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A measure of intergenerational tension in the workplace: Some preliminary findings

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Abstract:

An ageing population is changing the nature of the workplace. When combined with age discrimination legislation, employers now face the fact that they can no longer ignore and then quietly retire their older workers. One outcome of this is that the proportion of older workers is increasing. Further, they intend to stay at work longer and resist being an easy target for organisations when they restructure. This study proposes that the continued and increasing presence of older workers is responsible for a phenomenon called intergenerational tension which is defined as a latent or covert form of intergroup conflict in the workplace caused by value and attitudinal differences between the generations. The study measures these differences with an instrument called the Intergenerational Tension Questionnaire which was administered to employees from a large Western Australian government department. Preliminary findings indicate the presence of intergenerational tension along the broad divides of generational differences, organisational practices and employee demographics.

Introduction

Governments throughout the western world are becoming increasingly worried about their ability to meet the pension and health care costs of an ageing population. The baby boomers, or those born between 1946 and 1961, are the cause of the problem. According to a recent report commissioned by the Department of Health and Aged Care (Australia), once the baby boomers retire there will be only 2.5 workers between the ages of 15 and 64 to support them compared with the current ratio of more than five-to-one (Access Economics, 2001). Faced with this dilemma, governments in Australia and elsewhere are considering ways of reducing the anticipated financial burden of caring for them. For example, governments can either reduce levels of spending on aged care or increase taxes both of which are politically unpopular strategies. Alternatively, the ratio of young to old can be improved by actively supporting an increase in the number of young migrants — provided there are jobs for them. Another, less attractive option to improve the young to old ratio (at least for older citizens) is euthanasia. A more appealing and less controversial alternative, however, is for organisations to become more flexible when it comes to retaining and recruiting older workers including raising the retirement age to 70 years. To encourage this, Australia has already touted the option of offering taxation concessions to retirees who re-enter the workforce. Therein lies a dilemma because in today’s economic environment workers over the age of 40 years, let alone 70 years, are finding that organisations are not predisposed to employing them.

The reluctance of organisations to employ older workers can be traced in part to the notion of retirement itself. Prior to World War 2, working was usually a better option than retiring on a meagre pension and few benefits (Fyock & Dorton, 1994). This all changed, however, thanks to the rapid economic growth that followed World War 2. The new found prosperity enabled governments to boost spending on pensions, health care and other benefits for retirees to the point where retirement became an attractive alternative to work. Increasingly generous company funded retirement schemes and the high interest rates of the 1970s and 1980s also enabled many older workers to retire sooner than they might otherwise have done. The outcome was an environment in which older workers were expected to retire quietly to make way for the younger workers. In fact, not to do so was almost regarded as being unfaithful to one’s employer (Teh, 1999). Today, however, early retirement is no longer the attractive option it once was. As some older workers have found, low interest rates on savings have forced them to reassess their planned retirement age while others, particularly women, simply cannot afford to retire (Patrickson & Hartmann, 1996). Gone, too, are the seemingly attractive redundancy offers that were routinely offered to older workers when organisations downsized, or, in the case of government departments, privatised (Encel, 1998).

Regardless of the reasons for staying in the workforce, today’s older workers know only too well that the organisation they entered 20 or more years ago is not the same. Then, loyalty was highly regarded and rewarded with regular pay rises, preferred placements and the certainty of promotion if desired. Progress, therefore, was predictable and unless truly incompetent or dishonest, nobody was ever sacked. Today, older workers would argue that loyalty and seniority rarely seem to count. Promotions are hard to come by and seem to go to younger workers who fit the corporate image. The younger workers know how to sell themselves and how to get noticed. For older workers unused to these practices, applying for promotion or a preferred transfer often becomes a pointless exercise because they feel that a younger worker, regardless of experience, will be favoured. Realising this, many older workers have become disillusioned to the point where they feel cheated; that the organisation they served faithfully for so many years has let them down. This circumstance is often referred to as a breach of one’s psychological contract or that tacit understanding between the employee and employer in which aspects of employment such as stability, defined career paths and seniority related privileges are exchanged for “socioemotional elements such as loyalty and support” (Rousseau & McLean Parks cited in Wolfe Morrison & Robinson,
According to Jankiewicz and Brown (1998, p.26), "effectively managing today's workforce requires a knowledge of similarities of employees in general, balanced by an understanding of the generational influences dividing the groups outside of work. An ability to synthesize the different needs could prove a strong competitive advantage in today's tight labor market." Corporate policy development, therefore, needs to reflect not only the needs of the younger and older age groups but also the realities of different patterns of management and different business objectives in different industry sectors (Pickersgill, Briggs, Kittay, O'Keefe, & Gillezeau, 1996). For example, older workers want respect, dignity and appreciation for a lifetime of work (Guggini cited in Cohen, 1995). They do not want to be seen merely as functionaries but as employees to be appreciated for the time they spend at work which, for many, is part-time by choice (Christensen, 1988). By contrast, younger workers regard organisations more as a means to an end rather than an end to a means and are compressing the traditional 20-year career-building cycle into a 20-month process (Stern, 1997). In these circumstances, getting them to believe and cooperate with a felt leadership ability of members of any age but as Poller (1996) cautions, looking after their interests should not be at the expense of those with equally valid interests. Employers, therefore, should be cautious about treating all age groups the same. A failure to do so will result in generational mistrust and mutual antipathy for the other group's accomplishments (Ramsey, 1993).

The cause of this mistrust, however, goes deeper than organisational change and the violation of one's psychological contract. It can be traced to entrenched generational differences which can be summed up in the seemingly innocuous phrase "the generation gap". This term emerged in the 1960s when the popular press made much of gaps, for example, the missile gap, the poverty gap and the science gap (Howe & Strauss, 1992). Mead (1970) attributed the generation gap of the 1960s to a fundamental shift in the way young people acquired their values. What Mead referred to was a social phenomenon in which peers were replacing parents as the significant models of behaviour. This is in stark contrast to earlier, traditional times when elders were charged with the responsibility for the transmission of culture and knowledge.

Of particular interest to sociologists of the time were the student uprisings of the 1960s which first occurred in the United States of America and later spread to Europe and beyond. The uprisings were directed at the spread of nuclear weapons, social injustice and the Vietnam War. While rarely violent, there was sufficient violence for the Establishment to take notice, particularly when those at the forefront of the protests were middle class youth who, in the past, were expected to support the Establishment.

History, however, tells us that there is nothing new in the notion of student unrest and elders bemoaning the failings of youth. Some 6000 years ago an Egyptian had inscribed on a tomb "We live in a decadent age. Young people no longer respect their parents. They are rude and impatient" (Stanford cited in Penn, 1972, p.17). Then, in 394 B.C., Socrates wrote, "Children now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority. They show disrespect for elders, and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants, of their households" (Gottlieb & Ramsey cited in Penn, 1972, p.17). Plato used generational strife as the causal mechanism for his model of political change while to Aristotle generational conflict stemmed from the character of the generations. And, as Frankel (1962) points out, Cicero was writing in defence of old age circa 44 B.C. In medieval England, in 1209 dissent between locals and students, in Oxford was so bad that many scholars fled to Cambridge where they established Cambridge University. The so-called "town versus gown" unrest occurred once again in Oxford in 1355 when the locals killed or maimed as many students as they could find. The dissent on both occasions was attributed to fear amongst the locals regarding the secrecy surrounding the university (at the time Latin was the language of academia) and the boisterous, sometimes antisocial behaviour of the scholars. While not strictly generational conflict, it could be argued that the relative youth of the scholars (12 - 15 years was the usual entry age to the university) and their apparent freedom served to exacerbate the situation. Later, during the 18th and 19th centuries student movements throughout Europe were commonplace as students actively rejected the values of the gerontocracy or those who possesses a disproportionate share of a nation's economic and political power and social status.

Generational differences, however, rarely result in widespread conflict and social upheaval. For this to occur requires what Feuer (1969) terms a catalyst or signal event that de-authorises the older generation or a feeling that the older generation has failed in its moral obligations. Penn (1972) equates this to the younger generation experiencing a common disillusionment with and distrust of the older group. Within organisations, signal events that result in generational conflict are extremely rare but not unknown. Perhaps the best example is the intergenerational conflict that occurred during the Great Depression and the steel worker rebellions of the late 1950s where it was not uncommon for younger workers to force older workers out of employment: "We had to razz one [old] man a full year before he quit" (Frankel, 1962, p.48). Frankel also reported instances of younger workers resorting to physical violence against older workers. Whether this could happen today is a moot point given the advent of age discrimination legislation and anti-victimisation laws. Nonetheless, as older workers have discovered, other, subler means are at work. The missed promotion, the failure to receive a preferred transfer, the lack of access to training, the implementation of technology, the pressure to perform and the more rapid pace of work all combine to make older workers feel insecure and angry at the changes imposed on them by their employer and society.

It is the contention of this paper that generational differences, employee demographics and organisational practices are responsible for a phenomenon called intergenerational tension in the workplace which is defined as:

A latent or covert form of intergroup conflict caused by value and attitudinal differences between the generations.

Tension can be thought of as suppressed anxiety or a strained relationship between individuals and groups (Delbridge, 1982, p.1782). This is not to suggest that tension is a permanent state. Time and circumstances will dictate the extent and degree of the phenomenon. In this paper, the notion of suppressed anxiety is important because it is suggested that intergenerational tension is latent or covert. Intergenerational tension is presented as an everyday fact of organisational life which exists as an undercurrent or type of background organisational noise that it so all-pervasive that it is rarely noticed. In this respect, intergenerational tension bears similarities to gender and ethnic tensions both of which have been recognised as counterproductive to organisational efficiency.

A conceptual schema for intergenerational tension is presented in Figure 1. The schema shows that an employee enters
the workplace with preconceived values and attitudes (i.e., generational differences) which are moderated by organisational practices and employee demographics (e.g., age, gender, educational qualifications) leading to intergenerational tension in the workplace.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Schema for Intergenerational Tension in the Workplace**

![Diagram of Conceptual Schema for Intergenerational Tension in the Workplace]

The literature on generational differences in the workplace, while providing valuable insights into the possible causes and effects of these differences, does not provide a measure of them. Instead, existing research methodologies investigate single intergenerational issues such as values (Burke, 1994), communication (Forteza & Prieto, 1994), teamwork (Shea, 1994), training (Thornburg, 1993) and commitment (Daboval, 1998). This research, however, takes a broader view of generational differences and attempts to measure them by means of a questionnaire which for the purposes of this paper is called the intergenerational tension questionnaire or ITQ.

**Who are the Older Workers?**

There is no consensus regarding the point at which one ceases to be a younger worker and becomes an older worker. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, for example, classifies the over 55s as older workers whereas the Australian Bureau of Statistics defines older or mature workers as those from the age of 45 to the age of eligibility for the aged pension. The Australian Council of Ageing, though, has a different interpretation. This organisation categorises 45 – 64 year olds as the mature aged and the 65+ age group as the older labour force while Forte and Hansvick (1999) used 50 years of age to differentiate younger and older workers. Older workers can also be as young as 40 years of age (Dhooge, 1994) – an age often used as an arbiter of “old” as far as employment is concerned. In the United States of America, Federal law holds that age discrimination begins at 40 (Simon, 1995) while in society 40 years of age seems to be a generally accepted yardstick differentiating old from young. Statistically, too, this appears to be a pivotal age in one’s career aspirations.

For the purposes of this paper, 40 years of age has been chosen as the point at which an employee becomes an older worker, with employees less than 40 years of age being younger workers.

**Methodology**

The questionnaire was developed in three stages: (a) an informal experience survey, (b) a pilot study and, (c) the final study. Given the subtle nature of intergenerational tension, it was felt that the final study should have sufficient power to detect a small effect size. Using the simple rule of thumb that the more power the better, particularly when testing for small between-group differences (Aron & Aron, 1999; Gay, 1996), the power level was determined at approximately 0.90 and the effect size index at 0.30. These levels thus exceeded the generally accepted power criterion of 0.80 for the behavioural sciences (Cohen, 1988). The confidence level was determined at the 95% level.

Respondents for the pilot study and final study were all employees of a large Western Australian government institution. At the time of this research, the institution employed more than 6,000 personnel.

**Age Cohorts and Generations**

Having determined the methodology we must still ask, “will any differences between younger workers and older worker be indicative of intergenerational tension?” Herein lies a dilemma because on one hand the paper measures age cohort responses and on the other, seeks to interpret them in terms of generational characteristics. The dilemma, as such, was pre-empted because the research was conducted at a time when the younger workers surveyed consisted almost exclusively of the generation labelled Generation X with the older workers consisting almost exclusively of baby boomers. It must be acknowledged however, that because of the transition or overlap effect, the generations cannot be as neatly divided as can age cohorts. A 38-year-old generation Xer, for example, will have more in common with a 42-year-old baby boomer than with a 28-year-old generation Xer. The notion of overlap or transition is not peculiar to this paper but is a given in cultural comparisons of generations. The other issue to be addressed is that of deciding how many years comprise a generation. This is the biological or years only approach which considers that a generation is an arbitrary measure that indicates a period of years between parent and child. In the Old Testament generations were described in terms of “And so-and-so begat so-and-so...” without any reference to the number of years between. On the basis of changes in sexual maturity and fertility, Troll (1970) cites 20 years as an appropriate measure of a generation whereas Mackay (1997) suggests that 15 years is a more realistic figure. However, given the current trend for western women in particular, to have their first child in their late 20s or early 30s indicates that perhaps 30 years is more appropriate. Thirty years is also the number of choice for lexicographers.

The popularity of the biological approach is related to its convenience for age-related studies in that populations can be
neatly configured according to the needs of the research. For example, Hickey and Kalish (1968) used age gaps of 20 years in a survey of participant attitudes towards other age groups while Levinson (1978), used 20 years as the measure of a generation in the context of a multi-generational approach to a generation whereby someone 6 to 7 years younger or older than an individual is a member of “my generation”, someone 8 to 15 years younger or older is half a generation apart with 20 years marking a full generation. For the purposes of this paper, a generation is defined as a period of 20 years.

Stage 1 - The Survey
The survey comprised 55 respondents who were chosen because of their likely experience with intergenerational issues, their interest in the paper, their work experience, their position and their presumed ability to comprehend and respond to the survey. The respondents were divided into eight categories: (a) older workers, (b) academics, (c) younger workers (d) practising psychologists, (e) human resource practitioners, (f) management consultants (g) retired senior managers, and (h) senior management personnel. When a potential respondent agreed to participate, time was spent with them (either singly or in groups) discussing and explaining the context and purpose of the paper.

The survey contained 41 variables which were divided between four sections derived from the conceptual schema. The sections were Organisational Demographics, Organisational Variables, Personal Variables and Group Values and Attitudes. Respondents were provided with a brief description of each section as follows:

5. Organisational Demographics were described as the measurable aspects of an organisation’s workforce. This section was based on Corwin’s (1969) paper on the role of intergroup relationships in organisational conflict which included variables relevant to this research, namely, organisational size, specialisation and stability, all of which are possible causes of organisational strain.

6. Organisational Variables were described as variables which show a specific relationship between the employee and the employer. For example, there is a relationship between risk taking behaviour and an employee’s perception of job security. Whereas younger workers tend to take more risks and accept such failure as part of the learning process, older workers sense that they have more to lose.

7. Personal Variables were described as variables independent of the organisation, (e.g., gender and marital status) but with the potential to affect the individual and his/her relationship with other individuals, with groups in the organisation and with the organisation. Age was not included as a variable in the Stage 1 survey because in the context of the paper, it was a given variable.

8. Group Values were described as a relatively coherent set of beliefs and rules governing the behaviour of group members while Group Attitudes were described as the tendency by group members to act in a certain way.

Respondents were asked to rank the variables in each section from 1 - 5 (with “1” being the most important) according to the extent to which they thought each of them contributed to intergenerational tension in the workplace.

Of the 55 surveys distributed, 54 or 98.2% were completed and returned. As the survey was for exploratory purposes only, the results were used as a guide to the likely nature of the pilot study variables. Therefore, excluding variables from the pilot study on criteria such as respondent rankings or the percentage of respondents selecting the variable, incurred the risk of excluding an important variable. For example, while respondents regarded access to training and training considerations as unlikely to cause intergenerational tension, the literature refutes this (Thornburg, 1995). Nonetheless, if both the literature and the respondents accorded a variable a very low ranking, the variable was more likely to be excluded. After analysis, 29 variables were retained. These then became the nucleus of the variables that were developed for the pilot study.

Stage 2 - The Pilot Study
The pilot study comprised 60 completed responses, that is, 15 employees each from the age groups 20 - 29 years, 30 - 39 years, 40 - 49 years and 50+ years. The major objective of the pilot study was to construct a questionnaire for the final study. This was achieved by using factor analysis (principal component analysis) to reduce the number of items to a more manageable size and by considering the comments made by respondents. The other objectives were to:

3. Reveal the latent factors or dimensions behind the variables associated with generational differences in the workplace.
4. Identify problems with the wording of the items and other related matters such as layout, spelling and grammar.

Sixty-three items were developed and were initially classified as belonging to either “Generational Differences” or “Organisational Practices” each of which was subdivided into three factors (Figure 2). The factors represent the underlying dimensions thought to be responsible for generational differences in the workplace. The naming of the factors was an arbitrary process and was reviewed after data analysis.
The factors were operationalised as follows:

**Intergroup relationships.** The items in this factor were derived from Realistic Group Conflict Theory (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961) and its complementary theory, Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel, 1970). SIT posits that the fact that one perceives one belongs to a group is sufficient to cause intergroup discrimination. Thus, because people prefer to have a positive social identity, comparisons tend to be made which allows them (the in-group) to be perceived in a positively valued way (Brown & Williams, 1984). Further, when the in-group is valued positively, it is accompanied by a more favourable self-view compared with one’s peers (Luszcz, & Fitzgerald, 1986). People also tend to associate with those who think and behave like themselves and they thus conclude (perhaps erroneously) that most people agree with them (Yinon, Mayraz, & Fox, 1994). In effect, group members believe that certain things about a specific object or situation are true or false, and other things about it are desirable or undesirable.

**Values and Attitudes.** The items in this factor were derived from Schwartz’s (1996) proposition that the total structure of value systems is based on two basic dimensions with each in polar opposition between two higher order value types (Figure 3). Younger workers, it is argued, are more likely to adhere to the values on the left side of Figure 3 while older workers are more likely to adhere to the values on the right side.

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*Stereotyping can be considered as a perceptual bias which exacerbates the in-group versus out-group scenario (Sherif et al., 1961). In the workplace, stereotyping is largely associated with negative perceptions of older workers on the part of younger workers (Fyock, 1994) and negative perceptions of younger workers on the part of older workers (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000). The items for this factor were based on the older worker stereotypes described by Fyock,*
and the younger worker stereotypes described by Zemke et al.

The items for Perceived Organisational Discrimination were based on the concept that the organisation, as represented by management, is guilty of ageism or a "process of systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this with skin colour and gender" (Butler, 1996, p.1). For younger workers, the items, though all but identical, were based on the same concept as ageism but with a reversal of roles. That is, they too feel that the organisation, as represented by management, discriminates against them because of their age and relative inexperience.

The items for Changing Balance of Power were based on the notion that in today's workplace, power and authority are no longer vested solely in senior employees. Instead, the shift to merit-based promotions and an emphasis on teamwork has resulted in a more egalitarian workplace in which younger workers are no longer prepared to defer to the opinions of older workers and hide their time in the hope of reward.

The items for Change were based on the notion that younger workers adapt better to, and more readily accept, organisational change than do older workers. Exacerbating this situation is a perception that older workers have difficulty in adapting to the rapid implementation of new technologies, especially information technology. After factor analysis the items were reduced to a final set of 25. Even though factor analysis confirmed that six factors were appropriate, four of the original six labels were renamed and one factor, Changing Balance of Power, was renamed and relocated from Organisational Practices to Generational Differences (Figure 4).

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Introduction
Governments throughout the western world are becoming increasingly worried about their ability to meet the pension and health care costs of an ageing population. The baby boomers, or those born between 1946 and 1961 are the cause of the problem. According to a recent report commissioned by the Department of Health and Aged Care (Australia), once the baby boomers retire there will be only 2.5 workers between the ages of 15 and 64 to support them compared with the current ratio of more than five-to-one (Access Economics, 2001). Faced with this dilemma, governments in Australia and elsewhere are considering ways of reducing the anticipated financial burden of caring for them. For example, governments can either reduce levels of spending on aged care or increase taxes both of which are politically unpopular strategies. Alternatively, the ratio of young to old can be improved by actively supporting an increase in the number of young migrants - provided there are jobs for them. Another, less attractive option to improve the young to old ratio (at least for older citizens) is euthanasia. A more appealing and less controversial alternative, however, is for organisations to become more flexible when it comes to retaining and recruiting older workers including raising the retirement age to 70 years. To encourage this, Australia has already touted the option of offering taxation concessions to retirees who re-enter the workforce. Therein lies a dilemma because in today's economic environment workers over the age of 40 years, let alone 70 years, are finding that organisations are not predisposed to employing them.

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groups but also the realities of different patterns of management and different business objectives in different industry sectors (Pickersgill, Briggs, Kittay, O'Keeffe, & Gillezeau, 1996). For example, older workers want respect, dignity and appreciation for a lifetime of work (Gaggini cited in Cohen, 1995). They do not want to be seen merely as functionaries but as employees to be appreciated for the time they spend at work which, for many, is part-time by choice (Christensen, 1988). By contrast, younger workers regard organisations more as a means to an end rather than an end in itself and are compressing the traditional 20-year career-building cycle into a 20-month process (Stern, 1997). In these circumstances, getting them to believe in corporate culture will certainly test the leadership abilities of managers of any age but as Poller (1996) cautions, looking after their interests should not be at the expense of those with equally valid interests. Employers, therefore, should be cautious about treating all age groups the same. A failure to do so will result in generational mistrust and mutual antipathy for the other group's accomplishments (Ramsey, 1993).

The cause of this mistrust, however, goes deeper than organisational change and the violation of one's psychological contract. It can be traced to entrenched generational differences which can be summed up in the seemingly innocuous phrase "the generation gap". This term emerged in the 1960s when the popular press made much of gaps, for example, the missile gap, the poverty gap and the science gap (Howe & Strauss, 1992). Mead (1970) attributed the generation gap of the 1960s to a fundamental shift in the way young people acquired their values. What Mead was referring to was a social phenomenon in which peers were replacing parents as the significant models of behaviour. This is in stark contrast to earlier, traditional times when elders were charged with the responsibility for the transmission of culture and knowledge.

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Generational differences, however, rarely result in widespread conflict and social upheaval. For this to occur requires what Feuer (1969) terms a catalyst or signal event that de-authorises the older generation or a feeling that the older generation has failed in its moral obligations. Penn (1972) equates this to the younger generation experiencing a common disillusionment with and distrust of the elder group. Within organisations, signal events that result in generational conflict are extremely rare but not unknown. Perhaps the best example is the intergenerational conflict that occurred during the Great Depression and the steel worker rebellions of the late 1950s where it was not uncommon for younger workers to force older workers out of employment: “We had to razz one [old] man a full year before he quit” (Frankel, 1962, p.48). Frankel also reported instances of younger workers resorting to physical violence against older workers. Whether this could happen today is a moot point given the advent of age discrimination legislation and anti-violent laws. Nonetheless, as older workers have discovered, other, subtler means are at work. The missed promotion, the failure to receive a preferred transfer, the lack of access to training, the implementation of technology, the pressure to perform and the more rapid pace of work all combine to make older workers feel insecure and angry at the changes imposed on them by their employer and society.

It is the contention of this paper that generational differences, employee demographics and organisational practices are responsible for a phenomenon called intergenerational tension in the workplace which is defined as:

A latent or covert form of intergroup conflict caused by value and attitudinal differences between the generations.

Tension can be thought of as suppressed anxiety or a strained relationship between individuals and groups (Delbridge, 1982, p.1782). This is not to suggest that tension is a permanent state. Time and circumstances will dictate the extent and degree of the phenomenon. In this paper, the notion of suppressed anxiety is important because it is suggested that intergenerational tension is latent or covert. Intergenerational tension is presented as an everyday fact of organisational life which exists as an undercurrent or type of background organisational noise that it so all-pervasive that it is rarely noticed. In this respect, intergenerational tension bears similarities to gender and ethnic tensions both of which have been recognised as counterproductive to organisational efficiency.

A conceptual schema for intergenerational tension is presented in Figure 1. The schema shows that an employee enters the workplace with preconceived values and attitudes (i.e., generational differences) which are moderated by organisational practices and employee demographics (e.g., age, gender, educational qualifications) leading to intergenerational tension in the workplace.
The literature on generational differences in the workplace, while providing valuable insights into the possible causes and effects of these differences, does not provide a measure of them. Instead, existing research methodologies investigate single intergenerational issues such as values (Burke, 1994), communication (Fortezza & Prieto, 1994), teamwork (Shea, 1994), training (Thornburg, 1995) and commitment (Daboval, 1998). This research, however, takes a broader view of generational differences and attempts to measure them by means of a questionnaire which for the purposes of this paper is called the intergenerational tension questionnaire or ITQ.

Who are the Older Workers?
There is no consensus regarding the point at which one ceases to be a younger worker and becomes an older worker. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, for example, classifies the over 55s as older workers whereas the Australian Bureau of Statistics defines older or mature workers as those from the age of 45 to the age of eligibility for the aged pension. The Australian Council of Ageing, though, has a different interpretation. This organisation categorises 45-64 year olds as the mature aged and the 65+ age group as the older labour force while Forte and Hamsvick (1999) used 50 years of age to differentiate younger and older workers. Older workers can also be as young as 40 years of age (Dhooge, 1994) – an age often used as an arbiter of “old” as far as employment is concerned. In the United States of America, Federal law holds that age discrimination begins at 40 (Simon, 1996) while in society 40 years of age seems to be a generally accepted yardstick differentiating old from young. Statistically, too, this appears to be a pivotal age in one’s career aspirations.

For the purposes of this paper, 40 years of age has been chosen as the point at which an employee becomes an older worker, with employees less than 40 years of age being younger workers.

Methodology

The questionnaire was developed in three stages: (a) an informal experience survey, (b) a pilot study and, (c) the final study. Given the subtle nature of intergenerational tension, it was felt that the final study should have sufficient power to detect a small effect size. Using the simple rule of thumb that the more power the better, particularly when testing for small between-group differences (Aron & Aron, 1999; Gay, 1996), the power level was determined at approximately 0.90 and the effect size index at 0.30. These levels thus exceeded the generally accepted power criterion of 0.80 for the behavioural sciences (Cohen, 1988). The confidence level was determined at the 95% level.

Respondents for the pilot study and final study were all employees of a large Western Australian government institution. At the time of this research, the institution employed more than 6,000 personnel.

Age Cohorts and Generations

Having determined the methodology we must still ask, “will any differences between younger workers and older worker be indicative of intergenerational tension?” Herein lies a dilemma because on one hand the paper measures age cohort responses and on the other, seeks to interpret them in terms of generational characteristics. The dilemma, as such, was pre-empted because the research was conducted at a time when the younger workers surveyed consisted almost exclusively of the generation labelled Generation X with the older workers consisting almost exclusively of baby boomers. It must be acknowledged however, that because of the transition or overlap effect, the generations cannot be as neatly divided as can age cohorts. A 38-year-old generation Xer, for example, will have more in common with a 42-year-old baby boomer than with a 20-year-old generation Xer. The notion of overlap or transition is not peculiar to this paper but is a given in cultural comparisons of generations. The other issue to be addressed is that of deciding how many years comprise a generation. This is the biological or years only approach which considers that a generation is an arbitrary measure that indicates a period of years between parent and child. In the Old Testament generations were described in terms of “And so-and-so begat so-and-so...” without any reference to the number of years between. On the basis of changes in sexual maturity and fertility, Troll (1970) cites 20 years as an appropriate measure of a generation whereas Mackay (1997) suggests that 15 years is a more realistic figure. However, given the current trend for Western women in particular, to have their first child in their late 20s or early 30s indicates that perhaps 30 years is more appropriate. Thirty years is also the number of choice for lexicographers.

The popularity of the biological approach is related to its convenience for age-related studies in that populations can be neatly configured according to the needs of the research. For example, Hickey and Kalish (1968) used age gaps of 20 years in a survey of participant attitudes towards other age groups while Levinson (1978), used 20 years as the measure of a generation in the context of a multi-generational approach to a generation whereby someone 6 to 7 years younger or older
than an individual is a member of "my generation," someone 8 to 15 years younger or older is half a generation apart with 20 years marking a full generation. For the purposes of this paper, a generation is defined as a period of 20 years.

Stage 1 - The Survey
The survey comprised 55 respondents who were chosen because of their likely experience with intergenerational issues, their interest in the paper, their work experience, their position and their presumed ability to comprehend and respond to the survey. The respondents were divided into eight categories: (a) older workers, (b) academics, (c) younger workers (d) practising psychologists, (e) human resource practitioners, (f) management consultants (g) retired senior managers, and (h) senior management personnel. When a potential respondent agreed to participate, time was spent with them (either singly or in groups) discussing and explaining the context and purpose of the paper.

The survey contained 41 variables which were divided between four sections derived from the conceptual schema. The sections were Organisational Demographics, Organisational Variables, Personal Variables and Group Values and Attitudes. Respondents were provided with a brief description of each section as follows:

1. Organisational Demographics were described as the measurable aspects of an organisation's workforce. This section was based on Corwin's (1969) paper on the role of intergroup relationships in organisational conflict which included variables relevant to this research, namely, organisational size, specialisation and stability, all of which are possible causes of organisational strain.

2. Organisational Variables were described as variables which show a specific relationship between the employee and the employer. For example, there is a relationship between risk-taking behaviour and an employee's perception of job security. Whereas younger workers tend to take more risks and accept such failure as part of the learning process, older workers sense that they have more to lose.

3. Personal Variables were described as variables independent of the organisation, (e.g., gender and marital status) but with the potential to affect the individual and his/her relationship with other individuals, with groups in the organisation and with the organisation. Age was not included as a variable in the Stage I survey because in the context of the paper, it was a given variable.

4. Group Values were described as a relatively coherent set of beliefs and rules governing the behaviour of group members while Group Attitudes were described as the tendency by group members to act in a certain way.

Respondents were asked to rank the variables in each section from 1 - 5 (with "1" being the most important) according to the extent to which they thought each of them contributed to intergenerational tension in the workplace.

Of the 55 surveys distributed, 54 or 98.2% were completed and returned. As the survey was for exploratory purposes only, the results were used as a guide to the likely nature of the pilot study variables. Therefore, excluding variables from the pilot study on criteria such as respondent rankings or the percentage of respondents selecting the variable, incurred the risk of excluding an important variable. For example, while respondents regarded access to training and training considerations as unlikely to cause intergenerational tension, the literature refutes this (Thornburg, 1995). Nonetheless, if both the literature and the respondents accorded a variable a very low ranking, the variable was more likely to be excluded. After analysis, 29 variables were retained. These then became the nucleus of the variables that were developed for the pilot study.

Stage 2 - The Pilot Study
The pilot study comprised 60 completed responses, that is, 15 employees each from the age groups 20 - 29 years, 30 - 39 years, 40 - 49 years and 50+ years. The major objective of the pilot study was to construct a questionnaire for the final study. This was achieved by using factor analysis (principal component analysis) to reduce the number of items to a more manageable size and by considering the comments made by respondents. The other objectives were to:

1. Reveal the latent factors or dimensions behind the variables associated with generational differences in the workplace.
2. Identify problems with the wording of the items and other related matters such as layout, spelling and grammar.

Sixty-three items were developed and were initially classified as belonging to either "Generational Differences" or "Organisational Practices" each of which was subdivided into three factors (Figure 2). The factors represent the underlying dimensions thought to be responsible for generational differences in the workplace. The naming of the factors was an arbitrary process and was reviewed after data analysis.
The factors were operationalised as follows:

**Intergroup relationships.** The items in this factor were derived from Realistic Group Conflict Theory (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961) and its complementary theory, Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel, 1970). SIT posits that the fact that one perceives one belongs to a group is sufficient to cause intergroup discrimination. Thus, because people prefer to have a positive social identity, comparisons tend to be made which allows them (the in-group) to be perceived in a positively valued way (Brown & Williams, 1984). Further, when the in-group is valued positively, it is accompanied by a more favourable self-view compared with one’s peers (Lusczc & Fitzgerald, 1986). People also tend to associate with those who think and behave like themselves and they thus conclude (perhaps erroneously) that most people agree with them (Yinon, Mayraz, & Fox, 1994). In effect, group members believe that certain things about a specific object or situation are true or false, and other things about it are desirable or undesirable.

**Values and Attitudes.** The items in this factor were derived from Schwartz’s (1996) proposition that the total structure of value systems is based on two basic dimensions with each in polar opposition between two higher order value types (Figure 3). Younger workers, it is argued, are more likely to adhere to the values on the left side of Figure 3 while older workers are more likely to adhere to the values on the right side.

**Stereotyping** can be considered as a perceptual bias which exacerbates the in-group versus out-group scenario (Sherif et
al., 1961). In the workplace, stereotyping is largely associated with negative perceptions of older workers on the part of younger workers (Fyock, 1994) and negative perceptions of younger workers on the part of older workers (Zemke, Raines, & Filipezak, 2000). The items for this factor were based on the older worker stereotypes described by Fyock, and the younger worker stereotypes described by Zemke et al.

The items for Perceived Organisational Discrimination were based on the concept that the organisation, as represented by management, is guilty of ageism or "a process of systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this with skin colour and gender" (Butler, 1996, p.1). For younger workers, the items, though all but identical, were based on the same concept as ageism but with a reversal of roles. That is, they too feel that the organisation, as represented by management, discriminates against them because of their age and relative inexperience.

The items for Changing Balance of Power were based on the notion that in today's workplace, power and authority are no longer vested solely in senior employees. Instead, the shift to merit-based promotions and an emphasis on teamwork has resulted in a more egalitarian workplace in which younger workers are no longer prepared to defer to the opinions of older workers and bide their time in the hope of reward.

The items for Change were based on the notion that younger workers adapt better to, and more readily accept, organisational change than do older workers. Exacerbating this situation is a perception that older workers have difficulty in adapting to the rapid implementation of new technologies, especially information technology. After factor analysis the items were reduced to a final set of 25. Even though factor analysis confirmed that six factors were appropriate, four of the original six labels were renamed and one factor, Changing Balance of Power, was renamed and relocated from Organisational Practices to Generational Differences (Figure 4).

![Figure 4: Original Labels Renamed, Revised Factor Labels and Variable Distribution](image)

The 25 items represent the first level of abstraction, the 6 factors the second level, the 2 components the third level and the construct of intergenerational tension the fourth level. After implementing the changes, the schema was reconceptualized (Figure 5).

Insert Figure 5 here

The essential difference between the old structure (Figure 2) and Figure 5 is that Generational Differences comprises four instead of three factors and Organisational Practices comprises two instead of three factors. The rationale for the change is attributable to the results of factor analysis which revealed a clearer picture of the relationship between the factors and their higher order dimensions.

The factors were operationalised as follows:

1. Power Relationships is a measure of respondents' feelings regarding the power and influence of the other generation.
2. Ageism is a measure of respondents' feelings regarding intergroup discrimination because of one's age. This is often the manifestation of negative stereotyping.
3. Group Identity is a measure of the extent to which each group identifies itself as different from the other in terms of cohesion and work ethic.
4. Acceptance is a measure of the extent to which each group feels that the other contributes positively to the organisation.
5. Change is a measure of the extent to which each group perceives that they and the other group adapt to change in the workplace.
6. Perceived Organisational Bias is a measure of the extent to which each group perceives that the other receives preferential treatment either explicitly or implicitly.

![Figure 5: Structure of the Revised Conceptual Framework](image)

* Organizational

Stage 3 - The Final Study
The final study comprised 500 completed responses which were analysed using independent samples t tests, one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and post hoc tests (either Scheffé’s test or Dunnett’s C). Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for components 1 and 2, and factors 1 - 6.

Insert Table 1 here

All mean scores other than one are in the range 2.51 to 3.44 which suggests that even though older workers are more negative than younger workers, on average there are no extreme differences between them. The one exception is the mean of 4.16 for older workers on factor 5, Change, whereas the mean for younger workers is 2.61. This suggests that older workers feel threatened by the capacity of younger workers to adapt to workplace change. This gives tentative support to one of the main arguments of this paper – that organisational factors exacerbate pre-existing age-related biases. Lesser differences are observed in the factors related to Generational Differences, namely, Power Relationships, Ageism, Group Identity and Acceptance. Overall, however, the means support the contention that intergenerational tension is covert rather than overt.

The independent-samples t test for the relationship between younger and older workers and the ITQ was significant t (498) = -6.33, p < 0.001. On average both younger workers (M = 2.85, SD = 0.60) and older workers (M = 3.22, SD = 0.72) show evidence of age-related differences. The effect size index, d = .41 suggests that age has a moderate effect on the dependent variable intergenerational tension. This supports the contention that intergenerational tension is measurable and that older workers demonstrate a greater degree of intergenerational tension than do younger workers.

Having established a significant relationship between younger workers and older workers and the dependent variable, a one-way ANOVA was conducted for the relationship between the four age groups and intergenerational tension. The means and standard deviations for all groups were quite similar with the greatest difference occurring between the 30 – 39 years age group and the 50+ years age group.
Table 1: Group Descriptives for Components 1 & 2 and Factors 1 - 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component 1</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generational Differences</td>
<td>20-39 years</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40+ years</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Component 2</td>
<td>Organisational Practices</td>
<td>20-39 years</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40+ years</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>3.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 1</td>
<td>Power Relationships</td>
<td>20-39 years</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40+ years</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>2.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 2</td>
<td>Ageism</td>
<td>20-39 years</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40+ years</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>3.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 3</td>
<td>Group Identity</td>
<td>20-39 years</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>3.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40+ years</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 4</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>20-39 years</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>2.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40+ years</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>2.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 5</td>
<td>Change</td>
<td>20-39 years</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>2.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40+ years</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>4.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 6</td>
<td>Perceived Organisational Bias</td>
<td>20-39 years</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>2.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40+ years</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean score for 25 variables</td>
<td>20-39 years</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>40+ years</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Having established a significant relationship between age and intergenerational tension, factors 1 – 6 were subject to further analysis (see Table 2 for group descriptives).

Insert Table 2 here

Factor 1: Power Relationships
The means and standard deviations were quite similar for all groups with the greatest difference occurring between the 20-39 years age group and the 50+ years age group. The independent-samples t test for the relationship between younger and older workers and Power Relationships was not significant t (498) = -1.50, p = 0.134. On average both younger workers (M = 2.86, SD = 0.78) and older workers (M = 2.97, SD = 0.88) do not feel hostile towards, or threatened by, the presence of the other group in the workplace. This rejects the contention that the changing balance of power has resulted in older workers resenting the increased power and influence of younger workers. Likewise, younger workers do not resent the power and influence of older workers. The effect size index, d = .09 suggests that age has almost no effect on the dependent variable Power Relationships.

The one-way ANOVA for the relationship between the four age groups and Factor 1 was significant F (3, 496) = 4.19, p = 0.006. The strength of the relationship between age and Factor 1, as assessed by h², was small with age accounting for 2.5% of variance of the dependent variable. Homogeneity of variance was assumed thus Scheffé’s test was used for the post hoc comparison. The only significant relationship was between the 30-39 years age group and the 50+ years age group.
Table 2: Group Statistics by Age Group for Factors 1 - 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power Relationships</td>
<td>20 - 29</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 - 39</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40 - 49</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 +</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ageism</td>
<td>20 - 29</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 - 39</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40 - 49</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 +</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Identity</td>
<td>20 - 29</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 - 39</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40 - 49</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 +</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>20 - 29</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 - 39</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40 - 49</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 +</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>20 - 29</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 - 39</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40 - 49</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 +</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Organisational Bias</td>
<td>20 - 29</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30 - 39</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40 - 49</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>1.16</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50 +</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Factor 2: Ageism
The means and standard deviations were quite similar for all groups with the greatest difference occurring between the 30-39 years age group and the 50+ years age group.
The independent-samples t test for the relationship between younger and older workers and Ageism was significant t (498) = -4.64, p < 0.001. Younger workers (M = 2.99, SD = 0.89) on average displayed less evidence of ageism than did older workers (M = 3.39, SD = 1.05). This supports the contention that the older workers tend to harbour a greater degree of negativity towards younger workers than do younger workers towards older workers. The effect size index, d = 0.29 suggests that age has a small effect on the dependent variable Ageism.

The one-way ANOVA for the relationship between the four age groups and Factor 2 was significant F (3, 496) = 11.78, p < 0.001. Homogeneity of variance was not assumed, thus Dunnett's C test was used. The strength of the relationship between age and Factor 2, as assessed by h^2, was medium with age accounting for 6.7% of variance of the dependent variable. Significant relationships were evident between all groups other than between the 20 - 29 years age group and the 40 - 49 years age group.

Factor 3: Group Identity
The means and standard deviations were quite similar for all groups with the greatest difference occurring between the 30-39 years age group and the 50+ years age group.
The independent-samples t test for the relationship between younger and older workers and Group Identity was significant t (498) = -1.97, p = 0.05. Younger workers (M = 3.01, SD = 0.81) on average were more tolerant of older workers than were older workers (M = 3.15, SD = 0.84) of younger workers. This supports the contention that older workers exhibit a greater degree of group identity than do younger workers. The effect size index, d = 0.09 suggests that age has a minimal effect on the dependent variable Group Identity.

The one-way ANOVA for the relationship between the four age groups and Factor 3 was significant F (3, 496) = 4.58, p = 0.004. Homogeneity of variance was assumed, thus a post hoc comparison was made using the Scheffe test. The strength of the relationship between age and Factor 3, as assessed by h^2, was small with age accounting for 2.7% of variance of the dependent variable. Significant relationships were evident for all age groups other than the 40 - 49 years age group and between the 20 - 29 years age group and the 50+ years age group.
Factor 4: Acceptance
The means and standard deviations were quite similar for all groups with the greatest difference occurring between the 20–29 years age group and the 50+ years age group. The independent-samples t test for the relationship between younger and older workers and Acceptance was not significant t (498) = -1.59, p = 0.112. On average both younger workers (M = 2.51, SD = 0.77) and older workers (M = 2.62, SD = 0.83) feel that the other group make good team members and contribute positively to the organisation. The effect size index, $d = .10$ suggests that age has a small effect on the dependent variable Acceptance.

The one-way ANOVA for the relationship between the four age groups and Factor 4 was significant $F (3, 496) = 3.155, p = 0.025$. Homogeneity of variance was assumed thus a post hoc comparison was made using the Scheffe test. The strength of the relationship between age and Factor 4, as assessed by $h^2$, was small with age accounting for 1.9% of variance of the dependent variable. The only significant relationship was between the 20–29 years age group and the 50+ years age group.

Factor 5: Change
There were clear differences between the means and standard deviations for younger and older workers with the greatest difference occurring between the 20–29 years age group and the 40–49 years age group. The independent-samples t test for the relationship between younger and older workers and Change was significant t (498) = -20.82, p < 0.001. Younger workers (M = 2.61, SD = 0.78) on average feel less disadvantaged by, and imposed upon, by changes in the workplace than did older workers (M = 4.16, SD = 0.88). This supports the contention that older workers tend to feel that organisational change has benefited younger workers. The effect size index, $d = 1.32$ suggests that age has a large effect on the dependent variable Change.

The one-way ANOVA for the relationship between the four age groups and Factor 5 was significant $F (3, 496) = 146.986, p < 0.001$. Homogeneity of variance was assumed, thus a post hoc comparison was made using the Scheffe test. The strength of the relationship between age and Factor 5, as assessed by $h^2$, was large with age accounting for 47% of variance of the dependent variable. Significant relationships were evident between all age groups other than (a) the 20–29 years age group and the 30–39 years age group and, (b) the 40–49 years age group and the 50+ years age group.

Factor 6 - Perceived Organisational Bias
The means and standard deviations were quite similar for all groups with the greatest difference occurring between the 30–29 years age group and the 50+ years age group. The independent-samples t test for the relationship between younger and older workers and Perceived Organisational Bias was significant t (498) = -7.30, p < 0.001. Younger workers (M = 2.74, SD = 0.86) on average were less likely to feel unfavourably treated and discriminated against by the organisation than were older workers (M = 3.44, SD = 1.26). This supports the contention that older workers tend to feel that organisations value younger workers more. The effect size index, $d = .46$ suggests that age has a medium effect on the dependent variable Perceived Organisational Bias.

The one-way ANOVA for the relationship between the four age groups and Factor 6 was significant $F (3, 496) = 27.49, p < 0.001$. Homogeneity of variance was not assumed, thus Dunnett’s C test was used. The strength of the relationship between age and Factor 6, as assessed by $h^2$, was large with age accounting for 14% of variance of the dependent variable. The only significant relationship was between the 20–29 years age group and the 50+ years age group.

Reliability Tests of the Pilot study and the Final study
Cronbach’s alpha for the pilot study was .9006, and for the final study, .9077.

Summary of Results
The data show that in the organisation studied:

1. Significant differences exist between younger workers and older workers on Component 1, Generational Differences. Younger workers, on average, are more positive towards older workers than older workers are towards younger workers.
2. Significant differences exist between younger workers and older workers on Component 2, Organisational Practices. Younger workers, on average, are more positive towards the organisation than are older workers.
3. Significant differences exist between younger workers and older workers on Factor 2, Ageism. Younger workers, on average, are less ageist than are older workers.
4. Significant differences exist between younger workers and older workers on Factor 3, Group Identity. Younger workers, on average, display less group identity than do older workers.
5. Significant differences exist between younger workers and older workers on Factor 5, change. Younger workers, on average, are more confident in their ability to cope with change than are older workers. Older workers, on average, feel that younger workers handle change better and, as older workers, are less confident about their ability to handle change.
6. Significant differences exist between younger workers and older workers on Factor 6, Perceived Organisational Bias. Younger workers, on average, feel more fairly treated by the organisation than do older workers.
Significant relationships did not exist between younger workers and older workers on Factor 1, Power Relationships, and Factor 4, Acceptance.

The ANOVA results showed significant relationships between younger workers and older workers on all factors but the post hoc tests were less clear in distinguishing trends between the four age groups. The 30 – 39 year olds, however, had the greatest number of significant relationships, followed by the 50+ years age group. The 40 – 49 years age group had the fewest number of significant relationships. Yet to be analysed are between-group differences for the four age groups and the effect of the independent variables of educational qualifications, work fraction, gender, total length of service with current employer, number of years in the paid workforce and, employee category.

Conclusion

If we accept the premise that younger workers and older workers are synonymous with Generation X and the baby boomers respectively, then the respondents to the questionnaire are as much Generation Xers and baby boomers as they are younger workers and older workers. Given that the questionnaire revealed significant generational differences and given that the items were designed to measure latent or suppressed anxiety (i.e., tension) it is suggested that the differences are thus indicative of intergenerational tension, or that state of suppressed anxiety between groups.

The current paper is still in progress and not all data have been analysed. The findings, therefore, should be treated with caution. It is anticipated that as the paper evolves, more specific areas of generational differences will emerge. If future studies support the existence of intergenerational tension, the implication for human resource management is that older workers have different needs and expectations to younger workers and consideration should, therefore, be given to treating each as discreet groups. Implicit in this is a need for both groups to be aware of the other’s needs and expectations.

References


Limited.


