A review of the empirical generations at work research: implications for school leaders and future research

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Most schools currently employ three generations of teachers and leaders: Baby Boomers (1946–65), Generation X (1966–80) and Generation Y (1981–2003). However, the implications for school leaders of multi-generational schools remain relatively unexplored. This paper examines the empirical multi-disciplinary generations at work evidence to identify differences and similarities in how generational cohorts approach work/life balance, authority, collaboration and careers. The paper defines generational characteristics and introduces the review methods employed. The findings are organised within three important leadership actions: stimulating professional growth and capacity, building collaborative cultures, and establishing work conditions. The conclusion presents future research directions.

Keywords: school leadership; generations at work; collaborative cultures; work conditions; professional capacity building

Introduction

In the seminal work *Problem of Generations*, Manheim (1952) posited that each generation inherits a collective consciousness that emerges when individuals of a similar age group, or cohort, experience social and political events from a shared vantage point. More specifically, generational identity is primarily constructed when individuals transition to adulthood (Manheim 1952) and is greatly influenced by the pace and intensity of experienced social and political turbulence or stability (Pilcher 1994). This approach to understanding generations was historically helpful. However, as global communication technology fosters instantaneous access to significant global events, future generations will simultaneously and collectively experience events differently than their predecessors (Edmunds and Turner 2005). This shift may shape how generational cohorts develop and are defined. It may also inspire a new phase of generationally focused research aiming to understand the similarities and differences within and between generations and their implications for work, life and social interaction.

Over the last several decades, research and policy interest in generations has experienced numerous peaks and valleys. The current surge emerges from the business and organisational psychology and sociology communities and explores patterns of similarity and difference between generations. Much of this research is underpinned by a desire to understand the possible implications of the current generational composition within organisations. This currently includes members of three generations: Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1965), Generation X (1966–80) and Generation Y (1981–2003).

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This body of research appears to be predicated upon two assumptions: (1) that each generational cohort brings collective attributes, attitudes and aspirations to their work and the workplace; and (2) that developing a better understanding of both the individual cohorts and the outcomes of the generational mix will support both individual and organisational efforts to recruit, develop and retain each generation of workers.

While there is growing corporate sector interest in the implications of multi-generational workplaces, generationally focused research and practice remain relatively elusive in the public sector (Jurkiewicz and Brown 1998). More specifically, even though most schools now employ three generations of teachers and leaders, a sustained generational focus has yet to evolve within the education research community beyond several strands of work that examine: Generation Y teachers (Bulman 2002; Coggshall, Behrstock-Sherratt, and Drill 2011; Moore Johnson 2004; Williamson and Meyer-Looze 2010); teacher generational mix (Lovely and Buffum 2007; Moore Johnson and Kardos 2005; Strauss 2005); intergenerational communication (Rinke 2009; Walmsley 2011); generational career patterns (Hess and Jepsen 2009); generational leadership perspectives (Stone-Johnson 2011); and technology use across generations (Salajan, Schonwetter, and Cleghorn 2010; Worley 2011; Zieglar 2007).

While the overall number of generationally focused studies is increasing – albeit at different rates – the number of empirical studies exploring within- and between-generational patterns remains relatively limited. The growing number of non-empirical generations at work (GAW) resources is often designed to support leaders in understanding how generational patterns may improve organisational strategies for developing, recruiting and retaining talented staff members. Within this context, neither set of evidence has featured prominently on the educational stage. The empirical generational evidence has not been collectively reviewed in recent years and it has, more specifically, not been considered within the education community to inform theory and practice related to school leadership and school improvement.

This paper

To address the aforementioned school-based generational knowledge gap and stimulate discussion of the potential leadership implications of the current school-based generational mix, this paper reviews the empirical GAW research emerging primarily from business and organisational sociology and psychology disciplines. Specifically, the paper examines the existing empirical evidence related to generational differences in the workplace to identify if, and how, generational attributes influence the ways in which generational cohort members approach their work/life balance, authority, collaboration and career planning within and across generational boundaries. The paper focuses on research specifically examining Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y as they are most likely to be currently employed in schools.

To posit the implications of emerging GAW evidence for school leaders, the findings are organised within three selected components of the newly revised Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF) (The Institute for Educational Leadership 2012) including stimulating professional growth and capacity, building collaborative cultures and establishing work conditions. Globally, the OLF represents the most current state-level iteration of leadership standards and competencies to emerge from the international evidence linking school leadership actions to student outcomes. The decision to organise the GAW evidence in these three leadership actions is designed to simplify and encourage
consideration of the implications of the generational evidence not only in Ontario but across all jurisdictions with similar teacher/leader demographic profiles and similar leadership standards and priorities.

The first section of the paper begins with an exploration of relevant definitions of generations and describes common historical events and characteristics often ascribed to each one. It provides a brief overview of the contextual factors that influence individual and collective generations. Second, the Methods section provides an overview of the process employed to seek, select and review the empirical GAW literature. The third section briefly highlights the rationale for selecting the three aforementioned leadership actions used to arrange the evidence. Fourth, the emerging themes from the GAW review are presented to demonstrate the potential implications for leaders of the different generational patterns and attributes in the workplace. The final section identifies strands of potentially fruitful research to support both policy and practice knowledge development related to making the most of the generational mix currently present in schools.

Before the presentation of findings, several clarifications and caveats are needed to provide the boundaries of this paper. First, this paper does not discuss how leaders from different generations actually lead. Second, the freedom school leaders have to enact change based on these findings, or any findings for that matter, is often subject to great contextual variation, frequently due to local and national accountability infrastructures. Third, there are limitations associated with the corporate nature of the evidence base that may not hold up as more public- and education-sector evidence becomes available. Finally, GAW evidence is almost entirely mon-cultural in nature with most studies based in one country and most emerging from the United States of America (USA). While we have included studies from other jurisdictions, much of the empirical evidence remains derived from the USA. This creates an additional set of challenges in developing a holistic or international view of the evidence as there may be national or jurisdictional variations in the emerging themes. These notwithstanding, there remains merit in starting a conversation about generations in schools and moving forward a research agenda that addresses, not ignores, these important issues.

**Generations: definitions and contextual influences**

Beyond the more traditional description of a generation as a familial relationship, alternative definitions include chronological generations bounded by age (Edmunds and Turner 2002; Pilcher 1994) and social generations bounded by shared social experiences of growing up during a particular time (Pilcher 1994). Edmunds and Turner (2002) also define political generations as being bounded by collective identity fused by a shared experience of historical change and, possibly, upheaval. Alternately, Vincent (2005, 584) calls for a ‘fluid’ understanding of generations that challenges more bounded definitions, stating ‘as with other statuses, generations are fluid – boundaries solidify and relax, are appropriate in different contexts and not in others, and are nested into broader and narrower categories’. As it is the most frequently found definition in the empirical literature, a chronological approach to generations is applied to frame this paper.

Generations evolve as cohort members age and move through different phases of their lives (Corsten 1999; Vincent 2005). Vincent (2005, 584) reinforces this notion by highlighting the fact that the value individuals in a specific generational cohort place on a common experience evolves over time and that its ‘symbolic significance is constantly revised as the generation ages. This cultural approach to generation emphasises the role
of cultural learning and of memory through the life course in the construction of self-aware generations’. While this is an important element of generational study, it is not well considered in the empirical evidence and is offered here simply as a point of reflection and information. However, as much of the generational research does not account for participant age, this remains a common limitation of many empirical studies.

An individual’s membership in a particular generational cohort has, at times, been correlated to opportunity. According to Vincent (2005, 586), ‘different historical generations also have had greater or lesser opportunities for economic success, social mobility, migration, personal security, marriage and family development’. Edmunds and Turner (2005, 561) also believe that the ‘temporal position of a generation is important in terms of the opportunities, chances and resources that happen to be available to them’. In turn, they suggest that active generations transform social and cultural life and consume existing resources and opportunities, effectively closing them off for generations that follow. Conversely, passive generations inherit these changes. Edmund and Turner (2005) describe Boomers and Generation X as active and passive generations, respectively.

Generations at work in organisations

There is a lack of consistency between labels and specific birth years assigned to twentieth-century generations (Smola and Sutton 2002). However, the generally adopted generational monikers provide a helpful means of stratification. The following brief introduction to the three generations currently working in schools includes information related to birth year ranges, key life events and collectively ascribed characteristics. While there is international interest in the demographic influence of generations (Foot and Stoffman 2001; McCrindle undated), much of the literature outlining the particular experiences and traits of generation members emerges from the USA. As a result, many of the points of reference below highlight US-focused experience.

This paper reviews the empirical GAW literature to highlight the potential implications for school leaders. To this end, it focuses on generations most likely to be currently working in schools (Baby Boomers, Generation Xs and Generation Ys). As a result, the two peripheral generations, veterans (born before 1946) and Generation Zs (born after the late 1990s), are excluded from the definitional summaries and review of the literature. The age limits of each generation presented below have been selected to represent those commonly reported in the literature.

Baby Boomers (Boomers)

The name ‘Boomers’ reflects the birth rate ‘boom’ between the Second World War and the mid-1960s. Born between 1946 and 1965, Boomers grew up during post-war economic prosperity in a time of growing social and political turmoil. US-based key events include the Vietnam War, the civil rights movement and the assassinations of President Kennedy and Martin Luther King (Bradford 1993). Many Boomers experienced, either personally or at a distance, mass protests against authority and national institutions inspired by perceived failures of political, business and religious leaders (Kupperschmidt 2000). Boomers entered the workforce between 1965 and 1985. They are often described as workaholics, quality-minded, team players interested in title-based recognition (Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak 2000). The growing consumerism Boomers
experienced has been linked to a generational prioritisation of work and self-fulfilment, at
times, above family (Gentry et al. 2011).

**Generation X (GenXers)**

Members of Generation X are often referred to as GenX or GenXers in the literature. Born between 1966 and 1980, they grew up in the 1970s and 1980s. GenXers are often labelled the ‘latchkey’ generation, reflecting their adolescence spent at home alone during after-school hours as their Boomer mothers entered the workforce en masse. GenXers have also been referred to as the ‘sandwich’ or ‘slacker’ generation. Shaped by the emergence of single-parent families, music videos and home/personal computers, GenXers are viewed as independent and self-sufficient (Berl 2006), and committed to personal and professional friendships and social/peer networks (Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak 2000). In the workplace, GenXers cherish flexibility, freedom and informal structures and often resist authority and traditional hierarchy. They value networking, are techno-savvy and globally minded. GenXers entered the workforce between 1985 and 2000 and prioritise work/life balance (Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak 2000).

**Generation Y (GenY)**

GenY, or millennials, were born between the late 1970s and early 2000s. GenYs are also called ‘nexters’, ‘Ys’ and ‘echo Boomers’. In the USA but also more globally, key events include 9/11, the Columbine massacre, multiculturalism, globalisation, the internet, 24-hour news and reality TV. GenYs are extremely techno-literate due to the ubiquitous presence of PCs, laptops, Internet access and social networking sites. GenYs prefer digital working and crave opportunities for learning, working in teams, and experiencing real-time constant technology-facilitated connections with peers and social networks-based contacts (Espinoza, Ukleja, and Rusch 2010). GenY has grown up in a more diverse and tolerant society, resulting in a cohort well versed in equality, being heard and challenging authority (Berl 2006). They entered the workforce after 2000.

**Leader actions influencing student learning: framework to organise the GAW evidence**

The last decade has marked the emergence of a body of empirical evidence examining indirect and direct relationships between school leader actions and student outcomes (e.g. Leithwood and Jantzi 2008). This growing body of research provides evidence on a core of school leadership values, qualities and strategies (Day et al. 2009) that when applied within a contextually sensitive manner can significantly influence student learning (Day et al. 2009; Leithwood and Jantzi 2008; Robinson, Hohepa, and Lloyd 2009; Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe 2008). This influence is exerted through direct effects on teachers and school conditions and indirect influence on students (Day et al. 2009; Leithwood et al. 2004; Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins 2008). As a result, school leaders are now widely accepted to be second only to teachers in their influence on student learning and attainment (Day et al. 2009).

The research highlighted above has generated and inspired a range of evidence-based models that centre on core actions school leaders can adopt to produce direct and indirect positive influence on student learning. While these emerging leadership models and
factors may vary slightly, they demonstrate a consistent focus on the importance of school leaders working with teachers individually and collectively and nurturing supportive workplace conditions (Day et al. 2009; Leithwood et al. 2004; Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe 2008; The Institute for Educational Leadership 2012). For example, Leithwood et al. (2004) describe basic leadership practices as including setting direction, developing people and redesigning the organisation. Similarly, Hallinger and Heck (1999) refer to leadership purpose, people and structures and social systems.

To examine the potential relevance and implications of the GAW evidence for school leaders, three leadership action strategies were borrowed from the newly emerging OLF (The Institute for Educational Leadership 2012) and above leadership models. The actions were used to arrange and present the themes emerging from the GAW review in this paper. First, the notion of a leader’s role in stimulating growth and professional capacity was used to organise the empirical GAW literature related to career progression and compensation, loyalty and longevity motivation, and work ethic. Second, the core leadership task of building collaborative cultures was used to classify findings from the GAW literature related to trust and relationships, the importance of social interaction, mentoring and support, and individualism and autonomy. Finally, the potential implications of generational patterns and trends on how school leaders establish work conditions are examined. The following emerging empirical trends in the GAW literature are presented: societal context of work, workplace structures and conditions, centrality of work, work hours and work/life balance, job satisfaction and security, salary and status, and technology. These factors organise the discussion of generational differences which, in turn, informs the discussion of the potential implications and future research opportunities associated with understanding more about GAW in schools.

Methods for reviewing the GAW literature

The preliminary review of the wider GAW literature identified a largely theoretical field with a high concentration of reports, books and papers in the popular business literature (e.g. Lancaster and Stillman 2003; Tapscott 2008; Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak 2000). However, this strand of work was often without rigorous empirical foundation and focused more on providing leaders with insights related to how generational mix influences individual and organisational design, strategy and innovation (e.g. UNESCO undated).

The primary focus of this paper is to review the empirical GAW evidence in a formal and systematic way. The secondary focus is to organise the evidence in an easily accessible format for scholars and practitioners interested in school leadership. As such, the paper relied on a purposeful and narrow selection of school leadership evidence that served the sole purpose of framing the findings. The initial search phase of the review was designed to capture the full spectrum of disciplines within which GAW research has been published. As such, three databases were used for the initial search: Education Resources Information Center, SCOPUS and Sociological Abstracts. Each database was searched for peer-reviewed journal articles, books and book chapters published between 2000 and 2012 related to any combination of the following series of terms: ‘generation’, ‘generations’, ‘generational’, ‘age’, ‘work’, ‘workplace’ and ‘employment’. Educationally focused resources were sourced using the above terms in conjunction with the terms ‘school’ and ‘leadership’. A total of 11 searches returned 657 results after all results were collated and duplicates removed. All 657 abstracts were reviewed for inclusion of
empirical evidence. In turn, a long list of 119 resources was reviewed to confirm their inclusion of empirical generational evidence. This produced a final short-list of 45 resources selected for full review by members of the research team under key headings: research methods, key findings and conclusions. The conclusions from this review are presented in this paper.

The preliminary analysis of the shortlisted resources was conducted to identify patterns and themes in the generational literature. This analysis also identified the predominance of a work-values model (Twenge et al. 2010) that was frequently used to shape the design and/or analysis of empirical generations research. The work-values model is composed of five categories or work-related attitudes and values including extrinsic, intrinsic, social, leisure and altruistic. As this model was present throughout many of the reviewed resources, the first outcomes of each study were organised into the five aforementioned themes.

Once all papers had been reviewed and the evidence had been organised within the work-values model categories, the GAW patterns and trends needed to be examined to identify possible implications for school leaders. To this end, a light-touch review of evidence-based school leadership models linked to improving student outcomes was conducted. Three key leadership actions were identified as core to leadership influence of student outcomes that, at the same time, captured the essential empirical findings from the GAW empirical review as arranged in the work-values model. These core leadership actions capture leaders’ roles in working with individuals, groups and teams across organisations and in creating structural supports at the organisational level.

In turn, all GAW evidence derived from the reviewed resources, nested within the work-values model categories, was set within the adopted three-strand leadership framework. The overall organisation of the evidence is presented in Table 1.

In the next section, the empirical evidence from the GAW review is presented in general terms to identify larger patterns and trends within the following three leadership actions: stimulating growth and professional capacity, building collaborative cultures, and

| Component of the work values model | Themes emerging from the empirical generations-at-work research | Selected key school leadership actions that may be influenced by generational differences |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Intrinsic/extrinsic                | Career progression and compensation                            | Stimulating growth and professional capacity                                           |
| Intrinsic                          | Organisational loyalty and longevity                           | Building collaborative cultures                                                      |
| Intrinsic/altruism                 | Motivation and work ethic                                      |                                                                                     |
| Social                             | Trust and relationships                                        |                                                                                     |
| Social                             | Importance placed on social interaction                       |                                                                                     |
| Social                             | Mentoring and support                                          |                                                                                     |
| Social/intrinsic                   | Individualism and autonomy                                     |                                                                                     |
| Extrinsic                          | Workplace structures and conditions                            | Enabling positive work conditions                                                   |
| Extrinsic/leisure                  | Life balance                                                  |                                                                                     |
| Extrinsic                          | Salary                                                        |                                                                                     |
| Extrinsic                          | Benefits                                                      |                                                                                     |
| Extrinsic                          | Job security                                                  |                                                                                     |
enabling positive work conditions. Throughout, the statistics are not presented to streamline the overall presentation of the evidence as the overall trends provide evidence enough of possible implications for school leaders of generational trends and patterns.

**Tensions and gaps within the GAW evidence**

As in all developing, and even established, fields, conflicting findings exist. While the dominant trends are presented here, contradictions appear in the stereotypical descriptions of generations in the popular media (D’iRomualdo 2006; Giancola 2006; Macky, Gardner, and Forsyth 2008). The review process identified several tensions and gaps in the GAW research including contradictory evidence, a largely private-sector focus, and predominantly monocultural or single-country samples. These will also be highlighted in the discussion related to directions for future research.

While there is a mounting body of empirical evidence of differences in generational work attitudes and patterns, some studies provide contradictory evidence that suggests little or no difference between how generations experience, interact with and influence the workplace. However, the review presented here found that even the contradictory evidence (e.g. Deal 2007; Gentry et al. 2011; Kunreuther 2003) identified small, yet significant, differences in generational patterns on a number of variables.

Inherent challenges exist when applying research findings from one sector to another. However, at times, trends emerging from beyond the education sector may warrant discussion or debate regardless of the disciplinary or sector origin. The GAW literature is no exception. While there is little evidence related to the generational differences between public- and private-sector employees, it is possible that individuals choosing to work in the public sector may exhibit inherently different preliminary expectations and aspirations related to reward, promotion and job security. Similar differences may also apply to education professionals.

Beyond several large-scale international surveys (Deal, Altman, and Rogelberg 2010; Hewlett, Sherbin, and Sumberg 2009), much of the GAW research remains monocultural or focused within a single country. As generational attributes, at least historically, are linked to the shared social experiences of a cohort’s development, these may be inherently nationalistic in nature and may create a challenge in global urban centres where teachers and, at times, leaders are from various countries. This creates possible tensions and challenges in the application of the evidence.

**Findings from the GAW empirical review: generational differences that may influence leadership actions to improve student learning**

This paper adheres closely to its primary goal of providing a preliminary review of the GAW empirical literature. To ensure explicit links to the application of the GAW findings to school leadership research and practice, the evidence from the GAW review is organised in juxtaposition with a selected triad of core leadership actions. The core purpose is to highlight the empirical GAW evidence within the three identified leadership actions, and reflect on potential leadership implications and possible topics of future research. Future papers will tend to issues not addressed within the scope of this paper including delving deeply into the possible reasons for the generational patterns and the application of the evidence to prescribe a specific set of leadership actions to maximise
the potential opportunities and challenges presented by cohorts of multigenerational school-based professional communities.

**Leadership action 1: stimulating growth and professional capacity**
The notion of a leader’s role in *stimulating growth and professional capacity* was used to organise the empirical GAW literature exploring individual patterns emerging within the review related to career progression and compensation, loyalty and longevity, motivation and work ethic. Each section below presents key empirical evidence related to differences and similarities between generational cohorts.

*Career progression and compensation*
GenXers are less patient and less willing to wait for promotion than Boomers (Gursoy, Maier, and Chi 2008; Smola and Sutton 2002). GenXers are more likely to be dissatisfied with their career progression (Hewlett, Sherbin, and Sumberg 2009) and often expect more immediate recognition through praise, promotion and increase in salary (Pham et al. 2008) than other generations. Pham et al. (2008) also found that the majority of GenY’s desired instant gratification. Similarly, GenYs are more likely than Boomers or GenXers to feel as though they do not get the workplace recognition and respect they deserve (Gursoy, Chi, and Karadag 2013). Younger generations appear to be less patient and more demanding of work-related acknowledgement and career progression.

*Loyalty and longevity*
GenXers differ significantly from Boomers in relation to organisational loyalty and what is often referred to in the generational literature as the ‘me’ orientation. Boomers display more loyalty to their employers and organisation goals than successive generations (D’Amato and Herzfeldt 2008; Miller and Yu 2003). While Boomers indicate that their supervisors provide incentives for them to remain in post, GenXers report that their relationship with colleagues is most likely to influence their decision to remain in their current jobs (Benson and Brown 2011). PriceWaterhouseCoopers (2008) discovered that the economic downturn strongly influenced a dramatic decrease of GenY loyalty and an increase in their perception that they will have a greater number of future employers over time.

*Motivation*
Generational differences related to motivation and work ethic also exist in the research evidence. In one study, Boomers ranked the need for ‘freedom to conform’ significantly higher than their GenX colleagues did (Jurkiewicz and Brown 1998). From Boomers to GenYs, progressive generations place less importance on intrinsic motivation from their work (Lyons, Duxbury, and Higgins 2005; Twenge et al. 2010). Sullivan et al. (2009) found that GenXers have higher needs for authenticity and balance than Boomers.

*Work ethic*
GenXers place a higher importance on workplace learning than Boomers and GenYs, confirming a commonly held assumption that ‘Generation Xers are “addicted to
learning”’ (Lyons, Duxbury, and Higgins 2005, 69). Smola and Sutton (2002) found that GenXers claim to take more pride in their work than Boomers. Finally, Kunreuther (2003) found that GenXers are also more likely to be inspired by their organisation’s social change orientation as related to their own personal passions and commitment than Boomers, whose social or political awakening was often linked to larger social or political movements or change. Twenge et al. (2010) found that Boomers have stronger work ethics than GenXers and GenYs in relation to hard work and overtime. This finding was echoed by Cogin (2012) and Meriac, Woehr, and Banister (2010).

Leadership action 2: building collaborative cultures

Based on the school leadership evidence, school leaders are essential to the process of developing collaborative school-level cultures. Professionally, collaborative cultures are seen to positively influence teacher practice (Pounder 1999; Bryk, Camburn, and Seashore Louis 1999). However, based on the emerging evidence, generational cohorts may have very different views on collaboration and working with others (Lyons, Duxbury, and Higgins 2005). To support an enriched understanding of the possible cohort-based differences in desires for and approaches to working with others, the GAW evidence is organised into four themes: trust and relationships, the importance placed on social interaction, mentoring and support, and individualism and autonomy.

Trust and relationships

Differences in generational approaches to work-based relationships and levels of trust emerge within the GAW evidence. Hess and Jepsen (2009) found varying levels of relational (i.e. trust, loyalty and security) and transactional (i.e. financial incentive) obligations between generations. Boomers exhibit higher levels of relational trust than GenXers, who are often noted to be more cynical towards work and employment obligations (Hess and Jepsen 2009).

Importance placed on social interaction

Twenge et al. found that GenYs placed less of a priority than GenXers and Boomers on work-based social interactions and that ‘GenX and Boomers did not significantly differ in valuing work that allows for social interactions’ (2010, 1133). Conversely, several studies identify an oppositional finding: that GenYs place a higher value on social and intrinsic work values (Real, Mitnik, and Maloney 2010). Lyons, Duxbury, and Higgins (2005, 68) discovered that ‘millennials placed the greatest value on social work values, placing more importance on the social aspect of work than all other generations’. While this evidence appears to be in conflict, it may be that while GenYs do not rely on work for social interaction, they are more interested in ensuring that they have access to social interaction as part of their jobs. Similarly, Hershatter and Epstein identified that GenYs are more likely to have closer, informal relationships with their superiors at work than GenXers, stating:

Throughout their lives, Millennials have been encouraged to have, and continue to maintain, similarly close relationships with parents, teachers, mentors, and advisors. As a result, they are much more likely than Gen X to want their supervisors to take an interest in them. (2010, 220)
Mentoring and support

Another aspect of collaborative cultures relates to the pragmatics of nurturing productive working relationships between organisational members. To this end, Hewlett, Sherbin, and Sumberg (2009) found that GenYs prefer working with and are more likely to turn to Boomers, over GenXers, for mentoring and support. This is possibly the result of GenY perceptions of Boomers as more powerful and authoritative.

Individualism and autonomy

Boomers display more respect for authority (Gursoy, Maier, and Chi 2008) and are ‘most comfortable working within a chain of command and have respect for authority’ (Miller and Yu 2003, 13). Alternatively, Xers and Ys are consistently identified as more individualistic than Boomers (Twenge, Campbell, and Freeman 2012). GenXers prefer working independently (Jurkiewicz 2000) and tend to focus more on their individual goals and ambitions (Miller and Yu 2003). GenXers are also more independent, self-reliant and competitive than Boomers (Siris, Karp, and Botherton 2007). However, Gursoy, Chi, and Karadag (2013) identified that Ys display more ‘outside the box’ behaviours and challenge traditional norms around superiority more than their Boomer and GenX colleagues.

Leadership action 3: enabling positive work conditions

Discussion of school-based work conditions requires careful consideration of the influence, or lack thereof, that school leaders are able to exert on school-level conditions due to national, state/province and local level jurisdictional variations. However, leaders can influence a number of school-level work conditions to nurture and support teachers and other adults working in schools to improve teaching and learning. To frame the empirical GAW evidence and align it to discussions of supportive school-based work conditions, the generational patterns related to working conditions are presented in five categories: workplace structures and conditions, centrality of work, work hours and work/life balance, salary and status, and job satisfaction and job security. The final three categories are often described in the generational literature as extrinsic conditions that satisfy workplace motivation (Lyons, Duxbury, and Higgins 2005) and are most often linked to human resource-related functions. While being highly esteemed and recognised by others (Lyons, Duxbury, and Higgins 2005) is also recognised within the generational literature, as the discussions of perceptions of teaching as a prestige profession are contextually different, prestige will not be addressed within this paper.

Workplace structures and conditions

GenXers place more importance on working conditions than their Boomer colleagues (Hansen and Leuty 2011). Hershatter and Epstein (2010) suggest that GenY members prefer a more structured working environment, with clear rules and regulations, than GenXers. Increasingly, technology plays a role in workplace conditions and structures, and generational attitudes of and aptitudes for technology are not surprising. Technological competence and interest primarily relates to the age at which generational members have become engaged with technology on a regular basis (Deal 2007). Unsurprisingly,
Boomers express lower comfort levels with technology than Xers and Ys (Gursoy, Chi, and Karadag 2013). Historically, Boomers prefer phone to Internet/email communication (Rodriguez, Green, and Ree 2003). Similarly, GenXers appreciate technologically driven recruitment and training more than Boomers, who prefer face-to-face interaction (Jurkiewicz and Brown 1998). Hershatter and Epstein (2010) cite technology as the most striking difference between Ys and previous generations, describing it as their ‘sixth sense’.

**Centrality of work**
In 2005, the Families and Work Institute reported that work played a less central role in each successive generation’s lives, even though individuals in each sequential cohort work longer. As the desire for more leisure time increases with each generation, the central importance of work declines from the older to younger generations (Smola and Sutton 2002; Twenge, Campbell, and Freeman 2012). Accordingly, younger generations place greater importance on work/life balance. Gursoy, Chi, and Karadag (2013, 46) state:

> Millennials are likely to be the ones with the least attachment to their work. While Baby Boomers’ life rotates around work, for both Millennials and Generation X, work is something to be done for sheer survival; life outside of work is far more important than anything at work. Friends and family have a tremendous influence on these associates and work will likely never be the first priority in their lives.

**Work hours and work/life balance**
Workers across each generation are spending longer at work than previously, with GenXers working more hours in 2002 than Boomers did at the same age in 1977 (Families and Work Institute 2005). While GenXers and Boomers are equally as likely to work long hours, GenXers are far more anxious about work/life conflict. This is potentially related to life cycle issues: older workers have already raised their families. Each successive generation from Boomers to Ys places more value on enjoyment and happiness at work (Deal 2007). Concurrently, GenXers and GenYs place less importance on work and a higher value on leisure time than Boomers (Twenge et al. 2010). GenXers and GenYs show less interest in working overtime than Boomers (Busch, Venkitachalam, and Richards 2008).

**Salary and status**
Younger generations place more value on status and salary (Cennamo and Gardner 2008; Twenge et al. 2010). This is possibly explained by economic drivers including the increasing costs of higher education. Twenge et al. (2010, 1134) explain the possible growth of dual-income families and longer work hours in relation to ‘increased desire for extrinsic rewards and more leisure time could be in part a reflection of the increased financial demands and the decrease in leisure time’. This could also be related to Boomers’ achievement of these things while younger generations are still striving (Cennamo and Gardner 2008).
Job satisfaction and job security

Benson and Brown (2011) found that Boomers have significantly higher levels of job satisfaction and a significantly lower propensity to quit than their GenX counterparts. Similarly, GenXers are more likely to quit their jobs due to a lack of job satisfaction than Boomers (Jorgensen 2003). Kowske, Rasch, and Wiley (2010) identified that Ys report higher levels of company and job satisfaction related to career development and advancement than both Boomers and Xers. Perhaps not surprisingly given their career stage, GenXers attach more importance to job security than Boomers (Hansen and Leuty 2011).

Implications for leaders: potential lessons from the emerging GAW evidence

This paper set out to present a preliminary review of the current and historical empirical evidence related to how generations experience and shape their working lives. Based on this evidence, successive generational cohorts demonstrate distinctly different attitudes towards work, career progression and reward expectations. Coupled with generational decreases in organisation-level commitment and loyalty, the evidence points to several interesting implications for leaders seeking to fine-tune their efforts to influence individual and school-level conditions and initiatives. The possibility for generationally specific approaches to stimulating individual development, retention and career planning may be very helpful for leaders of multigenerational schools. By extrapolation, there may be implications for district and policy leaders as well.

These conclusions are by no means an attempt to create an in-depth and overall summative recommendation based on the GAW evidence. As the primary goal of the paper was to review and present the overall state of play of the empirical GAW evidence, a complete and exhaustive set of summative recommendations for leaders is beyond the scope of this paper. As such, the paper provides some reflections on considerations for leaders related to stimulating growth and professional capacity, building collaborative cultures and establishing work conditions. To streamline the evidence and acknowledge the overlapping nature of some of the categories herein, this section highlights three implications for leaders when (1) building collaborative cultures and (2) developing work conditions that support growth and professional capacity building. Within each subsection below, one of the emerging generational themes is highlighted in conjunction with any potential challenges linked to simultaneously leading members of different generational cohorts. Finally, a potential generationally focused solution is posited.

Generational implications for building collaborative cultures

Within the empirical GAW evidence, the following themes demonstrated different generational approaches to trust and relationships, social interaction, mentoring and support, and individualism and autonomy. To capture how leaders may consider and strategise generational differences in how teachers and leaders from different generations approach collaboration and relationship building, this section considers generational differences in relation to trust and suggests a potential strategy. As indicated by Day et al. (2009, 4), ‘leadership trust and trustworthiness are prerequisites for the progressive and effective distribution of leadership. Trust and improvement develop in a reciprocal way over time and are reinforced by evidence of improvement’. 
Within the GAW, trust emerged as a central difference between how members of different generations approach relationships at work. Recent research has highlighted the role of trust in supporting school-based relationships and improvement, educational change and reform (Moolenaar, Daly, and Sleegers 2010; Spillane and Thompson 1998), learning (Bryk and Schneider 2002; Tschanne-Moran 2009), student achievement improvements (Goddard, Salloum, and Berebtsky 2009) and distributed leadership (Day et al. 2009).

While trust is obviously important in the context of school improvement, GAW evidence identifies that younger generations demonstrate less trust towards their colleagues and organisations. This finding, combined with the evidence suggesting that younger generations are less reliant on work-based relationships but are committed to collaborative and social working environments (Twenge et al. 2010), creates an interesting challenge for leaders who need to recognise how members of different generations trust and collaborate with colleagues.

Therefore, building on the GAW evidence, leaders may be well served to consider how to recognise and create opportunities to nurture trust within and between the different generations. For example, Ys are more interested in working with Boomers than GenXers. GenerationX are also quite self-reliant. By finding ways to engage Xers by building on their self-reliance for the good of the team and sharing their knowledge, leaders may serve to bridge the identified generational trust gap. To this end, Lyons, Duxbury, and Higgins (2005) suggest that organisations mindful of recruiting and retaining younger employees need to focus on the organisations’ social and enjoyable components.

**Generational implications for establishing work conditions supporting growth and professional capacity**

Throughout the GAW review, differences in generational patterns emerged associated with workplace structures, the centrality of work, working hours, work/life balance, salary and status, and job satisfaction and security. Similarly, when examining the potential GAW evidence connected to professional capacity-building, trends relate to the overlapping issues of career planning, loyalty and motivation. This section highlights the potential leadership actions relevant to generational differences that relate to loyalty, recruitment and retention, and generational differences in approaches to salary and status.

As many educational jurisdictions have strict teacher/leader salary and seniority progression routes, leaders may have little flexibility with which to address some of the key evidence emerging from the GAW evidence. For example, the desire and expectation of younger generations for rapid progression and recognition, combined with lower levels of loyalty, may prove challenging for the rather restrictive settings of most state-funded schools. This is often combined with an acknowledgement of the implications of insufficient organisational loyalty which is often compounded in urban jurisdictions due to higher staff turnover and often younger staff profiles.

Building on the GAW evidence, leaders may be able to create alternative strategies for recognising and publically valuing contributions which may, in fact, be helpful in recruiting and retaining younger generations of teachers and leaders. For example, leaders may be well served to emphasise ‘intellectual simulation and learning opportunities in their work’ and to focus on how best to explicitly ‘engage their minds and their creative capabilities’ of the younger generations (Lyons, Duxbury, and Higgins 2005, 69).
Another potential strategy for engaging the younger generations may be to include ‘attaching symbols of status and prestige to their positions, such as official titles, travel’ (68).

Implications for research: building on the GAW evidence within educational contexts

Several potential strands of research may serve to develop theory and practice related to generational differences in how teachers and leaders approach their work. The end goal of this knowledge base would be to inform school, district and policy leader practice when working with current and future cadres of teachers and leaders to improve teaching and learning in schools internationally. For example, exploring how members of different generational cohorts respond to different school-level leadership styles and models of distribution of leadership may prove interesting and helpful in addressing particular generational workplace concerns and aspirations. More substantially, the following additional recommendations for future study are designed to extend generational and school improvement and leadership-focused educational research by focusing on opportunities to examine the implications of generations and life stages, generations and professional/personal identity, and generations and educational eras.

Generations and life stages

While there is growing evidence that attitudes towards work have remained stable across career stages (Hewlett, Sherbin, and Sumberg 2009), a recurring critique of the generational research is the need to systematically disaggregate differences in generational attitudes by life stages (Deal 2007; Jurkiewicz 2000). For example, differences in how individuals approach work can often be attributed to where they are in their lives and career stages (Macky, Gardner, and Forsyth 2008). Ensuring that future generationally focused research considers both life career stage and generational attributes would provide a positive step in this direction.

Generation and professional/personal identity

As highlighted earlier, almost all of the generational research studies have been conducted in one country. There has also been little, if any, attention to the differences within generational cohorts attributed to differences in individual background by characteristics including gender, ethnicity, language, nationality, socio-economic status (class), educational experience, sexuality and ability. Thus, future research considering these elements would make a contribution both across the overall generational research and within the educational community.

Generational and educational era

Even within the current and limited discussions of generational differences and similarities within educational workplaces, there is little focus on the influence of the educational era in which each cohort of teachers and leaders has ‘grown up’. Here, ‘educational era’ refers to the local, national and international educational context within which teachers and leaders have trained and developed as professionals. Future research
exploring the generational differences and similarities as well as the influence of each generation’s educational era will make a considerable contribution to understanding how to make the most of the different viewpoints and experiences within current and future cohorts of teachers and leaders. As noted earlier, some believe that there are active and passive generations.

Final thoughts
Based on this preliminary review, the empirical evidence from beyond education suggests intergenerational differences presently at work in modern organisations. The evidence has implications for how teachers and leaders may be experiencing and shaping their work and careers. In turn, it may inform leaders and scholars interested in mobilising teacher and leader resources and commitment to improve schools and student learning. Finally, there may also be benefits to leaders in understanding and harnessing this evidence to employ an even greater range of strategies to support individual and collective actions to develop student and school-wide improvement.

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