CROSS-GENERATIONAL COLLABORATION IN THE WORKPLACE: 
A STUDY OF MILLENNIAL GENERATION COLLABORATION PREFERENCES IN A 
GOVERNMENT AGENCY 

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Abstract

The collaboration style of the Millennial generation is shaped by their interactions and experiences, which influences the way they prefer to collaborate in professional interactions. This interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) study identified, through a focus on individual interviews, the collaboration preferences of the Millennial generation in their professional relationships. To better understand the experiences that shape the Millennial generation’s interactions with coworkers, this research study focuses specifically on answering the research question: How do Millennials prefer to collaborate in the workplace?

Two key tenets of Karl Mannheim’s (1927) Theory of Generations is the theoretical framework for this research study. Mannheim’s theory focuses on how external factors and experiences can shape the collective consciousness of a generation. The first and third tenets of Mannheim’s theory are pillars of this study and provide a strong structure to develop how to conduct a research study with Millennials to gain an understanding of how their experiences shape their collaboration preferences. The first tenet outlines the specific characteristics of generations in society and argues that generations are not concrete groups formed solely through demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, or class. The third tenet suggests that fresh contacts, or individual and personally meaningful interactions with individuals, shape generational consciousness. The core of this study is on understanding how external factors shape the experiences of generations and subsequently impact their collaboration.

The data gathered identified themes of this research study that resulted in three major findings related to how the Millennial generation prefers to collaborate in the workplace. The first finding is that the Millennial generation has an innate ability to adjust to the workplace to address conflict and create successful collaborative results with their colleagues. The second
finding is that the Millennial generation values innovation in collaborative work with colleagues. The third finding is that the most important aspect of any collaborative experience is setting clear roles and expectations at the outset of a project. These findings may influence how organizations shape processes to ensure effective cross-generational collaboration.

*Keywords:* millennials, cross-generational collaboration, collaboration, generations, government, technology
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Resilience and success are the result of time, love, and patience. Always.
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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The purpose of this Interpretive Phenomenological study is to understand how the experiences of the Millennial generation shape their collaboration preferences in professional interactions. This study of Millennial collaboration preferences in professional interactions will be generally be informed by how they communicate as well as their interactions in professional relationships. The knowledge generated from this study is expected to inform an understanding of how Millennials prefer to collaborate in their professional relationships.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to identify the collaboration preferences of Millennials in their professional relationships by understanding their experiences. The identification of these preferences may allow a unique understanding and perception of how to successfully interact with the Millennial generation for their success as well as the future success of organizations.

Our personal experiences shape the way we interact with others in our personal and professional lives. The reach of technology as a tool for communicating and connecting with others may shape how people view, understand, interact, and subsequently shape the world around them. The introduction of technology influences that way that Millennials interact with the world. Interpersonal interactions are different from past generations, and as a result, technology shapes their understanding and approach to professionalism and leadership in the workplace.

Several authors (Carter, 2015; Jirasevijinda, Yusuf, & Embi, 2018; Miraglia, 2014; Presseau, 2013; and Wright & Abell, 2011) have previously researched the area of how interactions through technology shape communication preferences in different social interactions. Carter’s (2015) research study uses an Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
(IPA) qualitative research method to capture participant experiences and perceptions of communication through Facebook for married and previously married men and women. Through his research, Carter explores how communication preferences shaped through Facebook affect the marital relationship in positive and negative ways.

Jirasevijinda et al. (2018) explores the lessons learned about how to work with the Millennial generation based on their experience working in the medical field training new doctors. The researchers find that collaboration is a fundamental key to success in working with a newer generation like Millennials. The article acknowledges that Millennial’s perceptions are shaped by their experiences with technology and suggests that this contributes to a mismatch in collaboration style between Millennials and older generations. Jirasevijinda et al. (2018) even share the example of the Millennial generation’s refusal to carry medical pagers because the medical students find the “pagers clunky, antiquated devices that are difficult to use” (p. 83).

To better collaborate and work with Millennial medical students, the author suggests three approaches that they identified as helpful in their workplace that recognize the characteristics of Millennials identified by the author as strengths instead of weaknesses. The three approaches are to focus on including Millennials in the workplace by acknowledging their opinions instead of writing them off as a generational lens on the situation at hand, leverage social consciousness to spark the passion and purpose that is synonymous with the Millennial generation, and incorporate technology thoughtfully by being open to the use of new technology and tools in situations they typically are not part of such as classrooms. Overall the author takes an empathetic and self-aware approach to understand the Millennial generation medical students they are interacting with to adjust their communication approach accordingly. Through this exercise, the author comes to the conclusion that “Older folks, including me, need to realize that
we must change to maximize our interactions across generations. The first step is acknowledging the strengths of others, and the second is leveraging those positives to reach common goals that benefit all” (Jirasevijinda et al., 2018, p. 85).

Presseau (2013) expands on our understanding of Millennials, collaboration, and technology in the workplace. Presseau (2013) explores the experiences of Millennial employees as they become socialized in a new organization. To fully understand the Millennial experience, the author found that “for Millennial participants of the study encounters and interactions with technology were an essential constituent of the individual’s lived experience of organizational socialization” (Presseau, 2013, p. ii).

Wright and Abell (2011) also found that technology influenced the communication style of the Millennial generation in the nursing workforce. The use of YouTube provides an opportunity for the Millennial generation to develop, share, and collaborate on ideas. The fluidity of technology and communication for Millennials indicates a deeper need to understand how to leverage social media and technology in how we effectively communicate with the Millennial generation.

Miraglia (2014) explores the phenomenon of instant connection created through Facebook and its impact on how the collaboration preferences and expectations of women between 30-44 years of age, in particular, are affected by this phenomenon. Through their research Miraglia (2014) connects the use of Facebook as a tool for communication to levels of individual happiness in research study participants. The influential ability of social media to shape communication is a phenomenon that each generation experiences and reacts to differently. Research on how technology specifically impacts Millennial generation
communication may help to expand this field of research and the ongoing understanding of how technology influences how people communicate in real-world relationships.

**Significance of the Research Question**

The goal of this research study is to provide context on the way Millennials prefer to collaborate in their professional relationships based on their personal preferences. As a new generation shaped by technology and innovation, Millennials face stereotypes and inequities (Presseau, 2013) in the workplace that stem from the lack of understanding and empathy of an older generation of managers. Identifying the true impact of technology on how Millennials develop their sense of the world, and how it shapes communication preferences in the workplace can provide the tools to leverage the promise, expertise, and innovation of the Millennial generation. The findings of this research may lay the foundation for stronger collaboration in organizations, a better understood and more productive Millennial workforce, and an understanding of how we can improve interactions with the younger generations that come after Millennials and may inevitably face the same challenges of assimilation into the professional workplace.

The immersion of technology in everyday life is a formative factor (Carter, 2015; Miraglia, 2014) in how social and communication skills manifest on a personal and professional level. Personal experiences can allow people to reflect through the view of hypothetical, and in some instances, real-world examples. Interactions through technology can be the strongest teacher (Cecere, 2018) in developing leadership skills and abilities. People can form a bond with the connections they form in the digital world and in the stories that they feel represent part of who they are as individuals. That connection strengthens the internalization of the stories we learn through technological networks and subsequent lessons learned to form our views and
preferences. It is important to view technology as a teacher for understanding the communication preferences of Millennials because the Millennial generation is more engaged in newer media (Kaifi, Nafei, Khanfar, & Kaifi, 2012). This newer media can range from the use of social media sites like Facebook to observe and engage in dialogue on everything from trending news stories to TV shows. The level of comfort and consistent flow of information provided by technology to the Millennial generation creates personal connections for the generation (Cecere, 2018) and indicates that a focus on understanding how technology shapes Millennial preferences may provide valuable information and guidance for effective professional interactions of Millennials.

The workforce is currently in flux and this change brings generational communication issues that are not consistently being successfully addressed by organizations (Gallup, 2016). A cross-generational workplace includes older generations, such as Baby Boomers and Generation X, which can at times group younger employees into a category widely labeled as Millennials. Over time the label of Millennial has become synonymous with a negative perception of how this generation works, fits into the workplace culture, and with an unrealistic expectation of career progression (Jirasevijinda, 2018). The inability of other generations to truly understand and embrace the working style of this younger generation on an individual level instead of as a statistic in a preconceived category may negatively impact organizations in the long run (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2011). Further, this categorist mentality is an ineffective approach to leadership on the part of the organization (Jirasevijinda, 2018). The responsibility of ensuring that an organization achieves its goals relies on the ability to understand how to communicate effectively with an employee, regardless of age, on an individual level (Jirasevijinda, 2018). The longer other generations in the workplace continue with a linear approach to communication and management of the Millennial workforce, the harder it may be for them to catch up with the next
generation of employees who were born and grew up with access to the Internet and the
birthright of expediency (Gallup, 2017).

The approach of an organization in acknowledging and embracing generational
differences dictates an employee’s success regardless of their age or the attributed societal
preconceived conceptions (Jirasevijinda, 2018). Other generations in the workplace need to
interact with Millennials in the workplace with the intention of understanding instead of
criticizing the generational group (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Every generation possesses
unique characteristics that are viewed as an asset or liability in the workplace depending on the
approach. Understanding the communication preferences shaped by technology can offer a
vehicle for other generations of leadership to more effectively interact with Millennials in their
workforce. These lessons can arise from our ability to identify best practices from the
experiences, interactions, and stories of the Millennial generation.

In many work environments, there is a generational divide between the newly hired
Millennial generation and other employees that compromise the workforce responsible for
managing these employees (Gallup, 2017). Technology provides a medium for which these
leaders may be able to better connect and relate to the Millennial generation. An understanding
of how Millennial preferences can offer lessons for an older generation of leadership to more
effectively motivate and manage Millennials in their workforce, which may be able to create a
more positive work environment. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the best ways
to collaborate with Millennials based on their preferences.

In 2015 the generation group known as Millennials became the majority of the workforce
in the United States and made up 35 percent of the workforce overtaking “Generation Xers”
(Fry, 2015). The rise in the Millennial workforce is expected to continue to increase and reach 50
percent of the workforce by 2020 (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2011). This premature change in the tide of the workforce indicates a larger need for a shift in how generations are managed to ensure organizational success. A steady stream of research (Murphy, 2010; Simons, 2010, PriceWaterhouseCooper, 2011; Thompson, 2012; Gallup, 2016; and Gallup, 2017) informs the idea of Millennial management and motivation as part of an organizational workforce.

Given the impact of Millennials on the workforce, the study of the group has increased with time. However, additional research is needed to understand better how to identify the collaboration approaches of Millennials, not as a group, but as individuals. Gallup’s (2016) report on Millennials found that traditional managers learn and practice an approach to leadership, management, and motivation that is wide-reaching and not individual. The study found that this approach is not successful with a generation of Millennials that value individuality, creativity, and uniqueness in all aspects of their lives, including work. Traditional managers need tools to understand how to move from a system of inclusivity to exclusivity in motivation and management style.

This research study of Millennials may inform an audience of managers and coworkers in organizations that work with Millennials. This study of the collaboration preferences of Millennials may help to improve and inform the future success of organizations. Through this organizations may be able to gain an understanding of the value of individuality for the Millennial generation as supported by the culture that shapes their view of the world and form perceptions, values, and working styles in adulthood. Understanding the key influencers of Millennials directly impacts how they are understood and consequently managed in the workplace (Young & Hinesly, 2012). Social media and the continued connection the Millennial generation has with it may provide a framework for managers to understand how to collaborate
and interact with the Millennial generation that now makes up the majority of the American workforce.

**Research Problem and Research Question**

The area of Millennial research is increasingly becoming more popular, but additional research is needed to understand better how to identify the collaboration preferences of Millennials. An individual approach to understanding the experiences of Millennials is not always used when working with the generational group, which can offend the values of individuality and uniqueness that are important for Millennials (Gallup, 2016). To address the gap of Millennial views on their preferences in collaboration the research questions addressed in this study:

1. How do Millennials prefer to collaborate in the workplace?

The use of this research question allows this study to specifically give a voice to the experiences and subsequent preferences of Millennials. The relationships we develop and share as human beings shape the value we place on communication. If those relationships are heavily reliant on technology for connection and definition the experience of building relationships may translate to real-world interactions in our professional lives as well.

**Definition of Key Terminology**

**Baby Boomer**- A generational group that is formed by common generation-defining experiences that typically took place between 1946 - 1964.

**Collaboration** - the action of working with someone to produce or create something.

**Communication** – The process of transferring and understanding views or information.
**Cross-generational communication** – The process of transferring and understanding views or information between individuals from different generational groups.

**Generation** – A sociological phenomenon in which the members of a group are connected by more than just the common characteristics of age – they are connected by shared experiences that define them.

**Generation X** – A generational group that is formed by common generation-defining experiences that typically took place between 1965 - 1979.

**Generational Cusp** – A person who is born within 3-5 years of the beginning or end of a generation and embodies a mix of characteristics and experiences of the generations that occur close to their birth year.

**Millennial** – A generational group that is formed by common generation-defining experiences that typically took place between the mid-1980s and early 2000s.

**Social Media** – A form of electronic communication that allows users to exchange information and communicate through websites and applications.

**Theory of Generations** – Theory of understanding how generations are formed developed by Karl Mannheim that suggests that people are grouped into generations not by age, but by common formative experiences (Karl Mannheim, 1927).

**Theoretical Framework**

The focus of this research study is to explore how personal experiences shape how the Millennial generation prefers to collaborate in the workplace. This study will focus solely on gathering feedback from members of the Millennial generation on how their experiences and
perceptions shape their preferences as they join, grow, and develop in the professional workforce. This study expands on the current generational shift in the workplace that has made the Millennial generation the majority of the workforce. The shift towards a majority Millennial workforce brings to the forefront issues of generational management, collaboration, and development.

Each generation is shaped by the predominant experiences of their time (Mannheim, 1927), which ultimately shapes how an individual functions in the workplace and is motivated on a professional and personal level. On a micro level, individuals who are a part of the Millennial generation may provide tools for organizations on how to collaborate with them in the workplace. This personal benefit to Millennials may improve the likelihood that they are understood in their organizations, managed accordingly, and flourish professionally. On a macro level, a deeper understanding of the differences in collaboration across generations, and specifically the Millennial generation, is a crucial tool for organizations as they begin to explore how they can succeed in a new generational landscape in the workplace.

**Theory of Generations.** Karl Mannheim’s theory of generations is used as the theoretical framework for this research study. Mannheim’s theory is also known as the sociology of generations because of its focus on how external factors and experiences can shape the collective consciousness of a generation. Mannheim’s theory of generations was presented in the 1927 essay “The Problem of Generations,” which explored the idea of generations through a social development and consciousness lens.

Mannheim is widely known as the founder of the sociology of knowledge. He defined the study of the sociology of knowledge as “the relationship between human thought and the conditions of existence in general” (Ryan, 2005, p. 470). His interest in phenomenology, the
focus of understanding consciousness and the impact of direct experiences on it, as a part of his focus on the sociology of knowledge, extended to the development of his theory of generations.

The theory of generations rests on three main tenets that define generations from the sociological perspective and provide a lens into understanding how social experiences impact the development of viewpoints. The first tenet outlines the specific characteristics of generations in society as well as the difference between how concrete social groups should be considered in the theory. The second tenet explores how class and location impact the development of a generation. Finally, the third tenet examines how fresh contacts drive the development of generational consciousness. Together, these three tenets form the pillars of the theory of generations that shape the development of this research study.

The first tenet suggests that generations are not concrete groups. Mannheim defines a concrete group or community group as a group of individuals who come together for a specific purpose and remain together through relationships built that are facilitated through physical proximity (Mannheim, 1927). Through this definition, he suggests that generations don’t exist as a community because of their far-reaching nature. This definition also serves to create a delineation between familial generations and class or societal generations. Mannheim’s theory of generations looks at the makeup of generations as more than just the demographic characteristics that bind a group together, such as age, gender, or class. The theory suggests that there are five defining characteristics of society because of the presence of generations:

1. New participants in the cultural process are emerging, whilst
2. Former participants in that process are continually disappearing;
3. Members of any one generation can participate only in a temporarily limited section of the historical process, and
4. It is therefore necessary continually to transmit the accumulated cultural heritage;
5. The transition from generation to generation is a continuous process (Mannheim, 1927, p. 292).

These characteristics provide context to understand Mannheim’s second tenet of how class and location impact the development of generational consciousness. The characteristics outlined expand our understanding of the generation and provide a framework for understanding how generations are formed, develop, and ultimately contribute to the next generational group. At the foundation of Mannheim’s theory is the belief that generations are not developed or constrained merely by spans of time. Instead, Mannheim argues that the flow and impact of social and cultural experiences and processes define generations. “The realization of hidden potentialities inherent in the generation location is governed by extra-biological factors, principally, as we have seen, by the prevailing tempo and impact of social change” (Mannheim, 1927, p. 310).

Class position and generation location provide a common thread for individuals who are a part of the same generation. Class position is the consideration of societal changes in economic and power structure. Generation location focuses on the biological factors that affect generation life span, including birth, aging, and death (Mannheim, 1927). The combination of class position and generational location is the foundation of generational consciousness. These two factors define generations and the impact of external factors on how their experience is shaped.
The third tenet expands on how generational consciousness is shaped through Mannheim’s concept of fresh contact. Fresh contact is the introduction of new pieces of culture into our experience. Each fresh contact can expand and reshape our breadth of experience and, by extension, our perceptions. The experience of fresh contact always results in a new perspective on a piece of culture that leads to a new way of thinking, adapting, and using the new knowledge gained (Mannheim, 1927). Fresh contacts force individuals into society and allow them to develop their own deeper individual perceptions and culture. When an individual is pushed into a new social group that group may be dictated by age as a definer of generation. The new social group individuals surround themselves with can impact how knowledge is formed and lead to a larger generational social consciousness.

Current Literature. Several scholars have used Mannheim’s theory of generations in their work to frame their research and subsequent understanding of findings. Through its use, Mannheim’s theory has gained supporters as well as critics.

The theory of generations has been used to explore the role of generation in specific situations as a framework for research. Day (2013) used Mannheim’s theory to explore how religion is understood and practiced across generations with the intention of understanding generational generalizations. Through her research, the author found that Mannheim’s perspective on how individual identity and experiences are often overlooked, as a symptom of generation was present in understanding the role of religion in generations.

The research question outlined for this study have become refined upon review of Mannheim’s theory of generations. The concepts of generation put forth in the theory allow consideration of the wider characteristics and impact of popular culture and social media on how generational identity is formed. The research question is focused solely on the area of interest
with regard to the Millennial perspective on collaboration in the workplace. The initial focus of this research question relied heavily on providing tools for the older generation of managers most likely to manage Millennials in the workplace. Through a review of Mannheim’s theory of generations, the focus of this study has shifted to focus on gathering Millennial feedback through the lens of Mannheim’s framework and how personal experiences shape personal preferences.

**Criticisms of the Theory**

The use of Mannheim’s theory adds strength to the development and analysis of the research study. However, the main limitation in the theory of generations is the defining characteristics of a generation that are outlined. Mannheim’s theory argues that generation should not be defined exclusively by biological factors such as birth, death, or aging. Instead, Mannheim argues that generations are defined by the social experiences that shape them.

This idea of how a generation should be defined varies from the typical year range associated with the Millennial generation in a large amount of academic literature. For the purpose of the research study, Mannheim’s view of a generation being defined by social experiences provides a strong framework for exploration of the impact of personal experiences on Millennial views, but may make it difficult to explore research findings in the context of the bulk of existing Millennial research because of the differing parameters used.

There are also several areas of the theory that raise questions about its structure, ideas, and realistic application to understanding generations. A prominent concern about Mannheim’s theory is the very clear assertion in the theory that generations are not constrained by timeframes, while also presenting an argument that generational change happens in a continuous cycle. (Agati, 2012). Without set timeframes, it is not truly possible to identify a continuous cycle of generational changes.
The other concern with regard to Mannheim’s theory is the lack of definition of knowledge in the sociology of knowledge. On a macro level in Mannheim’s work, the sociology of knowledge is the overarching guidance for the theory of generations. However, Mannheim does not explicitly define what knowledge means in the context of his work (Ryan, 2005). It could be argued or assumed that knowledge is a vague way of describing the experiences and perceptions gained through societal interactions, but it is not clearly stated.

Considering these criticisms Mannheim’s theory still provides the framework necessary for developing this research study. The concern of defining generational change as a continuous cycle can be considered as a structure for understanding the development process and defining characteristics of generations to date. This cyclical understanding frames the research study for Millennial participants to consider their interactions with those from other generations. In addition, the lack of definition of knowledge in the sociology of knowledge provides a wide lens for the analysis of findings from research conducted. Mannheim’s inability to specify his definition of key areas of the theory of generations can be seen as a negative characteristic of the theory, but it also provides a benefit for conducting a research study on Millennials in a field of generational research that is constantly changing and not sufficiently understood to date.

**Rationale for Use of the Theory**

The exploration of Mannheim’s theory of generations provides a unique lens to examine the research through. Although Mannheim’s theory supports the idea that generations are not the stereotypical groups we generalize with today. The focus on Millennials through the lens of Mannheim’s theory of generations is necessary to examine the generational cohort without the sociological stigma associated with Millennials. This allows for a deeper understanding of the generational cohort as defined by their experiences and subsequent preferences. For this reason,
the focus of this study is to understand the collaboration preferences of Millennials and how personal experiences shape their views and professional relationships. To do this, the research study will be used to identify best practices based on an understanding of Millennial preferences that can be used to collaborate with the Millennial generation in the workplace effectively. Using Mannheim’s theory as a framework, the intended research study is focused on answering the research questions outlined, feasible, and manageable. The best approach for gathering feedback for this study has also been considered using Mannheim’s theory as a guide to using the best approach based on the target generation.

Most of the tenets of Mannheim’s theory of generations are necessary to develop the research study. The core of the research study is on understanding how external factors, shape the personal experiences and preferences of generations. The first and third tenets of Mannheim’s theory are pillars of this study and provide a strong structure to develop how to conduct research with Millennials to gain an understanding of their motivation and management preferences in connection with their experiences with collaboration.

As Mannheim’s tenet suggests, generations are not limited to demographics such as age but shaped by their personal experiences and interactions with society, such as those experienced through technology and workplace interactions. Interactions with others (fresh contacts) are shaped by external factors like news, culture, and other information gathered through interactions. Individual connections, in turn, shape the way that Millennials approach communication and collaboration with other individuals in the workplace. The pillars of the theory of generations provide a strong structure to develop how to conduct research with Millennials to gain an understanding of their motivation and management preferences connected to their experiences.
**Theory Application to the Study**

Mannheim’s theory of generations provides a solid framework for this research study. The use of two of Mannheim’s three tenets guide the development and implementation of this study. The first tenet suggests that generations are not concrete groups formed solely by age. The third tenet in Mannheim’s theory argues that generational consciousness is formed through fresh contacts with others. The use of each tenet provides a unique approach for application to this study.

The first tenet argues that generations are not concrete groups, but are instead formed by common experiences. Using this concept of generation allows for a specific approach in the categorization of study participants. To identify the Millennial generation using this tenet cannot include the use of age. Therefore, specific shared experiences that have shaped the perspectives of individuals to the point that they identify with the group branded as Millennials. To identify individuals for interviews using IPA a survey will be used to determine if the participant identifies as a Millennial based on their experiences.

The third tenet focuses on the formation of generational consciousness through fresh contacts. Interactions through technology and in-person with individuals can serve as fresh contacts for Millennials. These fresh contacts can shape the preferences of collaboration for Millennials. For this reason, the third tenet will be used to guide the development of individual interview questions for those survey participants that identify as Millennials through shared experiences that form the Millennial generational consciousness.

The focus of this study is on how external experiences shape internal preferences and, by extension, communication. The use of IPA in the exploration of this topic provides a strategic
approach for truly understanding the individual viewpoint. According to Smith et al. (2012) the use of IPA is an effective approach if the study values the collection of multiple, deeply analytical perspectives from a small sample. This approach coupled with the use of the tenets of Mannheim’s theory of generations will provide an understanding of how personal experiences influence the development of a Millennial’s individual characteristics.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this study is to understand how experiences shape the collaboration preferences of Millennials in professional interactions. There is a great need for exploration in this area to give a voice to the lived experiences of Millennials as individuals with unique values and opinions. Millennials are often categorically stereotyped by older generations in the workplace out of ease and therefore struggle to achieve effective cross-generational collaboration. The use of Mannheim’s theory of generations provides a framework for identifying Millennials by their common experiences that shape their shared generational consciousness. Understanding the Millennial generation requires a framework for conducting and analyzing research, a willingness to understand the individual personal experiences of the generation, and the work that exists on the topic to date. The combination of these areas can be used as a guide for researchers to create more depth in our understanding of the Millennial experience.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The changing workforce requires an understanding and value for the Millennial generation. Managers struggle to move past the negative stereotypes of narcissism, laziness, and entitlement that are typically associated with Millennials. The landscape of generations in the workplace has shifted sooner than anticipated and Millennials now make up a majority of the workforce in the United States, which begs the question: How can older generations tap into the experiences of Millennials to effectively collaborate with them to ensure organizational success? The focus of this research is to understand the preferences of the Millennial generation when collaborating in the workplace. Millennials have a great deal of value to add to professional organizations, but managers need to reevaluate their tools, skills, and approach to manage Millennials successfully.

The issue of Millennials in the workplace is currently at the forefront of organizational development. Reputable research organizations release new reports frequently with insight into the lives of Millennials to assist organizations with the attraction, engagement, and retention of a workforce that is notorious for a lack of loyalty and seeking bigger and better opportunities. This shift in values and focus on self-worth by Millennials is a new situation for most organizations.

This literature review dissects the definition and stereotypes of the Millennial generation, their communication style, and the use of technology in interacting professionally with Millennials. This review focuses on three key areas of research stemming from our current understanding of the Millennial generation through research. First, a review of the varying definitions of Millennials that have been identified through generational research, including the role of stereotypes and personal values will be explored. Second, the considerations in the Millennial communication style and how it can be harnessed as an asset for organizational
culture and growth are reviewed. Third, an examination of the specific connections and lessons from the social experiences of popular culture that can improve communication with Millennials will take place. This includes the role of storytelling and narratives in forging personal connections and stronger communication with Millennials. Finally, a summation of the review of the literature and outline the implications of the research will have on this research study is provided.

This literature review explores the research that currently comprises a cross-section of the field of Millennial research and allows for a clearer understanding of the field. This understanding of the current field of research and subsequent summary provides a strong foundation to more clearly determine how future research on the area of Millennial communication preferences can be structured to add value to the field and help to move the area forward.

**Defining, Developing, and Leading Generations**

Organizations change and adapt with the generations that make them function. Just as no individual is the same, the people that make up a generation are bound together by an overarching definition, but this does not guarantee that one approach to communication and working with them will be effective. For this reason, it is important for leaders and organizations to truly understand the employees that make their organization successful in developing and leading them. Frequently older generations in organizations who are in positions of leadership lean on the stereotypes of generations when they do not fully understand the values or preferences of an employee with a different background.

An increase in research and leadership skill development on leading organizations diverse in not only race and gender, but also age, is slowly changing the understanding and
approach to leadership. Through experience, organizations have learned that strength and success are born from a diverse workforce. However, the struggle for many organizations now is to understand their diverse workforce fully enough to recruit, motivate, and retain employees. This is particularly true of the management of the Millennial generation in the workplace. The gap between leadership and Millennials can be a struggle for managers and supervisors to navigate effectively.

**Defining Generations**

Researchers define the parameters of who is included in the Millennial generation in different ways. Generally, a generation is regarded as a group of individuals “born in the same time period and raised in a similar social and historical environment” (Murphy, Gibson, & Greenwood, 2010, p. 2). In the time that Millennials have been researched and written about several conflicting ideas about who they are and what they value have been presented (Deal, Altman & Rogelberg, 2010). The parameters of how specific generations are defined can vary slightly for Millennials but consistently overlap to indicate that Millennials are individuals born sometime in the twenty-year span of 1980-2000. The Millennial generation is comprised of individuals who value individuality, collaboration, influence, and work-life balance (Dols, Landrum, & Wieck, 2010).

Emeagwali (2011) focuses on the value of uniqueness to the Millennial generation and outlines the core traits of the Millennial generation that more clearly define their persona and potential impact. The core traits that define Millennials include special, sheltered, confident, team-oriented, conventional, pressured, and achieving. The trait of “special” refers to the self-worth instilled by parents of Millennials, which results in a foundational feeling of importance. The trait of “sheltered” describes the community of protection Millennials grew up in. The era of
public service announcements, drug-free advertisements, and child protection created a safe space for Millennial children to grow up in. The core trait of “confident” is linked to the optimistic and trusting view the generation has for the future. “Team-oriented” reflects a strong belief in the values of consensus and collaboration that form the foundation for the friendships and relationships of Millennials. “Conventional” refers to the desire for Millennials to establish a culture of rules, while also being flexible to change.

The focus on conventional values differs from how norms and rules were viewed and valued by previous generations. “Pressured” describes the value and importance Millennials place on meeting demands through ambition. Finally, “achieving” refers to the desire Millennials have for improved accountability and standards in everything from technology to education reform. These combined traits paint a picture of a Millennial who has experienced the nurturing benefits of childhood and translated that into their value system and approach to creating a better world by setting higher standards and thinking more strategically and creatively about how to achieve them.

This connection is also mirrored in the research of Gursoy, Maier, and Chi (2008) who explored generational differences and similarities in the hospitality industry and identified the values of different generations in the workforce with regard to authority, leadership, and professional development. The authors researched the motivations of the Baby Boomer generation, which is typically born around the years of 1960-1964, and Generation X, which is typically born between the years of 1965-1978, in addition to focusing on Millennials through a detailed qualitative focus group research approach. This research uncovered that the Baby Boomer generation respects authority and hierarchical structure, lives to work, and are patient, loyal and true believers in a system of promotions and rewards. In contrast Generation Xers tend
to rebel against authority, are focused on working to enjoy life outside of work, and highly value immediate recognition, praise, and promotion. The Millennial generation is a hybrid of both Baby Boomers and Generation X because they believe in collaboration and teamwork, value and trust centralized authority and structure, and function with a very optimistic view of what is capable.

The gap between Generation X and the Millennial generation is comprised of a group known as Generation Y, which are typically born around 1979. The understanding and definition of generations take place on a sliding scale of sorts because although there are differences there are also similarities that can be harnessed to ensure organizational effectiveness regardless of and organization’s employee make up. Generation Y is typically lumped in with Generation X because of proximity and the very clear differences in personal and professional approach that is usually connected to Millennials. Murphy, Gibson, and Greenwood (2010) explore the differences in the context of a multigenerational workplace to identify value patterns of managers and non-managers across generations. This research focus yields specific areas of similarities and differences that will guide cross-generational effectiveness in the workplace and lay the foundation for understanding generational values. The authors suggest that the findings of this research, such as the varying, but present importance of freedom, to all generations can improve communication and create a sustainable organization.

Salahuddin (2011) expands on our understanding of generational differences by outlining leadership characteristics admired by the Baby Boomer, Generation X, and nexter, which is also known as Millennial, generations. Across the board, each generation valued competence among all other leadership characteristics. Differences in leadership value arose in the characteristics of honesty, forward-looking, and loyalty. The differences in the value of these leadership skills are
closely tied with the values of each generation. The characteristic of being forward-looking was understandably more highly valued by Generation X and nexters because these are the generations that are thinking about the next steps in their careers.

The lower ranking of forward-looking by the veteran generation in the author’s study reflects the veteran's focus on retirement given their age and the shifting demographics of the workplace. Loyalty was also highly ranked by Generation X, which is closely tied with their value of loyalty presented in past research. These valued leadership characteristics provide a lens into how these older generations, who are typically in a position of power, could potentially see and value Millennial leadership skills. This context of generational preference is helpful information for current managers as well as Millennials who have professional growth ambitions in organizations led by these leaders.

**Generational Stereotypes**

The views of Millennials compiled by several researchers are in stark contrast with the stereotypes that surround the generation. Imagination is a key factor in a study conducted by Chen and King (2002) that assessed the connection between age and stereotypes in communication. The researchers asked young adult and adult subjects to use their imagination to describe the traits and their perception of a conversation with a 20-year-old woman and a 70-year-old woman. The researchers found that stereotypes, whether positive or negative, are connected with age and the corresponding life experience. Most importantly, the researcher scientifically confirmed the assumption that older generations harbor more positive stereotypes about their own generation and more negative stereotypes of younger generations. This finding supports the need for further research and guidance for older managers and leaders on how to
effectively manage free of stereotypes to effectively manage the person and their ability instead of a prescribed version of management based solely on age and personal bias.

Lyons and Kuron (2014) support this idea of valuing generational differences through their review of generational evidence and studies. The authors focus on the factors that influence generational differences in the workplace and how they can be viewed more positively and productively. Through their review, the authors argue that a shift in how we view generation needs to occur so that generation is seen “as a social force in organizations rather than as merely a demographic variable” (Lyons & Kuron, 2014, p. S139). In addition, the authors also highlight that generational differences exist in several factors that are important in an organization including “personality, work values, attitudes, career expectations and experiences, teamwork, and leadership” which can create fuel the stereotypes that surround generations. Overall through this review, the outdated understanding and approach to generational management and communication are made obvious. Generations lean heavily on personal bias and perceptions that may be fueled by some level of truth but are ultimately perpetuated by fear and an inability to rid management of a simple understanding of generational identity and the corresponding expectation of ability or characteristics.

There is always a bit of truth in stereotypes. Stereotypes become negative when they are the sole basis for the evaluation of an individual. Although we are all born into a specific social generation this label doesn’t define all aspects of our personality or ability. Research on specific generations can lead to varying levels of understanding that can provide insight on their own, but combined provides a more detailed picture of a generation and the factors that affect and influence them. Hill (2002) explores the values of college students that will make up the next wave of the workforce in an attempt to identify areas of strength and challenge that may be
carried into the workforce. Through this research, the author identifies insights about the
generation that creates a more detailed picture of who they are and what motivates them. These
insights outline the fact that the generation was raised to be less competitive, focus on effort
instead of output, passion is at the core of influence and ambition, and there is a high value on
defining the self in both a personal and professional capacity (Hill, 2002). These insights
provide a deeper understanding of the generation, how to motivate them, and where the
stereotypes do not align.

**Developing Generations**

Generational snapshots can provide an overarching understanding of how to engage and
motivate those individuals, but it should not be the only tool utilized by managers to develop the
leadership skills of younger generations. Career and organizational commitment is a
characteristic that varies by generation. Millennials are frequently stereotyped as a generation
with a lack of loyalty. However, research indicates that the commitment of any individual, and
specifically, Millennials are connected to the commitment of the organization to its employees.
“Two general factors which influence the strength of a person's attachment to an organization are
the rewards he has received from the organization and the experiences he has had to undergo to
receive them” (Grusky, 1966, p. 489).

Without organizational commitment, a trend in career mobility becomes apparent with
the Millennial generation. Career mobility refers specifically to the upward growth and
promotion of an individual. This mobility can occur within the employees’ same organization,
but for various reasons can also occur if the employee chooses to move to another organization.
There are several factors that can affect career mobility for Millennials. The basis for these
factors is formed by the individual values of Millennials and can include anything from the
ability to travel freely and frequently as part of the value for work-life balance to a desire for creativity, innovation, and passion in their work. This desire for flexibility is further supported by McDonald’s (2015) research on the travel patterns of Millennials. Increasingly, Millennials are opting for careers that allow them to be more flexible with their time, money, and experiences.

As organizations struggle to recruit and retain Millennials to their organizations it becomes more important to understand not only what Millennials value personally and professionally, but also their specific career expectations. In contrast with stereotypes that paint Millennials as lazy and entitled, the generation does have specific career expectations, goals, and desires for advancement that are not linked to entitlement, but hard work (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010).

Understanding the bias and stereotypes that frame our understanding of the Millennial generation in the workplace is a foundational piece of creating a work environment that accepts, celebrates, and encourages Millennials towards success free of judgment. Training and developing Millennials are the next step in retention for organizations. Training Millennials requires a flexible and different approach that is focused on the delivery of content while also taking into consideration the values, creativity, and preferences of the audience (Langan, 2012). Technology and communication and learning preference of the Millennial generation is also a consideration in how organizations should approach training and developing Millennials to succeed in the workplace. Millennials have a “deep understanding of, and appreciation for, technology and social connectedness” that requires a strategic approach to training and development (Roberts, Newman, & Schwartzstein, 2012). Roberts et al. (2012) outline twelve tips for training the Millennial generation that serves as a pointed guide for managers of
Millennials in organizations. The tips provided take into account the changing approach to learning Millennials have thrived in as they’ve completed their higher education degrees and developed their professional persona.

1. Educate yourself about the concept of generational differences
2. Recognize the environmental and cultural forces that affect the Millennial Learner
3. Understand how potential intergenerational tension may impact learning
4. Millennials need guidance and focus in their learning
5. Identify your teaching or life philosophy
6. Learn how to utilize current eLearning technologies
7. Recognize that Millennials value (and expect) aesthetically appealing educational presentations
8. Emphasize opportunities for additional help and support
9. Encourage modern forms of curiosity and exploration
10. Recognize the importance of team dynamics and encourage collaboration
11. Be fair and straightforward
12. Identify the limits of multi-tasking

Use of these techniques will improve the success of training and development initiatives geared towards Millennials, but it is most important for managers to focus on being open to and trying new methods of teaching that will promote fun, interaction, and dynamic collaboration in innovative and interesting ways (Roberts et al., 2012). Generational differences need to be addressed and generation-specific programs can help to address the communication, professional, and value differences that exist within organizations. However, generational differences may not warrant programs that are specifically created for different generations.
To determine if a training program should be developed, organizations must strategically weigh the costs against the benefit to maximize their return on investment.

**Leading an Intergenerational Workforce**

Leading employees in an organization is a complicated task that requires patience, dedication, and flexibility. Strong organizations are only as strong as their employees and strong employees are only as strong as their leaders. Leadership is the backbone of organizational effectiveness and plays a large role in developing and utilizing the talents of the Millennial generation to further the success of an organization. To effectively lead an intergenerational workforce that is becoming increasingly more Millennial-heavy, managers need a new approach and restructuring of their skill set to lead. “As Baby Boomers retire and Millennials enter and take over the workforce, it becomes imperative for managers to learn more about their job satisfaction and organizational commitment levels” (Kaifi, Nafei, Khanfar & Kaifi, 2012, p. 88). This focus on better understanding the Millennial audience, their motivations, and their commitment level is an individual process. Stereotypes are not a reliable approach to management. Managers must understand, develop, and lead Millennials like the dynamic and emerging leaders they are.

An understanding of behavior in the workplace is crucial to lead Millennials effectively. To do this effectively managers need a stronger understanding of the Millennial background and context to take into consideration and replace any stereotypes that may inform judgments and negatively affect the leadership of Millennials in the workplace (Thompson & Gregory, 2012). The ability of “organizations and managers who take context into consideration and place their
stereotype-based judgments aside will find greater success attracting, engaging, and retaining this new generation in the workforce” (Thompson & Gregory, 2012, p. 238).

Relationships in the workplace are also key to understanding and leading Millennials. Relationships and collaboration are highly valued by Millennials and these views translate to the workplace as well. For this reason, relationships at work are critical to Millennial satisfaction and retention. Relationships with coworkers are important, but the relationship a Millennial employee has with their immediate manager is an important factor in motivation, commitment, and retention for Millennials. Managers can leverage and lead their Millennial employees effectively if they have a strong and positive working relationship that includes transparency, competency, and genuine feedback for the Millennial’s development. Although the Millennial generation is known as “GenMe” and “the most high-maintenance workforce in the history of the world” these stereotypes are only negative if viewed with a closed mind (Twenge, 2010, p. 208). The focus of the Millennial generation on finding passion in their work and creating innovative solutions to difficult problems can be harnessed with the right leadership approach.

The leadership and management of people requires an individual approach. This is particularly true with the Millennial generation. Successful leaders are able to recognize, praise, and develop employee talents on an individual level that fit into one cohesive organizational culture that embraces intergenerational skills, but doesn’t value them above the organization’s culture (Yang & Guy, 2006). Although the various generations that make up an organization perceive differences on the surface there are similarities that exist, but must be tapped into (Gentry, Griggs, Deal, Mondore & Cox, 2011). Strong leadership of intergenerational workplaces are reliant on a manager’s ability to pull the skills and values of every employee to
the surface to create a stronger organization that connects through similarities and learns to thrive on differences.

**Summary**

This strand of literature demonstrates the need for Millennials to be consciously managed in organizations. The commonalities that form generations can frequently morph into narrow stereotypes that create barriers to fully pulling the potential of generational members out for the sake of innovation and growth. A deeper understanding of the value of individuality in professional relationships and management can greatly benefit organizations. Every generation is shaped by unique experiences just as the personal preferences of any person are shaped by their individual experiences. Finding strength in differences rather than leaning on stereotypes for managing professional relationships is the key to creating positive interactions with Millennials that can create stronger workplaces.

**Generational Communication**

Communication is what enables organizations to function and thrive. There are several considerations in what effective communication in any organization looks like in reality. However, the ultimate communication culture in an organization is dictated by the larger organizational culture. Organization leaders can be as welcoming or strict with communication expectations and approach as they want to, but consideration to the generation of employees being led should be strategically considered. As with all things pertaining to Millennials for an older generation of leaders, flexibility is key to allow the younger generation and organization to flourish.
Organizational Communication and Culture

Although communication skills and approaches can vary by generation the communication culture of the workplace must be dictated by the organization. The organizational culture should take into account the types of employees as well as communication preferences and abilities, but these factors shouldn’t be the only thing dictating how the organization functions. Every generation in the workplace has brought a unique set of qualities and values that have shaped the culture of communication and success in the organization. The communication style of Millennials is affected by a parentally involved upbringing that has created a strong sense of self-efficacy, confidence, and desire for input. These values of communication coupled with communication technology has shaped why, how, and when Millennials communicate (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010).

The creation of an organizational culture that hears, values, and weighs the communication style and approach of the Millennial generation is possible with an open mind from leadership. This openness to Millennial communication styles creates a mutual respect with Millennials that makes it easier for leaders to gain organizational culture buy-in from Millennials. “The key for coworkers from older generations—especially those in positions of formal and informal power in organizations—will be interacting with Millennials with a desire to understand, rather than with the aim of criticizing how Millennials are different. Trust and supportiveness between Millennials and coworkers will encourage them to become more involved, committed, and better performing in their organizations” (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010, p. 235).

Effective communication skills are directly linked to individual effectiveness as well as organizational effectiveness (Hartman & McCambridge, 2011). However, to be an effective
communicator it is necessary to understand your individual communication style as well as those that report to you. Communication requires flexibility to be effective. Hartman and McCambridge (2011) argue that the ability to use style-typing and style-flexing are crucial skills to lead and be led at any generational level within an organization. The effective use of these skills “require individuals to attend not only to their own preferred communication practices but also to those of the individuals with whom they are interacting, serving, and leading” (Hartman & McCambridge, 2011, p. 36).

The ability to style-type and style-flex requires an understanding of the four dominant communication styles that surface in organizations: analytical, driver, amiable, and expressive. These four types are categorized on a spectrum of low to high assertiveness and responsiveness as well as the corresponding pace and priority of each quadrant (see Appendix A). Analytical communicators have a low level of assertion and responsiveness, which makes their work pace slow and their priority tasks. Drivers are highly assertive, task-driven, and results-oriented. Drivers tend to be seen as pushy and domineering, which makes them less responsive to new ideas and viewpoints. In contrast, the amiable communicator is highly responsive, but not assertive, which makes them a conformist. The pace of an amiable communicator is slow and they prioritize relationships and people above all else. Finally, an expressive communicator is highly assertive and responsive. This type of communicator is best viewed as a personable extrovert. The pace of the expressive is fast and they prioritize people and relationships above all else. Although the communication styles may vary slightly by individual, these four categories can help managers to be more flexible and aware of the type of communicator they are working with regardless of generation. Understanding the type of communicator they are working with allows leaders to adjust accordingly for maximum efficiency.
Social Media and Professional Communication

Technology changes the way we communicate in our personal lives as well as in the workplace. Social media provides great value in connecting and expanding our network of friends, family, and colleagues. Social media and other instantaneous communication tools have shaped how Millennials participate in and value communication. The narcissistic tendencies that arise as a result of social media use can translate into communication challenges in the workplace. The presence of narcissism in Millennial professionals can create a barrier to professional relationship development, promotion, and effectiveness. “Narcissists are usually unable or unwilling to form connections that require emotional investments, such as face-to-face friendships, but still desire the social admiration and attention that a large number of friendships can offer” (Bergman, Fearrington, Davenport & Bergman, 2011, p. 710). Narcissism is a risk in communication with the Millennial generation, but can also be an asset because of the value Millennials place on relationships. The translation from an online connection to the face-to-face relationship development is a factor that organizational managers should account for in creating the organizational culture needed for success and effectiveness.

This value on online relationships is also evidenced through a study of Facebook conducted by Steinfeld, Ellison, and Lampe (2008), which explores the connection between Facebook usage and the development of social capital. While the connections developed on Facebook can help Millennials to build self-confidence and self-worth, the primarily online nature of that relationship development does not necessarily stunt the ability of Millennials to develop in-person connections (Valenzuela, Park & Kee, 2009). The effort exerted to maintain an online relationship can potentially be significantly less daunting than what is necessary to build in-person connections and working relationships. The skill of networking and relationship
development online is a valuable one in the changing technological landscape but must be
coupled with a Millennial’s ability to thrive in face-to-face communication and relationship
building to succeed in a professional organization.

Summary

This literature review has demonstrated the need for further study of how our
understanding and support of generational stereotypes influence communication with the
Millennial generation. A focus on understanding and translating the trends and experiences of
Millennials, particularly with social media, into an effective approach for managers of
Millennials is a gap that is not deeply addressed in current research and literature. Every
organization has its own needs of Millennial employees that should be a priority consideration in
the management, motivation, and professional development of these employees.

Using Popular Culture in Leadership and Development

Learning from popular culture is the strongest tool leaders have to motivate and manage
the Millennial generation in their organization effectively. Through an understanding of the
experiences that shape generations, we can gain an understanding of the attitudes and preferences
that shape how a generation grew up and function in the professional world (Simons, 2010).
Technology surrounds and influences all aspects of our daily lives from how we get our news in
the morning when we wake up to how we commute to work and communicate in our jobs to be
effective. The level of engagement of Millennials in newer media indicates that their
experiences, outlook, and expertise will eventually shape work processes (Kaifi, Nafei, Khanfar
Popular culture can provide a lens into how a generation functions, which can help leaders to better collaborate with Millennial employees (Roberts, Newman, & Schwartzstein, 2012). Cultural context is a key factor in shaping the characteristics, values, and even consumer preferences of any generation and specifically the Millennial generation. Although popular culture may not have the same effect on every Millennial the understanding that as a member of that generational cohort Millennials “are unified because they shared the same cultural experiences during their formative years, which in turn, results in similarity in their values, beliefs, preferences, motivations, and behaviors. Moreover, the early shaping of generational cohorts has been shown to be long-lasting, with shared characteristics remaining consistent throughout the lifespan” (Young & Hinesly, 2012, p. 146). Understanding where a Millennial came from and how they were shaped by their surroundings, even at a general level, is a strong tool for leaders.

Popular culture is not just comprised of popular movies or music. Popular culture comprised the social and economic atmosphere that shaped the understanding, outlook, and values of an individual. A medium used to share information that has shaped how the Millennial generation thinks about communication is the use of YouTube not only to share content but also collaboratively analyze that content through the use of comments (Wright & Abell, 2011). The use of a tool like YouTube to develop, share, and collaborate on ideas is a concept that can be carried into the workplace. Traditionally organizations ask for feedback or collaboration in staff meetings or through emails, but the ability to view and expand on the ideas of colleagues is lost or diminished in those mediums. This is especially true for a Millennial who grew up with the ability to collaborate so efficiently using YouTube. Organizations don’t have to adopt YouTube
as a collaboration tool but should learn from the principle of the platform: the equal opportunity
dissemination and creation of ideas.

The use of popular culture artifacts may shape the effectiveness of training and
development experiences. Leaders and managers must think strategically about their Millennial
audience in tailoring any training or development activity for effectiveness. Determining how to
use popular culture artifacts in training or development must be carefully considered by
determining how the artifact will be used and for what reason (Callahan & Rosser, 2007). The
first consideration is whether the artifact will be used in person or shared as a self-reflective
exercise. Second, the manager must decide whether the artifact is effective as a whole or as an
excerpt. Finally, the use of the artifact must be determined to be inductive to prompt Millennials
to make individual connections or deductive to specifically highlight a leadership lesson or skill.
These parameters can effectively utilize popular culture to promote leadership lessons and skills
necessary to communicate with, motivate, and manage Millennials effectively.

Storytelling shapes how we connect and internalize the lessons that fuel our future and
shape our own personal narrative. Popular culture has the ability to influence larger cultural
narratives and, by extension, our individual narratives (Callahan, Whitener & Sandlin, 2007).
“The stories found in popular culture help both individuals and collectives make sense of
environments and realities on a global, national, local, organizational and individual level”
(Callahan, Whitener & Sandlin, 2007, p. 3). The stories shaped through popular culture provide
lessons that influence how we view leadership and execute our own leadership and management
style. Through this lens, popular culture is the most powerful tool for professional growth,
leadership, and development that we have little to no control over.
Summary

This literature review has demonstrated the need for further study of the connection between popular culture and the motivation and management of the Millennial generation in the workplace. A focus on translating popular culture trends and experiences into an effective leadership approach for collaborating with Millennials is a gap that is not effectively addressed in current research and literature. Every organization has its own needs of Millennial employees that should be a priority consideration in the management, motivation, and professional development of these employees. By focusing on the needs of Millennial employees as well as the needs of organizational leaders can effectively develop high impact assets in creating positive organizational change.

Conclusion

This review outlined the vastly different views of Millennials, illustrates the value of Millennial professionals to organizations, and highlights the need for an approach to creating more effective ways of communication, development, and ultimately motivation of Millennials in organizations. The personal values of Millennials were explored to provide insight into how Millennials view their place in society, their work, and their overall value. The varying definitions and stereotypes of Millennials were reviewed to provide insight into the work that needs to be done by an older generation of managers to connect with and prepare Millennials to be productive employees for their organizations.

The research shows a promising approach to creating an impactful strategy for improving professional collaboration and interactions with Millennials. However, this topic area requires additional research. Future research should focus specifically on understanding the perspectives of members of the Millennials generation. An understanding of Millennial preferences for
professional collaboration will fill a gap in our understanding of how to better collaborate with the Millennial generation in the workplace.
Chapter 3: Research Design

In many work environments, there is a generational divide between the newly hired Millennial generation and the leaders responsible for managing these employees (Gallup, 2017). A better understanding of the collaboration preferences of Millennials can offer a vehicle for other generations of leadership to more effectively interact with and manage Millennials in the workforce and create a more positive workplace environment. Identifying successful practices through an understanding of collaboration preferences will allow an understanding of the unique perceptions of the Millennial generation about how they need to be managed and communicated with for their individual success as well as the future success of organizations. The design of this research study will focus on answering the question:

1. How do Millennials prefer to collaborate in the workplace?

Qualitative Research Approach

The aim of this study is to gain an understanding of Millennial collaboration preferences using a qualitative research approach. Through qualitative research, we are able to gain a deeper understanding of the nuances in an individual’s experience and motivation. The use of a combined qualitative and phenomenological approach provides a strong foundation for answering the research question guiding this study.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

The use of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) will provide an approach that guides the collection of data by understanding individual experiences through interviewing. “Phenomenological approaches, such as interpretative phenomenological analysis, can illuminate the importance of situating embodied personal experience in the context of meaning, relationships, and the lived world” (Smith et al., 2009). Considering this problem of practice and
methodological approach, the purpose of this research study is to identify best practices that can be used to collaborate with the Millennial generation in the workplace effectively. Interpretive phenomenological analysis is a variation of phenomenology that is qualitative and focuses on cognition. The focus on cognition or hermeneutics is what differentiates IPA from basic phenomenology. IPA creates a structure for researchers to engage in the experiences of interview subjects and interpret their experiences to create a larger impact on our understanding of a particular phenomenological area.

**Strategy Background**

Phenomenology was developed through the use of German philosophy. The approach hinges on our understanding of phenomena at different levels. Phenomenology began to be used during the 18\textsuperscript{th} century in several philosophical texts and studies, including those of Immanuel Kant. Our modern understanding of phenomenology focuses on human consciousness and experience to better understand the world around us and how it impacts our experiences. An early scholar in the genre named Franz Brentano developed the modern understanding of phenomenology that we use prominently in research now, descriptive phenomenology (Dowling, 2007). Early philosophers Kant and Brentano built the foundation for phenomenology that is known as the traditional phenomenology and has led to what we currently refer to as new phenomenology. Our understanding of basic phenomenology has created the tool of interpretive phenomenological analysis.

Several scholars have contributed to our understanding of phenomenology since it began to be used widely in different research areas and disciplines. Each scholar has taken the interpretation of phenomenology put forth by their predecessors to craft their own use for the approach. With these shifting interpretations and applications, phenomenology has become a
fluid tool in qualitative research that is, on the surface, used to understand better the experiences attached to an event. Although there are several scholars who have shaped our understanding and approach to using phenomenology, there are three scholars in particular that have formed the use of interpretive phenomenological analysis: Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

Edmund Husserl developed our modern understanding of phenomenology as a descriptive methodological approach focused on understanding and interpreting individual experiences. Husserl was concerned with consciousness and the role it played in shaping our experience. His seminal text on the subject titled *The Idea of Phenomenology* provided great insight into Husserl’s understanding of phenomenology as varying levels of consciousness that can be aware of an individual in different ways, which require an understanding and awareness to complete intentional analysis (Owen, 2001). At his core, Husserl is primarily concerned with being able to describe the experience of the individual. Martin Heidegger further develops this high-level approach to phenomenology by Husserl.

Martin Heidegger is concerned with finding an understanding of the experiences of individuals. This desire for understanding pushes the boundaries of phenomenology further into the IPA approach we know today. Heidegger’s seminal text *Being in Time* looked at phenomenology using an ontological methodology. He was focused on the existentialism of the human experience and truly understanding it instead of merely describing it (Conty, 2013). Heidegger’s involvement of ontological views into phenomenology begins to also call into question the role of technology in how we shape our perceptions and experiences.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty expanded on the views of Husserl and Heidegger by simplifying
them. Merleau-Ponty published the *Phenomenology of Perception* and argued for phenomenology as the “primacy of perception” or the first experience of an individual (Dowling, 2007). The focus of Merleau-Ponty’s work is to reach the original awareness of the individual without the constraints of categories typically recommended to categorize reflective experience. Merleau-Ponty is seen as offering a sustainable model for addressing cognitive science research (Smyth, 2010).

Scholars of IPA have challenged its shift in focus over the centuries since it has been interpreted through the perception, values, and needs of the individual researcher. Divergent thinkers are the individuals that have pushed our understanding of the applications of phenomenology and IPA. The most prominent divergent thinker was Heidegger. Although he used the work of his predecessor, Husserl, as the basis for his understanding and application of phenomenology he disagreed with the depth of understanding Husserl choose to use in analyzing data. Through his desire for more than just describing experiences of individuals, but really understanding them, Heidegger created a stronger foundation for the IPA approach used today to deeply understand the experiences of individuals (Conty, 2013).

Similar to Heidegger’s difference in value for phenomenological studies, Bruno Latour also diverges from both Heidegger and Husserl. Latour agrees with Heidegger in the majority of his phenomenological approach and sees value in aspects of phenomenology, such as the use of descriptive vocabulary. However, Latour’s struggle with phenomenology and Heidegger’s interpretation of it is in the ontological aspect. Latour argues that Heidegger and Husserl are operating on the assumption that any individual can complete an internal reflection. The approaches of past authors put too much faith in the ability of an individual, to be honest, and
reflective about their experiences (Conty, 2013).

**Strategy Alignment**

The use of IPA is intended to provide a snapshot of the unique experience of study participants interviewed. An IPA study will allow a specific understanding of the individual experiences of Millennials. Interpretive phenomenological analysis is a variation of phenomenology that is qualitative and focuses on cognition. The focus on cognition or hermeneutics is what differentiates IPA from basic phenomenology. IPA creates a structure for researchers to engage in the experiences of interview subjects and interpret their experiences to create larger impacts in our understanding of a particular phenomenological area.

The use of an IPA approach to design this research study allows for the collection of meaningful feedback. This focus on understanding the view of the Millennial generation in relation to their professional experiences requires the use of IPA. This particular phenomenological approach is necessary to gather personal and thoughtful individual feedback and experiences that will provide answers to the set research question, which currently focuses on pulling the experiences of the interview subjects instead of merely their views. The IPA approaches on how feedback can be coded, categorized, and analyzed to determine the connection between the subject’s personal experiences and the topic are ideal for managing the level of data gathered through this qualitative study method.

**Strategy Influence on Study Approach**

The use of the IPA approach in conducting this study influences the choice of interview questions as well as how data is collected and analyzed. Data collection and analysis must intentionally follow the process of honoring the unique experiences of interview subjects to
effectively use an IPA approach in conducting this study. To do this data collection must be
guided, but not hampered, by an interview protocol and data analysis should be conducted
without influence from the researcher's preconceived notions based on their own personal
experiences or opinions. Flexibility and impartiality are key in effectively conducting an IPA
study.

Based on the IPA approach an individual interview protocol used with subjects will focus
on gathering individual perspectives through personal experiences. The review of an open-ended
research question requires an interpretive approach to data collection focused on narrative
research methods. To effectively conduct an IPA study data collection through the use of
interviewing will require an approach to narrative research known as depth interviewing to
provide “a rich, nuanced, storied sample of the subjectivity that details how it has felt to the
participant to be living the life he or she has lived in relation to the phenomena of the research
questions” (Josselson, 2013, p. 8). This depth interviewing requires the interviewer to
demonstrate a concentrated focus on the experiences and perspectives the interview subject
shares (Seidman, 2006).

Once collected, the analysis of data gathered is also shaped by the use of an IPA
approach for this study. After conducting interviews transcripts of the conversation will be
created and coded to analyze the qualitative feedback for themes and connections in addressing
the research question. The analysis of data collected through IPA is reviewed using a bottom-up,
inductive coding approach that allows for the organic unearthing of themes through a review of
interview transcripts. It is crucial to the effectiveness of the methodology that the researcher
conducting an IPA study approach the transcript review and coding without any preconceived
expectations of the results.
Participants

The participant group of this study was comprised of members of three different generations to provide a comparison between generations. These generation participant groups included Millennials, Generation X, and Baby Boomers. The inclusion of each generational group allowed for the collection of data that helps to identify not only Millennial generation preferences for collaboration in the workplace but how they compare to other generations. Although data was gathered from different groups, Millennials were the focus of this study because they represent the biggest change to society in decades (Gallup, 2017). The focus on the Millennial generational group provided an opportunity to understand the generation from their own perspective better.

Ideal Millennial participants in this study were born between the years of 1980 – 2000. Studies on Millennials claim several different age ranges encompass the Millennial group. Twenge (2010) considers the Millennial generation a demographic group comprised of people born between the years 1980-2000. Research by PriceWaterHouseCoooper (2011) also considers Millennials to be from the born in the same two-decade span of 1980-2000. Ng & Lyon (2010) present Millennials simply as “born in or after 1980” suggesting that anyone born since 1980 is considered a member of the Millennial generation. Jirasevijinda (2018) considers a person a member of the Millennial generation if they are born between the years 1980 – 1996, which is a smaller window of time than other research studies. The Pew Research Center defines the Millennial generation under the two-decade standard as people born between the years of 1981 – 1997 (Fry, 2015). Given these varying definitions of the age range of the Millennial generation the general age of a Millennial is within the twenty-year span of 1980 – 2000.
Aside from age, there were no other demographic parameters for participants of this study. In addition to age, a participant’s status as a Millennial was also identified based on their connection to popular culture experiences that typically coincide with the generational consciousness of the Millennial group. Those experiences that shape generational consciousness as described by Mannheim (1927) are transformational and impactful events in history that have shaped the experiences, development, and viewpoints of members of the Millennial generation. These experiences include events like political events, natural disasters and tragedies, television, music, and entertainment. Each event area permeates Millennial culture and provides a formative foundation for understanding the experiences of Millennials today.

The focus of IPA is to gather a descriptive and interpretive understanding of personal experiences (Smith et al., 2013). This study gathered the experiences of a group of 9 to 12 participants solely using interviews as the collection technique. Given the sample size of the group, participants were identified through purposive and criterion sampling to focus on idiographic inquiry to achieve an understanding of the specific perceptions and experiences of participants. Purposive sampling coupled with the interpretive approach of IPA results in interviewing a group of participants closely aligned with the research question outlined. Criterion sampling requires that participants involved in this study meet the specific criteria of a member of the Millennial, Baby Boomer, or Generation X generation based on birth year. The use of purposive and criterion sampling with a smaller, targeted sample size allows the researcher to effectively use a double hermeneutic approach of empathetic hermeneutics coupled with questioning hermeneutics to empathize with the perspective of the participant and, by extension, understand and make sense of their experience at a deeper level (Smith & Osborn, 2003).
The participants in this study were Millennial professionals who regularly interact with colleagues from several generations. Study participants were interviewed privately in a secure, neutral, and distraction-free location they were comfortable to allow for a focused interview. The participants interviewed were Millennial, Baby Boomer, and Generation X generational members who meet the criteria set for age and generational events. Data was collected through individual interviews.

Observations and experiences were collected through the use of individual interviews. The use of an interview to collect data provided an opportunity to better understand the experiences and perspectives of the study participant through deep and intentional questioning. In-person interviews also offered the opportunity to observe the body language and non-verbal cues that contribute to the study participant’s communication of their experiences. These observations are intended to provide guidance in analyzing the data collected through individual interviews.

**Procedures**

The aim of this study is to understand better the impact of social experiences on forming the views of the Millennial generation to identify their collaboration preferences. This study used a qualitative approach to understanding how personal experiences have shaped the development of collaboration preferences within the Millennial generation cohort. Mannheim’s (1927) theory of generations suggests that the identity of a generation of people is formed through a connection in social experiences.

**Data Collection**

When using the IPA methodological approach there are several approaches and techniques that can be used to collect data. IPA is a qualitative data collection method, which
requires a sole focus on collecting data qualitatively through interviews and focus groups. The basis of the methodological approach hinges on our ability to understand the nuance and detail of an individual’s experience. The researcher or interviewer must be strategic in using the prescribed interview questions combined with instinct to dive deeply into the experiences of the interview subject.

The following steps will be used to conduct interviews with survey participants, review the content gathered, and use themes identified through interviews to complete this study. Upon receiving approval from the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB), an email was sent to a purposive sample of multi-generational members of a team in a government workplace inviting them to participate in this study (see Appendix B). This email included an overview and purpose of the research study, as well as outline the amount of time needed for the interview and detail the next steps for interested participants. Participants were also informed of the anonymity of their responses as well as their flexibility to participate in this study completely at their own discretion. The email requested that those interested in participating in this study respond to the email to indicate their interest and schedule an interview time.

Once participants confirmed their interest in participating in this study an interview meeting time was confirmed via email and a calendar invitation was sent to the participant as a reminder of the scheduled meeting. Two days before the scheduled meeting time a reminder email was sent to each participant to avoid any last-minute cancellations or changes in the interview schedule. During the scheduled meeting time the informed consent form (Appendix C) was shared with the subject, the interview protocol (see Appendix D) was used to facilitate the interview, and participants received a handout that provided an overview of the different generations in the workplace (Appendix E). The generation overview handout was introduced...
after the background questions in the interview protocol prompted the participant to self-identify the generation they belong to and their descriptions of different generations. The generation each participant belongs to was determined as part of the interview protocol when collecting background information.

After completing the interview, analysis and coding of the transcript will be completed. The transcript of the interview was then shared with the interview subject via email (see Appendix F) to member-check the transcript. The focus of the member-check process was to allow an opportunity for the participants to review the transcript in detail and make any adjustments necessary in the transcript to create an accurate record of their experiences.

Observations and experiences were collected from interview subjects using interview questions that are semi-structured and guided by open-ended questions. Each individual interview took 45-60 minutes to complete. This time includes consistent member-checking throughout the interview through the use of techniques such as paraphrasing and summarization of participant responses to interview questions. The individual interviews were conducted using an interview protocol that provides context about this study and begins with some demographic questions before addressing the participant’s experiences through open-ended questions. The individual interviews with the participants were audio recorded with the participant’s permission using a digital recorder to allow for a more engaged interview experience with the participants.

**Data Analysis**

Once data was collected through a phenomenological approach there were several tactics implemented to analyze the data and determine trends. The use of a phenomenological approach is truly reliant on interpretation for both the researcher and the interview subject. Data collected resulted in a transcript of the interview being generated. The transcript was then used to develop
codes to guide further analysis of the data and determine trends that address the research question. The coding of a transcript is a time-consuming process that requires the researcher to review and annotate the transcript to indicate patterns and themes in the interview data gathered.

When using IPA any findings gathered through this qualitative approach should be presented with as much specificity as possible. The value of IPA and phenomenology as a methodological approach is in the level of detail gathered through the qualitative research approach. After data is gathered and coded, the codes identified were used to determine key findings. The initial overview of the study findings discussed the specific codes used for the analysis as a framework for presenting the themes in the study findings. The level of detail gathered through IPA requires a commitment to clearly and concisely explaining findings using the data as a guide. The analysis of data collected is guided by the six-step process recommended by Smith et al. (2013) to fully understand data gathered and determine thought out conclusions. These steps include:

**Step 1: Reading and re-reading.** The focus of this step in the analysis process is to become immersed with the original data before jumping directly into analysis. Audio recording of the interview is transcribed and reviewed to begin the process of reflecting on data gathered. Once transcribed, the transcript for each participant interview is reviewed by first reading it while listening to the audio and then re-reading the transcript by itself to become immersed with the original data.

**Step 2: Initial noting.** After becoming immersed with the data the process of initial noting takes place to begin exploring very high-level observations and themes within the data. In this step, the goal is free textual analysis. This is done in the structure of a three-column analysis
chart with a blank space in column one to identify emergent themes (step 3), the interview transcript in column two, and initial noting in column three as the transcript is reviewed.

**Step 3: Developing emergent themes.** In this step, themes begin to become evident after completing initial noting using the three-column chart. Considering the information learned through multiple reviews of the transcript themes will start to develop. Emergent themes are outlined in column one of the analysis chart.

**Step 4: Searching for connections across emergent themes.** With themes identified through multiple reviews of the transcript and analysis connections, the focus in this step is to make larger connections across the various emergent themes that have surfaced. To make these connections all themes are isolated into a chronological list. A review of this list should focus on identifying groupings around certain themes to determine trends.

**Step 5: Moving to the next case.** In this step, the process outlined in steps 1-4 is repeated for the data gathered from each participant interview recording and transcript. Systematic adherence to the process for each individual transcript is necessary to avoid themes from one set of data influencing possible themes in the future sets that are reviewed.

**Step 6: Looking for patterns across cases.** After reviewing and analyzing each transcript this step requires that the themes apparent in each case are compared across the study. The focus of this review is to identify common themes and connections that indicate a finding from the study data gathered. To identify patterns across cases a master list of themes from all cases should be compiled for review. This list should provide a detailed recounting of occurrences within the data that support the theme outlined. In this part of the analysis process,
the interpretive characteristic of IPA becomes crucial to explore at a deeper level (Smith et al., 2013).

**Criteria for Quality Qualitative Research**

The criteria used to determine quality qualitative research in a study are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). However, the key areas of focus for quality qualitative data in this study are credibility, transferability, the internal audit of the study, self-reflexivity, and the limitations of the study. Each of these areas provides insight into the strength of the research study as well as its ability to contribute a valid point of view to the research field.

**Ethical Considerations**

Maintaining the ethics of this study was of the utmost importance to ensure its success. The largest areas of ethical concern are anonymity and security. The top priorities in these areas were maintaining the anonymity of feedback provided by study participants and securing documents used to gather data as part of the study. The need to maintain anonymity was further emphasized by the consideration that study participants are also the professional colleagues of the researcher conducting this study.

To maintain anonymity in feedback and communication provided by study participants, all communication on behalf of the study was sent through the secure Northeastern University email account to ensure consistency as well as security for email correspondence. Interview recordings, notes, consent forms, and transcripts collected from participants were secured on Northeastern University’s cloud storage platform, Google Drive. When survey data was used for
analysis, pseudonyms were used instead of the real names of study participants. In addition to anonymity, documents containing data from this study were maintained on Northeastern University’s Google Drive cloud storage server. The feedback gathered was password protected and was not emailed outside of the Northeastern University network or thesis advisory committee.

Credibility

Credibility is a necessity in qualitative research to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of data gathered and subsequent findings. The credibility of this study was upheld through member-checking as well as engagement with study participants during the interview process.

Member-checking was used at two points in the data collection process to ensure clarity and accuracy in the data gathered from interviews. Member-checking through sustained engagement with the participants was first used in the data collection process through paraphrasing and summarizing consistently during the interview to confirm a clear understanding of the interview subject’s comments. Second, member-checking was employed after the collection of data by sharing the final transcript of the interview with the study participant to confirm accuracy and offer the opportunity to make any adjustments to the transcript for accuracy.

Transferability

Transferability indicates the level at which the findings of the study can be applied to other areas. This study sample size creates limitations to transferability because of the idiographic focus that comes with using an IPA approach. However, the specificity with which
the sample was determined provides specific guidance in certain circumstances for transferability.

**Internal Audit**

To ensure a clear connection between the study and the final report after data analysis there is careful consideration for maintaining records. Records of all documents were saved to Northeastern University’s cloud storage, Google Drive, and was password protected. The documents and materials that were saved for reference include the research question, research field notes, research journaling, research memoing, audio recordings, annotated transcripts, tables of themes, draft reports, survey results, the final report, and any additional devices used to conduct the survey.

**Self-reflexivity and Transparency**

Tension exists between tradition and technology when considering a successful management approach for the Millennial generation that comprises young professionals in today’s workforce (Langan, 2012). The research purpose is closely linked to my background and biases, which may cause gaps in the research and findings as a scholar-practitioner. My personal experiences can cloud my perceptions throughout research. There are four main points of bias I will have to consider as I move through my research study: my status as a Millennial, my personal connection to and love of popular culture and technology, my level of personal and professional accomplishments at a young age, and the ways that I am a minority in race, gender, and age.

First, my status as a Millennial has caused me to experience consistent bias throughout my career in the professional world in everything from salary to sexual harassment simply because of my age and perceived naiveté. The passion I have for this topic based on my personal
experiences and interactions will be a challenge to manage so that my bias does not overtake this research or blindly guide it. My age and perceived youth is an indicator that I grew up in a generation that places value on working hard, but more importantly, working smarter and is commonly referred to as the “Millennial” generation. The ingenuity of the Millennial generation is commonly perceived by older generations in the professional world as laziness and entitlement (Thompson & Gregory, 2012).

Second, my personal connection to and love for popular culture, the content I am using for my research, may be a consideration in my ability to view findings objectively as a scholar-practitioner. Before working with nonprofit organizations and in the field of talent and organizational development, I was a journalist who covered entertainment topics. My love for music and popular culture formed a lens that shaped my perception and adaptation to the professional world. The impact of popular culture has provided me a vehicle for inspiration, strategy, and approach in my career. As a scholar-practitioner, I will need to be cognizant of this bias given the deep connection I have to popular culture.

Third, my unique situation of having several personal and professional accomplishments at a young age is a bias that I will need to remain cognizant of. I am conducting dissertation-level research in my 20s with just under 10 years of professional experience when many doctoral-level students are usually middle-aged and possess decades of experience to guide their doctoral research and findings. My approach to academics and my professional life do not necessarily mimic all young professionals, so I will need to consider the bias connected to this in my work as a scholar-practitioner. I am a career-focused, biracial woman in my late 20s who is considered to be a Millennial in the professional world. These aspects of my identity have fueled much of my perspective on my life experiences and now my professional experiences. This passion for
finding diversity in the world that mimics mine has driven me to focus on the development of individuals in organizations. Organizations are stronger when they embrace diversity, but so often people from diverse backgrounds do not always have the same opportunities.

Finally, each of these biases coupled with my status as a minority in race, gender, and age gives me a unique point of view on the professional world. Although further research will allow for a deeper understanding of the topic, my own experiences may cloud my internalization of those ideas. As a bi-racial woman who is part Caucasian and Nigerian, I have always had one foot firmly planted in two different worlds outside of my family because of the societal expectations that frequently come with race. As such, I have been able to easily navigate barriers in the corporate world that others may not have experienced.

Limitations

The use of Mannheim’s theory will add strength to the development and analysis of the research study. However, the main limitation in the theory of generations is the defining characteristics of a generation that are outlined. Mannheim’s theory argues that generation should not be defined exclusively by biological factors such as birth, death, or aging. Instead, Mannheim argues that generations are defined by the social experiences that shape them. This idea of how a generation should be defined varies from the typical year range associated with the Millennial generation in a large amount of academic literature. For the purpose of the research study Mannheim’s view of a generation being defined by social experiences provides a strong framework for my exploration of the impact of popular culture on Millennial views, but can make it difficult to explore my findings in the context of the bulk of existing Millennial research because of the differing parameters used.
Chapter 4: Results

This research study focused on identifying the preferences of the Millennial generation for collaboration in the workplace. To do this, study participants who are members of the Millennial generation were interviewed as well as members of the Baby Boomer and Generation X generations. By collecting information about personal perspectives and experiences from each of these generations this study was able to understand the preferences of the Millennial generation and determine any potential alignment or differences in comparison with other, older generations in the workforce. The way organizations work is constantly changing so an understanding of management styles and attitudes can guide how employees of diverse backgrounds and generations are able to collaborate effectively (Simmons, 2010).

This chapter provides an overview of the results of this interpretive phenomenological study. The results of the study will be presented by first, providing an overview of the participant groups involved in the study. Second, the three emergent themes of the participant research study data analysis are presented. These themes include flexibility, self-awareness, and collaboration. The review of these themes provides insight into the experiences that are unique to the Millennial generation participants which shape their perspective and approach to collaboration in the workplace. The themes also consider the experiences of the Baby Boomer and Generation X participants to determine what, if any, disconnect exists between the preferences for collaboration in the workplace across different generations.

The ability to collaborate effectively is influenced by several contextual factors that shape how people approach collaboration in professional relationships. Although collaboration offers benefits for an organization the values of an organization, the employees involved, and the type of problem that they’re trying to solve can determine success in collaboration (Gardner, 2005).
Participant Overview

The study included a total of 11 participants who completed an in-person interview on their cross-generational collaboration experiences. A total of eight study participants (73 percent) were members of the Millennial generation. A total of two study participants (18 percent) were members of the Generation X generation. A total of one study participant (nine percent) was a member of the Baby Boomer generation. All participants are members of a team in a government agency and have worked together for at least one year. Study participants worked at their current government agency an average of 3.6 years. Their perspectives are a reflection of their experiences collaborating with colleagues on their team to complete work and projects on a daily basis.

The differences in generations are defined not only by demographic parameters, such as birth year but also by the shared societal events that shape individual experiences and group consciousness (Mannheim, 1927). Each participant was categorized by generation based on their birth year and asked to self-identify as part of the research study interview. Participant’s self-selection of their generation was then verified by a review of a Generation Overview Handout (Appendix E) that included common generational characteristics as well as influential cultural events for each generation. The assigned generation by birth year for each participant and the generation the participant self-selected were in alignment.
Table 1
Overview of Research Study Participant Generation and Position Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Assigned Generation</th>
<th>Self-Selected Generation</th>
<th># of Years in Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BB1</td>
<td>Baby Boomer</td>
<td>Baby Boomer</td>
<td>6.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX1</td>
<td>Generation X</td>
<td>Generation X/Millennial Cusp</td>
<td>7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GX2</td>
<td>Generation X</td>
<td>Generation X</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM1</td>
<td>Millennial</td>
<td>Millennial</td>
<td>2.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM2</td>
<td>Millennial</td>
<td>Millennial</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM3</td>
<td>Millennial</td>
<td>Generation X</td>
<td>2.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM4</td>
<td>Millennial</td>
<td>Millennial</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM5</td>
<td>Millennial</td>
<td>Millennial</td>
<td>7.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM6</td>
<td>Millennial</td>
<td>Millennial</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM7</td>
<td>Millennial</td>
<td>Millennial</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MM8</td>
<td>Millennial</td>
<td>Millennial</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Baby Boomer**

The Baby Boomer generation participants were born between 1946 - 1964. This generational group was comprised of one participant, which represented nine percent of participants in this research study. The societal events that define the Baby Boomer generation include the Cold War, Woodstock Music Festival, the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, the Space Race, the election of John F. Kennedy, Jr., and Beatlemania. Each of these events indicates a turning point in American society that shaped the experience of people who were born or being raised during this timeframe. Common characteristics of the Baby Boomer
generation include competitive, long work hours, experimental, individualistic, free-spirited, and rejection or redefinition of traditional values.

This study involved only one Baby Boomer participant because of resignations from the team involved in this study. In the months before this study was conducted several Baby Boomer team members left the team leaving one Baby Boomer to participate in this study. The Baby Boomer participant in this study has been in their government position for several decades. As a result of the tenure of the Baby Boomer participant, they experienced several operational changes for the sake of efficiency in their field of work. These changes have primarily been shifts in technology to improve information management and customer service. Experiencing these changes has made the participant flexible, but impatient with change. The Baby Boomer participant is seen as a wealth of historical knowledge in their organization.

The historical knowledge the Baby Boomer participant possesses has put them in the position of addressing current information and human resources system issues that result from errors in outdated systems that only the Baby Boomer has the knowledge to manage. As a member of the Baby Boomer generation, the participant is one of the most experienced groups that contribute to a diverse generational landscape in the workforce. This also means that Baby Boomers are currently planning to retire or may have already retired and moved on to second careers. This shift in professional focus creates tension between sharing knowledge to train the next generation and hoarding knowledge to stay relevant in a changing professional field.

**Generation X**

The Generation X generation was born between 1965 - 1979. This generational group includes two participants, which represents 18 percent of participants that were a part of this
research study. The cultural events that shaped members of the Generation X group include the Watergate scandal, Live Aid concert, the introduction of the personal computer, the beginning of mobile technology, the death of JFK, and the emergence of latch-key kids as a result of the rising levels of divorce. These cultural events shaped the personal values of Generation X and began to mirror a changing workforce that created opportunities for equality among men and women in the workforce, which changed what the structure of the American family looked like. As a result of these experiences members of Generation X generation are self-reliant, value work-life balance, are rebellious and tend to be multi-career minded.

Generation X study participants attach a great deal of their professional value to how busy they are while at work. The members of this generation also name how they were raised as a direct contributor to their hardworking and independent personality and approach to work. Participants were in their position in the government organization between two to seven years and had several experiences collaborating across generational groups in the workplace. Generation X participants expressed value for generations in the workplace and the opportunity to learn from the diverse experiences of different generations in the workplace. Overall the Generation X study participants expressed varied perspectives on personal alignment with Millennial generation qualities. All study participants in the Generation X group embraced the “generational cusp” perspective of embodying the qualities of both generations. Other study participants in this generational group vehemently felt that the characteristics of the Millennial generation, while valuable to the diversity and innovation of the workplace, were not personally desirable.
**Millennials**

The Millennial generation was born between 1980 - 2000. This generational group included eight study participants, which represents 73 percent of participants involved in this study. The Millennial participant group in this research study was the largest generational representation of the study participant group. The Millennial generation represents the biggest change to society in decades (Gallup, 2017). As such, the Millennial generation can provide an indication of what the preferences of future generations may look like. The events in popular culture that shaped the experience of the Millennial generation include the introduction of Google, PlayStation, the general rebirth of pop culture with MTV and reality television, the Challenger shuttle explosion, Harry Potter, Napster, and Y2K. The emergence of pop culture through the technological advances of the laptop, smartphone, and tablet, began to create the instant gratification mentality commonly associated with the Millennial generation. In the years that members of the Millennial generation were growing up information became constant, readily accessible, and most importantly, because of changes in technology the Millennial generation now had a direct line into the conversation to shape their culture through their experiences.

The Millennial generation participants in this study exhibited a high level of self-awareness and commitment to their personal development. The group has been with their current government organization an average of 3.1 years, which is slightly lower than the overall average for all study participants at an average of 3.6 years. The participants collectively demonstrate value for collaboration with a focus on finding innovative solutions. This concern with innovation generally results in Millennial participants coming across as less formal and more approachable when collaborating in the workplace.
The Millennial group participants also consistently discussed the value of diversity when considering the opportunity to work with different generations in their workplace. Although the value for diversity among the Millennial generational group was high, the group also expressed some frustration with older generations in their collaboration experiences in the workplace. Overall, the Millennial generational group shared through reflections their experience of working with coworkers from older generations who are sometimes reluctant to adjust to new approaches in work and collaboration. This difference in values around how to collaborate creates a gap in perspective between the Millennial generational group and the Baby Boomer and Generation X generational groups.

Overview of Emergent Themes

The focus of this research study was to identify how Millennials prefer to collaborate in the workplace. The study resulted in the emergence of several major themes and related subthemes that reflected the perspectives of the majority of Millennial study participants but also aligned with the perspectives of the Baby Boomer and Generation X study participants. The themes reveal that although generation and the experiences associated with them can be a defining characteristic, people can still have shared perspectives and preferences in their professional working relationships.

These themes are a result of the personal experiences shared by each study participant through interviews. The collective, consistent experiences of each participant were then identified through the first order coding process to identify the initial themes of data collected. The second-order coding of initial themes provided the three major themes at the crux of the cross-generational collaboration experience for the study participants.
Theme 1: **Flexibility**

Subtheme 1: Adapting to Change

Subtheme 2: Adjusting to Different Work Styles

Theme 2: **Self-Awareness**

Subtheme 1: Time Management Impact on Work Relationships

Subtheme 2: Understanding Personal Boundaries

Theme 3: **Collaboration**

Subtheme 1: Technology-Supported Collaboration

Subtheme 2: Value of Face-to-Face Interactions in Collaboration

Subtheme 3: Setting Clear Expectations for Successful Collaboration

**Theme 1: Flexibility**

The idea of flexibility overwhelmingly permeated interviews with research study participants. The experiences and reflections shared by participants highlighted their personal value for flexibility in working relationships when engaging in collaborative work. A total of nine study participants (82 percent) cited a commitment to flexibility as a valuable skill in collaboration in the workplace. For participants to be able to collaborate effectively in the workplace requires a level of conscious flexibility that enables them to be adaptable and
professional in their interactions. The idea that it is important to meet people where they are is at the center of successful collaboration for study participants. The approach of compromise and flexibility, for participants, was a proven method for working with people because it establishes trust and builds professional relationships that create positive collaboration experiences.

**Subtheme 1: Adapting to Change**

A component of flexibility that emerged through the results of the study is the adaptability of different generations when dealing with change. Overall, seven study participants (60 percent) indicated that their ability to be adaptable to change was a key factor in their experience collaborating successfully in the workplace across generational groups. Older generational groups in the study, directly connected adaptability with impending change and innovation in how work is completed. The focus of adaptability for older generations was professional development to continue to thrive in their professional work and relationships. This was made evident by an experience of change shared by study participant, BB1, during the research study interview.

[00:08:18] Our job got done but we didn’t have to have the computer to do it. 2003, I never thought that I would be helping to build a system for HR payroll which is now PeopleSoft. Nervous because I had never been pulled into a project team that was doing something to that magnitude. But because of the fact that we were still doing things the old way and had learned and knew where the resources were, that was a big help to give the programmers what you needed. I accepted that there was a change coming. A lot of my old-timers did not accept. They thought it would go away. And now we are with it for the last 15 years. They never thought it would last that long. Most of them had to go home because they fought against it, was not clearing their mind. Along with that came
younger supervisors, younger directors. They went with the dialogue, most of them. I’m not teaching him or her anything. They’re paying them six digits to do what I already know. Now they have raised it to you have to have a degree to do this, that, and the other, but in the meantime, you need to work and you’re not preparing yourself to be able to stay on board if you take that attitude.

Compared to all study participants, five out of eight Millennials (63 percent) indicated their adaptability was the key to success in collaboration at a similar rate. For Millennials, adaptability dictated their professional success in a more foundational way. To be able to achieve any professional growth, Millennial participants equated adaptability with access to professional opportunities that would allow them to build work relationships and take on more opportunities and experience. Millennial study participant, MM4, specifically described their experience adapting their approach to work with new coworkers to build relationships and collaborate effectively.

[00:32:37] Typically whatever is going to drive the work forward and make it most, I don't want to say easy, but whatever will establish the most amicable relationship that will drive the work forward. And, for some people, that means more face-to-face, for others, it means more email, for others, they want to see something before it gets sent out and make a comma edit. And, it's just like, "I mean, if you feel passionately about that comma, that's fine." So, I think it's really just more about what the path of least resistance is, obviously with regards to the most effective way forward.

[00:33:22] For some people, it's trial and error. In a lot of ways, I think with [coworker] in particular, [coworker] shared how [they] felt that [coworker] worked most effectively,
so I tried to follow a little bit of what they laid out, but also just very trial and error, like, "Do you want to see this, or don't you? Do you want to meet this often, or don't you?"

Because, I think, in the beginning of any forming relationship, they're also trying to meet you halfway, so in the beginning we were meeting way more often than we needed to, but I think it's because I wasn't sure how often they wanted to meet, and they also weren’t sure how often I wanted to meet, so it was just getting to a middle ground.

[00:34:14] I think it was just more organically, and maybe it's just a trust thing. Maybe it was, they needed to see more of my work, and I need to see more of how I needed to deliver communication or feedback to [coworker]. And then, once there was a little more rapport, we're like, "This can really be an email, this is totally fine."

[00:35:41] I think almost all the people that I work with frequently on our team require a different version of who I am, which means a lot of self-management for myself, but also a lot of emotional management about how they react to things or what type of feedback they will react well to.

The goal of adaptability for study participants was to prioritize flexibility and focus on the most important aspects of the working relationship. Compromise is key in working relationships. Being committed to flexibility in how you work with people establishes trust and builds professional relationships that create positive collaboration experiences. The other form of compromise that was an emergent theme with study participants was a focus on adjusting to meet different workstyles for the sake of effective collaboration.
Subtheme 2: Adjusting to Different Work Styles

A key tool in effective collaboration for study participants was exercising flexibility by adjusting their approach to the different work styles and preferences of coworkers. Overall, seven study participants (64 percent) specifically shared their personal experiences adjusting their work approach to different work styles of their colleagues for the sake of effective collaboration. Millennial research study participants highlighted adjusting to different work styles more frequently than other generations in the participant group. A total of six out of eight Millennial study participants (75 percent) identified one of their key collaboration techniques when working with different generations as being flexible by adjusting to the different work styles and preferences of coworkers. Study participant, MM3, shared their experience working with coworkers at different levels in the organization and how successful collaboration requires that they abandon their preference for the sake of results.

[00:07:35] I don't know that it has to do with the generations so much as it has to do with their role in the organization or their role in what I need them to do. So, my supervisors or my colleagues at work, I think I am more formal with the people that I'm bringing on and tend to be a little bit more engaging and friendly. I think I tend ... I try not to put up so much of a not lack of professionalism, but to be a little bit more warm and welcoming because I feel like they're ... they deal with a lot of very stiff personalities, and having someone that they feel they can relate to and talk to, I tend to be a little bit more relaxed with my communications with them.

[00:08:24] It does, but I think it's more based on their preference, and I don't know that I've noticed it. So, generally, when I'm doing an initial communication with anyone, whether it's a colleague or it's a candidate, I start with an email, but I put a sentence in
there to let them know that I'm available via phone if they would prefer to connect that way, even if we're doing a reference check, and I let them respond whichever way they want. So, if they initially reach out to me on the phone, in my head, I flag that as that's their preferred communication and that's how I will reach out to them initially. If I'm unsuccessful, then I'll follow-up with email, but it goes vice versa. So, if they reach out to me with email first, then that's kind of our normal communication.

The ability to be flexible and adaptable is a direct result of knowing your audience to be able to meet people where they are. This understanding and technique were very valuable to Millennial participants. Millennial participant, MM5, directly connected mitigating internal team conflicts with the ability to understand your coworker and be flexible enough to work with them on their level based on their experience as a minority on their team.

[00:50:50] I felt like I've learned because it's more than just cross-generational with me. I also am the only guy on the team, and that definitely plays a part with how I communicate with my coworkers, versus how I communicate with friends. Everybody has their own approach.

[00:51:17] You just have to be open to approaching them that way. And, I finally knew that a lot of the conflicts on our team come from when people aren't as open to approaching people on their own level and trying to force them to come to their level. I think once you're open enough to meet somebody where they are, you'll find that they're more open to come to you where you are. At least, find a nice, middle ground.
There are people on my team, on the HR team where I can identify as being very emotionally driven. I can't identify myself as being emotionally driven at work because my work isn't necessarily something that's an emotional thing.

And, numbers don't have feelings. But, knowing how to approach somebody about a thing, or knowing ... This is going to sound bad, but knowing how to manipulate the way somebody reacts to something, to get your desired response, definitely makes work easier.

In some cases, Millennial participants shared experiences and tactics for being flexible in working with older generations in the workplace. Millennial participant, MM1, specifically mentioned using empathy to identify gaps in effective collaboration and implementing techniques to work more effectively with older generations in the workplace.

Majority of the other managers are Gen Xers. I guess the quality of communication is good sometimes. I guess thinking about it, some things with the Millennial manager, he pretty much gets it. The others sometimes it's repetitive, in terms of reiterating what the next steps are. Not necessarily expectations, but like different things happen and I guess they feel like it changed something. But the process rarely changes. There's outliers but things are pretty consistent across the board.

I prefer to pick up the phone and call because sometimes in email you really can't tell tone. And sometimes, when I receive repetitive messages, there is a tone of annoyance because we just discussed these things. But I'll pick up the phone and explain it because I understand what they may be dealing with. They have several people
reporting to them. I don't have that level of stress, so I'll take the time and call them and communicate, answer their questions and then I'll follow back up in email.

Summary

The idea, technique, and skill of flexibility was a crucial element of successful collaboration for all participants in this study. However, the nuance of what it takes to be flexible when to be flexible, and how to exercise the skill varies by generation. Millennials across the study group overwhelmingly exhibit a commitment to embracing change by being adaptable in changing situations as well as using empathy to successfully and consistently meet their coworkers where they are in their professional relationships. Baby Boomer and Generation X study participants value these aspects of flexibility in collaboration but to lesser degrees. Figure 1 shows a conceptualization of the subthemes that contributed to an understanding of the theme of flexibility. The commitment of flexibility exhibited by the Millennial generation study participants is also closely connected to self-awareness.
Figure 1: Flexibility Subtheme Conceptualization of Study Participant Perspectives
Theme 2: Self-Awareness

Clarity of personal values, abilities, and boundaries contribute to how individual study participant’s development, manage and maintain work relationships. This overall self-awareness was demonstrated by study participants in two specific subthemes. First, the idea of self-awareness was expressed in how study participants manage their time and work to create more effective collaborative relationships in the workplace. Second, this focus on time and work management techniques was directly underscored by an understanding of personal boundaries. This understanding of personal boundaries enabled study participants to effectively manage relationships by tapping into their self-awareness and impact of their actions on collaboration in the workplace.

Subtheme 1: Time Management Impact on Work Relationships

To manage work and coworker relationships effectively overall a total of eight study participants (73 percent) indicated that they use some type of time management technique to manage their daily work. Study participants identified two key time management techniques. The first is the use of the calendar connected with their government email accounts. Second, the use of to-do lists to track the necessary tasks and prioritize them by importance. The use of each of these techniques was connected to their ability to collaborate effectively with coworkers in their workplace. A total of six out of eight Millennial study participants reported using time and work management techniques at a slightly higher rate of 75 percent. Study participant, MM1, shared their perspective on the value of time management techniques in managing work relationships.

[00:08:00] I start with the emails, that's the first thing I start with. So I guess technology plays a definite part. So I start with emails, I have to-do lists, so I do write things down. So whatever I didn't complete maybe the week prior, also the Friday I'm closing out, I
know what to start with on Monday. And then sometimes the emails will take precedence over what I've left off, depending on what may be happening. So typically, I'm working on anywhere from five to eight different disciplines. So that involves researching, communicating with managers, looking through whatever's in their personnel system in terms of attachments, videos, pictures, things like that. Following up if documentation is missing, and then the acquired time of kind of just painting the picture of what occurred on that particular day, if it's common attendance it's totally straightforward. If it's conduct, just trying to pinpoint and figure out what the infractions were, I've taken into account with the manager said but sometimes it doesn't paint a full picture.

[00:10:19] I have to write things down because things are constantly coming at me, whether it's emails or I need to speak to my director, or I have other colleagues that have questions and need answers and things like that. So I write things down because I will forget them. So you could tell me something five minutes prior and then it's forgotten if you ask me to come back later, so I have to write it down. So the to-do list is more or less just a bullet point and then I'll go back and prioritize what must be done.

The use of work management approaches outlined by study participants provides them with the flexibility needed to work collaboratively with coworkers. By intentionally managing their workload study participants are able to manage their responsibilities and relationships at work better. This leads to a successful outcome in collaboration efforts across generations in the workplace.
Subtheme 2: Understanding Personal Boundaries

The ability of study participants to use work management techniques effectively also requires that they possess some level of self-awareness. Overall, a total of seven study participants (64 percent) identified their focus on personal self-awareness as a skill needed to collaborate effectively at work. That self-awareness helps study participants to identify their areas of strength and weakness. This awareness opens participants up to opportunities for their learning and professional growth. Study participant, GX2, specifically identified how a project they collaborated with coworkers on created self-awareness of their areas of professional growth as well as guided how they collaborated on future projects.

[00:18:17] I was tasked with developing or creating an SOP for non-disclosure data privacy. You said what was the goal? The goal was to create the SOP for nondisclosure and data privacy and to also communicate the new procedures or the procedures to the managers.

[00:18:43] It was a challenge for me because I've never created a SOP. I didn't know where to start. I just had no idea what to do.

[00:19:39] Oh, it was easy [creating an SOP again later]. Well, I'm not going to say it was easy. Different responsibilities. But I had a start. I knew exactly what to do. SOPs to me now, they're very basic, just basic language, get directly to the point. I know where to go for resources. With that being a challenge the first go-round, I really appreciate stepping into that and completing it, with the help of [coworker]. But I really appreciate it because it helped me to grow, and it also just helped me learn how to create an SOP.
I don't think I utilized my team properly when it came to that. So I think the next time I'm faced ... And that also helped me with challenges, because now when I'm faced with a challenge I don't look at it as a challenge. When I'm faced with something different, I don't look at it as a challenge. I look at it as an opportunity to learn and grow. You just can't learn and grow if you're not faced with little tests. And I'm more optimistic about it because it's something new. It's something that I can add to my resume, it's something that I can hit some of my brainpower. The approach is different. It's more positive than, oh my God, I'm so stressed, I don't know what to do, I'm overwhelmed. No, I take it in stride and I know how to sort my resources.

Summary

The value of self-awareness impacts how study participants weigh their abilities and approach in collaborating with others in the workplace. A foundational tool for self-awareness is the use of time and work management tools to take accountability for work outcomes. In order to successfully manage work relationships for successful collaboration participants indicate a commitment to gaining clarity on personal boundaries and areas of professional growth. Figure 2 shows a conceptualization of the subthemes that contributed to an understanding of the theme of self-awareness. The focus on participants on self-awareness fuels successful collaboration at work in any form it takes.
Figure 2: Self-Awareness Subtheme Conceptualization of Study Participant Perspectives

Theme 3: Collaboration

Multiple generations in the workplace benefit work and create opportunities for collaboration that can lead to professional growth and development. Overall, a total of 11 study participants (100 percent) felt that a diversity of generations in the workplace adds value to their professional experiences and career development, as well as to the work outcomes. However, the way that collaboration takes place in the workplace varies by study participants. Three subthemes related to collaboration experiences at work emerged as a result of this study. First, technology-supported collaboration leads to greater innovation in work for some study
participants. Second, study participants indicated a consistent value on face-to-face interactions in collaboration. Third, every study participant heavily emphasized the importance of setting clear expectations in collaborative relationships at work. These themes outline the lived experiences of study participants and identify the value placed on different modalities of collaboration in the workplace.

Subtheme 1: Technology-Supported Collaboration

Technology played a crucial role in collaboration for study participants. Overall, a total of seven study participants (64 percent) indicated that they use technology when collaborating at work. The preference and value for the use of technology in collaboration increased to include a total of six out of eight Millennial participants in the study, which represents 75 percent of the Millennial participants in the study.

The use of technology for study participants indicated a commitment to innovation in their work. The percentages across all study participants and Millennial participants in the study remained consistent when considering the perceived value of innovation and new collaboration approaches when collaborating in the workplace. Again, a total of seven participants overall (64 percent) valued innovation in collaboration, while six out of eight of Millennial participants (75 percent) valued innovation by comparison. Study participant, MM5, specifically shared their experience as the technological bridge on a team that is resistant to new collaboration approaches that could improve the team’s outcomes.

[00:52:54] I feel like the younger generations, they have that grasp of current technology, processes, and I definitely feel like that bridge between knowledge and the actual work is how my work gets done the quickest.
[00:54:58] Or, the most effective. But, I can definitely see where that could go horribly wrong.

[00:55:17] It can't just be, "Hey, you know everything about this process, and I know how to do this process the way it's done now. Let's collaborate." Because if one of those pieces is missing, it can end up being really bad for the project.

[00:55:37] For example, on my team, because I know Excel so well, I'm the person that all the Excel spreadsheets go to and through.

[00:55:46] But, if I'm out, that work stops, because nobody else is as well-versed in this as I am. And, it takes both parties have to absorb from each other.

[00:56:05] Because, while synergy is nice, both parties need to be able to operate on our own at some point.

[00:56:15] And, as early as possible.

**Subtheme 2: Value of Face-to-Face Interactions in Collaboration**

Although technology and innovation are valuable approaches to collaboration across all study participants, the impact of face-to-face interactions in collaboration was highlighted consistently. Overall, seven study participants (64 percent) indicated that they value face-to-face interactions in collaboration. Participants specifically highlighted the need to use face-to-face interactions to expedite work and collaborate more effectively with colleagues in the workplace. The use of face-to-face interactions also helped participants to develop professional relationships with their colleagues, which also lead to more effective collaboration. Study participant, MM3, shared their experience getting better results when interacting face-to-face.
I prefer face-to-face.

So, especially with my hiring managers and the people, my colleagues here, if I can stop you in the hall, I would prefer to have that conversation. Not that I don't mind the written trail, but I feel like you pick up a lot more social cues and things like that or they can speak more freely about some sensitive matters if I'm able to address them on a one-on-one situation versus putting it even in the phone or in writing.

Some of my hiring managers have much more flexible telework schedules for their subordinate staff and trying to get them scheduled when I know the value of the face-to-face interview and they are willing to do it over the phone is somewhat frustrating because you want to move in an expeditious way, but you also want to be conscious of the fact that the people that you're trying to schedule are generally hiring managers and significantly above your level.

Subtheme 3: Setting Clear Expectations for Successful Collaboration

The ability to set clear expectations in working relationships was identified as the most important approach needed for successful collaboration in the workplace by study participants. Overall, a total of 11 study participants (100 percent) indicated clear expectations as the most valuable and effective tool in navigating a collaborative relationship in the workplace. Study participant, MM1, shared their experience working on a collaborative project that had successful results because of the time spent setting clear expectations, roles, and outcomes.

The goal was a report of disciplines that we had either worked on or touched at some point for time and attendance from January 1st until now. So because there are so many requests for discipline that were put into the system, it was best to break it down by
area of responsibility, so that would be terminal. So I had to delegate to two other specialists and our team lead stepped in and assisted to break things down by terminal. So since you should have a familiarity with your disciplines or proposed disciplines or requested disciplines I should say, it's a lot easier to navigate what was conduct and what was time and attendance. I sent an email [to the team], we had a conversation, a couple follow up questions, and then everyone knew what was expected. They emailed it back to me and we got it done. A couple of minutes late, but we got it done.

[00:23:12] It definitely started as an in-person conversation because like I said, I prefer to have that because we're equal. So it's not like [I am] delegating to you, it's just that the work necessitates that I need your support. And so, I said hey, I received this request, it's due at 3:00, you know, I have to facilitate from 9:00 until about 1:00, or when we have a debrief after that. So I only have two hours to get this done. Well, initially I mentioned it to our team lead, and then she said to go ahead and communicate it with the team. So I had a verbal conversation, and then I sent them what was needed in email, and then we had a follow up after that.

The use of a clear expectation setting minimizes the chance that coworkers will misunderstand the project or task at hand. Creating space to clarify roles and expectations in a collaborative project also allows for the opportunity to ask questions and gather resources that may otherwise have been overlooked. Conversely, study participant, MM8, shared an experience where the lack of clear expectations and space to ask questions for clarity was detrimental to a collaborative project.
I definitely would have suggested something that works best for the both of us. For an initial meeting I definitely would've said, "Okay, well for the first initial meeting, I do think you need to sit down to gauge your ideas and my ideas so that we can come to a common ground to figure out what I'll be contributing and what you will be contributing. Any additional questions or concerns moving forward or issues that we may come about within the project over time, we can do phone conversation and things like that." It's giving both people what they need and then also catering to the importance of the project overall.

There was a project that I was working on where there was a team of three. We had an initial meeting about what tasks would be distributed amongst the team. I was okay with that, but there were also some things that I was unclear about. I did what I could do and based on the knowledge that I had and the information that I felt contributed to the project. There were also other concerns that I had around whether this was going in the right direction if I needed things added and I would voice that.

I tried to set up different time frames and meetings and things like that where we can get together consecutively so that we can talk about it, but it never felt like it. Everyone's schedule was different, I felt like it was difficult to do that. When the time came I did, when we did get the opportunity to meet about it, I didn't bring it up. I think it's important to discuss that, just so people know what kind of person you are, you want them to be aware of how you work so that it can flow well. Like, how you work and how I work and you can find a common ground.
Summary

Collaboration is an iterative process that requires clarity about not only your strengths and skillsets but also those of the colleagues you are working with. The use of technology in collaborative relationships can lead to innovative solutions if embraced by team members. The value of technology in innovation does not replace the value of face-to-face interactions when collaborating but can improve the outcomes of it. Collaboration in the workplace can be a positive experience if coworkers understand each other’s preferences for interaction and intentionally determine clear expectations and roles for how they should work together. Figure 3 shows a conceptualization of the subthemes that contributed to an understanding of the theme of collaboration. Overall, the success of collaboration hinges on clarity. Clarity in the expectations of a project and the roles of those involved creates a foundation for success in collaborative relationships in the workplace.
Figure 3: Collaboration Subtheme Conceptualization of Study Participant Perspectives
Conclusion

Study participants identified effective collaboration in the workplace as an important tool that can be used to leverage the skills, abilities, and knowledge of colleagues in the workplace. The relationships and experiences we have shape our preferences for how we collaborate. The themes that emerged as a result of this study indicate that flexibility, self-awareness, and a commitment to collaborative techniques guide how participants worked effectively with their colleagues. The ability to be flexible required study participants to be adaptable when dealing with change in the workplace and learn to adjust their approach to meet the work style of their colleagues.

Self-awareness was identified by study participants as a consistent focus that determined their success in working with others. Participants shared that they used time and work management techniques to work efficiently with their colleagues and build positive professional relationships. Participants with a focus on their self-awareness were also aware of their personal boundaries, strengths, and weaknesses. This awareness helped participants to understand how they should adjust their work style to be effective collaborating in the workplace. Finally, an overall commitment to collaboration was connected to an understanding of how individual colleagues preferred to collaborate. The most important aspect of collaboration across the participant group was connected to clarity about the goal of the project and the expectations for each individual coworker involved.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

The focus of chapter five is to report the conclusions and implications of this study about how the Millennial generation collaboration preferences in a government agency. A review of
findings from the interpretive phenomenological analysis of data collected about the experiences of different generations collaboration in the workplace is presented in this chapter. The subsections of each finding in this study explores the implications for Mannheim’s Theory of Generations. The key findings outlined in this chapter are further discussed in relation to literature and the theoretical framework used to inform this study. The implications for practice of the research study are outlined to provide insight into how research findings will inform how Millennials work and are collaborated within the workplace. Finally, based on research findings, suggestions for future research are discussed to reflect on the research study and identify areas of improvement for future research.

Major Findings of the Study

This research study focused on understanding the lived experiences of the Millennial generation to answer the research question: How do Millennials prefer to collaborate in the workplace? Collaboration is defined in several ways, but consistently included the concepts “sharing of planning, making decisions, solving problems, setting goals, assuming responsibility, working together cooperatively, communicating, and coordinating openly” (Gardner, 2005, p.62). Considering the varied perspectives of collaboration that individuals can possess, understanding the preferences of the Millennial generation in the workforce can positively influence the success of organizations. To answer the research question participants from the Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial generation were included in the study. The participants provided insight into their professional collaboration experiences to identify themes, subthemes, and major findings.

The data gathered identified themes of this research study that resulted in three major findings related to how the Millennial generation prefers to collaborate in the workplace. The
first finding is that the Millennial generation has an innate ability to adjust to the workplace to address conflict and create successful collaborative results with their colleagues. The second finding is that the Millennial generation values innovation in collaborative work with colleagues. The third finding is that the most important aspect of any collaborative experience is setting clear roles and expectations at the outset of a project.

**Finding 1: Millennials Adjust to the Workplace**

This research study identified that six out of eight Millennial participants (75 percent) displayed a commitment and expertise in adjusting to their workplace to achieve effective collaboration. Collaboration requires flexibility and a conscious self-awareness of personal working style as well as the work style of colleagues. Successful collaboration requires a commitment to understanding and valuing the diversity and different approaches each person brings to the work (Gardner, 2005). This acknowledgment and acceptance of the varying perspectives of professional coworkers’ Millennial participants indicated a keen focus on their self-awareness. The connection between self-awareness and success collaboration was identified consistently by Millennial study participants.

One aspect of self-awareness for Millennial participants in the study was connected to their time and work management techniques. Phillips, (2018) discovered that when engaging in “formal collaborations, calendaring and follow through led to an increased perception of success in working with peers from diverse backgrounds” (p. 39). Overall, a total of six out of eight Millennial participants (75 percent) indicated that they used time management tools, such as email, calendars, and to-do lists, and tactics to shift their individual workstyle collaborate. The use of these tools prepared Millennials to engage and collaborate effectively with their colleagues.
The Millennial study participant, MM1, shared a collaboration experience working with an aggressive and direct colleague. The participant demonstrated a commitment to flexibility and a deep level of self-awareness in working with a coworker to effectively collaborate while mitigating conflict and disagreements.

[00:17:48] So a specific example, there was a mistake that was made, where we ended up working together because I was getting the information to someone else and they passed it off to them because they were going to be out for the last couple of days. And there was a mistake that was made, so the information that the [coworker] had was not disseminated to everyone. So there was a failure to communicate expectations for that particular action. So instead of addressing it in a particular way, they typically do raise their voice, draw attention, and they are annoyed, upset, all of those things. And we did get it resolved however, I did have to inform our director later on what took place, but it got a little loud, yeah.

[00:18:59] I tried to be respectful as possible. This particular person just pokes the bear so to speak, and I continue to try to walk away. I said, well going forward, now that I have this information, I will make sure that these things are done, this won't happen again, and then they continue with the conversation even after at that point, there's nothing else I could have done. I expressed, I understood what they were trying to communicate, so I tried to walk away, and end the conversation, but this particular person doesn't pick up on those social cues that the conversation has ended. So I politely let them know that I'm no longer talking about this, and so it sparked again. I guess one or two days after that, the weekend came and went, and then they were still at it, again. And so then our director kind of intervened and just resolved it. So things were working behind
the scenes to resolve the matter, but the dialogue hadn't ended until [our director] intervened.

[00:20:18] I think so. I'm not sure if [coworker] cares. Because I do feel it's this maternal thing, I would say toxic maternal thing, because my mother doesn't do that to me. But it's toxic because I'm older than you, I have the authority to speak to you in a particular way, or talk to you, or treat you with a particular way regardless of you being an adult as well. I can talk to you like you're a child.

[00:20:51] It doesn't happen often with me, but I observe it a lot. And I just heard someone else had the same complaint.

[00:21:03] Yeah, it's frustrating.

[00:21:08] Because it shouldn't happen at work. It shouldn't happen at all, but my understanding of how things work in the workplace is, regardless of how you feel, you still conduct yourself professionally. And I allowed that to make me lose my cool, which I don't like. Especially not at work. I mean, I'm very colorful in the things that I say and stuff like that, but that level of emotion, I don't think it should come out ever, but especially not at work.

The connection of the experiences of Millennial study participants to literature on cross-generational collaboration further supports this finding. Relationships at work are indicative of collaborative success and are critical to ensure the satisfaction and retention of Millennial generation in an organization. The Millennial generation has an instinctive nature to be forward-looking and intentionally consider the trajectory of their career (Salahuddin, 2001). These considerations for Millennials are the basis for their commitment to adjusting to the workplace.
They are flexible and determined to find a solution in collaborative situations. For Millennials, the trust that is needed in professional relationships is the drive for their adaptability to the workplace and encourages them to improve their performance at work (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010).

One of the approaches to flexibility Millennial study participants was the use of face-to-face interaction to collaborate more effectively. Overall, five out of eight Millennial participants (63 percent) indicated that they value face-to-face interactions in collaborative situations in the workplace. However, for the majority of Millennials in the study, this approach was adopted to suit the preferences of their colleagues to expedite the work that needed to be completed and also to avoid any miscommunication that could cause delays with progress in collaborative work. When responding to a scenario in the research study interview that described different working style of two colleagues, one who prefers to meet in person (Taylor) and one who prefers to meet using technology (Alex), Millennial participant, MM3, felt that flexibility was the key to making the collaborative relationship work.

[00:10:56] I'm Alex, but I'm a more friendly version of Alex, and I would be accommodating and come in because I would have to be here anyway and make it work.

[00:11:03] But I'm definitely the work outside regular hours. I'd rather do it in my pajamas at home person.

[00:11:14] I'd cave and just come in when they told me to.

[00:11:18] It's outside of preference, but at the end of the day, it's work and you need to do what you need to do, so if it means coming in and having a meeting when you'd rather be at home in your jammies, then you come in and you have a meeting.
The perspective shared by this study participant mirrors Hartman and McCambridge (2011) who indicate that the ability to use style-type and style-flex skills is crucial for successful collaboration. The skill is only effective if one person can comfortably abandon their preferences for communication and interaction to meet their colleagues where they are and use their preferred approach for communication and interaction.

The experiences of Millennial study participants are further reflected in Mannheim’s Theory of Generations. The first tenet of the Theory of Generations dictates that the characteristics of a generation are defined by shared experiences. The majority of Millennial study participants identified with their assigned generation, but a few did not. Overall a total of one Millennial study participant (12 percent of study participants) did not agree with their assigned generation based on birth year specifically stating a different perspective on the impact and awareness of cultural experiences that shaped the Millennial generation.

This reflects the core of Mannheim’s first tenet for the Theory of generations. Generational groups are formed by personal experiences and not only demographics because the shared experiences they have are so impactful in defining perceptions and preferences. The third tenet of the Theory of Generations dictates that the perception is shaped through fresh contacts and exposure to new knowledge and experiences. The diversity of experiences that the Millennial generation has access to in the workplace helps to shape their perspective and abilities. Access to other generations also shapes the experiences and flexibility of the Millennial generation. The more a Millennial learns through their experiences the deeper their generational consciousness becomes.

Figure 4 shows a conceptualization of the supporting emergent themes from this study
that contributed to an understanding of the finding that Millennials adjust to the workplace.

**Figure 4: Finding 1 Supporting Emergent Themes**

The experience of working in a government agency shaped the preference for collaboration and is consistent with the first tenet of Mannheim’s theory of generations. Millennial generation study participants specifically reported that their ability to navigate conflict in workplace relationships lead to successful collaboration experiences. To achieve successful collaborative workplace experiences Millennials intentionally worked with their coworkers by adapting to the collaboration and communication styles of their colleagues.

**Finding 2: Millennials Value Innovation in Collaboration**

Millennial participants in this study consistently valued innovation in collaborative relationships. Overall, a total of six out of eight Millennial participants (75 percent) indicated that they value innovation and trying new collaboration approaches in their work. In addition,
this same percentage of Millennial participants shared through their experiences that they prefer to use technology in collaboration with colleagues in the workplace and find it to be more efficient. This commitment to innovation is further supported by the value that Millennial study participants placed on diversity in their workplace collaborations. All Millennial participants in the study (100 percent) indicated that the diversity of generations as well as other areas added value to the outcomes of collaborative experiences. Millennials invited the opportunity to learn from diverse perspectives and find new, innovative solutions to the problems they work to solve in their organization. Study participant, MM6, shared their experience learning from generational diversity in the workplace and expressed how diversity can not only expand our individual expertise but also help to rejuvenate excitement and passion in work as well as inspire and support innovation.

[00:27:21] I think that people from different generations bring a different perspective to some things. I value having older people on the team because I do have a breadth of experience and different experiences from either previous work or the things that they've seen. Kind of been there, done that and so you can tap into their knowledge base. So I appreciate that. Having people on the team that are also Millennials or Generation X, they're easy to relate with and so it's easy to kind of push work forward because you have a mutual understanding socially of how things work. So I think it's just the different perspectives that come with the different generations.

[00:28:07] Having younger people on the team is good because, like you said, the iGeneration or Generation Z, they had an iPhone growing up and so having that tech-savvy, having that knowledge... And then sometimes they can be a little bit more fast-paced. Very excited about their career and where things are going. So it's kind of like
gung ho, I'm going to get this work done. And then once you've been in the workforce for a little while, it kind of dies. For some people, it can start to die down and now you're no longer so excited about your career.

After a while... After you've done something for so long, it can start to either get boring if you're working and doing the same thing all the time or you may just have a different perspective of what's important to you in your life. Things are important to people at different points in their life. And so for someone in Generation Z or a Millennial, their career might be really important to them because they're still at the beginning stages of it whereas someone who is a Generation X or Baby Boomer, they may be at the tail end of their career and they've been doing their work for so long that they're no longer interested and trying to find what's new or to be a change agent for progress in the workplace because they're comfortable with what they're doing.

Millennial participants viewed diversity in the workplace as a motivation that spurred their diversity and resilience. The innovation born out of diverse experiences and exposure to new knowledge created an opportunity for growth that Millennial participants highlighted as an asset in collaborative experiences in the workplace.

The perspectives of Millennial participants with regard to innovation in collaboration are further supported by the literature supporting the impact of technology and innovation in cross-generational collaboration in the workplace. The different generations in the workplace are influenced by the different expectations, approaches, and technology used to complete work (Simmons, 2010). The existence and use of technology in the workplace is a further testament to
the impact of the Millennial generation on the workforce. As the majority of the workforce, Millennials, reasonably, drive the future of the workforce.

Duant (2018) explored the influence of the Millennial generation on the future of work and concluded that Millennials are the guiding force for what technology is adopted for collaborative purposes in the workforce and how it is implemented. Duant (2018) argues that it is the responsibility of the organization to standardize approaches to work that consider the varied working styles of their employees and incentivize employees to embrace new technology to improve collaboration. The collaboration tools standardized by the organization must be intentionally “embedded in day-to-day processes where possible, so as to actively promote adoption among the workforce” (Duant, 2018, p. 34). The appreciation for technology held by the Millennial generation requires a strategic approach to create effective and innovative collaborative approaches in the workplace (Roberts et al., 2012).

The experiences of Millennial study participants are further reflected in Mannheim’s Theory of Generations. The first tenet of Mannheim’s Theory of Generations is that the characteristics of generations are defined by shared experiences. Technology is one of the most influential tools and experiences to shape the Millennial generation. Considering the vast impact technology has on the Millennial generation innovation in collaboration is a characteristic defined by a globally shared experience. Millennials were raised with handheld technology that shapes the way they interact with and shape the world and their experiences in it.

The third tenet of Mannheim’s theory is that the experiences of generations are shaped by fresh contacts and exposure to new knowledge and experiences. Exposure to new technology shapes the way the Millennial generation thinks about innovation. The innovative Millennial
approach to collaboration can improve the outcomes of collaborative work and also expose their colleagues to new knowledge, which can further shape other generations outside of Millennials.

Figure 5 shows a conceptualization of the supporting emergent themes from this study that contributed to an understanding of the finding that Millennials value innovation in collaboration.

![Finding 2 Supporting Emergent Themes](image)

**Figure 5: Finding 2 Supporting Emergent Themes**

Millennial generation participants in this study were influenced by their generational value of collaboration to produce innovation. The focus on innovation by Millennial generation study participants is consistent with the third tenet of Mannheim’s theory about how individuals in generational groups shape their preferences through personal values. The Millennial
generation seeks to have an impact or show progress with collaborative problem-solving and as a result, members of this generation reflect an energy for seeking new ways of doing things.

Finding 3: Everyone Needs Clarity to Collaborate

The final major finding of the research study is that across all generational groups in the research study the desire for clarity was a crucial step and preference for successful collaboration. Overall, all 11 study participants (100 percent) identified through their lived experiences the benefits of intentional expectation setting and role clarity, as well as the pitfalls when these things were not present in their collaborative experiences in the workplace. In order for study participants to achieve successful collaboration in their working relationships, it required clear expectations to be set.

One Millennial study participant, MM4, shared their experience leading a project that was misrepresented by their supervisor. The participant specifically references the miscommunication by their supervisor that derailed their collaboration attempts and lead to a delay in the implementation of the project. The lack of clear communication on the true status of the project as well as clear expectations for the desired outcome and how team members would collaborate together created a difficult collaborative situation.

[00:17:03] I think working on the HR portal because it's been very interesting. Not that we have the most diversity across age group on our team, but I think people lean on certain styles, maybe because they had managers, or like when they were just getting into the workforce, that were Traditionalist, so they lean to certain characteristics over another. But, it was different working with every single person, including our oldest person on the team, which it was very difficult to pin [coworker] down, actually. And, it
could've been a values thing, where [coworker] felt like [they] just wanted to own [their] work and didn't want anyone else to get in the way of it.

[00:18:04] To automate a good number of processes that were on paper. Either automate or just make some processes more efficient.

[00:18:18] Designing the portal, just outlining all the requirements for the applications in the portal, outlining user roles, user access, what that would look like, what automated would look like, and then just continually meeting with all the functional areas to test it, test it with managers, any other users, and just continue to adjust.

[00:18:59] So, we started working on this maybe like six to eight months after I came into the agency, and there was this notion from our director at the time that we had mapped out and understood all these processes. So, that's where I started. I started believing the assumptions that our director made on actually having this information readily available and being able to actually immediately start building the portal. So, I started at the completely opposite end of where the teams actually were.

[00:19:44] [The director] is someone who thrives on innovation but at a very, very high level. So, not very detail-oriented, just, "This is taking too long, or we can do this better, let's do it better," and not very grounded or bogged down by the context or the details, and [the director] could have been taking people at their word when they said they had standard operating procedures, or they said that they had the process, or that it was automated, in one place, like SharePoint, but it really wasn't. So, I think that was the biggest pain point, was just trying to pull apart what people wanted to be the reality, versus what the actual reality was.
The value of clear expectations when collaborating in the workplace is further supported by research on cross-generational collaboration in the workforce. Dols et al. (2010) argue that the members of the Millennial generation value collaboration as much as they value individuality, influence, and work-life balance. Gardner (2005) frames collaboration as a process as well as an outcome. “The collaborative process involves a synthesis of different perspectives to better understand complex problems. A collaborative outcome is the development of integrative solutions that go beyond an individual vision to a productive resolution that could not be accomplished by any single person or organization” (Gardner, 2005, p. 63). By this definition, the process of collaboration is only possible by embracing, analyzing, and applying different perspectives. The process for collaboration outlined by Gardner (2005) further supports the idea that clear expectations are key to the process. The process is arranged in three phases: problem setting, direction setting, and structuring. The focus at each phase of the process is on establishing clarity to determine roles, resources, and an approach to collaboration that can meet the objective outlined.

The preference of study participants to set clear expectations in collaboration align with the theoretical framework used for the study. Mannheim’s first tenet of the Theory of Generations is that the characteristics of generations are defined by shared experiences. The negative impact that is caused by a lack of clear expectations has been experienced by every Millennial participant in this study. The experiences of each Millennial participant that allowed them to identify the importance of clarity in collaboration were directly connected to the shared experiences they had with coworkers on their team, many of whom were also part of this study. This connection points to a larger shared experience for the study participant group indicative of Mannheim’s first tenet. These shared experiences, positive or negative, lead to a deep value for
clarity in collaboration.

The third tenet in Mannheim’s theory is directly supported by the experiences of Millennial study participants. The preferences of Millennial study participants are shaped by the fresh contacts they experience and their exposure to new knowledge and experiences. The preference for clear expectations in collaboration is the direct result of personal experiences by Millennial participants. Each new collaboration experience shaped the skills and tools of study participants. The exposure to new experiences informed and expanded the knowledge of study participants. Through their experiences, they were able to learn new approaches to collaborate more effectively.

**Summary of Findings**

This interpretive phenomenological analysis study focused on understanding the preferences of the Millennial generation for collaboration in the workplace. The results of this research study led to the identification of three major findings. First, the Millennial generation had a preference and skill for adjusting to the workplace. As a result of the Millennial generation’s influence by changing technology and innovation, their ability to adapt to new settings, expectations, and embrace new knowledge and experiences makes them apt at using flexibility to achieve collaboration in the workplace. The technology-influenced experiences of Millennials connect directly to the second finding of this research study, Millennials value innovation in collaboration. For the Millennial generation, innovation is the preference for finding more effective ways to collaborate. This innovation frequently involves the use of technology for the sake of working smarter instead of harder. The final finding of the research study is that Millennials, like all generations involved in the study, overwhelmingly value clarity when collaborating. Millennials in the study consistently point to the success and failure of
collaboration based on how expectations for work, roles, and outcomes of collaborative projects were intentionally set at the outset of a project.

The success of collaboration in a government agency for the Millennial generation study participants was contingent upon the extent to which clear roles and expectations were discussed and determined at the outset of the project. Mannheim’s theory of generations does not specifically outline the need for clarity in generational communication. The gap between Mannheim’s theory and this finding is primarily due to the time period that the theory was developed because the workplace at the time may not have been as dependent upon team projects. This finding is consistent with Gardner’s (2005) findings that the process and action of collaboration can only be successful when clear roles and expectations are set for all parties involved.

**Implications for Practice**

The key findings identified as a result of this research study provide insight into the preferences of the Millennial generation when collaborating in the workplace. These findings have the opportunity to shape the way organizations create more collaborative workplaces that effectively engage Millennial employees in workplace relationships and projects with colleagues. The two key implications for practice in organizations related to this study are a focus on improving organizational commitment to diversity and the importance of implementing a standard collaborative approach to norm expectations for setting clear expectations in collaborative projects.
Organizational Commitment to Diversity

As a result of this research study based on participant experiences and preferences, a focus on improving commitment to diversity takes many forms. First, organizations can create an overt commitment to diversity by intentionally creating a culture that embraces the diversity of background, knowledge, and experiences of its employees. Research data indicated the majority of study participants specifically value the diversity of perspectives that different generations of colleagues in their workplace bring to their collaborative work. One of the key silo-inducing factors in cross-generational collaboration is the stereotypes and misconceptions connected with different generations. These misconceptions about different generations can negatively influence how colleagues collaborate in the workplace. Havens (2015) argues that the idea of four distinct generations in the workplace, which includes Traditionalist, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials, is a myth that it would benefit organizations to abandon in how they think about employee engagement, collaboration, and motivation. “The four-generation model is entirely unworkable if you want to create loyalty, dedication, and runaway success. Thinking of your workforce as multigenerational creates more problems than it solves” (Havens, 2015, p.15). Instead, the idea of distinct generations can be simplified to a spectrum containing two labels: Us and Them.

“Us and Them is how we think about everyone and everything. We have friends and family, and everyone else is a stranger; we have people who are the same color or sexual orientation or religion as ourselves, and everyone else is not; we have people who work in our industry and people who work in other fields; we have people who work in our company, and everyone else is an outsider who can’t possibly understand the issues we’re dealing with or the processes that govern our business” (Havens, 2015, p. 41).
The removal of generational labels as a constraint for how employees understand and interact with each other in the workplace also creates an opportunity to embrace the use of technology and innovation in a collaborative workplace. Research data indicated the Millennial participants in the study valued the use of technology and innovative practices in collaboration at a higher rate than their Baby Boomer and Generation X colleagues. This discomfort with new, innovative approaches and technological tools can limit the growth and effectiveness of an organization.

In addition to abandoning the four-generation model organizations can also build a culture that intentionally values and promotes diversity is through the implementation of shared organizational values. Gardner’s (2005) review of effective lessons in collaboration revealed the impact and importance that shared values have on grounding varying perspectives as a value for collaboration in an organization. “Shared values and goals are a foundational part of the overarching mental structure that drives collaborative efforts. Therefore, it is important to evaluate personal goals and values and to make them explicitly conscious. This requires the dualistic pursuit of self-knowledge and knowledge of other’s mental models” (Gardner, 2005, p. 63). The implementation of clearly communicated shared organizational values provides a foundation for all members of the organization to use in how they collaborate in the workplace.

**Implement a Standard Collaborative Approach**

A major finding of this research study was the consistent preference of study participants for setting clear expectations when collaborating in the workplace. This preference for Millennial study participants, as well as Baby Boomer and Generation X participants, indicates that it is in the best interest of an organization to develop a standard approach for collaboration. The implementation of a standard collaboration approach used across the organization creates
consistency in the setting of roles, expectations, objectives for collaborative projects. Clarity on these aspects will help to ensure successful and positive collaboration experiences in the workplace. One possible approach to create this standard collaborative approach is to invest in the organization-wide adoption of a project management model that all employees can use as the basis for their working relationships. The implementation of a project management model can be used to standardize how clear expectations are set in collaborative projects in the workplace to support all employees by addressing their preference for clarity.

**Limitations of the Study**

The research study was able to identify the preferences of Millennials for how they collaborate in the workplace. However, there are three key limitations of the study that should be considered in reviewing the results of this research study. These three limitations of the study are the small size of the participant pool, the limited generational diversity of the participant pool, and the targeted selection process for identifying study participants.

First, the size of the participant pool was limited. To complete an interpretive phenomenological analysis research study the study focused on understanding the lived experiences of a total of 11 participants across the Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Millennial generations. The focus of an interpretive phenomenological study is to understand the personal experiences and perspectives of study participants, which makes a smaller participant group manageable. However, the small size requires that the research study exchange a wider scope of perspectives for a more intense depth of participant experiences.

Second, in addition to the limited size of the participant pool, the diversity of the participant pool was also limited. The majority of the 11 participants involved in this research
study identified as members of the Millennial generation. The inclusion of more perspectives from members of the Baby Boomer and Generation X generations could help to strengthen the findings of this study and understanding of how Millennial preferences for collaboration compared to a more robust group of additional generations. A key reason for this limitation was the resignation of several Baby Boomer and Generation X members from the government team targeted for this study in the months before research data was collected through in-person one-on-one interviews. The limitations of the participant pool also resulted in the exclusion of any Generation Z participants, which follows the Millennial generation and is the newest generation entering the workforce. Although the team involved in this study is generationally diverse, the team did not include any members of Generation Z so their perspective is not considered in this study.

Finally, the targeted selection process of identifying research study participants also presents a limitation to the study. To understand the lived experiences of a team’s collaboration experiences in the workplace the participants of the study were limited to one team in a larger government agency. The focus on members of one team provided a more connected understanding of their collaboration experiences in the workplace but narrowed the scope of data collected. The members of this government team represent a small percentage of their overall agency and the experience of other teams in other government agencies.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

There are several recommendations for future research that could be pursued as a result of the findings identified in this research study. The recommendations for future research include expanding the study participant group and utilizing varied methods of data collection.
First, the expansion of the participant group would address a key limitation of the study’s size and diversity. By expanding the participant group to include more participants from different generations a more comprehensive understanding of generational preferences for collaboration in the workplace is possible to understand. Additional teams within the government agency could also be included in the study to create a more detailed understanding of generational preferences for collaboration. It would also provide an additional level of detail to understand the perspective of the managers of each team. By also collecting the perspectives of team managers the research data can then be compared to identify gaps in the perceptions and preferences of employees and their supervisors.

In addition to the expansion of the study participant group, a recommendation for future research is to explore different methods of collecting data about participant experiences. The use of varied methods for data collection can provide a greater breadth of knowledge and data to identify more targeted findings. A focus group can be used to understand the collaborative experiences of the entire team better. Understanding the individual perspectives of team members alone provides value, but it is not possible to verify without the interaction of a focus group. There are multiple stakeholders involved in collaboration in the workplace. The perspective of just one stakeholder in a collaborative team does not provide a complete picture of the experience. It would benefit the future of this research to understand the Millennial collaboration experience in the workplace in the context of their professional colleagues and working relationships.
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Appendix A

Comparison of the Four Communication Styles for Hartman & McCambridge (2011)
Appendix B
Recruitment Email

FROM: Otiji.a@husky.neu.edu
TO: Study Participant Team
SUBJECT: Invitation to Join Adaora’s Doctoral Study

Dear Team:

As you may know, I am a doctoral student at Northeastern University (NEU) and I am working on my dissertation. I have received permission from your team director and approval from the NEU Institutional Review Board to conduct my research at your organization from April – August 2019. I am asking that you consider participating in the study. Your participation is completely voluntary, and if you decide to participate, you may opt out of the study at any time.

The purpose of the study is to address a gap in knowledge about how members of different generations collaborate most effectively in the workplace. The current workforce is made up of several generations so an understanding of how they work effectively will benefit the future of workplaces.

I will be conducting individual interviews to understand your personal experiences and preferences for collaborating at work. Each individual interview will take approximately one (1) hour. All of the interviews will be held at a location and time that is convenient for you.

I want you to know that the confidentiality of your feedback is important to me, and I will use pseudonyms to protect you. In addition, the information collected will primarily be used for my doctoral thesis project, and potentially for future journal articles.

Please email me at Otiji.a@husky.neu.edu if you are interested in participating in this study or have any questions. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Thank you,

Adaora N. Otiji-Spizler
Doctoral Candidate, 2019, College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University, Boston
Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Name of Investigator(s): Dr. Rashid Mosley (Principal Investigator), Adaora N. Otiji-Spizler (Student Researcher)

Title of Project: Generational Interactions in the Workplace: A Research Study of Cross-Generational Collaboration in Professional Relationships

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask the researcher any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You have been invited to participate in this research study on generational interactions in the workplace. You have been asked to participate because you are currently an employee in a government agency that has employees from different generations.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of the study is to address a gap in knowledge about how members of different generations collaborate most effectively in the workplace. The current workforce is made up of several generations so an understanding of how they work effectively will benefit the future of workplaces.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to participate in one-on-one individual interview that will be audio recorded. Specifically, we are seeking your consent to conduct a semi-structured interview that will be recorded and transcribed. The interview generally takes about one hour and will take place at a location of your choosing. We anticipate that this interview will take place during spring 2019 and consist of 4-6 main questions.

Your review of the interview transcript, particularly as it represents your perspective, is critical to the credibility of this research study. At the end of the interviews, you will be asked to review the interview transcript and confirm its accuracy in capturing your experiences and opinions.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

You will be interviewed at a location that is convenient for you. The interview will take about one hour to complete. After the interview, you will receive a copy of the transcript via email to review and determine if the transcript of your interview accurately reflects your experiences and opinions. The review of the transcript will take 15-30 minutes and you will be asked to respond to the email with your approval or with your comments on the transcript.
There is no risk to participating in this research. Your responses will be kept confidential and all audiotapes of interviews will be destroyed following transcription and analysis. Any reports or publications based on this research will only use pseudonyms, and will not identify you or any other participants as being part of this project.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. However, this research study is designed to obtain new knowledge, and your answers may help to improve cross-generational collaboration in government agencies.

Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. Your responses will be kept confidential and all audiotapes of interviews will be destroyed following transcription and analysis. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being part of this project.

The data that is collected from in-person interviews will be captured in a digital audio recording file and stored securely on Northeastern University’s password-protected cloud-storage server. Only the researcher and the transcription service will have access to these files. Once the file is transcribed and analyzed the audio recording will be destroyed as well as any identifiers or links to you, including written notes and email communication. Your signed consent form will be retained electronically on Northeastern University’s password-protected cloud-storage server and printed copies will be retained in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s personal home office for the required period of three years following the end of the study.

There are no known significant risks involved in being a participant in this study.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. Your participation or non-participation will in no way affect other relationships (e.g. employer, school, etc). You may stop your participation in this study at any time.
If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Adaora Otiji-Spizler at Otiji.a@husky.neu.edu, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Dr. Rashid Mosley at R.mosley@husky.neu.edu, the Principal Investigator.

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, Mail Stop: 560-177, 360 Huntington Avenue, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, Mail Stop: 560-177, 360 Huntington Avenue, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**

You will not receive compensation for your participation in the study.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**

There is no cost to participate in the study.

**I agree to take part in this research.**

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<th>Signature of the person who explained the study to participant above and obtained consent</th>
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Appendix D

Interview Protocol

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The purpose of the study is to address a gap in knowledge about how members of different generations collaborate most effectively in the workplace. The current workforce is made up of several generations so an understanding of how they work effectively will benefit the future of workplaces.

Part I: Introductory Questions Objectives (5-10 minutes). Build rapport, describe the study, answer any questions, and gain signed informed consent.

You are speaking with me today because you have volunteered to share your experiences on collaboration in the workplace. My research project focuses on how the experiences of different generations are understood in the workplace. Through this study, we hope to gain more insight into what drives different generations by understanding their preferences for collaboration. Hopefully this will allow us to identify ways in which we can better support cross-generational relationships in the workforce and leverage the value they bring to organizations.

Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. Do I have your permission to record this interview? [If yes, thank the participant; let them know you may ask the question again as you start recording, and then turn on the recording equipment].

**TURN ON RECORDER HERE** - For the record, do I have your permission to record?

I will also be taking written notes. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and only a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the transcripts. I will be the only one privy to the tapes, which will eventually be destroyed after they are transcribed. To meet our human subjects requirements at the university, you must sign the consent form I have with me (see Appendix C).

**GIVE INFORMED CONSENT FORM HERE**

Essentially, this document states that: (1) all information will be held confidential, (2) your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) we do
not intend to inflict any harm. Do you have any questions about the interview process or how your data will be used?

This interview should last about 45 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in order to push ahead and complete this line of questioning. Do you have any questions at this time?

Part II: Objectives (45 minutes): Obtain the participant's experiences and perspectives in their own words about how they have collaborated with others in their workplace.

I will ask you a few questions about how you collaborate with others in your work to learn about your experiences in the workplace. First, we will start by gathering some background information about you. Then I will ask specific questions about your professional work experience.

**Background Information**

1) What is your name?
2) What gender do you identify as?
3) What is your birth date (month/day/year)?
4) What is your current role in your organization?
5) How long have you been with your organization?
6) What generation do you feel you belong to? Why?

*GIVE GENERATION OVERVIEW HANDOUT HERE* - I have an overview of the different generations for you to reference. This reflects the different generations that are currently present in the workforce. Please take a few minutes to look it over. Do you have any questions about the handout? Do you still agree with your assessment of the generation you belong to?
Interview Questions

1) **What does a typical workday look like for you?**
   a) What tool(s) do you use most frequently to complete your work?

Possible follow up questions:
   1. Which generation(s) do you interact with on a typical workday?
   2. Do you use different tools based on the generation you are communicating with, in what way and why?

2) **Scenario 1: Meeting Time (Alex & Taylor)**
   Alex and Taylor have been tasked with creating a report for the head of their agency. Alex works from home a few days a week and tends to work outside of normal business hours. Taylor prefers to work only in the office during office hours and not work at home. They are having trouble finding a time to meet to get started on the project. Alex’s schedule during the day is too busy to meet and suggests that they do a phone call on a day when Alex is working at home. Taylor thinks it is important to be clear about the work that needs to be done and suggests a meeting in person when Alex is in the office. They cannot agree on a meeting and the project comes to a standstill.
   a) How would you describe the issue in this scenario?
   b) What generation do you think each person in the scenario is a part of? Why?
   c) What would you have done differently in this scenario? Why?
   d) How have you seen this scenario happen in your own work experience.

Possible follow up questions:
   1. What assumptions did you make about Alex and Taylor? Why?

3) **Thinking about your work this year, please describe a time you’ve had to work with a coworker on a project.**
   a) How did you work with your coworker(s)?
   b) What was your role in the project?
   c) What was the goal of the project?
   d) What would you have done differently?
   e) How does working in a government agency influence how you work with your coworkers?

Possible follow up questions:
   1. What generation do you think the coworker(s) you worked with belong to? Why?
   2. Which generations do you work with most frequently?
4) **Scenario 2: Forceful Feedback (Robin, Jace, & Cameron)**

Robin is assigned to setup a project contract. To ensure that the content of the contract is correct Robin invites three coworkers to meet and provide guidance as subject matter experts. Robin thanks them after the meeting and says that the contract should be up and running in a few months. After the meeting one of the subject matter experts in the meeting, Jace, stays behind and asks Robin directly to share the final draft to review to make sure it’s accurate. Robin shares the final draft a few weeks later and Jace provides extensive edits that completely change the scope of the project. Robin consults the supervisor who assigned the project, Cameron, and asks for guidance. Cameron disagrees with Jace’s edits and tells Robin to move ahead with the original final draft. When the contract is finalized a month later Jace is furious that their edits were not included. Jace ignores Robin for the next few weeks and declines to participate in any meetings with Robin.

a) How would you describe the issue in this scenario?

b) What generation do you think each person in the scenario is a part of? Why?

c) What would you have done differently in this scenario? Why?

d) How have you seen this scenario happen in your own work experience.

Possible follow up questions:

1. What assumptions did you make about Robin and Jace? Why?

5) **Please describe the people you work with most frequently. Which generation do you feel they belong to? Why?**

a) How did you determine the generation your coworkers belong to?

b) Describe how you work with a coworker based on their generation/age?

Possible follow up questions:

1. Describe any challenges you have experienced based on working with people from different generations?

2. Describe any benefits or advantages you have experienced based on working with people from different generations?

3. Which generation do you enjoy working with most?

6) **Do you have anything else you would like to share about how different generations collaborate in the workplace?**

Thank you for your time.
# Appendix E

## Generation Overview Handout

### Generations in the Workforce

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Appendix F

Member Check Email to Interview Participant with Transcript

FROM: Otiji.a@husky.neu.edu

TO: Interview Participant

SUBJECT: Doctoral Research Study Follow Up Interview Transcript Review

Dear [PARTICIPANT NAME],

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me during your interview. I am reaching out to share the transcript of our conversation for your review. The purpose of sharing the transcript with you is to identify any areas in the transcription that may be inaccurate.

Could you please review the transcript and let me know if you have any additions or edits to clarify the transcript that you think are necessary? Please share your thoughts with me by [DATE] so that I can ensure I include your thoughts in my research analysis.

I appreciate your continued support on this research study. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you,

Adaora N. Otiji-Spizler
Doctoral Candidate, 2019, College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University, Boston

Attachments:

1. Interview Participant Transcript