

Agents at Work:
Examining Intergenerational Relations

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Agents at Work: Examining Intergenerational Relations

Currently, the massive exodus of the Baby Boomers from the labour force looms large. The retirement of this cohort who represent the most significant demographic development in Canada since the Second World War, necessarily requires consideration in order to facilitate the continued functioning of our work organizations.

The employment of multiple generations within the same organization is not historically unprecedented, but with the recent shift to an information-centered workplace, social and physical separations between employees no longer prevent intergenerational relations. Therefore, an increase in the frequency of contact between generational groups has resulted.

This research endeavour examines social generations and the complexities of inter-generational relations in a setting with low levels of age segregation. Using in-depth interviews with federal government employees, the researcher contends that while differences do exist between generational groups there are practical solutions that can be implemented to overcome these obstacles, promoting cohesive work environments.

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Prelude: Generation, Why?

But we know that in every field we shall find a struggle, the specific forms of which have to be looked for each time, between the newcomer who tries to break through the entry barrier and the dominant agent who will try to defend the monopoly and keep out competition
(Bourdieu, 1993: 72).

My interest in conducting research in the sociology of generations was initiated by my work within the Canadian Public Service. After beginning my contract as a student employee, I became acutely aware of the importance within the public service to develop strategies to facilitate knowledge transfer between distinct sets of employees in very different stages of their lives. On the one hand, are employees who have had long careers working for the Canadian government and as such, have acquired tacit knowledge through years of experience and on the other are newcomers to the public service. The newcomers are those who, by and large, have spent several years studying in academic environments and whose toolboxes are equipped with several theoretical implements and abstract models, but who lack the practical knowledge that is valuable in order to accomplish a day's work in a particular occupational location. This, in addition to other factors¹ has contributed to the facets of diversity that now exist in many contemporary organizations.

The division I have been working in has made knowledge transfer and recruitment of new employees a priority. The programs I have observed as a result of working within human resources trickle down from a wider departmental priority. This priority has been termed 'Building the Workforce of the Future' and it highlights not only an increasing concern with

¹ Other factors that have contributed to an increase in the levels of diversity in the last two decades are the augmentation of women within certain spheres of the professional world, the broadened inclusivity and visibility of non-whites and minorities within work organizations and the rising levels of accommodation for those previously deemed 'unfit' for specific kinds of occupations.

workforce demographics and signals a particular cognizance regarding the age of employees, but it also places an emphasis on the importance of recruiting a credentialed workforce. The rationale for such a focus is provided below:

[the organization's] operating context requires that all employees be adaptable and quickly learn new ways of approaching their day-to-day business. The department also faces demographic challenges, such as an aging workforce. As a result, retention is increasingly becoming an issue in the public service environment, and managers will be competing for talented resources. Examples of improvements for 2009-2010 include: On-campus recruitment in Canadian universities, launching an external recruitment and development program, enabling continuous learning by ensuring that at least 90% of employees have an individual learning plan, implementing specific and targeted actions designed to improve work-life quality among all employees, and ongoing research, development, implementation and measurement of tools designed to help all employees prevent and/or manage conflicts encountered in the workplace.

The requirement that all employees have the characteristic of adaptability and the ability quickly to learn new ways of approaching their daily business does not explicitly state that there is a premium placed on 'young' employees. Yet the statement that the department faces the challenges of an ageing workforce is a reflection of the insidious, invisible,² and often poorly documented attitudes towards age, ageing, and the aged³ within work organizations. Attitudes towards ageing within work organizations and views that older employees do not learn as quickly or are not as adaptable as younger employees can be viewed as a microcosm of our society in which there is a preoccupation with youth and a de-valuation of age. Similar to many oppositions of classification, the ways in which the prospects of old age are feared are countered by perspectives that youth signifies initiative, progress, health, and above all, distance from decline

² For example, while ageing in contemporary society is used as a basis for social behaviour, it is barely recognized as such. While it operates in plain sight, it is almost invisible. In this way, contemporary ageing has become the 'unthought-known' of our everyday social and personal experience (Biggs, 2006: 113).

³ Ageism is a prejudice that specifically pertains to age difference and is a prejudice that has a continuing presence even as other forms of prejudice appear to be gradually diminishing (Biggs, 2006: 110).

and death (Blaikie, 2006: 19). Thus, oppositional views and beliefs about different age groups are not unique to the workplace but rather, the organization of work is but one site in which this societal preoccupation manifests itself. Additionally, within an occupational structure, the various types of stratification that exist including those based on age take a particular shape, and a closer investigation reveals inter-generational tensions and conflict.

There is some evidence to suggest that the organizational priorities that are oriented to the future of the workforce are not merely bureaucratic rhetoric, but that they exist as a real concern amongst executive employees⁴. Through my work as a student employee in a Learning and Development unit, I have had the opportunity to observe the implementation of projects designed to address this concern and to deliver on this objective. Projects such as knowledge succession planning and active post-secondary recruitment programs are some of the ways in which government departments are addressing the knowledge that has been gleaned from the attention that is currently being paid to retirement patterns amongst Baby Boomers⁵. As further evidence to this claim, the president of the Public Service Commission recently initiated a study that is presently underway to examine the generational turnover that is occurring in an attempt to understand the values and skills of the generation entering the public service, and it differs from the Baby Boomers who have dominated the public service for forty years (May, 2010: 1). The attention given to new recruits and to the retirement patterns of the Baby Boomers within the federal government, demonstrate an acknowledgement of the implications that massive demographic changes will have within specific occupational contexts. Further, the greying of the

⁴ Many of the executives within the organization that I am referring to are members of the Baby Boomer generation.

⁵ As the workforce ages, academics and policy makers are also paying increasing attention to the situation of older workers in specific workplace settings and in broader contexts including national labour markets and various types of companies and organizations. Brooke and Taylor (2005). 'Older workers and Employment: Managing Age Relations'. *Ageing and Society* 25: 415-429.

workforce will increase the amount of age diversity present in most work settings and, consequently, more age diversity enhances the likelihood of encountering greater age dissimilarity with one's colleagues than was the case for previous generations of employees (Avery, et. al., 2007: 1542).

I argue that it is not simply the exchange of old bodies for new ones in cubicles that makes the retirement of the Baby Boomers a priority requiring attention, resources, and action (although this is certainly a factor). In relatively static, bureaucratic, and hierarchical institutions; a massive disruption to continuity caused by massive departures and recruitment would impact the efficiency and productivity of work organizations given the loss of the knowledge that their daily functioning requires. It has been acknowledged that as knowledge-bearing agents, older workers pay an important role in providing institutional knowledge and networking with other organizations (Gunderson, 2003: 319). Mentoring as it is used within government organizations is framed as a relationship between more experienced employees who provide wisdom to newer and/or less experienced workers and is one that is propagated throughout some department as a solution to overcome some of the difficulties related to significant shifts in the demographics of work organizations that are occurring. However, it needs to be acknowledged that those with the power and authority to disseminate and impute the importance of mentoring relationships within the workplace have a tendency to be senior employees. In addition, based on the data collected for this study, it appears that those who are in a position to provide guidance and mentor new employees are also the employees who view knowledge exchange as a practical and valuable exercise. The younger employees interviewed who would perhaps be the greatest beneficiaries of such relationships do not appear to see great value in pursuing a mentor. Therefore, attempts to achieve knowledge continuity and the lack of consensus about the value of knowledge exchange

in mentoring relationships highlight the importance of analysing employee relations; but with such different perspectives on the virtues of mentoring at work, attention is also drawn to how the gulf of misunderstanding between older, not so old, and younger employees in the workplace can be seen for several reasons as increasingly problematic (Zemke, 2000: 1).

While a detailed discussion about the history of retirement is beyond the scope of this study, it must be noted that retirement as an institution emerged as a benefit to workers who could look forward to a period of enforced leisure (Blaikie, 2006: 14). With the advent of early capitalism, human value became equated with productivity and retirement was institutionalized as a time of non-productivity (Leedham and Hendricks, 2006: 37). In addition, by serving as a mechanism with the function of rejuvenating the workforce it therefore represented a form of institutionalized generational succession. Throughout its existence, the idea of retirement has been reinvented several times and the latest innovation has been the association of compulsory retirement with ageism and age discrimination. For example, in Ontario the 'Ending Mandatory Retirement Statute Law Amendment Act' was passed in December of 2005. The primary purpose of this piece of legislation was to protect people aged 65 and over from age discrimination in most employment contexts. While the legislation seeks to condemn discrimination based on age, it is also likely an attempt to minimize the impact of a vast number of retirements by providing workers who have reached the 'golden age' of retirement with the ability to remain in the workforce. This serves the purpose of maintaining knowledge continuity within occupational settings while alleviating strains to the social system generally because it results in fewer people drawing public pensions (Gunderson, 2003: 318).

The debates about the abolishment of mandatory retirement contain important and multi-faceted elements of intergenerational conflict. In other words, we may expect that the

intergenerational conflict as it relates to the workforce will express itself in terms of a variety of channels. There will be struggles not just over labour markets (and who the actors within these markets ought to be), but also over capital investments, salaries, and various forms of cultural capital (Edmunds and Turner, 2002: 94-95). The abolition of mandatory retirement within Ontario, while seeking to eradicate discrimination on the basis of age has, to a certain extent, exacerbated intergenerational and age-related tensions within work environments and beyond. It addresses concerns about public pension schemes, the viability of social support systems, and the loss of corporate knowledge; but it is also significant with regard to intergenerational employee relations. This is because mandatory retirement as a formal mechanism for opening up job and promotion opportunities for younger employees no longer exists.

This research endeavour in the sociology of generations then, stems from two overlapping interests: to examine social generations and the complexities of inter-generational relations in a setting where there are relatively low levels of age segregation. The purpose is to understand the differences and similarities between governmental employees from distinct generations and how generational differences in cultural capital manifest themselves within a particular occupational location. The guiding questions structuring my research include: are there differences in the values held between older and younger workers that represent a 'generation gap' within the workplace? What are these differences and how do they manifest themselves for workers of different ages? If differences exist, do they have an observable impact on work relationships? The findings generated by these questions and the methods through which I chose to explore them are not intended to be generalizable, but rather to act as a detailed case study that will illuminate pertinent aspects of this complex topic in order to guide further research. Limits to generalizability notwithstanding, I anticipate that while my findings are presented as a detailed

case study, I will be able to illuminate aspects of this topic to provide potential avenues of inquiry both empirically and theoretically for other fields of research within the discipline of sociology. I believe that this is an achievable outcome because inquiries in the field of generations touch heavily theorized subjects such as time, knowledge, social change, and conflict. Generational research also highlights many key dichotomies that are topics of recurring sociological debate; such as the views of the biological and the social, theories of continuity versus discontinuity, and qualitative/quantitative methodological discussions. While not of all these debates will be explicitly addressed within this study, they provide the backdrop to my study and they are the areas that much of the previously conducted generational research straddles. Indeed, the focus is on intergenerational relations in a singular bureaucratic social space, but I contend that such research has broader applications because the relationships between changes in labour markets, structures of age and patterns of work are never simply issues of impersonal human resources, but rather they are indicators of issues that go beyond the individual work milieu to arguments about what kind of society we want to live in and the role that institutions (including the organization of the economy and work) have to play in such a society (Roberts, 2006: 67).

Capitalizing on Capital: Bourdieu on Generations

In recent years, scholars have deplored the lack of recognition of the significance of generation within sociology (Pilcher, 1994: 238). As a rejoinder to the claim that generation is sociologically under-recognized, I contend that it is precisely the abundance of work produced in the sociology of generations that has produced the lack of recognition of the concept. As Kertzer points out, conceptual confusion often occurs when a term is transferred from popular to scientific vocabulary. The transformation of generation from folk to analytical usage invites confusion because the multivocality of the concept of generation, while a virtue in popular discourse, becomes a liability in science (Kertzer, 1983: 125). This is evidenced by the work of individual scholars on generation, which encompasses several theoretical approaches and covers a wide range of subject areas, from anthropology, family, political and cultural sociology to work in the area of social inequality (Corsten, 1999, 251). These various approaches contribute to different conceptualizations and operationalization of 'generation', making it a challenging topic area to survey.

In his canonical essay, 'The Problem of Generations' Karl Mannheim draws attention to this issue plaguing the term generation by arguing that, "it is clear from the foregoing survey of the problem as it stands today that a commonly accepted approach to the problem does not exist...the present status of the problem of generations thus affords a striking illustration of the anarchy in the social and cultural sciences, where everyone starts out afresh from his own point of view, never pausing to consider the various aspects as part of single general problem..." (Mannheim, 1952: 287). Thus, it is the lack of consensus among sociologists on what 'generation' means and how the concept should be employed that has impeded the utility of the

concept and produced a void of recognition within sociology⁶. Despite the high quality work produced within the topic, generation remains underdeveloped as a powerful tool of sociological analysis (Edmunds and Turner, 2002: 2).

Risking a simplification of the generational literature, the term ‘generation’ as it is mainly used within sociological research and discourse can be seen as falling into one of two categories: kinship-oriented and socially-oriented. Considering the fundamental differences between these two approaches to the concept, it is necessary to distinguish them to avoid confounding the distinct properties of each type and to provide clarity to the theoretical model that I will utilize. Because the concepts of Pierre Bourdieu which he develops in *Distinction* are employed within this study, such a demarcation is not only necessary but also relevant.

In its kinship sense, generation is concerned with family lineage and ancestry. To elaborate, a study that considers the differences in social capital and the transitions made from school to work between a sample of men and their sons operationalizes generation on the basis of the relationship between parents and their children⁷. Bourdieu addresses generation in terms of kinship and in its social sense; however it is the kinship conceptualization of generation that he mainly uses to support his argument that education reproduces class differences. He distinguishes two types of cultural capital: acquired and inherited. In a discussion of ancient aristocratic families and the cultural privileges that are transmitted intergenerationally and that function as an advantage in the perpetuation of class domination he writes; “the embodied cultural capital of the previous generations functions as a sort of advance (both a head-start and a credit) which, by

⁶ For an in-depth discussion of the myriad of ways that generation has been addressed by scholars, see Michael Corsten’s work. He argues that studies of generation can generally be categorized according to their approach: succession-reproduction; intergenerational relations; and generation-as-collective-identity.

⁷ For an example on generation conceptualized in a kinship sense see Strathdee’s work, *Changes in Social Capital and School-to-Work Transitions*.

providing from the outset the example of culture incarnated in familiar models, enables the newcomer to start acquiring the basic elements of the legitimate culture, from the beginning...” (Bourdieu, 1984: 71). Thus ‘social origin’ which is measured in his analysis by father’s occupation and is an important tenet of his argument demonstrates how material goods and dispositions are inter-and-intragenerationally transferred between members of a family through processes of capital ‘conversion’.

In contrast to a progeny-oriented definition of generation, a social generation can be understood as contemporaries of approximately the same age but for whom age is established not necessarily by a calendar of years but by a calendar of events and experiences. Thus, a generation is a phenomenon of collective mentality and morality and members of a generation feel themselves linked by a community of standpoints, beliefs, and wishes (Phillipson, 1996: 212). Defined in this way, a social generation can be understood as a collective identity and refers to the ways people who are born and raised within the same time period can reach a common understanding of their experiences (Corsten, 1999: 252).

Such a definition of generation might be seen as capricious and possibly invite questions regarding its boundaries as a social category. Indeed, it is not as clear cut as the distinction between parent and child, but for the purposes of analysis, social generation is not unlike other sociological categories with imprecise boundaries and is no more arbitrary than specifying social classes, or ideologies, or political movements where there is inevitably a shading off or ambiguity at the boundaries of categories (Strauss and Howe, 1991: 59). However, it should be acknowledged that while these “fuzzy” boundaries can create some difficulties in applying the generational concept in an empirical investigation, in the identification of a generation and its

internal sub-divisions or units, they can also be beneficial in generating an understanding of the social processes at work in the creation of generations (Cherrington, 1997: 318).

Recognizing the difficulties inherent in operationalizing the concept of generations, the sample used in this study was divided into two age groups which tend to correspond to popular generational labels⁸. While these age groups can only be regarded as conceptual approximations, following Taveggia and Ross, if there are differences in values and orientations to work corresponding to generational stereotypes, then comparison of age groups should bring them out (1978: 335).

Institutionalized Cultural Capital

Despite the challenges faced by empirically employing social generation in sociological research, Pierre Bourdieu's work in *Distinction* provides several theoretical insights that are useful for understanding sets of employees belonging to distinct social generations who occupy the same occupational milieu. As previously mentioned, his task in *Distinction* is to reveal the connections between aesthetic tastes and class position, arguing that there is a close relationship between cultural practices and the capital that an agent possesses. Class differences are reproduced within the educational system because the competencies and proficiencies that are rewarded within educational institutions and thereby constitute 'success' are those which the dominant classes inculcate in their children. The reproduction of class difference occurs because by inheriting capital, the children of the dominant classes are more likely to succeed educationally and obtain access to high-paying professions. While a 'hidden curriculum' phenomenon likely continues to exist and serves as a means to understand the reproduction of class domination in present-day institutions, within the context of this paper, capital-or more

⁸ The popular generational labels used within this study are Baby Boomer and Generation Y.

specifically-cultural capital can be utilized as a means to explore the differences discovered between members of generational groups.

Cultural capital refers to the symbols, ideas, and preferences that can be used by agents as resources in the course of social action. Bourdieu distinguishes between its different forms. “Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.) and in the institutionalized state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee” (Bourdieu, 1986: 242).

I argue that it is institutionalized cultural capital and the dispositions and relations to work that educational qualifications produce that provides the best means for using Bourdieu to explore intergenerational employee relations. While other forms of capital such as economic, human, and social capital have utility for understanding organizational dynamics, cultural capital offers the most efficacy in explaining intergenerational relations within a work organization. Arguing from an organizational perspective, Emirbayer and Johnson assert that cultural capital is distinct from other forms of capital and informs organizational research in important ways. It differs from economic capital because it is only transmissible by means of an investment of time, it differs from human capital because it is not an individual-level phenomenon but instead a subjectification of objective structures within the mind and body of a singular actor, and it is different from social capital in being the product not merely of network ties but more deeply of a person’s life history understood as the experience of and passage through a number of social

fields (2008: 25). Therefore, my contention is that its deployment into relational, organizational research will yield interesting results.

For Bourdieu, cultural capital can either be inherited through intergenerational transfers or it can be acquired by an agent. Educational capital is one form of acquired cultural capital that has a relationship to inherited forms of capital; although, observing the changes in access to education that were already occurring at the time of his research, Bourdieu emphasizes that inherited capital is not a necessary precondition for acquiring educational capital (Bourdieu, 1984: 81). Bourdieu uses the number or level of credentials an agent has acquired as the unit of measurement for educational capital. He refers to qualifications as ‘guaranteed’ cultural capital because the credential acts as a symbol of academically sanctioned assets. As an aside, referring to educational capital as ‘guaranteed’ should not be taken to mean that the value of particular educational qualifications is stable and unresponsive to structural change. Rather, educational capital and the competences ‘guaranteed’ by a credential fluctuate in value over time and within the different fields in which they are deployed. In the context of generational research, I am principally concerned with the impacts of change in the value of qualifications that has occurred over time and which result from structural changes in access to education, such as the devaluation of qualifications which occurs when the educational system is used more intensely (Bourdieu, 1984: 82). Moreover, following Stehr I argue that a detailed examination of the weight and importance of formal education among younger individuals for the emergence of particular value orientations, thought processes, and ways of comprehending experiences is quite significant (Stehr, 2001: 57) and is especially important for intergenerational relational research when the value orientations of different generations can be subjected to a comparative analysis.

The structural changes to the chances of access to educational capital are important generationally speaking in a bureaucratic occupational context for three reasons. First, Bourdieu argues that educational qualifications function as a condition of entry to the universe of legitimate culture (Bourdieu, 1984: 28). Within the context of bureaucratic employment, qualifications also act as a condition of entry to be considered for employment, functioning as a screening device for potential candidates. This occurs both in job postings and in targeted hiring such as the ‘post-secondary recruitment’ programs that government departments have implemented. This condition of entry creates a discrepancy between employees of generational groups because different school generations have unequal opportunities for acquiring educational qualifications and, as Bourdieu notes, because of this the oldest agents have lower educational capital than younger agents (105). Moreover, because qualifications function as a condition of entry, there is increased competition between members of the same generation. As Bourdieu acknowledges; “...with the ‘schooling boom’ and the accompanying changes in the system itself-and also the changes in the social structure resulting from the new relationship between qualifications and jobs, are the consequences of intensified competition for academic qualifications’ (132). Thus, the discrepancy between levels of education and its relationship to an agent’s relation to work and to others could be a site in which intergenerational tensions manifest themselves.

Second, the mode of acquisition of educational capital or the ways in which agents obtain this form of cultural capital also has implications for intergenerational relations within the workplace. This is because as employers use educational qualifications as a condition of entry to employment, acquired cultural capital increasingly comes to be viewed as an ‘investment’. The ‘sense of investment’ refers to the knowledge that enables an agent to get the best return on their initial cultural capital in the scholastic market but also that which provides the best return on

scholastic capital in the labour market (Bourdieu, 1984: 142). The sense of investment is used in a dual sense as both an economic investment but also as an emotional investment. Bourdieu offers clarification. “This means that the term ‘investment’, for example, must be understood in the dual sense of economic investment-which objectively always is, through misrecognized-and the sense of affective investment which is has in psychoanalysis, or, more exactly, in the sense of *illusio*, belief, an involvement in the game which produces the game” (86). I posit that this sense of investment with regards to educational qualifications is important because it changes the aspirations, demands, values, and expectations of the labour market of those agents who make the investment. Bourdieu himself contends that at all stages of schooling, educational institutions manipulate aspirations and demands, or in other words, self-image and self-esteem (25).

As academic knowledge tends to gain social recognition and thereby also social efficacy it is increasingly viewed as a sound investment. Thus, individuals invest in educational qualifications and the belief that their credentials will secure maximum employment profits. I contend that this alters the relations of an agent to the field in which their educational capital is valued (the workforce). Due to the aforementioned discrepancy between the educational qualifications of employees from different generational groups, I expect that the sense of investment combined with the aspirations that the educational system produces and manipulates and its impacts on employees’ relations to work will be one way in which employees of generational groups are distinct. Further, because the same educational qualifications may guarantee quite different relations to culture, I anticipate that even when members belonging to different generational groups have obtained the same level of qualifications, this sense of investment and the aspirations and entitlements it results in will still be a means by which to understand the differences between generational groups.

Finally, the third concept that results from structural changes in the access to education and offers explanatory powers for generational research in an occupational context is the 'hysteresis effect'. Bourdieu introduces this idea in a discussion of generational differences between the classes in education and diploma inflation which results from the 'democratization' of schooling. I understand and deploy hysteresis as a lag in response to change; thus, the hysteresis effect is a process in which educational qualifications and the aspirations that the educational system produces lag behind the realities of the opportunities that obtaining those qualifications are supposed to guarantee. For example, at a particular time in history obtaining a Bachelor's degree had a certain level of distinguishing power and likely functioned as a guarantee for obtaining a job within a federal government department. But the effects of credential inflation and diploma devaluation within the labour market have meant that the requirements for obtaining employment have changed. Thus, while agents continue to perceive that the 'guarantees' offered by their credentials are still valid, the market has fluctuated and those credentials no longer are a means for securing the highest profit. In this way, the hysteresis effect is similar to the notion of structural lag or the idea that there is a lag between institutional and organizational arrangements and many of the aspects of culture internalized by agents (Leedham and Hendricks, 2006: 39). In the context of generations, Bourdieu aptly captures why this phenomenon could be seen to impact relations between the generations in a governmental work institution.

In an earlier period and for other classes, these aspirations were perfectly realistic, since they corresponded to objective probabilities, but they are often quickly deflated by the verdicts of the scholastic market or the labour market...the collective disillusionment which results from the structural mismatch between aspirations and real probabilities, between the social identity the school system seems to promise, or the one it offers on a temporary basis, and the social identity that the labour market in fact offers is the source of the disaffection towards work, that *refusal of social* finitude...the structural de-

skilling of a whole generation, who are bound to get less out of their qualifications than the previous generation would have obtained, engenders a sort of collective disillusionment: a whole generation, finding it has been taken for a ride, is inclined to extend to all institutions the mixture of revolt and resentment it feels towards the educational system (1984: 143-144).

The use of the hysteresis effect is not intended to explore the possible resentment the younger workers feel towards work organizations. Rather, I am concerned with how this might impact intergenerational relations. Not only are young people affected by the hysteresis effect, but also members of the previous generation are affected in a working context, because unless they return to educational institutions to increase their level of qualifications throughout their career, they are increasingly working in environments in which the newest members of the organization hold higher levels of education. Does this have an impact on the perceptions employees have of older or younger employees? Is it possible to observe and to measure empirically the collective disillusionment of the younger generation that Bourdieu describes? My assertion is that the institutionalized cultural capital held by agents belonging to different generations is a factor and the concepts generated by Bourdieu's analysis of the changes to education will be useful in exploring how this is manifested in the everyday experiences of government employees.

A New Species of Capital:

In addition to exploring the impacts of institutionalized cultural capital on intergenerational relations by using Bourdieu's established concepts as a theoretical framework, I will endeavour to introduce and develop a sub-species of cultural capital. Recognizing that science and technology enter relational fields and simultaneously permit new forms of action while eliminating old forms of action (Stehr, 2001: 30) I propose that

technological capital is increasingly a means of distinction between generational groups, particularly within work organizations in knowledge societies. By technological capital, I am referring to the knowledge of technology an agent possesses and the ease with which information and communication technologies are used by agents within the work environment. Like other forms of cultural capital, the critical aspect of technological capital is that it allows culture to be used as a resource that provides access to scarce rewards (such as promotions and organizational power) and is subject to monopolization. In light of the extensive deployment and use of forms of technology with the shift from industrial to post-industrial economies and in governmental departments as work organizations, combined with the high volume of this form of capital that younger employees possess relative to workers of the generations that precede them, this subspecies of cultural capital increasingly needs recognition. Particularly, as a factor that represents a cultural (and digital) divide and requiring an exploration of its impacts on employee relations.

One of the ways that the introduction of technology into the workplace has impacted employee relations is the structural changes to occupations that it has produced. For example, while the employment of multiple generations within the same organization is not historically unprecedented, a previously manufacturing-oriented economy structured organizations in such a way that fostered age stratification. Often, executive employees were older, white, and male and worked in head offices. Middle-aged employees tended to be middle managers or in high-skill trade jobs, while the youngest employees were working on the factory floor or were in specific training positions. With the shift to an information-centered workplace, however, social and physical separations between employees no longer prevent intergenerational relations (Zemke, 2000: 10-11).

Moreover, the greying of the workforce as a result of the abolition of mandatory retirement as discussed in the previous chapter means an increase in the amount of age diversity present in many work settings, which enhances the likelihood of encountering greater age dissimilarity with one's co-workers than was the case for previous generations of employees (Avery et. al, 2007: 1542). Therefore, the dissolution of previously existing barriers within organizations has meant an increase in the frequency of contact between generational groups and the development of new working relationships.

Secondly, the information economy and knowledge work are having differing impacts on older workers because these changes facilitate continued employment through work that has become less physically demanding. Alternatively, it also can be seen to give rise to skill obsolescence and the requirement to learn new technologies, especially those associated with computers (Gunderson, 2003: 319). Therefore, younger agents with a greater volume of technological capital, which is increasingly a dominant form of capital in work organizations, are positioned to use this knowledge as a profitable resource to obtain higher organizational status more quickly than the generations preceding them.

Through the analysis of my data and the development of the concept of technological capital, I aspire to contribute to sociological theorizing by elaborating on Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital. While I will build this concept in the context of intergenerational employee relations, I believe that its utility as a concept has potential applications to several other sociologically relevant areas-particularly as technological capital becomes increasingly dominant in the organization of work and beyond.

Generating Findings: Methodological Approach

Having presented the theoretical model that will be used to interpret the research findings the focus now turns to a discussion of the methodological techniques that were used to gather the research data. For the purposes of obtaining material that would enable an understanding of generational issues within the workplace; in-depth interviews were selected as the best means. In-depth interviewing is a qualitative data-gathering technique used for capturing detailed, richly textured, person-centered information and it is a method that is often used when the researcher wants to investigate what is meaningful to the individual. As a research method, in-depth interviews draw from several methodological sources which contribute to the potential depth and richness of the data they can generate. For example, as a research technique, they combine features of the ethnographic interview in which social and cultural features of a topic are explored in relation to the informant's life; and the biographical interview through which a narrative of a person's identity and life course are constructed (Kaufman, 1994: 127). In addition to these qualities of in-depth interviewing, this method was chosen because of the flexibility it provides, allowing the researcher to modify the wording of the questions, the order in which the questions are asked, and enabling probes for more detail to be unique to each interview because they are contingent on the investigator's relationship with each informant and the nature of the responses received during each interview (Kaufman, 1994: 124).

Through the use of an interview guide, I was able to ensure that all of the topics pertinent to my study were covered while facilitating a 'natural' dialogue with participants. The interview guide was formulated around three areas developed from the research questions and included:

educational, employment and work history, and experiential/personal belief questions⁹. Working with a guide provided a flexible structure to each interview enabling the researcher to ask all of the participants the same questions but in an order that was determined by the context of each interview. The interview guide also served to inform the participants of what they could expect to be asked about during the course of the interview. This was seen as a crucial aspect in creating a rapport with the participants and because an important part of the in-depth interview is the social interaction between the interviewer and interviewee, it was pertinent that measures were taken to create a comfortable environment.

Further with regards to rapport building, all of the interviews began with the participants signing an informed consent form. Regardless of the individual participant's feelings about anonymity, as a measure to create trust and build rapport all informants were assured that their words in spoken, recorded, and written forms were considered confidential and would be treated as such by the researcher. The research participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time and they were able to indicate whether they wished to be contacted when the project was completed in order to obtain a copy of the study. While for the most part the material discussed within the interviews was not of a highly personal nature, the discussion and reassurance of the confidentiality of the research at the beginning of the interview helped to set the tone and to build trust between the interviewer and the interviewee.

Participants and the Recruitment Process

The participants of the study were ten federal government employees. Potential informants were recruited via email using a purposeful sampling method. Purposeful sampling is a technique whereby the researcher selects a sample based on the purpose of the study and is

⁹ See Appendix A for the interview guide.

made up of relatively homogenous groups of people with something in common that is relevant to the topic of study. The main point of commonality shared by the participants was their employment within the federal government and their age demographic. While not intended by the researcher, the majority of the participants were white¹⁰ and the sample was approximately equal in terms of Francophone and Anglophone representation¹¹. In the early stages of the interview process, a snowball sampling technique was used and subjects were asked to identify other individuals who might be willing to participate in the study and those leads were followed in order to obtain the total sample size.

Using purposeful and snowball sampling techniques enabled the selection of participants on the basis of age. Rather than drawing on the strict classifications of age or generation as a measure to avoid reinforcing divisive lines between individuals and groups, a fluid approach to generation was utilized as a means to acknowledge the potential for connection and/or conflict that exists in encounters within and between generations (Grenier, 2007: 317). Therefore, in the development of the research design, several factors were taken into account. First, was the number of years of work experience each individual might have that would provide different perspectives on the organization and would enable the researcher to make a distinction between 'experienced' and 'new' employees. A second factor built on the notion that a generation achieves its identity between the ages of twenty and thirty and that becoming conscious of one's own distinctive identity emerges as a force that links and distinguishes generational groups through awareness of generational differences during this same time frame (Biggs, 2007: 696).

¹⁰ Eight of the ten participants interviewed were white.

¹¹ Six of the participants were Anglophone and the remaining 4 were Francophone. While this representation might not accurately reflect the numbers of Francophones and Anglophones working in Federal departments, the sample is perhaps more reflective of the limitations created by the interviewer's background and first language which prohibited data collection from participants who did not feel comfortable expressing themselves entirely in English.

Thus, it was reasoned that a group under thirty years of age would be entering into this period of generational identification and consciousness formation and that this could contribute to a more acute awareness of the similarities and differences with the generational group preceding them.

With these factors considered, the total sample of ten participants consisted of two smaller samples of five employees broadly grouped on the basis of chronological age. One sub-sample of the employees interviewed were 30 years of age or less and the second sub-sample of employees were over 45 years of age. In addition to asking each participant their chronological age, social and cultural markers of generation were incorporated by asking participants to self-identify the generational group they felt a sense of belonging to or identification with¹².

In order to ensure accuracy and to facilitate active listening on the part of the researcher, the interviews were tape-recorded with some written notes taken to supplement answers and to highlight themes as they began to emerge in the course of the interview process. As Luborsky suggests, the discovery of themes ought to begin during the interviews so as to avoid a one-sided process that relies heavily on transcripts and produces an 'armchair method' of text analysis (Luborsky, 1994: 202). Towards the final stages of the interview phase, informants were consulted directly about the themes that had begun to emerge in earlier interviews that had been identified by the researcher through the re-reading of written notes.

In the main, the interview questions were open-ended, which meant that the content of the responses from participants could be determined in advance. Therefore, the interviews ranged in length from thirty-five to ninety minutes. After all the interviews were complete, and prior to

¹² Generational labels as they appear within popular discourse were presented to participants such as 'Baby Boomer', 'Generation X', 'Generation Y'. Because of the nature of the term generation and its frequent usage in everyday language, it was seen that an emic approach to data collection would be provide the most fruitful and compelling results.

beginning the process of transcription the interview notes were reviewed again. Once the themes were identified, relevant data were transcribed for further analysis.

Process of Analysis

In a qualitative study, thematic analysis provides a direct representation of an individual's personal point of view and descriptions of experiences, beliefs, and perceptions. In this way, it exemplifies the goal of qualitative research which aims to discover lived experiences and meanings or insider's view of the lived world (Luborsky, 1994: 190). Given the focus of this study on the values and experiences of generations, thematic analysis was selected as the best means for analyzing the interview data because themes provide insight into the cultural beliefs and values that instil powerful experiences and motivations and shape how individuals plan, make sense of, and respond to events. This method of analysis was also selected in order to preserve the richness of detail and depth of the data that was communicated during the research gathering phase of the project (Luborsky, 1994: 190).

Drawing on the steps of analysis from Luborsky, the identification of themes in this study consisted of four steps. First, with the audio taped interviews transcribed, an initial reading of the notes was conducted in order to locate recurrent topics and these were summarized. A second reading was then conducted to identify main points which were written down and captured with a phrase. Third, the phrases were analyzed and while both a 'frequency' and 'importance' approach¹³ were used; the primary orientation was of a frequency orientation. This meant that the topic and themes were counted and those that most frequently occurred were noted and the

¹³ In thematic analysis, there are two approaches to the identification of themes. One is the 'frequency' approach in which the researcher seeks the statements that occur most frequently or that are repeated. In the second approach, 'importance' is determined by looking for statements that are particularly meaningful to respondents. This approach is more interpretative and requires the researcher to identify the importance by factors that are internal to the informants discourse. The analytic task is to explain how an infrequent statement is significant to the speaker (Luborsky, 1994: 196)

interview notes were re-read to look for the importance of other statements that were not included in the initial theme identification. Finally, once the themes that most accurately captured what was meaningful to the participants were captured, the notes were re-read until no further themes emerged. In thematic analysis, this is referred to as pattern saturation (Luborsky, 1994: 203-204).

With this process complete, the themes were considered vis-à-vis the theoretical framework. Chapter two will provide a clearer illustration of the analysis process through a presentation of the interview findings. For ease of communication, the sample groups will be distinctly labelled. The set of employees under thirty years of age will be referred to hereafter as the ‘newcomers’ and the sample of employees over forty-five years of age will be referred to as ‘experienced employees’¹⁴. It is the discussion of the interview findings to which we now turn.

¹⁴ It should be noted here that while 4 out of 5 of the employees over 45 that were interviewed could be considered ‘experienced’ by virtue of the length of time spent working for the federal government (15 years or more), there was one informant in this sample who had spent less time employed for the government than the others. While this was significantly less than the others in the sample, it was still considerably more than the participants in the ‘newcomer’ sample group.

Thematically Speaking

The thematic analysis of the interview data generated several compelling results. Within this chapter, the findings of the analysis are presented and discussed. As highlighted in the previous chapter, the analysis discovered themes using a frequency and an importance approach. The first two topics, 'generational collective awareness' and 'rapid career growth' that are presented emerged during the analysis stage from the utilization of the importance approach. The significance of these themes was determined by the language used by participants and the notes that were taken during the interviews capturing the respondents' facial expressions, body movements and language. While these first two themes were not anticipated by the researcher, the ways in which participants spoke about them and the length to which they were discussed signalled that these are issues that employees perceive as sources of difference and tension between generational groups such that the researcher felt it was pertinent to include these themes as factors affecting intergenerational relations.

In contrast, the theme of educational credentials that is presented at the end of the chapter was, in part, anticipated by the researcher because of the theoretical model deployed and because of the overarching research questions which structured the development of the interview guide. The participants were asked several questions about education and during the interview stage as the researcher re-read the interview notes, technology emerged frequently and represented a distinct difference between the generations and therefore it was pertinent that it be included in the final report.

Generational Collective Awareness

June Edmunds and Bryan Turner argue that a generation can be defined as a cohort that for some special reason, such as a major event (war, pestilence, civil conflict, or natural

catastrophe such as an earthquake) develops a collective consciousness that permits a generation to intervene significantly in social change (Edmunds and Turner, 1998: iv). One of the things that struck the researcher during the primary analysis of the interview data was the difficulty that respondents from the newcomer sample had in identifying with a particular generational label. For example, only one out of the five respondents definitively classified himself as belonging to Generation Y. Three of the respondents clearly stated that they did not feel as though they belonged to a generational group, and two of them described why they felt the label of Generation Y was not applicable to them. The fifth newcomer believed that she was a part of Generation Y based on her year of birth, but expressed that she felt a greater sense of belonging to Generation X.

In stark contrast to the lack of generational identification of the newcomer sample, four out of the five experienced employees articulated that they felt a sense of belonging to the Baby Boomer generation and the fifth experienced employee (who was also the youngest in the sample of older employees) commented that she felt more like she belonged to Generation X because she related more to the values of that generational group.

More of the values than the age...because like I said I'm pretty borderline, I was born in 1964 which is usually part of the Boomers but because of the way I see work, because of the values, because of work-life balance; Boomers are known to be workaholics and I'm not like that. I'm more like ok, my time balanced and stuff so that's why I say I always feel that I am on the line between Boomers and the Xers because I do belong in terms of age to the Boomers but I think of myself as more of a Xer.

The size of the Baby Boom generation is a factor that likely contributes to the relative ease with which respondents over 45 years of age were able to identify the generational group they belonged to. According to Statistics Canada, the Baby Boom represents Canadians born in

1946-1965. During this time, almost 10 million citizens were added to the country's population; thus, the Baby Boom represents the most significant demographic development in Canada since the Second World War. The cohort is so large that demographers divide the Baby Boom generation into two waves. The first wave consists of those born in 1946-1955 and the second wave is the Boomers born between 1956-1965 (McDougall, 1998: 1).

In this study, both waves of the Baby Boom are represented with two respondents belonging to the first wave and second wave respectively. The fifth respondent at 54 years of age is on the cusp between the two waves. Given the immense size of the Baby Boom generation, the cultural significance, and the impact of this cohort on Canadian society, it was not unexpected that members of this generational group would be easily able to identify their generational location, the values and characteristics associated with the Baby Boom generation, and a significant event that had an impact on their views of the world. For example, three respondents stated that music was a means by which they felt a sense of belonging to their generational group and a fourth referred to music to justify why he felt at the tail end of the Boomer generation. When asked about characteristics, traits, and particular value that they associate with the Baby Boom generation, freedom as a Baby Boomer value emerged as a response to several different questions throughout and across the interviews. For some, it was the freedom to challenge authority that set them apart from the generation preceding them. Other responses included the freedom associated with affluence and opportunity, freedom of expression, and the freedom of mobility. While in some interviews this was expressed more explicitly than in others, it was a distinct value that emerged from all respondents.

Cohort size however is not the only contributor to a well-defined generational collective consciousness. To return to Edmunds and Turner, there were several major events that helped to

give shape and solidity to the Baby Boomers as a generation. Most notably, the Boomers interviewed mentioned the Vietnam War, the Cold War, and Woodstock as exerting a powerful influence on the views of their generation. These events evoked passion and co-operation, involvement and action amongst those who were interviewed. As one respondent remarked:

Woodstock would represent sort of that people believed in a better world. And it was the era, like the war in Vietnam was a very bad period of time and there was kind of the counter action to the, we didn't want war-we wanted peace. Actually the peace movement started in the era a lot...

Another respondent commented on how certain events contributed to the formation of a particular orientation to the world;

There are a few things that come to mind and I think it goes back to the Cold War, because there you've got, probably for the first time, you've got the potential risk of a nuclear war and at the same time you have the Vietnam War and you've got capitalism meeting communism in Southeast Asia and then you've got people rising to withdraw from Vietnam, you know, the '60s and '70s peace and love. So for me, I think that had a profound impact on my need for collegiality, openness, transparency. There was a lot of engagement...a lot of passion.

Interestingly, not only did these events exert an influence on the Baby Boom generation producing a sense of collectivism and a distinct worldview, but they were also mentioned by participants in the newcomer sample as a means for discussing the lack of powerful events experienced by their generational group and to account for their inability definitively to name an event that they felt has shaped their generation. This illustrates that a generation represents a more fundamental freezing of consciousness. The Baby Boomers in this study are an example of the enduring and transformative nature of generations. As Abrams contends, age contemporaries are ephemeral and leave a culture fundamentally untouched whereas generations endure and transform culture. The consciousness of a generation is both more inclusive than that of an age

group, and it is carried forward beyond the bounds of age spans, age groups and the life cycle (Abrams, 1970:183). For example, when asked to identify a significant event that they felt had profoundly impacted the way their generation views the world, two respondents made the following comments:

I honestly cannot think of one particular example...because what I see and what I should have mentioned earlier is that I think Generation X is apathetic and not really caring one way or not showing any large amount of interest or emotion toward any one cause in particular...and I can't think of any one event that has significantly changed my generation. I can think of events that have happened and the *lack* of reaction, like if you look at the 1960s for example, everyone protested, everyone was so involved and you just wanted to be a part of it. And now, people are really just afraid to, or they just don't want to bother. There is a real lack of caring, people just living in their own bubbles.

I can't necessarily think of any one seminal event. I don't think there is a Woodstock in there, or a World War Two or a Great Depression.

Indeed, the lack of caring and involvement as perceived by one of the newcomers appears to have some validity. As Jeffrey Arnett discusses in 'Suffering, Selfish, Slackers? Myths and Realities about Emerging Adults' current studies on the civic engagement of Americans aged 18-29 years of age show considerably lower levels of involvement when compared to the previous generation during the same span of their lives. While the Boomers, in particular, are apt to point to the apathy of Generation X'ers for the emphasis on materialism and individualism in contemporary society, the erosion of social capital began long before the birth of any Generation X'er (2007: 24). The inability to name an event that has shaped their generation as compared to the Baby Boom cohort helps to explain why the newcomer sample does not feel part of a generational collective consciousness with particular values and it accounts for the difficulty respondents had with clearly identifying their generational group. It also speaks to how

generations are able to endure and transform culture and it illustrates how the consciousness of a generation can be understood to be more inclusive than an age group and is carried forward beyond the bounds of biological age spans and age groups (Abrams, 1970: 183).

While alone this may not have a direct impact on the relationships between employees of different ages within a work context, it highlights a shift in values between the groups. According to an American study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2009, almost eight in ten of those surveyed believe that there is a major difference in the point of view of younger people and older people today. This represents the highest spread since 1969. Around the notion of work ethic, the differences in point of view are felt by people of various ages and unlike the counterculture that was built by young people opposing the Vietnam War the survey found that presently it is more of a general outlook, a different point of view that separates the members of generational groups (No Author, 2009). Value differences, whether perceived or real, have an impact on how generations view one another and it speaks to difficulties encountered in developing mutual understanding and fostering effective working relationships within age diverse work organizations such as those found within the Federal government.

Rapid Career Growth and Intergenerational Tension

A source of intergenerational tension that was discussed by both the experienced and the newcomer sample was the rate at which employees who have recently joined Federal government departments are being accelerated in their careers. Respondents from both samples acknowledged upward mobility as causing frustration and having an impact on the working relationships between different generations. The impact on working relationships can be understood as resulting from perceptions that the newcomers to the public service who rise quickly are ineffective in their positions due to a lack of experience and knowledge. Moreover, one

experienced respondent perceived that younger people who are moving upward quickly in his department demonstrated a lack of concern for their ability to do their job, preferring instead to focus on their career despite the potential effects on the work unit. Several respondents attributed this rapid career growth to different career expectations between the generations, while others believed that it was not only expectations but also the values of younger generations that created this difference. One respondent from the experienced sample explained from an organizational perspective why this was occurring, but he also admitted that it had caused problems and feelings of resentment amongst more experienced employees in the organization.

For example, in response to a question about the emphasis on the recruitment of employees right out of university, a 45 year old respondent discussed how the acceleration of younger employees at a rate faster than Baby Boomers had experienced, explained in her view how this has an effect on inter-generational relationships at work:

...What frustrates also in this way is the younger generation because they are smart, because they come with more education than we used to and because of their values and expectations also...they're promoted very fast. So when you have someone who has been here for 15 years who in the 15 years climbed the ladder very slowly to become a PE-05 like me. Then you have a younger generation who was hired two years ago then went from a PE-01, PE-02, PE-03 in three years and is seeking a PE-04...but in my honest opinion? This is too fast, too quick with very little experience that they could use from people that have been here, that know more...so this is a big source of frustration, a lot of people are frustrated by this...

Another experienced employee aged 55 years expressed frustration with the rate at which young employees are being promoted within her department and the lack of acknowledgement that young employees gave to the experience that more senior employees had obtained when she was asked about post-secondary recruitment programs and the role of mentoring relationships:

Some people came here and they knew everything, so they were younger than us and they were going to show us their knowledge. Well I'm sorry to say, but when you

scratch a bit and you see how they write, you know, writing is a basic competency and the way they think and you read their stuff-but they know everything and they're going to change...I'm not saying this is a perfect division, but if you come with the idea that you're going to go somewhere and you're better than, and these guys are moving up and I know that they'll meet their waterloo eventually and they'll screw up a lot of things but meanwhile they have all of a sudden...its like going into the army, a soldier has to do his time before he can move up the rank. He doesn't become the general next day. But in the Federal Government it seems to be like that. Like young people they move up, they come in as a low level but in 3 or 4 years they move up three levels. And to me, I find that really incredible because I haven't moved up in my time and they could've given me...basically they always choose the younger people because they probably see that within the next 15 years, this person will still be here but I won't be here. So this is very frustrating. I'm going to compare that to the way we treat our older people in general...its like as if growing older is a crime and look at the way we treat our older people.

In response to a question on his experiences of attitudes towards age within the workplace, an experienced employee commented on the fast-tracking of employees that are new to the public service, highlighting why this is a cause of frustration for older employees. He was also able to frame his comments within a broader political and organizational perspective illuminating why governmental organizations are oriented towards the rapid promotion of new employees:

...The other thing I would say, when we finally woke and realized that we were all the same age we got to start hiring some young people here, we started fast-tracking them and we turned our generation off because we were treating these young, bright, fresh out of school kids differently than we were treating our long-term, seasoned employees...so some of the older ones got dropped off and some of the middle ones are being left out and here we're investing all our time in these bright young people that we're bringing in...but we were really in a situation because we didn't hire for ten years and that there was this huge generational gap and it was in every department...in the early nineties for about ten years we didn't hire, it was the Liberal government that downsized the public service by about 30%. It was dramatic...a lot of people lost their jobs and we weren't hiring for a long long time.

Finally, during an interview with an experienced employee who was 51 years of age, it was mentioned that the status of young employees and their rate of career progression had been expressed throughout several interviews and he was asked to share his thoughts on the subject.

He perceived that this was due, in part, to generational differences and like his peers, he pointed to the negative affects that this could have on government departments:

There are two things that drive that. One thing is that they can, there are all sorts of positions open. But there's another thing that drives it and that's a generational difference. Younger generations who've been brought up with a certain sense of entitlement, they don't stop to think about if they meet the requirements for the job. They just think 'OK, I was selected; now I'm going to do it'. So they carry around their own sense of success and they don't rely on external indicators of success, they're not even really particularly concerned about it. 'Do I have the job? Do I have the title? Can I get to the next level?' So you have lots of managers who are much more focused-and they are younger-much more focused on managing their career than on managing. So the decisions that they make while doing the job are less about meeting inherent requirements of that particular workflow and more about whether it will make them be seen to be successful. Typically, those people last about two years in a job because that is long enough to get noticed and to prepare yourself to move to the next level, but short enough if you're a manager to avoid any real responsibility or measurement.

The newcomers also discussed the tension that rapid career advancement created between employees of different generations and the feelings of frustration from experienced employees.

One 30 year old respondent in the newcomer sample perceived resentment from more experienced employees as a result of this and like some of the senior employees, he attributed this tension to the different expectations held by Baby Boomers and those belonging to the Generation X and Generation Y cohort:

As far as the intergenerational challenges as it has transpired in the workplace? I think a lot of Baby Boomers are affronted by the expectations that the younger generation has both for their jobs and their lifestyle. I think that the impression of a lot of Baby Boomers is that a lot of the younger Gen Y's or Gen Xer's feel that they are entitled to certain material comforts or work environments that the Baby Boomers maybe when they were at equivalent points in their careers didn't feel they were entitled to and didn't receive. I guess that would be the biggest chasm that I've noticed in the workplace. This is definitely something that I have observed. Um, that a lot of the more senior staff of an older generation feel that a lot of younger staff have been accelerated in their careers at a rate greater than their own to the point that they haven't acquired the necessary skills or experience to hold the jobs they currently reside in.

When a newcomer to the public service at 28 years old was asked about his experiences of ageism within the workplace, he remarked on the rapidity of career progression amongst young employees. His perception was that the frustration of older employees with the rate of career growth with newcomers when compared to their own was an example of ageism at work:

I have heard some discussion about the fact that the department will have to deal with employees with not a lot of experience and that new employees, younger employees are upgrading too fast. Their career progression is too fast for them. But I think that you do not have to rely on the age but more on the potential and are you able to do the job? Yes or no?

The same respondent also drew from a personal example to highlight how he felt his age and level of experience were factors in the ways he was treated by a senior employee who was sceptical of his ability to perform his job.

For the project, I was not the only younger employee implicated and I saw him-the older guy-he had the habits to be very critical about younger employees like, 'oh they think they are able to do the job but in fact they are not as good as they are supposed to be in their position'. I have interpreted this negative feedback as prejudice and I do not think that the prejudice reflects reality.

Also a newcomer to the public service at 24 years old, a female respondent remarked on the upward mobility of young employees within her organization when asked about the organizational culture in her department. In her view, this is problematic not just as it relates to interpersonal relations at work, but also because she saw it as affecting the service clients receive from the department and because she believes it undermines the work done by people in the lower levels of her organization:

...the culture seems a bit, well at least in National Headquarters...ladder climbers? It's just a bunch of ladder climbers who all want to get ahead and who don't care who they step on to do so. There seems to be a lot of trying to meet quotas instead of reflecting the clients that we're supposed to be serving and it seems that the employees who are

doing a lot of the grunt work are being ignored in terms of workloads and the amount of people that there are to actually get the work done.

The rapidity of career progression amongst newcomers to the public service can thus be understood as a source of frustration for experienced and new employees, albeit for different reasons. In the interviews with the employees over 45 years of age, several respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the increased upward mobility of younger employees particularly in relation to the progression of their own careers. Such comparisons result in the experiencing a sense of organizational injustice which is manifested by feelings of exclusion, neglect, and a disregard by employers for their commitment given to the organization as demonstrated by their years of service. It can contribute to feelings of resentment towards younger employees, a lack of trust in their credibility as competent holders of a given position, and in some cases, it can lead to their contributions to the organization being closely scrutinized and susceptible to scepticism and questioning.

The tendency to draw comparisons between themselves and younger employees in terms of career growth as expressed by several experienced respondents can be seen as contributing to the attribution of characteristics such as selfishness, greed, and an unwarranted sense of entitlement to younger employees. These comparisons are augmented by the fact that when the bulk of the Baby Boomers were hired in the 1960s and early 1970s, the sheer number of employees alone meant fewer opportunities for promotion. In direct contrast to this, the current context fosters the promotion of newcomers to the public service as the bulge of Baby Boomers (particularly those in executive positions) moves into retirement at a rate faster than can be replaced.

Research participants who were 30 years of age and under also articulated views about rising quickly within federal government departments. For one newcomer, doubts from a senior employee about his abilities given his lack of experience were perceived by him as unfounded, based on his age, and this too caused frustration for him as he felt unable effectively to contribute to a project when he was working with a more experienced employee. The scepticism about the capabilities of accelerated younger employees exhibited by senior workers has an impact on the relationships between workers of different ages. Feelings of frustration about the advancement of young employees in government departments, when expressed, contribute to tension in certain contexts and can produce negative impressions of the more experienced employees as rigid and critical of new ideas when the newcomers perceive that there is a lack of engagement with their ideas.

Related to the speed with which young employees are moving upward in government departments and that reveals a shift in values, are the comments that the experienced sample made about commitment to a position, employer, or organization. While the Baby Boomers expressed themselves as having negative views on changing positions too frequently, their lesser sense of loyalty is something that they felt differentiated them from their parents, in that they perceive themselves to be less faithful to the organizations in which they work. When asked to identify something that was different between their generation and their parents' generation in regards to work, two respondents made the following comments:

The first thing would be the sense of loyalty...maybe I have a lesser sense of loyalty than they did...

Yes. I guess my parents had a job for life. You were in a job and you considered yourself lucky to have a job and you stayed in it and you were very faithful to your employer. I

sort of carried this in my values, but to me it's much more a career than just a job to bring money. I need to find satisfaction, I need to be able to grow in my career, I need to feel like I'm constantly developing. I do have this loyalty because I'm not one that is going to change jobs every two years, but at the same time I see the value of also moving and changing jobs. Like, for example, whenever I tell my mom that I am going to change jobs, she starts panicking, she's scared that employers won't see me in a good light if I do change jobs. I don't believe that...So I think that this differentiates my parents from me in terms of career.

It is interesting given the comments expressed by some of the respondents about their sense of loyalty relative to their parents is that they would feel so frustrated by the rapid moves between jobs made by younger employees. This returns to the point about organizational injustice and feelings of unfairness about the attention that is paid to newcomers to the organization to the neglect of more experienced employees. It also suggests that experienced employees attribute negative values to younger employees regarding their ambitions and career moves. Specifically, in terms of younger employees and their level of commitment to a position or organization, one experienced respondent commented that while he thought the differences in values between the generations were manageable in terms of interpersonal relations; he described how negative qualities are attributed to the younger employees as a result of different values:

Values...but I think that people can live with values...sometimes you hear 'oh the younger generation aren't as loyal, you have them for awhile, but appreciate them while they're there because they're just going to be gone and you know, they won't give you any heads up on it.

This attribution of negative qualities might, in part, be due to the reluctance of young employees to seek the advice and experience of more senior employees. As revealed in some of the excerpts above, senior employees felt that younger employees could benefit from their knowledge gained over the years, but sensed that younger employees were generally not interested in receiving help nor did they feel that their departments were encouraging this role of

senior employees through the implementation of mentoring and knowledge transfer programs or policies. Thus, some respondents expressed perceptions of newcomers as arrogant about their knowledge and their ability to fulfill the requirements of their positions. One respondent in particular felt especially strongly about this as illustrated by her remarks:

...because the government see that the Baby Boomers are going to retire within the next five years so they're creating so much opportunity for the young people to come in, which is really good but the people like me they shove aside and where is the mentorship in that? I find that you just see here...I've created a lot of stuff here and uh, you know, at the end of the day its going to be 'oh the young person did this and did that'. Actually, now often now the directors are younger than me so they do perceive me as 'my date is expired'. And I find that very offensive and its not, I'm not the first person in my age group that finds that. It's like all of a sudden, we're shoved aside for some young people....basically I think that that they would gain if young people could come in and they would have a mentor and help and the transfer of knowledge.

In the main, respondents in the experienced sample saw the value of having a mentor and expressed that learning from the experience of others had helped them during their careers. To elaborate, four of the five Baby Boomers interviewed stated that presently or at some time during their career they had benefitted from a mentoring relationship. Two respondents in particular expressed how important and valuable they thought these types of relationships were within the workplace. Given the amount of age diversity within government departments currently, one experienced employee commented on how she thought the need for this type of relationship was more necessary than ever:

I think mentors are key and I think its even more key now because of the big generation gap between the newcomers and the ones that are leading the organization because newcomers are coming with fresh ideas but very little experience and they are promoted very fast and sometimes may lack the learning you can get from experience, so a mentor can help diminish the gap between the lack of experience.

In contrast to the views on mentoring relationships held by the experienced group of employees the newcomer sample just starting out in their careers, did not express the same conviction regarding the value of seeking advice from an older, more experienced employee. Only one respondent in the newcomer group stated that she had been mentored and that this type of relationship had been valuable to her in terms of her career. However, she also mentioned that this was not something that she had pursued, but rather those who had acted as mentors had identified her and offered their assistance and experience to help her with completing certain tasks, applying for job competitions and presenting herself positively during interviews. The remaining four respondents had not had a mentoring relationship since joining their departments, although two admitted that they had benefitted from observing the behaviours of others who had more professional experience and from occasionally seeking the advice of their immediate superior. In comparison to the experienced employees who emphasized how important they felt this type of relationship is, newcomers were more likely to express some of the downsides of having a mentor. While not totally opposed to the mentoring relationship, the newcomer sample was more apt to point out the potential negative effects of having a mentor:

I don't think it's a bad thing to have a mentor, but a mentor is a person and each person has bias and I think that a mentor can transfer his bias to you and then you have your bias and the bias of your mentor...I think its more constructive to be able to see the good qualities of a lot of people around you instead of only from the experience of one person.

The absence of formal mentoring mechanisms coupled with the reluctance of new employees to pursue this type of relationship with more senior staff, impairs the development of relationships between employees of different generational groups. Not only would the implementation of a policy in government departments to foster mentoring relationships aid in

the transfer of knowledge between employees of different levels of experience, but it would also provide senior employees a role within the organization to reduce the feelings that despite their contributions to the workplace, towards the end of their career they are 'cast aside' in favour of younger employees, as was expressed by some of the experienced sample during their interviews.

The analysis of the data revealed two topics that can be understood as factors that may impact the working relationships between age diverse employees. First, the lack of a generational collective awareness amongst the newcomer sample as compared to the experienced sample indicates that there has been a shift in values between generational groups that might (within a work context) impede the ability of employees of different ages to engage in mutual understanding and effective working relations. Second, an unanticipated source of tension between generations of employees that emerged during the analysis stage is the rapidity with which younger employees are moving upward in governmental departments. Not only did participants from both groups express strong feelings about the rate of career progression amongst young employees, but their sentiments about this were revealed as responses to several different questions throughout the interviews. In addition, there were no questions in the interview that specifically asked the research participants to share their views on career progression and yet the issue surfaced repeatedly. While it is difficult to verify whether the rate of career progression has increased in recent years or if this is merely the perception amongst those that were interviewed; the feelings of the Baby Boomers who made comments about feeling pushed aside or neglected within the workplace despite their contributions to the organization are quite real. As one respondent reflected:

...I am also expecting them [her employer] to support me because I am not a newcomer and I'm not all flashy like the newcomers with all the great ideas, they may forget at some point in time that I've been here for twenty years and I brought value, because

now a lot of the focus is on the younger generation, so I'm expecting them to recognize that so yes, my expectations may have changed a little bit.

Also real, are the feelings of the younger employees who feel that their work and their credibility are more subject to questioning and scepticism by older employees. These feelings, beliefs, and perceptions, whether accurate reflections of reality or not, are significant to the individuals that possess them and it is possible to understand how such views would impact intergenerational relationships at work through the attribution of particular values and negative qualities to co-workers belonging to a different generation. As discussed, one possible solution to this is the development and implementation of a mentoring program for new employees within government departments. This would ensure that knowledge transfer between more experienced employees and new hires would occur, but further that employees would engage in dialogue with employees of different ages without the pressure of meeting deadlines and completing projects.

The last section of this chapter will consider the institutionalized cultural capital held by the members of the generational groups and will present the most significant finding of generational difference within the workplace: technology. The discussion will highlight the ways in which specific forms of cultural capital impact intergenerational relations, the various ways in which technology divides employees of different generations and is a source of perception-formation for both new and experienced workers, and finally it will provide the basis for further exploration using Bourdieu's theoretical concepts as developed in the previous chapter.

Institutionalized Cultural Capital

While research participants were not selected for the study on the basis of the level of their qualifications, the institutionalized cultural capital for both sample groups was high. Educational capital as defined in Chapter 1 is measured by the number of educational credentials

that an agent holds. Congruent with Bourdieu's argument that younger agents typically possess more educational capital than older agents, the researcher expected that the newcomer sample would have higher levels of education than the experienced group. And, following the line of reasoning that as newer generations receive more education, they undergo a 'value shift' that puts greater emphasis on self-development and personal identity; it was reasoned that the levels of education between the samples could be a factor to account for some of the differences in values observed between generational groups. However, because educational qualifications were not used as selection criteria during the recruitment phase of the project, the samples were relatively similar with regard to education, tending toward higher educational capital amongst the experienced group. With the exception of one experienced employee, all of the respondents had more than one university degree including one individual who had two Master's degrees. Only three of the newcomer sample had more than one degree, with two employees only possessing Bachelor degrees.

All of the participants were asked which type of knowledge they believe is considered more valuable by the Federal government as an employer. The experienced group believed that it was educational qualifications that took precedence over work experience, whereas three of the five participants in the newcomer sample perceived that work experience was given more consideration by employers. However, these answers are likely to be a reflection of the individuals' own status and personal experience in their organizations. In other words, while the samples that were interviewed were both high in educational capital, younger employees tend to lack the on-the-job experience and perhaps this has created restrictions in terms of changing positions which would cause them to view work experience as having a higher value. The majority of experienced employees perhaps saw educational qualifications as having more

weight, because as holders of management positions they are more familiar with the qualifications as a condition of entry to federal employment and how increasingly this has become the case. Discussing how she thought that education was a factor that differentiated the Baby Boomers from her parent's generational group in terms of obtaining higher education and as a means for achieving certain types of employment, one experienced respondent indicated that this was something she believed became important for her generation and essential for members of a younger generation:

Education also is something that differentiates me. I do have parents who both have a Bachelor degree but they did that throughout their years, not when they first stated their careers. They went back to school after because they were that kind of people. But a lot of my parents' generation didn't need a Bachelor degree, did not need a university degree to get a decent job. You see, my parents got their decent jobs before getting their Bachelor's degree. I find that in my generation and even more now you need to get education going to get a decent job. Because I see some of my friends who didn't graduate from university that are still in lower-income, less growth types of jobs. So to me, this is a difference also.

Several respondents from both groups acknowledged how degrees are used within bureaucracies as screening devices for potential job candidates. One newcomer thought that work experience was ultimately more important to employers than educational qualifications, but because degrees are used as a condition of entry into employment, their value cannot be underestimated:

I think it's the work experience. At first, when you apply to a competition? I know that the academic experience is really important for the discrimination of candidates. So during that moment I know that it is really important for the employer. But in the end, when you win the competition and you have to do some tasks, I think the employer doesn't mind about your diplomas and academic past. You need to do the job.

Another newcomer had this to say about educational qualifications as a condition of entry:

...I don't think that if I as a twenty year employee have been busting my hump running programs and files for 20 years and have been educating myself within the system...that

my experience should be any less weighted than a student who just came out with a Master's and all the fresh words...Like for example, you have people who have worked in CR¹⁵ categories or AS¹⁶ categories who have Master's degrees. Then you have a student come in with four or five years of education with a basic bachelor's and they use the bridging program, they transition them in and they're at a higher level...I just don't think its weighted fairly. Yes, I think there is more weight put on education, like I said earlier, everything is about recruitment-the baby boomers are leaving...well recruit them for the CR4 jobs, let them work up through the ranks...I don't think age should be a factor but I don't think that personal knowledge and experience and everything else should be pushed to the wayside because somebody has letters behind their name....

Finally, an experienced employee also commenting on recruitment and the focus of federal government hiring:

If people have reached their educational level, then they should have as much opportunity as someone that has gone to university. But the bulk of the hiring focus now is on university grads so the next generation of the public service is going to be very much an educated, professional workforce. So it's probably tough for people with just a high school background to connect, but there's got to be still those kinds of jobs, there's still a mailroom, there is still a warehouse and you know, those kinds of things, so maybe they need to have a trades kind of focus...

Some of the employees in both samples recognized that educational qualifications are a condition of entry to employment within the federal government, and some also believed that once employed by a federal department, having a certain level of education provided individuals with certain opportunities. One experienced employee perceived that work experience was more important, but he remarked how having more educational capital increased the opportunities for individuals once they were already working for the organization:

I think...the work experience is more valued. I think so. But the thing is? You will not get the opportunity at certain assignments if you haven't got the degree, the paper. You need both. So yes, maybe you need that to get in.

¹⁵ The 'CR' classification stands for Clerical and Regulatory work.

¹⁶ The 'AS' classification represents the employees in Administrative Services.

The findings on educational attainment as a factor influencing orientations to work were not as significant as the researcher had anticipated. This was likely due to two factors; the relatively similar levels of education between the two samples and the types of questions that were asked during the interviews. Perhaps if different questions were asked or a larger sample was used for data gathering, this would have produced more distinct differences between the generational groups with respect to education. While it was predicted that the interview questions would yield interesting results on educational qualifications and the generations, the final theme by contrast was completely unexpected. The remainder of this chapter will focus on this theme as a divisive factor amongst generations in the workplace.

Technology, Work, and the Generational Digital Divide

The most significant finding of the study was the emergence of technology as a factor that represents a fundamental difference between members of generational groups. Technology was raised during the interviews as a response to several questions by both the newcomer and the experienced samples. There are two reasons that this finding is particularly important. First, it was not a theme that was anticipated by the researcher and despite the exclusion of questions about technology in the interview guide, it emerged in every interview. The introduction of certain information and communication technologies into the workplace during the careers of the Baby Boom generation and the widespread adoption of it in various facets of life during the formative years of the newcomer group has meant tremendous differences in the ways that the members of generational groups approach, perceive, and use technology. Secondly, and more specific to the federal government context, are the ways in which the Internet, social networking sites and other forms of technology have produced changes in the public service and have

transformed the way people work, how they view their jobs, privacy, and even the role of government itself (May, 2010: 1).

The introduction of communications technology into federal departments has represented a series of important changes for the experienced group of employees or those interviewed who were forty-five years of age or older. The main changes that this group identified were in regards to the amount of work, employee relations and conflict in the workplace, and the necessary job skills and requirements. With respect to changes in the amount of work, one experienced employee pointed out that a fundamental difference between his parents' generation and his own in terms of work was that the amount of work has increased and he attributed that increase to the introduction of information and communications technology. When asked why he thought the amount of work had increased relative to his parents' time, he had the following to say:

Because of technology, principally. Work can be done just about anywhere so a person is never or rarely not available. The dead space in communication has been eliminated so the turnaround times for everything have been shortened so you're not thinking 'oh, I can't work on that, I have to wait for something to arrive in the mail'.

Similarly, another experienced employee discussed how checking her e-mail added to the amount of work she had because it was another duty to be fulfilled in addition to her job requirements:

I find with technology, we're putting all...technology is the end of it. For instance, we used to have, in my time, weekly meetings about where to go, we had discussions and nowadays it's done, like send e-mail. So it's an overdose of emails all the time, about everything. And you're supposed to do your work on top of the reading your email...

In addition to highlighting how experienced employees feel about the amount of work they are expected to manage, the first part of the above statement also speaks to shifts in the way that employees relate to one another that was perceived by the experienced sample as resulting

from the use of communication technologies such as e-mail. Because the experienced sample was employed prior to the implementation of fax machines and personal computers, they had observed what they perceived to be changes in the relationships between people in their work organizations. Furthermore, the wide adoption of personal computers has meant the disappearance of certain occupations such as stenographers. The shift from typewriters and stenographers to the uses of personal computers that is commonplace today can be readily understood as occurring in two stages. The first stage or the point at which personal computers came to replace typewriters (and therefore typists) subsequently meant the diffusion of word processing among employees which represented a change in the types of skills required for many jobs. The second stage can be understood occurring when personal computers were extended beyond the functions of word processing machines and became the primary form of communication both within and between government departments. Having lived through these stages, experienced employees generally feel that the onset of the second stage has resulted in a lack of human interaction and that the instantaneous nature of electronic communication has meant that conflicts at work can escalate more quickly than was the case prior to e-mail acquiring its status as the most common method of communication:

I mean, talk about Facebook...to me that's the wrong expression. Because when I was a manager and some of my team would get into an e-mail battle, I would call them into my office and say, 'it's time for face mail'. I kind of coined that term, see the other thing in the early days you had to write your memo by hand and by the time it got typed and got back to you it was usually overnight so you had a chance to sleep on it, so like if you were writing a nasty memo you would think, 'oh I might tone this down a bit' and you actually had to sign it. But now? You type it out in an e-mail and you hit send and then you think 'oops' and then of course the person gets it, has an instant reaction, fires back and then it escalates and I've seen that happen...but it didn't in the old days, you had fights and conflicts but they were thoughtful, they weren't emotionally quick. I think that's a factor, everything is instantaneous, so it's not as thoughtful and if you're not having those face-to-face meetings, you're not reading body language. There are no nuances there...

The dangers of communicating primarily by e-mail and the opportunity for conflicts to escalate quickly within the workplace as a result of the usage of certain forms of communication technologies as the quote above illustrates, were one of the risks that experienced employees perceived. Another device that experienced employees identified as a potential contributor to some of the problems associated with e-mail communication was the widespread use of Blackberry devices within Federal departments. While one experienced employee expressed how helpful she thought the device was in terms of providing her with a more flexible and accommodating work schedule, she was also acutely aware of the ways in which use of the device could impact the work environment due to the added work and the higher expectations it created for people:

...I am really mindful also not to overload people and send email very late so they come in early, but to me this is the best tool...but I know it has been a plague also because some people are overusing it, like they send email at 4 or 5 in the morning so the employee comes in and the inbox in their system is full already and they don't even have time to breathe. The work that's generated also by the blackberry is also not healthy because people send emails too many times, too early...and you're expected because you have a Blackberry also to have instant reply, which is not the way I look at my Blackberry, it is more a tool that suits my working style rather than plaguing other people with it.

The same employee also discussed other forms of technology that have impacted the workplace during her career such as having remote network access on her personal computer at home and a portable device to save her documents to when completing tasks outside the office. She perceived these aspects of technology as providing her with greater flexibility by allowing her to work in a way best suited to her personality. But as her comments above suggest, technological tools and devices that help one employee complete their work more comfortably, can pose dangers to healthy working relations to work and to others within the workplace.

This is one of the ways in which technology and the use of certain devices within the workplace can be understood as a divisive factor between different generational groups. Both generational groups employ various forms of technology within their daily work functions; however, unlike the newcomer sample, the Boomer group having witnessed the implementation of personal office computers, e-mail, Blackberries, and remote access to government computer networks were the only employees interviewed who expressed the negative aspects on relations to work and at work in a more general way. In stark contrast, the newcomers were more likely to view the lack of technological literacy amongst older employees as negative qualities of those individuals rather than the implementation of the technology itself. For example, two employees when asked about what they perceived to be the biggest difference between younger and older workers had the following to say:

Younger employees are more technical they like everything via email. Older employees are not as technical, they are much more old-school. Old school in the sense of, like we tend to send everything electronically you know, we don't like to keep papers and hard copies and older generations have a hard time letting go of the hard copy.

Older employees can't use Excel or Microsoft Outlook. Yes, the ability to use technology, there is quite a divide between the generations simply because the younger generation has used it either for their entire life or for the majority of their life and they're open to all the changes in technology that are always happening. Whereas the older generation is still new to them and they're not sure...and once they get comfortable with one thing, they really don't want it to change because they just got comfortable with it.

The tendency for older employees to be uncomfortable with the implementation of technology at work was also a topic that was mentioned by the experienced sample. They were witness to the effects on those who were reluctant to incorporate technology into their work lives,

the pressure that they and others their age felt to 'keep up' with technological developments. For the experienced group, technology at work ushered in a completely new 'era'.

I think that there was a lot of growth in terms of technology in my generation and that's why some people still aren't totally comfortable because we weren't raised with that much technology. But then, it was sort of the technology era where we had to learn if we wanted to keep up.

I think nowadays everything is done by technology. You know, you can talk to a person, but you're going to send an e-mail. You need to have, if you don't get the Excel, PowerPoint, Word, well; you need to be technologically literate because it's like you become an illiterate...

The older people that didn't embrace the computer when it arrived really got disenfranchised and lot of them disengaged, they retired early or got pushed off to the side. That was clearly an age thing.

The comments expressed by the experienced sample of employees regarding pressure to keep up with technological changes in terms of job skills and requirements, the increased volume of work, and the potential effects on employee relations in addition to highlighting fundamental differences between employees of different generations, also suggests that older employees are more susceptible to 'technostress' than their younger counterparts and this type of stress represents a generational difference amongst employees. Borrowing from Wang et al., technostress is defined as a reflection of one's discomposure, fear, tenseness, and anxiety when one is learning and using computer technology directly or indirectly, that ends in psychological and emotional repulsion and prevents one from further learning or using computer technology (Wang et al., 2008: 3004). In the workplace, technostress results from the introduction of fast advancing information and communication technologies because employees have continuously to renew their technical skills, endure

increasing pressure from a more complex system and manage higher expectations for their productivity (Wang et. al., 2008: 3003). Interestingly, all of these aspects were mentioned by the experienced sample in their interview comments regarding technology.

The concept of technostress provides an understanding of the role of information and communication technologies in the workplace because it offers insight into the ways in which technology can be understood as a generational divide and a source of tension. The frustration expressed by the newcomer sample in regards to the technical skills of their older colleagues might be lessened if the concept was introduced into workplace discussions on employee wellness. Given that younger employees generally have had exposure to information and communication technologies for the majority of their lives, they are likely not to be attuned to the techno-uncertainty faced by more experienced employees who are not learning how to use various forms of technology over an extended period of time in a leisurely way, but who face on-the-job pressure to develop technical skills lest they become (or appear) incompetent in their work roles. Given that information communication technologies also increase the amount and pace of work, the pressure to learn and adapt to changes quickly is also quite real for employees who have not necessarily had a lot of exposure over the course of their lives.

The technological capabilities of employees and the comfort level with the implementation and widespread use of technology with government departments will be returned in chapter three in order to develop the concept of technological capital. The final research finding with respect to technology as a generational divide at work that will be presented and that is directly connected to the idea of technological capital is the recognition of technology as a significant generation-defining event for the newcomer

group. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in contrast to the experienced group who had no difficulty specifying which generational group they belong to and the significant events that had profoundly impacted members of their generational group, the newcomers were unable to collectively identify with a generational label. When asked about a significant event that had influenced members of their generational group, three out of five of respondents mentioned technological developments as shaping their generation. In addition, the experienced sample also made comments about the influence of aspects of technology on younger generations and how they felt that this was a factor that differentiated them from one another in work contexts and beyond. The views expressed regarding technology as a significant influence on the development of a particular worldview of younger generations will be discussed further in the following chapter as a means for developing and exploring the notion of technological capital and this concept can enable a better understanding of generational divisions at work.

Putting Bourdieu to Work

It's a general trend; information technology and in the past 20 years, the amount and speed with which we can transfer, process, and generate information has been the general trend that has defined my generation (Male interview respondent, age 30).

The applicability of Bourdieu's work to generational research rests fundamentally on the resemblance shared between social class and generation as categories of analysis. Among others, this similarity is discussed by Karl Mannheim in his essay, 'The Problem of Generations'. Mannheim asserts that individuals who share the same year of birth are endowed with a common location in the historical dimension of the social process (Mannheim, 1952: 290). What is significant about Mannheim's contention is that similar to class position (the starting point for Bourdieu's research in *Distinction*) a common location in the social and historical process limits individuals to a specific range of potential experience. Therefore, according to Mannheim any given location excludes a large number of possible modes of thought, experience, feeling, and action; and restricts the range of self-expression available to an individual to certain prescribed possibilities. Put differently, to speak of generations is to speak of age groups that share a qualitative identity, a 'geist' brought on by a sharing of the social, economic, and political events of an identifiable historical era (Taveggia and Ross, 1978: 334).

Such a view of generation coheres with Bourdieu's position that sees class as prescribing certain possibilities for agents which he refers to as 'classes of conditions of existence' (1984: 101). In the opening of *Distinction*, he endeavours to determine how cultivated dispositions and cultural competences vary according to the category of agents. Within the context of the current analysis, the categories of agents subject to comparison are classified on the basis of generation (empirically measured by distinct sets of age groups) in order to view how their generation-specific conditions of existence can produce observable differences.

While Bourdieu's concern is with the differences in tastes and perceptions of the different class groups observed; he facilitates the deployment of his model in generational research by his acknowledgement of the intersection of generation and class as categories of analysis. Asserting that it is naïve to claim to settle the question of social change by locating 'newness' or 'innovation' in a particular *site* in social space (Bourdieu, 1984: 156), he introduces the notion of generation that provides the means for him to account for change in his theoretical model. For example, he recognizes that within the different class fractions, changes in preferences can be observed between different generations, "there are similar differences between educational generations within the 'technician' fraction of the class. The younger differ from the older not much in their overall competence as in the extent and 'freedom' of their investments...what perhaps most distinguish the generations of technicians are the external signs-dress and hairstyle, in particular-and also their declared preferences" (83-84). This method by which Bourdieu is able to describe certain tastes, preferences, and dispositions as class identity markers¹⁷ and the ways in which these preferences intersect with generation also work towards the extension of his ideas into the field of generations as a way to account for the differences or 'generational identity markers' observed amongst employees belonging to different generational groups.

Furthermore, the notion of stratification that is an integral component to Bourdieu's work on class differences and the reproduction of class through agents of socialization such as the education system can be extended into generational organizational research and offers another site in which class intersects with generation. Stratification is taken to mean a process of

¹⁷ For example, Bourdieu contends that agents originating from the middle or upper classes know a higher number of musical works and composers, are interested in modern art and philosophy, and more often attend the cinema than those who emerge from lower classes. Demonstration of such knowledge would 'mark' that agent as having a certain background and belonging to a particular class.

continued interaction, dispute, and struggle over the differentiation of people and their allocation to groups of varying social power (Vincent, 1999: 12). The introduction of cultural capital into organizational research can draw on the notion of generational stratification and can be applied to the differentiation of generations and their corresponding social power within the workplace.

The results yielded by the introduction of Bourdieu's work in the realm of generational research have proven fruitful by other scholars. For example, Bryan Turner argues that the notion of generation as a collective strategy to secure and maintain resources is characteristic of the sociology of Bourdieu because he treats generation as a social construct which is produced by a conflict over resources (economic and cultural) within a specific field. Therefore, each field can be understood to have its own 'laws of ageing' which structure the clash of aspirations. In this clash, the older generations attempt to exclude youth by the creation of cultural hurdles such as credentialism, while younger generations accuse their elders of cultural obsolescence (Turner, 1998: 302).

Educational Capital: A Misfit

Credentialism was not observed as a primary factor structuring inter-generational exclusion, difference, and conflict amongst the sample interviewed and yet it is clearly evident that there is conflict over resources such as occupational prestige, income, and titles between newcomers and experienced employees. Therefore, generation much like social class involves conflict and complex social relations, social structures including relations of ruling, and social meanings. Through this perspective, generational issues of sociological interest are those that are concerned with the organizing, managing, regulating, and occasional 'modernizing' of the generational system (McDaniel, 2002: 540). Because of the multi-faceted impacts of technology, the introduction of information and communications technology into the workplace can be

understood as one factor that contributes to this process of 'modernization' within generational systems of relations.

In addition to viewing the deployment of cultural capital in generational research, it also has a particular meaning within organizational research. Bourdieu's cultural capital in this study is focused on a particular site or 'field' i.e. workplace and while this project provides a rigorous investigation of the intersection of capital and generation in an organizational context; it does not intend to be generalizable beyond this context. Organizational culture specifically, is best described as a system of symbols in which there are myriad layers that work to form a constantly changing web. The symbols within a cultural system consist of thoughts (ideas, ideals, attitudes) behaviour (actions), and material artefacts. Thus, the main concern in organizational research is to focus on the values, behaviours, and artefacts displayed in the workplace and the ways in which workers' perceptions of these influence work behaviour (Jordan, 1989: 3-4). Within an organizational context with its cultural specifics, cultural capital refers to that which specifically is deployed by an agent within the field of organizational dynamics in order to maintain or improve status and social power.

Prior to the research gathering phase of the project it was initially hypothesized by the researcher that deploying Bourdieu's model as a means for understanding intergenerational relations would produce the greatest results if it was used as a theoretical framework with which to view the institutionalized cultural capital (educational qualifications) of the agents interviewed and to discern which, if any, observable differences between generational groups was produced based on discrepancies between their levels of qualifications. It was projected that congruent with Bourdieu's findings, there would be distinct differences inscribed in agents based on their educational experiences and in their level of qualifications.

However, as discussed in chapter two, once the transcription and analysis of the interviews was complete, it was clear that the discrepancy between levels of education between the generational groups did not cohere with the anticipations of the researcher at the outset of the project. In fact, counter to the projection that the younger sample would have higher levels of education, the experienced sample held more postgraduate degrees with four Master's degrees and one Bachelor of Education amongst the participants for a total of five post-graduate degrees. In comparison, the newcomer sample held only two Master's degrees and one Bachelor of Education degree between them. More specifically, in the experienced sample only one participant held a Bachelor degree only whereas in the newcomer sample, two informants did not have postgraduate degrees.

There are two possible reasons for this deviation. First, the sample size of the project was relatively small in scope-even for a detailed-oriented research method such as in-depth interviewing. Had the sample size of research participants been expanded to a greater number of informants, the differences in levels of education may have become more apparent because the larger sample would have produced a more discernible trend. Secondly, while the sample was diverse in terms of age, the level of homogeneity amongst the participants was high. For example, both samples had a similar representation in terms of the participant's gender and with the exception of one newcomer; all of the participants were white and all of the participants were Canadian-born with both Francophone and Anglophone descendants represented.

Bourdieu argues that educational capital as a form of cultural capital expresses many things including the economic and social level of one's family of origin. While this continues to have some saliency within a current Canadian context, at the time of his writing Bourdieu recognized that access to education in France was becoming more open; a change that was most

noticeable when comparing agents of different generational groups. His contention is that different school generations have different chances of access to the educational system and that this change in the chances of access to education was part of a more systematic change also involving the definition of competence, thus presenting challenges to those wishing to examine and to make comparisons between generational groups (105).

Technological Capital

Based on the research findings of this study, I argue that institutionalized cultural capital in the form of educational qualifications is not the site in which the deployment of Bourdieu's work is particularly robust. While cultural capital is a concept that continues to provide insight into generational and organizational research,¹⁸ I would like to introduce a concept that has more explanatory power within intergenerational organizational research: technological capital. For Bourdieu, cultural capital refers to specific types of knowledge i.e. cultural competence that an agent is able to mobilize in order to maintain or improve her position in social space. However, in light of the extensive deployment of information and communication technologies, it is not unreasonable to anticipate a loss or decline of certain types of knowledge (Stehr, 2001: 15) such as the cultural capital that Bourdieu describes. As technological knowledge and expertise become increasingly valuable in a post-industrial workplace, the importance of exploring other types of capital, including the ways in which science and technology permit new forms of action while eliminating old forms of action, becomes strikingly clear. (Stehr, 2001: 30). Therefore, we can expect that an examination of the conflicts over symbolic resources which are illustrated in the

¹⁸ For an example of this, see Emirbayer and Johnson's work on Bourdieu and Organizational Analysis.

contest between generations over income and occupational prestige will, in part, be a reflection of these new forms of action.

As a concept, technological capital builds on the premise that science and technology permeate relational fields of social action of groups that display an interest in maintaining the status quo while also entering the domain of opposing forces (Stehr, 2001: 30). Therefore, it is akin to the notion of cultural capital in significant ways. First, technological capital can be understood as widely shared cultural signals such as attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviours, and goods which are used for social and cultural exclusion (Lamont and Lareau, 1988: 156). Technological capital is similar to institutionalized cultural capital because it is acquired by agents. However, it differs significantly. To elaborate, Bourdieu contends that, “the embodied cultural capital of the previous generations functions as a sort of advance (both a head-start and a credit) which, by providing from the outset the example culture incarnated in familiar models, enables the newcomer to start acquiring the basic elements of the legitimate culture, from the beginning” (Bourdieu, 1984: 71). With regards to technological capital it is not the embodied cultural capital of an agent’s predecessors that functions as a head start, rather it is economic capital that gives some agents advantages in terms of social power. This is because the possession of technological capital and the social power it rewards to the agents who wield it are not acquired over time through inheritance or cultivated dispositions that are part of the process of socialization. The development of technology, particularly information-communication technologies has been so rapid, that the transmission of technological capital from one generation to the next cannot occur to the same extent. In fact, in the case of technological capital, the reverse is more likely true and the transmission of this form of capital is more likely to occur from child to parent. In this way, economic capital gains importance in determining an agent’s

ability to acquire technological capital because it enables some agents to provide technological items and devices for their children to give them early exposure to certain forms of technology, while others cannot. Thus, the notion that early exposure produces a cultivated ease or 'natural disposition' is not discarded with the introduction of technological capital, but rather is modified to reflect new realities.

It is this idea of exposure as it relates to technological capital that is integral for understanding intergenerational relations amongst employees. This is principally for two reasons. First, the development of and exposure to personal computers, the Internet, and instant communication during the period of their coming-of-age has endowed the agents of the newcomer sample seamlessly to integrate certain skills and ways of being in a technologically advanced world into their mindset and to be able to navigate technology with a 'cultivated ease'. This is in direct contrast to the experienced sample that has not had the same type of early exposure and who generally expressed reservations about work-related technology. The experienced sample was also more apt to comment on the limitations or drawbacks of the wide deployment of technology by articulating the potential dangers of usage.

Returning to Mannheim as discussed at the outset of this chapter, we can see how a common location in the social and historical process such as the coming of age during the widespread diffusion of personal computers and internet has a profound impact on the formation of a generation. This is illustrated by the responses from the newcomer participants interviewed when asked to describe a significant event that had influenced their generation and two of the five participants identified the internet and a third informant mentioned social networking sites such as Facebook. Interestingly, newcomers perceive technology as having a profound impact on their generation and this finding is supported by the existing literature. For example, as Stehr asserts,

in spite of the unprecedented growth and the volume of information and channels of communication, the impact on individuals actually results in the decrease of democratic participation and an intensified sense of isolation (Stehr, 2001: 57). This helps to account for why a particular “generational” group that has better means of communication and greater access to information has a lesser sense of generation collective conscience than those preceding them.

Bourdieu argues that the logic of the field determines which forms of capital are valid;

In practice, that is, in a particular field, the properties, internalized in dispositions or objectified in economic or cultural goods, which are attached to agents are not all simultaneously operative; the specific logic of the field determines which are valid in this market, which are pertinent and active in the game in question, and which, in the relationship with this field, functions specific capital-and, consequently, as a factor explaining practices. This means, concretely, that the social rank and specific power which agents are assigned in a particular field depend firstly on the specific capital they can mobilize, whatever their additional wealth in other types of capital (Bourdieu, 1986: 113).

Thus, the introduction of technological capital as a concept to understand the social relations between generational groups is not to suggest that cultural capital does not operate in an organizational domain. Rather, I am arguing that technological capital has become increasingly valuable as a form of capital within governmental organizations. More importantly, it is technological capital that presents a chasm between employees of different social generations that is not captured by cultural capital. For example, with the pressure to recruit new employees some governmental departments have initiated changes to their organizations to attract younger workers and to capitalize on a technologically competent labour force. As one experienced employee highlighted,

I don't have a clue (not having any kids) what this Facebook and twitter and tweet stuff is, I'm amused by it. But I am working with a communication group in another department and they're actually looking at making the departmental communication media much more user-friendly by integrating it into Facebook and using those kinds of social networking tools...this total inter-connectivity, it's the kind of stuff that young people live on!

The technological capital that newcomers to government departments are bringing into the labour force causing government employers to organize recruitment campaigns and workspaces on the basis of this type of knowledge, can be seen as a contributory force in intergenerational conflict. As Bourdieu contends, when agents begin to arrive in a job that hold different qualifications from those of the usual occupants, they also bring unknown aptitudes, dispositions, and demands with them into their relation with the position, in terms of both its technical and social definition. Among the most visible changes that can be observed as a result of this process is a redefinition of careers related to the emergence of expectations and demands that are new in both form and content. (Bourdieu, 1984: 150). In addition to being holders of large volumes of technological capital, the aspirations, demands, and expectations that newcomers are bringing with them into the workplace can be seen as conflicting with those held by the Baby Boom generational group. For example, it emerged in this study that newcomers feel a greater sense of urgency in terms of career progression. While Baby Boomers were more inclined to build their careers gradually, the newcomers want to achieve prestigious and high-reward positions quickly. In addition, other studies have shown that new recruits don't have the same deference to authority that is foundational to the functioning of bureaucracies and that newcomers are also more apt freely to share information and knowledge, to be collaborative and to enjoy teamwork (May, 2010: NP).

As Turner points out, prior to the industrial revolution, wisdom was attributed to the elderly, but with technological advances the knowledge held by the elderly is rapidly rendered obsolete (Turner, 1998: 303). This claim is supported by the findings of this study. Most of the experienced employees interviewed discussed feeling 'forgotten' or 'neglected' by their

organizations for the contributions they had made, or the knowledge they had derived from years of experience and that the skills and work of younger employees are being given more recognition. As one informant from the experienced sample asserted, "...you don't know the kind of work that I do, but I've created a lot of stuff here and uh, you know at the end of the day it's going to be 'oh the young person did that and did that'...and they perceive me as my date is expired".

The tendency to view the experience and knowledge held by older workers as outdated is augmented by the holders of technological capital who perhaps are more likely to be dismissive of the contributions of older workers because of their styles and preferences of accomplishing work tasks. For example, several respondents in the newcomer sample expressed negative views about older workers' abilities to use certain types of software, their tendency to require hard copies of documents, and their lesser inclination to send documents electronically. The experienced sample also described reluctance towards the adoption of technology amongst members of their generation and many expressed that they had felt compelled to acquire some technological capital for fear that they might get 'left behind'. These comments made by the experienced sample are indicators that there are processes of generational stratification at work as evidenced by competition for access to resources and rewards amongst different generational groups. The concept of technological capital enables a viewing of how different forms of capital have become increasingly valuable in the struggles between generations within the workplace.

Finally, beyond the specific context of employment within the public service, technological capital can be extended to lend understanding to the ways in which we might think of the formation of future generational groups. June Edmunds and Bryan Turner argue that it becomes evident when examining catastrophes such as the terrorist attacks of September 11th,

2001 that there has been an important social development regarding the formation of social generations. Their contention is that in historical terms, past generations were typically local and specific but global communication has made possible the rise of a new cultural phenomenon: a global generational consciousness (Edmunds and Turner, 2005: preface). Within the context of this study, such a notion speaks to the difficulty with which respondents aged thirty years or less had to identify a generational group they felt they belonged to. Perhaps global communication as facilitated by certain technologies has made it such that 'generation' has become a much broader phenomenon with a greater span of diffusion than it was previously. Or alternatively, it could be that with the diffusion of many different beliefs, values, and cultures as a result of information and communication technologies that the formation of one generational conscience collective is no longer possible. Age cohorts today have much greater choice to select their identity and the characteristics that accompany it than ever was the case before. However, the idea of a global generational consciousness also offers the broader deployment of technological capital beyond the context of generations at work. For example, technological capital could be introduced as a means of investigating the ways in which stratified access to technological capital impairs the development of a fully global generational consciousness.

Indeed, the applications of technological capital and its connections with generation as developed within this study are immense and warrant further investigation. Despite the growth in research on the uses and impacts of information and communication technologies, the intersection of these technologies with generation has received scant attention, particularly generation as a social relation (McDaniel, 2002: 537). Technological capital provides an avenue with which to drive future investigations examining the differences between generations, aspects of co-worker relations, and for making comparisons amongst users of technology. Such a concept

extends the legacy of Bourdieu's theory into the post-industrial world of work and creates new sites of investigation and theoretical development in the sociology of generations.

Final Thoughts

In the last decade, generational differences have increasingly become a focus of employers within the public service and beyond. The literature on ‘managing generations’ within the workplace has grown exponentially to include videos, books, and training seminars since the implications of the Baby Boomers’ retirement patterns and the myriad of impacts on the labour force¹⁹ have been realized. Furthermore, with changes to the organization of work and the abolition of mandatory retirement in the province of Ontario in recent years has meant that in the present organizational climate there are more employees belonging to different generational groups working closely with one another than ever before.

Within the public service specifically, it can be argued that the generational ‘passing of the torch’ has been on the radar since the publication of the ‘Federal Public Service Renewal: La Relève Initiative’. After an examination of the public service, the clerk of the Privy Council advised the Prime Minister in a 1997 report that a ‘quiet crisis’ was growing within federal departments. It was projected that this crisis would impair the ability of the public service to attract and recruit the people necessary for the continued functioning of government departments.

In order to address this ‘crisis’ a succession of human resources initiatives were created in order to achieve the objective of developing a modern institution possessing employees with the skill sets needed to respond to future challenges (Stillborn, 1998: 1). The focus of these initiatives sought to introduce a culture shift in the public service by addressing some of the negative effects that resulted from the hiring of a massive number of public servants in the 1960s and early 1970s also referred to as the ‘baby boom bulge’. The recognition of this generational bulge, its

¹⁹ The broader term labour force is used to acknowledge that the ramifications of a massive departure of Baby Boomers from the workforce will extend beyond specific sites of employment i.e. organizations and into areas such as public pension schemes and debates about inter-generational equity.

problems, and the future implications on government departments during this time meant that demographic factors-particularly birth cohort and generational group-were on the map as necessary considerations for the continuation of viable and functioning governmental organizations.

On a departmental level, workforce renewal continues to be a priority. As discussed at the outset of this study, 'Building the Workforce of the Future' is a concern that has provided the impetus for a number of projects to address projected gaps and shortages in the number of workers and their skills in the years to come. For example, it is recognized that there is a need to facilitate knowledge transfer between senior and less experienced employees for the continued functioning of daily operations; however, it seems that less attention is paid to the differences between these two sets of employees and the ways in which these differences might create misperceptions, a lack of understanding and impair the building of developing a mutual understanding.

Therefore, using federal government workers as a case study, this project sought to observe what differences exist between employees belonging to different generations and how these differences manifest themselves in a work environment. The aim of this research was two-fold: to contribute to theoretical development within the sociology of generations and to use empirical means to illuminate aspects of this topic in order to guide future research endeavours. While an in-depth methodological approach was employed, the small size of the sample meant that the findings were not intended to be generalizable to a larger population, but rather that they be viewed as a means for further exploration into intergenerational relations.

Through a combined approach of primary and secondary research methods, it was discovered that differences in attitudes, skills, expectations, and capital do exist between

individuals of diverse generational groups. To contend that there is a 'generational war' occurring within workplaces is an exaggerated claim; however in the case of generations, the differences between generations are undoubtedly a source of misperceptions, tension, and conflict. The analysis of interview data revealed four areas in which generational differences can be observed in a work setting. First, unlike the baby boom generation, younger generations have difficulty in identifying with a generational label and characteristics or traits that would compose a generational collective awareness. This speaks to a shift in values between generations and perhaps results from the increasing individualism that is increasingly characteristic of contemporary society. This lack of a generational collective consciousness may also account for the lack of mobilization amongst younger generations in comparison with members of the baby boom generation.

Secondly, the rate at which newcomers to the public service are being promoted is a source of intergenerational tension. This creates tension for several reasons. First, baby boomers experience a sense of organizational injustice when comparing their career progression to that of those who are new to the public service. They discussed feeling neglected and dismissed by the organization in favour of younger employees despite their years of service. They also expressed scepticism regarding ability of younger employees to effectively do their jobs because of such rapid promotion and these doubts were perceived by younger employees, creating feelings of resentment.

The third area in which it was predicted there would be a significant divergence between newcomer and senior employees was credentials and educational levels. Contrary to this prediction, significant differences did not exist between the two groups and therefore it was not a factor in accounting for the values and expectations held by experienced and newcomer

employees. The possible reasons that the researcher's hypothesis was not supported was discussed in chapter three and future research projects involving larger sample sizes might want to re-examine this to discern if a connection between differences in education and values are related to generational divisions.

In contrast, the final finding of the research project was not anticipated by the researcher and did not emerge until the data collection process was underway. The uses of and approaches to technology are a point where the generational groups examined diverged. While this was an unexpected finding, it enabled a re-working of Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital and the development of technological capital as means by which within the workplace, agents are able to maintain or improve their status position. Bourdieu's theoretical model continues to offer insight and adaptations to it increase its applicability despite tremendous shifts since the publication of *Distinction* and its transfer from French sociology into a Canadian context.

Despite initiatives to eradicate sexism and racism in contemporary organizations through employment equity programs and diversity training, it seems as though ageism remains a site within the workplace where discrimination and prejudice continue to persist. While not explicitly discussed as a theme in Chapter 3, every employee that was interviewed for the study had experienced or observed what they perceived to be ageism within the workplace. A closer investigation into experiences of ageism at work would provide an interesting site for further research. In this project, the researcher's status and familiarity with the research context did not produce the ideal conditions for using participant observation as a research method, but such a method would be useful to capture the insidious ways that ageism within the workplace operates.

Building Relationships to Bridge the Gaps

As a response to the question about what advice to give to new employees and the most valuable skills that agents had developed during their careers, several employees mentioned networking as an integral component to having a successful career in government. For example, the comments below indicate why employees feel that networking is so vital for a successful career;

Have a good network. The more you know people, the more you learn from them so build a good network.

Networking. Talk to people especially in the government because that's how you get yourself visible and that's how you prove yourself...

Both of these comments were made by newcomers to the public service, although respondents from the experienced sample also emphasized the importance of networking. In the main, the importance of networking was seen to be related to career advancement and it has been argued that one way that employees can increase their networks ties and improve individual and organizational effectiveness is through mentoring relationships (Feeney and Bozeman, 2008: 1652). While mentoring was a topic that recurred frequently in the interviews with experienced employees, newcomer employees did not express the same enthusiasm towards mentoring as the experienced sample. In fact, the newcomers expressed that they didn't have a mentor and preferred to seek the advice of many people within the organization instead of relying solely on one source. Only one employee from the newcomer sample disclosed that she had had a mentoring type of relationship, but that this was not something she had pursued, rather, the more experienced employee had approached her.

Mentoring relationships offer possibilities for addressing intergenerational relations within the workplace. Two of the major findings of this study indicate why the implementation of a mentoring program in government departments could be effective in bridging some of the gaps and unravelling some of the judgements that both newcomers and experienced employees purport to foster more positive working relationships within age diverse work environments. For example, the finding that the rapid career growth amongst newcomers can act as a source of intergenerational tension could be addressed. In addition, misperceptions about technological ability could also be diminished through such a program. Before showing how the implementation of mentoring program could address these issues, a definition of this type of relationship is necessary. Mentoring is defined here as an interpersonal relationship in which a senior or more experienced person helps a junior or inexperienced person (Gibb, 1999: 1056). According to several conceptualizations, mentoring is multi-dimensional and includes psychosocial support, career and job advice, and information about the organization and its history, especially as it pertains to its informal aspects (Feeney and Bozeman, 2008: 1652). Typically, mentoring is characterized by its degree of formality and while mentoring emerges from informal relationships among people; it can also result from design by organizations (Feeney and Bozeman, 2008: 1656). There are advantages and disadvantages to informal and formal mentoring. With regards to informal mentoring, its main advantages are that it is an organic relationship that both parties enter into freely and usually because there is interpersonal chemistry that provides a comfortable relationship. The disadvantage of informal mentoring is that it is not a required relationship that employees must enter into, which decreases the possibility that it will occur.

Formal mentoring relationships offer a solution to this, because they are mandated by the organization. In a formal system, employers will adopt a mentoring policy and decide who is to be mentored and who should be the mentors. This is often accompanied by a system for matching people and providing guidelines on how mentors ought to mentor (Gibb, 1999: 1058). However, because of this formal aspect there can often be problems of mismatching mentors and protégés which can lead to uncomfortable relationships with minimal communication and additional stress for both parties (Feeney and Bozeman, 2008: 1656). This type of relationship does not offer any benefits to either party and especially not conducive to the productivity of the organization. In addition, I argue that formal mentoring relationships can augment the notion that mentoring is a uni-directional relationship (mentor guiding protégé) instead of a mutually beneficial endeavour for both parties.

Therefore, based on the research findings of this study, as an employer, the federal government could improve employee relations and reduce age-related tensions while achieving greater levels of knowledge transfer if mentoring programs were implemented across departments. This program would incorporate both formal and informal aspects of mentoring relationships. Drawing from the advantages of formal mentoring systems, the federal department program would mandate that new employees within the first year of their appointment develop a mentoring relationship. Because all departments require that employees have a personal learning plan within the first year of their hire date, a mentoring component could be incorporated into this already existing system. In addition to the policy, the organization would also develop the means to ensure that employees were complying and because this could be a dimension of the existing learning plan that employees must complete, such a program would require minimal resources to

be executed. The development of a policy and the means for measuring compliance would be the formal aspects of the program and would ensure that new employees engaged in this type of relationship early on in their career. While mandated to select a mentor, employees would be free to choose the individual that they would develop the relationship with. The incorporation of this informal aspect of mentoring would work to ensure commonalities and chemistry between the mentor and the mentee. Such an open selection method would also facilitate dialogue as potentially new employees would 'interview' more than one person as an attempt to maximize the benefits of the relationship for the duration of their first year of employment.

While it is not expected that all employees would continue these relationships beyond their first year of employment, it would expose younger employees to benefits of mentoring early on in their careers. Furthermore, mandating such relationships would help address two of the intergenerational issues uncovered by this study. First, a mentoring policy would help to encourage knowledge sharing and transfer between more experienced and junior employees. One of the main concerns of the experienced sample as revealed by this study is the rate at which newcomers are being accelerated in their careers. The implementation of a mentoring program- while not implicating all employees- would signal that there were measures in place to create powerful mechanisms for knowledge transfer.

Secondly, the issue of technological capital and the diversity in the levels amongst employees of different generational groups would also be addressed by such a policy. Rejecting the textbook definition of mentoring provided above and instead advocating the notion that mentoring relationships are not uni-directional but rather are mutually beneficial, experienced employees would also have the opportunity to learn from the newcomers of the organization in a

comfortable and informal learning relationship. This would result in a reduction of techno-stress that can be caused by the rapid introduction and requirements of certain types of information-communication technologies and the impacts of the pressure to adopt and become adept at using new forms of technology on employees as they carry out their daily work. This would apply to all employees regardless of their age or generational membership.

Finally, the presentation of a mentoring policy on a departmental level that highlights the mutual benefits and dyadic nature of mentoring relationships would facilitate dialogue between age-diverse sets of employees and would work to eradicate some of the negative perceptions and judgments made about 'older' or 'younger' employees. Increased communication would foster more positive working relationships and work environments. This would contribute to greater understanding and efficiency amongst employees of all ages across government departments and not just those managers who find the money in their budgets to purchase a training course or the latest book on generations within the workplace.

While there is still much to be achieved within work environments to ensure fair and equitable treatment of all employees, age as a source of diversity has not received the same attention as other differences such as race and gender and this helps to account for some of the tensions and misperceptions that continue to exist between employees of different ages. Furthermore, as discussed at the beginning of this study, the specific work environment can be understood as a microcosm of a society in which ageist attitudes abound unfettered. The abolition of mandatory retirement, longer life spans resulting in the increased likelihood of age-diverse organizations, and the echoing impact that the exiting of baby boomers will have on work environments suggests that intergenerational relations in the workplace and beyond will require

attention for many generations to come. As so aptly captured by Karl Mannheim over a half-century ago and continuing in its relevancy today:

The problem of generations is important enough to merit serious consideration. It is one of the indispensable guides to an understanding of the structure of social and intellectual movements. Its practical importance becomes clear as soon as one tries to obtain a more exact understanding of the accelerated pace of social change characteristic of our time (1952: 287).

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Appendix A

Research Participants:

Government employees

Location of Interviews:

Ottawa, Ontario

Introductory Questions:

- 1) What is your age? (This information will be used as aggregate data only).
- 2) Do you identify with any of the following? (Baby Boomer, Generation X, Millennial, etc.)?
 - Is your identification with this generational group based on age, or are there other factors that contribute to your identification with this cohort (i.e. social events, mindset or attitude)?
- 3) What characteristics or traits do you associate with this generational group?
- 4) My study considers continuity versus discontinuity between generational cohorts. Can you identify something that you feel has changed between you and your parent's generation in terms of work and/or education?

Employment and Educational Questions:

- 1) What was your age when you began working for the government?
- 2) Did you have professional experience before beginning your job at the government?
 - If yes, please describe the type of employment
- 3) What are the most valuable skills you believe you have obtained in your career thus far?
- 4) What is the highest level of education that you have achieved to date?
 - Did you obtain this level of education prior to beginning work for the Canadian government
- 5) Do you, or have you had a mentor?
 - If yes:
 - Why did/do you?
 - Was/is this a valuable experience?
- 6) What expectations do you have of your employer?
- 7) Have your expectations changed over time? What do you believe caused them to change?
- 8) How would you describe the organizational culture?
- 9) What factor(s) would cause you to make a decision to leave your job for a different position?
- 10) Career mobility within the Federal Government is encouraged, what aspect of a new position do you consider to be the most important?

Personal Beliefs and Experiential Questions:

- 1) What do you think is the biggest difference between academic learning and on-the-job learning?

- 2) In your experience, which type of learning do you think is more valued by employers? Do you think that this has always been the case?
- 3) At any time during your professional life, have you ever experienced or encountered ageism or attitudes that you considered to be ageist? (this could be ageism directed to either younger or older employees)
- 4) Does the idea of the 'collective worker' have any significance to you? Why or why not?
- 5) Can you please identify one significant event that you believe has had a profound impact on the way your generation views the world? Why do you think this event had such an impact?
- 6) Based on your employment experiences, what would be the best advice one could offer to a new employee?