relationships that they have formed have kept them grounded. Increased complexity of work processes coupled with advancing technologies have forced Gen Xers to rely on teams, and relationships within those teams, to achieve desired results. In fact, a positive perception associated with Gen Xers has been their ability to be team oriented (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003). Edward, one of the study participants and someone in a leadership role, has built his leadership style around teams. During the interview, he expressed great satisfaction and pride in the fact that he promotes a team environment and his employees want to stay. Given the vast diversity on his team, as mentioned previously, Edward finds promoting team work as an equalizer:

I'm just a big team guy because I found that successful in the past and I think that works here. I think that's a way ... it's an equalizer between those that are early in their career and have no idea where they're going and those are later in their career that are looking for support. Everyone can benefit from it if it's presented in the right light. If you talk about it as a positive or manage it as a positive, team support, someone's got your back, team diversity and opportunity, and you manage around the fears of it's going to hold me back or if one guy sinks we all sink, or does that mean it's the only way I can progress in my career is through somebody else on the team, as long as you take those fears away

and focus on the positives, then the team concept can be very, very powerful dynamic. (IP4, 2013, p. 14)

Edward's premise is largely supported in the academic and popular literature where the impact of teams on organizational output has been well documented with academic findings supporting the notion that teams can outperform individual contributions (Katzenbach, 1993).

Basic theme 4.3.2: Fosters employee development. Edward was one of the few participants who managed a large number of direct reports. His personal style has been to encourage employee development for everyone on his team:

Every single person on my team has an education track .I don't care what you're learning this year, but you're learning something. Every single person on my team has a career track. Every single person on my team has a social track. Those are the three things that we work on. You cannot assume that you can still be a great guy and have this job in two years. (IP4, 2013, p. 14)

This aligns with the previous basic theme that stressed relevancy. Edward continually reinforced the notion that his employees, as well as himself, needed to be prepared for a potential job search. He expressed the three factors that influence a job search which included one's career experience, career path and then one's social network.

Organizing theme 4.4: Gen Xers are influenced by life stage factors. Levinson's Model of Life Development was formulated as a result of in-depth interviews of 40 men conducted over a two-year period. The essential premise of this model is that all persons will grow through specific life stages during which there are equally specific psychological adjustments that must be completed (Ornstein, Cron, & Slocum, 1989). These life stages are directly related to biologic age and Levinson suggested that there are four distinct life eras: childhood, early adulthood (20-40), middle adulthood (40-60), and late adulthood (over 60) (Ornstein et al., 1989). Moreover, the life cycle effect would suggest that different issues may have differing degrees of importance based on what life stage an individual is in. As an example,

Levinson suggested that the majority of those in a midlife stage (40-45 years old) focused their career strategies on finding more meaningful work as well as finding a job that provided a better fit between personal values and their work (Jans, 1989). The study participants, many who fall within that same biologic age range, suggested meaningful work and value congruence were critical factors for their job satisfaction, as well. The organizing theme of influence of life stage factors is co-constructed with two basic themes: *impacts career decisions and economic factors more relevant than life stage*.

Basic theme 4.4.1: Impacts career decision. Researchers have studied the effects of family on careers. Jans (1989) examined the effects of many variables on organizational commitment. It was hypothesized that the more a person valued family factors, the lower the organizational commitment would be for that individually. Secondly, the study hypothesized that organizational commitment would vary across the life cycle of an individual. Family priorities/focus did tend to influence a person's level of organizational commitment (Jans, 1989).

The study participants echoed similar sentiments:

And I'll be very honest with you. Life stage right now, I'm probably putting more energy into home and civic stuff than I am my work, so that's a choice I make right? But that's what I want to do right now. (IP2, 2013, p. 19)

For Paul, who has school aged children and a working spouse, family is taking top priority. Additionally, being involved in civic responsibilities and volunteering has also been important to him on a personal level. Moreover, career-family priorities were variable based on family pressures such as having school aged children and thus needing geographic stability (Jans, 1989). Again, Paul echoed very similar sentiments:

Right, I mean I've talked about you know, kids are in college, I'm free to travel and go wherever, but right now, it's a pretty sticky, you know just from a gen ex standpoint and career opportunities, I've just never thought of it in that context. (IP2, 2013, p. 16)

The findings from the Jans' study also revealed that life cycle influenced organizational commitment and that varied throughout one's life stages (Jans, 1989). Paul recognized the distinction between being a Gen Xer and being in a certain stage of life and believes that his stage of life is having a greater influence on his career choices, which he anticipates will change:

So I'll always be a Gen Xer, but I won't always be in this life stage, so talk to me seven years from now and it's going to be completely different, so good point. (IP2, 2013, p. 19)

Basic theme 4.4.2: Economic factors more relevant than life stage. John did not perceive life stage as a factor that has impact on one's career. Throughout John's interview, he referenced the economic influences on his life. This was apparent from historical references (economic hardships) such as the dot-com "bust" of the late 1990s when economic conditions became unfavorable within the U.S. As such, John perceives that economic factors weigh more heavily on career choice than a person's life stage. He describes this belief as follows:

Well, I perceive all of us in the same stage. I see Baby Boomers as a lot of them, what I see is if they can, both of them are working because most of these people are not ready for retirement. Then, the Gen Xers, I think, it's not uncommon for both to work because just to maintain the lifestyle that's harder to maintain than it used to be, and then, the Millennials, they're coming out of school, and I think both of them are working typically. I don't know. My perception is we're all similar. (IP6, 2013, p. 6)

Summary of global theme. This sub-section presents a visual of the ensuing hermeneutic spectrum for the global theme of *Gen Xers have perceptions of themselves and their work role*—how this global theme is experienced and expressed similarly and differently by Gen Xers. A summary is also provided in the form of a table of the global, organizing and basic themes together with selective clarifying and supporting points from the participants and literature.

Hermeneutic spectrum. The global theme has a moderate to broad range of description. As discussed previously, many of the participant's constructions are contextual and unique to

that individual. For this theme, which speaks directly to their perceptions of themselves and their work role, again there are unique constructions that result in a looser spread of experience and ways of knowing. Life and career stage are important factors for this theme. For example, one of the organizing themes recognizes a varied career strategy based on where the participant may be in their career cycle. One participant, who was a senior leader, recognized the importance for him to have a defined leadership style. Again, these organizing themes speak to the unique context of the individual. The theme has a moderate to broad range of description suggesting a looser spread of experiences as presented in Figure 22.

Key points from participants and supporting literature. The following summarizes Gen Xers have perceptions about themselves and their work role. The six participant's individual and shared constructions consisted of the following: *Gen Xers live in both worlds, Gen Xers need a dynamic career strategy, Gen Xers have a defined leadership style, and Gen Xers are influenced by life stage factors.* Table 14 summarizes the organizing and basic themes by identifying key points from the participants and then aligning supporting literature.

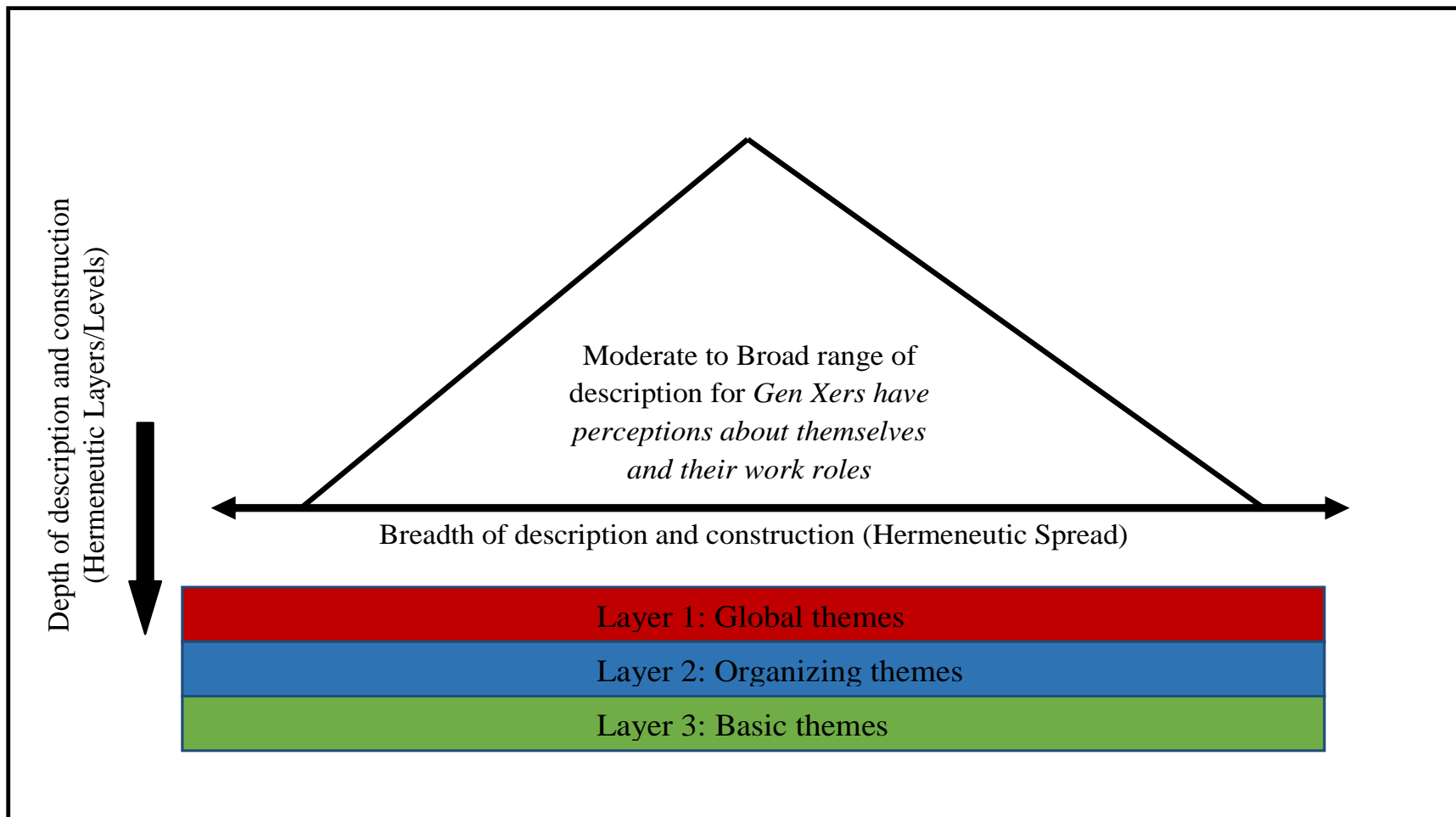


Figure 22. A moderate-broad/wide and deep/thick hermeneutic spectrum for *Gen Xers* have perceptions about themselves and their work roles

Table 14

Summary of supporting and clarifying points from participants and informing literature for the global theme of Gen Xers have Perceptions about Themselves and Their Work Role

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
4.1: Gen Xers live in both worlds		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think I live in both worlds a bit. • You have to be in tune with, you know, what the Millennials are asking for and also what the Baby Boomers need and want. 	
	4.1.1: Adopts best of each generation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hopefully, I'm viewed as someone that has the skill set of a Gen Xer or even a Millennials, but I have the personality or social mannerisms of a Boomer. That's really what I'm looking for. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gen Xers are “stuck in the middle” (Klie, 2012).

(continued)

Table 14. Continued

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
	4.1.2: May feel out of touch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't what it's like to be 55 and have those issues, as well. • I feel a little bit out of touch. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generational differences can impact retention and motivation issues (Glass, 2007).
4.2: Gen Xers need a dynamic career strategy	4.2.1: Focused career strategy is at professional level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I refuse to start low. • I refuse to work beneath my work level anymore because it won't go anywhere. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gen Xers are motivated by extrinsic factors such as pay, title and career advancement (Sullivan et al., 2009).
	4.2.2: Tries to stay relevant and flexible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have to maintain your edge. • You've got to keep up on your skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gen Xers' goals is to maintain career resiliency (Brousseau et al., 1996). • Gen Xers have different view concerning their value to employers and sense of loyalty (Brousseau et al., 1996).
4.3: Gen Xers have a defined leadership style			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The knowledge economy has force a new way of leading that is

(continued)

Table 14. Continued

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
	4.3.1: Necessity of teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I'm just a big team guy. You actually get that it's about collaboration and working together. 	<p>more collaborative (Yu & Miller, 2005).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gen Xers are perceived as being team oriented (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003). Teams outperform individual contributions (Katzenbach, 1993).
4.4: Gen Xers are influenced by life stage factors		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> So, I'll always be a Gen Xer, but I won't always be in this life stage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Levinson's Model of Life Development basic premise is that all persons go through specific life stages that require psychological adjustments (Ornstein et al., 1989).
	4.4.1: Impacts career decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You know I think we're probably a little less, we're more conservative than we were, so we're not taking as 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family priorities influence a person's level of commitment to their job (Jans, 1989).

(continued)

Table 14. Continued

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
	4.4.2: Economic factors more relevant than life stage	<p>many risks in our career.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It depends on the economic conditions. 	

The essence of Global theme 4 is recognition by the participants that they have defined perceptions about them as Gen Xers in the workplace and in their unique work roles. This was highly variable based on one’s life stage and career stage. These constructions from the participants reflect in a moderate to broad hermeneutic spread. Global theme 5, following, details perceived similarities and differences between the generational cohorts and provides the broadest range of description.

Global Theme 5: There are Generational Similarities and Differences

Generational differences are one of the most well-researched and widely discussed areas in the study of generations. It seems that popular myths and stereotypes abound about each generational cohort. Most of the management literature recognizes that generational differences exist and that understanding these differences can improve organizational performance. Despite this increased interest from the practitioner side, empirical data to support generational differences has been mixed (Arsenault, 2004; Benson & Brown, 2011; Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Macky et al., 2008; Twenge, 2010; Westerman & Yamamura, 2007). As originally reported in Chapter Two, Table 4 provided a synthesis of the research that examined generational differences. Although the studies are somewhat conflicting, it appears that small to moderate differences do exist between the generations in the workforce. Controlling for age and

time-period variables may provide even stronger results. As previously mentioned the findings provide differences on average and should not be interpreted as applying equally to all members of a certain generation. One researcher argued that people perceive that generational differences are larger than they actually are due to the human tendency to generalize (Twenge, 2010) as may be the case with our participants and their perceptions of each generational cohort.

As part of the interview process, the participants were asked to give their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of each generational grouping (Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials). The intent of this line of questioning was to unearth the participants' understanding of each cohort and how each participant perceived the generations. What emerged was a sense from all the participants that differences do exist. Paul's statement summarizes these findings:

Differences in expectations, differences in how you work, when you work, how you communicate, so how that affects me I think is just that I live in both worlds a bit. (IP2, 2013, p. 5)

Participants' perceptions of each cohort's strengths and weaknesses covered a wide spectrum. For example, the positive and negative traits for Baby Boomers amounted to five positive traits and five negative traits. Some traits, such as openness to change, were seen as a positive by one participant, but viewed as a negative by another. Additionally, as part of the member checking process, this global theme generated more dialogue around what did not resonate for participants than what did. Although they agreed with the global theme, participants struggled with other participants' perceptions of positive and negative traits for each cohort and/or wanted more clarification around what that participant may have meant when ascribing a certain trait to a cohort. As an example, Catherine described her experience when reading the themes for the first time:

I had definitely had one section with the least amount of check marks. It might be bias because I am a Gen Xer, but it was under the section F, the Gen Xers negative traits. It

says we lack open-mindedness, increased divorced rates, and helicopter parents smothering our kids and materialistic, I didn't mark any of those because I don't see myself that way. I was curious about who thinks that and why, why do we lack open-mindedness. (IP1, 2013, p. 3)

Perceptions held by each generational cohort have been examined in research and popular literature, and tend to support what this study's participants experienced in regard to their varying perspectives. A 2008 study examining generational differences asked participants, through a focus group methodology, to describe their perceptions of each generation (Gursoy et al., 2008). Participants were able to articulate perceived differences, and those perceived differences had a similar breadth in terms of the dimensions that have been described in this study.

For this global theme, the participant's individual and shared constructions resulted in 10 organizing themes and 32 basic themes. The organizing themes are: *positive traits for Baby Boomers, negative traits for Baby Boomers, positive traits that are shared by both Boomers/Gen Xers, negative traits that are shared by both Boomers/Gen Xers, positive traits for Gen Xers, negative traits for Gen Xers, positive traits that are shared by both Gen Xers and Millennials, positive traits for Millennials, negative traits for Millennials and positive traits that are shared by Boomers, Gen Xers and Millennials*. For each organizing theme, basic themes were included that represent both the positive and negative traits for that particular organizing theme. A summary of the basic themes is included in the analysis at the organizing theme level. It was determined that analyzing specific traits is contrary to the intent of this study; describing and understanding at the organizing theme level was determined to have greater meaning for the overall intent of the study. Figure 23 provides a visual representation of this global theme.

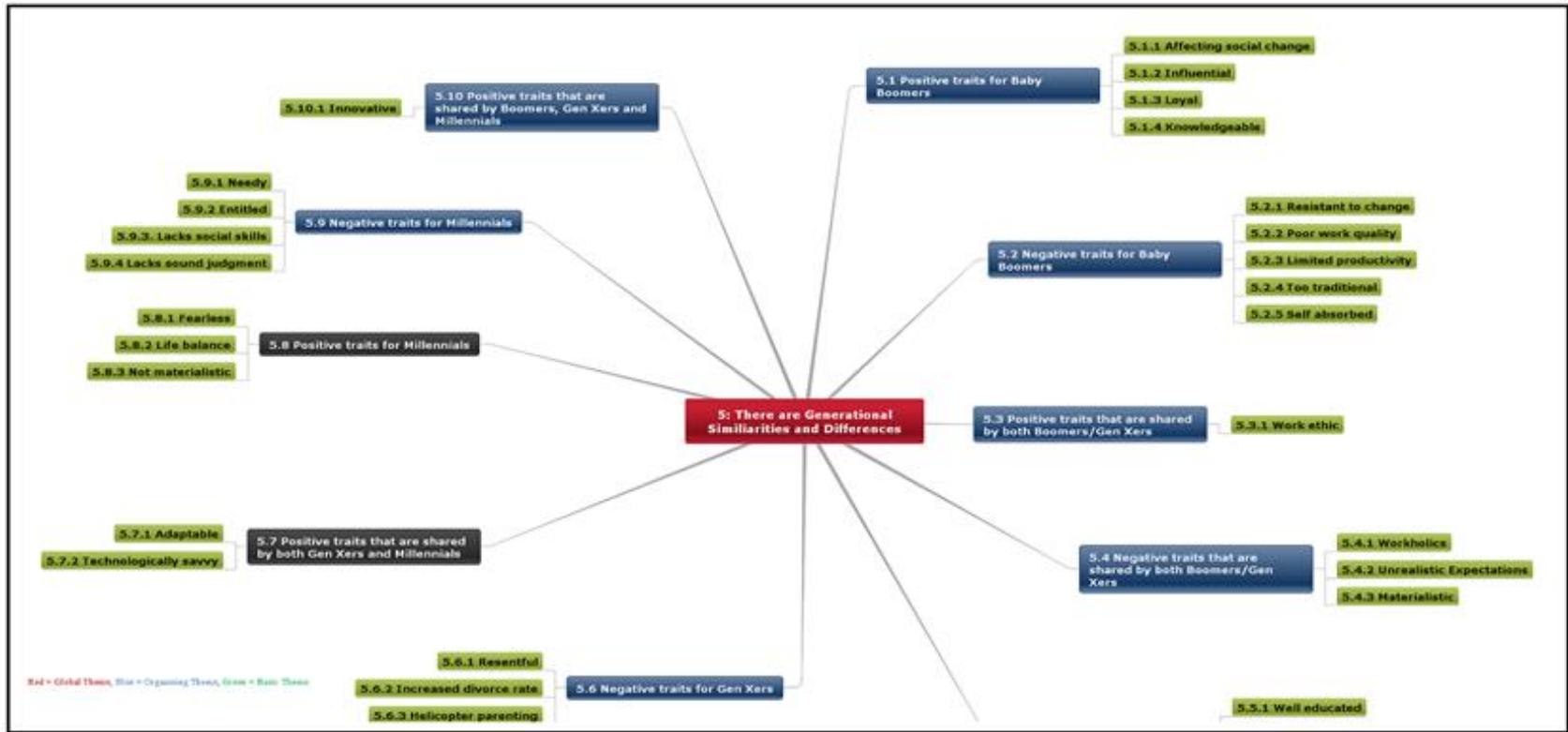


Figure 23. Global theme of *there are generational similarities and differences*

Organizing theme 5.1: Positive traits for Baby Boomers. There were four basic themes for this organizing theme: affecting social change, influential, loyal, and knowledgeable. Although the participants agreed that Boomers may be resistant to change in the context of the workforce as discussed below as a negative characteristic for Boomers, Elisa recognized Boomers' contribution to social change by giving them "credit for doing some things in the U.S. history that I think were good, maybe starting with the Civil Rights Movement" (IP5, 2013, p. 13). A few participants recognized Boomers as being influential and knowledgeable as a recognizable positive trait. Several participants suggested Baby Boomers were loyal, which has been supported in the literature (Westerman & Yamamura, 2007). Catherine described Boomers as "they stay the course" (IP1, 2013, p. 10) and Michelle felt Boomers thought that "they were loyal" (IP3, 2013, p. 8).

Organizing theme 5.2: Negative traits for Baby Boomers. The participant's co-constructed five basic themes to describe the negative traits for Baby Boomers: *resistance to change, poor quality work, limited productivity, too traditional, and self-absorbed*. All study participants felt that Boomers were resistant to change. In fact, for this study, the participants provided 33 comments that mapped to the basic theme of Boomers being resistant to change. Paul described Boomers resistance as "putting their anchor down and holding onto that and I think that's a huge, huge barrier for innovation and progress of a company" (IP2, 2013, p. 9). John, who works with large Enterprise Resource Planning implementations, has struggled with this resistance amongst his large Baby Boomer demographic:

People have been very resistant. They're very negative, like when we rolled out this ERP system that managed all of the manufacturing, the buying, and all the manufacturing of software system to manage all that. The software in itself is not very well-written, but people were just very negative about it. They didn't use it properly, and that affected the output. The data that we had in our system wasn't accurate so we couldn't get quality information out of it because people weren't using it properly. (IP6, 2013, p. 13)

Catherine described the Baby Boomers as being “early adopters of the resistance” (IP1, 2013, p. 11) and suggested that Boomers’ resistance “is stopping the progress of change, it’s stopping potential service for consumers and customers, and it’s causing frustration for everyone who is on board and championing the change” (IP1, 2013, p. 10).

In addition to the resistance to change, some participants, who have experienced negative encounters with Boomers in their work environment, described Boomers’ work products as having low quality with limited productivity. Other participants described Boomers as being too traditional, meaning that Boomers hold on to traditional work practices that may be incongruent with today’s work environment. One example given was the idea that Boomers lead through a top down approach and have this mentality of “I know the answers” instead of more collaboration (IP2, 2013, p. 7). Finally, three participants shared the idea that Boomers are self-absorbed. The participants characterized Boomers as being in self-preservation mode and not necessarily doing the right things for the company. Paul, who works with many Baby Boomers who are in senior leadership positions, commented:

You know many of them are in higher level positions, and again my experience is that they're not necessarily doing the right thing for the company but rather they're doing the right thing for themselves and so it's a very selfish attitude whereas I don't know that Gen Xers or Millennials feel that way. (IP2, 2013, p. 8)

Similarly, John described his interactions with Boomers as them talking about their lifestyle, savings, and what they expect out of their jobs and organizations.

Organizing theme 5.3: Positive traits that are shared by both Boomers/Gen Xers.

The participants spoke of individual and shared constructions that provided insight into similarities that exist between the generations. For this organizing theme, there is one basic theme that suggests *work ethic* is a similar positive trait between Baby Boomers and Gen Xers. For example, Michelle suggested that “there is also a sense of work ethic with both of them and

continuing to work” (IP3, 2013, p. 3). Although popular literature suggests that Baby Boomers have a strong work ethic and Gen Xers are lazy (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003), the study participants described both Boomers and Gen Xers as having a strong work ethic. The participants felt that Boomers were a hard working group and characterized their work ethic as “early up, early down” (IP4, 2013, p. 12); they believed that this was a positive trait Boomers brought to the workforce. Gen Xers were described as having a strong work ethic, pretty strong determination, and ability to get things done.

Organizing theme 5.4: Negative traits that are shared by both Boomers/Gen Xers.

There were three negative traits for Boomers and Gen Xers that were shared constructions by the participants: *being workaholics, having unrealistic expectations, and being materialistic.*

Although work ethic was seen as a positive, participants describe workaholic as a negative trait meaning that Boomers/Gen Xers worked too much. Michelle felt that both Gen Xers and Boomers were workaholics and suggested that “it’s a negative trait. I think it’s a negative trait” (IP3, 2013, p. 7).

The participants felt that Gen Xers held unrealistic expectations with regard to what they deserve specifically in terms of title and promotion. Paul has a working theory that suggests Boomers are doing better than their parents and strive to keep this standard of life:

And my theory on that is, the baby boomers are doing better than their parents and they want to keep it that way, right? (IP2, 2013, p. 9)

Yet, Edward described Boomers’ unrealistic expectations in terms of expecting to be in a job for 20 years, as opposed to Gen Xers who recognize the short term nature of many roles in today’s economy. As Edward commented, “I think the generation ahead of us, they expected to be in a job for 12, 15, 20 years” (IP4, 2013, p. 11).

A study conducted in 2010 examined generational differences with respect to extrinsic rewards that found that Gen Xers were more extrinsically motivated than the other two cohorts (Boomers and Millennials) (Twenge et al., 2010). Interestingly, the Gen Xer participants' acknowledged this focus on materialism by suggesting that "there's probably a little hangover maybe from the 80s and the greediness. I think that leaves a bad taste in my mouth" (IP5, 2013, p. 15). John recognized the broader context of U.S. materialism that may have profoundly impacted Gen Xers' bias towards this way of life:

I think the US society, in general, we tend to be materialistic, but I definitely think the Gen Xers are. I mean, we grew up as teenagers in the '80s. The '60s and '70s was freedom, and materialism maybe wasn't as important then, but then that changed in the '80s with the Wall Street movie. I mean, that movie Wall Street epitomized it. If you look at it, after the year 2000 dot-com fall and the economic problems we've had since 2000, we grew up with the year 2000 being a peak in US economic power, and early on, that was when we were teenagers and going into college and the first 5 to 10 years of work, were in those very good times, where it was very materialistic. Yeah, I do think that's where we [Gen Xers] are. (IP6, 2013, p. 2)

Although the study participants perceive Boomers as being materialistic, Twenge et al.'s (2010) study showed that Boomers had the least amount of preference for extrinsic rewards than either Millennials or Gen Xers. Elisa, to the contrary, noted that Boomer materialism is "alive and well" in corporate environments, suggesting that she has had recent arguments with Boomer executives about where their offices will be located:

Yes, the money ... the title, the cars, the size of my office. I've had arguments with managers over where their offices ... right. I've seen all of this as recently as six months ago. (IP5, 2013, p. 16)

Organizing theme 5.5: Positive traits for Gen Xers. The participants' individual and shared constructions included three basic themes: *well educated, autonomous, and collaborative*. Catherine identified education as a positive for Gen Xers, which is actually supported in the

literature that suggests Gen Xers are the most well-educated cohort (Erickson, 2009). Michelle described Gen Xers as autonomous in that they act and work very independently:

Independent. They're very independent. Even my friends. I think that we realize that some of us have grown up being in divorced families. I did not, but all of my friends either had their parent divorced by the time they left high school. I don't know how much that changed them, but I think half of them never got married or they're currently divorced and have no children. The other ones have children and focus a lot of their time on their families. (IP3, 2013, p. 14)

That Gen Xers are independent has been reinforced in the popular literature and empirical studies. Several studies found that Gen Xers value freedom more than the Boomers or Millennials (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Jurkiewicz, 2000); many others have shown that Gen Xers show less organizational commitment than their cohort counterparts (Benson & Brown, 2011; Sullivan et al., 2009).

John felt that Gen Xers were collaborative as Gen Xers have the ability to work with different age groups. He commented:

I do think, hopefully the ability to work with different age groups might be a little better than some of these Millennials who don't have as many social skills as maybe we did, even though I think we probably had less than even the baby boomers. (IP6, 2013, p. 7)

Studies have shown that Millennials value teamwork (Gursoy et al., 2008) as opposed to the Baby Boomers and Generation X. However, many generational authors suggest that collaboration is a key variable for managing a multigenerational workforce (Erickson & Gratton, 2007; Glass, 2007).

Organizing theme 5.6: Negative traits for Gen Xers. The participants' individual and shared constructions included three basic themes for the organizing theme of negative traits for Gen Xers: resentful, increased divorce rate, and helicopter parenting.

Gen Xers were described as being resentful. Paul suggested that Gen Xers might be resentful of Millennials' anticipated influence. Specifically, he describes Gen Xers as being "a little resentful of the Millennials because there are a lot of them and they want to progress very quickly and maybe we feel a little threatened by them" (IP2, 2013, p. 7). Another perceived negative trait for Gen Xers is the increased divorce rate. Elisa suggested this as a negative for Gen Xers as she is seeing more divorces amongst her peers, which influences her perception that Gen Xers have an increased divorce rate. During the member checking process, another participant questioned that trait because she has not experienced it in her life. Interestingly, data suggests that the divorce rate reached a "plateau" in the 1980s that continued through the 90s (Goldstein, 1999), which might suggest that Gen Xers have lower divorce rates than the Boomer generation. Finally, Elisa commented on "helicopter parenting," which she described as occurring when "parenting has gone too far, the helicopter parenting, protecting our kids from everything and bad things happening" (IP5, 2013, p. 13). The term "helicopter parenting" was first coined in 1969, but it has largely been used to describe the Baby Boomer population in reference to the way that they raised their Millennial children (Monaco & Martin, 2007).

Organizing theme 5.7: Positive traits that are shared by both Gen Xers and Millennials. The participants spoke of individual and shared constructions that provided insight into the similarities that exist between the generations. For this organizing theme, there are two basic themes on the positive traits shared by Gen Xers and Millennials. There were no shared constructions of negative traits between the two cohorts. The two basic themes are adaptable and technologically savvy. As opposed to the overwhelming belief that Boomers were resistant to change, the participants felt that Gen Xers and Millennials were tremendously adaptive to change. They recognized that both generations grew up at a time when things were changing

rapidly. They characterized seeing change as just “a part of life” (IP1, 2013, p. 11). Edward perceives Gen Xers’ adaptability to change as an extension of our childhood:

We grew up in a time when it didn’t get spoon fed to us or it wasn’t an internship thing. You didn’t have to learn by watching a guy for three years. You just did it. I think that we still learn very quickly. I think that’s a positive trait. (IP4, 2013, p. 11)

A number of participants talked about the idea of flexibility, although different participants conceptualized it differently. For example, Paul felt that Gen Xers and Millennials were flexible in terms of how they structure their work:

So I would say positive is flexibility, and I think of flexibility as not only in how things are done but flexibility in just the way we structure work, I think we can sort of do the baby boomer button share thing, but we also kind of look the other way and say hey I want to go skiing on Friday and that appeals to us right? So there's a lot of flexibility (IP2, 2013, p. 6)

Edward speaks of flexibility in Gen Xers’ ability to learn new things;

I still think there’s an education thing. I think folks in my age group are more adaptable to learning new things where they just go, “Okay, I’ll learn something new. I’ll learn something new.” I still hear the older generation complain about having to learn something new. (IP4, 2013, p. 12)

And finally, the participants acknowledged the changing world of work and how that impacted their relationship with it:

I think that we're flexible. We were the first generation, I think, that didn't expect to die at their desk. They accepted the fact that they might be in a job for three years. (IP4, 2013, p. 12)

Being technologically savvy was another positive trait associated with Gen Xers and Millennials. Edward described his upbringing as growing up in an environment of technology. He was exposed to computer labs as a teenager at his high school. So, for Gen Xers, they describe themselves as “technically literate” (IP4, 2013, p. 11). The participants also recognized the exceptional technology skills of the Millennial generation and characterized Millennials as

technologically very savvy and always “wired.” Michelle described her Millennial colleagues as follows:

Yeah. I think wired. They always have plugs in their ears and they're always wired and there's nothing that you can do to take them out. (IP3, 2013, p. 8).

Elisa, who works with a number of Millennials in her role as HR Business Partner, recognized Millennials’ prowess with respect to their technical skills:

Anyway, I admire their technical savvy. I try to hook up with those people so I can learn. They can be patient and maybe teach me or help me do things. (IP6, 2013, p. 17)

Organizing theme 5.8: Positive traits for Millennials. For this organizing theme, the participants’ individual and shared constructions included three basic themes: *fearless, life balance, and not materialistic*. Edward mentioned that his first thoughts to describe this cohort were fearless because they are not afraid of anything. He has had positive experiences with his Millennial employees in that they will take on and learn anything:

The first words that come to mind is fearless. I don’t think they’re afraid of anything. (IP4, 2013, p. 12)

Millennials were also described as having life balance and that was seen as a positive trait. This was described by the participants as being good at priority setting and efficient at their jobs; Millennials valuing a balanced life style is reinforced by much of the popular literature. A recent study from Bentley University found that Millennials placed a higher premium on the success of their personal lives than on their careers (Larson & Metzber, 2013). Elisa commented that “I think they maybe have some good priority setting” (IP5, 2013, p. 17)

Whereas the Gen X participants described themselves as materialistic, they described Millennials as not being as materialistic and viewed that as a positive trait:

And I'm not sure if the Millennials, I don't know enough of them, but maybe they're not as materialistic. I've heard that they might not potentially be that way, but I'm not convinced that they're any different at this point. (IP6, 2013, p. 9)

John wasn't quite clear how accurate the perception of Millennials being materialistic is, but other participants reinforced this view as they thought Millennials have graduated during a difficult economic time and thus are being impacted in terms of personal prosperity and wealth.

Organizing theme 5.9: Negative traits for Millennials. The participants described the negative traits of the Millennial generation with four basic themes: *being needy, entitled, lacking social skills, and lacking sound judgment*. Largely driven by the perceptions that Millennials' parents were overly involved and overly indulged their children, Millennials have been characterized as wanting to be constantly entertained and stimulated (Schwarz, 2008). Millennials have also been characterized as the "Gen Me" generation (Twenge & Campbell, 2008), as they want it all and they want it now (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). The characterization of Millennials as needy may be supported in the research. A Human Resource Management study showed that Millennials want frequent and open communication from their managers (Burke, 2004). Michelle echoed very similar feelings as she indicated that in general "they require a lot of feedback, and, as a manager, I don't always give that" (IP3, 2013, p. 6). Similarly, Paul talked about the energy that it took to keep Millennials happy and engaged at work:

Millennials need so much more; they need flexibility, they need promotions, they need technology, they need to save the world...it's just so much energy. (IP2, 2013, p. 13)

The last quote also speaks to this idea that Millennials feel entitled. Most of the participants described Millennials as acting entitled. Paul provided a specific example:

Yes, so I definitely see it and here's an example-- I love this statement-- I want to be the CEO so how do I get there, which is great I mean very ambitious, without really understanding what the path is, you know what it takes. Yes, and you know I want to get promoted tomorrow and sometimes you know I try to give them the perspective you know it's a marathon, not a sprint and you have to sort of have these, I call it lapping yourself. (IP2, 2013, p. 8)

Edward has worked with a large Millennial population and definitely experienced the sense of entitlement from this cohort, as evident in the sarcastic comment below:

They expect all these entitlements. They expect to wear bunny slippers to work and even get paid for it. You avoid that too. You try to be less of the negative and hopefully that makes you into a positive. (IP4, 2013, p. 11)

For other participants, the entitled attitude from Millennials has just been annoying:

Tired, right. Maybe a little annoyed with the Millennials because maybe there's this perception a little bit of, "Okay, now we're 15, 20 years into our career," and maybe that is an entitlement, "what are we entitled to next"? Then, these Millennials think that they get to take our job or what. (IP5, 2013, p. 20)

The research tends to validate the popular perceptions that Millennials have overly inflated career expectations (Ng et al., 2010), expectations around good pay and benefits (Hill, 2002), and expectations of accelerated advancement opportunities (Pooley, 2005).

Edward described the Millennials he manages as lacking sound judgment, suggesting "younger generations do a lot of really stupid things" (IP4, 2013, p. 13). John had the perception that Millennials lack social skills. He attributed this belief to the fact that Millennials are playing video games all the time and do not work in teams as much. This concern has also been expressed in the popular and academic literature. Concern was expressed in one report about how to teach the Millennial generation as they have such a short attention span due to the fun, hyped technology that they have grown accustomed to in their lives (Schwarz, 2008).

Organizing theme 5.10: Positive traits that are shared by Boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials. *Innovation* was a positive trait that was perceived for all three generations and the only basic theme for this organizing theme. For the Boomers, Elisa recognized the innovation that happened after WWII:

I think our economy after World War II and the way it grew, I know maybe some of that were their parents. Yeah. I mean, I guess from a business perspective would reflect on a lot of the innovation that happened with them [Baby Boomers]. ... Microsoft or Google

or Apple or ... sort of transforming our economy. I don't know, maybe for the ... I mean, if we kept some manufacturing, that would be good, but I mean a lot of innovation happened with them. (IP5, 2013, p. 15)

Paul recognized Gen Xers' innovative nature and attributes much of this skill set to technology advances:

And then I tend to feel it's a fairly innovative generation although with technology progressing so fast, it's a tough spot to be in because we didn't grow up with the computer in our hand, but we definitely progress to it more quickly than baby boomers did, right so my first job, you know we didn't really have internet, and ... you know a couple of years after that we started to get it and email and everything else so, we didn't grow up with it, but we definitely career wise, we probably grew up with it. (IP2, 2013, p. 6)

Edward suggests that Millennials take creativity to the next level:

I think they're more innovative. I think we were inventive, but they really just innovate a lot of things just because of their fearlessness. They just dove with both feet and really didn't think of the consequences and have a positive and negative attributes. Positive is they can really come up with some cool stuff and they're more creative, that whole paradigm of thinking outside of the box. They're not used to the status quo. That's great. (IP4, 2013, p. 13).

Summary of global theme. This sub-section presents a visual of the ensuing hermeneutic spectrum for the global theme of *there are generational similarities and differences*—how this global theme is experienced and expressed similarly and differently by Gen Xers. A summary is also provided in the form of a table of the global, organizing and basic themes together with selective clarifying and supporting points from the participants and literature.

Hermeneutic spectrum. With 10 organizing themes and 32 basic themes, this theme generated the broadest range (or spread) of description signifying highly varied individual constructions and descriptions. It seems that all six study participants had an opinion about the positives and negatives of each generation. Moreover, those individual opinions/constructions were highly variable. Whereas one participant thought Baby Boomers were adaptable, other

participants characterized them as resistant to change. This level of variation was present within each organizing theme which could be defined as either a positive or negative of a particular cohort. This variation highlights, again, the importance of the unique individual context and worldviews for the study participants. As such, this global theme has a broad range/spread of description.

Key points from participants and supporting literature. Similar to what is presented in the popular and academic literature, the six study participants perceive that there are generational similarities and differences. However, there was much variance in how the individuals constructed specific strengths and weaknesses for a specific cohort. Although it was not the intent of the study to examine generational difference, it is an interesting byproduct as it revealed a genuine passion, interest, and concern of each study participant that garnered so much discussion and debate. Table 15 summarizes the organizing and basic themes by providing summarizing key points from the participants and then aligning supporting literature.

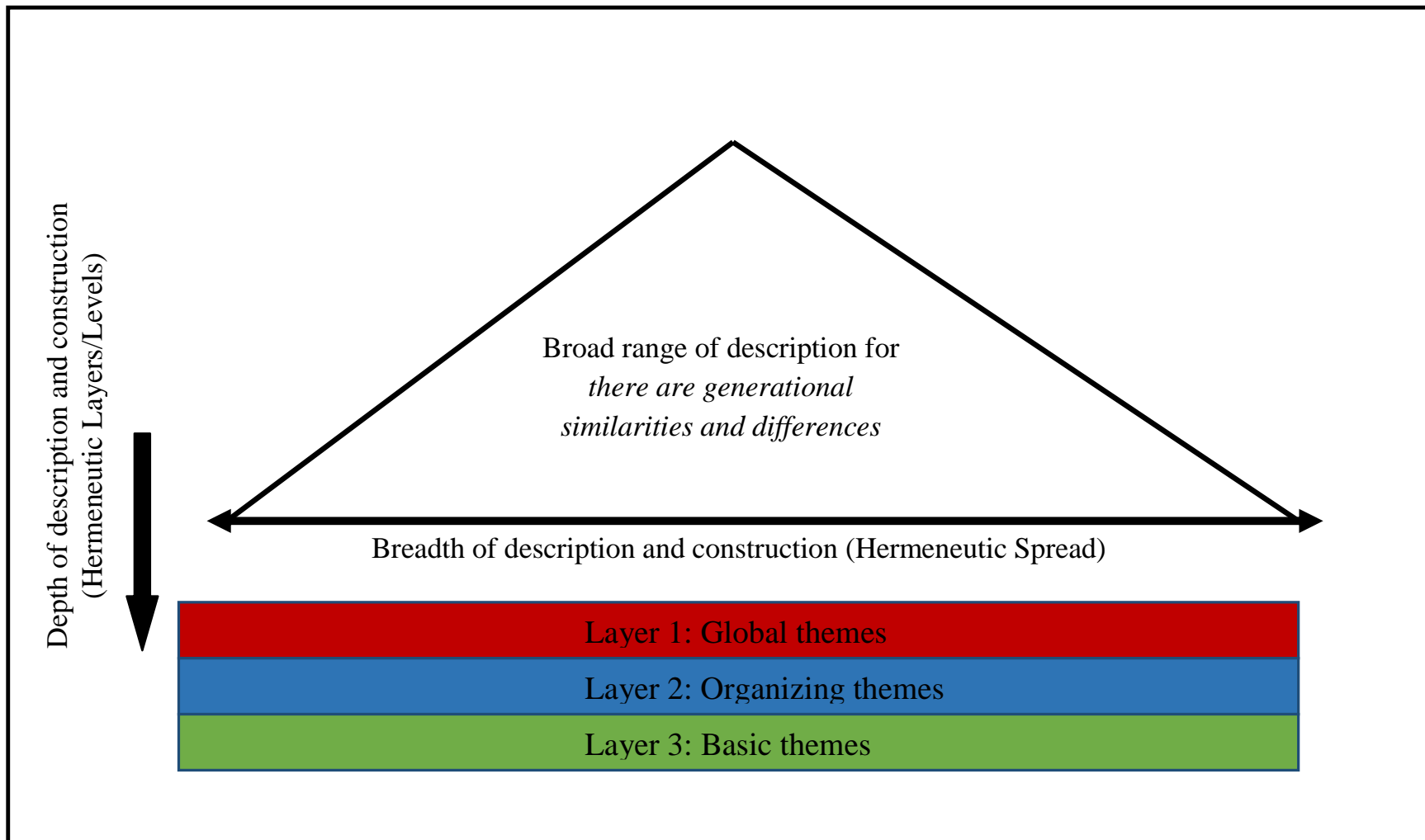


Figure 24. A broad/wide and deep/thick hermeneutic spectrum for *there are generational similarities and differences*

Table 15

Summary of supporting and clarifying points from participants and informing literature for the global theme of There are Generational Similarities and Differences.

Organizing sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
5.1: Positive traits for Baby Boomers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I give them credit maybe for doing some things in U.S. history that I think were good, maybe starting with the Civil Rights. • Definitely influential, right? • They stay the course. • I think they're loyal. • Positive is a lot of time, there is a wealth of knowledge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baby Boomers are loyal (Westerman & Yamamura, 2007).
5.2: Negative traits for Baby Boomers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They've reached a point of resistance to change. • Whereas the Boomers will be early adopters of the resistance. • The quality of their work was very poor. 	

(continued)

Table 15. Continued

Organizing sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The productivity that you'll see out of one of these people versus somebody half their age is not nearly as high. • It's more of a top down kind of, you know. • They're doing the right think for themselves and so it's a very selfish attitude. 	
5.3: Positive traits that are shared by both Boomers/Gen Xers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think that there is also a sense of work ethic with both of them and continuing to work. • Pretty strong work ethic, pretty strong determination. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baby Boomers have a strong work ethic yet Gen Xers are lazy (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003).
5.4: Negative traits that are shared by both Boomers/Gen Xers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think the Baby Boomers that are still around are workaholics. • I think they were also workaholics (Gen Xers). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research studies indicate that Gen Xers tend to value extrinsic motivators more than the other two cohorts (Boomers and Millennials) (Twenge et al., 2010)

(continued)

Table 15. Continued

Organizing sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think we might be a little bit deluded about what we deserve. • I think there’s a little hangover from the 80’s and the greediness. • Yes, the money, the title, the cars, the size of my office. 	
5.5: Positive traits for Gen Xers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education. • I think there’s still a lot of individuality. • The ability to work with different age groups might be a little better. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gen Xers value freedom more than the Boomers or Millennials (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Jurkiewicz, 2000). • Gen Xers show less organization commitment than their cohort counterparts (Benson & Brown, 2011; Sullivan et al., 2009).
5.6: Negative traits for Gen Xers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parenting has gone too far, the helicopter parenting. • They have friends whose parents are divorced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The term of “helicopter parenting” was first coined in 1969 but it has largely been used to describe the Baby Boomer population in reference to the way that they raised their Millennial children (Monaco & Martin, 2007). • Divorce rate in the U.S. has been declining (Goldstein, 1999).

(continued)

Table 15. Continued

Organizing sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
5.7: Positive traits that are shared by both Gen Xers and Millennials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technologically very savvy. • I think wired. • So, I think we're very adaptive. • For Millennials, change is all they've ever known. 	
5.8: Positive traits for Millennials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They're not as materialistic • Good priority setting. • Fearless. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Millennials value work-life balance more than the other generations (Twenge, 2010).
5.9: Negative traits for Millennials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Millennials need so much more. • Millennials seems to have a sense of entitlement. • They don't have the social skills because they are playing video games all day. • Younger generation does a lot of really stupid things. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A 2009 SHRM study confirmed that Millennials expect frequent and open communication from their managers (Burke, 2004). • Millennials have been characterized as wanting to be entertained and stimulated (Schwarz, 2008).

Interview questions were designed to unearth the participants' understanding of each cohort and how each participant perceived the generations. The response from the participants showed individual constructions and descriptions that were tremendously varied which resulted in a loose spread of experience and ways of knowing. Global theme 6 describes the unique work environments of the study participants and how those unique work environments impact their ways of knowing and experiencing of generations.

Global Theme 6: Unique Work Culture Impacts Generational Issues

All the study participants were able to highlight aspects of their unique work context that had an impact on their perceptions and experiences as Gen Xers. As such, the construction of the organizing themes is unique to the individual rather than a shared experience. As an example, one participant's perception of his culture is that it accommodates Baby Boomers. This was unique to his experience within his workplace. The global theme includes four organizing themes and no basic themes. The organizing themes are: performance-based culture minimizes generational impact, talent management strategies focus on Millennials, positive workplace culture reinforces Gen Xers' satisfaction, and culture reinforces hiring and accommodating Baby Boomers. A visual representation of the global theme, organizing themes, and basic themes is displayed in Figure 25.

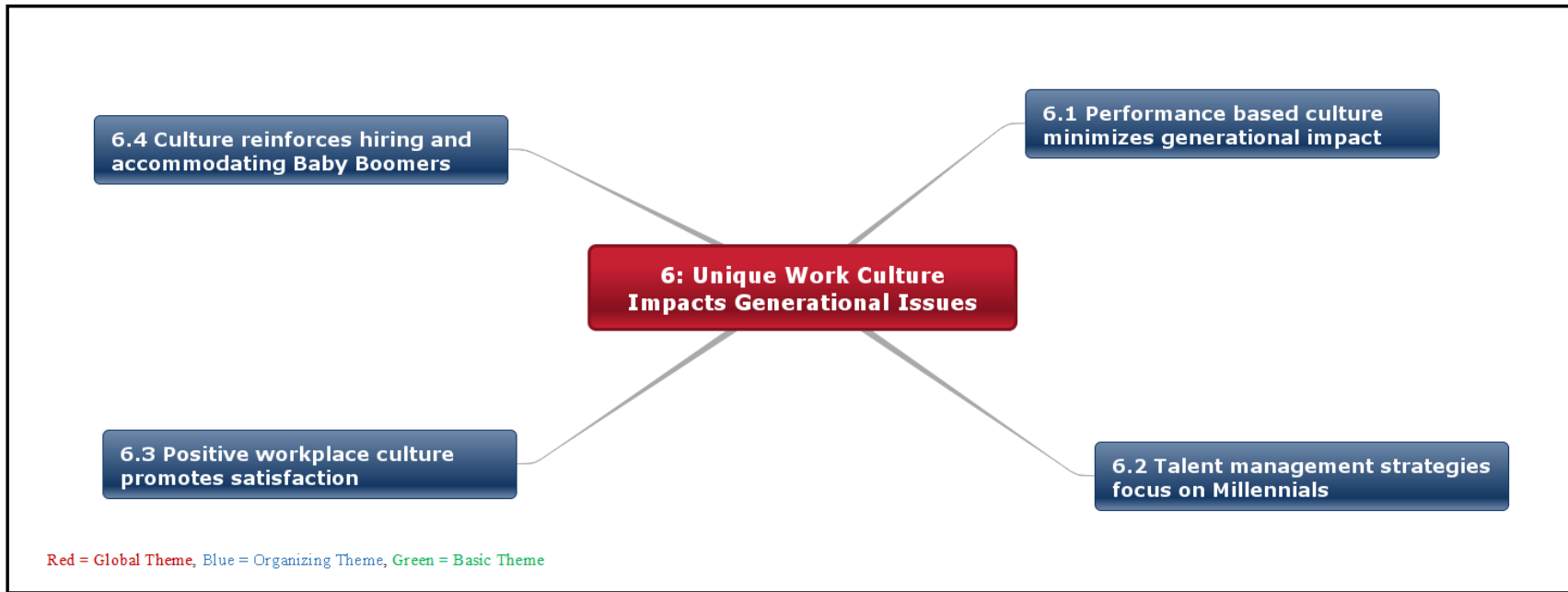


Figure 25: Global theme of *unique work culture impacts generational issues*

Organizing theme 6.1: Performance based culture minimizes generational impact.

“Up or out” is how Michelle characterized her work culture. This approach to performance requires an employee to be promoted within a three to five year time frame or leave the organization. The promotion is completely dependent on an employee’s performance, which is clearly defined by the organization. Michelle explained that because the company has such a performance based culture, she does not feel generational pressures such as feeling stuck in her role. She indicated that she does not have fear about this process and in the end, it does not matter what your age, but rather how you perform. This is how she described the up or out process at her organization:

They make some changes and I don't necessarily know all those changes right now, which is why I have a year to make some key decisions. This is standard. This is not necessarily the absolute rule, but it's usually three to five years. You're at a certain level and you have three to five years to get promoted to the next level. I'm coming up on my fifth year at that level. If I don't get promoted, then they'll like you to either leave because it's more sales focused, earning money, or they have a new thing called an expert track which I'm not familiar with yet. Yeah, I think it's limiting because I think that the strengths that some companies are looking for might not necessarily be all of my strengths. (IP3, 2013, p. 12)

When asked about her feelings toward this organizational approach, Michelle did not express any fear or anxiety about having to find her next role. She stated, “I’m not concerned at all...it doesn’t matter what your age is. It’s how you perform” (IP3, 2013, p. 13).

Although this organizing theme was related to Michelle’s particular culture, during the member checking process this “up or out” concept really resonated with Paul and in fact, he commented that his company just went through a lay-off that was based on performance. He described his feelings around this organizing theme, and in particular how the idea of being stuck based on your generational location did not resonate with him:

I don’t think it really matters what your age is or anything else. It’s just all about the performance and the value that you bring to the company. While these generational

nuances are probably there for different folks, in the end, I'm really identifying with this theme. (IP2, 2013, p. 4)

A performance-based culture has a strong focus on excellence in performance as well as having a belief that the success of the organization hinges on employee's success (Graham, 2004). The idea that a strong culture can support organizational performance has been written about in the popular management and academic journals for decades. Consider the work of Peters and Waterman, *In Search of Excellence*, or Jim Collins, *Good to Great*, in helping businesses start to think about the impact a culture can have on its organizational output. Building a performance-based culture is even more of a necessity in today's competitive environment. A highly competent and result-oriented workforce is key for organizations who want to differentiate themselves from their competitors. Having such a workforce is an opportunity for companies to raise the performance standards. For Michelle, her organization's culture has long relied on performance as a source of competitive advantage and clearly sets those expectations for the employees.

Organizing theme 6.2: Talent management strategies focus on Millennials. Having robust talent management strategies is a necessary component of having a performance-based culture. In 1998, McKinsey's extensive study examining talent practices found that the greatest corporate resource for organizations over the next 20 years would be talented, smart, business people who are technologically literate and globally astute (Chambers, Foulon, Handfield-Jones, Hankin, & Michaels, 1998). The study also found that companies with robust talent management practices outperformed their peer groups (Chambers et al., 1998). This has become even more evident as in the 21st century as globalization and organizational complexity increased. More recent research shows that "best in class" companies have a robust talent management strategy

that aligns and guides their overarching business strategy and this proves to be a competitive advantage for those organizations (Lombardi & Laurano, 2013).

Most large companies in today's global economy will focus on building their internal talent, including strategies that "stratify out" generations by recognizing their career stage and workplace preferences (Burke, 2004). Paul works in a unique environment that requires specialized engineering skills. It is a critical skill set and vitally necessary for the continued survival of the organization. The organization has found that this unique skill set is only resident in the Millennial population because the current academic programs and advanced degrees support these emerging skills and technologies. As such, his organization's talent management strategies focus on Millennials:

Yes, you know so I heard it here because we use it to describe it as partly tied to our strategy in that our pipeline of talent is new graduates to feed the Baby Boomers who are retiring. (IP2, 2013, p. 10)

Paul's company's focus is to hire new Millennial graduates and develop them for more senior roles:

Absolutely, because it's again our core strategy is not to go out in the environment and buy talent; it's really to grow talent. (IP2, 2013, p. 12)

A problem with the company's strategy is that they are having trouble retaining the Millennials. The reasons why Millennials leave are varied and complex. Millennial retention has become problematic for Paul's company. Once his company invests the time and money into development of a new graduate, around the five year mark, other companies come in and hire them. Secondly, Paul has observed that around the fifth year of experience at his organization, Millennials have developed a solid foundation with positive results so they want to jump into a broader role or leadership position. However, most Millennials are not ready for that next level role after five years of work experience. This idea of Millennials having larger than life career

expectations and feeling entitled to the next role has been supported in the literature (Twenge, 2006). Despite the Millennials' beliefs that they can take on much larger roles, Paul reinforced that most of the Millennials within his organization are not ready to be successors in these key roles. They may be five years into their jobs, but that is not enough experience to take those more senior roles:

You would say, well you have some right? So why isn't there someone ready, well they're either new to their role or they don't have the technical expertise for that particular role? (IP2, 2013, p. 15)

Moreover, the company has an unsophisticated succession planning process that is exacerbating the issue of managing the Millennial talent. The company does not leverage formalized succession planning so they are unsure who their top talent is and how strong the "bench strength" is:

Yes I mean we aren't very sophisticated to be honest with you in succession planning and, you know, it's one of our strategies going forward, but currently we don't have very good information on the backgrounds of our people to be able to truly populate a succession plan that's meaningful. (IP2, 2013, p. 14)

Many of the challenges that Paul articulated during the interview are ones that other organizations are facing today, as well. The talent management challenges, that include but extend beyond generational issues, are compounded by a range of factors to include business strategy, global needs, cultural diversity within the workforce, and changing demographics.

Organizing theme 6.3: Positive workplace culture promotes satisfaction. The relationship between an organization's culture and perceived impact to the employee population has been extensively explored in organizational studies. From the early works of Elton Mayo and the Human Relations Movement to more contemporary research such as Peter Senge's Learning Organization, scholars and practitioners have held a belief that a strong, healthy culture can serve as a positive force for employees and organizational performance.

Peters and Waterman (1982) in their landmark book, *In Search of Excellence*, discussed the value of understanding what your company stands for and what is important for your company (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Organizational culture, often casually referred to as “the way we do things around here” (Schein, 1990), can profoundly impact an employee’s quality of life and satisfaction with their jobs. For example, one recent study concluded that the primary reason employees stayed at their respective firms was due to the culture, and this was especially evident when the cultures were value based and community focused (Chalofsky, 2008).

Many of the participants expressed positive feelings towards the culture where they currently work. Some characterized their culture as innovative and hard working. Others characterized their culture as entrepreneurial and dynamic and recognized that most people within their organization really wanted the organization to continue to improve and change.

Paul, who expressed frustrations with various extrinsic and intrinsic aspects of his role, left me with the impression that he would be ok in this environment because he liked the culture and believed that he fit in well there:

But I truly believe that I fit in well here; I think it’s a great place. I love the culture, I love a lot of the things about it and I think the future is going to be very bright. (IP2, 2013, p. 22)

Organizing theme 6.4: Culture reinforces hiring and accommodating Baby

Boomers. John works for a materials management department that is part of a large organization that develops networking solutions. Given that his group is largely manufacturing, John believes that there are more Boomers with a manufacturing skill set based on the fact that manufacturing has largely been outsourced in the United States and Millennials are moving into other functional areas that have longer term career options:

Well, some of this, the skill set they're looking for in my groups is manufacturing, and since manufacturing is not in this country as much as it used to be, most of these people are older. (IP6, 2013, p. 11)

John became aware of the generational demographics shortly after being hired:

Yeah, I think I realized after, shortly after being hired on, that the group I was in was much older, and I think that was a concern for my boss when he hired me. He wanted somebody who could work with Baby Boomers, and I don't think that's always something people look for. (IP6, 2013, p. 11)

Now that he has been employed at his organization for almost four years, he has seen a number of hires and perceives a bias towards Baby Boomers:

And I think there is a bias towards hiring an older person. I've noticed that since I got in. (IP6, 2013, p. 7)

During our interview, John described how his company accommodates Boomers and how the focus on accommodating Boomers has resulted in frustration:

My particular company now, they're very accommodating. I think it's very frustrating from my standpoint. (IP6, 2013, p. 6)

Summary of global theme. This sub-section presents a visual of the ensuing hermeneutic spectrum for the global theme of *unique work culture impacts generational issues*—how this global theme is experienced and expressed similarly and differently by Gen Xers. A summary is also provided in the form of a table of the global, organizing and basic themes together with selective clarifying and supporting points from the participants and literature.

Hermeneutic spectrum. With respect to the hermeneutic spread for this theme, it was determined that it has a moderate range of description. In contrast to many of the other themes within this study, this global theme has two levels of interpretation as opposed to three which suggests a mid-level hermeneutic depth. Within those levels of interpretation, there was very little variation in the individual constructions, primarily because each of the organizing themes was representative of only a few participants and highly contextual to the participants' unique

work environments. For example, performance-based culture minimizes generational impact is in reference to Michelle's specific work environment. Thus, there is no variation because it is unique to her situation. Yet, understanding their shared experiences and unique workplace cultures informs the reader of a greater depth of meaning into the collective environment. The range/spread of description for this global theme is presented in Figure 26.

Key points from participants and supporting literature. Unique work culture impacts generational issues is composed of *performance based culture minimizes generational impact, talent management strategies focus on Millennials, positive workplace culture reinforces Gen Xers satisfaction, and culture reinforces hiring and accommodating Baby Boomers*. Table 16 summarizes the organizing and basic themes by summarizing key points from the participants and then aligning supporting literature.

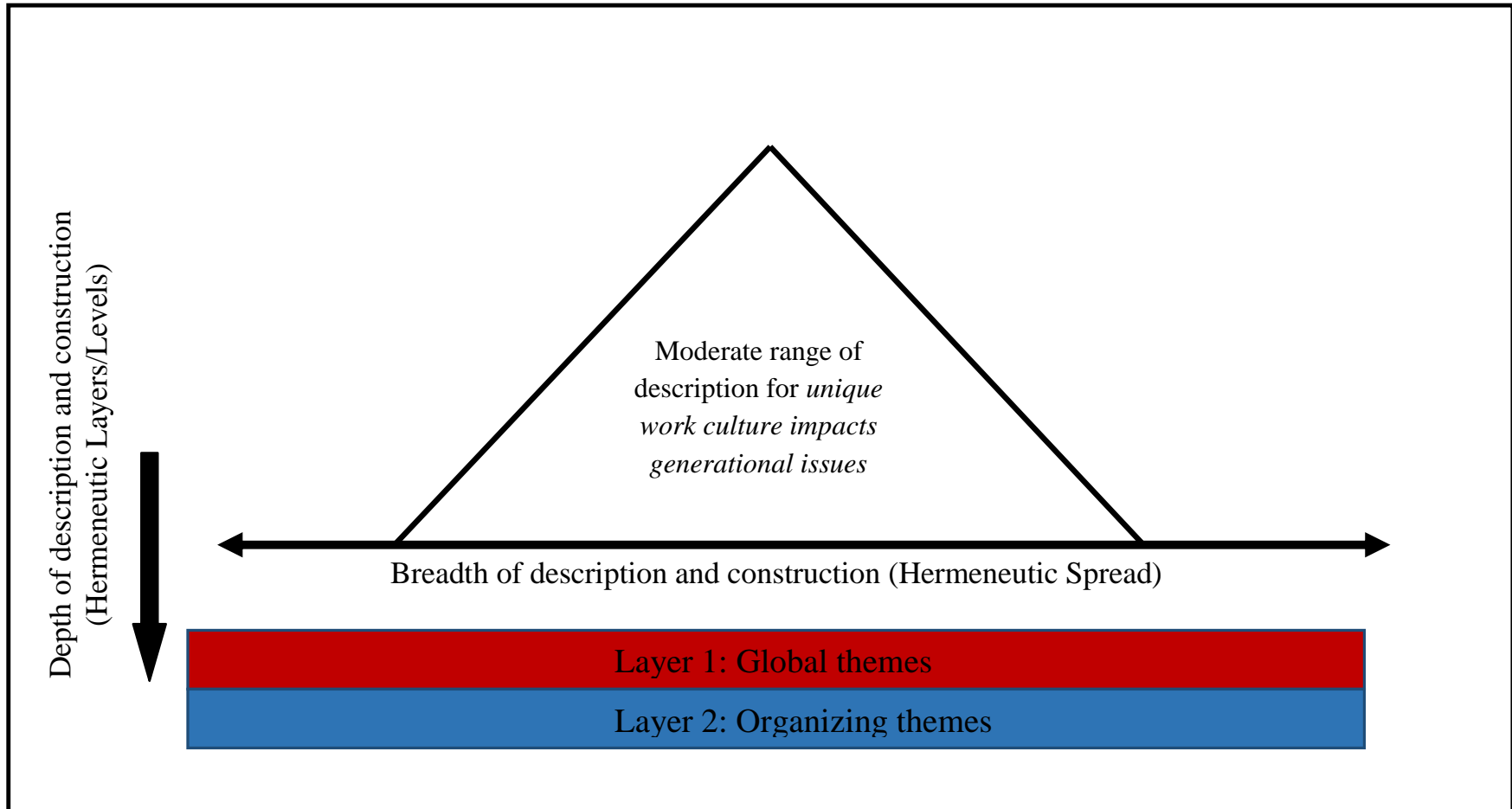


Figure 26. A moderate/wide and mid-depth deep/thick hermeneutic spectrum for *unique work culture impacts generational issues*

Table 16.

Summary of supporting and clarifying points from participants and informing literature for the first global theme of Unique Work Culture Impacts Generational Issues

Organizing sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
6.1: Performance based culture minimizes generational impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well, our company is really different too. It's an up or out! • I am not concerned at all. There will be and it doesn't matter what your age is. It's how you perform. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance based culture's basic premise is that organizations depend on employee's success in their roles (Graham, 2004).
6.2: Talent management strategies focus on Millennials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our pipeline of talent is new graduates from school to feed the baby boomers who are retiring. • Our core strategy is not to go out in the environment and buy talent; it's really to grow talent. • We have a ton of investment in them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Companies with robust talent management practices outperformed their peer groups (Larson & Metzber, 2013). • Millennials have a larger than life career expectation (Twenge, 2006).
6.3: Positive workplace culture reinforces Gen Xers satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think it's a great place. I love the culture. • Innovative culture • Most people here really want change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic premise for organizations is to understand what your company stands for and what is important (Peters & Waterman, 1982). • Study found that the primary reason people stayed at their company was due to the organizational culture (Chalofsky, 2008).

(continued)

Table 16. Continued

Organizing sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
6.4: Culture reinforces hiring and accommodating Baby Boomers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think there is a bias towards hiring an older person. I've noticed that since I got in. • He wanted somebody who could work with baby boomers, and I don't think that's always something people look for. • They'll try to accommodate them. 	

The essence of global theme 6 was to describe the unique work environments of the participants and shed insight into how those unique work environments impacted their ways of knowing and experiencing different generations. As an example, John perceived his work environment as accommodating Baby Boomers which significantly impacted his job satisfaction. Other work environments were able to minimize generational effects by focusing on employee performance (rather than age). Global theme 7 describes the perceived impact of economic factors on a participant's career.

Global Theme 7: There May Be Economic Influences on Their Career

Although popular literature reinforces the notion that Gen Xers' careers got off to a slow start due to a weak economy, the participants' perspectives were mixed on whether the economy had been a factor or not with respect to their career success. This global theme is comprised on two organizing themes and no basic themes. The organizing themes are: the economy has not



Figure 27. Global theme of *there may be economic influences on their career*

been a factor to their career success and the economy has been a factor to their career success.

Figure 27 represents the visual representation of this global theme.

Organizing theme 7.1: The economy has not been a factor to their career success. An article written in 1985 suggested that economists forecasted golden opportunities for college graduates during the mid to late 80s through the mid-90s (Williams, 1985). Williams cited a booming economy and shrinking college class sizes, notably 8% smaller by the 90s, to suggest that the Gen X college graduates (or “Baby Bust” generation as coined in the article) would have an easy time landing employment (Williams, 1985). One perspective, therefore, may be that the economy was a positive for Gen Xers in the 1980s to mid-1990s and thus the economic impact was positive rather than negative. Two of the study participants did not feel that the economy was an inhibitor to their success; two other participants did not even remark on the economics of their experiences. One of the participants, who has struggled with career progression, suggested that there are always external factors to blame, but suggested that the economy will never be completely right:

Well, there are better times, sure, but just like with workforce economy, there's never going to be a right time, and there's never going to be this like golden bucket of opportunity for everyone to get their dream job and their dream pay. But it seems like the timing is never right and the economy is never right. (IP1, 2013, p. 19)

The other participant had had great career success and felt that he was able to navigate through any economic downturns within his career history. He specifically noted 9/11, when the twin towers were hit and our economy spiraled downward. He was fortunate that he worked for a firm that contracted with many government agencies and that work continued while many other public and private firms had to reduce their costs:

So I think that it definitely is applicable to the group. It didn't hit home with me. Or I could even say number eleven to a positive effect. It just so happens that 9/11 hit, I was

working with a firm that did a lot of local government work. So when 9/11 hit, those were the people that were spending all the money. (IP4, 2013, p. 5)

Organizing theme 7.2: The economy has been a factor to their limited career

success. Contrary to the beliefs sited above about the booming job market, unemployment hit 10.3 percent in 1983 and recruiting professionals were suggesting that it was the worst job market for recent college graduates since WWII (Erickson, 2009). Gen Xers got caught up in the stock market crash of 1987, the reengineering movement and subsequent layoffs that followed in the early 1990s. Most recently, Gen Xers have been considered the hardest hit group from the 2008 mortgage crisis as they essentially bought their houses high and sold low (Erickson, 2009). Given these realities, it is not surprising that Gen Xers might feel that the economy has been a factor in their career success. In response to my question about other factors that may have impeded their career and job satisfaction, John quickly offered the following sentiments:

Yeah, so the one I resonate with, number 11, which economic conditions have been a factor to my career success. For me, I'm in technology. After the dot-com bust, it was very easy to get jobs before the year 2000, and it was very difficult to get jobs after the year 2000. Then, the same thing happened again in 2008, towards the end of that year. Very difficult again, and it was never really “easy” after 2000. It became a lot more competitive from a career standpoint. People expected more. It was a much more mature industry, and then when the downturn happened starting in 2008, I was able to get a job, but it was more difficult, so it had an impact. (IP6, 2013, p. 7)

Michelle added her thoughts about economic pressures on her career by indicating “back in the 90s and even early 2000s”, she had been laid off or the company went out of business (IP3, 2013, p. 3).

Summary of essential theme. This sub-section presents a visual of the ensuing hermeneutic spectrum for the global theme of *there may be economic influences* on their career—how this global theme is experienced and expressed similarly and differently by Gen Xers. A

summary is also provided in the form of a table of the global, organizing and basic themes together with selective clarifying and supporting points from the participants and literature.

Hermeneutic spectrum. With respect to the hermeneutic spectrum for this theme, it was determined that it has a narrow range/spread of description suggesting less varied experiences and ways of knowing. This global theme has two levels of interpretation. Within those levels of interpretation, there were no basic themes and as such, no level of variation. If relevant to their experiences, participants either said that economic factors were or were not limiting to their career. The range of description for this global theme is presented in Figure 28.

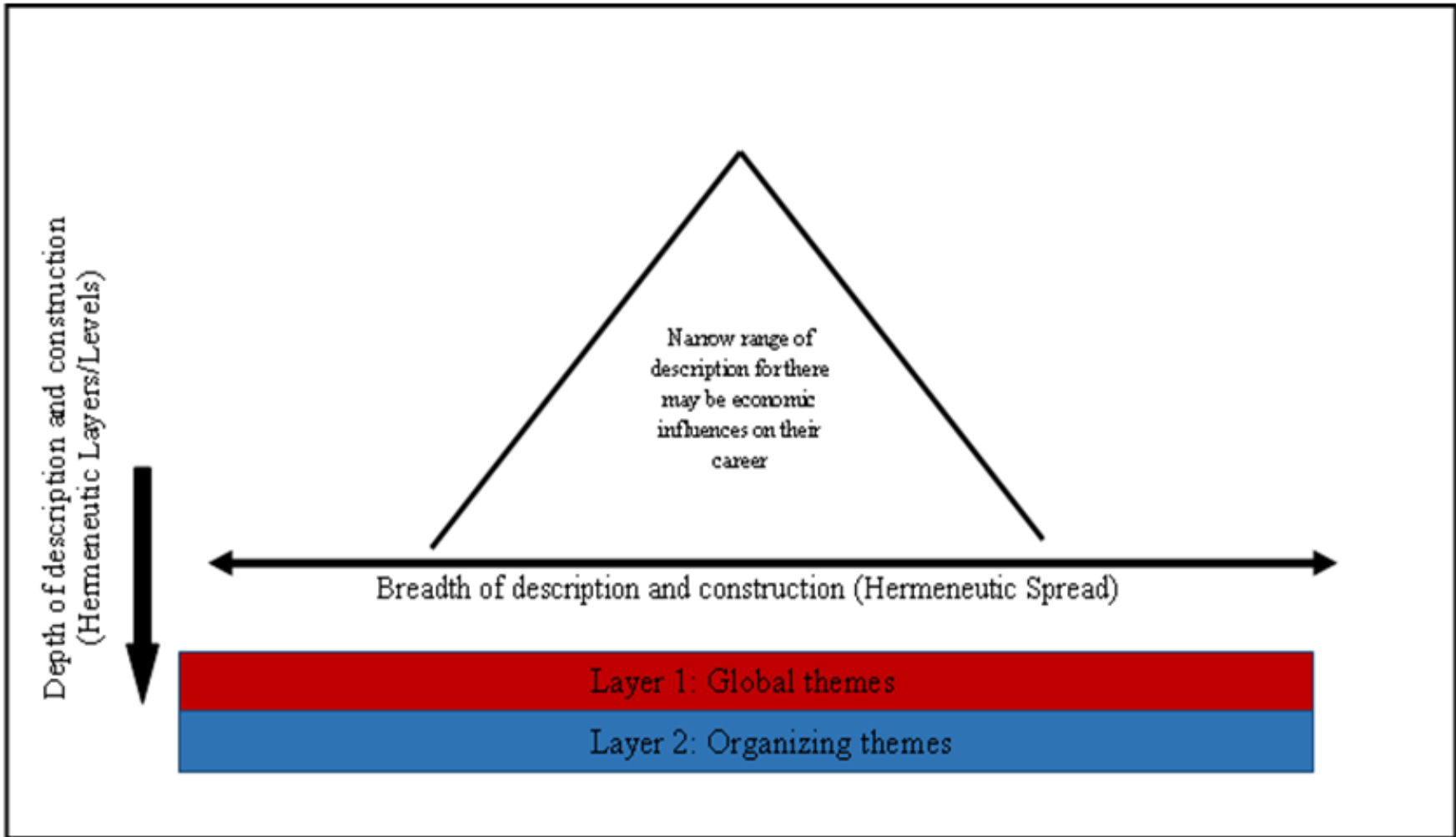


Figure 28. A narrow and mid-level deep/thick hermeneutic spectrum for *there may be economic influences on their career*

Key points from participants and supporting literature. There may be economic influences on their career includes two organizing themes: *the economy has not been a factor to their limited career success, and the economy has been a factor to their limited career success.* Half the participants provided constructions that aligned with the two organizing themes. Table 17 summarizes the organizing and basic themes by providing summarizing key points from the participants and then aligning supporting literature.

Table 17

Summary of supporting and clarifying points from participants and informing literature for the global theme of There may be Economic Influences on Their Career

Organizing sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
7.1: The economy has not been a factor to their limited career success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you're going to blame the economy, when is the environment ever right? • It didn't hit home with me. 	The economy was booming during the 1980's and college class sizes were shrinking (Williams, 1985).
7.2: The economy has been a factor to their limited career success.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's definitely affected my career. • I've always been laid off or the company went out of business. 	Economic events such as unemployment at 10.3% in 1982; stock market crash in 1987 and 2008 mortgage crisis impacted Gen Xers economic future (Erickson, 2009).

The participants were divided on whether or not economic factors impacted their career. There appeared to be a relationship between type of career choice (i.e. IT professionals were more impacted than HR professionals) as well as where a person sits in the generation span. Those older Gen Xers commented on the dot-com meltdown in the late nineties/early 2000 compared to younger Gen Xers who were conceivably still in college. As such, this theme had a

narrow range of description which indicates less varied ways of knowing. Global theme 8 is defined as historical context shapes Gen Xers as adults and fully describes their individual experiences as it relates to their childhood.

Global Theme 8: Historical Context shapes who Gen Xers are as Adults

Mannheim's Theory of Generations, which provides a theoretical framework for this study, suggested that people are significantly influenced by their socio-historical environment and thus, experiencing similar historical events collectively shapes a cohort (Mannheim, 1952). Mannheim characterized generations as social constructions rather than biological ones. As such, he spoke of historical-social events that demarcate a cohort. Within Mannheim's theory, he depicts a stratification that defines generational location, generational actuality, and generational units. One's generational location, defined as all the people who are born in a certain time period, is considered a key factor in the determination of knowledge (Corsten, 1999). Specifically, generational location accounts for "...certain definite modes of behavior, feeling and thought" (Mannheim, 1952, p. 291) and furthermore, formative experiences from one's youth are highlighted as a key period where social generations are formed (Pilcher, 1994). Second, generational actuality is the way in which the experiences of a generation are connected by interpretation (Corsten, 1999). Generational units or subgroups recognize that individuals will have unique and specific responses to situations (Dunham, 1998). Given the different levels of stratification within a generational grouping, members may have collective thoughts, behaviors, and feelings.

For this theme, the participants co-constructed four organizing themes and 14 basic themes. The organizing themes are: *there are collective historical events in the minds of Gen Xers, Gen Xers are not aware of historical events, there are parental influences from our*

upbringing, and childhood experiences have shaped them as an adult. My intention for this theme was to understand if the participants had historical and social experiences that they recalled as being significant to their development and understanding of the world. Given Mannheim's informing theory, it was assumed that Gen Xers would have some level of collective experiences that were unique to their cohort. Recognizing this focus, the analysis for this theme was developed at the organizing theme level rather than delving into highly contextual specifics of each participant. Figure 29 provide a visual representation of the global theme of *Historical Context Shapes Who Gen Xers are as Adults.*

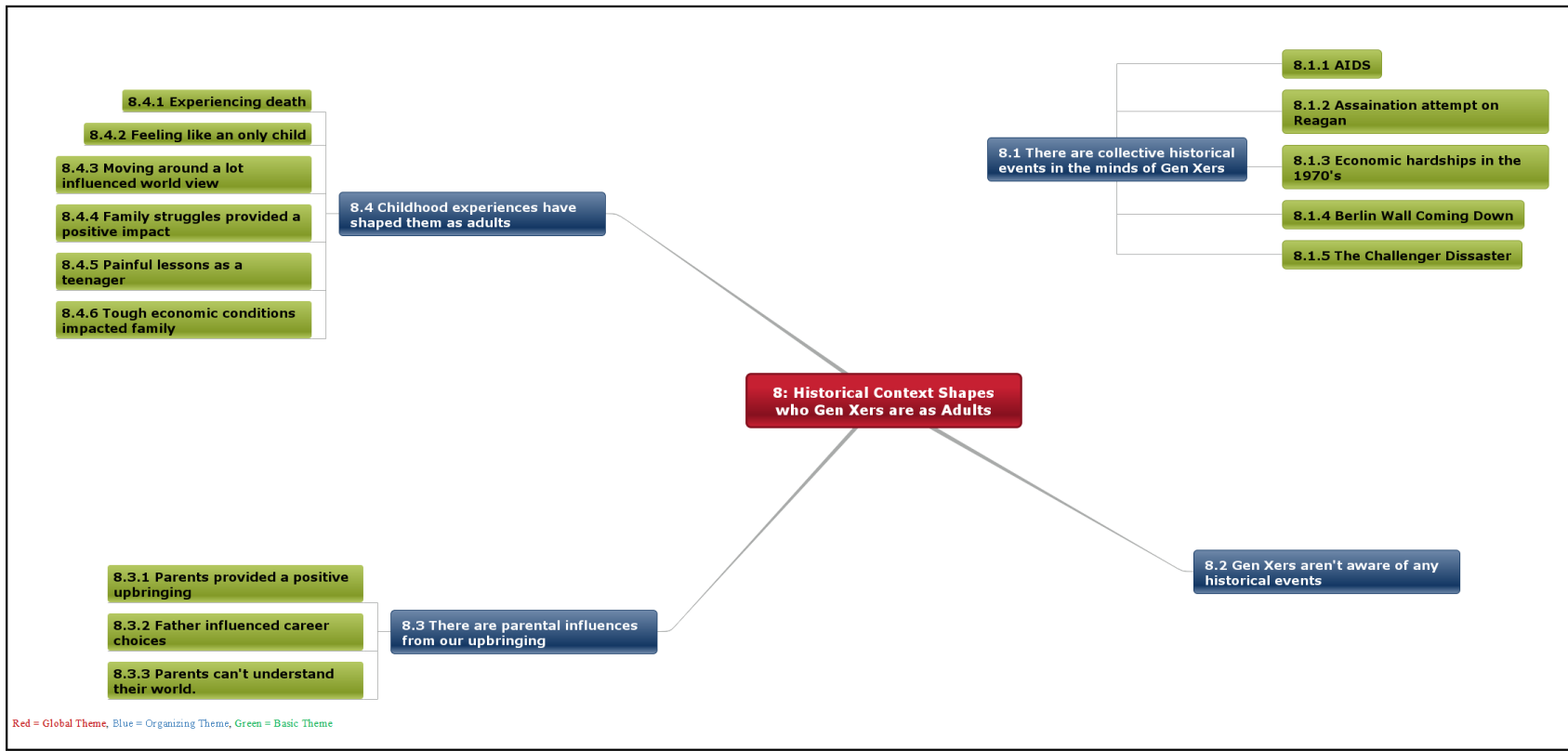


Figure 29. Global theme of *historical context shapes who Gen Xers are as adults*

Organizing theme 8.1: There are collective historical events in the minds of Gen

Xers. Other research studies have attempted to validate Mannheim's theory. The most comprehensive study was conducted by Schuman and Scott in which they found that individuals of the same generation do have collective memories (Schuman & Scott, 1989). Participants within their study were not only able to identify defining events of their eras, but they were able to assign meaning to why those events are important to remember (Schuman & Scott, 1989). A more contemporary study found similar results suggesting that there are distinct memories for each generation (Arsenault, 2004). Within the present study, the Gen Xer participants had collective memories as well, by recalling events such as the Challenger Disaster, the fall of Communism, and the AIDS Epidemic as being significant historical events. The historical events, identified as basic themes, that were co-constructed for this study include AIDS, Berlin Wall coming down, the Challenger disaster, assassination attempt on Ronald Reagan, and economic hardships in the 1970s. The analysis, however, is at the organizing theme level as the relevance to this organizing theme is the alignment with Mannheim's theory.

Most of the participants initially struggled with this question. There was even discussion that events such as 9/11 or the Gulf War were bigger events for the other generational cohorts. One participant remarked that "our generation hasn't experienced anything quite, I guess, volatile as the school shootings today and any type of war. That is overseas that I don't think we even have an idea of what that means. So I think we're very spoiled in that sense" (IP3, 2013, p. 4).

For Catherine, however, she had vivid memories of the outbreak of AIDS as she was living in a small community in Franklin, Indiana, where people's reactions were negative. Catherine recalled her memory of that time in her life:

Well, I remember significantly the outbreak of AIDS, that had a lot of impact on my life. (IP1, 2013, p. 5)

In Catherine's community, the response to AIDS was negative and judgmental, yet Catherine remembers a very different response to the news that the Berlin Wall was coming down:

Then I remember when the Berlin Wall came down and that having almost the opposite, yet global effect of when the wall like physically came down and Berlin was rejoined and reunited again and how so many people saw that as such a positive thing. I remember thinking, because they were very close in time span, that locally, there was such a negative impact on America in terms of AIDS being in our society yet Berlin, very far away, was seen as a positive. (IP1, 2013, p. 5)

The Challenger Disaster was recalled by a number of people. Michelle remembered that the "space shuttle in '86 was big" (IP3, 2013, p. 4). Elisa described her memories of the day when the Challenger Disaster happened:

The first thing that popped into my head, I don't know if you think about events or remember. Maybe it's a reflection of Kennedy's assassination this week, which obviously I wasn't alive for. I do remember when the Challenger blew up and I remember exactly where I was. It was an event where maybe everything doesn't go right in the world. Maybe it was the first time that something on a national scale had really impacted all of ... and I would imagine my classmates might feel the same way and remember that incident. (IP5, 2013, p. 5)

The assassination attempt on President Reagan was another historical event that a few of the participants mentioned that showcased another example of a connection to an early memory when bad things happen. For John who grew up in a small farming community in Colorado, he vividly remembered the economic hardships of the 1970s as a historical memory:

In the early '70s, I vaguely remember there was the oil problem with gas prices in the early '70s. Embargo for a short period of time. Then in the late '70s, early '80s, I know they had very high inflation. The inflation, actually, affected us a lot because it affected land prices, and the interest rates, I know, on certificates, just putting a certificate of deposit gave you a 15% interest rate, so that meant that loans at the time were 15%, and land prices when you're farming. That affected the amount that people, as they were running their business, had to borrow. That actually impacted us and a lot of others negatively. That was a tough time. (IP6, 2013, p. 4)

This was a very poignant historical memory for him because it directly impacted his family and his daily life.

Organizing theme 8.2: Gen Xers are not aware of historical events. Edward struggled to identify impactful historical events and as such concluded that “nothing stands out. I’m sure there’s one or two obvious things that I’m forgetting about, not nothing that wasn’t localized” (IP4, 2013, p. 5). We spent a great deal of time discussing very personal events that happened in his upbringing that he believes had a profound impact on him rather than any specific historical event. Unique personal experiences is further explored below.

Organizing theme 8.3: There are parental influences from our upbringing. The organizing theme of there are parental influences from our upbringing is described by the study participants as: parents provided a positive upbringing, father influenced career choices, and parents can’t understand their world.

Several of the study participants described very positive influences and experiences from their childhood and parents. Edwards described how he perceived those early influences from his parents:

Yeah, really involved. Very supportive. If you would’ve asked me two days before he went into the hospital I said I have a really good relationship with my parents and a really good relationship with my family. Pretty tight family. Jumping forward a little bit, for whatever reason, we all still live in the general Chicago end area, so I see all of my siblings and their families three or four times a year. (IP4, 2013, p. 4)

Michelle described her early experiences with her father as positive in the sense that he made learning and work fun:

Growing up maybe not necessarily from a generational standpoint, but maybe from the family standpoint, my dad was very much into playing games to get things done. For an example ... And my sister and I talk about this still today ... He wanted to clean the gravel to make it look pretty for his immaculate Japanese backyard garden. In order to clean gravel, you have to put it through a sieve. He said, "Okay, girls. Let's see how

many rocks we can clean." In the winter, we'll get a cookie or something. There wasn't really a big reward at the end ever but he was able to make work fun. (IP3, 2013, p. 4)

For Catherine, she described how her parents provided guidance and reinforced positive work values that she still holds to today:

I think that our parents instilled strong work ethic in us, and I believe that that probably comes from something that stems maybe from that Vietnam service that was enforced on our parents. And sometimes that hierarchical get in line type thing, I think that helps with work discipline. (IP1, 2013, p. 9)

Edward spoke extensively about the support and influences that he received from his parents. Specifically, his dad was not only supportive but instrumental in influencing Edward's career choices. Edward's father directed him into the world of technology. This is how Edward described his father's influences:

My dad is all about my kids need to do better than I do. He would say, "You can't work in an office and be a white collar executive. You have to do something different." Your company or whatever it is, so ironically, I have two brothers that both own their own businesses. I've been the number two or three in business. My dad was all about entrepreneurial, all about being an entrepreneur, always about don't work for the man. Don't do what I did and have a miserable life having someone bark down orders. The technology computer world was probably my dad's way of saying this is a way to leap frog the white collar, nine-to-five, red tape, crap world that I had to live in. (IP4, 2013, p. 8)

For Elisa, however, who is a female Gen Xer in a dual career household, she described her experiences as vastly different than her mother's experiences, who was in the Traditionalist cohort and a stay at home mom. This concept came up during our conversation about outside factors that impinge on her job satisfaction. In addition to the stressors of too much to do and not enough time, she mentioned the feeling of not being fully supported by her mother, at times, due to feeling disconnected between their two worlds:

Maybe sometimes I feel a little bit that while they did certainly support education and careers, I question whether our parents have a full understanding of what our lives are like. I talked to my girlfriends, too, and people at work, maybe especially women, about their mothers or mother-in-law as being very judgmental. Yeah. "Why aren't you doing

this better? I don't understand." Or, "Oh, my gosh. Your husband does so much. He made grilled cheese sandwiches on Friday. He is a God." I don't know, sometimes I wonder if we're fully supported by our mothers. (IP5, 2013, p. 29)

Indeed, as compared to our mothers' generation, Gen Xer women's labor participation rate over the past 50 years has changed dramatically. Consider that in 1950, women's labor force participation was around 29% compared to 46% in the year 2000 (Toossi, 2002). Over the past 50 years, the role of women in the workforce has changed dramatically and yet, as mentioned above, the changes in the social organization of family and life has not kept pace (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). Women in the Gen Xer cohort do have vastly different experiences and challenges than their mothers so it is not surprising that this experience by Elisa, who is a wife, a mother, and a full-time employee, feels this disconnect between her experiences and those of her mother. Elisa summarizes her thoughts about the differences:

It's such a different world and I don't know if there's some jealousy or resentment or whatever there, but I've heard that from other women. (IP5, 2013, p. 5)

Organizing theme 8.4: Childhood experiences have shaped them as an adult. As part of the interview process, participants were asked an open-ended question on what it was like growing up. Each of the study participants shared their individual constructions related to childhood experiences that had meaning for them. The organizing theme of childhood experiences have shaped them as an adult includes six basic themes. The six basic themes are: *experiencing death, feeling like an only child, moved around a lot influenced world view, family struggles provided a positive impact, painful lessons as a teenager, and tough economic conditions for family.* The study participants collectively shared very personal and deeply impactful childhood experiences that facilitate the understanding of their unique contextual environments. Given the context specific nature of their responses, which resulted in the six basic themes, the analysis will be at the organizing level

Early theories representing child development are rooted in a central premise that early childhood experiences largely shape who people are as adults. Some of the more influential child development theorists are Freud (1856-1939), Vygotsky (1896-1934), Erikson (1902-1994), Piaget (1896-1980), and Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005). Sigmund Freud, one of the earliest theorists on child development, was one of the first to conceptualize children's experiences in early childhood. A basic premise of Freud was that a child's development would directly influence how one behaves as an adult. Moreover, adults' actions correlate to something happening in their childhood, which is especially true with feelings on anxiety and fear (Brooks, 1981). Erik Erikson's theory of child development suggested that patterns develop early on in life that influence a person's action for the rest of their life (Mooney, 2000). His theory reinforced developmental timetables that were critical to build trust, autonomy and initiative (Mooney, 2000). Jean Piaget developed a cognitive-development stage theory that suggested children develop ways of thinking based on their interactions with the world around them (Mooney, 2000). Piaget's epistemology was that children construct their own knowledge by giving meaning to the people, places, and things in their world (Mooney, 2000). Leo Vygotsky placed emphasis on parents as partners in their child's life as one of his basic beliefs was that children learn through the interactions with knowledgeable partners (Brooks, 1981). Given that children spend most of their childhood with their parents, parents provide and model positive behavior for the child.

Child development theories provide insight into the various influences of a child's early stages of life. They provide a foundation for helping one better understand what shapes a child's ways of knowing the world. The study participants had childhood influences that they vividly remembered as being influential in their upbringing and having an impact on their childhood.

Catherine described her childhood experience as one where she moved around quite a bit. She perceived living in different locations as a positive as it forced her to be adaptable to new situations:

So I've always had a lot of exposure to a large diverse group of people. I think that it played well in terms of my spatial and societal awareness and it was really important in terms of becoming adaptable in new situations. So having lived all over the country, I've seen and done it all, I think, in terms of work and education life balance with my environment. So I think that that has worked really well in terms of transitions at work and being able to adapt in positions, regardless of who I'm working with. (IP1, 2013, p. 4)

Catherine continued this line of thinking when she discussed people's reaction to an historical event such as the AIDS epidemic. Being introspective, she recognized that her diversity of experiences has shaped her as an adult and other people's experiences will shape them as well:

It makes you think about how your background has shaped your opinions and that everyone else's background is going to shape theirs. (IP1, 2013, p. 6)

Paul's childhood experiences were very different in that he grew up in a small town in rural Minnesota. He was the youngest of three kids, but his brothers were much older than him. He described the impact of having much older siblings:

But with my brothers being older, I almost grew up an only child and therefore was very independent, but I also felt very different because I wasn't really linked in with my brothers, they were more like uncle figures sort of and I think they were almost in, I mean they're not, but well maybe they are, they could be baby boomers, I don't know. (IP2, 2013, p. 4)

Paul described being impacted by deaths in the family, and relating that to historical events of the same nature:

I mean I think a huge impact on my development was I lost three grandparents in one year. So yes, separation, death was a big thing, and then the Challenger thing added to that, I have no idea, but it was probably around the same time. (IP2, 2013, p. 4)

John grew up on a farm in rural Colorado. His childhood memories were heavily influenced by the financial difficulties that his parents had as farmers. In contrast to the other

participants' parents, John's father was a farmer and thus, he was self-employed. John was the only participant to mention the inflation of the 1970s as it significantly impacted his family and his views on how to get ahead:

I think it demonstrated to me that you needed to get a good job. I know not having a lot of those resources and everything. My parents would talk around the dinner table about that a lot, so I was well aware of the situation and all that, whereas some kids probably wouldn't have been involved with that. I think my parents were always telling me, "Just put your head down and work hard, and you'll be rewarded." That's just what you should do. (IP6, 2013, p. 4)

The economic theme ran through his interview. John expressed that economic conditions impacted his career. Additionally, he holds a view that economics are more relevant than other factors such as life stage or generational influences. For John, all individuals are impacted by the economy. As an example, the mortgage and financial crisis of the 2008 impacted all generations, irrespective of one's life stage.

For Edward, his childhood experiences involved his father's alcoholism, which was painful, but resulted in a positive outcome as the family worked through it together. Edward described how he learned of his father's alcoholism:

I found out about that when I was 15 years old. It is weird during the teenage years when someone comes and says, "Dad's going to the hospital for 28 days because he's an alcoholic," and you didn't know he was an alcoholic, I guess that shaped my teenage years a little bit. (IP4, 2013, p.3)

Edward described this childhood experience as providing "a lot of awakening, a lot of awareness" (IP4, 2013, p. 3). He recognized that what his family was experiencing was also being experienced in the broader community. For example, his high school had a program for children of alcoholics and Edward believes he was on the forefront of the self-help movement that was emerging in the 1980s. For Edward, this experience, albeit painful, was tremendously

positive as it helped show his father as a role model who was able to deal with his internal troubles:

It was an influence in my teenage years, a positive, extremely positive influence. To this day, I'm still very proud that he corrected his whatever demons he had to deal with. (IP4, 2013, p. 3)

Elisa's described childhood experiences that were impactful as well. She detailed an experience in her formative years when things did not go right:

Kind of like ... well, maybe I think Dr. Phil sometimes talks about 10 life events, but I think I maybe lost some of my self-esteem or confidence. In sixth grade we had had a ... it was elementary school. We had had a ... one of my favorite teachers. Anyway, he did a parliamentary procedure all through sixth grade and learned Robert's Rules of Order. Anyway, every quarter you could run for an office, and I ran for president twice. I didn't think anything of it, and won. I think by like sixth or ... this is going to sound so stupid, but in eighth grade a tried out for the cheerleading squad and didn't make it. I think that was the first time that I remember trying something and it didn't work out. (IP5, 2013, p. 6)

As suggested by early childhood development theorists, the childhood experiences described above still hold meaning for the study participants and clearly are regarded as events in their early lives that have profoundly impacted them and the way that they see the world. As Gadamer posits, our history and early experiences situate our understanding in a priori prejudices (Gadamer, 2004) and allow for a new understanding through the iterative process of the hermeneutic circle. Through their reflections on childhood experiences, the participants began the necessary first steps for the hermeneutic process.

Summary of global theme. This sub-section presents a visual of the ensuing hermeneutic spectrum for the global theme of *historical context shapes who Gen Xers are as adults*—how this global theme is experienced and expressed similarly and differently by Gen Xers. A summary is also provided in the form of a table of the global, organizing and basic

themes together with selective clarifying and supporting points from the participants and literature.

Hermeneutic spectrum. In some respects, there is a collective nature to this theme as represented within the discussion surrounding collective historical events from the participants past. The other aspect to this theme, however, is the highly variable nature of the participants' contextual experiences as children. There are unique differences in how the participants were raised, what they remember as significant events, as well as what were their primary influences were that has shaped the way that they have come to know and see the world. The unique context, therefore, suggests a broad range/spread for the hermeneutic spectrum which signifies highly varied individual constructions and descriptions, suggesting a looser spread of experience and ways of knowing. See Figure 30 for a visual of the hermeneutic spectrum.

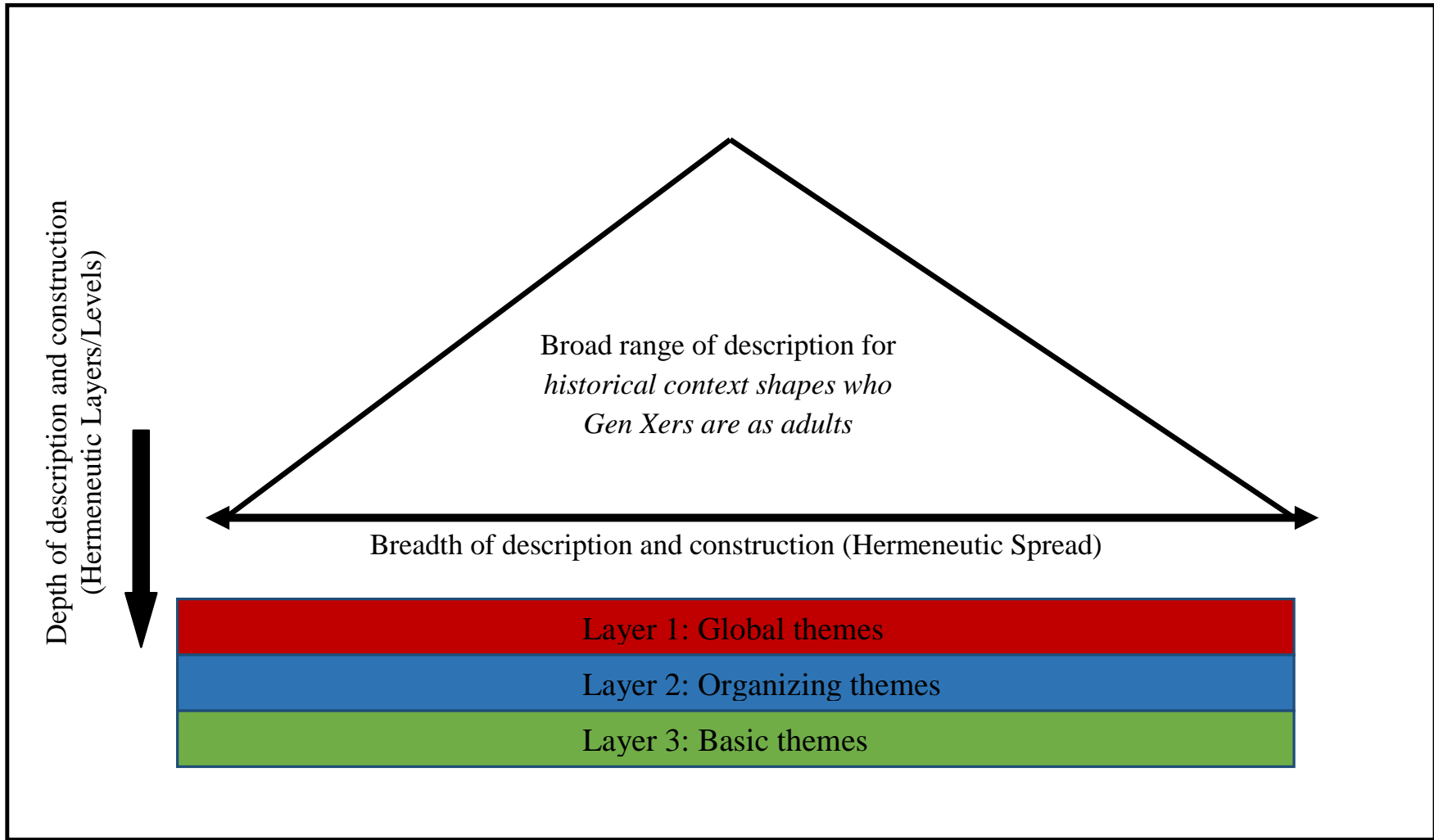


Figure 30. A broad/wide and deep/thick hermeneutic spectrum for *historical context shapes who Gen Xers are as adults*

Key points from participants and supporting literature. Historical context shapes who the study participants are as adults and provides a greater understanding as to the foundations for the study participants. This global theme is constructed by the participants as: *there are collective historical events in the minds of Gen Xers, Gen Xers are not aware of historical events, there are parental influences from our upbringing, and childhood experiences have shaped them as an adult.* Table 18 summarizes the organizing and basic themes by summarizing key points from the participants and then aligning supporting literature.

Table 18

Summary of supporting and clarifying points from participants and informing literature for the global theme of Historical Context Shapes who Gen Xers are as Adults

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
8.1: There are collective historical events in the minds of Gen Xers		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well, I remember significantly the outbreak of AIDS, that was a really, that had a lot of impact on my life. • I remember the Berlin Wall because we had a family on our street that was German. • Well, the space shuttle in '86 was big. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generational location accounts for “...certain definite modes of behavior, feeling and thought” (Mannheim, 1952, p. 291). • Generational units or sub-groups recognize that individuals will have unique and specific responses to situations (Dunham, 1998).

(continued)

Table 18. Continued

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
8.2: Gen Xers aren't aware of historical events.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maybe when Reagan got shot. • In the early '70s, I vaguely remember there was the oil problem with gas prices in the early '70s. Embargo for a short period of time. Then in the late '70s, early '80s, I know they had very high inflation. • Nothing stands out. • I don't think we had a major event. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals of the same generation do have collective memories (Schuman & Scott, 1989))
8.3: There are parental influences from our upbringing	Parents provided a positive upbringing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My dad was into playing games to get things done. • I think our parents instilled a strong work ethic in us. 	

(continued)

Table 18. Continued

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
<p>8.4: Childhood experiences have shaped them as an adult</p>	<p>Father influenced career decisions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't do what I did and have a miserable life having someone bark down orders. 	
	<p>Parents can't understand their world.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't know, maybe sometimes, if we're fully supported by our mothers. • I think a huge impact on my development was I lost 3 grandparents in one year. • We did move around a lot. • My dad was an alcoholic, then was a recovering alcoholic. • The mean girl thing kind of put a dent in my self-esteem. • They were struggling, and it might have been for other reasons, as well, but they had no income. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women's labor force participation was around 29% compared to 46% in the year 2000 (Toossi, 2002). • Child development theories are rooted in a central premise that early childhood experiences largely shape who they are as adults (Mooney, 2000).

Participants were asked to describe their past from two vantage points (1) memorable historical events (2) characterization of their childhood. For the memorable events, there was a significant level of commonality amongst the participants in the events that they remembered as being significant. Their childhood memories, however, were quite varied and largely contextual as one might imagine. The broad range of description suggests a looser spread of experience and ways of knowing. Global theme 9 highlights Baby Boomers influences on Gen Xers job satisfaction within the workforce.

Global Theme 9: Baby Boomers' Influences Contribute to Job Satisfaction

This global theme is comprised of four organizing themes to describe Baby Boomers Influences Contribute to Job Satisfaction. The organizing themes are: *Baby Boomers' imposed value system, feeling equalized with Baby Boomers, Baby Boomers' dominance in the workplace, and hand holding Baby Boomers*. A visual representation of this global theme, organizing theme, and basic themes is displayed in Figure 31.

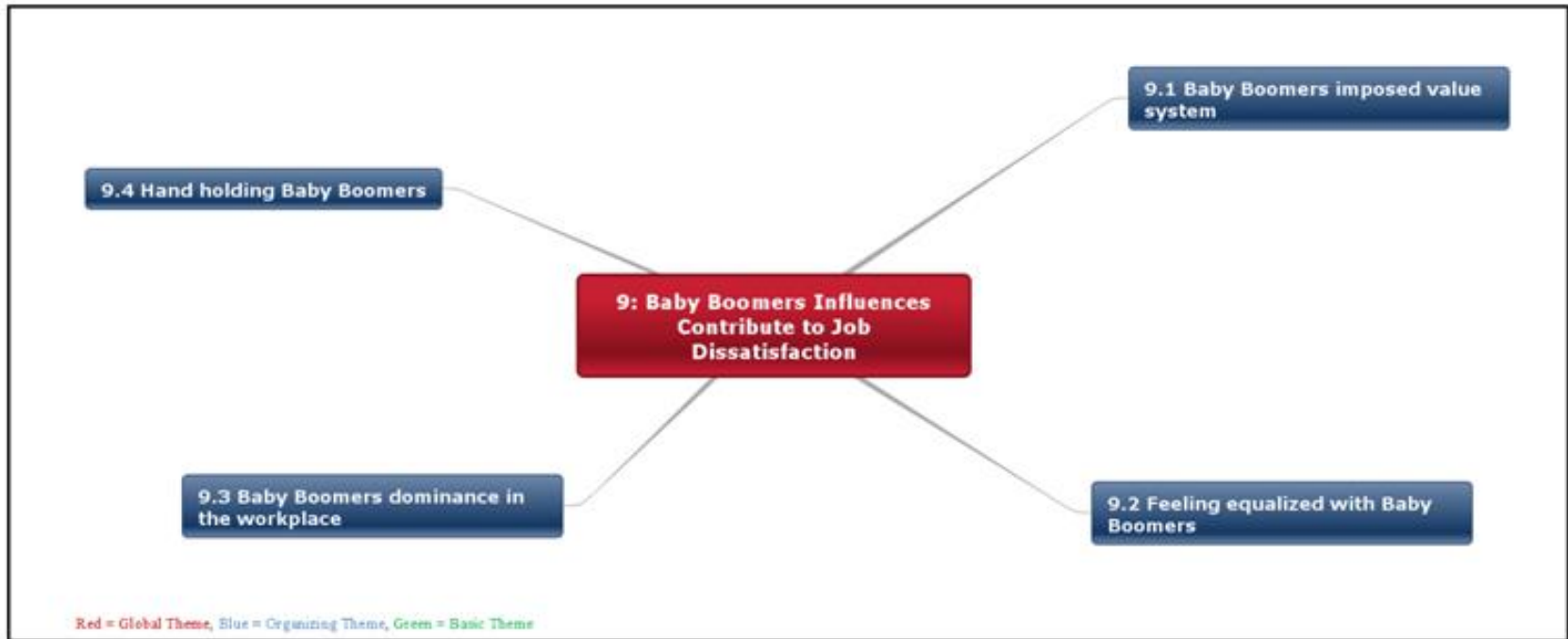


Figure 31. Global theme of *Baby Boomers influences contribute to job dissatisfaction*

Organizing theme 9.1: Baby Boomers' imposed value system. Work values have been defined as “the outcomes people desire and feel that they deserve through their work” (Twenge et al., 2010, p. 1121). Therefore, work values shape employee preferences in the workplace, which ultimately impacts their attitudes and behaviors (Dose, 1997). There is empirically-based evidence that suggests there is a difference in the value systems of each generation (Lyons et al., 2007a; Twenge et al., 2010). For example, studies have shown that Gen Xers are more open to change, whereas Boomers value tradition and uniformity (Lyons et al., 2007a). Other studies confirmed that Gen Xers place more value on work-life balance than the Baby Boomers; studies also show that Boomers are more work centric than the Gen Xers (Twenge et al., 2010). Gen Xers tend to value extrinsic rewards more than the other two cohorts, Boomers and Millennials (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). Moreover, Gen Xers tend to demonstrate more individualistic traits such as self-esteem and assertiveness (Twenge, 2010).

Several of the participants talked about their frustrations regarding perceived disconnects between themselves and their Boomer colleagues. This was especially evident when they felt incongruence between their value system and Baby Boomers' value system. As an example, although Paul indicated that he did not feel stuck in a negative sense, he indicated that he has looked to Boomers and felt dissatisfaction. A part of this dissatisfaction is a perceived incongruence between his values compared to the Baby Boomer population at his work environment. The feeling of frustration has been exacerbated for Paul as he feels the climate of his organization will not change until Boomers exit the organization:

It is frustrating and not very satisfying to be dependent upon those people making the decisions and they may not share your same value system and I think that's pretty important to me is the value system. So I talked about some of the work life balance decisions that are possibly made by boomers when they don't understand what I'm going through. For example you know having to leave at 3:30 to go to school to pick up a kid

or whatever and somebody has a meeting scheduled so they make comments, oh nobody's here at 5pm (IP2, 2013, 23)

Paul perceives that he values work life balance more than the Boomers, which provides a practical example of a generational difference in values. Elisa expressed similar frustrations:

How I view things is this cultural notion that working hard is what gets you ahead. Number of hours in the office, how long you're sitting in your seat. Now even maybe made worse by the fact that people can get e-mails or whatever at all hours, so it's not only how much time you spend in your seat during the day, but then also kind of those 24/7 availability. Some jobs have been worse than others in that regard. (IP5, 2013, p. 9)

Elise talked about this concept of "face time," which she referred to it as a Boomer legacy work expectation. Face time for Elisa means that employees are rewarded for just being present rather than actually achieving results.

Organizing theme 9.2: Feeling equalized with Baby Boomers. Catherine talked of feeling equalized with her Boomer colleagues. For Catherine, equalized meant not getting advancement opportunities because their years of experience seemed to trump her educational background:

The issue that I have with that, which leads to this word equalized, is that I've heard a number of times in different positions, that it wouldn't be fair if I were moved up, as opposed to one of these peers with all these years of experience. (IP1, 2013, p. 8)

Catherine specifically talked about her perception that being equalized has impinged on her job satisfaction. She has struggled to get the more senior roles and she feels Boomers are blocking those opportunities because her work environments are placing more value on years of experience:

It's disappointing that organizations would choose to function that way, especially when they are going to give the Boomers that credibility in terms of their wealth of knowledge and then you don't use my wealth of knowledge, plus my education, plus my loyalty. (IP1, 2013, p. 16)

Organizing theme 9.3: Baby Boomers' dominance in the workplace. Feeling that Baby Boomers dominate the workplace was a common experience of the study's Gen X participants. A feeling that one might be dominated by the Boomers should not be that surprising given that Boomers represent the largest cohort at 80 million of the U.S. population (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003) and hold up to 90% of the top leadership roles in the world's top 200 companies (Erickson, 2010). Elisa recognized that she may feel dominated by the Boomer cohort simply as a function of their large size and the fact that they hold so many of the leadership roles:

You're in your 20s and your perspective of people and their experience maybe was like people were old. But I would say maybe the dominant thing about at least the first half, if not maybe a little bit more of my career, is the dominance of the Baby Boomer generation on me in my work experience because it was just so ... I mean, there's such a large percentage of the workforce, I guess, and they were the ones in leadership positions. (IP5, 2013, p. 8)

Other factors that contributed to this feeling of being dominated by the Baby Boomers were a belief that they control the decision making and that they strongly influence the culture. For decision making, several participants acknowledged that Boomers hold the keys and ultimately the power in the strategic decisions being made:

Yes so it's the political, nature and let's face it, when you're company is looking for some key decisions to be made, and the people that it might affect are the people that are actually making the decisions, I'm not confident they can make the right decision and be truly selfless right? And just put them out there and say this might cost me my job but it's the best thing for the company. (IP2, 2013, p. 12)

Gen Xers perceive that they do not have much power or influence:

I think many of the Gen Xers are sort of mid manager level, you don't have a ton of say in really large strategy decisions, right? (IP2, 2013, p. 23)

During the member checking process, this particular organizing theme resonated with John as he mentioned in his culture, many of the Boomers retire and then are hired back as contractors. Or, they remain employed and continue to protect their own interests and the interests of other

Boomers at the same level. So, essentially, they continue to maintain control of the decisions and reap the rewards of options around their careers:

Number 12, yeah, I resonate with Baby Boomers as the leaders. They're typically the higher level managers that dominate decision making. They bring their own value system to the management and to the company. They're definitely impacting people like that. Yeah, I mean, I get the sense a lot of times that Baby Boomers who tend to be the managers in my company protecting each other's jobs, because they're all towards the end of their careers. They're trying to just eek out whatever they can at the end. I get a sense that that's the case. (IP 6, 2013, p. 7)

Gen Xers also perceive that Baby Boomers are overly influencing the culture. Similar to the organizing theme about Baby Boomer values, Gen Xers perceive that Boomers are reinforcing a culture that may not be as progressive and still relies on traditional work practices. For example, Catherine spoke of networking as being a leftover Boomer legacy:

Because I feel like, now that I said networking, I feel like that might be one of those leftover Boomer good ole boy type trends that people will still choose someone based on, a voucher from their buddy as opposed to their skills and their work ethic and their background. (IP1, 2013, p. 19)

Face time, as mentioned in the previous organizing theme, is another example of a Baby Boomer legacy work practice that was mentioned as frustrating and can impact one's job satisfaction. This provides another example of the perceived culture that Baby Boomers may still value and promote within their workplaces.

Organizing theme 9.4: Hand holding Baby Boomers. A reoccurring theme for John was his frustration with the limited technology skills of the Baby Boomer workforce at his place of employment, and the impact that has had on his day to day workload. He repeatedly mentioned the resistance to change mentality of his aging workforce, and the implications for him as his role requires him to introduce new technology solutions and ultimately, automate manual processes:

Yeah, like the baby boomers struggling with basic computer skills is very frustrating. That can be frustrating when you feel like they should know this stuff since they work on computers all day long. They should know simple basics. (IP6, 2013, p. 18)

As part of the interview process, I asked John to describe an experience that would give insight into his frustrations with hand holding the Baby Boomer employees at his workplace. John described an example where employees were questioning the capability of the system, when in fact, the system was fine, but the issue was human input error:

Just the other day, people were saying that our system wasn't working properly, and I question that because we made no changes to it for months, and after I got these people to actually dig into what they're looking at, they found out that their set up was not right on lead times of parts. It was not telling them to order parts because they had very short lead times, and a lot of people either don't know where to look, or they're too lazy sometimes to go look and do what I consider to be their job, and I'm not sure why they're asking me to check. They have a tendency to question the system versus questioning their own work. (IP6, 2013, p. 12)

The problem is exacerbated by a culture that John perceives is accommodating Baby Boomers and a direct supervisor who does not help filter the individual requests and/or does not prioritize the work so John can focus on higher level objectives:

Another thing is, you know my boss has kind of given everybody in our organization carte blanche ability to come in and ask me to do whatever they need me to do at any time, and that can be very stressful because I'm inundated with lots of little requests from people. (IP6, 2013, p. 12)

During the member checking interview with John, John was asked if this organizing theme accurately characterized and described his experiences:

Yes, I still have that feeling. In my particular role, I mean that's definitely a Baby Boomer person that gives me those issues. (IP6, 2013, p. 4)

It certainly is a popular perception in business publications that Baby Boomers struggle with change and technology. Largely characterized as the "digital divide," to mean an inequality in skills and access to technology, Boomers have been stereotyped to represent this gap (Morris, 2007). Statistics do suggest older individuals are using technology less than their younger

counterparts. Researchers found that only 14% of the elderly had access to the Internet compared to nearly 50% of the non-elderly population (Morris, 2007). In the U.S., the Department of Commerce reported in 2000 that people over the age of 50 had the lowest Internet use compared to other age groups and that was largely attributed to seniors' comfort and skill level with technology (Kolodinsky, Cranwell, & Rowe, 2002). Researchers have taken interest in the digital divide by acknowledging the real nature of computer anxiety in older adults and are providing interventions to work with older adults (Slegers, Beckers, van Boxtel, & Jolles, 2006). John has experienced the digital divide in his work environment. The impact, as reported by John, has been dissatisfaction and frustration in his current environment.

Summary of global theme. This sub-section presents a visual of the ensuing hermeneutic spectrum for the global theme of *Baby Boomers influences contribute to job dissatisfaction*—how this global theme is experienced and expressed similarly and differently by Gen Xers. A summary is also provided in the form of a table of the global, organizing and basic themes together with selective clarifying and supporting points from the participants and literature.

Hermeneutic spectrum. This global theme has a moderate range/spread of description. The participants co-constructed four organizing themes with no basic themes, thus two levels of interpretation. Within each organizing theme, there was little to no variation as the organizing themes were contextual to an individual's unique experience which has influenced their job dissatisfaction. As an example, the organizing theme of hand holding Baby Boomers is specifically related to one participant who is experiencing that phenomenon in his workplace. Again, this contextual specificity underscores the importance and relevance of understanding a participants' unique experience as it relates to being a Gen Xer, stuck in the middle between

Baby Boomers and Millennials, in the U.S. workforce. The range of description for this global theme is presented in Figure 32.

Key points from participants and supporting literature. The study participants expressed that part of their experiences as Gen Xers being stuck in the middle between Baby Boomers and Millennials in the U.S. workforce is a feeling that Boomers are contributing to their job dissatisfaction. This global theme specifically addresses the study's second research question that relates to how being stuck is impacting their job satisfaction. From their shared constructions, their job satisfaction is being impacted by feeling stuck between the Boomers and Millennials. Whether it is feeling dominated or incongruence in value system, the Gen Xer participants shared their constructions, which resulted in four organizing themes: *Baby Boomers imposed value system; feeling equalized with Baby Boomers; Baby Boomers dominance in the workplace; hand holding Baby Boomers.* Table 19 summarizes the global theme by providing key points from the participants, along with supporting literature.

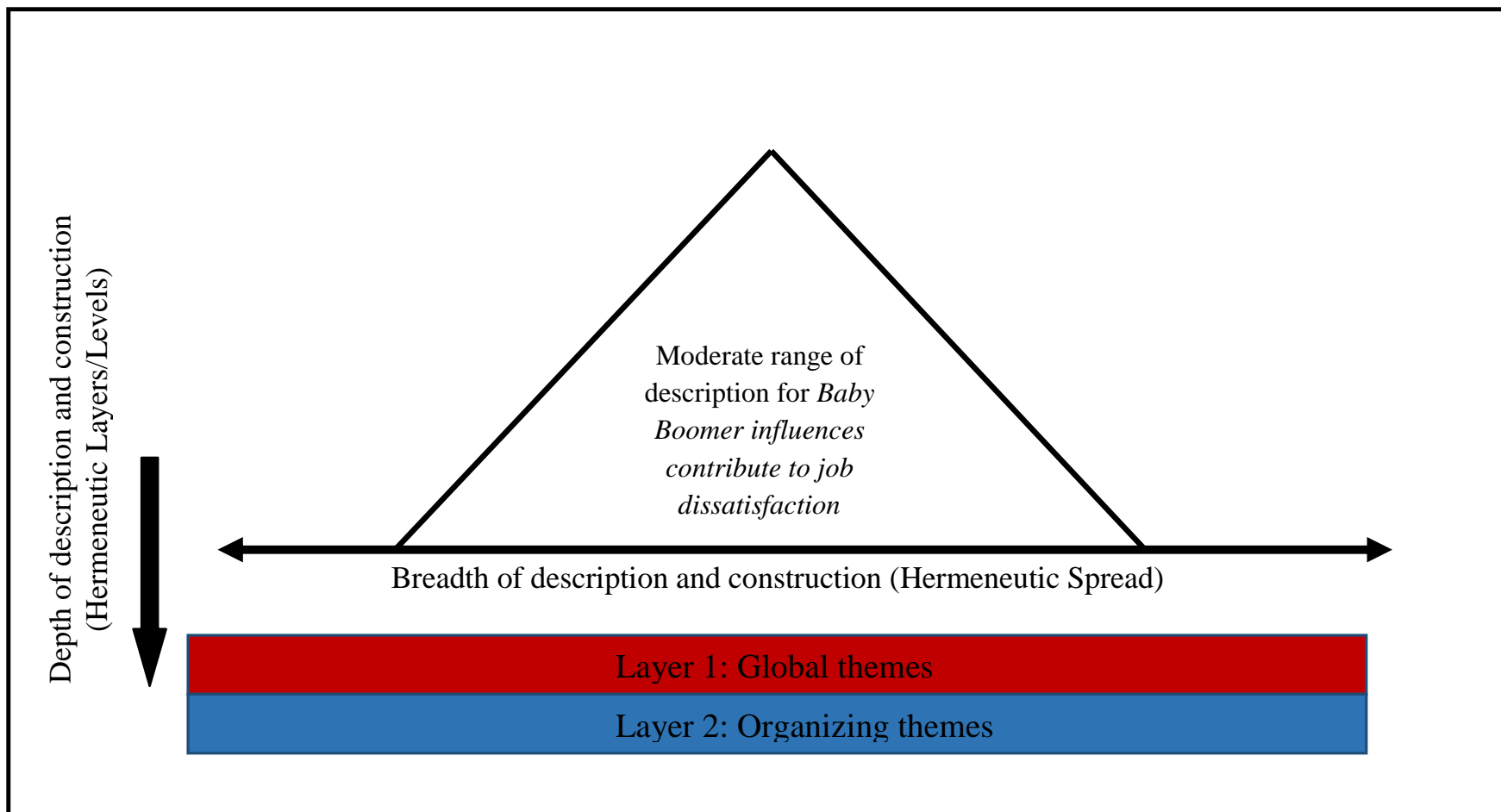


Figure 32. A moderately wide and mid-level deep/thick hermeneutic spectrum for *Baby Boomer influences contribute to job dissatisfaction*

Table 19

Summary of supporting and clarifying points from participants and informing literature for the global theme of Baby Boomers Influences Contribute to Job Dissatisfaction

Organizing sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
9.1: Baby Boomers imposed value system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They may not share your same value system. • I definitely have looked to Baby Boomers and felt dissatisfaction. • It's a cultural notion that working long hours gets you ahead. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The outcomes people desire and feel that they deserve through their work” (Twenge et al., 2010). • Research that suggests there are generational differences with respect to value systems (Lyons et al., 2007a). • Gen Xers tend to value extrinsic motivators more than Boomers or Millennials (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008).
9.2: Feeling equalized with Baby Boomers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The issue that I have with that, which leads to this word equalized, is that I've heard a number of times in different positions, that it wouldn't be fair if I were moved up, as opposed to one of these peers with all these years of experience. 	
9.3: Baby Boomers dominance in the workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They hold the keys and it's just powerful, right? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baby Boomers represent the largest cohort in the U.S. population at 80 Million (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003).

(continued)

Table 19. Continued

Organizing sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
9.4: Hand holding Baby Boomers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They're (Baby Boomers) are typically the higher level managers that dominate decision making. • I think maybe what has not, maybe changed, is that dominance of the Baby Boomer generation. • A lot of these people, they sit literally in front of computers almost all day long, but yet they struggle operating them in a lot of cases. It creates a lot of extra work for me • Yeah, like the Baby Boomers struggling with basic computer skills is very frustrating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boomers have been stereotyped to represent the digital divide (Morris, 2007). • People over the age of 50 have the lowest Internet use (Kolodinsky et al., 2002). • Researchers are acknowledging computer anxiety in older adults and have begun to design interventions to work with this population (Slegers et al., 2006).

With a moderate range of description, participants expressed individual constructions that were more similar than dissimilar. The feelings of many participants was that Boomers were negatively contributing to their job satisfaction due to overly influencing the values, work practices and general work environment. For global theme 10, the participants detailed extrinsic motivators that were identified as impacting their job satisfaction.

Global Theme 10: Extrinsic Motivators

The theoretical underpinning for this study is Herzberg's Hygiene-Motivator theory, sometimes referred to as Two-Factor Theory. Herzberg posited that there are specific elements that influence job satisfaction and a distinctly different set of elements that influence job dissatisfaction, hence the dual nature of the theory (Herzberg et al., 1959). Those specific elements are characterized as motivator and hygiene factors (Bassett-Jones & Lloyd, 2005; Herzberg, 1987; Herzberg et al., 1993; Smerek & Peterson, 2007). Motivator factors can be classified as achievement, verbal recognition, challenging work, responsibility, and promotion. When these factors are present, the theory suggests that a person's basic intrinsic needs have been met and, consequently, a person's satisfaction at work is improved.

Job dissatisfaction is identified by a different set of factors that Herzberg coined hygiene factors (Herzberg et al., 1959). Hygiene factors, which are determined by the context in which the work is performed, include supervision, status, money, company policies, and relationships with peers, and administrative rules. Herzberg's premise was that hygiene factors can be improved to remove dissatisfaction in the workforce; however removal of hygiene factors will not lead to job satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). According to Herzberg, job satisfaction can only be obtained through a focus on the motivator factors (Herzberg et al., 1959). Thus, while hygiene factors are relevant, they will only move an employee to a neutral state and then the

focus must shift to more intrinsic motivators. Herzberg argued that for an employee to move towards satisfaction, both hygiene and motivator factors must be addressed (Herzberg et al., 1959).

With respect to generational research on extrinsic motivators, studies have shown that Gen Xers are significantly more likely than other cohorts to value extrinsic rewards in their work (Twenge et al., 2010), so it may not be surprising that Gen Xers expressed dissatisfaction with some of the extrinsic factors originally mentioned by Herzberg. For this study, extrinsic rewards included things such as prestige, work status, substantial earnings, and advancement or promotion opportunities, which aligns with studies conducted by generational experts on extrinsic value differences between the generations (Twenge et al., 2010). Twenge (2010) suggested that part of the reason that Gen Xers value extrinsic rewards more than the other cohorts is that they graduated at a time when our economy was in a recession and are seeing a depleting social security system as well as rapid inflation of living expenses. As aligned with Twenge's research, noted above, the participants identified external motivators as being important to their job satisfaction and dissatisfaction which will be further explored in greater detail below.

Using interview questions similar to the ones employed by Herzberg, participants in this study were asked to relate a work experience that brought them joy and satisfaction. Conversely, they were asked to speak to a work experience that was a negative experience or brought them dissatisfaction. A global theme, extrinsic motivators, resulted from their constructions. The global theme is followed by five organizing themes of status, money, job security, supervision, and relationships with peers. One organizing theme, relationship with peers, includes a basic theme of poor relationships promote job dissatisfaction. Four out of the five organizing themes

align with Herzberg's model, which states that hygiene factors can be addressed to remove dissatisfaction. Those four factors are status, money, job security, and supervision. For these organizing themes, the participants equated negative experiences that resulted in job dissatisfaction but did not express job satisfaction.

There was one exception to Herzberg's Hygiene Factor Theory and that was related to relationships with peers. Herzberg characterized relationships to peers as a hygiene factor suggesting that good relationships will not bring you job satisfaction, but rather will leave you neutral (not dissatisfied or satisfied) (Herzberg et al., 1959). The study participants did express

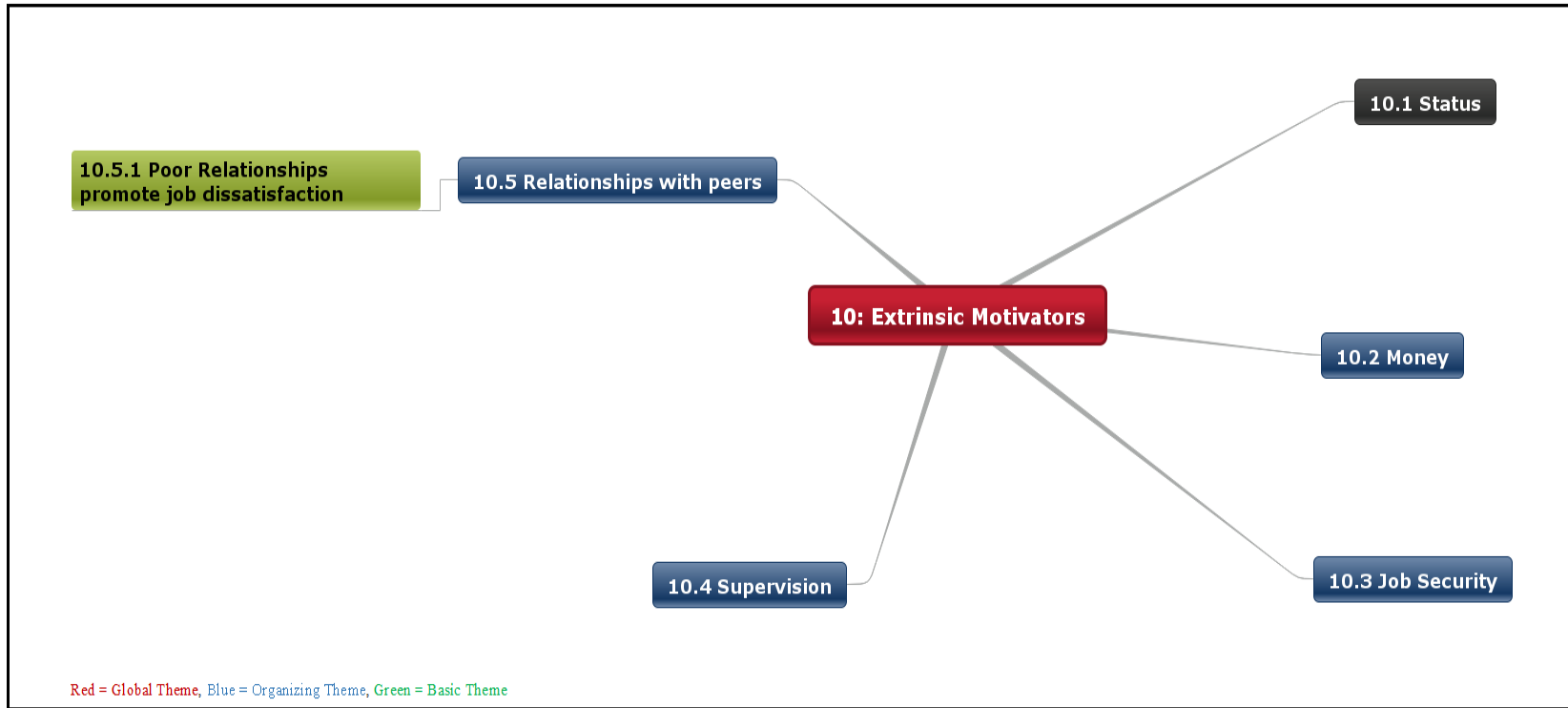


Figure 33. Global theme of *extrinsic motivators*.

relationships as being integral to their job satisfaction and will be discussed in a subsequent theme related to Intrinsic Motivators. Further analysis on each organizing theme is highlighted below along with Figure 33 which visually represents this global theme.

Organizing theme 10.1: Status. Herzberg differentiated status from professional development or advancement by suggesting that status was related to some external factor that occurred in the job such as a title change, receiving a company car, or being assigned a secretary as opposed to any type of advancement (Herzberg et al., 1959). Thus, his proposition was that factors related to status, as defined above, could result in an employee's feeling of dissatisfaction on the job. Catherine expressed discontent with issues related to job status. She characterized her experiences as feeling equalized with the Baby Boomers;

And I think that a lot of times, from my experience, I have been equalized by Baby Boomers with less education but more years of service. Even though their attitudes and drive to make improvements at work has not matched that of my own. But I have similar work titles, I have similar pay grades, things on paper that make us peers. (IP1, 2013, p. 8)

She expressed frustration and dissatisfaction in a system that has failed to recognize her contributions (both in terms of title change and financial rewards), which ultimately has resulted in her feeling undervalued. This notion aligns with Equity Theory, which suggests individuals who perceive themselves as undervalued or under rewarded will experience distress and as a result of this distress, will make great efforts to restore a perceived equity (Huseman, Hatfield, & Miles, 1987). Catherine expressed that her job satisfaction was very poor and noted that it is harder for her to stay the course when there is no reward.

Organizing theme 10.2: Money. For Herzberg, money (salary) was related to job dissatisfaction rather than job satisfaction and thus classified it as a hygiene factor. When compared with other factors, the issues around money were related to "unfairness of the wage

system within the company” (Herzberg et al., 1959, p. 83). The study participants expressed this particular hygiene factor in terms of receiving a competitive, living wage as opposed to the administration of the compensation structure within their firm. Catherine expressed dissatisfaction in her wages that was having an impact on her quality of life:

Well, again, I think it comes down to money earned. Again, you know, if you feel like you could never take a vacation, or you have to limit even your local entertainment budget, and you're confined to the same environment you come home from work to, you never really break out of it. So money is always a factor and I think that for me, that's one of the biggest motivations to go to a larger city, to have more options. (IP1, 2013, p. 27)

And yet, another participant expressed this hygiene factor in terms of feeling competitive with his peers in terms of salary, as well as title:

Well, I think there's always the competition, competing with the Joneses. That peer pressure that everybody has. That definitely affects people, I think. The community that you live in and how you see each other, yourself. (IP6, 2013, p. 18)

Organizing theme 10.3: Job security. Although Herzberg and his team did include job security in their original study, it appeared in only one percent of the stories related to job dissatisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). Within the context of Herzberg’s study, job security was defined as presence of company instability or issues of tenure (Herzberg et al., 1959). Not surprisingly, given the economic environment of the late 1950s, job security was not a prevailing issue for employees. For the participants of this study, job security was very much a dissatisfier and a cause for anxiety as noted and discussed earlier in Chapter Four findings on perceived anxieties. Edward expressed his dissatisfaction as follows:

In the technology industry that was just an unforeseen nightmare where everyone was talking about the heydays of '97, '98, '99, where you had these older boomers that were raking in \$200 or \$300 an hour gigs that disappeared overnight. All those people had to go get jobs and guess whose job they wanted? Mine. That was a little bit frustrating. Then right after that, we had the dot bomb, where all the dot coms, finally all the VC money dried up, and then right after that was 9/11. Those were three years of my life that I want back. (IP4, 2013, p. 22)

During the member checking process, another member resonated with the notion of job security by suggesting that the economics of today does threaten his job security with the prospect of his IT job being outsourced.

Organizing theme 10.4: Supervision. In Herzberg's 1959 study, bad feelings associated with an employee's immediate supervisor ranked second as a cause of job dissatisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). The critical incidents that were described by Herzberg's study participants mentioned ineffective supervisors who were unable to schedule work and who failed to inspire. Overwhelming, participants were dissatisfied with supervisors who lacked the competence to carry out their function (Herzberg et al., 1959). Ultimately, according to Herzberg's theory, effective supervision does not promote satisfaction, but rather an ineffective supervisor can promote dissatisfaction although other studies have refuted this claim. One study found that having effective supervisors are significant predictors of job satisfaction (Smerek & Peterson, 2007)

John commented that working for a supervisor who has limited leadership skills has significantly impacted his satisfaction at work. John expressed that "there was no management managing the whole thing and making sure that it was running right, so it was more stressful for me" (IP6, 2013, p. 12). During another part of our interview, John expressed frustration when he worked for a manager back in Washington D.C who he felt had limited managerial experiences. Similar to Herzberg's participants, John experienced difficulties with his direct supervisor and incompetence that has ultimately reinforced job dissatisfaction in his current role.

Organizing theme 10.5: Relationships with peers. Herzberg defined interpersonal relationships with peers as a hygiene factor that suggests that this factor can impact job dissatisfaction if the relationships are negative (Herzberg, 1959). However, having positive

interpersonal relationships, according to Herzberg's theory, cannot promote job satisfaction, but rather creates a neutral position. Other theorists argue that Herzberg's model is too simplistic and as such, recommend a broader conceptualization of job satisfaction that includes relationships with co-workers (House & Wigdor, 1967). Motivational theories argue that people have a need for affiliation or sense of belonging with a group (Schermerhorn, Hunt, & Osborn, 2008). Those individuals who have a strong need for affiliation may tend to promote workplace relationships and feel a stronger impact from those relationships. Finally, given that today's workplace is vastly different than that of the 1950s, when Herzberg conducted his study, it seems reasonable that the participants would remark on relationships as a key to their satisfaction and success. In a complex, knowledge-based economy where much of what we learn is through tacit knowledge, being able to be collaborative and effectively communicate with our peers is critical to personal and organizational success (Yu & Miller, 2005). Organizational scholars acknowledge that many of our traditional paradigms of the workplace may be obsolete (Drucker, 2007), resulting in the need for new ways of thinking about workplace practices. One of those new paradigms is the value of relationships and working collaboratively. Working collaboratively and building teams is often the only way to ensure the breadth and depth of knowledge required to execute of many tasks that businesses face today exists (Erickson & Gratton, 2007).

The study participants valued relationships with peers and primarily spoke of the relationships with their peers as a positive. Most often, it was one of the first things that they mentioned when they spoke of job satisfaction. As such, the participants' individual and shared constructions showed strong support for relationships with peers promoting job satisfaction. This sentiment was echoed by many participants:

And then I'm a relationship person, so the relationship with my team and my boss and my clients, that really drives a lot of job satisfaction. (IP2, 2013, p. 29)

Michelle described her experiences on a consulting engagement in Bentonville, Arkansas. Although she confessed that the project was not fun or particularly engaging, what made the experience one of her most positive memories was the people that she knew, respected, and trusted on the assignment with her. She described the positive feelings that she had when she and her coworkers volunteered on Monday nights at the community college teaching business and professional skills and then went out for sushi. The relationships on that team impacted her job satisfaction. When asked about a favorable work experience, Edward talked about his team. He described his team as being “about collaboration and working together and looking out for each other; not stabbing each other in the back” (IP 4, 2013, p. 9).

Finally, when asked about job satisfaction, Elisa reflected on her long work history and had positive memories of a former client who had impacted her work experience at the time:

You know when I think also what’s engaging and something that I feel really proud about and it maybe relates to this example as well, is I was working with a woman who was the CFO of this organization. I would say some people have found her hard to work with from an HR perspective, or maybe just working with her in general. I don't know, something ... we hit it off right to begin with or I hit the right notes. I believe I really became one of her confidants. (IP5, 2013, p. 24)

Basic theme 10.5.1: Poor relationships promote job dissatisfaction. Conversely, and more aligned with Herzberg’s original theory, several of the participants identified poor working relationships as being a key factor to their job dissatisfaction. Paul, for example, expressed a very unpleasant workplace experience that involved a relationship with his superior:

I just had a really, really dissatisfying experience and it was my former manager, who has now left. It was really bad, so and I think the main thing that drove that was just, you know communication style and some of that ego thing going on and some controlling. I don't know if it was generation or not, we were both the same generation, but it was horrible. Yes, so when you look at what drives my satisfaction, relationships, this was a very negative relationship and negative you know all around just bad right? So then everything else went with it. (IP2, 2013, p. 33)

John described a similar experience with a manager where the relationship started to unravel and it became increasingly awkward for John, to the point where it impacted his job satisfaction:

Yeah, there was a time working for a manager back in Washington DC who was not a very good manager, and I didn't handle her very well. I think I started avoiding her, and we got to be where I was probably obvious that I didn't like working with her, and that didn't end very well. I mean, I was happy to have been rolled off her project, but it didn't end very well. (IP6, 2013, p. 16)

He continued by commenting that he was very unhappy and he knew it was not going to end well. One of the other participants, who spoke very positively about key relationships in her past jobs, described other experiences and characterized those experiences as being bullied by coworkers, which ultimately led to job dissatisfaction.

Summary of global theme. This sub-section presents a visual of the ensuing hermeneutic spectrum for the global theme of *extrinsic motivators*—how this global theme is experienced and expressed similarly and differently by Gen Xers. A summary is also provided in the form of a table of the global, organizing and basic themes together with selective clarifying and supporting points from the participants and literature.

Hermeneutic spectrum. This global theme has a broad range/spread of description. There was varied individual constructions and ways of knowing for this global theme which suggests a broad hermeneutic spread. While all participants shared a belief that extrinsic motivators were important in their roles, there was variation amongst the participants as to what extrinsic motivators they valued. This difference in terms of way of knowing extrinsic motivators may be due to the diversity within the participant group and the fact that there is variability in the roles that they currently hold. One of the participants is in an entry level/administrative role, so money is a variable related to her lack of job satisfaction. Alternatively, one of the more senior

participants, in terms of his role, did not indicate money as a factor in his job dissatisfaction or satisfaction. The range/spread of description for this global theme is presented in Figure 34.

Key points from participants and supporting literature. In summary, for the six participants within the study, extrinsic motivators were found to impact their job dissatisfaction, as aligned with Herzberg's 1959 study. The one exception to Herzberg's original theory was that the participants felt that their relationships with peers were very important to their job satisfaction. The shared constructions for extrinsic motivators include: status, money, job security, supervision, and relationships with peers. Table 20 summarizes the organizing and basic themes by providing key points from the participants as well as supporting literature.

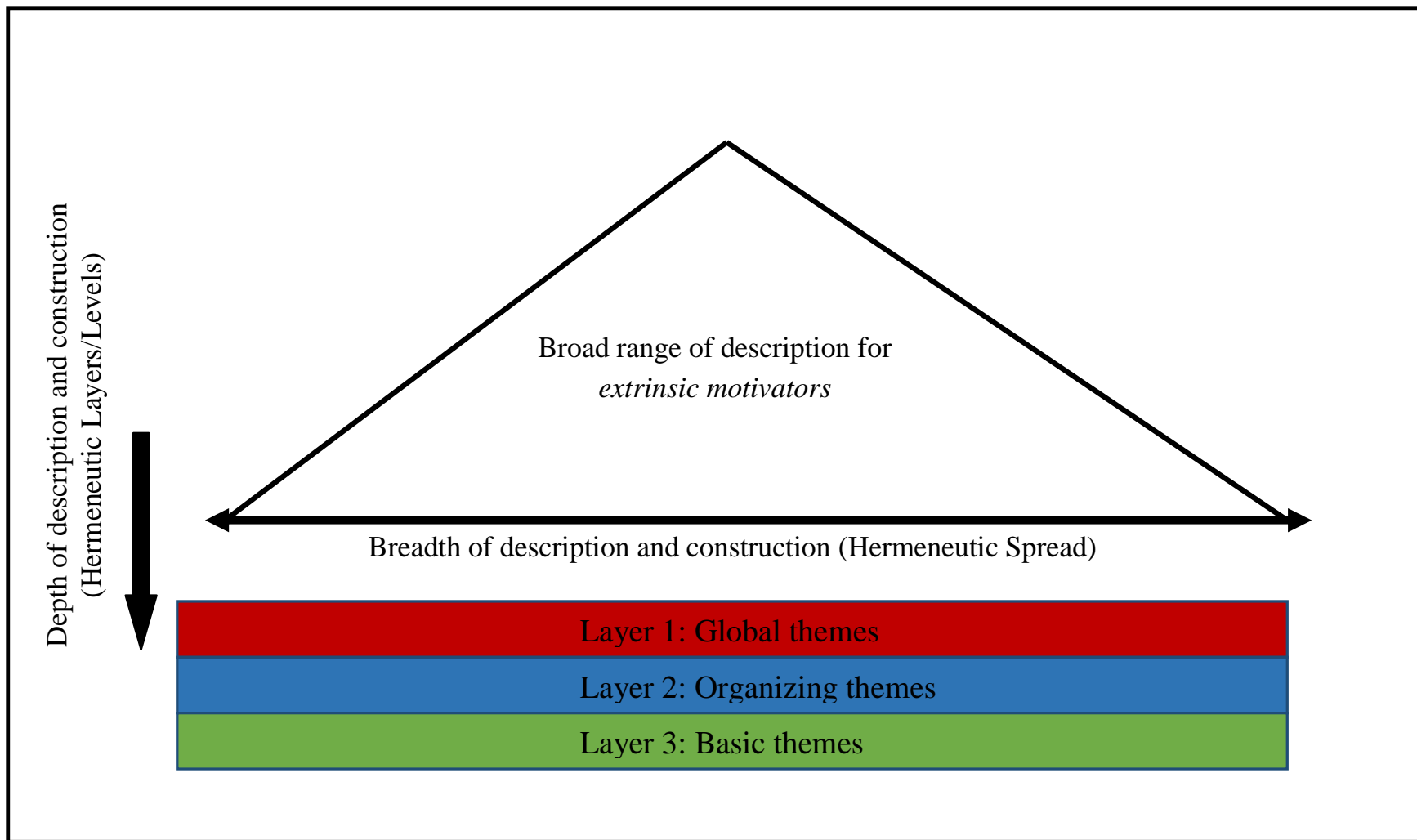


Figure 34. A broad/wide and deep/thick hermeneutic spectrum for *extrinsic motivators*

Table 20

Summary of supporting and clarifying points from participants and informing literature for the global theme of Extrinsic Motivators

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
10.1: Status		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My title hasn't changed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gen Xers place more value on extrinsic motivators (Twenge et al., 2010).
10.2: Money		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a little extra money. • I don't see the reward. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money is a hygiene factor as defined by an unfairness in the wage system (Herzberg et al., 1959).
10.3: Job Security		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no jobs. • External competition threatens job security. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a hygiene factor, job security is the presence of company instability or issues of tenure (Herzberg et al., 1959).
10.4: Supervision		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was no management managing the whole thing. • Somebody who doesn't really have the best decisions. 	<p>In Herzberg's study, bad feelings associated with an immediate supervisor with the second highest factor for job dissatisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959)</p>

(continued)

Table 20. Continued

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
10.5: Relationships with peers	10.5.1: Poor relationships promote job dissatisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having great clients and great relationships. • So, the relationship with my team and my boss and my clients- that really drives a lot of my job satisfaction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having effective supervisors are significant predictors of job satisfaction (Smerek & Peterson, 2007). • Relationship with peers is a hygiene factor (Herzberg et al., 1959). • Job satisfaction includes relationships with peers (House & Wigdor, 1967). • Working collaboratively is an important 21st century skill (Erickson & Gratton, 2007).
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I had a really, really dissatisfying experience and it was all my former manager. • Working with people that are kind of caustic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor relationships can promote dissatisfaction on the job (Herzberg et al., 1959).

In alignment with Herzberg's original theory of job satisfaction, the participants identified a number of extrinsic motivators that impacted their job satisfaction. Participants commented on extrinsic motivators ranging from Money, Status, to Relationships. Further understanding of intrinsic motivators is expanded upon in global theme 11.

Global Theme 11: Intrinsic Motivators

Drawing from many behavioral scientists before him such as Jung, Adlerfer, Sullivan, and Maslow, Herzberg sought to identify factors that led to positive job attitudes because they satisfied the individual's need for self-actualization (Herzberg et al., 1959). He labeled those factors as motivators as they serve to bring about job satisfaction with the intended outcome of promoting organizational performance. As such, during Herzberg's critical incident interviews, motivators were the satisfying events described in the interviews. Motivators included achievement, recognition, work itself, responsibility, advancement, and growth (Herzberg et al., 1959). As 20th century research continued in the area of motivational theories, intrinsic motivation continued to be studied with a formal definition emerging as "doing of an activity for its inherent satisfactions rather than for some separable consequence" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 58). As opposed to extrinsic motivators, which implies that there must be some type of reward, intrinsically motivated activities are said to be the ones for which the reward was the activity itself (i.e. meaningful, challenging work) (Ryan, 2000).

All of the study participants acknowledged the impact of various intrinsic motivators on their job satisfaction. Additionally, many of the organizing themes for this study align with Herzberg's original description of intrinsic motivators: the work itself (challenging work), advancement and growth, achievement, and recognition. Meaningful work and having autonomy are two additional organizing themes that were captured as a part of this study. Thus, the global

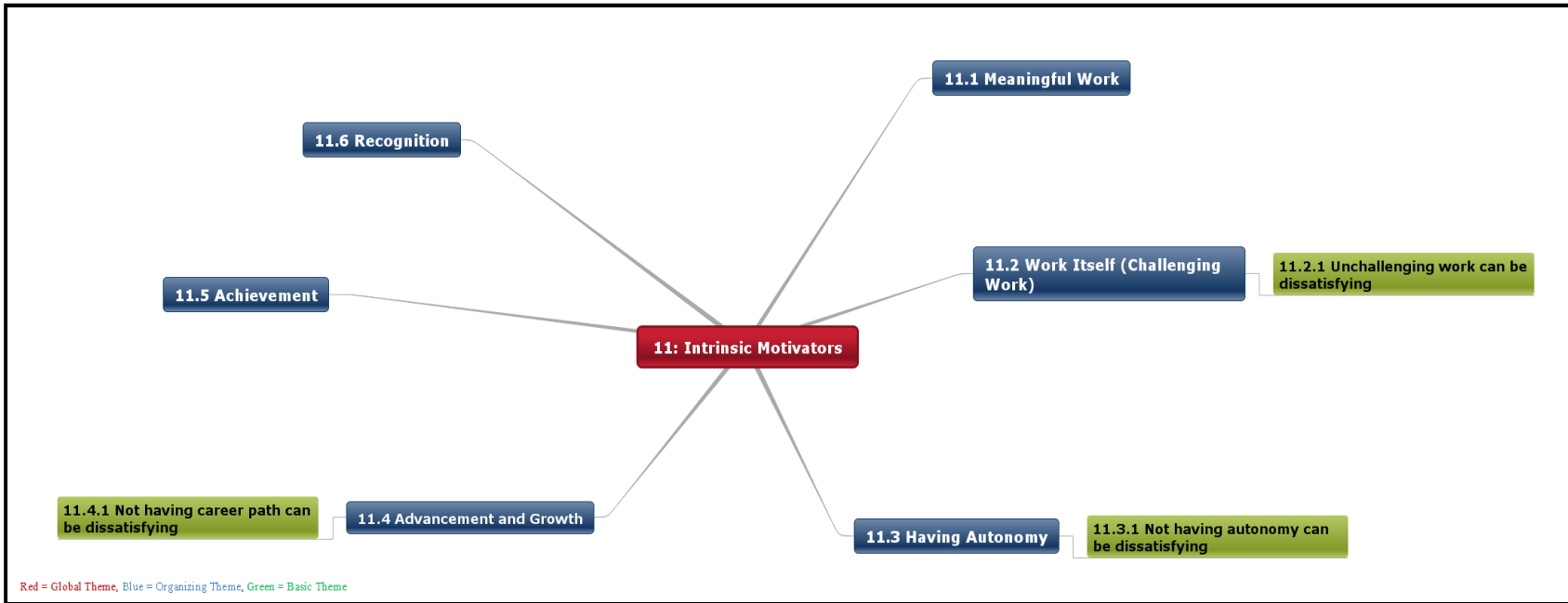


Figure 35. Global theme of *intrinsic motivators*

theme of Intrinsic Motivators is comprised of six organizing themes and three basic themes. This global theme and organizing themes are displayed in Figure 35.

Organizing theme 11.1: Meaningful work. Herzberg noted that “work is one of the most absorbing things men can think and talk about. It fills the greater part of the waking day for most of us” (Herzberg et al., 1959, p. 3). Given that work is central to most people’s lives, finding a job that provides satisfaction and meaning has relevance. The belief that human beings have a need to transform themselves with a greater purpose is not new. Maslow argued that people strive for the higher order need of self-actualization, while Hackman and Oldham recognized meaningfulness as an essential part of their job characteristics model (Schermerhorn et al., 2008). Meaningfulness is defined as the “value of a work goal or purpose, judged to the individual’s own ideals or standards” (May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004) and “the sense made of, and significance felt regarding, the nature of one’s being and existence” (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006, p. 81). Research suggests that attaining meaning is important to individuals (King & Napa, 1998) and the study participants affirmed the same belief. For Michelle, having meaning in her life manifested itself in helping others:

I think that, helping somebody through the course of the day or the week or whatever it is and knowing that you helped someone. Even as an example this girl, who has nothing to do with work but she works with me and I was able to help her in a small way. That was the only thing that really made me feel good yesterday. This could just again be my personality, but she is a Baby Boomer I think, works at the front desk, so administrative assistant. Has decided now she’s going to go full time because she wants more money, but we’re doing a painting and wine. Oh we can go tonight with your girls at Cherry Creek. She said, “I can’t go.” She says, “It’s not in my budget.” I said, “I might be able to get a get one get one free, could you go then?” I lied my ass off and said I found a ticket for you. I’m an includer. I like to include people who want to go. (IP3, 2013, p. 21)

Michelle also felt that meaningful work aligned to her personal definition of job satisfaction and suggested that it had to be something of a greater purpose:

Oh wow. Something that I feel good about doing at the end of the day, not just helping raise somebody's stock price which is nice here because this is government. (IP3, 2013. P.21)

Catherine and John agreed with Michelle that doing work at a higher, or more impactful level, was important to their job satisfaction and felt that it was hard to characterize as it can only be defined from within. As Catherine described:

Well, you know, when you're doing something higher level that you're proud of, it makes you want to go into work and it changes your just presence in the office. (IP1, 2013, p. 22)

For John, meaningful work is somewhat indescribable:

Also, my workload, actually, being too busy and inundated with these little things can be very frustrating, but also when you're not busy enough, that can be frustrating as well. There is this secret. It's a magical, a certain level of work where what you're doing is valuable, is very important. That's an internal thing. (IP6, 2013, p. 16)

Organizing theme 11.2: The work itself (challenging work). Herzberg categorized critical incidents, where the participant mentioned specific aspects of their job as being a source of good or bad feelings, as part of the work itself (Herzberg et al., 1959). For this study, the participants characterized the work as challenging, which in definition, aligns with Herzberg's categorization of the work itself. Thus, both labels are used to show alignment with Herzberg's original concept. Within Herzberg's study, he cited examples when a person mentioned a varied, creative, or challenging task. For this study, the participants collectively expressed satisfaction with having work that they characterized as challenging work. Furthermore, they expressed a belief that challenging work contributed to their job satisfaction. When asked to provide his personal definition of job satisfaction, Paul was quick to respond:

Yes so job satisfaction to me, probably the first word that comes to me is probably challenging work. (IP2, 2013, p. 22)

For John, challenging work is critically important to his job satisfaction as it draws on his technical skills and his need to solve problems and reach an outcome:

It's something that's very technical, you're just challenged. Having that unique skill set or the ability to solve a problem that maybe other people don't have is nice. Maybe you're at the right place at the right time, or whatever. (IP6, 2013, p. 15)

The participants described experiences that required using higher level thinking and expanding their skill sets to more challenging tasks as being part of their personal definitions of job satisfaction:

It was funny, we just did an offsite and we had an icebreaker that talked about when you felt most successful in your job. The example I gave is, and it's kind of a negative thing but maybe this is an HR thing. Right now, after the financial crash in '80-'09, I was with an organization that was trying to cut cost and do some restructuring. I worked with this newly promoted general manager to do a huge restructure of cost reduction, and it was ... although in the end some people did lose their job, I think they were treated with dignity or respect, but it was really engaging to be involved with him and some higher levels in the organization and make these sort of impactful decisions. (IP5, 2013, p. 23)

Paul described a current project that incorporated complexity of design with broad reaching exposure that made it functionally and organizationally challenging:

Yes so, ok exposure to corporate enterprise wide projects and one that I'm on right now is talent management integration, taking all the HR processes and functions and understand all the connection points so how they work together and what's great about it is, you know it has exposure up to the top of HR in the company and so I mean those type of experiences make you happy and feel valued. (IP2, 2013, p. 21)

Similar to the other generational cohorts, Gen Xers want challenging and stimulating work (Sullivan et al., 2009). Although, recognizing that Gen Xers are in a midcareer and life stage, challenging work can be difficult to obtain. For Gen Xers, it is about prioritizing their needs and attempting to align a career that has the flexibility to accommodate those prioritized needs.

Basic theme 11.2.1: Unchallenging work can be dissatisfying. Contrary to Herzberg's Motivator-Hygiene Theory, the study participants did perceive the lack of challenging work as

impacting their job satisfaction to the point of dissatisfaction. Where challenging work can make you feel satisfied, not having challenging work, for some participants, was dissatisfying.

Catherine expressed the difficulty that she has been facing when she is given the chance to do more challenging work and then either expected to go right back to her administrative role or is not allowed to make the pivotal decisions related to her project. As an example, she described one experience that brought her tremendous dissatisfaction in a role when she was assigned a large company cultural integration project. This is how she describes that assignment:

They let me build it from the ground up. It was completely my show, whatever I said, I had a valid and data driven reason behind it and they were picking up everything I was laying down and just letting me build it from scratch. (IP1, 2013, p. 20)

Although the project started off with great opportunity for challenging work, she was quickly relegated back to the unchallenging/more administrative aspects of her role:

So and again, it was like the second that I handed it off, I was back to just an admin, just an intern. I had to then set up all the WebEx and do just all of the support functions from that point forward. And even the audience was disappointed because I had met them over the course of the acquisition. (IP1, 2013, p. 21)

She spoke of the impact that had on her and how it was difficult to continue doing mundane administrative tasks after she had been given so much responsibility. For her, the impact was significant and she talked about that during our interview:

It makes me resent the fact that you can see that I'm capable of doing so much more, and yet you won't let me do it full-time, for a pittance in terms of salary, but what it would do for my self-esteem and the office as a whole, is significant. (IP1, 2013, p. 22)

Organizing theme 11.3: Having autonomy. Described as “latch key” kids, referring to children who saw both of their parents working, Gen Xers grew up in an environment where they had to take care of themselves (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003). Gen Xers were also a by-product of a world where traditional norms of thinking about your work and role began to erode. Gen Xers

saw their parents getting laid-off and their jobs outsourced. Thus, generally speaking, Gen Xers grew up with vastly different life experiences than the generations before them. As such, generational experts have argued that Gen Xers value autonomy, freedom, and independence (Erickson, 2009; Lancaster & Stillman, 2003) as this aligns with what they knew growing up. Research has confirmed this perception that Gen Xers place more importance on freedom work values (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). A 2002 Bridge Works Survey found that the number one reason Gen Xers stay at their places of employment was autonomy (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003). For Catherine, when asked to describe a satisfying work experience, she expressed satisfaction when she was given autonomy to design the project:

I was doing data collection for gap analysis of both personnel and systems improvement in my group and I collected all of the data and I wrote up the problem, some potential outcomes and how to get there and had the conversation with the decision-maker (IP1, 2013, p. 20)

Michelle described her job satisfaction as “being able to make a decision without someone questioning it” (IP3, 2013, p. 14).

Basic theme 11.3.1: Not having autonomy can be dissatisfying. For Michelle, she recognized the importance of having an autonomous work environment for her job satisfaction. She also noted the impact of not having autonomy as she described it as being “demotivational” and considered it “emotional stress” (IP3, 2013, p. 18).

That Gen Xers value autonomy has been reinforced in the academic and popular literature as an important value and necessary for organizations to consider when working on strategies to retain Gen Xers. Research has shown that many organizational management techniques, such as offering people rewards, undermines a person’s intrinsic motivation and ultimately undermines their autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Other organizational practices such

as deadlines, tracking time, and setting schedules can be just as inhibiting for those employees who value autonomy (Amabile, DeJong, & Lepper, 1976).

Organizing theme 11.4: Advancement and Growth. For Edward, the ability to receive job specific training that can be transferable to other organizations is very important:

That has to do with quality manufacturing-ISO [which allows] organization has one certified security. It's the 27000 series and we're certified. We were one of the first ones. Still kind of an oddball. You don't see a lot of them in the United States. We have a certified security program, and it's a huge win and hugely valuable to my career. I can go get a job at any consulting firm I ever wanted to just because of it probably for the next 10 years. (IP4, 2013, p. 20)

This notion of having transferable skills that can make one more marketable is largely associated with Gen Xers. Gen Xers have been characterized as “job hoppers” as the goal has been to get as many skills and experiences on the resume as possible, so as to make one more desirable to the open market (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003). Having advancement opportunities and growth potential is very relevant for Gen Xers. John described his need for advancement as follows:

Yeah, I think we all want to expand in your role, but that takes lots of different forms if you're managing people. It would be managing more people. If you're working on projects, maybe it's working on more sophisticated projects, or bigger projects. (IP6, 2013, p. 17)

John, specifically, is talking about advancing into a management role from his technical role, which would be an alternative career path. Learning is an important value for Gen Xers and they need to feel that they are constantly learning new skills. In the Bridge Works Generation Survey, 58% of Gen Xers agreed with the statement that “training opportunities play a role in my staying at the company” (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003).

Basic theme 11.4.1: Not having career path can be dissatisfying. Several of the study participants expressed frustration over not having a career path or options for upward advancement. John commented:

What I'm most frustrated is there's not really a future career path, and so the thought of doing this forever can be kind of, without that next challenge, can be very frustrating. That's what's bothering me, I guess, for today, is the lack of career. (IP6, 2013, p. 17)

For Catherine, the inability to move up the ladder to a role with greater responsibility and challenge has been a continual struggle in her career:

I feel in general like I'm a very confident person and so for me not to have confidence that I'm going to get that next high level job or that next appropriate job, that someone's really going to give me a chance, in fact, that that has been lessened from my job life so far, is really the biggest impacter. (IP1, 2013, p. 24)

The 2004 Society for Human Resource Management Generational Differences Survey Report asked HR survey participants if retention was an issue for Gen Xers. The findings suggested that 42% of respondents agreed that career advancement is an issue for Gen Xers—and that attrition, due to Boomers holding the high level positions in the company, is an issue for this cohort (Burke, 2004). Another study found that Boomers were more satisfied than Gen Xers and it was posited that the “Boomers have higher job satisfaction is to be expected since Gen Xers are competing for jobs with Boomers who are oftentimes their managers” (Beutell & Wittig-Berman, 2008, p. 519).

Organizing theme 11.5: Achievement. In Herzberg’s 1959 research study, achievement, as one of the identified intrinsic motivators, was the most frequent factor to appear in the critical incident reports (Herzberg et al., 1959). Typically, employees stories around their accomplishments revolved around a successful completion of a task or job, such as the engineer who built a new type of atomic reactor or the accountant who designed a new cost accounting system (Herzberg et al., 1959). Herzberg defined achievement as successful completion of a job,

solutions to problems, vindication, and seeing the results of one's work (Herzberg et al., 1959).

The study participants' individual and shared construction echoed similar observations about the role of achievement on their job satisfaction. Michelle described her job satisfaction when she was able to find a solution:

There was a solution. There was an end result. I don't know how long consulting has been going on, but I don't know how [Gen Xers or even Baby Boomers], I think they're the same thing, end result; I want to see something tangible. That's probably why I like that. (IP3, 2013, p. 17)

Edward described satisfaction and his current role as having a good run of successes. For John, who has a background of engineering and information technology, achievement was significantly relevant for him:

But it's definitely what motivates me to stay in this field, is the warm fuzzy you get from solving problems, and projects or building something. (IP6, 2013, p. 15)

Organizing theme 11.6: Recognition. Herzberg defined recognition as a first level factor, which meant that it was “an objective element of the situation in which the respondent finds a source for his good or bad feelings about his job” (Herzberg et al., 1959, p. 44). His findings suggested that recognition was more often cited as a bad feeling, or low stories, and included a variety of stories where the participants failed to receive recognition for the work that they had done (Herzberg et al., 1959). Overwhelmingly, Herzberg's participants characterized their experiences as that “no one gives you a pat on the back around here” (Herzberg et al., 1959, p. 74). In the present study, the participants echoed similar thoughts suggesting “here we go back to recognition and feedback. It was nice to have that” (IP3, 2013, p. 19). Michelle expressed the importance of receiving feedback in her current role:

It could be a good job or some feedback, because you don't want to struggle or I don't want to struggle like my entire day of doing a project when I don't even know if it's worth what it was unless I hear a feedback (IP3, 2013, p. 6)

Summary of global theme. This sub-section presents a visual of the ensuing hermeneutic spectrum for the global theme of *intrinsic motivators*—how this global theme is experienced and expressed similarly and differently by Gen Xers. A summary is also provided in the form of a table of the global, organizing and basic themes together with selective clarifying and supporting points from the participants and literature.

Hermeneutic spectrum. The belief that intrinsic motivators are important to a person's job satisfaction was a shared construction by all the study participants. There was, however, variation with respect to the factors that had meaning for each participants, which is why the global theme has a broad range/spread of description. The varied ways of describing, constructing and knowing intrinsic motivators such a looser spread and ultimately constitutes a broad hermeneutic spread. The range of description for this global theme is presented in Figure 36.

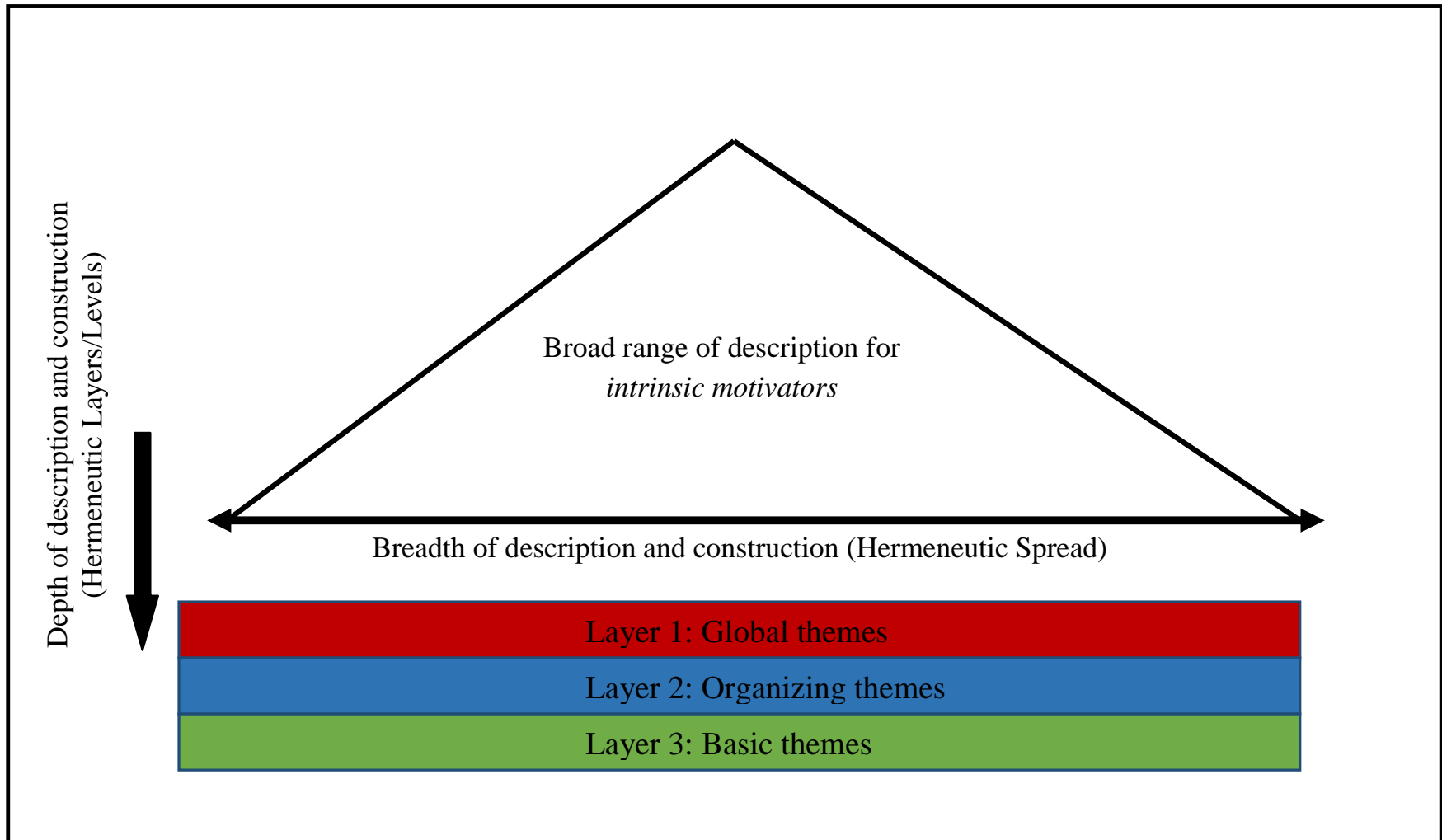


Figure 36. A broad/wide and deep/thick hermeneutic spectrum for *intrinsic motivators*

Key points from participants and supporting literature. Intrinsic motivators is comprised of meaningful work, the work itself, having autonomy, advancement and growth, achievement, and recognition. Table 21 summarizes the global themes and organizing themes by providing key points from the participants, along with supporting literature.

Table 21

Summary of supporting and clarifying points from participants and informing literature for the global theme of Intrinsic Motivators

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
11.1: Meaningful work		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping someone through the course of the day. • Doing something higher level that you are proud of. • Oh wow. Something that I feel good about doing at the end of the day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaningfulness is defined as the “value of a work goal or purpose, judged to the individual’s own ideals or standards” (May et al., 2004). • Work is meaningful when one has a purpose or serves a great good (Dik & Duffy, 2009).
11.2: The work itself (Challenging work)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was very engaging. • So job satisfaction, the first word that comes to mind is challenging work. • It something that’s very technically, you’re just challenged. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Described by Herzberg as an intrinsic motivator in the 1959 study on job satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). • Similar to other cohorts, Gen Xers value challenging work (Sullivan et al., 2009).

(continued)

Table 21. Continued

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
	11.2.1: Unchallenging work can be dissatisfying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I didn't get to deliver it because I had the intern title. • It's OK. I mean learning what PeopleSoft is. Great. 	
11.3: Having autonomy		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being able to run independently. • They let me build it from the ground up. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gen Xers value autonomy, freedom and independence (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008; Erickson, 2009; Lancaster & Stillman, 2003).
	11.3.1: Not having autonomy can be dissatisfying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's very demotivational. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current organizational practices can undermine a person's intrinsic motivators and impact autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1985).
11.4: Advancement and growth		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hugely valuable to my career. • You want to expand in your role. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gen Xers' focus has been to get as many skills and jobs on the resume to make themselves more marketable (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003).

(continued)

Table 21. Continued

Organizing sub-themes	Corresponding basic sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
11.5: Achievement	11.4.1: Not having a career path can be dissatisfying.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They did not move me out of an intern role and into a project manager role. • What I'm most frustrated with is there's not really a future career path. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 42% of respondents agreed that career advancement is an issue for Gen Xers in a SHRM survey (Burke, 2004).
11.6: Recognition		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I also think there was a tangible end. • I've had a really good run of successes here. • The ability to solve a problem. • Here we go back to feedback and recognition. It was nice to have that. • I don't even know if it's worth what it was without feedback. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Herzberg's study, achievement was cited as the most frequent factor to appear in the critical incident reports (Herzberg et al., 1959). • In Herzberg's 1959 study, participants characterized their experiences as "no one gives you a pat on the back" (Herzberg et al., 1959).

This global theme highlighted the importance of intrinsic motivators to one's job satisfaction within the workforce. Participants expressed individual and shared constructions around intrinsic motivators such as meaningful work, challenging work to recognition and achievement. A broader understanding of how job satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction can carry over to one's life was explored in global theme 12.

Global Theme 12: Job Satisfaction or Dissatisfaction can carry Over to Life

Life satisfaction has been characterized as cognitively evaluating one's life" (Diener, Scollon, & Lucas, 2009). One theory that scholars have developed to conceptualize life satisfaction has been with a bottom-up approach, which essentially asserts that it is the accumulation of satisfaction with various life domains such as job satisfaction (González, Coenders, Saez, & Casas, 2010). People who report high levels of life satisfaction could also be considered to have high levels of job satisfaction.

The job satisfaction-life satisfaction connection has been well researched with varying results (Judge & Watanabe, 1993). Research on the relationship has yielded correlations ranging from .16 (Crohan, Antonucci, Adelman, & Coleman, 1989) to .68 (van de Vliert & Janssen, 2002). A meta-analytic study performed in 1989 estimated the correlation between the two constructs to be .44 and suggested that the "explanatory research of this nature is now clearly warranted" (Tait, Baldwin, & Padgett, 1989, p. 505). Some scholars have argued that job satisfaction causes life satisfaction (Orpen, 1978) whereas, others have suggested that life satisfaction causes job satisfaction (Schmitt & Mellon, 1980). Judge and Watanabe (1993) found that there was a correlation between the two variables with a strong bidirectional relationship that was equivalent in magnitude.

For this study, participants were asked to discuss their perceptions and experiences with job satisfaction. During the course of our discussions, the participants made the connection between their job satisfaction and life satisfaction with most of them identifying that having life balance significantly contributed to their life satisfaction. Paul commented that he felt “job satisfaction, home satisfaction, I mean it’s all connected” (IP2, 2013, p. 34). John expressed similar sentiments indicating that “job satisfaction can carry over to life satisfaction and that’s because we spend so much time working” (IP6, 2013, p. 9). The co-constructions for this theme include two organizing themes: negative events at work impacts well-being and life balance leads to life satisfaction. There were no basic themes included in the global theme. Figure 37 represents the visual representation of this global theme.

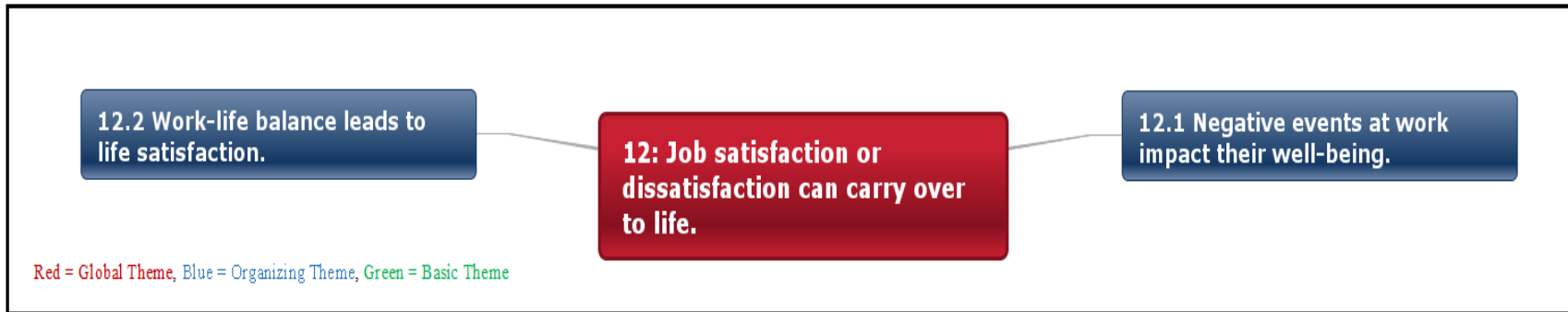


Figure 37. Global theme of *job satisfaction or dissatisfaction can carry over to life*

Organizing theme 12.1: Negative events at work impact their well-being. Subjective well-being has been described as “a broad category that includes people’s emotional responses, domain satisfactions, and global judgments of life satisfaction” (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999, p. 277). Although it is readily considered that well-being should not be isolated to a single life domain (Diener et al., 1999), there is a great deal of interest in subjective well-being in the context of the workplace. Given that individuals spend a great deal of time at work, understanding the specific domain satisfactions in the job has broad reaching implications. For this global theme, Catherine shared her experiences of how the influence of her work environment has impacted her well-being. The following quote from Catherine depicts the frustration that she feels as a direct result of her work experiences:

I think it's pervasive and this is what I think is the double-edge sword or the catch-22 in all of this, is that the work environment in which we all are trying to thrive, is keeping us down. And yet, any kind of guttural or emotional reaction we have to that environment that is making us that way, is playing a part in our inability to move up. I mean, you can only work under the confines of stress and frustration and dissatisfaction for so long, before it does start affecting your attitude. (IP1, 2013, p. 17)

That workplace events can be related to job satisfaction in conjunction with employee’s experience of stress is supported in the literature (Fairbrother, 2003; Sullivan, 1992). These events can either result in a positive or negative impact on one’s well-being (Sullivan, 1992). Catherine expressed frustration and lack of motivation when she was relegated to administrative tasks that were unmotivated and unchallenging. Moreover, she felt that the organizational culture was holding her back and that leadership was “punishing her for having a reaction” (IP1, 2013, p. 17) to negative workplace experiences.

Organizing theme 12.2: Work-life balance leads to life satisfaction. The Kaleidoscope Career Model, a relatively new career theory, describes how individuals alter the direction of their career by evaluating different aspects of their lives with the goal of determining the best fit

among work demands, opportunities as well as relationships, personal values, and interests (Sullivan et al., 2009). The theory suggests that individuals focus on three parameters when making career decisions: authenticity, balance, and challenge. Authenticity refers to alignment of an individual's values and the values of the employing organization. Balance refers to an ability to reach equilibrium between work and non-work. Challenge represents an individual's need for challenging work as well as career advancement. Sullivan et al. (2009) found that Gen Xers had a significantly higher desire for balance than their Baby Boomer counterparts.

Gen Xers' need for a balanced life style is reinforced many times over in the generational literature. A Harris poll found that 80% of Gen X men said that having a balanced work schedule to allow time with family was more important than doing challenging work or earning a higher salary (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003). Some practitioners have suggested that Gen Xers' demand for balance, albeit annoying, is a catalyst for change as other generations are now seeing the positive impact of a balanced life style (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003).

The study participants shared similar desires for a balanced life style. "Three words ... quality of life" (IP4, 2013, p.21) is how Edward summed up his definition of job satisfaction. He went on to articulate that "the only way I can describe it is quality of life. I cannot put a value on the fact that I'm home every night with my kids to eat dinner" (IP4, 2013, p. 21). Michelle described how training for a half marathon was helping her get through all the de-motivating aspects of her job, suggesting the need to balance other parts of her life to find peace at work. Work-life balance has been a "hot topic" for the better part of the 21st century as scholars and practitioners seek to understand how to improve employees' quality of life. Given that the current organizational climate in the United States promotes excessive work demands, it is understandable why this theme emerged in this study and in the minds of Gen Xers. This may

hold especially true for those participants who are in dual career families and trying to raise children. Indeed, the 21st Century Work-Family Research study found that the excessive nature of our work requirements was becoming a major problem for families as it was leaving insufficient time and energy for family life (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010). Elisa remarked on this concept of balancing work life in response to my question regarding other factors that might be impinging on her job satisfaction:

I think balancing work-life. I think as spouses, working full time, although he's [my husband] I would say ... we're not going to split hairs, but pretty much divide the home stuff 50/50 and he gives full support of my career, absolutely. No question about that. He'd rather have me working than not working. I think the fact that trying to manage all this kid stuff is hard. (IP5, 2013, p. 21)

Summary of global theme. This sub-section presents a visual of the ensuing hermeneutic spectrum for the global theme of *job satisfaction or dissatisfaction can carry over to life*—how this global theme is experienced and expressed similarly and differently by Gen Xers. A summary is also provided in the form of a table of the global, organizing and basic themes together with selective clarifying and supporting points from the participants and literature.

Hermeneutic spectrum. With respect to the hermeneutic spectrum, this global theme has a narrow range/spread of description which suggests that the individual constructions and descriptions varied less and the lived experiences were more similar than dissimilar. There were two levels of interpretation with no basic theme level. In general, the participants shared similar constructions about job satisfaction or dissatisfaction carrying over to life.

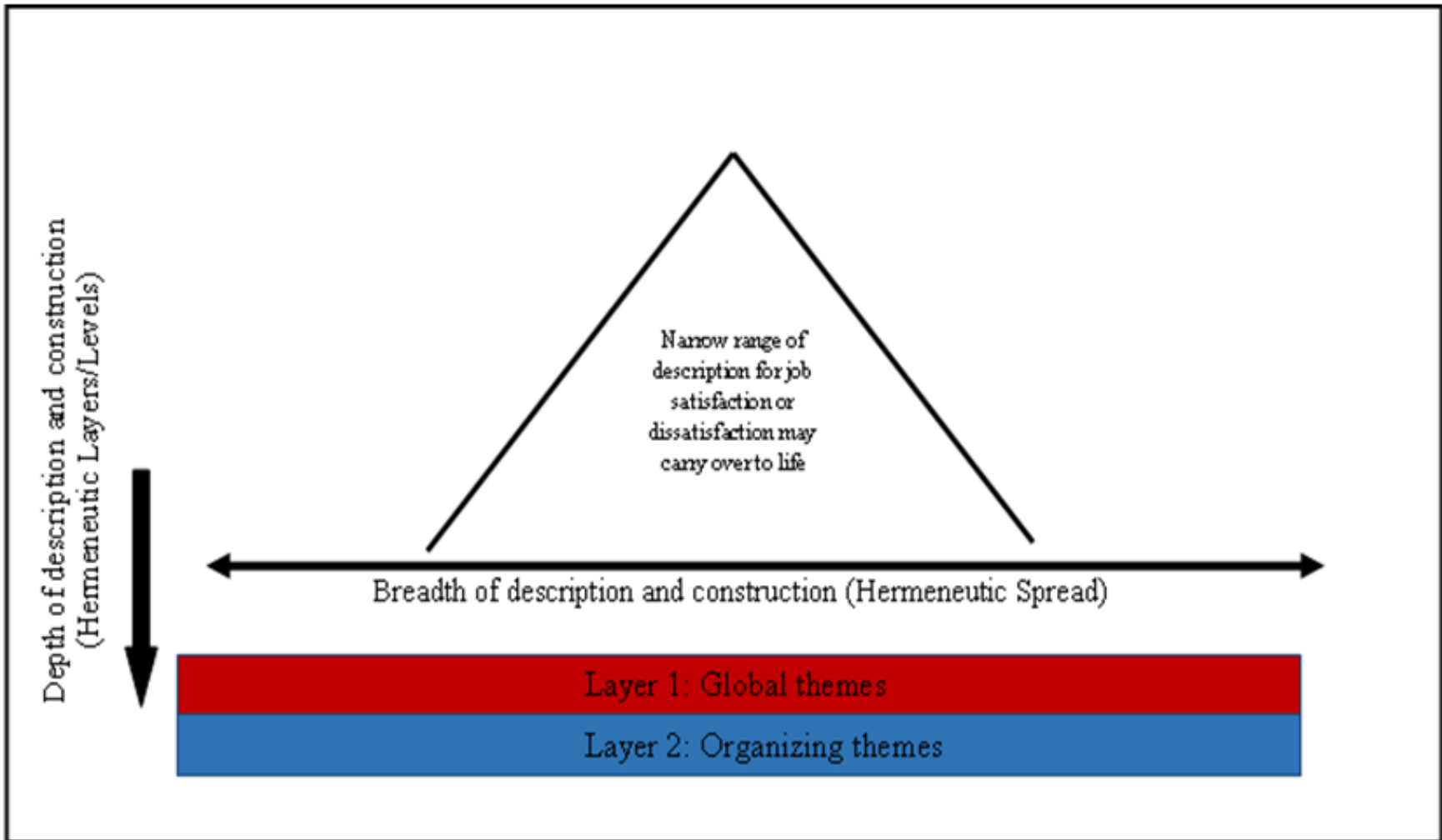


Figure 38. A narrow/wide and mid-depth deep/thick hermeneutic spectrum for *job satisfaction or dissatisfaction can carry over to life*

Key points from participants and supporting literature. Similar to what is supported in the academic literature, the study participants expressed a perception that there is a connection between job satisfaction and life satisfaction. For most of the participants, life satisfaction is correlated with having work-life balance. Negative events impact their well-being, and work-life balance leads to life satisfaction create the meaning for this global theme. The global theme is constructed with two organizing themes of negative events at work impact their well-being and work-life balance leads to life satisfaction. Table 22 summarizes the two organizing themes with key points from the participants and supporting literature.

Table 22

Summary of supporting and clarifying points from participants and informing literature for the global theme of Job Satisfaction or Dissatisfaction can carry over to Life

Organizing sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
12.1: Negative events at work impact their well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't want to come into work. • Leadership is creating the environment and then punishing us for it. • I can only work under the confines of stress and frustration for so long before it starts affecting my attitude. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workplace events can impact a person's job satisfaction and overall well-being. • Subjective well-being has been described as a broad category that includes people's emotional responses, domain satisfactions and global judgments of life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1999).
12.2: Work-life balance leads to life satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three words, quality of life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within the Kaleidoscope Career Model, Gen Xers had a higher desire for.

(continued)

Table 22. Continued

Organizing sub-themes	Example key clarifying points from participants	Corresponding supporting literature
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can't not put a value on the fact that I'm home every night with my kids to eat dinner. 	balance (Sullivan et al., 2009)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I think balancing work-life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gen Xers value balance over a more challenging job or higher paying job (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003).

The participants expressed a recognition that job satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction can carry over to life. These individual constructions were largely similar suggesting a narrow hermeneutic spread. Specifically, the participants identified similarities around the importance of work-life balance and the impact of negative events in the workplace.

Part III: Conclusion

The intention of this chapter was to provide in depth description of the findings from the study. This included detailed description of 12 global themes and their respective organizing and basic themes, as well as description of the hermeneutic spectrum and level analysis for each theme. To augment the reader's understanding of each global theme and organizing theme, corresponding supporting literature was detailed.

To answer the question regarding the essence of the lived experiences of Gen Xers as being stuck between the Baby Boomers and Millennials in the generationally diverse U.S. workforce, 12 themes were constructed. *The 12 global themes include: Theme 1: "Stuck in the middle" is experienced and expressed differently by Gen Xers; Theme 2: Gen Xers have anxiety about their professional future; Theme 3: There are challenges unique to Gen Xers; Theme 4:*

Gen Xers have perceptions about themselves and their work role; Theme 5: There are generational similarities and differences; Theme 6: Unique work culture impacts generational issues; Theme 7: There may be economic influences on their career; Theme 8: Historical context shapes who Gen Xers are as adults; Theme 9: Baby Boomer influences contribute to job dissatisfaction; Theme 10: Extrinsic motivators; Theme 11: Intrinsic motivators; Theme 12: Job satisfaction or dissatisfaction can carry over to life. Additionally, each global theme was co-constructed with organizing and most often, basic themes, which helped to fully describe the essence of the participant's experiences as Gen Xers.

In Chapter Five, it is the intent to provide the summary of the dissertation and interpretation of my findings. With this in mind, I revisit the research questions, providing greater interpretation as well as the overall philosophy for the study to include concluding thoughts on the methodologies of constructivist and critical theory. Additionally, I revisit the implications for theory, research and practice. Finally, I provide insight into my own personal journey and the impact this process has had on me both personally and professionally.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

The overall purpose of this constructivist study was to examine the lived experiences of Generation Xers as being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials, and acknowledge the voices of the Gen Xer participants in the context of their unique individual work circumstance. Through the emergent design and methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology, I collected data from six participants to describe, illuminate, and provide understanding to the following research questions:

- What do Gen Xers experience, as it relates to their professional lives of being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials, in the generationally diverse U.S. workforce?
- How do Generation Xers perceive the experience of being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials in the generationally diverse U.S. workforce as impacting their job satisfaction?

The individuals' personal stories revealed a shared construction of the six Generation X participant's perceptions of being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials in the generationally diverse U.S. workforce, in addition to providing insight into how they perceive those experiences impacting their job satisfaction.

Thus far, the dissertation has included four chapters: Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, and Report on Findings. Chapter One highlighted the background and significance to the problem, the purpose, the chosen methodology that guided the study, informing theoretical frameworks, significance to the study, as well as my perspective. Chapter Two provided an extensive review of the literature in the areas of generational research, which framed the background of the study as well as literature on job satisfaction. Chapter Three explained my

philosophical posture, which described the paradigm, methodology, and methods used in this study. Chapter Four provided thick description of the global, organizing, and basic themes, which provided in depth understanding into the essence of the lived experiences of the six Generation X study participants. The fifth and final chapter provides conclusions to the study within five sections. The first section revisits the research questions and summarizes the findings. The second section revisits the study's philosophical posture and notes any additional considerations. The third section provides implications to theory, research, and practice. The fourth section explores my personal reflections, and finally, the fifth section concludes the study.

Revisiting the Research Questions, and Summary of Findings

The stories and voices of six Generation X participants, who work in the U.S. workforce, provided insights into the phenomenon of being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials. The result was 12 themes that described and provided meaning for those lived experiences. Given that Chapter Four provided thick description on the findings, I was able to holistically analyze the output of the participants' lived experiences and reveal further insights as detailed below for each question. It should be recognized that although the interviews were designed to specifically address the two research questions, participants interpreted the questions largely based on their historical starting point and unique life experiences. Thus, the participants' lived experiences provided the starting point that essentially breathed meaning into the phenomenon being studied (Manen, 1990). The essence of Gen Xers being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials in the U.S. workforce is summarized below.

1. What do Gen Xers experience, as it relates to their professional lives of being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials, in the generationally diverse U.S. workforce?

According to van Manen (1990), four lifeworld themes, or “existentials” are “helpful as guides for reflection in the research process: lived space (spatiality), lived body (corporeality), lived time (temporality), and lived human relation (relationality or communality)” (p. 101). The four existentials can be differentiated, but not separated, and they form a unity for the lived world (Van Manen, 1990). Generation X participants share a common location and share the four existentials in the purest form, but still it is important to recognize the differentiated aspects of the four existentials as they are applied to the participants’ lives.

Lived space (spatiality) is defined as felt space and is difficult to describe as it is “largely pre-verbal; we do not ordinarily reflect upon it” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 102). The spatiality of the study participants is their workplaces. This is the commonality for all participants in that the study was reflective of Gen Xers’ lived experiences in the workplace. The lived space in which one finds themselves can influence the way we feel. Despite this, spatiality in this study is differentiated by the unique workplace context for each participant. Global Theme 6 identified the unique work culture of each participant with the realization that their culture impacted their lived experiences as Gen Xers. As an example, Michelle’s performance-based workplace culture minimized generational issues; for John, the Boomer accommodating workplace culture magnified generational issues. These examples depict how lived space can impact our feelings about the phenomenon being studied.

Lived body (corporeality) refers to the fact that we are always bodily in the world (Van Manen, 1990). In addition to physical presence, corporeality can be thought of as an actuality, genuineness as well as a realness of our identity. For the Gen Xer participants, it is perceived as their collective identities as members of the Generation X cohort within the U.S. workforce. Their identities became differentiated as they began to reflect on themselves and their unique

position in the work environments. This differentiation was reflected in Theme 4 where the participants expressed beliefs about themselves. Paul's identity is reflective of trying to adopt best practices of each generation, whereas Edward saw his identity through his role of a leader. All the study participants were able to express beliefs about their personal identities as they related to being a Gen Xer in the workforce.

Lived time (temporality) refers to subjective time and represents "our temporal way of being in the world" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 104). Van Manen (1990) refers to "the temporal dimensions of past, present and future that constitute the horizons of a person's temporal landscape" (p. 104). In alignment with Heidegger's philosophy (Racher & Robinson, 2003), it is a recognition that we cannot separate ourselves from our past. Thus, the encounters of Gen Xer participants to this hermeneutic process have involved an interpretation that has been largely influenced by their history and experiences. Moreover, Gadamer recognized that a person may not only be influenced from past experiences, but may also have a broader range of vision that expressly recognized present and future known as ones horizon (Lavery, 2008). Thus, the horizon for Gen Xer participants include temporality of past, present and future experiences and visions. In Global theme 8, participants openly spoke about their childhood experiences and the impact those experiences had on their worldview and ways of being. Childhood experiences, such as the death of a loved one or being an only child, were impactful to the study participants and shed insight to the notion that we cannot separate ourselves from our past. The past sticks to us as memories, both positive and perhaps painful, that we weave into our daily interpretations of our lived world. Similarly, we have expectations, visions, and aspirations of our future. As an example, Catherine expressed her vision on how she would pursue her career strategy, and Elisa

saw a future where change happened for the better in the workplace. Both examples highlight the temporality of our future in the broadest form of subjective time.

Finally, lived other (relationality) refers to the lived relation that we maintain with others (Van Manen, 1990). It is essentially the act of being relational with others. As we interact within the workplace with others, this interaction develops the “Self” and exposes us to a larger sense of purpose—the communal sense of belonging. Relationality for the study participants refers to their lived relationships with other generational cohorts within the workplace. Part of being relational suggests that we are constantly forming opinions and learning about others. Van Manen (1990) suggested that as we meet others we “develop a conversational relation which allows us to transcend our experience of the other” (p. 105). The study participants spoke in length about their perceptions of the different cohorts in Theme 5 as well as the importance of workplace relationships in their lives. Most of the participants spoke of relationships that were of great value to their quality of life and also spoke of negative relationships that had caused them great pain and turmoil. Being relational is an integral part of the lived experiences of Gen Xers in the workplace as the participants fully expressed this life world theme. Figure 39 depicts a visual model of the four existentials that present both a shared and differentiated experience.

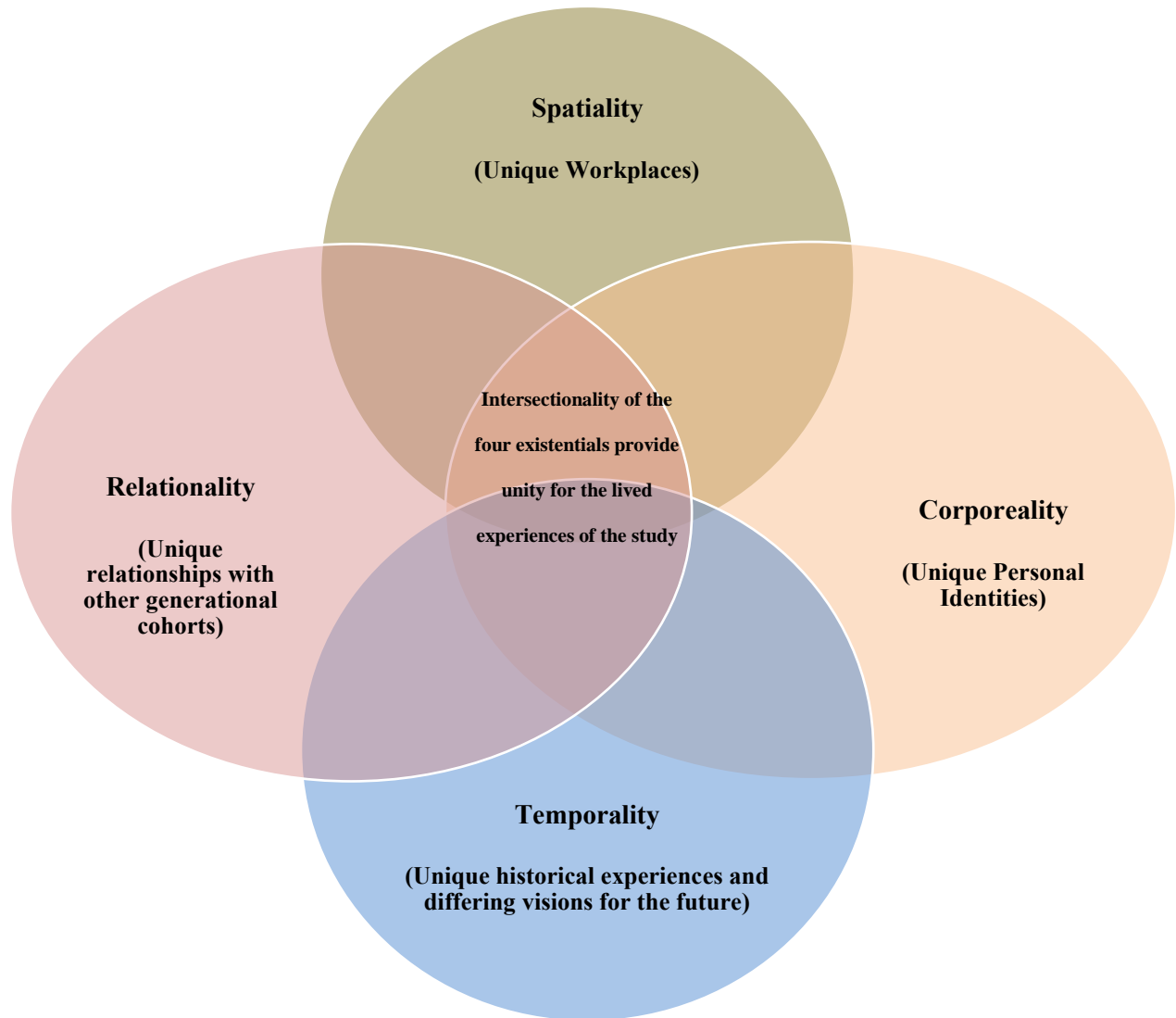


Figure 39. Visual model of the four existentials.

The four existentials underscore what van Manen calls life world, and what supports our understanding of the lived experiences. This understanding provides a richness of meaning for the phenomenon being studied. Specifically, the lived experiences of the Gen Xer participants feeling stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials. As mentioned above, the four existentials can be differentiated, but not separated, for one to fully understand the meaning. For the study, the differentiation of Gen Xers within spatiality, corporeality, temporality, and relationality is

influenced by three factors: individuality of Gen Xers, lack of mutual exclusivity, and the significance of context.

Individuality of Gen Xers. A theme throughout this paper has been Gen Xers' individual and autonomous nature. It has been well substantiated in the popular and academic literature that Gen Xers value autonomy more and tend to have less organizational loyalty than the other cohorts (Benson & Brown, 2011; Erickson, 2009; Lancaster & Stillman, 2003). Chen and Choi (2008) found that Gen Xers valued independence more than Baby Boomer or Millennials. Other studies found that Gen Xers ranked freedom from supervision (autonomy) more significantly than Baby Boomers, which supported the stereotype of Gen Xers (Jurkiewicz, 2000). Qualitative studies also support Gen Xers' need for independence, as well as their being less committed to the organization. Qualitative findings suggest that Gen Xers work to live as work is less central to their lives (Gursoy et al., 2008). Smola and Sutton's (2002) longitudinal study reinforced the belief that Gen Xers make work less central to their lives and value having options available to them.

The study participants' descriptions of their lived experiences varied. This may be attributed, in part, to an overall individualistic nature of the Generation X cohort as substantiated in the empirical literature cited above. Additionally, there is a body of literature that recognizes the potential for more heterogeneity *within* a generation than between generations. Research suggests that the probability of significant differences *within* a generation makes studying generations more complex (Parry & Urwin, 2011). As an example, one study examined work values for Gen Xers and found little variation between generations, but did find significant variation within the Generation X cohort based on sex and race (Eskilson & Wiley, 1999). Similarly, another study found significant gender differences in generational characteristics when

defined within the Gen X cohort (Parker & Chusmir, 1990). It seems reasonable that one might expect differences based on gender or other variables even within the same cohort and yet, the impact of gender, for example, on generational differences has not been fully investigated (Parry & Urwin, 2011). Although the intent of this study was not to examine women in the Generation X cohort, part of the lived experiences of one female participant did reveal the confounding nature of being a woman within the workforce. This expression of gender was highlighted as a theme and should be considered as part of the unique experience of the study participants.

Lack of mutual exclusivity. As reported in Chapter Two, there is a wide variability of dates that are used to define a generational cohort. Although birth year has traditionally been the most common way to group a particular cohort, there is much debate as to what years actually constitute a cohort and in the end, most scholars tend to agree that ranges are just guidelines (Lancaster & Stillman, 2003). Individuals born on the cusp of another generation may be predisposed to holding traits that represent more than one cohort. In the literature, this has been referred to as lacking mutual exclusivity between generations (Arsenault, 2004).

The most notable case of mutual exclusivity is the Generation Jones cohort. Johnathan Pontell labeled those individuals born between 1954 and 1965 as Generation Jones, distinguishing them from Baby Boomers as well as Generation X (Crampton & Hodge, 2006). Pontell characterized the Generation Jones cohort similar to the way that Gen Xers have been characterized in this study. He suggested that this group perceives that they have missed out as they arrived after the culture boom of the 60s and in many respects believe that they have been overshadowed by the Boomers (Crampton & Hodge, 2006). The debate over whether Generation Jones exists is a heated one. None the less, it continues to fuel the speculation that those

individuals who rest on the cusp may have different preferences than someone solidly within the cohort.

The lack of mutual exclusivity was evident within the study participants and thus, considered an interesting factor when understanding their lived experiences. As an example, Edward characterized himself as a Baby Boomer with traditional values of loyalty and hard work, but also valued Gen Xer characteristics such as being open to change and embracing technology. Catherine, on the cusp of the Millennial cohort, expressed a fear that she would be bypassed by the Millennials. Given that she had less work experience and would be more closely aligned with a Millennial in terms of years of work, it is understandable how she could perceive Millennials who are now entering the workforce as a threat. Catherine also expressed a strong desire to find meaningful and challenging work rather than focus on the more materialistic aspects of employment. These values would align more closely with the Millennial cohort and could possibly be explained by the fact that Catherine is on the cusp of both generations. Clarity around generational grouping is problematic, as discussed in Chapter Two. Lack of mutual exclusivity can result in a blurring of the characterization of a specific cohort. For those participants who did sit on the fence of either the Baby Boomers or Millennials, there is potential that their individual lived experiences may be influenced by more than one cohort.

The significance of context. Van Manen (1990) speaks to the “contextual complexity of a human science research study” (p. 166), which recognizes the importance of context within research endeavors exploring lived experiences. People’s lived experiences in the workplace are influenced by their unique organizational contexts, which underscores Kurt Lewin’s insights posited in his 1947 field theory. Essentially, Lewin’s belief was that human behavior is largely a function of both the person and his/her environment (Burke, 2013). For a study within the

workplace, contextual complexity can take many forms such as industry, organizational culture, work policies and practices, and situational settings. The study participants' workplaces were all quite different and each had varying influences on the participants, daily experiences with other generations. As an example, Michelle's performance-based culture minimized generational influences while John's workplace culture accommodated for generations. Catherine's unique workplace context emphasized seniority over education resulting in Catherine feeling equalized with her Baby Boomer counterparts. Moreover, Elisa's context emphasized workplace policies that she perceived negatively impacted her as a Generation X woman within a dual career family.

Unique context was also demonstrated by the roles that a participant had and their career focus. The context of being in an IT role, for example, largely influenced the participants' perceptions over the perceived threat or insecurity from Millennials entering the workforce and yet, felt upward security knowing that Boomers didn't possess superior technology skills. As such, there appears to be a unique impact to the IT professional in how they perceive and experience the influences from Boomers versus Millennials. The context of being an HR professional had impactful, albeit unique, perceptions of the impact of generations. For example, HR professionals serve to help develop organizational policies and build desired cultures. Both of the participants who were HR professionals commented that they felt Boomers were overly influencing the work culture and reinforcing policies that were unfavorable to Xers. These examples highlight the importance of the participants' unique context, to include roles, and how that context influences their lived experiences as Gen Xers within the workplace.

Academic research has begun to explore the role of specific contexts of employee's everyday lives within many organizational constructs such as change and organizational learning (Ellinger, 2005; Halford & Leonard, 2006). As such, researchers are starting to recognize the

situated interdependence of life, which means that employees are dependent and influenced by their environment and the resources that are available to them (Halford & Leonard, 2006). Just as discussed with the four existentials, different time and space forms varied contexts for the participants that must be considered to fully understand the meanings of their lived experiences. Lefebvre (1991), for example, argued that spatiality is not just a container for lived experiences, but rather a tool by which individuals can give expression to themselves. As evidenced within this study, the human expression can be varied and offer a range of meaning.

The power and influence of context continues to reveal its importance within organizational practices. As an example, informal organizational learning that is largely embedded within organizational context has been abundantly studied. Direct association between organizational learning and context was explored in Cseh's 1998 study (Cseh, 1998). Cseh's findings suggested that "context permeates every phase of the learning process—from how the learner will understand the situation, to what is being learned, what solutions are available and how the existing resources will be used" (Ellinger, 2005, p. 392). Halford and Leonard (2006) examined the role of context on the nature of organizational change. The authors found that the participants' unique organizational context helped shape the construction of their own workplace subjectivity and understanding of the change (Halford & Leonard, 2006). In summary, as Lewin proposed more than 50 years ago, organizations are social and complex systems that must be viewed with an understanding of the varied contexts that influence individual behavior in those organizations. This nuance of individual and organizational context was evident in the findings and contributed to the differentiation of the lived experiences from the participants.

2. How do Generation Xers perceive the experience of being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials in the generationally diverse U.S. workforce as impacting their job satisfaction?

The participants expressed dissatisfaction with their roles as Gen Xers in the workforce. Moreover, the generational influences were perceived to be strongly associated with the participants' lived experiences and feelings of dissatisfaction. Their dissatisfaction can be categorized within three dimensions. First, the participants expressed dissatisfaction as a result of being stuck, which manifested as not having a career path and not having opportunities for growth. Either the participants felt that Boomers were blocking their career opportunities or the organization focused more intently on the other generations, resulting in a feeling of being ignored or not having defined human resources programs targeted to their needs. As an example, Paul mentioned that his company's talent management practices were focused on Millennials. Consequently, Gen Xers were largely ignored in his organization.

Secondly, the participants noted that Baby Boomers' overt influence in the workforce, as noted in Global Theme 9, impacted their job satisfaction. For Gen Xer participants, Baby Boomers influence manifested itself in an imposed value system from Baby Boomers. Additionally, some participants expressed that they felt *equalized* with Baby Boomers, which, for the participant, meant that seniority (years of experience) was more highly regarded from employers than education which resulted in fewer opportunities for advancement because Boomers had more years of experience.

Finally, the participants' lived experiences suggested Baby Boomers' dominance in the workplace impacted their job satisfaction. Gen Xers expressed dissatisfaction in their roles as a result of a culture that accommodates Baby Boomers. As a result of this culture, Gen Xers are

required to hand hold Baby Boomers through their performance deficiencies with technology. Dominance was also characterized by the participants as Boomers influencing workplace policies and practices that, again, impacted the organizational culture. In summary, existing within a generationally diverse work environment has, indeed, impacted the Gen Xers' job satisfaction. Although this perception is manifested very differently for each individual, the participants provided individual and shared constructions that expressed dissatisfaction as a result of generational issues within their work environments.

Revisiting the Study's Philosophical Posture, and Additional Considerations

The study was nested in a constructivist paradigm that believes reality exists in the form of multiple mental constructions (Guba, 1990). Those multiple mental constructions form the essence of the phenomenon being studied. In Chapter Three, I acknowledged the basis for utilizing a constructivist study. Given the guiding research questions, I understood that knowledge would come in the form of human expression. It would require that the participants shared their lived experiences and perspectives through individual and collective constructions. To fully unearth the descriptions, and moreover explicate the meaning of the Gen X participant's lived experiences, I chose a hermeneutic phenomenology methodology that is aligned within the constructivist paradigm.

The guiding approach to this type of methodology was emergent, which means that the design must emerge, recognize context, and be adaptable. Emergent design requires that successive steps are largely based on the results of the prior steps already taken (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For this study, the process required that following each interview, complete analysis was conducted that reinforced the continual nature of interacting with and interpreting the data. At times, this continual process of interpretation resulted in minor adaptations along the

way. For example, my original interview questions and script were too leading. Following the initial interview, data analysis and subsequent review with my advisor, resulted in a change that provided more open-ended questions that would allow the participant to openly express their lived experiences rather than responding to leading questions that were framed from my operating assumptions of those lived experiences.

Another dimension of this type of methodology is a sampling strategy that relies on purposeful sampling rather than representative sampling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Clearly, given that I was studying Gen Xers, I needed to have a sampling strategy that targeted those individuals. I found that within my original strategy for sampling, I needed to make more adaptations to my approach that would support selecting participants that would contribute to this study in meaningful ways. For example, I originally intended to have a sampling strategy that narrowly defined those participants who were experiencing being stuck as I had defined in Chapter One. However, when I started the prequalifier questionnaire for potential participants, I soon realized that my approach was too constricting. Potential participants were giving me broad conceptualizations of their views on being stuck. As such, I realized that my original approach was more about controlling and predicting than allowing the constructed realities from the participants to be described, heard and subsequently, better understood. As a result, I rewrote the questions in the prequalifier questionnaire so they were more open ended, allowing me to better understand the participants' experiences with other generations in the workforce. Rather than asking specific questions about being stuck or sandwiched; I asked questions that explored their larger experiences with generations in the workplace. This gave some assurance that my purposeful sampling was targeting those individuals who had experiences with Baby Boomers and Millennials. In the end, the purposeful sampling strategy selected participants "to include as

much information as possible, in all of its various ramifications and constructions” and “to detail the many specifics that give the context its unique flavor” so the study could capture the full essence of Gen Xers’ lived experiences in the workplace (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 201).

Finally, given this type of methodology, there was no intention to have a prescribed number of participants. I allowed the cyclical process of data collection, analysis, refinement, and then data collection to guide my work. As a result, I was able to analyze the data following each interview to reach an understanding as to when saturation was received. Through this process, it was determined that saturation was achieved following analysis of the sixth participant’s interview.

The alignment of a constructivist paradigm with a hermeneutic phenomenology methodology largely supported the goals for this research study. The methodology was augmented by Van Manen’s (1990) inquiry process and framework. His process provided a general framework that is emergent and nonlinear, while recognizing that all research activities need to be intertwined to fully understand the phenomenon or phenomena being studied. In summary, through this aligned approach I was able to provide the thick description necessary to more fully understand the targeted Gen Xers’ experiences and perceptions, and to use this understanding to inform improved action and employee conditions.

Critical Theory

As a researcher, I began this journey hoping to gain insight into the lived experiences of Generation X participant’s who are stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials in the generationally diverse U.S. workforce. Through the constructivist lens, I was able to help co-create their shared constructions with the final outcome of providing a thick description of those experiences. As their stories unfolded, however, I realized that the plight of women was another

experience that needed to be more fully understood. While I suspected that there would be many dimensions in the lives of Gen Xers, I did not anticipate the entangled nature of a female Gen X participant in the workforce. With this in mind, reframing the data through a critical lens would underscore themes that were presented in this study and should be recognized as they call out issues of power and social injustices.

Critical theory suggests that one's ontology is shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender views that are crystallized over time (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Not only is research under a critical lens intended to understand the phenomenon, but also change it as there is a recognition of a system of inequality that requires emancipation (Lather, 2004). Moreover, there is a methodological assumption that the research project is tied to power and the outcome must show means to interrupt the power imbalances (Lather, 2004). To fully understand the depth of that power imbalance, it is impossible for me to gain knowledge through a belief that there is a disinterested way of knowing. As such, knowledge within critical theory involves research that tends to emphasize relationships that involve inequities and power, with an inquiry aim of trying to help those individuals without the power to achieve it (Willis, 2007).

As my second interview with Elisa was concluding, she asked me the question "where is the relief going to come from?" (IP5, 2013, p. 5). I paused as I struggled to know how to respond. She continued her line of thinking by suggesting that professional women are dropping out of the workforce. She felt that organizations will now be forced to stop and take notice. She also suggested that the government may step in and implement legislation to help more women with dual career families. Elisa, poignantly, recognized the clear inequities within the context of her job situation and work environment and realized that change needed to happen. Essentially, she was contemplating ideas on how to balance these workplace inequities for women. A critical

research design would provide opportunities to more deeply explore the issues that surfaced in my interview with Elisa. Critical theory works towards transformative action where it connects meaning to broader structures of power, control, and history (Lather, 2004). Moreover, critical theorists believe that “the research process is interwoven with practice in such a way that it helps those who are oppressed to free themselves from the oppression” (Willis, 2007, p. 85). For Elisa, she recognized issues of power within her organization, as reflected in her observations of Baby Boomers, and issues of control and history in another context of males continuing to perpetuate gender biases resulting in her strong desire for change that she felt powerless to achieve. Critical theory, as a lens for understanding, would bring light to the ongoing plight of women in the workforce who continues to experience gender bias and neglect of workplace issues that disproportionately hinder their work and personal lives.

Implications for Theory, Research, and Practice

The research identified a gap in the literature with regard to understanding Gen Xers’ experiences as being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials within the generationally diverse U.S. workforce. Moreover, it was highlighted that there is very limited research that fully examines the essence of job satisfaction as it relates to the different generational cohorts (Benson & Brown, 2011; Kowske et al., 2010). This study attempted to fill this gap through a deep exploration of understanding with respect to Gen Xers’ workplace stories and related experiences. Moreover, the shared construction of the themes can be leveraged to provide practical application for practitioners who have the responsibility of designing workforce solutions targeted at this cohort. As such, the findings of this study have implications for theory, research and practice in human resources development.

Implications for Theory

The theoretical underpinnings for this study were Mannheim's Theory of Generations and Herzberg's Motivator-Hygiene Theory. These theories have sufficiently provided an overarching lens which helped to frame the study. Moreover, the theories have provided utility, as identified as one of the quality criteria for sound theory, that serves as a bridge that connects theory and research (Bacharach, 1989). This was demonstrated in the current study and thus continues to build on the credibility of these two foundational theories in organizational studies.

Mannheim's Theory of Generations has been tested and revised throughout the years. One study confirmed Mannheim's theory of generational identity by demonstrating that participants' age aligned with their recall of important historical events (Griffin, 2004). Another study questioned Mannheim's conceptualization of generations as a biologic one, especially in light of our contemporary world. Despite the author's reservations, the results supported Mannheim's theory (Scott, 2000). Finally, Arsenault's (2003) findings, again, supported Mannheim's theory that there are distinct collective memories through a shared association based on generational grouping.

As originally mentioned in Chapter Two, Mannheim's theory suggests that generational location, based on birth year, aligns individuals to modes of behavior, feeling, and thought and predisposes them to definite recall of memories based on their historical location (Mannheim, 1952). The study participants were selected based on their birth year and thus, generational grouping. Although differentiated by the participants' unique context such as different parental influences and current workplace environment, the participants did share commonalities as being part of the Gen X cohort. This commonality was most evident in their descriptors of historical events. Moreover, despite being highly individualistic, as noted above, there were shared values

that were expressed by the study participants such as a desire for extrinsic motivators. Therefore, in thinking about generations and generational theory, as originally conceptualized by Mannheim, one might postulate that the current study supports Mannheim's Theory of Generations. It does provoke the question, however, to what extent does generational location influence things such as desire for certain intrinsic or extrinsic motivators versus other factors such as life stage?

Herzberg's Motivator-Hygiene Factor theory was selected as foundational to the study's understanding of job satisfaction. In general, the concept of motivational theory has been abundantly studied and developed for the better part of the 20th century and into the 21st century. As the world has become increasingly more complex and competitive, the desire to understand what motivates employees to improve organizational performance has also increased. Herzberg's theory, as one of the prominent motivational theories, has certainly received its share of criticism. Herzberg's theory was criticized for poor respondent recall, methodology issues, and data interpretation inconsistencies (Bassett-Jones & Lloyd, 2005). Other contemporary researchers have asked the question of whether Herzberg's theory even has staying power, but within their study, which replicated part of Herzberg's original study, the researchers found that the results aligned with Herzberg's theory of intrinsic motivators (Bassett-Jones & Lloyd, 2005).

For the present study, the findings largely support Herzberg's theory of motivator (intrinsic) factors that promote job satisfaction, and hygiene (extrinsic) factors that promote job dissatisfaction. There were exceptions, such as meaningful work as a driver for job satisfaction, which was noted in the findings sections of Chapter Four. Reasonably speaking, there are some organizational scholars who recognize that some organizational theories and models are quite dated and have lost their utility (Drucker, 2007). Work motivation, as has been suggested, is one

of those organizational concepts that needs to be studied from new perspectives in order to progress (Locke & Latham., 1990). It does seem for the present study, however, that Herzberg's theory did provide utility in linking theory to research. Moreover, given the real world nature of Gen Xers in the workforce and the challenges as identified from the themes, the application of Herzberg's theory to this study aligns with theory in a real world context and ensures its relevancy and usefulness to Gen Xers in the workplace (Lynham, 2002).

Given the linkages between the study's informing theoretical frameworks and the research, it is conceivable that the findings will offer additional opportunity to study these seminal theories and relate them to contemporary research and practice. As such, the study contributes to the informing theoretical frameworks in two specific ways. First, the use of the lived experiences of Gen Xers as stuck between Boomers and Millennials in conjunction with Mannheim's Theory of Generations and Herzberg's Motivator-Hygiene Theory provides a deeper, more nuanced understanding of this phenomenon that has not been explored in the literature. Second, the study confirms the role of extrinsic and intrinsic motivators as central to one's work life from the perspective of Gen Xers in the workplace and therefore offers opportunity to provide practical solutions for Gen Xers in the workforce who may experience being stuck.

Implications for Research

As indicated in Chapter One, there has been relatively little empirical research examining the lived experiences of Gen Xers, especially in relationship to the phenomenon of being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials in the workforce. The intention of this study was to add to the existing body of research as well as prompt further inquiry into this phenomenon. There

are many areas of research that could build on the nature of this study as well as expand into other areas of Generation X research as summarized below.

Recommendation One. First, an underlying conclusion in this paper was that Gen Xers are highly individualistic as evidenced by the hermeneutic spread of experiences for the six study participants. An opportunity for further research would be to duplicate this study with additional Gen Xer participants to provide greater understanding of the individualistic nature of Gen Xers who have different backgrounds and different contexts. This replication study could consider a sampling strategy that removed those individuals on the cusps of the Millennial and Baby Boomer generation to encourage more exclusivity to the Generation X cohort.

Recommendation Two. Secondly, conducting a similar qualitative study with Gen X female participants under a critical lens perspective would provide insight into the confounding nature of being a woman in the Generation X cohort. There were obvious suggestions and descriptions of gender bias and workplace inequalities that could be better understood through the critical paradigm. Additionally, building on the themes surrounding gender bias and working women, there would be a number of opportunities to examine the unique challenges of working Generation X women. Given that the findings suggested that Gen Xers have more dual career families who are opting for alternative career paths and options, understanding how women in the cohort are experiencing those alternative paths would reveal another dimension to buttress understanding of this cohort. Essentially, a study of this nature would be examining the intersectionality of generation, gender, and life stage and how those frameworks interact to shape the lived experience of Generation X female participants.

Recommendation Three. Recognizing that generational cohort is largely an American phenomenon (Schewe & Noble, 2000), there are opportunities to study Generation X participants

(as defined by birth year) in other countries to understand how the lived experiences of this cohort are similar or dissimilar. Moreover, given that a basic premise to this study was that Baby Boomers are not retiring and that Millennials are entering the U.S. workforce in large numbers, it would be interesting to see if the patterns of generational demographics that we are seeing in the U.S. resonate in other countries.

Recommendation Four. As mentioned in Chapters One and Two, there has been very little research on generations under a constructivist lens. Much of the literature that examines generations has been from a post-positivist lens that seeks to predict and control. This study added to our understanding of the Generation X cohort in a deep and meaningful way. Utilizing alternative methodologies to post-positivism to understand generational differences and their impact on the workplace, would be illuminating in light of organizations that continually seek ways to harmonize their diverse workforces. Employing soft systems methodology, under a constructivist lens, is an example of a type of methodology that would have tremendous practical utility in the workplace while allowing the research to explore the intersectionality of generational differences and workplace effectiveness.

Recommendation Five. A longitudinal study of Gen Xers through various life stage events would be interesting as it would provide insight into Gen Xers' perceptions of job satisfaction and intrinsic/extrinsic motivators as they navigate through life. As previously mentioned, longitudinal studies on generations are scarce. The use of a longitudinal design is especially meaningful when studying generations as it can help disentangle the effects of generational cohort, life stage, and age (Sullivan et al., 2009). Longitudinal designs would collect data over several times during a life span allowing the researcher to account for changes within a person that could be a reflection of aging, life stage, or both.

Implications for Practice

One of the primary drivers for conducting a study about Gen Xers was a perception that their voices were not being heard within corporate environments. As a practitioner with 20 years of experience, I offer our findings in support of Gen Xers who want to be heard. Moreover, knowing the current state of organizational dynamics, I believe that the findings have tremendous utility for business. As such, I offer specific recommendations for both organizations and for Gen Xers.

Recommendations for Organizations. One of the themes for this study and certainly a trend for 21st century human resources development (HRD) is the increasingly diverse workforce and the imperative of robust talent management practices. There are currently up to four different generations working side by side with potentially different values, needs, and varying life stages (Burke, 2004). Additionally, managing organizational talent has never been more critical with the pending shortage of talented workers, global needs, and increased competitive nature of work (Cappelli, 2008). The following recommendations for organizations are guided by the belief that organizational diversity is more complex than ever and having robust talent management practices is a 21st century imperative.

Recommendation One. Given that Gen Xers are the next in line successors to those coveted senior leadership roles, and the growing belief that there will be a labor shortage for highly skilled roles (Erickson, 2009), organizations can no longer ignore the unique needs of this cohort. Rather, organizations need to be mindful of the individualistic nature of Gen Xers and design HRD solutions that provide options for Gen Xers. The traditional corporate model of designing workforce solutions as a “one size fits all” will be problematic for Gen Xers. As reinforced within each theme, Gen Xers have significant variation in what motivates them, what

has importance to them, and in how they view life in general. Understanding those differences, even within the Generation X cohort, will ensure that the solutions accommodate the broader Gen X audience. Organizations will need to make efforts to understand the needs and preferences of this cohort before designing and implementing workforce solutions. For example, most employee engagement surveys do not stratify based on generational grouping, but rather provide results at the business unit or functional level. Understanding employee engagement data by generational demographics would provide tremendous insight for an organization.

Recommendation Two. Second, as many of the study participants did feel stuck in their current roles, organizations can address those needs by augmenting employees' current job experiences to be more inclusive of intrinsic motivators such as meaningful and challenging work. Acknowledging intrinsic motivators aligns back with understanding the unique needs of this cohort and then working to design HRD solutions that meet those needs.

Recommendation Three. Recognizing the full talent management cycle, organizations need to adopt strategies and solutions for each phase. First, workforce planning needs to be developed that recognizes the pending retirement of Baby Boomers and the potential shortfall of "ready now" Gen X successors to fill those key roles. Having that comprehensive picture of the workforce needs, from a generational perspective, will help to identify those gaps. Once the identification of workforce planning gaps has been identified, building a talent acquisition strategy to meet those needs is required. Gen Xers value different employment contracts than the Boomers and as such, employers need to be mindful of those differences when recruiting and offering employment to Gen Xers. For example, Gen Xers are seeking employment opportunities that provide them flexibility and autonomy. Employers should consider offering options to Gen Xers such as virtual employment, telecommuting, and flextime. Developing Gen X employees

requires designing roles that are challenging and meaningful with opportunities for continual learning as ongoing learning is an imperative for Gen Xers. Dedicated succession planning and career path efforts aimed at Gen X employees should be a best practice by organizations to promote job satisfaction and retention.

Recommendation Four. Although U.S. based organizations have recognized and made progress with diversity acceptance, diversity issues still plague our workforces. As the study participants expressed belief that biases still exist today, organizations need to continue to work on building cultures that accept, support, and promote diversity. Diversity best practices include strategies such as ensuring leadership commitment through a organization vision statement, linking diversity to performance, measuring the success of diversity programs, and holding leadership accountable to a culture of diversity acceptance (Kreitz, 2008).

Recommendation Five. Finally, recognizing the significance of life stage factors on Generation X, organizations need to make workplace policies and practices supportive to those employees with life stage factors. Many Gen Xers are in a life stage where they are taking care of young children and caring for older parents. Additionally, they are in a stage of life where they are starting to contemplate meaning of life issues and thinking through the broader implications of how they spend their day. As such, workplace practices need to take into account those life stage challenges for Gen Xers. As an example, providing alternative career track programs for employees who may want to opt out of climbing the corporate ladder, but still want a satisfying and challenging job. As mentioned above, implementation of workplace practices such as flex-time and virtual workspaces can help those dual career families that struggle to meet competing agendas. Finally, organizations need to promote a corporate culture that supports a family friendly work environment where employees are encouraged to put family first.

Recommendations for Gen Xers. As the stories of the Generation X participants unfolded, it was evident that special and unique challenges are present in their work lives. It has been suggested that as Gen Xers take stock of their work lives to date, many are frustrated with where they are with respect to their careers, financial status, and overall quality of life (Erickson, 2009). With this in mind, I offer three recommendations for Gen Xers.

Recommendation One. Gen Xers need to clearly define what they want. As previously noted, Gen Xers are individualistic. What may work for a peer or colleague may not serve other Gen Xers' needs or personal desires. Therefore, Gen Xers need to reflect on what they want out of their career and life and be prepared to prioritize those needs. For example, if a Gen Xer values balance as a priority, serving in a vice-president role of a Fortune 500 company probably will not allow them to realize that goal. Elisa, a study participant, desired a balanced life style and recognized that the impact was a career that did not have as much upward mobility. Moreover, given that Gen Xers value extrinsic motivators, Gen Xers need to identify the motivators they value the most and prioritize those as well? As a Gen Xer, identifying individual desires and priorities will help craft a career that aligns with personal goals and values.

Recommendation Two. Take a realistic look at the options ahead Gen Xers who are in a midcareer stage. Gen Xers, more than any other generational cohort, are positioned in a career and life stage with competing agendas and priorities. Gen Xers need to take a realistic look at their options as they may not have the flexibility to take a big career risk or drastically alter their lives in pursuit of their passion. For example, Paul recognized that his life stage, having young kids at home and an unwillingness to move, precluded him from finding other employment. Despite having a job that was less than challenging, Paul knew that he needed to focus on other aspects of his life such as community involvement and service to find challenge and meaning.

Moreover, many of the Gen Xer participants admitted to adopting an attitude of waiting for Boomers to retire before things can change for the better. Limited career options may be a Gen Xers' reality for the near term, with an anticipation of greater options long term.

Recommendation Three. Gen Xers need to be open to alternative career paths and creating career strategies that can work for their unique needs. As mentioned in Chapter Four, the Kaleidoscope Career Model allows one to change the patterns of their career by rotating various aspects of their life (Sullivan et al., 2009). Essentially, by leveraging this type of approach, Gen Xers can have greater options and flexibility surrounding their career. Secondly, alternative workplaces such as a startup organization can provide challenge and breadth of opportunity that may be missing in a more traditional workplace environment. Portfolio careers are a smart strategy for Gen Xers as it allows them to continue on the same path while exploring and experimenting with different options. Portfolio careers may be a smart strategy for a Gen Xer who is not able to completely abandon their job due to family obligations. In summary, the recommendation for Gen Xers is to not allow themselves to feel stuck in a career with no options, but rather continue to seek alternatives that can provide that meaningful, challenging work that Gen Xers desire.

In conclusion, it should be noted that given the context of the study, the recommendations were specifically addressed to the Gen X cohort. However, there is applicability of my recommendations to the broader employee population as other cohorts who could potentially benefit from these suggestions, as well.

Personal Reflections

The unexamined life is not worth living.

Socrates

Despite the dissertation process being incredibly long and arduous, I have found it to be one that has been deeply enriching, both personally and professionally. Largely attributed to reflexivity or critical reflection, I entered a state of

conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the processes of research itself. Reflexivity forces us to come to terms not only with our choice of research problem and with those with whom we engage in the research process, but with ourselves and with the multiple identities that represent the fluid self in the research setting. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 124)

Through this process of reflexivity, and through the broader PhD journey that I have been on, I encountered the potency of examining one's life. This examination, if you will, has manifested itself in two areas: as a member of the Generation X cohort and in a larger context of the Self and the way that I experience the world (Van Manen, 1990).

In Chapter One, I detailed my experiences as a member of the Generation X cohort as well as my long and rich history with U.S. based organizations. I expressed an understanding of feeling stuck within my own roles, at times, and understood how that feeling can impinge on one's job satisfaction. Throughout the dissertation journey, I continued to hear frustrations from friends and colleagues who felt stuck in their roles with no apparent career path or way out. Most significantly, I observed how the voice of my Generation X peers and colleagues was not being heard, and continued to recognize that most organizations are ill-equipped to address, or even understand, the complex dynamic that is occurring with Gen Xers in the workforce.

With the initiation of my first participant's interview, I felt certain that I understood the "true" lived experiences of Gen Xers as being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials.

Catherine, my first study participant, validated my operating assumptions. Paul, however, the second study participant, offered very different views on how he perceived the concept of being stuck as a member of the Generation X cohort. My way of understanding, as I knew it, was changing and I found this tremendously unsettling. As my process continued, I realized that I had entered the hermeneutic circle as I had started with a pre-understanding of this phenomenon, but through the successive interviews, I acquired more knowledge, which allowed me to begin to understand in new and different ways (Debesay et al., 2008). Moreover, this process enabled me to have a greater appreciation of my constructions of the lived experiences of Gen Xers, who are stuck in the workforce. Similarly, I heard comparable feedback from the study participants who expressed that participating in the research had heightened their awareness and helped them see how these themes can play out in their unique environments.

For the Self, I entered the program through a Post-Positivist lens. Although I considered my life full of “grey,” my actions in the world reinforced the belief that the world was “black and white” and there was an absolute truth. As a practitioner, I found that the organizational system promoted predictability, one reality, value free inquiry, and objectivity. Quickly, I learned the paradox between what I was learning in school and the reality of my day to day life as a practitioner. Through the constructivist paradigm, I have discovered a world that looks at multiple realities, understands the connectivity between the known and the knower, and ultimately understands that there are multiple ways of seeing, describing and understanding. This new lens has been a tremendous source of growth for me, both personally and professionally, and I see how it has made me not only a better student but impacted me as a mother, wife, and consultant.

Conclusions

The research study was conducted to provide insight into the lived experiences of Gen Xers in the workplace as experiencing the phenomenon of being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials, as well as a desire to understand how those experiences impacted their perceptions of job satisfaction. Utilizing a methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology enabled me to garner detailed accounts from all participants resulting in thick description of their lived experiences. Their personal individual and collective stories amounted to 12 themes to describe the lived experiences of Gen Xers. The twelve themes include: *Theme 1: “Stuck in the middle” is experienced and expressed differently by Gen Xers; Theme 2: Gen Xers have anxiety about their professional future; Theme 3: There are challenges unique to Gen Xers; Theme 4: Gen Xers have perceptions about themselves and their work role; Theme 5: There are generational similarities and differences; Theme 6: Unique work culture impacts generational issues; Theme 7: There may be economic influences on their career; Theme 8: Historical context shapes who Gen Xers are as adults; Theme 9: Baby Boomer influences contribute to job dissatisfaction; Theme 10: Extrinsic motivators; Theme 11: Intrinsic motivators; Theme 12: Job satisfaction or dissatisfaction can carry over to life.*

While I suspected there would be a high degree of complexity involved in this topic, I did not anticipate how varied their personal stories would be and how responsible I would feel to ensure that we were able to fully co-construct the participant’s shared and individual lived experiences. To facilitate the explication of their personal narratives, I used strategies such as employing the quality criteria for constructivist research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); being mindful or intentional in my experiences that focus on thoughts, feelings, judgments and perceptions to fully understand the essence of what was being described (Moustakas, 1994); and then reflecting

on the themes and co-constructing thick description so that the reader can not only describe the context, but can also understand the meaning for their own personal transfer (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Van Manen, 1990). Being conscientious of those key principles and strategies underscores the trustworthiness of this research and adds credence to my findings. To that end, it is hopeful that the research allowed the voices of the six Generation X participants to be heard with the opportunity of continuation of future research and understanding of this important cohort within the context of our workplaces.

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APPENDIX A: PRE-QUALIFIER QUESTIONNAIRE

These questions are designed to purposefully select participants who have experienced interactions with Baby Boomers and Millennials, either positive or negative, in a generationally diverse U.S. Workforce. Once participants pre-qualify for the study, they will be given the Consent to Participate Form and invitation to participate letter with the intent of proceeding to the full interview.

1. What year were you born?
2. Are you currently working in a U.S. organization as an internal employee?
3. Are you working full-time (defined as 32 hours per week)?
4. In your current role, describe three top issues that concern you regarding your career?
5. In your current role, describe your experiences with Baby Boomers (defined as those individuals born between the years of 1946-1964) and Millennials (defined as those individuals born between the years of 1981-2000).
6. In your current role, do you have any concerns about generational diversity within the workforce? Please explain.
7. Do you feel that there are any limitations in your career and/or job satisfaction as a direct result of Millennials and/or Baby Boomers from current or past employment? Please explain.

APPENDIX B: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Dear

My name is Suzanne Dickson and I am a PhD Candidate the Organizational Learning, Performance and Change program in the School of Education, Colorado State University, Fort Collins. In addition to my academic background, I have over 20 years of experience in this field as an internal and external Organization Development consultant. Although I have a broad background in many areas within my field, I have developed a strong interest in Generations in the workplace and Motivational Research.

For my dissertation, I am interested in Gen Xers lived experiences in the U.S. Workforce. Specifically, my title of the research study is “Stuck in the middle: Generation Xers lived experiences in the workforce while navigating between Baby Boomers and Millennials, and Perceived Impact on their Job Satisfaction”. Given the dynamics around generational diversity within the 21st century workplace, I am seeking to better understand your perspectives, as a member of this cohort, which I define as those individuals born between the years of 1965-1980.

I am requesting personal interviews at a location that is deemed acceptable to both parties (yourself and myself). The duration of the interview will be approximately 60-90 minutes. I will also be requesting that I have your permission to record our interview. Additionally, as part of the process to ensure trustworthiness of the data, I will be following up with you to ensure that my analysis accurately reflects and describes your experiences.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide not to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty. The results of the research study may be published but your name will not be made public, thus ensuring your anonymity.

In this research, there are no foreseeable risks to you. Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation is your help in furthering research. If you are willing to participate or have additional questions, please call or email me at the contact information below. I earnestly look forward to your participation in this study and thank you in advance.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Dickson

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Opening Comments:

(1) Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. This study is focused on learning about Gen Xers lived experiences of being stuck between the Baby Boomers and Millennials in the generationally diverse U.S. Workforce, and how they perceive these experiences impacting their job satisfaction. As a background to the topic selection, the following provides relevant details to help frame our discussion:

- Baby Boomers represent about 80 Million of the U.S. population with many Boomers continuing to work for various political, economic, and social reasons.
- Millennials represent about 78 Million of the U.S. population and will be fully represented within the workforce by 2019.
- It has been suggested in the literature that Millennials are very different from the previous two cohorts, Baby Boomers and Generation X, in their value system, work preferences and motivations.
- Gen Xers, who represent approximately 49 Million, are a much smaller cohort but still relevant within the workforce despite being sandwiched between these two larger cohorts.

The questions I am about to ask you can be answered from your experience and perspective in your current role.

(2) In this interview, I will audio record our discussion, so that I do not miss any relevant details, and I may also write some notes on things I'd like to follow up on. With this next step, I have two, identical copies of an informed consent form for you. In order to participate, please take a few minutes to read these and then sign both copies; one copy will belong to me and the other copy is for your records. (*I will pause and wait for participant to read and sign both copies; answer any questions.*) As noted in the informed consent form, the recording will only be available to me and an external transcriptionist who will be briefed and sign a statement on the confidentiality of the collected information. Your involvement is voluntary; you may decline to respond to any question asked, and you have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without consequence. Should you withdraw, you may specify that any information you have provided to me be withdrawn from the study as well.

Demographic Information:

1. What year were you born?
2. Gender?
3. Where did you grow up?
4. How long have you been in Colorado?
5. How many years have you been working?
6. What has been your total number of jobs?
7. What is your current company? What industry? U.S. Based company?
8. What is your current role?
9. How many years have you been in your current role?
10. Where do you work?

Open Ended Questions (Part 1)**Historical Experiences:**

1. Describe your up bring. What was it like growing up?
2. Are there particular historical events that stand out in your mind? If yes, what impact did those events have on you as a person?
3. Are there any particular past events (either social, political or economic) that have influenced in your behavior in the workforce? Describe

Open Ended Questions (Part 2)

Research Question 1:

What are Generation Xers lived experiences of being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials in the generationally diverse U.S. Workforce?

- If you were to describe what it is like to belong to the Generational X cohort in the workforce, how would you do so, and why?
- What positive and/or negative qualities do you associate with Gen Xers, and what are examples of each? Baby Boomers? Millennials?
- How aware are you of generational diversity in your current work environment? How would you characterize this diversity in your current company of employment?
- What kinds of career challenges do you see/experience as a result of the generational issues described above? What are some examples that might illustrate these challenges?
- What experiences are you having as a result of the generational issues previously mentioned?
 - Describe the interactions in relationship to your experiences
- Do you perceive generational issues impinging on your career opportunities in the workforce? If yes, how so?
 - a. Detail how your career has been affected.
- Are there other issues that you feel are impinging on your career opportunities in the workforce? If yes, describe.

Research Question 2:

How do Generation Xers perceive the experience of being stuck between Baby Boomers and Millennials in the generationally diverse U.S.. Workforce as impacting their job satisfaction?

General feelings towards one's job

- Think about a time when you felt exceptionally good or exceptionally bad about your current job. Describe those experiences.
- What did those events mean to you?

- Did those events affect the way you did your job?
- Did those events affect you personally, both in and out of work?

Questions related to job satisfaction.

- What is your personal definition of job satisfaction?
- How would you describe your job satisfaction in your current role?
- What personal experiences have led you to this description?
- What meaning do you prescribe to your job satisfaction?
- What factors drive this job satisfaction?
- What factors impede your job satisfaction?
- Have you ever described yourself as dissatisfied? What is your personal definition of being dissatisfied with your job?
- What factors have led to you feeling dissatisfied with your job?
- Are there other factors, outside of work, that are impacting your job satisfaction/dissatisfaction?

Thank you for your participation.

APPENDIX D: INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH BOARD SUBMISSION

PROTOCOL

Social, Behavioral & Education Research

Colorado State University

Protocol # 13-4264H

Date Printed: 01/03/2015

Protocol Title: Stuck in the Middle: Generation Xers Lived Experiences in the Workforce while Navigating between Baby Boomers and Millennials, and Perceived Impact on their Job Satisfaction.

Protocol Type: Social, Behavioral & Education Research

Date Submitted: 05/04/2014

Approval Period: 06/17/2014-06/16/2015

Important Note: This Print View may not reflect all comments and contingencies for approval. Please check the comments section of the online protocol.

Questions that appear to not have been answered may not have been required for this submission. Please see the system application for more details.

* * * Continuing review * * *

Continuing review: In the space below, provide the requested participant number information. As in the previously used H-101 form, the numbers you provide must include: a) Total number of participants approved to date; b) Number of participants studied since the last approval date; c) Total number of participants studied since the beginning of the project, and d) Number of participants remaining to study. Input NA if not applicable. Do not leave any questions blank.

1. Summary - Number of Participants Associated with the Protocol:

a. Total number of participants approved to date (please list by participant group): 12 qualitative participants

b. Number of participants studied since the last approval date: In June of 2013, you approved six participants and despite asking for permission for additional participants, my sample size is complete at six participants. So, I believe the correct answer to this question is that all six participants have been studied and no further participants will be needed.

c. Total number of participants studied since the beginning of the project: 6

d. Number of participants remaining to study (total number of participants approved LESS the total number of participants studied to date): 0

e. Please explain if there is a discrepancy in participant numbers (e.g., more participants responded to a survey than had been expected and approved):

Given the nature of the qualitative study, I wasn't sure as to the exact sample number. I interviewed six participants and was able to reach saturation. Therefore, even though you extended the sample size, I will not be needing additional participants.

2 a Reasons and number of withdrawals from the research (both subject and investigator initiated) since the last approval date.

There have been no withdrawals from this study since its inception.

b Number of subjects lost to follow-up since the beginning of the study.

There have been no lost to follow up participants since the beginning of this study.

c Description and number of any protocol deviations/violations or unanticipated problems (UPs)/adverse events (AEs), particularly those that may have affected the risks to subjects since the last approval date. There have been no protocol deviations/violations or unanticipated problems since the last approval date.

d. Complaints about the research during the last year.

There have been no complaints.

3. Description of the remainder of project:

N Do you plan to enroll more subjects?

Y If "No," have all subjects completed all research-related interventions?

N Are you following subjects for longitudinal study purposes? Note: Protocols must be renewed to continue recruiting participants and/or collect data.

Y Are you only performing data analysis?

4. Summarize all changes in the protocol since it was last approved.

There have been no changes to the protocol since it was approved. Given the nature of qualitative research, I continue to analyze the data while I am writing Chapter 4. However, my participants have completed the required aspects of their participation.

Proceed to the appropriate section(s) of the protocol and make your changes. Make necessary changes in Consent Form(s) or Alteration of Consent Form(s) (i.e., Cover Letter or Verbal Script), or other attachments when applicable.

5. List of Protocol Sections (and questions) that have been changed/modified.

* * * Personnel Information * * *

IMPORTANT NOTE: Mandatory Personnel on a protocol are: Principal Investigator and Department Head. Only the Principal Investigator can submit the protocol; although other personnel listed on the protocol can create the protocol. Human Subjects Protection Training is mandatory for Principal Investigator, Co-Principal Investigator, and Key Personnel (as defined by NIH). Training must be updated every three (3) years.

Principal Investigator Mandatory

Name of Principal Investigator

(Faculty, Staff or Postdoc)

Degree Title

Lynham, Sue PhD Associate Professor

Email Phone Fax

Susan.Lynham@colostate.edu (970) 491-7624

Department Name Campus Delivery Code

1588 School of Education 1588

Human Subjects Training Completed? PIs must complete Training every three (3) years

Y

Co-Principal Investigator

Name of Co-Principal Investigator

(This can include Master's or Ph.D. students)

Degree Title

Dickson, Suzanne Instructor

Email Phone Fax

Suzanne.Dickson@colostate.edu

Department Name Campus Delivery Code

1588 School of Education 1588

Human Subjects Training Completed? Co-PIs must complete Training every three (3) years.

Y

No training data is available.

Department Head Mandatory

Name of Department Head Degree Title

Robinson, Dan PhD Professor

Email Phone Fax

Dan.Robinson@colostate.edu (970) 491-6316

Department Name Campus Delivery Code

1588 School of Education 1588

Human Subjects Training Completed?? Training is not required for

Department Heads. Select "No" if you do not know if your Department Head has completed training or not.

Y

* * * Subject Population * * *

Subject Population(s) Checklist

Select All That Apply :

Adult Volunteers

Elderly

Employees

Mentally Disabled or Decisionally Challenged

Minors (under 18)

Pregnant Women

Prisoners

Soldiers

Students

Other (i.e., non-English speaking or any population that is not specified above)

Page 4 of 14

* * * Study Location * * *

Study Location(s) Checklist

Select All That Apply - Note: Check "Other" and input text: 1. If your location is not listed, or 2)

If you would like to list details of your already-checked location (e.g., specific school within a school district) Aims Community College

Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment

Colorado State University

Colorado State University - Pueblo Campus

Denver Public Schools

Poudre School District

Poudre Valley Health System (PVHS)

Rocky Mountain National Park

Thompson School District

University of Colorado - Boulder

University of Colorado - Colorado Springs

University of Colorado - Denver
University of Colorado Health Sciences Center
University of Northern Colorado

X Other (In the box below, list your study location if not checked above. You may also list details of your

Already-checked location (e.g., specific school within a school district)

The location of the actual interviews will be a setting in which is mutually agreed upon by the interviewee and the researcher. The location will be an area where the participant feels comfortable and safe to provide answers to the interview questions which will not be their place of work.

* * * General Checklist * * *

General Checklist

Select All That Apply :

Cooperating/Collaborating Institution(s) –Institution where recruitment will occur OR Institution where Collaborating PI will conduct associated research.

Federally Sponsored Project

Training Grant

Project is associated with the Colorado School of Public Health

Program Project Grant

Subjects will be compensated for participation

Behavioral observation

Deception

Human blood, cells, tissues, or body fluids. If checked, is IBC approval needed? List PARF approval date and number.

X Interview

Study of existing data

Survey/questionnaire

X Thesis or Dissertation Project (Attach Methodology chapter in the Attachment section)

Waiver of consent

Other (clarify in text box to the right)

* * * Funding * * *

Funding Checklist

X NONE

NOTE: If applicable, Grant Application must be attached in the Attachment Section (#11).

Funding - Grants/Contracts

Funding - Fellowships

Funding - Other

Gift Funding

Dept. Funding

Other Funding

* * * Expedited Paragraphs * * *

PLEASE READ: The criteria for expedited review are listed below. Please review these criteria to evaluate if your

protocol meets the expedited-review criteria. For expedited review, a protocol must be no more than minimal risk (i.e., "not greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life") AND must only involve human subjects in one or more of the following numbered paragraphs. If none of the expedited criteria are appropriate for your project, please move to the next screen without selecting any of these criteria; your protocol will be reviewed by the full IRB. Note: The IRB will make the final determination if your protocol is eligible for expedited review.

Expedite Criteria:

1. Clinical studies of drugs and medical devices only when condition (a) or (b) is met.
 - a) Research on drugs for which an investigational new drug application (21 CFR Part 312) is not required. (Note: Research on marketed drugs that significantly increases the risks or decreases the acceptability of the risks associated with the use of the product is not eligible for expedited review.)
 - b) Research on medical devices for which
 - i) An investigational device exemption application (21 CFR Part 812) is not required; or
 - ii) The medical device is cleared/approved for marketing and the medical device is being used in accordance with its cleared/approved labeling.
2. Collection of blood samples by finger stick, heel stick, ear stick, or venipuncture as follows:
 - a) From healthy, nonpregnant adults who weigh at least 110 pounds. For these subjects, the amounts drawn may not exceed 550 ml in an 8-week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week; or
 - b) From other adults and children, considering the age, weight, and health of the subjects, the collection procedure, the amount of blood to be collected, and the frequency with which it will be collected. For these subjects, the amount drawn may not exceed the lesser of 50 ml or 3 ml per kg in an 8-week period and collection may not occur more frequently than 2 times per week.
3. Prospective collection of biological specimens for research purposes by non-invasive means.
4. Collection of data through non-invasive procedures (not involving general anesthesia or sedation) routinely employed in clinical practice, excluding procedures involving x-rays or microwaves. Where medical devices are employed, they must be cleared/approved for marketing. (Studies intended to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of the medical device are not generally eligible for expedited review, including studies of cleared medical devices for new indications.)

Examples:

- a) Physical sensors that are applied either to the surface of the body or at a distance and do not involve input of significant amounts of energy into the subject or an invasion of the subject's privacy;
 - b) Weighing or testing sensory acuity;
 - c) Magnetic resonance imaging;
 - d) Electrocardiography, electroencephalography, thermography, detection of naturally occurring radioactivity, electroretinography, ultrasound, diagnostic infrared imaging, doppler blood flow, and echocardiography;
 - e) Moderate exercise, muscular strength testing, body composition assessment, and flexibility testing where appropriate given the age, weight, and health of the individual.
5. Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected, or will be collected solely for nonresearch purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis). (NOTE: Some research in this paragraph may be exempt from the HHS regulations

for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR 46.101(b)(4). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

X 6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

X 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior(including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. 45 CFR

46.101(b)(2) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

* * * Purpose,Study Procedures,Background * * *

Original Protocol Number (e.g., 07-226H)

Title (Please indicate if the protocol title is different from the proposal title)

Stuck in the Middle: Generation Xers Lived Experiences in the Workforce while Navigating between Baby Boomers and Millennials, and Perceived Impact on their Job Satisfaction.

Complete Sections 1 - 11. Specify N/A as appropriate. Do not leave any sections blank.

1. Purpose of the study

a) Provide a brief lay summary of the project in < 200 words. The lay summary should be readily understandable to the general public. Generational diversity is one dimension of changing workforce demographics—a dimension and area that has received a great deal of attention in both academic and popular management literature over the past decade. Many feel this demographic dimension represents a legitimate organizational issue for the 21st century workforce. Despite this increased awareness, employers struggle to know how to respond to this dimension. Employers are, for the first time, faced with the realities of four different generations working side by side--Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials—each of whom have different expectations about the nature of work, motivational needs, and, among others, career goals. One significant factor that needs to be examined is a better understanding of an employee's level of job satisfaction, and what factors influence their job satisfaction or dissatisfaction. However, there is little extant literature that examines job satisfaction as it relates to generational diversity. Therefore, it is the purpose of this study to begin to address the gap and extend our understanding of the nature and meaning of the lived experiences of one particular generational cohort, namely, Generation Xers, within the context of the 21st century workforce, and, how they perceive and describe related experiences affecting their job satisfaction.

b) What does the Investigator(s) hope to learn from the study?

The investigator hopes to understand the lived experiences of Generation Xers, who participate in this study, and better understand how the participants perceive those experiences impacting their job satisfaction within the context of the USA workforce.

2. Study Procedures

a) Describe all study procedures here (please do not respond "See Attachment Section"). The box below is

for text only. If you would like to add tables, charts, etc., attach those files in the Attachment section (#11). Purposeful snowball sampling will be utilized to find individuals who would be able to provide rich information for studying Generation Xers lived experiences in the workforce

within the context of being sandwiched between Baby Boomers and Millennials. Once a participant is identified, the researcher and the participant will meet in a mutually agreed upon location and time. Participants will be provided with a purpose of the study, consent form, and with a draft protocol of the anticipated research questions. Participants will be asked open-ended questions that will be digitally recorded. Probing questions will be prepared as follow-up to the overall open-ended questions. The participants will need to be willing to partake in multiple interviews (2-3) that each last approximately 90-120 minutes. The researcher may need to follow up on additional questions to gain a deeper understanding of the Xers experiences as being sandwiched between two larger cohorts, namely Boomers and Millennials, in the workforce and how that impacts their level of job satisfaction. Additionally, the researcher is expected to engage in member checking. The participants will be given drafts of the researcher's preliminary analysis and will check, if necessary, correct the findings and/or interpretations from the researcher. This iterative process, back and forth between the researcher and participant, will occur throughout the data collection and analysis phases to ensure co-construction of the meaning of Xers lived experiences.

b) State if audio or video taping will occur. Describe how the tapes will be maintained during and upon completion of the project. Describe what will become of the tapes after use (e.g., shown at scientific meetings, erased, etc.).

All interviews will be digitally recorded. The participant's alias of choice will be used for the interviews that are digitally recorded, so there will be no identifying information on the recordings. During the project, the recordings will be placed in a locked box separate from any identifying information. Upon completion, the recordings will be stored in a locked box at the researcher's home, separate from any identifying information. Due to the potential cumulative nature of the study, all related data will be destroyed after ten years.

c) State if deception will be used. If so, provide a rationale and describe debriefing procedures. Submit a debriefing script in the Attachment section (#11).

No deception will be used

3. Background/Rationale

a) Briefly describe past findings leading to the formulation of the study, if applicable.

Both job satisfaction and generations have been extensively studied for decades. Generational studies and conceptual understanding date back to the 19th century where interest to better understand one's generational location in history and how that influenced behavior became prominent. For job satisfaction, early studies coming out of the Human Relations movement (Hawthorne Studies) sought to better understand job satisfaction as a workplace attitude and how job satisfaction impacts organizational outcome variables such as productivity and retention. Despite this extensive literature, there is very little empirical data that examines job satisfaction and generations. Of the handful of studies available, all studies are designed from a post-positivist perspective. For this researcher, the intent and design of the study, is to fully understand the experiences and meaning of one particular cohort, Generation X, and how this impacts their level of job satisfaction. This will be achieved through a hermeneutic phenomenological study.

* * * Subject Population * * *

4. Subject Population - In the space below, please describe the participants that you are requesting to recruit (include requested participant number and description of each group requested).

a) Requested Participant Description (Include number that you plan to study and description of each group requested, if applicable).

Through a constructivist paradigm, the design parameters are emergent. Thus, I anticipate using enough participants to establish "thick description" of the phenomenon and reach a point of saturation. Although it is not the intent to give a defined sample size, it is estimated that in this type of study, saturation could occur by five or six participants. This number could vary based on the data analysis process. At this point, I am requesting approval to recruit and interview up to 16 participants.

b) What is the rationale for studying the requested group(s) of participants?

I am specifically seeking participants who are located in the Generation X cohort (defined as those persons who are born between 1965-1980) as well as those persons who are currently experiencing the phenomenon of being sandwiched between the Baby Boomers and Millennials in the context of the USA workforce. Therefore, to understand those experiences, I must select participants who meet that criteria.

c) If applicable, state the rationale for involvement of potentially vulnerable subjects to be entered into the study, including minors, pregnant women, economically and educationally disadvantaged, and decisionally impaired people. Specify the measures being taken to minimize the risks and the chance of harm to the potentially vulnerable subjects.

There are no inherent risks to the participants for this study. Participants who voluntarily enter into this study have the potential to garner insight into their unique experiences within the workforce and their level of job satisfaction.

d) If women, minorities, or minors are not included, a clear compelling rationale must be provided. Examples for not including minors: participant must be a registered voter; the drug or device being studied would interfere with normal growth and development; etc.

Minors are not included in the purposeful sampling as they are not part of the Generation X cohort (those born between 1965-1980) as I am seeking to understand that generations perspective in the proposed study.

e) State if any of the subjects are students, employees, or laboratory personnel. They should be presented with the same written informed consent. If compensation is allowed, they should also receive it. The participants are likely to be from diverse occupations, employers throughout the state of Colorado. Therefore, there is a chance that some of the subjects may be students, employees or laboratory personnel who meet the criteria and choose to be included in the study.

f) Describe how potential subjects will be identified for recruitment. Examples include: class rosters, group membership, individuals answering an advertisement, organization position titles (i.e., Presidents, web designers, etc.). How will potential participants learn about the research and how will they be recruited (e.g., flyer, email, web posting, telephone, etc.)? Attach recruitment materials in the Attachment section

(#11). Important to remember: subjects cannot be contacted before IRB approval.

Through the process of snowball sampling, I will be seeking participants who meet the purposeful sampling criteria. I plan to begin with one individual who meets that criteria. That individual will then refer me to another individual, who also meets the criteria and would be willing to participate. I will contact all potential participants via email.

* * * Subject Population * * *

4. Subject Population (continued)

g) Identify the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The following criteria include Generation X, defined as individuals who are born between the years of 1965-1980. Using birth year as a way of defining the Generation X cohort will eliminate an individual who was born prior to 1965 or after 1980. Additionally, participant selection will be based on participants who are currently working full-time (as defined by 32 hours per week) as an internal (to an organization) employee within the USA workforce. They must pre-qualify for the study based on their responses to a series of questions that identify them as experiencing sandwiching, as described in the study, in their current work environments. Finally, they must be willing to fully participate in the interview process and to include successive rounds of member checking, which is a process used to help establishing trustworthiness of the study

h) Compensation. Explain the amount and schedule of compensation, if any that will be paid for participation in the study. Include provisions for prorating payment.

There will be no compensation.

i) Estimate the probable duration of the entire study. This estimate should include the total time each subject is to be involved and the duration the data about the subject is to be collected (e.g., This is a 2-year study. Participants will be interviewed 3 times per year; each interview will last approximately 2 hours. Total approximate time commitment for participants is 12 hours.)

Given the emergent design in a constructivist study, it is estimated that each participant will be interviewed at least 2-3 times for 90-120 minutes per interview. Therefore, the total approximate time commitment could be approximately six hours per participant. This, of course, may vary based on the data analysis and point of saturation. It is anticipated that the total time span of the study will be completed within one year.

* * * Risks * * *

5. Risks (Input N/A if not applicable)

US Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) Regulations define a subject at risk as follows: "...any individual who may be exposed to the possibility of injury, including physical, psychological, or social injury, as a consequence of participation as a subject in any research, development, or related activity which departs from the application of those accepted methods necessary to meet his needs, or which increases the ordinary risks of daily life, including the recognized risks inherent in a chosen occupation or field of service."

a)

For the following categories, include an estimate of the potential risk. Input N/A if not applicable.

Physical well-being.

NA

Psychological well-being.

NA

Political well-being.

NA

Economic well-being.

NA

Social well-being.

NA

b) In case of overseas research, describe qualifications/preparations that enable you to evaluate cultural appropriateness and estimate/minimize risks to subjects.

NA

c) Discuss plans for ensuring necessary medical or professional intervention in the event of a distressed subject. The study has no inherent risks for the participants, however, if an emergency situation was to occur, the researcher would call 911.

d) If audio/video taping will be used, state if it could increase potential risk to subject's confidentiality. Audio taping will be utilized, however the participants will choose an alias at the very beginning of the study. Therefore, the tapes will only contain their alias names. The link that identifies their alias to their actual name will be placed in a separate lock box from the audio tapes and other research records.

* * * Benefits, Procedures to Maintain Confidentiality * * *

6. Benefits

a) Describe the potential benefit(s) to be gained by the subjects or how the results of the study may benefit future subjects. Indicate if there is no direct benefit to the participants. There are no anticipated benefits.

7. Procedures to Maintain Confidentiality

a) Describe the procedures in place that will protect the privacy of the subjects and maintain the confidentiality of the data. If a linked list is used, explain when the linked list will be destroyed. Provide a sample of the code that will be used, if applicable.

All participants will receive a consent form approved by the CSU IRB to be signed before data collection begins. At the beginning of the study, the participants will be able to choose their alias that will be used for the remainder of the data collection period (as well as audio recordings) and data analysis. A list that links their alias with their identity will be kept in a separate lock box from all other research records and recordings. Due to the potential cumulative nature of the study, related data will be destroyed after ten years.

b) If information derived from the study will be provided to the subject's personal physician, a government agency, or any other person or group, describe to whom the information will be given and the nature of the information.

NA

c) Specify where and under what conditions study data will be kept, how samples will be labeled, who has access to the data, and what will be available and to whom. Federal Regulations require that study data and consent documents be kept for a minimum of three (3) years after the completion of the study by the PI. For longitudinal projects, the PI may be required to keep the data and documents for a longer time period. The researcher will keep all research records/data in her home in a lock box. A separate lock box will be used for the list containing the link between the aliases and identity, as well as consent forms as a way to ensure confidentiality. Ownership of the data will be confined to the researcher and my faculty chair, and the data will not be shared with anyone who is not part of this study. The ideal time period to keep data is between five to ten years. Due to the potential cumulative nature of the study, related data will be destroyed after ten years.

PER PI: Once the data collection and analysis have been completed, the data will be securely stored at Colorado State University by the Principal Investigator (Dr. Susan Lynham).

* * * Potential Conflict of Interest * * *

8. Potential Conflict of Interest

Although you have already submitted CSU's official Conflict of Interest form (COI/COC) to the University, it is the IRB's responsibility to ensure that conflicting interests related to submitted

protocols do not adversely affect the protection of participants or the credibility of the human research protection program at CSU.

Please answer questions a-d below. Please note that if you indicate that you have a potential conflict of interest in relation to this protocol, your CSU COI/COC Reporting Form must reflect this potential conflict.

Link to CSU's Conflict of Interest policy: <http://www.provost.colostate.edu/print/coirev.pdf>.

a) N In connection with this protocol, do you or any of the protocol investigators or their immediate family members (i.e., spouse and legal dependents, as determined by the IRS) have a potential conflict of interest?

b) N/A If you do have a potential conflict of interest, is this reported in your current COI/COC?

c) N/A If you do have a potential conflict of interest, is there a management plan in place to manage this potential conflict?

d) N/A If you do have a potential conflict of interest, is this potential conflict of interest included in your consent document (as required in the Management Plan)?

If you have reported a possible conflict of interest, the IRB will forward the title of this protocol to your Research

Associate Dean to complete your COI file.

For more information on CSU's policy on Conflict of Interest, please see the Colorado State University

Academic Faculty and Administrative Professional Manual Sections D.7.6 & D.7.7:

<http://www.facultycouncil.colostate.edu/files/manual/sectiond.htm#D.7.6>.

Link to CSU's Conflict of Interest policy: <http://www.provost.colostate.edu/print/coirev.pdf> .

* * * Informed Consent * * *

9. Informed Consent See sample consent forms at

<http://web.research.colostate.edu/ricro/hrc/forms.aspx>

NOTE: In order to complete this protocol, you must upload either a Consent Form or an Alteration of

Consent Form (i.e., Cover Letter or Verbal Script) OR (if neither of those apply to your project) you must

Consent Form (i.e., Cover Letter or Verbal Script) OR (if neither of those apply to your project) you must complete the Waiver of consent information.

In the space below, provide consent process background information, for each Consent Form, Alteration of Consent Form (i.e., Cover Letter or Verbal Script), or Waiver of consent. You will not be able to submit this protocol without completing this information.

Informed Consent

Title Consent.final.w.date

Consent Information Type Consent

Consent Form Template X Attachment Dickson. Consent to Participate in a Research

Study.final.w.date.docx

Who is obtaining consent? The person obtaining consent must be knowledgeable about the study and authorized by the PI to consent human subjects.

How is consent being obtained?

What steps are you taking to determine that potential subjects are competent to participate in the decision making process?

*** Assent Background ***

10. Assent Background

All minors must provide an affirmative consent to participate by signing a simplified assent form, unless the

Investigator(s) provides evidence to the IRB that the minor subjects are not capable of assenting because of

age, maturity, psychological state, or other factors.

See sample assent/consent forms at <http://web.research.colostate.edu/ricro/hrc/forms.aspx>

If applicable, provide assent process background information for each Assent Form, Alteration of Assent

Form (i.e., Cover Letter or Verbal Script), or Waiver.

Assent Background

*** Attachments ***

11. Attachments

Attach relevant documents here. These could include: Collaborating Investigator's IRB approval and approved documents; Conflict of Interest information; Debriefing Script; Grant/Sub-contract; HIPAA Authorization or Waiver Form from HIPAA-covered entity; Interview/Focus Group Questions; Investigator's Brochure; Letters of Agreement/Cooperation from organizations who will help with recruitment; Methodology section of associated Thesis or Dissertation project; Questionnaires; Radiation Control Office approval material; Recruitment Material (e.g., flyers, email text, verbal scripts); Sponsor 's Protocol; Surveys; Other files associated with protocol (can upload most standard file formats: xls, pdf, jpg, tif, etc.) Please be sure to attach all documents associated with your protocol. Failure to attach the files associated with the protocol may result in this protocol being returned to you for completion prior to being reviewed.

Students: Be sure to attach the Methods Section of your thesis or dissertation proposal. All PIs: If this protocol is associated with a grant proposal, please remember to attach your grant.

To update or revise any attachments, please delete the existing attachment and upload the revised document to replace it.

Document Type Methodology Section of Thesis or Dissertation

Attachment DICKSON FINAL PROPOSALS 041513

Document Name DICKSON FINAL PROPOSALS 041513

Document Type Interview/Focus Group Questions

Attachment Draft Interview Questions

Document Name Draft Interview Questions

Document Type Email Correspondence

Attachment Email To Participants.rev

Document Name Email To Participants.rev

*** Obligations ***

Obligations (Researcher's Responsibilities)

The Principal Investigator is ultimately responsible for the conduct of the project. Obligations of the Principal Investigator are:

Conduct the research involving human subjects as presented in the protocol, including modifications, as approved by the Department and Institutional Review Board. Changes in any

aspect of the study (for example project design, procedures, consent forms, advertising materials, additional key personnel or subject population) will be submitted to the IRB for approval before instituting the changes (PI will submit the "Amendment/Revision" form);

Provide all subjects a copy of the signed consent form, if applicable. Investigators are required to retain signed consent documents for three (3) years after close of the study;

Maintain an approved status for Human Subjects Protection training. Training must be updated every three (3) years (Contact RICRO to check your current approval/renewal dates). For more information: Human Subjects

Training Completed?

Submit either the "Protocol Deviation Form" or the "Report Form" to report protocol Deviations/Violations, Unanticipated Problems and Adverse Events that occur in the course of the protocol. Any of these events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible, but not later than five (5) working days; submit the "Continuing Review" Form in order to maintain active status of the approved protocol. The form must be submitted annually at least four (4) weeks prior to expiration, five (5) weeks for protocols that require full review. If the protocol is not renewed before expiration, all activities must cease until the protocol has been reviewed; Notify the IRB that the study is complete by submitting the "Final Report" form.

X The Principal Investigator has read and agrees to abide by the above obligations.

* * * Event History * * *

Event History

Date Status View Attachments Letters

04/24/2013 NEW FORM CREATED

05/31/2013 NEW FORM SUBMITTED Y

06/03/2013 NEW FORM PANEL

ASSIGNED

06/03/2013 NEW FORM REVIEWER(S)

ASSIGNED

06/17/2013 NEW FORM REVIEWER(S)

ASSIGNED

06/25/2013 NEW FORM APPROVED Y Y

09/23/2013 AMENDMENT 1 FORM

CREATED

10/04/2013 AMENDMENT 1 FORM

SUBMITTED

Y

10/06/2013 AMENDMENT 1 FORM

APPROVED

Y Y

05/04/2014 CONTINUING REVIEW 1

FORM CREATED

05/04/2014 CONTINUING REVIEW 1

FORM SUBMITTED

Y

05/06/2014 CONTINUING REVIEW 1

FORM REVIEWER(S)

ASSIGNED
05/19/2014 CONTINUING REVIEW 1
FORM MOVED
05/19/2014 CONTINUING REVIEW 1
FORM APPROVED
Y Y