

A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATORY INQUIRY OF COMMUNICATING IN A  
MULTIGENERATIONAL TRADITIONAL-RATIONAL ORGANIZATION

by

Brian H Kane

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
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Doctor of Management in Organizational Leadership

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory inquiry was to explore the perceptions of separated or retired Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y Marine Corps in the Southern California geographical area regarding communication. The specific perceptions were obstacles and enablers that they experienced when communicating with each other and any issues that arose from differences in communication preferences. The use of the exploratory inquiry design helped to gain insight into the communication problems that exist within the Marine Corp and provided possible solutions to assist leaders in improving multigenerational communication. The identification of communication problems may help individual leaders improve their leadership skills to accommodate generational needs, leading to a more effective workforce in any organization that uses the traditional-rational organizational paradigm. Seven Baby Boomer, six Generation X, and five Generation participants shared perspectives using semi-structured interviews to accomplish the study's purpose. Data results and narrative construction revealed a communication gap problem between generations within the United States Marine Corps related to traditional-rational organizational design contributed to the communication gap problem. A model was proposed to assist leaders of traditional-rational organizations to create an organizational culture in the future that might help reduce or eliminate the communication gap problem that was found to exist within the USMC.

## DEDICATION

My father, who is no longer with me, always told me that he wanted me to pursue a doctorate someday. Throughout my early career in the military and raising my family, opportunities to fulfill that wish did not exist. However, the University of Phoenix entered my life and I saw the opportunity to fulfill my father's wish. I would like to dedicate this project to my father who I hope in heaven is looking down on me and is proud of this accomplishment and all the good I have been able to do for others with what I have learned on this doctoral journey.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a greater number of generations of employees existed within the workforce compared to the previous century (Lavoie-Tremblay, Paquet, Duchesne, Santo, Gavrancic, Courcy, & Gagnon, 2010). Baby Boomers who were born between 1946 and 1963, Generation X'ers who were born between 1964 and 1980, and Generation Y'ers who were born between 1981 and 2000 are recognized as the current majority generations within the workforce (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2010). Although Baby Boomers and members of Generation X and Generation Y generally work with whatever leadership style is necessary to complete tasks, communication may become more problematic as Generation X and Y assume leadership roles (Gentry, Griggs, Deal, Mondore, & Cox, 2011). Members of Generation Y communicate with each other in ways difficult for Baby Boomer and Generation X leaders to understand (Wen, Jaska, Brown, & Dalby, 2010). Although Baby Boomer and Generation X members attempt to embrace and understand virtual communication, Generation Y has become as comfortable communicating by virtual social media as in person (Bulc, 2012).

Chapter 1 contains information describing and identifying communication problems that exist between generations and specifically within a traditional-rational organization. Additionally, the research design, assumptions, limitations, delimitations and nature of the study are presented.

## **Background of the Problem**

Generation Y workers might require different communication methods instead of traditional face-to-face communication and lecturing used to engender productivity in the workforce (Espinoza, Ukleja, & Rusch, 2010). Results of a study by Lavoie-Tremblay et al. revealed that Generation Y hospital workers and nurses have different characteristics than Baby Boomers or members of Generation X. Generation Y hospital workers and nurses believe their work environments do not fully take advantage of their skills, especially in the technology area (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2010).

Members of Generation Y in any profession desire coaching and mentoring and do not want someone telling them directly what to do (Lowe, Levitt, & Wilson, 2008). Generation Y members expect a certain level of open communication and leaders to show them how to do things and let them work on their own (Sinclair, 2006).

Generation Y members prefer a different method of communication than generations of the past, particularly because of the information and technology rich environment they grew up in (Wessels & Steenkamp, 2009). Members of Generation Y characteristically perceive social identity existing virtually with psychological and social components like that of a face-to-face relationship (Yerbury, 2010). Members of Generation Y use tools such as Twitter and Facebook to communicate, similar to how Baby Boomers communicate face-to-face (Espinoza et al., 2010).

United States military organizations operate from a traditional-rational organizational paradigm (Scott & Davis, 2007). A typical traditional-rational military organization is based on the following characteristics: “rational calculation, information and knowledge efficiency, optimization, implementation, design, authority, control,

coordination, rules, directives, and performance program” (Scott & Davis, 2007, p. 36). Baby Boomer and Generation X leaders enforce strict rules using formal, mass-communicated group formations at different sizes and echelons, depending on the nature of the task (Scott & Davis, 2007). Organizational culture subsequently develops the infusion of beliefs and attitudes within the workforce, creating social, generationally segmented workforce whereby effective communication is difficult (Baker, 2009; Sinclair, 2006).

The USMC is designed as a traditional-rational organization (Scott & Davis, 2007). USMC Generation Y members do not prefer to communicate or work in an environment that does not capitalize on using technology to speed up operations and delegate work (Lowe et al., 2008). The preference of members of Generation Y to communicate primarily electronically within a more open organizational structure presents a challenge to the traditional-rational organizational structure (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2010).

### **Problem Statement**

The general problem is that the Marine Corp is comprised of leaders who come from a different generation than the Marines they lead (Pastel, 2008; Sinclair, 2006). Generational differences in values, work ethic, and communication preferences impact Baby Boomers leaders’ ability to lead and could result in tragic consequences (Wilson, Salas, Priest, & Andrews, 2007). One area of concern is the different approaches to communication endorsed by the older generation leaders and the younger Generation Y and Generation X followers (Mokrovich, 2013). The specific problem is that Generation Y, who comprise a large percentage of the Marine Corps, prefer to communicate by

social media and electronic devices that causes a problem in effective communication between Baby Boomer leaders, Generation X, and Generation Y (Grice, 2008, Pastel, 2008, Sinclair, 2006).

If members of organizations such as the military services have communication problems with their leaders in combat, unnecessary deaths might occur. Fratricide (i.e., members of the same military force kill each other by accident) involves miscommunication and a lack of coordination within teams (Wilson et al, 2007). During the Persian Gulf War, ineffective communication was the cause of more than 45% of casualties caused by fratricide (Wilson et al, 2007). The results of the research in this study may lead to possible solutions to communication problems in the military that exist between generations, possibly saving lives.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory inquiry was to explore the perceptions of separated or retired Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y Marine Corps in the Southern California geographical area regarding communication. The specific perceptions were obstacles and enablers that they experienced when communicating with each other and any issues that arose from differences in communication preferences. The use of the exploratory inquiry design helped to gain insight into the communication problems that exist within the Marine Corps and provided possible solutions to assist leaders in improving generational communication. The results of this research may help individual leaders improve their leadership skills to accommodate generational needs, leading to a more effective workforce.

## **Significance of the Study**

The research from this study may have the potential to be significant by describing deeper problems for generational communication and providing possible solutions for each generation within the workforce. The USMC operates within a traditional-rational organizational paradigm led by older individuals who are members of the Baby Boomer or prior generations who might not want to change the organization at the pace possibly demanded by a younger generation (Terriff, 2006). The results from this research identified the possible seriousness the problem and called attention to solutions that USMC leadership may implement to help improve communication in the future. Results from this study were also found to be transferable to other organizations using the traditional-rational organizational design.

No substantial empirical research appeared to exist related to generational communication problems in the USMC; thus, related research seemed limited. By developing emergent themes that exposed more insight to existing generational communication problems more researchers might further investigate the problem and provide additional knowledge to help save lives or improve their organizations in the future.

## **Significance of the Study for Leadership**

Within the larger field of leadership, this study may be significant to leaders within any industry. The results of this research adds to the body of knowledge in multigenerational studies by revealing emergent themes developed from exploring the different generational communication experiences of members in a traditional-rational organization. As mid-level and the upper echelons of leaders begin to retire and

Generation X and Y members take over these positions, the traditional-rational organizational paradigm might inhibit leadership. Traditional-rational organizational members may want to know how to communicate with each other across generational nuances to keep organizations effective within a leadership paradigm that may work in the future.

### **Nature of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory inquiry was to explore the perceptions of separated or retired Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y Marine Corps in the Southern California geographical area regarding communication. The specific perceptions were obstacles and enablers that they experienced when communicating with each other and any issues that arose from differences in communication preferences. Other qualitative methods might also have been appropriate for this study. Although an ethnographic method might have been suitable for studying cultural interactions within an organization, in this case organizational culture was already defined. Determining what the USMC's organizational culture was not relevant. Analysis took place within the framework of existing organizational knowledge management concepts, making the development of a new theory using the grounded theory method not relevant.

Qualitative exploratory inquiry was chosen because the study's purpose was specifically to explore a possible existing problem to gain participant insight on possible solutions. The study design needed to frame a way to inquire into participant experiences and explore emerging themes from the data results. The exploratory design aided in determining if there was a problem and subsequently the severity of it, followed by participant data to determine possible solutions.

Quantitative study designs are more linear, logical measurement approaches and would not have revealed data to align with the study's purpose. This study's problem revealed an environment of complex, social generational relationship regarding communication problems. A quantitative design would not have fulfilled the study's purpose.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions were developed to assist in collecting data that fulfilled the study's purpose. The interview questions and script depicted in Appendix A complimented the exploratory inquiry design by engendering data collection for a problem that is known to exist and required further exploration to help solve the problem or reveal results to engender further research). Each research question led to the development of nested interview questions. The overarching research question was as follows: What were the perceptions of USMC Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y members regarding issues that arise because of differences in communication preferences? Two sub questions support the primary research question.

SQ1. What obstacles, if any, did USMC Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y members face when communicating with each other?

SQ2. What enablers, if any, did USMC Baby Boomer, Generation X and Generation Y members use when communicating with each other?

### **Conceptual Framework**

To better understand communication problems in a multigenerational workforce, developing a conceptual framework based on theories to develop themes was necessary. The theoretical foundation was necessary to help understand and develop concepts to

engender themes from the data in relation to the problem and to understand why the participants experienced the phenomena in the way the data suggest. The theoretical foundation helps to connect the results to a larger base of knowledge (Merriam, 2009). This study included foundational organizational and knowledge management theory to develop concepts and themes to help accomplish the purpose of the study.

Organizational theory describes traditional-rational, natural, and open structural designs (Scott & Davis, 2007). The traditional-rational military hierarchies are the framework that the participants use in articulating their experiences (Scott & Davis, 2007). Organizational theory is important to understand how communicating with members of different generations with traditional-rational techniques affects their contribution to the organization (Scott & Davis, 2007). Leaders of organizations should facilitate leadership and communication development skills that help their workforce achieve organizational goals (Alam, Islam, & Islam, 2011). This study involved understanding Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y communication experiences within the USMC's traditional-rational organizational design.

Organizational culture complements the traditional-rational design by infusing beliefs and attitudes within the workforce (Baker, 2009; Sinclair, 2006). Within the USMC, organizational design and culture play key roles in generational communication (Grice, 2006; Pastel, 2008).

### **Definition of Terms**

The following definitions will assist readers in framing the study based on the specific problem presented within the USMC. The terms appear throughout the study:

**Baby Boomer.** Born between 1946 and 1963, Baby Boomer technological socialization centered on the first television sets and they prefer to communicate face-to-face in a direct manner and understand the importance of technology and are impressed by how other generations use it to communicate, but they do not understand why (Djamasbi, Siegel, Skorinko, & Tullis, 2011; Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2009; Schoch, 2012).

**Communication.** Methods organizational leadership uses with its workforce, specifically between Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y, to provide direction and guidance to get the most out of the workforce, either in person or virtual (Sinclair, 2006).

**Generation X.** Born between 1964 and 1980, Generation X was the first generation to initially socialize information technology in the workplace with the personal computer and the early development of the Internet (Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2009; Schoch, 2012; Smith, 2009; Spear, 2009).

**Generation Y.** Born between 1981 and 2000, Generation Y is the most technologically proficient generation, mastering more current technologies such as smartphones, tablets, and virtual social media tools on the Internet and are most comfortable communicating in a virtual environment (Danielsen, 2011; Newman, 2008; Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2009; Strutton, Taylor, & Thompson (2011).

**Organizational strife.** A bitter, contentious, or possibly violent conflict within the USMC where structure and culture clash with characteristics of the workforce and its leadership (Andert, 2011).

**Traditional-rational organization.** A traditional-rational organization is designed around specific goals and desired end states using specific structures and

methods to achieve them (Scott & Davis, 2007). A rational organization design entails “rational calculation with information, knowledge, efficiency, optimization, implementation, design, authority, control, coordination, rules, directives, and performance” (Scott & Davis, 2007, p. 36).

**Zero-defect.** This is the culture Generation X and Y members continue to experience when they enter the USMC (Pastel, 2008).

### **Scope**

Interviews of seven Baby Boomer, six Generation X, and five Generation Y separated or retired USMC members was enough to achieve data saturation. The resulting data represented a new source of knowledge that senior leaders could use to help organizational leaders communicate with other generational members more effectively, save lives, and further multigenerational workforce studies. The participants were in the Southern California from USMC bases within the region. The Southern California region has one of the largest concentrations of USMC members compared to the total organization and provided the necessary access to draw a study sample from. Obtaining a study sample from three different generations within the USMC helped to explore and develop themes that may help each generation to communicate more effectively with each other.

### **Assumptions**

The first assumption was that the participants would answer honestly about their experiences and about any communication issues. Interviewees may have tended to make their communication preferences inadvertently seem valid when they did not align with the major themes of their generation, but they were not put in a position by which

they had to prove their actions right or wrong. The exploratory inquiry design with open-ended questions did not involve putting interviewees on the defensive.

Participants had similar experiences communicating with each other and subsequently used similar techniques within the traditional-rational organizational structure. The responses the participants provided were subsequently clearer than if the sample came from an organization with multiple organizational designs and subcultures.

I assumed that through my personal experience with the problem and the nature of the open ended questions that I would not always stay exactly with the script. Making this assumption helped me to take notes on anything that was off script and noted as such. I could then later compare any off script data collection within the assumption that my personal bias had developed during the interview and interpret the data correctly.

### **Limitations**

The USMC's organizational culture is different from any other military service (Sinclair, 2006). The USMC's overall small size within the U.S. military and the uniquely different culture limits transferability to the workforce in other parts of the U.S. military and traditional-rational organizations. The size of the sample also limits transferability to larger traditional-rational organizations.

### **Delimitations**

The U.S. military is the closest type of organization that works within the traditional-rational paradigm definition (Scott & Davis, 2007). To ensure results from the data were the most relevant to communication and multigenerational workforce studies, the USMC was chosen to provide results from an organization whereby the differences between generational members were the most prominent. The results provided themes

that are more helpful to U.S. military and traditional-rational organizational leaders than analyzing the problem through an organization that has fewer differences between generations.

The Southern California area near bases such as Camp Pendleton and Marine Corps Air Station Miramar was the location where recruitment and interviews of the study sample took place. Traditional locations for Marines are San Diego, California; Camp Lejeune, North Carolina; Japan; and Hawaii. Camp Pendleton, California, has the largest population of Marines and had residents who have served in the concentrated areas.

### **Summary**

The specific problem is that Generation Y, who comprise a large percentage of the Marine Corps, prefer to communicate by social media and electronic devices that causes a problem in effective communication between Baby Boomer leaders, Generation X, and Generation Y (Grice, 2008, Pastel, 2008, Sinclair, 2006). The purpose of this qualitative exploratory inquiry was to explore the perceptions of separated or retired Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y Marine Corps in the Southern California geographical area regarding communication. The specific perceptions were obstacles and enablers that they experienced when communicating with each other and any issues that arose from differences in communication preferences. Research questions were developed to fulfil the purpose of this study. The significance of this study was relevant to contribute to leadership and communication studies.

Chapter 2 contains the larger conceptual framework, describes perspectives from completed multigenerational studies, and presents literature closer to the problem that assisted with data collection and analysis.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory inquiry was to explore the perceptions of separated or retired Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y Marine Corps in the Southern California geographical area regarding communication. The specific perceptions were obstacles and enablers that they experienced when communicating with each other and any issues that arose from differences in communication preferences. As an essential step in the research process, this chapter contains a review of known information about the problem under study, with a focus on what exists to provide the foundation for analysis, any gaps that exist, and the ways the study might fill those gaps. Theories and empirical studies used outside the United States Marine Corps (USMC) provided the foundation to conceptually understand the specific problem facing USMC leadership.

Chapter 2 begins with an overview of the generations in the workforce: Baby Boomers, members of Generation X, and members of Generation Y. The overview lays the conceptual foundation to discuss a problem between these generations that were relevant for understanding themes from the data analysis. A review of organizational theory helped to conceptually understand why the USMC uses a traditional-rational structure, the type of organizational culture present, and any relationship to empirical studies from mainstream industry. Understanding the USMC using the traditional-rational paradigm helped discover what connection methods, communication techniques, and work environments motivate and satisfy members of Generation Y. Chapter 2 then provides an overview of knowledge management theory to conceptualize how members

of Generation Y prefer to communicate and how they create and transfer knowledge. The theoretical and empirical reviews from organizational and knowledge management theories allowed for a conceptualization of Generation Y members' communication and work environment preferences. Chapter 2 laid a scholarly foundation for the problem and provided a framework for the subsequent data collection and analysis.

### **Documentation**

The ProQuest and EBSCOhost databases, along with the University of Phoenix SAGE research library, initially served as a resource. The University of Phoenix dissertation database contains current studies similar in content and methodology, leading to several sources from existing bibliographies in similar studies. Additional research was conducted after formulating the problem from open sources, including Google Scholar, visits to the Marine Corps University, and government research databases such as the Defense Technical Information Center, to identify studies related to the problem.

Keyword searches revealed relevant literature, as reflected in Table 1. The words or phrases included *Baby Boomers*, *Generation X*, *Generation Y*, *generational differences*, *organizational theory*, *organizational design*, *organizational culture*, *leading Generation Y*, *knowledge management theory*, and *work environment preferences of Generation Y*. Peer-reviewed journals formed the majority of relevant literature. Non-peer-reviewed references in the form of military journals such as *The Marine Corps Gazette* helped described some foundation for the military aspect of the problem where a current gap in research exists. Foundational books provided theoretical foundation for conceptual support. Many of the sources spanned more than one keyword area. Table 1 displays the keywords that the sources spanned.

Table 1

*Key Word Search*

Key words searched	Peer reviewed	Non-peer-reviewed	Books	Geminal
Workplace generations (Generations X, Y, Baby Boomers)	138	21	3	12
Generational differences	42	38	3	8
Organizational theory	12	0	2	1
Organizational culture	32	2	2	2
Knowledge management	21	0	1	2
Leading Generation Y	122	16	3	11
Communicating with Generation Y	76	43	3	11
Generation Y work environment preferences	31	34	3	3

**Baby Boomer Generational Overview**

A generation is generally a group of individuals of similar ages that experiences history using the same social lens that becomes important when considering applying a label to a generation (Schoch, 2012). Baby Boomers are one of those labels. Baby Boomers (born from 1946 to 1963) grew up with strong family values in an era that included the aftermath of the Great Depression and of World War II. Baby Boomers had a hard-working, careful nature and see hard work as the definition of their identity (Danielsen, 2011).

From collecting data from 6000 participants from each generation, Gentry et al. (2011) concluded that Baby Boomers missed the upheaval of World War II, but were old enough to understand their experience of the postwar period. Baby Boomers subsequently developed prominent characteristics of stability, hard work, achievement, and materialistic tendencies, sometimes at the expense of the family (Gentry et al, 2011). Growing up in a stable family environment made leadership and communication not as

complex for Baby Boomers. By examining traditional leadership research on generational needs and hierarchal organizations, Andert (2011) reported that Baby Boomers “lack full leadership skill development in areas that include: understanding, listening, communicating, motivating, and delegating necessary to exploit synergy with other workers” (p. 72). Schoch (2012) indicated that Baby Boomers’ technological point of reference growing up was the black and white television without a remote control.

Baby Boomer leaders within the USMC must confront the challenge of Generation Y membership increasing and requiring more junior leader focus (Sinclair, 2006). Baby Boomers grew up watching technological marvels such as the first man landing on the moon, but did not understand the technology or realize the significance of technology behind the event (Schoch, 2012). Fifty-nine participant’s interpretation and use of web pages found in a study that Baby Boomers spend much more time trying to interpret and use technology related to web pages on the Internet than do members of Generation Y (Djamasbi et al., 2011).

A Baby Boomer is much more likely to read all the text on a web page and scroll through the entire page before using any information as a tool (Djamasbi et al., 2011). In the same study, Generation Y participants tended not to spend much time on a page but focused on what was important and moved on if nothing seemed interesting (Djamasbi et al., 2011).

### **Generation X Overview**

Members of Generation X (born from 1964 to 1980) grew up in contrasting environments from Baby Boomers, often with separated or working parents (Danielsen, 2011; Schoch, 2012). Generation X’s upbringing caused an uncertain childhood (Smith,

2009). The number of Generation X is approximately one-half the size of the Baby Boom generation, accentuating the loneliness or forced independence that members of Generation X might experience from parenting (Schoch, 2012). Members of Generation X did not have overbearing parents micromanaging their schedules, causing them to become more independent but also less trusting of others (Schoch, 2012). Generation X grew up during conflicts such as the Vietnam War and the beginnings of the Cold War were at the forefront of the political and global environment. Generation Xs' parents preferred to spend a majority of their time with their own families to make up for what they might not have had growing up, and subsequently developed a work–life balance (Danielsen, 2011).

In the 1970s, members of Generation X developed an inward-looking attitude and became more self-absorbed during the 1980s and 1990s when the globalization of information technology was beginning to take place (Tulgan, 2009). From analyzing data from 797 respondents, Reisenwitz and Eyer (2009) found that Generation X initially socialized the use of technology in the workplace. Generation Xers also prefers to use electronic tools to communicate in educational settings (Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2009).

Members of Generation X tend to change jobs frequently, with the average worker holding approximately nine jobs before age 32; in contrast to the traditional Baby Boomer employee who might work an entire career within one organization (Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2009). Within the military service, members of Generation X occupy the middle-level leadership positions between the younger Generation Y members and the Baby Boomer leaders (Wong, 2000). Members of Generation X might ultimately have pressure put on them by Baby Boomer leaders to maintain the traditional organizational

culture and values of the USMC despite the demands and requirements of Generation Y members (Sinclair, 2006).

Generation X prefer a mix of classroom, online training, and opportunities to practice what they learn prior to assuming leadership roles (Spear, 2009). Members of Generation X would rather work a 4-day, 10-hour-a-day workweek rather than a 5-day, 8-hour-a-day workweek (Schoch, 2012). Generation X incorporate training and do not have an opportunity to practice, obtain more developmental opportunities in another organization, or find a better schedule to suit their desires to be with their families more (Schoch, 2012). Spear (2009) found surveying four focus groups that Generation X members seek environments that offer multiple training programs and facilitate trusting collectives that allow for practice and trial and error when performing and leading.

Spear (2009) identified the specific desires of Generation X members to gain access to senior leaders who can mentor and discuss their leadership practitioner skills as a form of validation and to gain necessary feedback to feel as if they are performing well. Feedback becomes key for Generation X members, leading to their desire to understand the larger framework that their work contributes to, especially in the government sector (Spear, 2009). Generation X members within a traditional type of organization such as the government may need to know that their efforts matter (Spear, 2009). Generation X members want to know how their actions affect things both higher and horizontally among other organizations (Spear, 2009). As Spear espoused, Generation X members desire for understanding and feedback is so strong that they will go above their direct supervisors to get it.

Members of Generation X grew up conditioned not to respect leaders who did not display ethical behavior, such as Richard Nixon or Bill Clinton (Schoch, 2012; Smith, 2009). Generation X are skeptical of leadership and authority which translates into their independent drive for success and reliance on themselves rather than the organization to achieve goals (Smith, 2009). Members of Generation Y have similar experiences and characteristics (Newman, 2008).

Another issue that influences members of Generation X is that many women entered the workforce during their childhoods (Wong, 2000). Without full-time mothers at home, Generation X children had to learn to be more independent and rely on their own resources to develop as adults (Smith, 2009). Generation X built an aura of self-confidence sometimes mistaken for arrogance (Smith, 2009). Generation X members often had to seek a group of friends with similar characteristics to develop relationships they might not have had at home (Wong, 2000). Generation X members believe that they had to earn what they desired; their parents did not nurture this belief within them. (Wong, 2000).

Generation X members entered college in large numbers and excelled in thinking critically in environments in which they had to find solutions to academic and life problems, similar to their youth experiences (Wong, 2000). Upon entering their profession, members of Generation X found a computer waiting to help them solve problems that led them to begin to use technology for communication (Smith, 2009). Unlike their Baby Boomer predecessors who used the evening news for updates on the environment, the onset of a media-rich information environment through the Internet and

cell phones exposed members of Generation X to a more significant portion of world events and instant communication opportunities (Smith, 2009).

### **Generation Y Overview**

Like members of Generation X, Generation Y members born from 1981 to 2000 also value the work–life balance and strive for rewards from work, recognition, and quick success in any undertaking (Danielsen, 2011). Strutton, Taylor, and Thompson (2011) opined that Generation X parents who might have been compensating for the lack of attention they received as children were making Generation Y a nurtured generation. A drawback to growing up in a nurtured household is Generation Y’s sense of entitlement and bluntness (Newman, 2008). Newman (2008) characterized Generation Y’s parents as those who ensure their success with influence at every chance. Parents ensured their Generation Y children participated in any activity possible that they might not have had when they were children that reinforced the sense of entitlement, drive for winning, and gravitation toward social technologies that can allow them to participate in more events and social circles (Smith, 2009).

Generation Y are the most technologically proficient generation in the workforce (Schoch, 2012). Although members of Generation X became masters of the Internet and the personal computer, Generation Y members mastered instant messaging, cell phones, and smaller computers (Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2009). Members of Generation Y took the technological foundation laid by members of Generation X and became more adept at using tools to communicate and collaborate in virtual environments to solve problems (Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2009). Strutton et al. (2011) found that virtual communication and creating social networks through electronic means is the most effective way to

communicate with members of Generation Y. Traditional, standard e-mail is still the preferred electronic communication tool for members of Generation X (Strutton et al., 2011). Through in depth interviews of 16 participants in a study on creating virtual social identities, Yerbury (2010) found that Generation Y members look at social identity existing virtually with psychological and social components similar to that of a face-to-face relationship. Members of Generation X grew up with Atari video games whereas members of Generation Y played with computers as preschoolers (Strutton et al., 2011) Early socialization to technology led to an expectation of instant gratification and access to information and feedback among members of Generation Y, making them more efficient but not necessarily effective (Newman, 2008).

Like their parents' environment growing up, members of Generation Y desire coaching and mentoring by their superiors, with some flexibility and independent work after they understand a task or job (Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2009). Per the exploratory surveys conducted of 319 respondents by Wessels and Steenkamp (2009), Generation Y members desire achievement similar to how they pleased their parents within the structural paradigm of the family. The need for achievement and use of technology and social media tools leads to a desire for immediate gratification in their daily work and life (Smith, 2009). From motivational factor surveys of 18 government respondents, Generation Y ranked lowest in happiness with responsibilities, indicating that they do not experience large enough challenges or that they are not happy with those they have (Barford & Hester, 2011). Statistically, Generation Y members ranked advancement and free time much higher than the Baby Boomers or members of Generation X (Barford & Hester, 2011).

The lives of members of Generation Y intertwine with digital technologies and mastering technological innovations quickly, and the mission-oriented, success or failure nature of traditional-rational organizations might lead members of Generation Y organizational members to feel stunted (Gentry et al., 2011). Stunting the use of technology use causes Generation Y members to lose interest quickly when operations move slowly (Wessels & Steenkamp, 2009). Members of Generation Y have less tolerance for older technologies or are those not as simple to use (Djamasbi et al., 2011).

Boot camp involves assimilating a Marine into the USMC culture that does not recognize generational groupings as (Sinclair, 2006). As Marines get further away from boot camp and back into their virtual worlds, the generational characteristics might become more prevalent and important for the USMC as an institution to recognize (Baker, 2009).

Within the U.S. Army, Generation Y officers are more optimistic than their predecessors in Generation X, who are pessimists (Wong, 2002). Generation Y officers are team players and get along with their more senior leaders, whereas Generation X Army officers might not get along with their Baby Boomer senior leaders (Wong, 2002). Wessels and Steenkamp (2009) also found members of Generation Y prefer to work in teams with peers instead of listening to others discuss a topic or read something on paper. Generation Y grew up watching teams of individuals on reality television work together to vote off others (Smith, 2009), demonstrating the social conditioning they learned from watching and practicing communicating virtually through social tools such as Facebook (Smith, 2009). Like other groups within Generation Y, Army officers were some of the most nurtured children by their parents, with many of their events in their lives occurring

as planned and shaped events (Wong, 2002). Generation Y officers are receptive, are team players, and are willing to work hard when they enter a hierarchal, traditionally structured and operated organization that does not facilitate innovation (Wong, 2002).

### **Generational Differences**

For the purpose of this study, with an understanding each generational overview, it is important to identify relevant literature concerning how generational differences may contribute to the problem. Through a quantitative study of 1,376 hospital workers spanning three generations, Lavoie-Tremblay et al. (2010) found that the workforce includes more generations than mainstream industry has experienced in recent history. People in different generations have their own unique nuances professionally that might begin to cause more conflict within the workforce in the future (Danielsen, 2011). Smith (2009) surmised that generational beliefs can cause judgments on others that limit organizational members thinking outside their generational paradigms. Members of Generation Y bring a set of characteristics significantly different from previous generations that might reinforce the generational stove piping (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Newman (2008) noted that U.S. Army leaders must adapt their organizational paradigm to integrate an emerging part of the workforce in Generation Y. Newman (2008) recommended that U.S. Army leaders should study the requirements of their workforce who entered between 1996 and 2018 to prepare leaders for leading members of Generation Y.

**Technology.** Technology might become a nexus for generational differences that might be decisive in the future in regard to how current Baby Boomer and Generation X leaders communicate with members of Generation Y (Danielsen, 2011). As Generation

Y begins to fill some of the leadership gaps that Generation X is not able to fill (Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2009), their generational preferences might place more demands on an organization. Each generation's characteristics within the workforce are valuable to each group and leadership should attempt to understand them to provide an effective organizational culture (Cox & Holloway, 2011).

Like other mainstream organizations and the U.S. Army, USMC leaders have begun to recognize and write about generational differences (Baker, 2009). Baker (2009) determined that requirements exist for USMC recruits to have more hands-on involvement from their parents. Hands on involvement was in the form of Internet and personal computer-based mail program that speeds up the process of recruits receiving mail, sometimes daily (Baker, 2009). Generation Y USMC recruits needed more open communication with their parents to sustain their confidence (Baker, 2009). More open communication is something that USMC Generation Y leaders might see as removing some of the cultural mystery behind the recruit depots that somehow weakens a system that they had to go through and survive (Baker, 2009). A difference in communication expectation brings the generational difference full circle, and the problem the USMC leaders confront is adjusting the traditional-rational structure and understanding the needs of Generation Y so they can more fully integrate them in the workforce (Cox & Holloway, 2011).

**Leadership.** Gentry et al. (2011) found that Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y leaders generally choose leadership styles that work for the given task, making these generations more similar than different with effective leadership practices. All three generations also do poorly when confronting problems with employees,

indicating typical generational differences that might cause more conflict than warranted based on the leader's inability to confront employees on a normal basis to resolve conflict (Gentry et al., 2011). Generation Y members were quick studies and subsequently would attempt to solve problems quickly and progress to the next one (Gentry et.al., 2011). Danielsen (2011) noted that Baby Boomer leaders are more patient and methodical because of their upbringing. Generational differences normally do not cause a problem based on the similar leadership practices they would choose to solve a problem, but with a possible inability to communicate with employees effectively, study results might indicate that communication differences might be the cause of the problem (Gentry et al., 2011).

Generational perceptions might also be causing more of a problem than a difference (Gentry et al., 2011). Generation X and Y members of organizations place value on being able to ascertain the nature of an issue quickly and solve problems (Gentry et al., 2011). Baby Boomer leaders might place the same value on solving the problem, but their patience and approach differ on the time frame according to their leadership experience. Myers and Sadaghiani (2010) deduced Generation Y members' perceived lack of obedience to authority and open communication styles cause Baby Boomer and Generation X senior leaders to perceive disrespect, effectively widening the generation gap. When Generation X speak up openly, senior leaders will expect more responsibility from them and not just the idea (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). If organizational leadership does not synchronize the generational differences with unity of effort, organizational paradigms might experience challenges in a variety of professions (Hokanson, Sosa-Fey, & Vinaja, 2011).

**Information Management.** Gentry et al. (2011), like Halse and Mallinson (2009), found that Generation Y members might process information differently because of growing up in a technologically advanced environment. Information at the organizational level has taken on new levels of saturation, creating a cumbersome repository of knowledge maintained through the delegation of technological and informational responsibility (Schoch, 2012). A cumbersome repository of knowledge is nothing new to members of Generation Y but might be a complex problem for Baby Boomer and Generation X organizational members (Schoch, 2012). Members of Generation X connect with personal computers, and members of Generation Y expand on that capability through smart phones, tablets, and instant communication engines that allow them access to much more information compared to Baby Boomers and Generation X members (Halse & Mallinson, 2009). Generational preferred electronic tools help leadership create an environment in which the workforce feels empowered (Halse & Mallinson, 2009). The generational problems might come when leaders are not comfortable or proficient in using the tools to communicate effectively and resolve conflict created by generational differences, creating an environment where each generation stays within their generational paradigm.

A manifestation of generational differences in the U.S. Army is the attrition problem in younger officers because of senior officers not understanding younger Generation Y officer perspectives (Wong, 2000). The lack of understanding centers on Baby Boomer and Generation X Army officers applying their understanding of an organizational culture similar to their home environments growing up and perceiving that Generation Y officers see things the same way (Wong, 2000). Senior officers attempt to

sway younger officers to see communication their way instead of trying to understand the Generation Y perspective (Wong, 2000). In the U.S. Army, as in the other U.S. military services, the generational distinctions subsequently do not stand out as the culture as the military tends to subsume individual and group characteristics (Wong, 2000). As of 2000, the younger ranks of lieutenant and captain were Generation X members, whereas senior ranks of lieutenant colonel and above were Baby Boomers (Wong, 2000).

### **Connecting with Generation Y**

With an understanding of generational differences, it is important to look at what the literature describes that may help to explore ways to connect with Generation Y more effectively. Carter (2009) expressed a leadership model that managers should be inspirational and effective leaders to successfully implement effective management techniques. Rozcenkova and Dimdins (2011) surveyed 744 soldiers by having them rate each other and concluded that military leaders have a responsibility to provide inspiration and social identification to allow service members to maintain stability in psychologically stressful problems. Leaders must be able to communicate and connect to their workforce. Generation Y members prefer coaching, mentoring, and parental influence, and leading them into the future involves USMC Baby Boomer and Generation X senior leaders to begin to give up the belief that their ability or work ethic alone will help them get the most out of the workforce (Andert, 2011). Members of Generation Y are a curious group and question everything, requiring leaders to be equally flexible in their willingness to have the patience to explain everything (Newman, 2008). Members of Generation Y do not automatically lack trust in their leaders; rather, they are curious to understand

something important the organizational leaders want them to do so they can be as creative and innovative as possible (Newman, 2008).

**Leadership.** Generation Y members of the USMC do not see senior leaders as stars or the stories of legend as previous generations might have done (Andert, 2011). Traditional leadership in traditional organizations such as the military was beginning to be a flawed model in leading the next generation that has different values (Andert, 2011). Generation Y desires that their ambitious Generation X and Baby Boomer leaders to be more concerned about the workforce than their careers (Andert, 2011). Generation Y members do not like expressions of power when exercising authority (Newman, 2008). The difference for Generation Y members is their parental influence and their growth with ambition, but also a nurturing influence that set structure and drives them to meet expectations; their parents mentoring them at any hint of failure (Sinclair, 2006). Evidence suggests that Generation Y members grew up relatively comfortably, leading to self-assurance in their identity but requiring parental maintenance in the form of mentoring (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010).

Members of Generation Y prefer leaders who are imaginative and inspiring which is the opposite of the Baby Boomer and Generation X senior leaders' zero-defect mentality and controlling authoritative nature that exists in the military (Andert, 2011). Leading Generation Y members requires using the inspirational leadership tools that the military engenders in its leaders to gain the trust of Generation Y members through an emotional, social connection (Rozcenkova & Dimdins, 2011). The emotional connection can help leadership create a connection between Generation Y and the organizational culture (Roczenkova & Dimdins, 2011).

USMC leaders have experienced success in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq because of younger members' ability to think on the ground and solve incredibly complex problems (Grice, 2006; Pastel, 2008). Generation Y members desire flexibility and room to be individuals and to contribute to overall organizational effectiveness by exercising their individual decision-making process (Newman, 2008). Military members able to work closely with other cultures on an individual level and adapt to complex problems quickly are the types of individuals who will help the military be more effective and are skill sets well suited to members of Generation Y (Rozcenkova & Dimdiņs, 2011).

**Generation Y Skills.** Members of Generation Y can operate successfully working closely with others because of their high emotional intelligence (Rozcenkova & Dimdiņs, 2011). High emotional intelligence gives them the ability to understand their identity, strengths, and weaknesses, and they can synchronize that with their environment to engender momentum to solve problems (Rozcenkova & Dimdiņs, 2011). Working closely with others characterized the steadily growing Generation Y portion of the USMC's workforce, but Baby Boomer and Generation X senior leaders' misunderstanding increased (Sinclair, 2006). Members of Generation Y are a portion of the workforce that can make the USMC more effective by solving problems better than previous generations who resisted adaptation (Sinclair, 2006). Generation Y members' emotional intelligence makes them work well in teams and implement their strengths to cover for someone else's weaknesses, creating tremendous adaptability options for the USMC (Rozcenkova & Dimdiņs, 2011).

Some of the traits Generation Y members can offer the USMC are "order and structure, high self-esteem, positive attitude, technologically savvy, prefer team

collaboration, are determined to matter, trust authority, prioritize safety, thrive in multitasking, and are good followers” (Sinclair, 2006, p. 73). Leaders should take advantage of Generation Y characteristics, especially the techno-savvy nature (Newman, 2008). Some of the drawbacks associated to Generation Y members’ contribution to the USMC include the following:

They are unsettled by chaos and friction, are unable to connect with difficult people, have not experienced much loss, lack creative thinking, have trouble leading without consensus, are easily dejected by adversity, expect and need guidance in most situations, are averse to risk taking, are prone to piecemeal efforts, and have poor self-discipline (Sinclair, 2006, p. 73)

Understanding helps leadership understand the nuances of Generation Y members and the potential and areas of concern they present for the future (Sinclair, 2006).

To cope with parental guidance, members of Generation Y have become skilled in the tools technology offers to validate themselves in their parents’ eyes (Sinclair, 2006). Technological tools were readily available to Generation Y members growing up as new markets for portable social media devices focused on the individual and those who would benefit the most in virtual social comfort (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). The military should make every effort to make the most current and effective technologies available to keep members of Generation Y motivated in the workplace (Newman, 2008). Although utilization of newer technology would help Generation Y members, focus might still need to center on how people can help solve problems using technology instead of focusing on technology solving the problem (Sinclair, 2006).

New technologies are an effective way of keeping Generation Y Marines more informed in response to the demands they will place on the organization (Newman, 2008). Bulc (2012) discussed the need for leaders to be present, connect with people, and lead change instead of micromanaging. Baby Boomer and Generation X leaders in the USMC should learn the balance between communicating personally and using technology to assist in managing their force to strike a balance that members of Generation Y prefer (Carter, 2009). Myers and Sadaghiani (2010) found that although members of Generation Y are prone to and can work virtually or telecommute, they still require the support and structure of the workplace, similar to the parental structure they grew accustomed to growing up.

Carter (2009) espoused that managers rate “compensation, job security, growth opportunities, good working conditions, and interesting work as the top five motivational factors they thought their employees preferred” (p. 145). Employees ranked, in order, “interesting work, appreciation by management, being well informed, job security, and compensation” (Carter, 2009, p. 146). Leaders felt employees with job security and the right compensation would motivate performance, whereas interesting work and care from their leaders motivated employees. Leaders should understand the generational differences in perceptions of motivational factors instead of traditionally believing employees do their job for compensation (Fisher, 2009).

**Generation Y Needs.** Employees of any generation have needs, and members of Generation Y have specific needs that leaders should understand so they can meet them and subsequently motivate Generation Y members (Fisher, 2009). Generation Y military members are moral and patriotic and are willing to fight for a cause they believe in, as

they joined the force after September 11, 2001, but their attachment to their family causes them to seek the same relationships in their jobs (Lowe et al., 2008). Technological literacy is one of the primary differentiating characteristics from other generations in the workforce, and they will demand it from their leaders (Lowe et al., 2008). Generation Y Marines desire challenge, less micromanagement, inclusion in decision making, and consistent feedback (Lowe et al., 2008).

Baby Boomers in 2017 are in or are progressing quickly toward retirement age, and Generation X and Y members will begin to assume leadership positions of increasing responsibility helping possibly to alleviate some of the gap in using information technologies in leading Generation Y members (Hines, 2011). Technological communications might begin to replace traditional forms of communication in the USMC, possibly leading to the improved work–life balance environment that Generation Y prefers (Hines, 2011). When emergencies come up or increased demands at home require Generation Y Marines to be away from the workplace, using alternate methods of leadership such as Twitter, Facebook, and group messaging might begin to bridge the generational gap (Hines, 2011).

The challenge USMC leaders have to overcome is Generation Y members' drive and pace to succeed quickly (Hines, 2011). Out from under their parents, USMC Generation Y members appreciate parenting types of leadership styles but do not prefer micromanagement impeding their haste to be successful (Hines, 2011). Parents nurtured and inspire confidence in Generation Y members' ability to shape and change the world, and they want to lead right away that is a shift from the traditional hierarchal ladder the USMC has ingrained in its culture from Baby Boomer leaders (Hines, 2011). Generation

X leaders coming into senior leadership positions might present problems in the form of a competition for leadership positions and power within the organization. Although Generation X members' will lead the USMC into the future, Generation Y members think they are ready as well, presenting possible additional challenges (Hines, 2011).

Compounding this dynamic, Gentry et al. (2011) theorized that managers within each generation felt leadership, executing change, and relationship building were important for the success of the organization. Conversely, leaders rate the issue of difference management and keeping people happy as skills managers need to excel in (Gentry et al., 2011). The common thread is that leaders do not recognize that key developmental traits that their managers believe are important might not be a point of emphasis for training and mentoring, leading possibly to the reduced performance for the managers (Gentry et al., 2011). Generation Y members do not distrust their leaders automatically. Rather, lack of trust comes from their curiosity and questioning that goes ignored by traditional leaders and might develop as part of the social interaction between generations, indicating the existence of a window of opportunity to develop trust up front instead of losing it (Newman, 2008)

**Connection Problems.** Within the USMC, reconciling generational problems will continue to accommodate young men and women as a part of making the organization more effective (Pastel, 2008). Baby Boomers occupy senior leadership positions within the USMC, with Generation X members occupying the middle-manager-type positions, bridging the gap with the growing Generation Y members that occupied many of the junior leadership positions (Pastel, 2008). Between each rank group, senior members are either retired or have moved up in position and power within the USMC.

Members of Generation Y form the majority of junior Marines who solved complex problems by themselves in combat around the world (Pastel, 2008). In the late 1990s, the commandant of the USMC, General Krulak, made a concerted effort to recruit young members of Generation X to harness their strengths to make the USMC better, but a similar focus from current senior leadership has not recognized the potential in members of Generation Y (Pastel, 2008).

Pastel (2008) concluded that leaders should communicate with Generation Y Marines on rules and regulations so information will be assimilated describe the consequences. Coaching and mentoring on these subjects and not simply telling them in a mass formation would strengthen trust within members of this generation and facilitate the characteristics of the generation and the type of leadership they desire (Pastel, 2008). Leaders should trust members of Generation Y to make the right decisions on their own and not incur micromanagement because of micromanagement or risk aversion (Pastel, 2008).

Bois and Howell (2009) surveyed 148 military members in 32 different teams and deduced that military teams at Generation Y's level are the foundation for military life. Lee and Oguntebi (2012) reinforced team success in military life in finding that knowledge-creating teams solve complex problems effectively. How Marines form teams of individuals to go out with on a Friday night, work with on their daily jobs, and fight with in combat can be the mental map that they use to communicate with and ultimately decide what they will or will not accept from their leadership (Boies & Howell, 2009).

Members of Generation Y connect to each other and the military organization through teams and collaborative characteristics (Newman, 2008). Generation Y members prefer to collaborate to solve meaningful problems within the design of their organization that is necessary in a traditional-rational structure to ensure the success of the individual and the teams formed (Boies & Howell, 2009). Boies and Howell (2009) stated that transformational leadership styles facilitate the effective forming of teams leading to more effective mental models for individual Marines.

**Teamwork and Communication.** Teamwork, in addition to creating a transformational environment, facilitates the characteristics of Generation Y and the environment they would be comfortable in (Boies & Howell, 2009). Teamwork, coupled with a focus on multigenerational team formation might create mental models that will assist USMC Generation X leaders better understand and incorporate members of Generation Y more effectively into the force (Cox & Holloway, 2011). Knowledge transfer becomes a key component of integrating generational differences into an aspect of organizational culture that might work to make Generation Y more effective and reduce generational differences (Cox & Holloway, 2011). Teamwork also becomes essential in creating new knowledge for organizations and assisting military members at junior ranks solve complex problems on their own (Lee & Oguntebi, 2012).

Communicating effectively with members of Generation Y is an important aspect for incorporating and retaining them in the workforce. Generation Y expect a certain level of open communication and their leaders to show them how to do things and let them work on their own (Sinclair, 2006). Growing up in an environment where communication was virtual and at their fingertips, along with parental shielding, led to a

generation not well suited to the lecture and speech type of knowledge sharing and transfer (Sinclair, 2006). Members of Generation Y seek coaching and flexibility to discover how to accomplish things through trial and error, not micromanagement, to achieve the best result. Generation X leaders might want to communicate why they are asking them to do something, establish the rules and consequences and let them go, enforce accountability on everyone equally, and provide feedback through teams (Sinclair, 2006). Wen et al. (2010), through analyzing responses on a questionnaire from 205 participants, concluded that how members of Generation X choose to communicate becomes key to create a bridge between the generations. Members of Generation X prefer rich and detailed technology similar to a preference for an online encyclopedia, whereas members of Generation Y use technology in a more collaborative means to work with other individuals to solve problems (Wen et al., 2010).

**Technology.** Members of Generation Y communicate through what may be interpreted as the largest team known as the Internet (Bulc, 2012). With a wide variety of communication tools for anyone to use, all Internet users can have an equal say in team matters. The interaction mirrors the social human experience, and Generation Y members have become as comfortable forming teams and mental models on the Internet as they have in person (Bulc, 2012). The information environment has become so complex and has so many options to communicate that members of Generation Y communicate with each other in ways difficult for Baby Boomer and Generation X leaders to understand (Wen et al., 2010). Marines who train and live with team members can have the same interaction when communicating using an Internet communication tool (Bulc, 2012).

The use of tools on the Internet, although popular with Generation Y members, might also be useful for leaders to shape how they interact with members of Generation Y and what sites they use to improve communication and collaboration within an organization (Djamasbi et al., 2011). Leaders have experienced success in hiring remote workers, not meeting them for some time, and experiencing no drawback when meeting personally for the first time (Lund, Manyika, & Ramaswamy, 2012). Although Baby Boomers did not experience the Internet as a potential tool for leading members of Generation Y, members of Generation X are closer to the phenomena and can attempt to bridge the gap and find common ground (Djamasbi et al., 2011). Members of Generation Y use no tool more than another. Rather, Generation Y look for how to put information into context to help them solve problems using recreational communication tools first (Halse & Mallinson, 2009). Members of Generation Y prefer real-time and immediate technological tools so they can solve the problem right now (Wen et al., 2010). Solving problems right away is how they grew up solving problems in school (Wessels & Steenkamp, 2009).

Podcasts allow members of Generation Y to have knowledge ready at any time they choose by downloading programs to watch or listen to at their leisure (Halse & Mallinson, 2009). Podcasts help Generation Y have information ready to help solve problems in their teams. Online blogging offers members of Generation Y a convenient way to dialogue, collaborate, and open a forum to a wide variety of mental models and ideas (Halse & Mallinson, 2009; Newman, 2008). From an exploratory survey of 319 Generation Y students, Wessels and Steenkamp (2009) concluded that Generation Y students growing up in virtual social environments go to school full-time virtually just as

comfortably as Baby Boomers attend traditional institutions. Members of Generation Y also have a desire for social interaction like those in face-to-face traditional campuses and not replicated in online institutions (Wessels & Steenkamp, 2009). Generation Y also learn more from assimilating, creating, and transferring knowledge from reading a graphic novel than listening to someone (Short & Reeves, 2009). Generation Y is better able to absorb information through pictures than written text (Short & Reeves, 2009).

Visual modes of learning were part of Generation Y's childhood years through television, the Internet, and video games (Smith, 2009; Wessels & Steenkamp, 2009). Facebook and LinkedIn offer members of Generation Y expansive capabilities to find members of the online community to form virtual teams that support any need for coaching and mentoring they are not receiving in the workplace (Halse & Mallinson, 2009). Generation Y's preference for virtual teamwork provides useful options for leaders to include remote hiring or collaborating with some parts of the organization but also maintain traditional workplace communication when required (Lund et al., 2012). Virtual tools help Generation Y members work in teams more efficiently, post information and transfer knowledge, and collaborate across distances to find the right team members who suit their personalities (Halse & Mallinson, 2009). Virtual tools also force leaders to distribute guidance and not micromanage the workforce because there is an element of trust in the virtual work environment (Lund et al., 2012). Less micromanagement and more trust is a combination that facilitates productivity in Generation Y. Lewis (2011) recommended establishing a technology team on equal footing with other departments within an organization to create communication strategies to facilitate environments where the workforce will excel.

Surveys of 306 university students revealed that leaders of traditional organizations tend to build trust through face-to-face processes that do not account for techniques to do the same in virtual environments (Salter, Green, Duncan, Berre, & Torti, 2010). Baby Boomer and Members of Generation Y communicate with as much ease virtually as they do face-to-face, and not adapting to their preferences at least with some balance might create generational differences (Espinoza et al., 2010). The MSTP Staff (2003) noted the inability of senior USMC staff member to integrate new technologies to facilitate effective staff-to-staff communications. When organizational leaders try virtual communication, the initial reaction usually has high energy to succeed, but over time, a lack of a mechanism for success within the virtual paradigm might cause a communication gap (Salter et al., 2010). The words, images, and visual cues leaders use become important to link the face-to-face and virtual worlds (Short & Reeves, 2009; Wessels & Steenkamp, 2009). Leaders who can facilitate effective virtual communications could connect more effectively with Generation Y (Salter et al., 2010).

### **Generation Y Work Environment Preference**

Similar to connecting with Generation Y more effectively, work environment preference is a key aspect to explore in this study. Generation Y prefers an environment of challenge without conflict and warmth (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2010). Lavoie-Tremblay et al. (2010) found that Generation Y members who work in an environment where they use their skills effectively feel challenged. Members of Generation Y have a much higher tolerance for levels of conflict because of their junior positions within the organization and the expectation that they will receive much more feedback and interference that might seem like conflict to Baby Boomers or senior Generation X

leaders. Members of Generation Y generally describe their workplace as tolerable as long as they are forming the teams they want to, using technological tools to assist in forming teams and mental models, and given room to do their work (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2010). Baby Boomer and senior Generation X leaders do not value that kind of warmth (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2010).

Generation Y members might not see goal emphasis as strongly as Baby Boomers, especially when they either do not agree with organizational goals or they feel the goals are vague or unrealistic (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2010). Generation Y organizational members who are not comfortable with stated goals might choose to go elsewhere instead of remaining in what they perceive as an organization that will not adapt (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2010). A lack of technological tools causes nurses to leave organizations to find better job skill training elsewhere (Lavoie-Tremblay et al., 2010).

Lowe et al. (2008) found not embracing Generation Y's work environment preferences might limit that talent within organizations in the future. Losing talent coincides with Generation Y members' willingness to leave an organization to find what they need elsewhere (Lowe et al., 2008). Although losing talent is a challenge, Generation Y members also represent an opportunity for increased organizational effectiveness (Lowe et al., 2008). Generation Y desire innovative and energetic environments from their organization and force their leaders to be more inclusive and less structured and micromanaging (Lowe et al., 2008). After leaders' coach and mentor members of Generation Y and see positive results in the work environment, they might support gradual changes to the organizational culture (Lowe et al., 2008).

Members of Generation Y prefer a team environment that makes them more productive and involved (Lowe et al., 2008). An involved team environment leads to more interactions with leaders who should welcome their ideas and praise them for being creative (Lowe et al., 2008). Generation Y members function effectively with leaders who have open-door policies and reward them when they perform well (Lowe et al., 2008). A team culture also allows knowledge creation and transfer from peer to peer that facilitates an effective work environment (Smith, 2009). Communication and training and development in the work environment encourage members of Generation Y to stay with an organization and show commitment to a culture that invests trust in them for the long term (Lowe et al., 2008). A culture of fun is an appealing environment for members of Generation Y because of less stress and more motivation to be in the workplace (Lowe et al., 2008). As Generation Y members commit to an organization, leaders might want to return the trust with options to telework from home that will be an additional motivator for retention and effectiveness for Generation Y members (Lowe et al., 2008). Members of Generation Y work more effectively physically in the workplace when facilitating their teamwork and inclusive preference of interaction (Lowe et al., 2008).

### **Knowledge Management Theory**

Part of the workplace environment that Generation Y, along with the tools that may be used to connect with them more effectively, is information and knowledge and how it is made part of the work environment is relevant to explore for the purpose of this study. Effective managers use tools such as instant messaging instead of phone calls to save time, be more efficient, and improve organizational effectiveness (Alam et al., 2011). Knowledge transfer is key to integrating Generation Y into an organization, and

information systems are important (Alam et al., 2011). Also important is the tacit or unarticulated knowledge communicated through an organizational culture from one member to another compared to explicit knowledge or knowledge written down (Nonaka & von Krogh, 2009). Marines transfer knowledge tacitly through the USMC's history and traditions and explicitly through hierarchical and traditional orders and directives. The information system subsequently orients on what the knowledge manager chooses to transfer to make the organization more effective. When knowledge is not beneficial to the organization, information management planning will create a system to transfer information that will not help the organization (Alam et al., 2011).

If leadership does not plan the information system to maximize the dissemination of effective knowledge, leadership and the information management system can cause organizational ineffectiveness (Alam et al., 2011). Knowledge workers are doctors, lawyers, and managers, the Generation Y young Marines on the frontline dealing with complex problems also take on the role of knowledge workers for the amounts of information processed and interpretations that lead to knowledge creation on the spot (Lund et al., 2012). A Marine's role as a knowledge worker accentuates the importance of each Marine's mental models developed through teamwork and interaction with each other. In the legal field, paralegals help lawyers manage the workload of knowledge transfer, like nurses in the health care field, and both cases lead to higher customer satisfaction (Lund et al., 2012). In the USMC, Generation Y Marines might have the requisite skill set because of their generational characteristic of carrying more of the knowledge worker load.

Leaders using effective knowledge management techniques take advantage of talent within an organization at all levels and in every generation, as opposed to specific individuals attempting to assimilate every piece of information (Lund et al., 2012). Tools such as broadband that enable video conferencing, cloud computing, and online collaboration made it possible for more organizational members to participate in the knowledge-creation process (Lund et al., 2012). Generation Y members appreciate technological tools, because it makes their jobs more flexible and allows them to succeed more efficiently (Lund et al., 2012). By breaking functions into components and assigning other knowledge tasks virtually, leaders are better able to assimilate knowledge and provide timelier, more effective decisions to guide the organization (Huang & Yang, 2011; Lund et al., 2012).

Teamwork and group interactions consist of close management in a virtual and distributed knowledge management environment to maintain accountability, especially in a military organization (Lund et al., 2012). Micromanagement is always a danger, as managers must ensure accountability through mandatory reporting, information collection, and checking in (Lund et al., 2012). Remote workers, or those who do not interact with teams face-to-face, sometimes suffer disconnection and lack a mental model to keep them effective (Lund et al., 2012).

**Information management.** Leaders of traditional-rational organizations such as the USMC, focus on controlling and regurgitating information flow (Nonaka & Nishiguchi, 2001). The military is conceptually similar to a large machine that processes information but does not necessarily redistribute it dynamically or with any layer of translation that gives knowledge workers the opportunity to create new knowledge

(Nonaka & Nishiguchi, 2001). Integral to enabling distributed knowledge worker capability is the information systems used to manage information and put it into the knowledge-creation process (Alam et al., 2011).

Instant information about most issues in society is commonly available in the work environment with Internet access. A cell phone with a camera and access to e-mail, Facebook, and YouTube can instantly distribute information to a large audience. Organizational leaders who can master information tools are more effective (Alam et al., 2011). Information system planning is important for short-, medium-, and long-term planning to harness social units such as Generation Y to maximize the effectiveness of the organization (Alam et al., 2011). More effective Generation Y organizational members help leadership make the organization more competitive in any industry (Alam et al., 2011). The ultimate judge on the effectiveness of the information system is the end user, and including a group such as Generation Y in its development might help (Alam et al., 2011).

Changes in socially created teams within a culture might depend on the use of technology to support it. Given Generation Y members' propensity to use and respond effectively to collaborative information tools that might assist them as knowledge workers, it might be useful for USMC Generation X leaders to consider possible uses to facilitate a virtual information environment. Other technological discoveries such as the steam engine, electric motor, and computer chip caused leaders of organizations and industries to change their paradigms to survive (Bulc, 2012). Innovative individuals create technological breakthroughs such as the Internet, Facebook, and instant messaging

that have also taken on a much larger purpose in the environment used by members of Generation Y to push the barriers of social identity and collaboration (Bulc, 2012).

**Knowledge management.** Relating to the structure discussed by Alam et al. (2011), a leader is responsible for a structural design using people of an organization to make the most effective knowledge management system possible. The mental models military teams create between themselves come from discourse and mutual sharing of information they collect (Boies & Howell, 2009). Knowledge sharing integrates into the organizational culture, and becomes easier to retain important members of Generation Y and develop them for increased responsibilities (Hokanson et al., 2011).

Military teams manage the knowledge of the organization as knowledge workers, and the retention of the teams becomes important for the organization to retain the knowledge (Hokanson et al., 2011). With the retirement of Baby Boomers and some elements of Generation X institutions stand to lose accumulated tacit knowledge unless leaders understand how to transfer knowledge to members of Generation Y (Hokanson et al., 2011).

Using effective knowledge management, organizational leaders preserve knowledge to transfer to future generations (Hokanson et al., 2011). Knowledge transfer ensures the retention of knowledge by retaining the talent within Generations X and Y (Hokanson et al., 2011). Knowledge transfer leads to creating a knowledge-sharing culture within an organization, where members of Generation Y subsequently become more involved with Generation X senior leaders and sharing knowledge with each other (Hokanson et al., 2011).

**Knowledge creation.** Like knowledge management, knowledge creation is another part of the work environment that is important to explore in relation to connecting with Generation Y. Technology can be an effective tool to involve Generation Y members structurally in the knowledge-creating process (Alipour et al., 2011). Effective organizations use tools to make knowledge available and then processes to ensure sharing and collaboration among the members (Nonaka & von Krogh, 2009). Online tools such as Google's use of Knol to create collaboration on documents stimulate dialogue and create new knowledge that is a good example of the type of technological virtual teams that members of Generation Y prefer (Hardaway & Scamell, 2012).

Applying something like a Knol to a traditional-rational organization, a different rule emerges when creating knowledge and expectations and when that occurs across generations conditioned to transfer knowledge in different ways (Nonaka & Nishiguchi, 2001). The longer teams stay together in the collaboration mode of their choice like a Knol, the more effective they become at solving organizational problems (Lee & Oguntebi, 2012). Effective leaders should facilitate retention and continuity in teams and focus them on problem solving to keep them viable and interested in the welfare of the organization (Lee & Oguntebi, 2012).

Teams create knowledge, a necessary step within knowledge management theory, that organizational leaders should consider to ensure their leadership techniques do not stagnate (Ramírez, Morales, & Rojas, 2011). Leaders should integrate members of Generation Y into the knowledge-creating process by providing the right culture and environment (Ramírez et al., 2011). Generation Y members might respond to leaders who promote knowledge-creating processes linked to the organization's tacit culture and

Baby Boomer leaders to work more outside their traditional comfort zones and within the technological paradigm of Generation Y (Wilcox, 2011). Creating new knowledge often requires leaders to develop new personal boundaries to be effective (Nonaka & Nishiguchi, 2001). At times, traditional-rational organizational leaders might implement knowledge management processes without understanding the target audience or in response to their own paradigms (Wilcox, 2011).

### **Organizational Theory**

With a foundational understanding of generational characteristics, connecting with Generation Y, and Generation Y work environment preferences, organizational theory and understanding becomes important to explore for the purpose of this study. The mix of generations within the current workforce might cause leadership to become out of touch with goals that consider Generation Y's communication and leadership preferences (Alam et al., 2011). Organizations should have a design that incorporates communication techniques that allow members to achieve organizational goals (Alam et al., 2011). Information technology is one tool to that can get to improve communication and performance within any organizational design (Alam et al., 2011). Generation Y might function more effectively within an organization designed to take advantage of information technology, but the success behind the implementation of information tools might rest with the organizational leaders (Bulc, 2012). Leadership defines the characteristics of the organizational culture (Bulc, 2012).

Organizations should adapt their designs to changing environments to survive, especially given the influx of Generation Y into the workforce (Scott & Davis, 2007). Jones (2010) reinforced the point that organizational design must adapt but not

necessarily change with regard to the environment to be as effective as possible.

Organizational members will determine success or failure in the future (Scott & Davis, 2007). Within the social structures and among its people, organizations fall into a rational, natural, and open system paradigms, each having a different impact on members of Generation Y.

**Rational system.** Rational organizations focus on specific goals and desired end states using specific structures and methods to achieve them (Scott & Davis, 2007). A rational organization design entails “rational calculation with information, knowledge, efficiency, optimization, implementation, design, authority, control, coordination, rules, directives, and performance” (Scott & Davis, 2007, p. 36). In the military, the organizational culture influences the rational paradigm to the point where the military still attempts to solve military problems from a rational perspective no matter what the environment might dictate (Terriff, 2006).

**Natural systems.** Scott and Davis (2007) noted that natural systems may be collectivities. Collectivities are sets of different aspects about an organization that help leaders cope with a complex environment (Scott & Davis, 2007). The goal-specific and formalized aspects of rational organization would be present in a natural system, but the complex environment would dictate that other aspects are present and perhaps more important, depending on the environmental context. Specific goals and organizational goals become much more complex, and informal organizational structures are much more flexible (Scott & Davis, 2007). Natural systems facilitate a smaller culture within the larger organization that adapts to solve problems in a way that might allow Generation X

leaders to use their solutions to appease Baby Boomer senior leaders to adapt to nontraditional problem solving (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010).

Rational organizations might have flexible enough leadership that can allow the organization to exist as a rational system but also have elements of a natural system that adapts to changes in the environment (Byrd, 2012). The USMC most closely resembles a rational organization (Baker, 2009; Sinclair, 2006). The iteration, or patterns, emerges in a natural system and keeps the organization moving in step with the environment (Mahmud, 2009).

**Open systems.** Open systems encompass the rational and natural organizational systems, but also define an organization as a set of systems and subsystems (Scott & Davis, 2007). Organizations within an open system form a relationship based on the organizational design and are themselves attuned to the environment where they influence the organization (Scott & Davis, 2007). Open systems vary in complexity, size, and purpose (Scott & Davis, 2007). The open system paradigm yields specific current examples of success oriented around, among many options for an open system paradigm, “input, process, output, permeable boundaries, and feedback” (Minter, 2010, p. 35). Like the natural system, the open system gives Generation X leaders a method to bridge the gap sublimely with members of Generation Y and their Baby Boomer. (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Open systems help leaders to shape the organizational design and culture to be more open in the event they assume Baby Boomer senior leader positions in the future (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010).

## **Military Organizational Design**

Based on the theoretical foundation of organizational theory, the United States Military and specifically the United States Marine Corps (USMC) organizational designs become key points of literature in exploring the problem for this study. Ahern (2009) found that military organizations have the need for the traditional-rational structure. Ahern (2009) also surmised that traditional-rational structures cause an inherent resistance to change based on the leadership's desire to minimize uncertainty and risk with strict rules and a culture of the zero-defect mentality. If the military can tap into areas that break the traditional-rational paradigm or at least take advantage of capabilities within it, then more flexibility from the traditional-rational organizational design might be possible (Ahern, 2009). Turnover in jobs within the military also reinforces the requirement for a hierarchal, rationally structured leadership chain of command but also inhibits change because of the socialization required each time a senior leader changes jobs (Ahern, 2009). Turnover takes place on average every 3 years, with each senior leader having different personalities and individual priorities. The cultures and organizational designs developed within the military are subsequently naturally resistant to ideas that might change the organizational structures, especially radical ideas that engender rapid changes (Ahern, 2009). Organizational changes usually come from those directed externally, such as force cuts and budget restraints (Ahern, 2009).

## **USMC Organizational Design**

The culture of military organizations closely aligns traditionally within the rational framework (Terriff, 2006). Within U.S. military services, each culture based on its own cultural and historical narrative (Terriff, 2006). As depicted by Bulc (2012),

organizations that have a hierarchal structure might risk developing the workforce internally and might not create external critical and innovative thinking in the future. Hierarchal structures tend to limit critical thinking that leads to problem solving (Bulc, 2012), possibly leading to situations where members of Generation Y, wanting to engage and innovate, become limited in their contributions (Bulc, 2012). Leaders of rational organizations tend not to see the organization as an entity or culture of people and instead make changes without consideration of the people involved at all levels (Bulc, 2012).

Generation Y members entering the USMC grew up in different environments than their leaders. USMC Generation Y members desire to communicate more with their leadership, whether virtually or in person that keeps them happy and motivated to perform (Baker, 2009). Generation Y parents raised them in that kind of environment, and they expect the same from the USMC (Baker, 2009). Members of Generation Y have the most involved, mentoring parents of any generation in the workforce, and they feel very protected and sheltered prior to entering the USMC (Pastel, 2008). Using technology to increase communication with Generation Y members' parents might increase Generation Y members' motivation and endurance as members of the USMC (Baker, 2009). USMC recruiters train in school to understand that members of Generation Y, a closely mentored group, are technology experts (Baker, 2009; Pastel, 2008).

When Generation Y leave home, the absence of their parents hurts their morale and confidence (Baker, 2009). Generation Y members in the USMC do not have experience making the decisions asked of them from the time they join throughout their time in the USMC without input from their parents or a parental figure (Baker, 2009).

USMC leaders might have to adjust cultural norms to develop tools to replace parental guidance with means to bridge the gap Generation Y members' experience when they leave the home to join the USMC (Baker, 2009). New Generation Y marines expect to receive protection and shelter from the same kinds of things their parents protected them from (Newman, 2008). The hierarchal structure of the USMC's culture limits the innovation required to transcend structural norms to look at ways to create the parental influence to keep Generation Y members and their parents linked together throughout their journey in the USMC (Baker, 2009). The traditional-rational organizational structure causes isolation and feelings of separation from their families who are equally as excited and who contributed toward the Marine's decision to join the organization (Baker, 2009).

The traditional-rational military organizations can be innovative under the right conditions to fill the gap (Byrd, 2012). The issue in the military and the USMC is that Generation Y entered an organization that runs purely on structure, supervision, and a tight hold on how members communicate (Pastel, 2008; Wong, 2002). Innovation has been stunted because of publicity concerns and centralized policy making versus Generation Y parents that have encouraged their children to be creative, innovative, and to think nontraditionally (Pastel, 2008).

After the Gulf War in the 1990s, downsizing in the military began to foster a zero-defect mind-set in the service members allowed to stay in and reinforced how well they had to perform to remain in the organization (Wong, 2000). Downsizing called into question the organizational loyalty of those serving in the military, with subsequent competition and careerism becoming the driving forces behind performance (Pastel,

2008). Subsequent wars have reinforced the culture and mentality that is the culture Generation X and Y members continue to experience when they enter the USMC (Pastel, 2008). Across the government service, organizational members who enter the force with the energy and motivation that Generation Y has might lose motivation and morale when they experience or perceive that careerism is a priority (Paarlberg & Lavigna, 2010).

Wong (2000) observed Army officers that used personal digital assistants and the Internet to access and inform their Generation Y members and to facilitate a culture where they communicate with Generation Y members in a familiar manner. Communicating virtually counteracts the feelings of wasted time, but substituting electronic means of communication to facilitate more trust with members of Generation Y might be foreign to more senior Baby Boomer and Generation X leaders, causing risk to junior leaders in the zero-defect military culture (Wong, 2000). The second-order effect of a zero-defect type of cultural gap leads to an environment of micromanagement within the USMC between Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y members, with serious implications of developing mistrust (Pastel, 2008).

A culture exists within the USMC that causes Generation Y Marines not to trust their Baby Boomer and Generation X leaders (Grice, 2006). The USMC facilitates an environment that does not take positive advantage of what Generation Y brings to the workplace (Grice, 2006). Following the war in Afghanistan, it will be difficult for Generation Y Marines to reconcile an organizational culture that trains them to be responsible enough to make life or death decisions in combat but requires adherence to strict and micromanaged daily routines at home (Grice, 2006). Instead of capitalizing on Generation Y members' ability to be adaptive and make decisions for the good of

themselves and the organization because of the close bond they have formed with each other and in combat; the zero-defect mentality at home destroys the trust (Grice, 2006; Pastel, 2008).

In the USMC, the structure exists to coach and mentor Generation Y but the zero-defect mentality does not promote coaching or mentoring for poor decision making (Grice, 2006). Rather, Generation Y receive punishment or suffer negative impacts to their careers (Wong, 2000). The zero-defect culture might lead to Generation Y members leaving the organization to seek the type of structure that they grew accustomed to growing up (Pastel, 2008).

### **Summary**

This chapter contains the foundational characteristics of Baby Boomers, members of Generation X, and members of Generation Y with emphasis on relevancy to the problem and purpose statements. Organizational theory as well as USMC organizational design and culture then framed the generations under examination in the environment necessary for the particular interpretative aspects of the study. Tying generational preferences and organizational theory together, knowledge management theory served as a baseline to conceptualize and enrich the interview depth and design presented in Chapter 3.

## Chapter 3

### Method

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory inquiry was to explore the perceptions of separated or retired Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y Marine Corps in the Southern California geographical area regarding communication. The specific perceptions were obstacles and enablers that they experienced when communicating with each other and any issues that arose from differences in communication preferences. The study involved exploring generational communication problems within the traditional-rational structure by conducting an exploratory inquiry, interviewing 18 USMC Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y members. Stebbins (2001), Schwandt (2007), and Merriam (2009) provided baseline information regarding qualitative and exploratory inquiry research techniques. The method, selection of sample, and data collection procedures used in the study appear in Chapter 3, ending with information related to trustworthiness and the type of method used to analyze the data.

#### **Appropriateness of Research Method**

Exploring and understanding communication problems between USMC Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y members within a traditional-rational organizational design and culture required the use of a softer, contextual data type. The focus of the study was sought an understanding of the multiple layers of social complexity involved with generation and communication studies. Qualitative studies provide knowledge to help others understand an individual's interpretation of meaning of

how or why specific phenomena occur based on personal experiences (Schwandt, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

Collecting contextual data did not fit within a quantitative method. Researchers such as Djamasbi et al. (2011) and Lavoie-Tremblay et al. (2010) collected quantitative data from Generation Y by directly accessing them with specific quantitative methods, but exploring communication problems through the personal perceptions of USMC Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y members within a traditional-rational organization was a new area. No empirical research appeared to have taken place within the USMC to ascertain USMC Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y members' communication problems with each other, creating undefined contextual boundaries that supported the qualitative method used.

The USMC maintains a complex and unique organizational culture among the military services, making it one of the more difficult places to find common ground between Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y (Mokrovich, 2013; Pastel, 2008). Communication problems may exist within the USMC between generations, and the qualitative methodology assisted in creating themes developed from referencing organizational and knowledge management theory and concepts presented from Chapter 2. The results of this study revealed themes for future leaders within the USMC and other traditional-rational organizations that reveal options for improving leadership and communication techniques and tools to facilitate effective use of Generation Y members' characteristics.

## **Appropriateness of Research Design**

Schwandt (2007) and Stebbins (2001) are exploratory research experts describe the design's conceptual foundation. Exploratory research subsequently fit the framework based on USMC Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y members' perceptions of their ability to communicate effectively with each other using an exploratory inquiry design. Developing themes that explained the reasoning behind generational communication problems may help provide new knowledge to help solve the problem and satisfy the purpose of this dissertation.

The exploratory analysis was conducted through inquiry by collecting data through semi-structured interviews using a script. The population in this study came from the USMC. The sampling frame was the USMC population in the Southern California region. The sample came from each generation of Marines in the sampling frame. The exploratory nature of the design used combined narratives from the individuals within each generation in a traditional-rational organizational design to aid in developing the most relevant themes to address the research questions.

Other designs such as phenomenological studies might seem appropriate for phenomena related to organizational theory. Phenomenological methods describe deeper, sometimes transcendental meaning with emphasis on the psychological meaning, not necessarily just the social context that the exploratory inquiry focuses on (Stebbins, 2001). Organizational structure and culture set the framework for the analysis. Although an ethnographic design might seem suitable for studying cultural interactions within an organization, organizational culture was already defined. Individual perceptions within the understood organizational culture was the most appropriate criterion for selecting the

exploratory inquiry over ethnography. Analysis took place within the framework of existing organizational knowledge management concepts, making the grounded theory method not as appropriate as an exploratory study, as the purpose of this study was to develop themes, not a new theory.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions were developed to assist in collecting data that fulfilled the study's purpose. The interview questions and script depicted in Appendix A complimented the exploratory inquiry design by engendering data collection for a problem that is known to exist and required further exploration to help solve the problem or reveal results to engender further research). Each research question led to the development of nested interview questions. The overarching research question was as follows: What were the perceptions of USMC Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y members regarding issues that arise because of differences in communication preferences? Two sub questions support the primary research question.

SQ1. What obstacles, if any, did USMC Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y members face when communicating with each other?

SQ2. What enablers, if any, did USMC Baby Boomer, Generation X and Generation Y members use when communicating with each other?

### **Population**

The USMC, regardless of the location of concentrated bases, is composed of a population of Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y members who have experienced communication between each generation with some level of commonality.

Of some 180,000 members of the USMC, less than one percent are Baby Boomers, 30% Generations X, and 69% are members of Generation Y (Mokrovich, 2013).

### **Sampling Frame**

The target Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y were drawn from retired or separated Marines located in the Southern California region, totaling over 60,000 of the total USMC population. The sampling frame provided representative members from each generation that could describe their experiences communicating with the other generations within the USMC's traditional-rational structure. Each member within this sampling frame, including leaders and subordinates had opportunities to communicate with each generation within the frame to help satisfy the purpose of the study.

### **Study Sample**

The sample came from purposive and snowball recruiting, a common sampling method for qualitative studies. Studying inter-generational communication problems within the complexities of the USMC's traditional-rational organizational design and culture provided an environment for ascertaining knowledge from a specialized sample. Purposive sampling is an effective method to collect relevant data from a specialized sample to help explore a problem (Neuman, 2011; Merriam, 2006).

Each participant was provided the flyer as shown in Appendix B either in person or from an e-mail with the help of colleagues. The colleagues were those individuals known from various informal relationships that had access to the population. Colleagues further gauged interest about potential participants and, if they were an honorably separated Marine or retired and fit within the age group of Baby Boomers, Generation X,

or Generation Y, an orientation phone or in-person meeting was set up with the researcher. The researcher then validated each participant during the orientation phone call or meeting, and scheduled the interview for data collection. Once the participant was validated by the researcher during the orientation phone call or meeting, each participant was presented with informed consent. Seven Baby Boomer, six Generation X, and five USMC Generation Y members, were recruited using this process to achieve data saturation within each generation.

### **Geographic Location**

After the sample recruitment was complete, semi-structured interviews took place in Southern California at a local public library. The use of premises form in Appendix C represents the approval to use the library for this study. Geographic location did not affect the type of questions or answers involved in the study because of the sample's link to USMC generational members who have served in other locations.

### **Informed Consent**

Each participant received an informed consent (see Appendix D) after an initial phone call meeting. The informed consent was e-mailed to each qualified participant and e-mailed back ink signed by each participant in pdf format. Before each interview, informed consent was reviewed one more time to ensure the participant clearly understood every aspect of their participation. Each participant was advised of the ability to withdraw at any time during the study as specified in the informed consent form.

To ensure the ethical protection of the study participants, the informed consent form contained general information how the research would relate to their experiences in the USMC regarding the phenomena in the study. Informed consent ensured that the

participants completely understood the purpose of the study and how the interviews would be used to collect information from them. Each participant understood that their identify would be completely protected, and that a risk assessment was completed to ensure that the interview environment was as far away from USMC influence as possible so that no participants would be connected to the study.

Anonymity helped reduce some of the participants' reluctance. No danger or repercussion existed from the USMC if they speak honestly about their experiences with the phenomena. Each participant understood clearly that their contributions were voluntary and they could terminate the semi-structured interviews or not answer specific questions at any point during the study. Emphasis was placed on participants' right to privacy.

To ensure all protection afforded to participants in this study were validated, the proposal was submitted to the University of Phoenix Institutional Review Board (IRB) in January of 2016. It was approved with no recommended changes. Due to the length it took to achieve data saturation, an extension to the IRB was submitted and approved in February of 2017.

### **Confidentiality**

All identities of the participants were protected during the data collection and analysis processes. No identifying names or other distinguishing characteristics were used on any data collection materials. After each interview, a series of alphanumeric codes was used when the interview was transcribed from the digital recording to a written transcript. That alphanumeric code identified a specific participant from that point on.

As participants were interviewed, one letter represented the participant's generation (B, X, Y) along with their interview number as the interviews were conducted (1-7). An alphanumeric number was recorded on the informed consent. For example, interview number one from Generation X was assigned the alphanumeric code X1. The same logic in the alphanumeric numbering system used for each participant. Interviews were coded until data saturation was achieved within each generational group.

Each participant was the only individual aware of what code their name was associated with. The alphanumeric code was only depicted on the informed consent for identification purposes in case a participant desired to withdraw. The code was also given to the participant at the time of their signing of the informed consent. If at any time a participant had decided to withdraw from the study, their data would have been destroyed, along with their informed consent so there would be no record of their participation. Data used for the study will be maintained on an external hard drive locked in a safe for 3 years before being destroyed.

### **Data Collection**

Each participant was recruited with the assistance of colleagues. Once a flyer was distributed to each potential participant through a colleague, a phone or in-person interview was set up with the researcher. The researcher validated each participant to be in one of the generational age groups explored in this study and that they were a retired or honorably separated Marine. Informed consent was presented to each participant during the interview and the circumstances were established to meet for the data collection interview at the established later date and conduct the interview. Each participant met with the researcher at the designated public library in the Southern California region.

Semi-structured, electronically recorded interviews were the primary data collection tool for the study. Interviews was the data collection method suited the purpose of this study by providing some structure to ensure relevant data was collected to compare. In semi-structured interviews, questions are not all direct, but arrived at from dialogue and introductory discourse to allow the participants to become comfortable and gradually move toward their truthful perceptions (Merriam, 2009). Appendix A lists the interview questions as part of the overall script used for data collection. The questions were open-ended and were designed to create a reflective mood for discourse and dialogue. The number of questions used for all participants was the same for each interview.

The interviews were recorded using a smartphone. Each electronic interview was uploaded to a website for GMR transcription services, who transcribed the interview word for word. Each transcription was transcribed by a human representative and checked by other members of the organization for accuracy. A signed confidentiality agreement with TMR transcription services is in Appendix E. Once the transcription was complete and received, it was e-mailed to each participant as identified by their alphanumeric code received during their interview. The participants had seven business days to return any edits that was required in case they found errors in the transcriptions or wished to add to their answers or change them. No participant required more than seven business days to return the transcription.

Once the participant had a chance to check the transcript for any errors or misrepresentation of their perceptions, the researcher loaded the interviews into the NVivo software. This step completed the data collection process.

## **Instrumentation**

The script and research questions in Appendix A were instruments used in this study. The interview questions and script were developed from the research questions and communication related issues between generations discovered in the literature review. The questions were designed to engender data collection consistent with the qualitative design and to assisted in developing relevant themes from the perspective of the participants that answered the research questions. Using the same interview questions and script for all participants ensured no variation in the data collection and limited bias.

The research questions were as follows: What were the perceptions of USMC Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y members regarding issues that arise because of differences in communication preferences? Two sub questions support the primary research question.

SQ1. What obstacles, if any, did USMC Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y members face when communicating with each other?

SQ2. What enablers, if any, did USMC Baby Boomer, Generation X and Generation Y members use when communicating with each other?

The researcher was also an instrument used in this study. The interview questions and script were developed based on the researcher's experience interviewing Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y individuals in a traditional-rational organization for 15 years. The researcher's experience and skillsets developed interviewing individuals with the same criteria as this study's population and sample assisted in deriving the meaning from the complex communication interaction between each participant to enhance the study's relevance and validity (Seidman, 2006). Using

the same interview questions and script for all participants ensured no variation or bias in the data collection.

### **Field Test**

The script was a crucial portion of this study's qualitative method. The script set established the background in engendering the study participants to describe their experiences in relation to the study's purpose. To accomplish this study's purpose, the script needed to be tested to ensure it met face and construct validity. A field test consists of having three to five experts in the design field review the script and interview questions prior to executing any part of the primary study (Schreiber, 2008). A field test helps to validate the script and modify the questions to fit the study's design based on feedback from the experts (Neuman, 2006). The results of the field test reinforce the appropriateness of the script and questions, which will lead to a more effective data collection and analysis phase of a study.

Before the field test for this study was conducted, used the University of Phoenix SASWEB database was searched for mentors and chairs to recruit experts in qualitative exploratory design. The research criteria for those faculty who listed qualitative a methodology specialty was entered. Within a one-month period sending out requests to several members of the faculty, three positive responses were received from faculty who agreed to participate in the field test.

The field test was conducted during July of 2015. The script was mailed to each expert and received feedback within a week. Recommendations to incorporate to improve the script and questions were provided. Parameters and demographic data for each generation was added. Specific terminology usage to ensure the questions reflected

an exploratory inquiry design was added, and some additional questions to ensure flow from one question to the next. Overall, significant recommendations were received and the script was adjusted to ensure participants were asked the same questions, to include a standardized opening and closing to make sure that data collection was not unscripted or biased.

### **Reliability and Consistency**

Reliability concerns how study results may be determined similar to another study conducted using the same method and solving the same problem (Merriam, 2009). In qualitative studies, analyzing the deeper, social human interactions in generational studies do not fit well with the traditional idea of reliability (Merriam, 2009). Consistency is a more appropriate term to use instead of reliability, particularly for qualitative studies (Merriam, 2009). Interviewing different samples of the population may yield different data and interpretations. However, if a study's findings are nested within the data presented for the study, then the qualitative study may be considered consistent, or reliable according to the traditional definition (Merriam, 2009). From nesting the findings with in the data and the literature review, consistency was strengthened. The field test, along with a research journal and detailed notes, ensured that the data collection and analysis phases of this study effectively supported consistency.

### **Validity and Truthfulness**

Validity is the accuracy of conclusions and truthful connections drawn from study results (Christensen, Johnson, & Turner 2011). Researchers can look at validity in general in a qualitative study as a point on a continuum (Christensen et al., 2011). As validity is adapted to qualitative case studies, controls must be in place to ensure

conclusions and recommendations match the data collection and analysis and produce unbiased results (Christensen et al., 2011). For a qualitative case study, truthfulness may be a better way to look at validity because of the complex social phenomena communicating between generations (Merriam, 2009). Each participant's data are their perception of the truth. Categories were developed for all participants to synchronize the participants' perceptions of the truth. Narratives were developed from the data and assisted in making sense of the categories and what they meant in relation to the research questions, leaving the results for a reader to decide on their truthfulness.

**Internal validity and credibility.** A traditional association exists between internal validity and quantitative studies, although researchers conducting qualitative studies should consider internal validity to ensure it has application to a larger body of knowledge. Internal validity assists a researcher in looking at how reliable the study is based on possible errors beyond control, which is easier to control in a quantitative study but is more subjective in a qualitative study (Neuman, 2011). In qualitative studies, the credibility of the study reflecting as closely as possible to reality is a more appropriate term (Merriam, 2009). Although not be possible to align this study completely with reality as systems and the environment influencing the results constantly changes, specific techniques strengthened credibility.

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with additional notes taken during the interviews. Interviews and notes provided multiple deeper themes than would be available in a quantitative study, reinforcing internal validity or the truthfulness of the results as a strength for the exploratory methodology.

Member checks also strengthened the credibility of this study. After each interview, the participant was afforded an opportunity to review their results and provide additional input, if any, to clarify their experiences and reflect after the interview. Member checks reinforced the credibility of the results through ensuring the participants were able to verify that the transcripts reflected their accurate perceptions regarding what they stated in the interviews.

Data saturation also reinforced the validity and truthfulness of this study. Although 18 participants were interviewed, as many that were required to achieve data collection that was repetitive and similar would have been conducted if necessary. Additionally, a field test ensured the instrument was validated before the actual study took place. Credibility was reinforced through a detailed research journal on all data collection processes, data saturation, a field test., and an audit trail that depicted all steps and actions taken to ensure an unbiased chain of events throughout the execution of this study.

**External validity and transferability.** The study results might apply beyond the context of the study and the assessment of external validity reveals the ability to generalize results from a small sample and transfer conclusions to a larger but still particular group. For qualitative studies, the more appropriate term is transferability (Merriam, 2009). For this study, the reader will determine what results are transferable, if any, based on how clear the narrative and themes developed from the study are presented and how clearly the sample is depicted.

## **Data Analysis**

The qualitative data analysis approach selected for the study represented a process to determine relevant categories or themes to answer the research questions, achieve the purpose of the study, and help provide new knowledge to contribute to solving the problem. The use of NVivo software helped to identify themes and develop categories. NVivo provided tools to assist in further understanding, without bias, each individual's perceptions about an existing problem that was appropriate for studying complex, intangible social concepts such as communication within a multigenerational workforce.

**Category construction.** After data collection ended and uploaded into the NVivo database, the first step in the data analysis process was grouping the expressions relevant to each participant's experience based on the interview and creating the initial textural descriptions of their experience. NVivo software was used to assist in constructing initial categories to reduce any chance of researcher bias. Open coding notes and grouping common phrases and perspectives was used. Open coding helped develop relevant nodes and concepts from the interview that related to the literature to develop categories. Additionally, the audio recording was used to reflect and refer to notes taken during the interview, made additional notes, and group the statements into categories using the NVivo tools as a baseline. Reflective, iterative reading of the initial data helped develop an important foundation when developing the categories and sorting the data. Overall, 41 categories were constructed during this step of the data analysis process.

**Sorting categories and data.** After constructing the initial 41 categories from the previous step, each category was compared to other categories to look for categories or elements that related across other categories. NVivo software assisted in developing

unbiased links between categories. The links were the initial set of categories that related most to the problem and purpose of the study. The final categories with the most common themes across their spectrums were chosen for further analysis and for assignment of important themes still left to be categorized. Overall, four final categories emerged during this step of the data analysis process.

**Naming the categories.** The initial category names were reviewed to ensure exclusivity and exhaustion of the themes captured from the open coding process in step one. After capturing names, they were validated across the original transcripts to ensure they were relevant. Four category names emerged from this step of the data analysis process. Any unexplained phenomena within the categories was classified as an outlier or as unexplained, and could be added later as additional areas for further study.

**Determining the number of categories.** After naming and validating categories, they were mapped together to draw a narrative from the interview data. The individual category analysis began to blend into cross-category analysis where categories contained common themes for each. Essences of individual experiences emerged from core themes that related to elements of the study's problem, purpose, and research questions, which determined the number of categories to include in the final narrative. The previous step in the data analysis process yielded four categories to develop the final narratives from. NVivo software was used to assess linkages between categories, help develop initial narratives, and began to assess any utility in developing models to support the types of categories that emerged.

**Theorizing.** Theorizing involved comparing the responses within each category and putting them together from the reflecting on the named categories to develop a

narrative. The narratives were where initial sense making occurred as a result of the previous data analysis steps and the interpretation of what should be included in the final narrative. NVivo software was used to develop possible connections between categories to help prepare the final narratives.

**Final narrative.** The final narratives were written from meanings and perceptions into overall collective descriptions. The final narratives assisted in deriving on overall picture of the influence of the study results to the larger population. The collective meaning also allowed for recommendations for future study based on the data provided by the study.

### **Summary**

The sample provided enough data to achieve data saturation and create relevant categories that yielded themes to achieve the study's purpose and help explore the problem. Specific techniques were described to ensure strength in the study's consistency, truthfulness, credibility, and transferability. A qualitative exploratory inquiry analysis subsequently provided an opportunistic framework to explore participants' perceptions of their experience, analyze major categories and patterns, and provide recommendations and conclusions

Results are presented in Chapter 4. Detailed and rich descriptions of the categories that emerged assisted in providing the foundation for the final narratives. The final narratives contained the most saturated emergent themes from the named categories to draw relevant conclusions from.

## Chapter 4

### Results

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory inquiry was to explore the perceptions of separated or retired Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y Marine Corps in the Southern California geographical area regarding communication. The specific perceptions were obstacles and enablers that they experienced when communicating with each other and any issues that arose from differences in communication preferences. The study involved exploring generational communication problems within the traditional-rational structure by conducting an exploratory inquiry, interviewing 18 USMC Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y members. Data collection from the 18 interviews was analyzed with the help of the NVivo software tool to determine the results in the study. The results are grouped into how each question in the interviews were used to collect and subsequently analyze the data presented that answered the research questions. How interview questions were grouped with each research question is depicted in Appendix A.

#### **Data Collection**

Participants were more difficult to find than initially anticipated. Ten months was required to reach data saturation. Generation Y participants were the most difficult to find to reach data saturation within that generational demographic. Colleagues coordinated some participants as planned, but when their span of contacts was depleted, the researcher had to spend time soliciting additional colleagues at local events where potential participants from the sample would be present.

Once new themes no longer emerged and all relevant data had been collected to support development of themes that accomplished the purpose of the study, data saturation was achieved. The uniformity within the organization and the demographics of each generation ensured a cohesive sample within each generation, which aided in determining data saturation. Using a cohesive sample of 18 participants was enough to achieve data saturation. Themes became repetitive after three interview participants for each generational demographic. Interviews continued with participants who had already agreed to participate even though data saturation had occurred. At least two interviews were conducted for each generational group past when data saturation had been determined.

Once final member checked transcripts were obtained from participants, data were immediately imported into an NVIVO database. Once two or more transcripts were imported for each participant's generation, expressions were grouped together and compared them to the purpose, problem statement, and research questions to determine the initial nodes to group data in. As more data were imported and open coded into the NVIVO database, more saturated nodes turned into initial categories. Some categories emerged later in the data collection process if nodes became more saturated. Additionally, previous data was reviewed repeatedly each time a new data source was open coded to ensure the nodes encompassed all possible relevant perceptions. Notes taken during interviews and audio portions of interviews were used to ensure data collected later in the process was synchronized with categories developed earlier. Consistent review of previous data created connections with previous categories, which

reinforced data saturation and helped build the eventual final categories chosen for naming and further analysis.

Forty two categories were identified after open coding, sorting, and naming. Table 2 displays the four final categories by number of sources and overall frequency from participant interviews that were considered for final inclusion for narrative development. The four categories were chosen because they fulfilled the purpose of the study and answered the research questions. The four categories provided the foundation required to theorize new knowledge and develop the final narratives.

Table 2

*Final Categories*

Emergent Categories	Sources	References
Communication perceptions	18	107
Communication obstacles	18	85
Communication enablers	18	91
Types of communication	18	198

**USMC Culture and the Traditional-Rational Paradigm**

Data collected about United States Marine Corps (USMC) using a traditional-rational organizational paradigm is important when considering communication problems. The data collected to display participant perceptions about the USMC work culture and organization from each generation and the themes that emerged is shown in Table 3. The emergent themes in Table 3 were used to make connections to other themes in other categories to help analyze the data results within the traditional-rational organizational paradigm.

**Baby Boomer perceptions.** Baby Boomers perceived that the USMC is a closed culture. B3 commented that stepping outside the USMC culture is similar to a child being out of the “womb.” A closed culture, as Baby Boomers perceived, caused them to have to be more talkative and explain things more clearly to junior members to ensure they understand what is being communicated, which relates to the tasks younger generations are given. As B3 explained, “Marines more senior in rank and experience with Baby Boomers require less explanation and talk.”

Baby Boomer participants commented that they grew up in the WWII or Vietnam era when most of them were single and learned that when someone senior to them told them to do something, they did it. No one questioned their leadership. Baby Boomers grew in rank and experience to utilize the same leadership style until the last decade or so when they began to perceive that younger Marines were different. B4 best summarized the perception in stating

You do as I say. There was no room for questioning. As I progressed in rank I’m getting a whole different ballgame now with the young men that were coming in, and women. And I could see their thought process when I would tell the Gunny or whatever, “Just have them do it.” And I could see them like, “Hmm... why are we doing this?”

Baby Boomers perceived that the USMC began to integrate more electronic communication in the late 1990s and 2000s. B6 perceived that

Most of my conversations with the Marine Expeditionary Force by '1995- 2000 were email. So in that four-year period, we went from maybe 10 emails a week to

40 to 45 emails a week. To almost everybody did almost everything by email in that four-year period from '95 to 2000 – we bridged the gap.

B6 described an explosion of electronic communications, which caused much more information to be available to the organization and its members at any given time. B7 had a similar perception in that USMC members all had to become immediately aware that the information being passed by e-mail was transcending the traditional-rational hierarchal lines of communication that had existed since Baby Boomers had entered the USMC.

**Generation X perceptions.** Generation X perceptions focus in on how they communicated with their seniors. Generation X perceive that Baby Boomer members of the USMC grasp at least e-mail as a communication preference of other generations.

Table 3

*USMC Organization and Culture Themes*

Generation	Sources	References	Emergent Themes
Baby Boomer	7	50	Closed culture; no questioning; more electronic communication emerging; transcending traditional communication
Generation X	6	32	Face-to-face relationships; small group communication; explain why; middle management
Generation Y	5	35	Small team communication; adapt to organization; prefer collaborative authority

But, Baby Boomer leadership also associated effective communication with face-to-face communication, which allowed them to form a “relationship” as X2 noted. X2 explained

that if things were ever important to communicate with a senior Baby Boomer leader, it was best to do in person. In X2's case, there was never anything important enough to bring to a senior Baby Boomer leader. However, X2 also noted that peers always tried to push X2 to go see Baby Boomer leadership more to develop a relationship; e-mail information was not enough.

X3 talked about how to communicate within in the USMC traditional-rational culture: "I didn't like formations so much. I like smaller groups because you can get down, again, to see people, see what their facial reactions are, identify them by name. A formation doesn't do that very well." X2's perception was similar to other Generation X perceptions concerning the USMC traditional-rational structure. The typical traditional-rational organizational paradigm calls for formations or similar ways of communicating. Generation X participants found it easier to effectively communicate in smaller groups so discussion may take place to explain the "why" behind work tasks. According to Generation X participants, small team communication is how to effectively communicate Baby Boomer guidance down to the Generation Y level.

Generation X perceptions also revealed that asking "why" is more prevalent in Generation Y. X6 reinforced this perception by describing that "I would have questions on why we were doing things, but never asked. The younger marines today are not afraid to ask. And it's expected to be – they expect to be involved to a greater degree than, I think, older marines used to be." X6's perception relates directly to job performance and support for the USMC organizational culture: "there's a great correlation between not being involved and the quality of performance. You know, if they're not involved, if they don't feel like they have buy-in, they'll do it, but they're not gonna do it very well." To

compensate, Generation X perceived that they had to have play middle management, as X6 stated: “That is just the middle management in which I am right now. I take that beating.”

Generation X also perceived that although they were the middle management between generations, they also perceived that USMC as a traditional-rational organization should work according to a hierarchy. X4 commented

You don't always get to talk directly to them. It sounds trite, but that is the marine core – you know, give them a clear task purpose and end state. And trust that you've given them the tools to operate on their own.

However, Generation X also perceived that with the rise of electronic communications, sometimes it can “flatten” the hierarchy and Baby Boomer leadership can attempt to communicate directly with the younger generations. X6 best summarized this perception:

So you had higher leadership completely skip middle management and go directly into frontline troops, and are manipulating events there on the ground level, and that's not ideal. That's not the way we were built and that's not the way we train and that's not the way we task organize.

**Generation Y perceptions.** Generation Y perceptions of the USMC's traditional-rational structure all associated the importance and effectiveness of the teams they worked in. Y1 explained that

I would say like on the span and control side having the smaller scale on the team wise worked that way, so only three or four guys, you know, that's where that information is being spanned out to. But for the most part I would say it was pretty effective. The only time it would get dismantled is if you were getting it

directly from someone higher in the company, and then that information wouldn't be passed down correctly through the platoon sergeant.

Generation Y perceived that all types of information to come at them rapidly as well, with time being the most important determiner of whether communication is electronic or face-to-face. Within the smaller teams, communication was perceived to be effective by Generation Y within the current USMC organizational culture. Y1 observed: "It would get passed down to the platoon sergeant normally. 90% of the time we got it passed down through the platoon sergeant and then it would get dished out to us. It came pretty fast."

Generation Y also perceived themselves to have grown up in an environment when electronic communications were more prevalent than for their senior generations. Generation Y participants unanimously agreed that they understood that in their leaders and tried to adapt to whatever way their seniors like to communicate. Y3 commented that "The best approach is to adapt to their assumed techniques. If both people refuse to adapt, then quality of communications will diminish." From the Generation Y's perspective of the USMC culture, they felt like they have joined a family in which their inquisitive nature was looked at more favorable than in other organizations, producing a more family like environment when communication is effective. Generation Y participants perceived themselves as those who will try to adapt to everyone through some type of communication to better understand them, leading to more effective communication. Y3 stated:

I typically try to utilize the same approach with my superior officers that I do with my subordinates. I believe that being able to relate to an individual, superior or subordinates will increase my ability to communicate effectively with them.

Generation Y participants also liked to work in an environment that were collaborative. Y4 particularly had some direct perceptions like that of other Generation Y participants: “Older Marines are difficult to collaborate with, and they can communicate in a directive manner that stifles innovation and initiative.” Y4 went on to state that “I do not necessarily have problems created for me except in the authoritarian and directive older generation that I have to deal with.” Y4 described it best with the following perception: “These obstacles cause me to withdraw, and I find myself not trying to go above and beyond because I feel stifled because of the communication.”

### **Issues that Arise During Communication**

Issues that arise during communication came directly from collecting data to answer the primary research question: What are the perceptions of USMC Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y members regarding issues that arise because of differences in communication preferences? Table 4 displays the overall sources, references, and emergent themes from each generation.

**Baby Boomer issues.** Baby Boomers perceived the value and effectiveness of face-to-face communication and the relationship, not necessarily generational difference, to be the most important part of effective communication. B6 stated: “And I don't think that's a communication thing. But I think there can be a communication breakdown if you're not listening, and you're not trying to listen, and you're just saying, Oh, well, that's simple. Do this.”

This issue reflects a perception that emerged in the data collection by Baby Boomers that they saw it as a communication issue in technique used to keep others’

interest and attention. Baby Boomers did not necessarily perceive that the issue in any communication problems is generational. B4 stated, “leaders need to know that they need to communicate. They need to know when to send that email and when to stand in

Table 4

*Issues That Arise During Communications*

Generation	Sources	References	Perspective Themes
Baby Boomers	7	50	Face-to-face communication; no communication problem; different leadership techniques is the issue
Generation X	6	32	Social and workplace collaboration different; Generation Y individualistic but adaptive; Generation Y less tolerant of authoritative leadership
Generation Y	5	35	Small team collaboration; adaptive; prefer face-to-face; dislikes authoritative communication

front of the troops. And that goes all the way down.” B1 reflected and noted that “each team just has a different chemistry the way that the personalities come together but I think this separate from the generational issues we are talking about.”

**Generation X issues.** Generation X perceived more use of social media in the workforce, but that there is more of a line to be drawn socially versus at the workplace. X1 commented that “They don't use collaborative sites like SharePoint very well. They don't manage it very well. They don't know how to use other forms of media organizationally as good as they could.” Generation X liked to use collaborative sites that are tools for the workplace, perceived that Generation Y likes to collaborate but not in a professional way using collaborative tools that the USMC provides. X1 called it a generational gap:

And some of that is a generational gap. I mean, there's young kids that know all about it. They just don't know how to put it to work for business applications or you'll have an older leader that will say, hey, this makes sense, let's do this. But he can't – he'll get it started but it's just they don't keep it maintained.

X2 accentuated the gap in what collaborative communication is at work and socially by discussing how Generation X is more collaborative at work, but Generation Y is more individually focused at work. The collaboration for Generation Y comes from their ability to be somewhere else socially by using their social media tools and not necessarily focusing on their job or their workplace. This perception expressed by every Generation X participant. X3 went on to describe how important it was to explain to Generation Y members why they are doing things instead of just telling them. X3 stated

I've had more than a few buddies relieved because they yell, they get mad, or, obviously, they've taken it to the next level, but I've had more than a few because that have been relieved because they have a hostile work environment, or at least that's what their people think that it is.

X5 and X6 perceived communication to be more of an individual preference rather than a generational characteristic. X5 and X6 felt that Generation Y will adapt to whatever type of communication that they are convinced is effective, which also reinforces the perception on selling Generation Y on an effective communication system that will work. X6 stated:

With my subordinates that dialogue, just it sounds different in that there's education involved in that dialogue, there's persuasions and there's sales involved

in that dialogue as well. But that's two main ways in which I communicate during my work day.

**Generation Y issues.** Generation Y perceived themselves to be close knit within the teams that they operated, comprising most of their collaboration and communication takes place based on what information they receive from higher levels of the organization. X1 stated: "I would say like on the span and control side having the smaller scale on the team wise worked that way, so only three or four guys, you know, that's where that information is being spanned out to."

Generation Y also perceived themselves to be adaptive to whatever type of communication works best for the task at hand, but that virtual is their primary. X2 summarized:

I communicate in a variety of ways, but I tend to lean toward virtual.

Professionally, I email quite a bit. I also text when a colleague is out of the office. If it's an urgent matter, I'll pick up the phone or swing by their desk. I like the written word because I have more time to formulate thoughts, edit, and keep communication cohesive.

Generation Y also unanimously perceived that Baby Boomers like face-to-face communication but are less likely to trust any type of virtual communication. Generation Y participants also agreed that though they are comfortable the most with virtual communication, they prefer face-to-face communication the most at the workplace.

However, when they are treated in an authoritarian manner, Generation Y participants all commented that they are not inspired and will do what is necessary to complete the task, but any collaboration or innovation is lost.

## Communication Obstacles

The communication obstacles category comes from sub research question number one: What obstacles do USMC Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y members face when communicating with each other? Table 5 displays the overall sources, references, and emergent themes from each generation.

**Baby Boomer obstacles.** Baby Boomers acknowledged differences in communication and that no mystery existed about how the workforce will like to communicate in the future as newer generations assume leadership roles. B7 commented, “And, ultimately, yes, I think it’s a good thing in terms of a better ability to communicate with people. I think there’s still no substitute for one on one communication.” B7’s comment reflects the Baby Boomer perception that the future of communication may revolve around more

Table 5

### *Communication Obstacles*

Generation	Sources	References	Obstacles Themes
Baby Boomers	7	35	Face-to-face communication at risk; instant feedback requirement for Generation Y; cultural divide (collegial versus formal)
Generation X	6	42	Non-work related communication tools; time and communication type for Generation Y; lost knowledge
Generation Y	5	8	Leadership communication ineffective; inability to effectively communicate with seniors

virtual than face-to-face. B7 also expresses the clear intent of a Baby Boomer's current belief that is reflected in the entire Baby Boomer sample: face-to-face is the preference to communicate and there is perceived to be "no substitute."

Baby Boomers perceived that other generations, particularly Generation Y, need electronic means to communicate because they have grown used to communicating electronically. As B2 observed, "instantaneous gratification" when it comes to having relationship. B2 also felt that days can go by without any communications with Generation Y friends and considers those relationships still strong. B2 further discussed, as did other Baby Boomer participants, that they do not understand or believe that Baby Boomers require more than several friends anyway. B6 commented that "there were no laptops then so I could easily be away from my computer for 30 days or 2 weeks at sea or whatever." Baby Boomers perceived they lived in a time in the USMC when they were executing job duties in places not possible to have electronic communications, so the expectation of other generations to have instant feedback does not make sense.

Baby Boomers perceived a "cultural divide" as B3 discussed at length. As B3 discussed,

And those guys had been World War 2, Korea, Vietnam. The values and the structure between those three strata in the Marine Corps, I thought, made it difficult or at least to do a two-way communication and it was much more directive.

Baby Boomers grew up in the workforce within the USMC of direct communication to get things done because of the cultural characteristics of the generations in the workforce

at that time. B1 perceived a different environment, one that is more “informal and collegial” than “formal and respectful” of senior members of the workforce comparing Baby Boomers to Generation Y.

**Generation X obstacles.** Generation X participants perceived Generation Y’s use of social media tools for leisure as something that can get in the way of professional business. X1 stated,

Generation Y Marines get brought up in a business context a certain way. And so if they don't get brought up that way, they've learned to separate, this is my social side, this is what I do on the social side and this is what I do on the business side.

Generation X perspective that sees electronic communication as more social than business as an obstacle.

Generation X also perceived that the time it takes and the communication technique used with Generation Y can be an obstacle. Generation Y requires more time to explain why they are told to do something and if it is delivered in what Generation Y perceives to be an authoritarian manner, it shuts off effective communication between the two generations. X3 perceived the following:

I think that, however you choose to do it, making sure you are an effective communicator about expectations, and when somebody screws something up, not to be afraid to tell them, Hey, you..., but again, you can't – now, think is another great example of why, you can't yell at people as much as you used to. People don't go for that, and it creates a hostile work environment.

Generation X participants also unanimously perceived that electronic communications may help depending on the situation, but something was lost in the

translation at times when an organization relies on only electronic communications. X4 stated:

Well, I think it can be an obstacle because it encourages less complete communication and sometimes a junior person talking to me, I need the rest of the story to understand what he's giving me so I have full situational awareness on what he's talking about.

X6 added a leadership example to demonstrate where the danger exists that the story can be lost in translation:

I would start by first saying that the digital footprint can only be an aide and it is not a substitute for leadership and training. It is only an aide. We went digital with all our training manuals, which is fantastic, it saves weight, it saves space, it saves a lot of things. But where we fail is where we will give the marine the tablet and say here's your answers, that's incorrect from my point of view.

**Generation Y obstacles.** Y1 commented that any obstacle from effective communication comes when information is attempted to be disseminated in any type of manner larger than the small teams they are comfortable in. "I would say within our own platoon we had things figured out, but anytime like companies or battalion formations would happen, they would always be like a complete cluster." However, as Y3 noted, when Generation Y is trying to learn something new or something to help them with their task outside of their team or small group, communicating face-to-face with those from other generations that have the knowledge they need is imperative. That can be an obstacle if Generation Y participants do not trust that they can effectively communicate outside their team depending on the leadership style of their superiors. Y4 perceived:

“Older Marines have communicated in an authoritarian manner and I react poorly to that, I find it insulting and demeaning.”

### **Communication Enablers**

The communication enablers category comes from SQ2: What enablers do USMC Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y members use when communicating each other? Table 6 displays the overall sources, references, and emergent themes from each generation.

**Baby Boomer enablers.** B5 stated, “to be an effective leader, you have to gain a relationship with the person you're communicating with. Then the informal communications will come better because now you at least have developed a relationship.” They perceived themselves as leaders to be able to communicate with Generation X or Y members of their organization by any means that operations require if there is a pre-existing relationship. B1 discussed that the best way to show that a leader cares, even when angry, is face-to-face.

Part of the relationship, as Baby Boomer participants all commented on, is to establish trust over time and be willing to work more in teams. B1 stated, “A good leader will find ways to break the ice, break down the barriers, build trust, and begin to communicate. So, I think that word "trust" is a really important.” Baby Boomer participants agreed improved relationships could be created by education at every level of the organization. B2 reinforced that data point by stating that “some discussion about communicating to the younger marines, how they do it, why they do it that way. It doesn't mean you have to adopt completely, but understand how they receive, process, at our organizational schools.”

Another enabler that emerged is how Baby Boomers felt about being in positions of authority over younger Marines compared to being just another team member. B3 stated, “and I’m not in a position of authority anymore. Because I’m not in a position of authority, I can just go talk to the Marines.” Baby Boomers perceived informally communicating with Generation Y members instead of having the aura of authority and not wanting to communicate at the risk of saying the wrong thing was an enabler.

**Generation X enablers.** Generation X unanimously perceived small group communication as an enabler. X3 stated the following:

Even if you break them down and get them into the group, the school huddle, the school circle, that doesn’t do as well either because there’s too many of them. We always have to see them in smaller groups and get a feel for what was going on.

Table 6

*Communication Enablers*

Generation	Sources	References	Enabler Themes
Baby Boomers	7	46	Relationships; education; less authoritative communication
Generation X	6	32	Small team communication; leadership; tools for understanding
Generation Y	5	17	Different tools for different information; relationships; adaptive

Generation X participants perceived the usefulness of being able to text multiple others to get specific types of information out quickly as an enabler. However, Generation X participants drew a distinction when it came to communicating things they

wanted to get across to Generation Y. X4 talked about a “whiteboard” where thoughts and issues that Generation X wanted other members of the team to be aware of, think of, and be prepared to talk about would be displayed. X4 perceived that Generation Y team members were prepared to talk about these issues when the time came, and it helped for the overall understanding of the issues. X4 noted that the whiteboard could take any form if it served the same effective communicative function. Places where Generation Y could seek information they knew would be important at some point was more effective than simply texting the information to them. Socialization of the information was an enabler for X4.

**Generation Y enablers.** Y1 accentuated the enablers that Generation X participants perceived in that that different types of communication helped them: “Normally it would just be either like a text, like hey, let’s meet in this room and we’ll have a quick meeting. Sometimes it was at formation, but normally it took too long to get everyone into formation.”

Generation Y participants also perceived their ability to relate to different generations and be adaptive as an enabler to help them with their job duties. Y3 commented, “I try to learn as much as I can about my Marines, and treat them as a person, not a subordinate. Being able to associate with a Marine’s background, and leaning about what drives them, helps to communicate with them in an effective manner.” Y3 espoused,

I typically try to utilize the same approach with my superior officers that I do with my subordinates. I believe that being able to relate to an individual, superior or subordinates will increase my ability to communicate effectively with them.

## Types of Communication and Generational Preferences

Part of the overall data results and analysis included categories that emerged within components of each research question that contributed to exploring the study's problem and purpose. Table 7 displays the relevant data that emerged frequently across all research questions about the types of communication that each generation within the participants discussed the most in their responses.

Baby Boomers and Generation X members gave their perceptions about how they use face-to-face, email, and phone communication the most. Table 7 data summarizes generational communication preferences.

Table 7

### *Types of Communication and Generational Preferences*

Communication type	Sources	References	Generational preferences
Face-to-face	15	237	Baby Boomers; Generation X
Email	18	149	Baby Boomers; Generation X
Phone	14	91	Baby Boomers; Generation X

predominantly from Baby Boomers and Generation X by using word frequency queries and then comparing them to how many times each generation used the words and then exploring each participants' actual statements about each to determine relevancy within the emergent category. Generation Y unanimously discussed texting and virtual communication within their sample the most compared to the weight of participants versus frequency.

## **Summary**

Data were collected from 7 Baby Boomer, 6 Generation X, and 5 Generation Y participants to achieve data saturation. Data collection followed an iterative, reflective, and rich exploration of the interview responses to name and construct four categories from which emergent themes were produced to assist in developing final narratives for Chapter 5. Data exploration for each category assisted in providing analysis directly from participants. The results of the data collected for this study revealed four named categories with emergent themes from each category as the most relevant to each participant within their respective generation groups.

Chapter 5 contains final narratives developed for each constructed category. Additionally, conclusions were developed from further analysis using comparing data results to the literature. Relevant findings based on reflecting on the data and literature review compliment the implications presented for each generational group and traditional-rational organizations.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The specific problem was that Generation Y, who comprise a large percentage of the Marine Corps, prefer to communicate by social media and electronic devices that causes a problem in effective communication between Baby Boomer leaders, Generation X, and Generation Y (Grice, 2008; Pastel, 2008; Sinclair). The purpose of this qualitative exploratory inquiry was to explore the perceptions of separated or retired Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y Marine Corps in the Southern California geographical area regarding communication. The specific perceptions were obstacles and enablers that they experienced when communicating with each other and any issues that arose from differences in communication preferences.

Data results of the response of participants to the interview questions that fulfilled the purpose of this study revealed four named categories that, through analysis, revealed emergent themes for each of the four categories. The themes, when put in the perspective of the problem statement and the literature review, helped to develop final narratives for each of the four named categories: communication perceptions, communication obstacles, communication enablers, and types of communication. The final narratives assisted in determining implications for each generational group in the workforce as well as the future viability of the traditional-rational organizational structure, with conclusions and recommendations for each subject. Communication problems, communication problem solutions, and leadership were added to the findings based on comparing data results with the literature and the four named categories.

## Emergent Themes

Table 8 displays the emergent themes that were developed from data results.

Table 8

### *Emergent Themes*

Category	Emergent themes
Issues that arise during communications	Baby Boomers prefer face-to-face (no communication problem); Generation X middle management; Generation Y prefer small teams and collaborative authority
Communication obstacles	Baby Boomers do not want to risk loss of face-to-face communication; Generation X feels non-social collaborative tools are more effective than social media tools; leadership communication techniques ineffective for Generation Y
Communication enablers	Relationships; education; less authoritative communication; tools to create understanding; different communication tools for different information
Types of communication	Baby Boomers and Generation X prefer face-to-face, email, and phone; Generation Y prefer text and virtual
Communication problems	Traditional-rational organizational structure and culture; authoritative leadership communication techniques
Communication problem solutions	Improved relationships through communication techniques; less authoritative leadership communication techniques
Leadership	Generation Y adaptive; level of work output depends on leadership communication techniques of Baby Boomer and Generation X leadership

Returning to the data before writing final narratives was necessary to ensure that the overall emergent theme was captured from the data so that the final findings and narratives would have the richest and detailed development possible. Communication

problems, communication problem solutions, and leadership were added as categories requiring narratives.

### **Narratives**

The final narratives represent the most saturated themes for each of the categories emerged from data collection. The final categories and emergent themes are summarized in Table 8. The data results in Table 8 combined with a review of previous literature were used to develop rich and detailed final narratives. Each final narrative shares common themes that, in one narrative may be an obstacle but in another narrative, creates a possible enabler or solution. The issues that arise during communication, communication obstacles, and communication enabler narratives are drawn from categories that directly relate to the research questions and how the data collected fulfilled the purpose of the study to answer the research questions. The types of communication, communication problems, communication problem solutions, and leadership final narratives are complimentary to the first three narratives and provide additional analysis that assisted in reinforcing future implications for research.

**Issues that arise during communication.** Baby Boomers prefer face-to-face communication but do not perceive it as a communication problem with other generations in the workforce. However, their perception of how face-to-face communication may be defined by the younger generations within the workforce highlights a lack of skill development communication techniques that might assist them in creating the relationships they desire with Generation Y (Andert, 2011). Baby Boomers never had to develop face-to-face communication techniques beyond looking at someone else physically in their presence because of the environment they grew up in (Andert, 2011;

Schoch, 2012). The data and literature subsequently showed that though Baby Boomers appreciate that younger generations communicate differently than they did growing up, Baby Boomers do not substitute any other communication technique for physically communicating face-to-face.

Generation X see themselves as middle managers who translate information and knowledge from Baby Boomer leadership to Generation Y. Generation X occupying middle management roles has also been noted in a previous study (Wong, 2000).

Generation X participants in this study all perceived that translation is required between Baby Boomer leaders and Generation Y. Members of Generation X are frustrated with Generation Y because Generation X wants to use workplace electronic communication tools but perceive that Generation Y only wants to use social media communication tools. Generation X becomes forced to attempt to use variations of face-to-face communication techniques that fall more towards the tools preferred by Baby Boomer leadership.

Generation Y participants prefer small team communication and collaborative authority and prefer more instantaneous types of communication in texting and virtual techniques which contrasts with the type of electronic information tools Baby Boomers and Generation X prefer to use (Newman, 2008; Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2009; Schoch, 2012). Different communication technique preferences reveal a communication gap problem. Baby Boomers and Generation Y, with Generation X somewhere in the middle in what they perceive, as having different definitions based on generational perspectives what a clear definition of face-to-face communication is (Yerbury, 2010).

**Communication obstacles.** Baby Boomers do not want to risk losing the ability to conduct face-to-face communication with their workforce, which becomes an obstacle

when Generation X attempts to translate Baby Boomer communication and information to Generation Y. However, Generation Y, as a large and growing part of the workforce, is placing demands on their leadership that questions the traditional way of communicating by Baby Boomer leadership (Danielson, 2011). Baby Boomer leadership's traditional perception of how face-to-face communication is conducted becomes an obstacle to effective communication in the current workforce.

Generation X perceptions reinforced the revealed communication gap problem with their preference of using collaboration tools developed for the professional workplace and not the types of communication used for social media specifically. Generation X' understanding of the tools that can help achieve that goal is still an obstacle. Generation X perceptions reveal that they think they know what works best to translate communication between Baby Boomers and Generation Y, but their perception is not aligned with Generation Y's perception.

Generation Y feels that the ways and means used by their leadership to communicate with them are ineffective. Each generation communicates according to the environment they grew up in. The type of communication they prefer is based on what they have learned to be effective (Danielson, 2011; Gentry et al., 2011). Generation Y participants perceive their leaders' communication techniques ineffective, which aligns with what previous studies have found and reinforces Baby Boomer and Generation X obstacles that contribute to communication gap problem (Grice, 2006; Pastel, 2008; Sinclair, 2006).

**Communication enablers.** Each generation perceives relationships to be an enabler. However, forming relationships is difficult given the obstacles contributing to

the revealed communication gap problem. Forming a relationship with Generation Y requires communication techniques like how a coach, mentor, or parent nurture those under their influence (Baker, 2008; Sinclair, 2006). The data suggests relationships with Generation Y require less authoritative communication techniques, which would then be an enabler to help reduce the communication gap.

Each generation also perceives that enablers consist of tools to help reduce the revealed communication gap problem to create a better understanding with other Generations within the workforce. Baby Boomers and Generation X understand the need to communicate differently with Generation Y, but they are not willing to give up what they know to work within their generations. Baby Boomers and Generation X also do not use the right tool to help them create connections with Generation Y to form a relationship to facilitate more effective communication techniques.

An emerging part of the communication enablers narrative comes from a characteristic of traditional-rational organizations. The USMC as a traditional-rational organization suggests a “zero-defect” mentality and leadership communication that is authoritative according to the traditional-rational organizational design (Andert, 2011). The data in Table 8 reveals the zero-defect mentality is an obstacle to communicating effectively with Generation Y. Generation Y prefers communication styles that would not fall within the traditional-rational organizational design to create the relationship required for more effective communication between generations within the workforce (Bodla & Nawaz, 2010).

**Types of communication.** The narrative for this category is straightforward in that these preferences are important to understand how they affect the communication

perceptions, communication obstacles, and communication enabler narratives. The split between Generation Y and the other two generational groups explored in this study highlight the revealed communication gap problem with leaders trying to create relationships to enable more effective communication but also not understanding what types of communication would work best, which is a communication obstacle.

**Communication problems.** The communication problem narrative highlights similar points that reinforce the communication perceptions, communication enablers, and communication obstacle narratives developed from the data used to answer the research questions. The traditional-rational structure of the USMC, where the authoritarian type of communication comes from, is a factor that contributes to the communication gap problem revealed in this study. As Table 8 indicates, each generation within the USMC participant sample agreed on what would constitute more effective communication, but something is causing those perceptions not to become reality on an organizational scale.

The USMC uses a traditional-rational organizational design because in directing a type of organization that conduct missions involving national security and life and death situations, not all working environments allow for time to explain everything that needs to be accomplished (Scott & Davis, 2007). Military organization or other traditional-rational organizations see their missions only will be successful using a traditional-rational organizational design (Ahern, 2009). However, the traditional-rational organizational design also is not as effective in adjusting to a changing world environment and subsequently resists change (Ahern, 2009). Although generations within the traditional-rational organizations understand what would make communication

more effective, leadership does not want put missions and lives at risk (Grice, 2006; Pastel, 2008).

**Communication problem solutions.** Considering the possible communication problems that emerged from data results and analysis, each participant group also acknowledged communication enablers to help find solutions. Baby Boomers perceived that less authoritative communication would be more effective to help reduce a communication gap problem. Relationships are also perceived to be key, which coincides with the perceptions of Generations X and Y. Generation X perceives that tools to help understanding as an enabler would also help with solving a communication gap problem. Generation Y perceptions also reinforce that point, and Generation Y also perceive that relationships are important.

The common thread that emerges is the types of communication used within the traditional-rational structure and how to develop new tools or use existing ones more effectively to create the relationships required to make communication more effective in the USMC. Common effective tools that are usable by all generations within the workforce may be a problem solution that reduces the revealed communication gap problem.

Generation Y participants in this study did not want to be told what to do in an authoritarian manner. Generation Y desired engagement with leadership, inclusion, and to try and work faster and use more innovative solutions than any previous generation has done within the workforce (Bulc, 2012). In the traditional-rational organization, communication is still limited to traditional methods of written orders and it takes a long time for the information to be communicated from the Baby Boomer leadership down to

the Generation Y team level that they feel comfortable working in. Generation X can compound the problem with using techniques Generation Y likes to use, but ultimately they are the wrong tools. Generation Y subsequently shuts down and performs the minimum because the tools perceived to be effective by Baby Boomers and Generation X are not effective for Generation Y.

The data suggested a narrative where the solution is improving the relationship between a Generation Y member of the organization and its Baby Boomer leadership through improved communication techniques. Accomplishing that under a traditional-rational organizational design and structure requires new communication tools that incorporate where and how each generation is comfortable communicating.

**Leadership.** Because each sample in this study contained leaders at different levels within the USMC's traditional-rational structure, the data suggested that with the difference in communication preferences between Baby Boomers and Generation X compared to Generation Y, the leadership themes that emerged are relevant to the revealed communication gap problem. According to the data, Generation Y is willing to adapt to how their leaders communicate, but depending on the delivery method the problem is compounded if Generation Y leaders only do enough to get the minimum accomplished. No data suggested that Generation Y leaders will bring up how the communication is delivered to their leaders. The data revealed that Generation Y will adapt to however leadership communicates with them but that the level of performance may be different.

The leadership narrative is closely intertwined with the revealed communication gap problem, and would also be extremely important in any proposed solution. From a

leadership perspective, each generation within the population for this study can perceive and discuss the revealed communication gap problem, but that has not yet provided a communication problem solution for the USMC or those organizations using the traditional-rational organizational design.

### **Implications**

Implications emerge along the original problem statement presented in Chapter 1. The USMC has a large proportion of Generation Y members like that of other traditional-rational organizations. Generation Y communicates differently and has different definitions of traditional communication means than do Baby Boomers and Generation X. The revealed communication gap problem from the narratives is caused by the restraints of the traditional-rational organizational design, which has different implications for Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y members in the future.

**Traditional-rational organizations.** Organizations are organized groups of individuals that work together towards common goals (Alam et al., 2011). The implications from this study to the traditional-rational organizational design reflect generational groups that are did not communicate effectively. The result, as this study revealed, illustrated a communication gap problem.

Within the USMC, hierarchal traditional-rational structures that Baby Boomer leadership maintain to communicate with the workforce causes Generation Y to not perform to potential (Bulc, 2012). Generation Y USMC members enter a traditional-rational organization working for Baby Boomer and Generation X leaders that although understand the generational differences with Generation Y, still maintain the traditional-rational communication techniques of face-to-face communication (Byrd, 2012).

Traditional-rational communication techniques do not facilitate harnessing the full potential of younger generations in the future.

Leadership may recognize and acknowledge the differences in communication preferences between generations, but if the organizational design does not allow leaders to change the organization to cover a communication gap problem, then leaders in traditional-rational organizations will not be able to use ideas that conflict with organizational hierarchy. Leaders that recognize the communication gap problem but do not choose to transcend the current organizational paradigm to offer solutions will not be able to fix the communication gap problem.

**Baby Boomers implications.** As Generation X and Y members become more dissatisfied over time, further implication for Baby Boomer leadership may be that quality members leave the USMC for another organization with a more natural or open structure (Scott & Davis, 2007). The worst implication may be that the organization, if Baby Boomer leadership does not attempt to adapt a new organizational paradigm, may cease to exist at some point if it becomes ineffective for the purpose it was designed for.

**Generation X implications.** Generation X are also subject to the rules and regulations used by a traditional-rational organization and have not yet transcended the organizational paradigm to offer a solution. Generation X attempts to do so with more understanding about what Generation Y communication needs are, but the tools and methods are not yet aligned with what will be most effective with Generation Y. The implication that puts Generation X leadership in a difficult position as middle managers or translators of Baby Boomer leadership information causes them to try and create effective communication solutions for two generations.

**Generation Y implications.** If Generation Y do not perform effectively under an authoritative communication style typical of traditional-rational organizations, they will either be underperforming or they will leave the organization. If they continue to adapt to whatever communication style is used, the problem will never be magnified to the level of Baby Boomer leadership to force a change. The USMC or any traditional-rational organization may subsequently experience a slow and subtle deterioration over time. A subtle deterioration over time may not expose the revealed communication gap problem with enough time to prevent the organization from losing its relevancy.

### **Models for solutions**

The results of this study highlighted the existing communication gap problem between Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y in the USMC. The revealed communication gap problem is caused by the traditional-rational organizational design maintained by the USMC. To improve multigenerational communication in the USMC, a different organizational design model is needed. Figure 1 depicts the beginning step in how to solve the problem presented in this study.

Unlike the traditional-rational organizational design in which a hierarchal structure is used to communicate information, a first step is to adjust the organizational paradigm to create an environment where the communication solutions explored in this dissertation study will work with a multigenerational workforce. A natural system as a base organizational structure can overlay the organizational structure of the USMC that will allow for some parts of the organization to remain rules governed, while other parts of the organization will become more open by design.

Figure 1 depicts a working environment that allows Baby Boomer leaders to maintain what they feel is necessary from a traditional-rational perspective. A natural organizational system facilitates traditional-hierarchical structure where absolutely required but also facilitates parts of the organization to develop open systems. By allowing parts of the organization to then use an open system organizational design, the USMC could then begin to integrate some of the communication enablers and solutions explored in this study by setting an open environment to use all generational qualities to create communication tools that work.

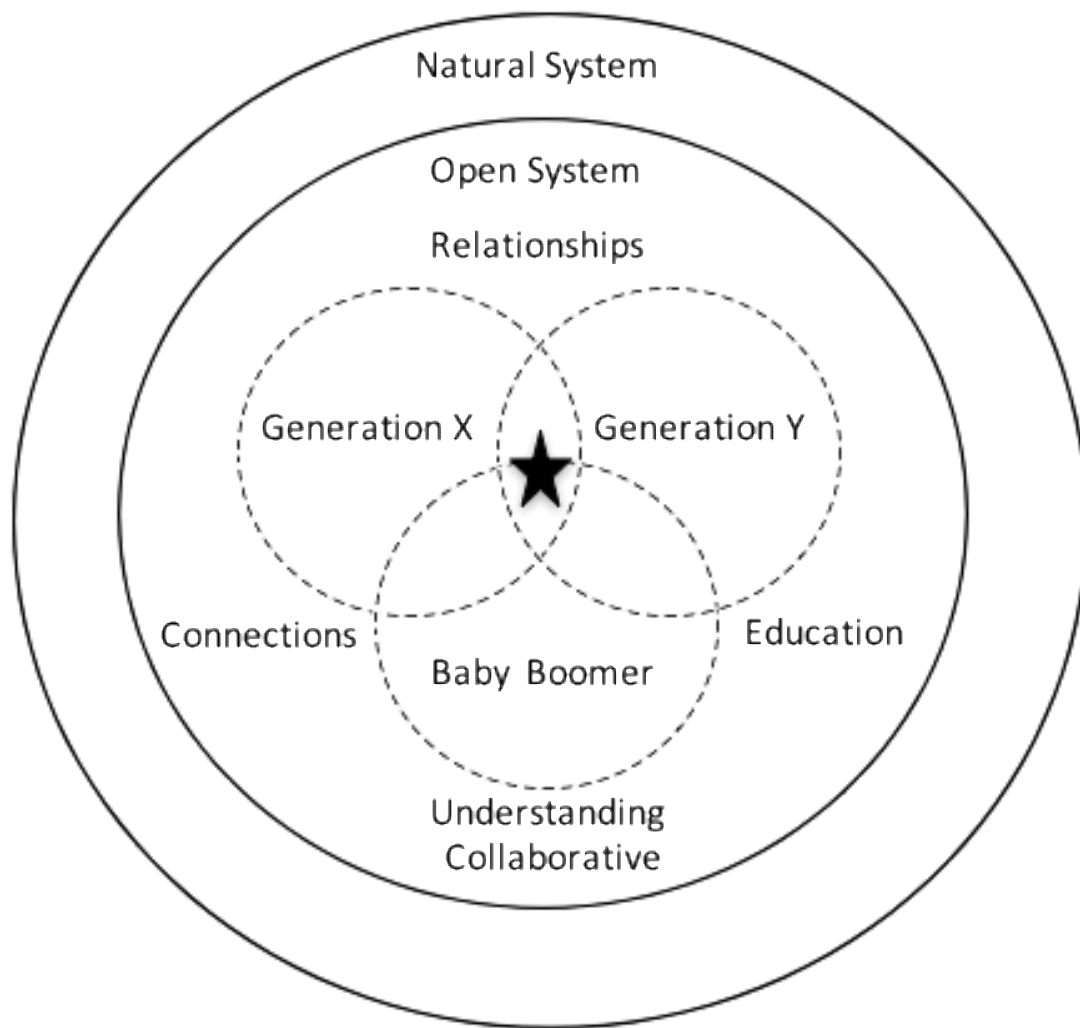
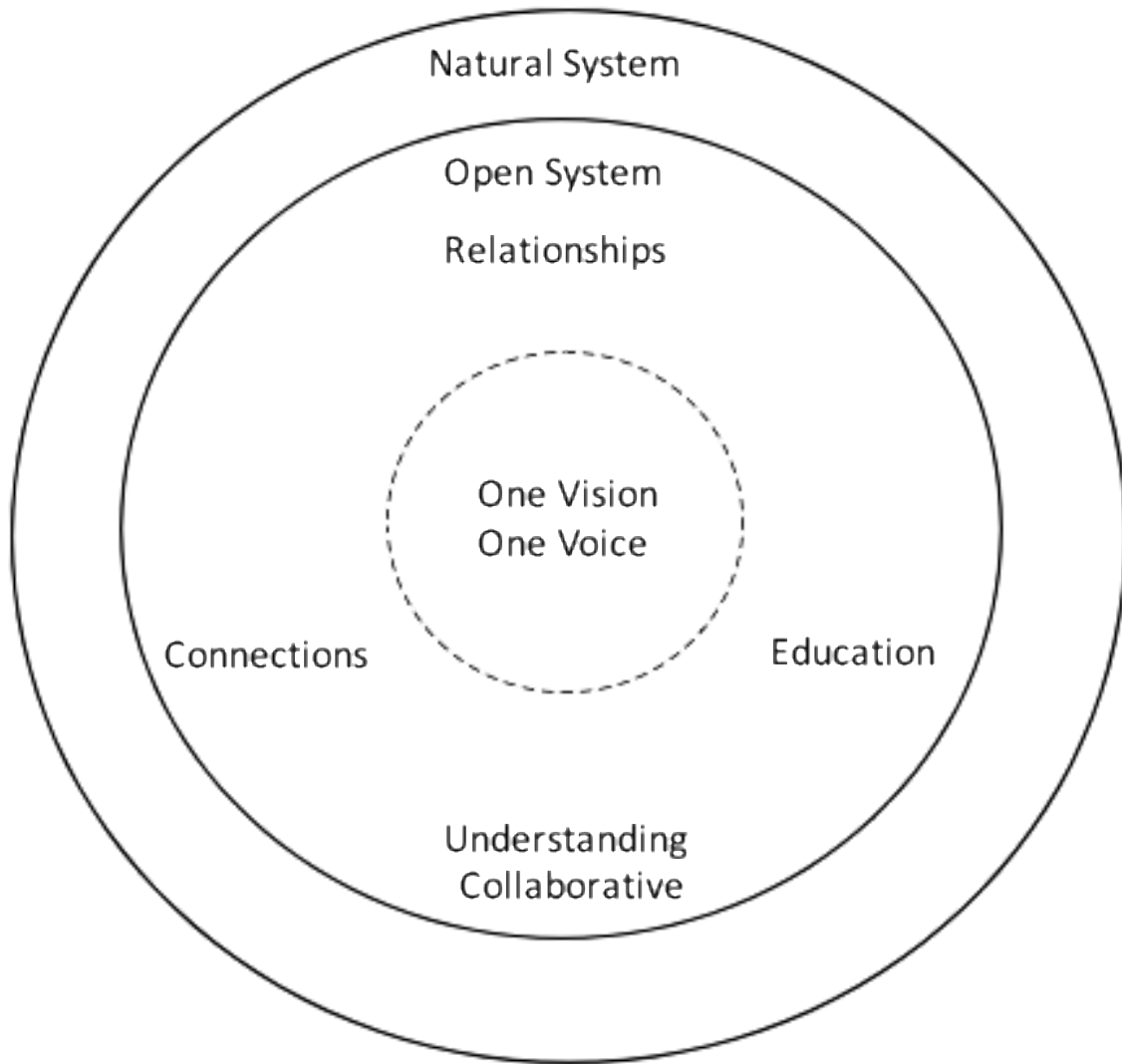


Figure 1. A proposed multigenerational communication model for today's USMC.

In the case of this study, emergent themes such as relationships, connections, understanding, education, and collaboration that all emerged could then be put to work in fostering the right leadership environment to facilitate the multigenerational workforce to be more closely aligned. Tools to help reduce the communication gap problem may then emerge. The goal as displayed in Figure 1 would be to facilitate generational groups eventually synchronize their perceptions, represented by the star, to make changes communication gap solutions part of the work culture for the future.

Sometime in the future the multigenerational communication model might look something like that presented in Figure 2. Over time, as the USMC as a traditional-rational organization becomes more natural and subsequent communication tools began to synchronize the multigenerational workforce by more effective communication, the generational groupings that exist would no longer be present. Figure 2, based on the results of this study, provides an organizational environment for all generations within the workforce to create the communication tools necessary to provide solutions to the communication gap problem revealed in this study.

Creating more effective communication between generations in the workforce may facilitate a new organizational paradigm that might emerge that could break down generational barriers. The problem is that the USMC currently does not have an organizational environment that facilitates the current multigenerational workforce to be able to work together to provide more effective communication tools to help with the communication gap.



*Figure 2.* A new traditional-rational organizational paradigm.

Figure 2 depicts how, over time, as identified communication solutions are implemented, an organization can transition from to a more effective organizational design. The natural organizational paradigm allows organizations like the military to maintain traditional-rational parts where necessary, but institutionalizes open systems where they work best within the natural system design to create an organizational culture based on forming relationships, connections, and understanding through education of the

workforce. When that becomes the organizational culture of an organization, generational communication gap problems will fade and the organization will operate and communicate with a synchronized methodology. This proposed traditional-rational organizational paradigm may help traditional-rational organizations transition over time to organizational designs that are more suited for enhancing the productivity in the younger generations within the workforce.

### **Recommendations for Future Study**

Recommendations for future studies relate to the narratives, implications, and proposed model to determine substantively what types of activities may be called traditional-hierarchical as opposed to more natural activities that do not have to be restricted by rules and regulations. An updated definition of the traditional-rational organizational paradigm could be a key piece of knowledge that could help any Baby Boomer or Generation X leader to begin to develop an organizational culture based on Figure 1. The next step would be research that could identify actual organizational design structural changes based on qualitative case studies using specific organizations.

This study's purpose required generational feedback from participants based solely on their age which made them part of a generation. Some of the participants had leadership experience and some did not. Future research might focus on the leadership aspects alone or undertaking an exploration of this study's elements using one generational group only. A mixed mode approach may work best for this scenario. Quantitative data may help describe demographic characteristics to hone in on with further qualitative exploration. Additionally, research involving the different types of organizational paradigms may provide further perspective in aiding leaders to begin to

develop an organizational culture conceptualized in Figures 1 and 2. A consistent theme that applies to these recommendations is that conceptualized model created as a conclusion to this study would be useful in guiding any further research in this area.

### **Reflections**

This qualitative exploration of others' perceptions was a personal journey as much as it was a professional and academic one. I grew to mature and expand my own thinking during the years I was on this journey which shaped it to be the final product it became. I think had I been more patient up front instead of trying to rush through to get a solution, I would have understood more about the topic early on to make the journey easier.

Overall this has had a profound impact on my life as a leader and practitioner. The work involved for this long a period changes how I see leadership and communication now daily. I found myself learning from what I was doing and using it as a practitioner to become a better manager and leader in my daily life. Hopefully others who read this can see that growth and apply it to their knowledge base to gain some helpful knowledge for them as well.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory inquiry was to explore the perceptions of separated or retired Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y Marine Corps in the Southern California geographical area regarding communication. The specific perceptions were obstacles and enablers that they experienced when communicating with each other and any issues that arose from differences in communication preferences. The specific problem is that Generation Y, who comprise a large percentage of the Marine

Corps, prefer to communicate by social media and electronic devices that causes a problem in effective communication between Baby Boomer leaders, Generation X, and Generation Y (Grice, 2008; Pastel, 2008; Sinclair). Findings from seven final named categories became emergent themes that assisted in developing the final narratives for each. From those seven final narratives, four areas drew implications from this study, and a conceptualized organizational paradigm emerged in conclusion to assist leaders and researchers in the future with areas for further study or implementation.

The purpose of this study was fulfilled by achieving data saturation that assisted in creating the seven named categories from data that answered the research questions. A communication gap was discovered along with several obstacles that contribute to it and enablers to help reduce the identified gap. Even though the generational groups explored in this study recognize the communication gap problem, a solution will be difficult to adopt until USMC leadership looks at a new organizational paradigm conceptualized in Figures 1 and 2.

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APA

## Appendix A: Interview Script and Questions

Good morning/afternoon/evening,

I just wanted to thank you again for your participation in this study. In this research I am exploring Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y communication within the United States Marine Corps (USMC). Your participation will help me to understand how you like to communicate in the workplace and any communication problems that exist between generations within the USMC. Your participation will also help identify any problems you might have in communicating with other generations. Results of this study may go a long way in improving communication in the USMC and help the organization improve as well as other organizations in other industries with similar generations within their workforce. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Before we get to the main questions that I would like you to provide your honest, perceptions about, I would just like to go over a few introductory questions so I can get to know you a bit better.

Would you consider yourself a Baby Boomer, Generation Xer or Generation Yer? For the purposes of this study, if you were born between 1946 and 1963, you are a Baby Boomer. If you were born between 1964 and 1980, you are a member of Generation X. If you were born between 1981 and 2000, then you are a member of Generation Y.

What is/was your highest rank?

What is/was your primary job specialty?

Now that I know a little bit more about you, I would like to move to the questions that will help fulfill the purpose of this study. As I mentioned, I am trying to explore communication between yourself and the other Generations within the USMC's workforce. By talking about your experiences, you can help me, together with other participants, to create new knowledge about the communication dynamics between you and other generations within the USMC. Do you have any questions? Okay, let's begin.

Primary research question: What are the perceptions of USMC Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y members regarding issues that arise because of differences in communication preferences (do not ask this directly...use the below interview questions to collect data to answer this question)?

How do you communicate with your peers? How do you communicate with Marine Corps members from different generations?

What issues, if any, have arisen because of problems communicating with members of a different generation?

Considering the types of communication methods today such as in person, virtual, and social media, how do you communicate with your leaders, your peers, and how do they communicate with you?

(If a leader.) How do you communicate with your subordinates? How do they communicate with you?

How effective do you perceive these forms of communication to be?  
What type(s) of communication methods do you prefer to use

Do you have any thoughts of ways that communication could be improved?  
How?

Sub research question number one: What obstacles, if any, do USMC Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y members face when communicating with each other (do not ask this directly...use the below interview questions to collect data to answer this question)?

What obstacles do you encounter when communicating with Marine Corps members who come from a different generation?

In your opinion, how do these obstacles to communication affect your ability to do your job effectively?

How well do you think that other generations in the USMC understand your way of communicating with them?

How well do you think that you understand other generation's ways of communicating with you?

What kind of problems does this create for you, if any? Why?

Sub research question number two: What enablers, if any, do USMC Baby Boomer, Generation X and Generation Y members use when communicating with each other (do not ask this directly...use the below interview questions to collect data to answer this question)?

What approaches or techniques help you communicate better with members who come from a different generation?

If you are in a leadership role, what communication methods do you use with those you lead that work well?

(If a subordinate) What communication methods do you use with your leaders that work well for you?

What improvements in communication would help make communication with different generations more effective?

Concluding remarks. That is all the questions that I have for you. Your input has been really helpful. Do you have anything else that you might want to add that might help me to understand your perceptions about communication within the Marine Corp?

In a couple of weeks I will be sending you the transcript of this interview. I would appreciate it if you would review the transcript and make any changes or additions to it that you feel are important and then returning it to me.

Thank you for your help today.

## Appendix B: Recruitment Flyer

Dear Participant:

My name is Brian Kane. I am pursuing a doctor of management degree in organizational leadership at the University of Phoenix. My dissertation study is entitled "A Exploratory Inquiry of Communicating in a Multi-Generational Workforce." Your potential part in this study is simply to describe your experiences communicating with other generations within your organization and any communication problems you feel exist based on questions I will ask you. The questions will be asked during semi-structured interviews that will be scheduled after each eligible participant formally volunteers to participate in the study. A semi-structured interview is a meeting between myself and participant volunteers at the XXXXXXXXXXXXX, away from any organizational pressure or relationship to organizational pressure and influence. Volunteers will be free to express their truthful insights regarding communicating with other generations within the USMC with full anonymity during the entire interview and subsequent analysis and publication of the results. A letter of consent will be provided for your review and signature prior to any interviews. You may withdraw from the study at any time by notifying me of your decision. All records created up to that point in the study will be destroyed.

Participation in the study is on a voluntary basis. There may be benefit to you by offering your experiences to attempt to provide knowledge to the USMC and other organizations in different industries to help improve multi-generational communication for its organizational members. Having a voice to help provide input to a study that may help your organization improve may provide you with a sense of fulfillment. This process will include providing you with a verbatim transcript of the interview and my analysis for review and correction prior to final submission of the dissertation. Your perspective and input is important to this study. Please contact me if you will participate in the study or have any additional questions. My home phone is (XXX) XXX-XXXX Thank you.

Sincerely,

Brian Kane

Appendix C: Use of Premise Form



**PREMISES, RECRUITMENT AND NAME (PRN) USE PERMISSION**

[Redacted]  
**Name of Facility, Organization, University, Institution, or Association**

*Please complete the following by check marking any permissions listed here that you approve, and please provide your signature, title, date, and organizational information below. If you have any questions or concerns about this research study, please contact the University of Phoenix Institutional Review Board via email at IRB@phoenix.edu.*

I hereby authorize Brian H Kane, a researcher from University of Phoenix, to use the premises (facility identified below) to conduct a study entitled "A Comparative Case Study of Communicating in a Multigenerational Workforce."

  
Signature

1/24/2015  
Date

[Redacted]  
Name

[Redacted]  
Title

Address of Facility  
[Redacted]

[Redacted]

## Appendix D: Informed Consent

Dear Participant,

My name is Brian Kane and I am a student at the University of Phoenix working on a doctor of management degree in organizational leadership. I am conducting a research study entitled, *An Exploratory Inquiry of Communicating in a Multi-Generational Workforce*. The purpose of this qualitative exploratory inquiry was to explore the perceptions of separated or retired Baby Boomer, Generation X, and Generation Y Marine Corps in the Southern California geographical area regarding communication. The specific perceptions were obstacles and enablers that they experienced when communicating with each other and any issues that arose from differences in communication preferences.

Your participation will involve semi-structured, face-to-face interviews by me on your experiences leading and communicating from your time in the USMC for approximately 60 minutes. A professional transcript of the interview will be prepared and returned to you for review to ensure that the written response represents your viewpoints. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, you can do so without penalty or loss of benefit to yourself by calling or e-mailing me to inform me of your withdrawal. Any information you submitted up to the time of your withdrawal that point will be destroyed. The results of the research study may be published but your identity will remain confidential and your name will not be disclosed to any outside party.

In this research, there are no foreseeable risks to you. Although there may be no direct benefit to you, a possible benefit of your participation is the insights you provide may help future leaders lead and communicate more effectively with other generations in the workforce. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX. My home e-mail address is XXXXXXXXXXXX.

As a participant in this study, you should understand the following:

1. You may decline to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without consequences either by e-mailing or calling the researcher, Brian Kane.
2. Your identity will be confidential.
3. Brian Kane, the researcher, has thoroughly explained the parameters of the research study and all of your questions and concerns have been addressed.
4. You must grant permission for the researcher, Brian Kane, to digitally record the interview. You understand that the information from the recorded interviews may be transcribed. The researcher will structure a coding process to assure that anonymity of your name is protected. Your signature below serves as permission to record your voice and to participate in this study.
5. Data will be stored in a secure and locked area. The data will be held for a period of three years, and then destroyed.

6. The research results will be used for publication.

“By signing this form you acknowledge that you understand the nature of the study, the potential risks to you as a participant, and the means by which your identity will be kept confidential. Your signature on this form also indicates that you are 18 years old or older and that you give your permission to voluntarily serve as a participant in the study described.”

Signature of the interview subject \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E: Third Party Transcription Services Confidentiality Statement



GMR TRANSCRIPTION SERVICES, INC.

### CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

This Agreement is made between GMR Transcription Services, Inc., a California Client ("GMR") and Brian Kane on July 7, 2015.

Covenants of the Parties: GMR agree to do the following, and the Client agrees to do the following. GMR and the Client both have made these commitments in reliance on the promises of the other as listed below.

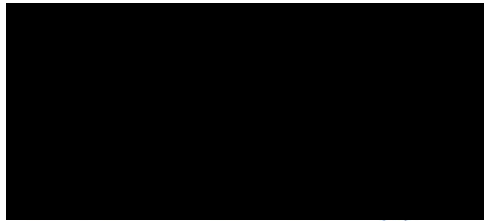
1. Nondisclosure of Transactional Information: At all times, both during GMR's Services and after the cessation of GMR's service, whether the cessation is voluntary or involuntary, GMR shall:
  - a. Keep in the strictest confidence and trust, all Transactional Information of the Client, which includes client information, production techniques, technical operations, recording information, transcription information, etc., from any source whatsoever ("Transactional Information"), which is disclosed to GMR in the course of negotiating, discussing the implementation of, or following hiring of GMR's service with the Client; and
  - b. Not knowingly disclose, use, or induce or assist in the use or disclosure of any Transactional Information, or anything related to any Transactional Information, without the Client's prior express written consent, except as may be necessary in the ordinary course of performing GMR's duties as a service of the Client.
  - c. Delete all uploaded audio within one (1) week after GMR's completion of the service.
  - d. Take all precautionary measures to ensure that GMR's computers used for all services is protected from unauthorized personnel by obtaining and properly running an antivirus software, obtaining and properly running proper firewall protections, not allowing any other person to access GMR's computers, not allowing any documentation relating to any project of the Client to be backed up by an unrelated source, not allowing any documentation relating to any project of the Client to be backed up onto any device that is not handed over to the Client at the completion of the project, and any other precautionary measures needed to protect the Transactional Information from being released to unauthorized personnel.

Appendix E: Third Party Transcription Services Confidentiality Statement



e. At all times during GMR's service, promptly advise the Client of any knowledge that GMR may have of any unauthorized release or use of the Client's Transactional Information, and shall take reasonable measures to prevent unauthorized persons or entities from having access to, obtaining, or being furnished with any Transactional Information.

This Agreement is entered into on the date recited above by the undersigned parties in consideration of the foregoing mutual commitments.



Client

\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNATURE

\_\_\_\_\_  
PRINT NAME