HOW DOES GENERATIONAL DIVERSITY CONTRIBUTE TO THE ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMIC?
AN EMPIRICAL VIEW

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Abstract
Continuity and change are at the core of intergenerational diversity. By linking the literature on generations with the concept of dynamic capabilities, the aim of this paper is to offer a better understanding of how intergenerational relationship contribute to the organizational dynamic. The literature on generations leads to a multi-dimensional and multi-level conceptual framework of generational diversity in the workplace, and dynamic capabilities approach links intergenerational relationship and organizational issues. A qualitative case study of a French national state-owned railway company validates, illustrates our framework and offers a deep understanding of the process of intergenerational transfer, its generational antecedents and its organizational results.

Key words:
Generation, Intergenerational, Diversity, Dynamic capabilities, Intergenerational transfer
INTRODUCTION

Generational diversity in the workplace has gained increasing attention in management for a decade. The attraction and retention of employees of all age, as well as the continued development of their skill are crucial topics in the context of war for talent and population aging (De Long 2004). Particularly, the arrival of the so-called Millenial generation in the workforce has raised many questions about their integration in the workplace (Kowske, Rasch et al. 2010; Twenge and Campbell 2012), while the on-going retirement of the Baby-boomer generation causes the needs for intergenerational knowledge transfer (Ashworth 2006; Calo 2007; 2008; Harvey 2012).

Generation can be defined as a group of people localized in a particular chronological order within a social system (Wade-Benzoni 2003; Joshi, Dencker et al. 2010; 2011). It is a social category characterized by its temporal dimension, each generation succeeding to another (Joshi, Dencker et al. 2010; 2011). Generational identity is based on the stamps left by the time, called generational imprints (Attias-Donfut 1988; Wade-Benzoni 2003; Joshi, Dencker et al. 2010; 2011). The generational imprints take the form of representations, attitudes and behaviours (e.g. (Cennamo and Gardner 2008; Kumar and Giri 2009; Booth, Budd et al. 2010; Benson and Brown 2011; James, McKechnie et al. 2011), or manifest themselves through a set of knowledge and competences (Tempest 2003; Huyez-Levrat 2007; McMullin, Duerden Comeau et al. 2007; Ebrahimi, Saives et al. 2008). While most of the literature dealing with generational issues at the workplace refers to the concepts of age or cohort at the society level, some authors propose a refined definition of generation adapted to the workplace (Joshi & al., 2010, 2011; Sturman, 2003; Wade-Benzoni, 2002, 2003, 2010). These imprints can thus be seen at different levels: societal, organizational and occupational levels.

These imprints are passed on another generation, through the process of intergenerational transfer (Joshi, Dencker et al. 2010; 2011). Two types of intergenerational transfer are identified in the literature: the descendant transfer from the older generation to the new generation, and the ascendant transfer from the new generation to the older generation. On the one hand, the descendant transfer is wildly recognized in the literature, as a mean to ensure the organizational continuity (e.g. Abattu and Lamotte 2005; Ashworth 2006; Kapp 2007; Ebrahimi, Saives et al. 2008; Ball and Gotsill 2010; Stevens 2010; Harvey 2012). On the other hand, much less attention has been paid to the ascendant transfer from the new to the
older, (see, for notable exception, Tempest 2003; Abattu and Lamotte 2005), while it contributes to the organizational learning and renewal (ibid.).

In the literature of strategic management, the concept of dynamic capabilities (Teece, Pisano et al. 1997; Eisenhardt and Martin 2000; Winter 2003; Helfat, Finkelstein et al. 2007; Teece 2007; Wang and Ahmed 2007) refers to the ability of the organization to purposefully transform its resource-base in order to adapt to or shape its environment. The transformation of the resource-base operates through three functions: the integration of new resources (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2000; Teece & al., 1997; Wang & Ahmed, 2007; Zahra and George, 2002), the exploitation of existing resources (Ambrosini, 2009; Zahra, 2002), and their adaptation (Bowman and Ambrosini, 2003; Wang and Ahmed, 2007; Zahra and George(2002). However, little is known about how concretely these process function in practice, at a micro level (eg. Salvato 2003; Felin and Hesterly 2007; Foss 2007; Regnér 2008; Foss, Husted et al. 2011).

Based on the literature on dynamic capabilities and on generations in an organizational context, the aim of this paper is to understand how generational diversity in the workplace participates to the dynamics of organizational continuity and change. More precisely, we investigate to what extend the intergenerational differences in the workplace lead to particular type of intergenerational relationships, which, in turn, influence the intergenerational transfer.

Building upon and integrating recent theoretical developments on generation in the workplace (Wade-Benzoni 2002; Sturman 2003; Joshi, Dencker et al. 2010; Joshi, Dencker et al. 2011), we propose a conceptual framework of generational diversity. This framework distinguishes six facets of generational diversity, at the crossroads of two generational dimensions – age and cohort – and three level of analysis – society, organization and occupation -. 

Referring to literature on dynamic capabilities (Teece, Pisano et al. 1997; Eisenhardt and Martin 2000; Helfat, Finkelstein et al. 2007; Teece 2007; Ambrosini and Bowman 2009), we propose a theoretical articulation of the intergenerational transfer issues with the dynamic capabilities’ process of integration, exploitation and adaptation of resources within organization (Zahra and George 2002; Zollo and Winter 2002; Wang and Ahmed 2007; Easterby-Smith and Prieto 2008): the ascendant transfer is linked to the integration of new resources, and the descendant transfer to the exploitation of existing resource, while any mixture of the two can leads to the adaptation of existing resource.
Then, we draw on a qualitative case study of a big French public railway company undergoing the opening of market to competition: the SNCF. The case of SNCF was chosen as an extreme case study of an evolving context, in order to highlight intergenerational issues related to continuity and change. Data was collected from forty-two semi-structured interviews, during 2012 and 2013, and analyzed from an interpretative viewpoint.

The results show that differences in generational imprints of different social groups - which form different generations – may be viewed as competitive or complementary each other. These differences are reflected in the intergenerational relationships. When individuals feel complementary each other they tend to cooperate, and conversely, when they feel in competition each other, they are more likely to enter into conflict with one another. While cooperative intergenerational relationships lead to enriching descendant/ascendant transfer or status-quo, conflicting intergenerational relationships generate a balance of power among generations. The result of this balance of power may be enriching ascendant transfer, contaminant descendant transfer or status-quo between generations. While ascendant transfer lead to organizational continuity, descendant transfer lead to organizational change. Finally, the organizational change and the organizational continuity may be desirable or undesirable by the top management depending on how they qualify the intergenerational transfer: enriching or contaminant.

Our paper contributes to the existing literature in various ways. First, we propose an integrative definition of generation in the workplace, by integrating the age and cohort dimension in coherent manner, while also taking into account three different levels of analysis. Moreover, our findings confirm the relevance of these different generational facets in the workplace. Second, our paper contributes to the literature on generations by explaining how the complementarities and competition between generational imprints can lead to cooperative and conflicting intergenerational relationships. Third, to characterize the influence of one generation to another, we have developed the concept of descendant (from the old to the new) and ascendant transfer (from the new to the old) and illustrated the related managerial issues. Fourth, by linking intergenerational transfer to the concept of dynamic capabilities, this paper provides the dynamic of generation with an organizational and managerial perspective. Especially, we have introduced the distinction between the enriching and contaminant transfer, in regard with organizational strategy. In this way, we also respond to the call for more micro analysis in the analysis of Dynamic Capabilities (eg. Salvato 2003; Felin and Hesterly 2007; Foss 2007; Regnér 2008; Foss, Husted et al. 2011).
The paper is organized into four sections. The first section presents our conceptual framework about generational diversity in the workplace, and their relationships to dynamic capabilities. The second section describes our methodology constructed on a case study approach. The third section exposes our main findings, while the fourth one discusses the results by exposing their implications for research and practice, and summarizes the limitation and directions for future researches.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Six facets of generational diversity in the workplace

A generation is a group of anonymous people characterised by a unique temporal localization (Attias-Donfut 1988; Mannheim 2011). Generational members are aware of living this temporal localization which differentiates them from their predecessors, and other generations also recognize their particularity. It is a social category like gender or ethnicity, whose specificity resides in its temporal dimension (Joshi, Dencker et al. 2010; 2011).

Generation does not form necessarily a homogeneous group; neither does it involve interactions between members (Mannheim 2011). Members of a generation form a system rather than a community: they are all influenced by period characteristics in which they locate whereas their reactions may differ. These temporal stamps left on generations are called generational imprints and make up the particularity and the identity of each generation (Attias-Donfut 1988; Wade-Benzoni 2003; Joshi, Dencker et al. 2010; 2011). Generational identity is twofold: members of a generation are conscious of their own temporality, which differentiates them from other generations, while other generations also recognize their temporal specificity. More precisely, two kinds of generational imprints appear in the literature: those consisting in particular cognitive representations with their related attitudes and behaviours (e.g. (Cennamo and Gardner 2008; Kumar and Giri 2009; Booth, Budd et al. 2010; Benson and Brown 2011; James, McKechnie et al. 2011), and those which manifest themselves in terms of specific nature or variety of knowledge and competences (Tempest 2003; Huyez-Levrat 2007; McMullin, Duerden Comeau et al. 2007; Ebrahimi, Saives et al. 2008).

The concept of generation has evolved through time, acquiring different meanings by circulating between disciplines (Menger 2009: 17). This semiotic diversity of the concept of generation blurs the literature on generational diversity in the workplace, and makes difficult
the advancement in this research area (Joshi, Dencker et al. 2010; 2011; Parry and Urwin 2011; Djabi and Shimada 2012). More importantly, the dominant age and cohort approach of the generation at the societal level of analysis ignores the existence of different temporalities and their temporal imprints left on groups of individuals (Djabi and Shimada 2012). While it is still quite rare, some authors propose a refined conceptualization of generational diversity at work. (Wade-Benzoni 2002; Sturman 2003; Wade-Benzoni 2003; Joshi, Dencker et al. 2010; Joshi, Dencker et al. 2011).

Sturman (2003) differentiates job experience and organizational tenure from the chronological age of employees. According to the author, these variables often serve as proxies for job knowledge, organizational socialization, and physical skills, while they refer to different phenomena. *Job experience* allows the accumulation of the job-specific knowledge through action, practice and perception of task and duties associated. *Organizational tenure* entails an accumulation of work related information that is conceptually distinct from job experience. Through organizational experience, employees familiar with the organizational culture and norms, learn how to behave within it and gain recognition and legitimacy from other employees. For example, employees with long experience in the organization should be more knowledgeable about what procedures to follow, who to contact for help, where resources are located, and so on, than employees with little seniority. Through a meta-analysis of the literature, the author confirms the influence of job experience, organizational experience and age on employee’s performance. He also shows that these relationships are moderated by organization and job characteristics, and do not follow the inverted U-shaped form evolution over time. According to the author, the trend toward increased participation of the older workforce and the more frequent employee movement in organization and careers will diversify the age range, job experience and organizational tenure.

Wade-Benzoni (2002; 2003), Wade Benzoni & al. (Wade-Benzoni, Sondak et al. 2010) and Joshi & al. (2010; 2011) consider that individuals who occupy a unique localization in an organizational chronology constitute an organizational generation. Each organizational generation carries with it a particular organizational time which imprints in the form of attitudes, skills, knowledge and values that it can transmit to the preceding generation.

Joshi and al. (2011) propose to distinguish among three types of “organizational generation”. The first type refers to cohort entering the organization during the same time period. Members of this cohort bring the time stamps related to the particular characteristics of the environmental conditions, or that of organizational socialization and trainee they have
experienced at the moment. The second type is about generations based on successive passage through organizational roles. It refers to the individuals occupying a job/role for a finite amount of time, and thus who develop and get influenced by a set of knowledge and skills related to this job. Finally, the third type is about generation based on a discrete organizational event. This refers to significant events which create ‘before and after’ generations, for example, after a period of economic uncertainty, the experience of firm merger or dissolution.

These authors’ works are innovative in that they adapt and refine the concept of generation in order to make it more relevant to workplace issues. More precisely, three levels of generation analysis can be deduced from their works: the societal level, the organizational level, and the occupational level. We thus propose a matrix of the concept of generation in organization, made up of the two dimensions of age category and cohort, and the three levels of analysis identified in the literature on organization.

Regarding the generational dimensions, we consider that the age dimension gathers together a group of individuals having similar years of experience in a given context, while the cohort dimension refers to a group of individuals who have entered a context around the same period, and thus who have lived through similar events around the same age. The first one is about the length and the quantitative accumulation of experience at the individual level, while the second is about differences in the qualitative nature of experience, because of the evolution of the collective context.

The three levels of analysis reflect different contexts or realms in which the age and cohort dimensions can be identified and analysed: the society, the organization, and the occupation. These domains which used to be synchronized within a single and normalized life cycle are now desynchronized, because of the individualization and the diversification of life trajectory and the occupational mobility (Raoult, Delay et al. 2006).

Six facets of generations appear through this matrix, at the crossroads of the two dimensions and three levels of analysis. Then, we obtain three age effects and three cohort effects, each referring to the three levels of analysis (see Table 1).

Insert Table 1 here
It is important to note that the aim of this framework is neither to separate nor to compartmentalize different generational imprints, but rather to shed light on the complexity of generational diversity in the workplace while helping to identify the most prominent generational issues at stake. The idea we put forward with this framework is that generational diversity in the workplace is shaped by the overlapping and interactions of multiple temporalities. In particular, the originality of this framework resides in the full importance given to the role of organization and occupation in producing generations. Generational diversity is unique to each workplace, and an individual can belong to different generational facets at the same time. Accordingly, the aim of this framework is to draw attention to different temporal dynamics in the workplace that involve issues relating to organizational continuity and change.

The intergenerational dynamic in the workplace

As we know, the generational diversity rarely has an unambiguous effect but is a “double-edged sword” (Kunze, Boehm et al. 2011). The literature has shown that intergenerational relationships in the workplace can be cooperative and contentious (Perry, Kulik et al. 1999; Le Roux 2006; Flamant 2007; McGuire, By et al. 2007; Deyoe and Fox 2011; Cogin 2012).

Through the socialization process of newcomers, the elder transfer their knowledge, practice, values and norms, allowing in this way the continuity of the social system (Wade-Benzoni 2002; Down and Reveley 2004; Wade-Benzoni, Sondak et al. 2010; Joshi, Dencker et al. 2011). In particular, the massive retirement of experienced employees make the intergenerational transmission of knowledge a major concern (De Long 2004; Calo 2007; 2008), as the recent increase of studies on intergenerational transmission confirms (e.g. Abattu and Lamotte 2005; Ashworth 2006; Kapp 2007; Ebrahimi, Saives et al. 2008; Ball and Gotsill 2010; Stevens 2010; Harvey 2012). The integration of newcomers allows the development of their skills, while contributing to their better integration and thus, retention (McGuire, By et al. 2007; Harvey 2012). When the transfer is interrupted, whether intentionally or not, the social system faces change (Hokanson, Sosa-Fey et al. 2010).

According to some authors (e.g. Tempest 2003; Abattu and Lamotte 2005), the potential of intergenerational transmission is not limited to the descendent transmission from the incumbent to the newcomer, but can also consists in the ascendant transmission from the latter to the first. Abattu and Lamotte (2005) highlight the reciprocity in intergenerational transfer: the older bring their experience and the young, the new technology. In the opinion of
these authors, it is important for the company to identify where the key knowledge resides, in order to reflect on knowledge sharing in intergenerational cooperation. Tempest (2003) shows how less experienced employees can contribute to organizational learning by stimulating former hidden knowledge, or by bringing new insight to the organization. His work highlights the crucial role of reciprocal intergenerational learning in organizational learning (Tempest, 2003).

In the dynamic capabilities approach (Teece, Pisano et al. 1997; Eisenhardt and Martin 2000; Winter 2003; Helfat, Finkelstein et al. 2007; Teece 2007; Wang and Ahmed 2007), generational relationships can thus be viewed as the key point, which in a micro level, contributes to adapt, modify and restructure organizational resource base of an organization to adapt to and shape the environment.

The resource base transformed by the dynamic capabilities are broadly defined, including all kinds of tangible, intangible and human assets (Helfat, Finkelstein et al. 2007). In our understanding of generations, generational imprints shape this resource base over time. Given that the notion of dynamic capabilities refer to the ability of the organization to purposefully transform its resource base (Helfat, Finkelstein et al. 2007; Teece 2007), intergenerational transfers contribute to the dynamic capabilities only if they are desired. The capacity to manage intergenerational relationships contributes to the ability of a firm in developing dynamic capabilities.

Several functions of dynamic capabilities acting on the resource base are identified in the literature: the exploitation of existing resources (Zahra and George 2002; Bowman and Ambrosini 2003), the integration\(^1\) of new resources (Teece, Pisano et al. 1997; Eisenhardt and Martin 2000; Zahra and George 2002; Wang and Ahmed 2007) and the adaptation\(^2\) of existing resources (Zahra and George 2002; Bowman and Ambrosini 2003; Wang and Ahmed 2007).

To understand how the organization evolves through the exploitation, integration and adaptation of its resource base, we propose to link these dynamic capabilities’ functions with the process of intergenerational transfer in the workplace. The descendant transmission from the older generation to the new can be linked to the leveraging and exploitation of existing resources, whilst the ascendant transmission from the new generation to the older generation.

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1 Integration refers to “integration” (Eisenhardt and Martin, 2002); “coordination/integration” (Teece & al., 1997); “absorptive capacity” (Wang & Ahmed, 2007); and “acquisition and assimilation” (Zahra and George, 2002).

2 Adaptation refers to “transformation” (Zahra and George, 2002); “reconfiguration” (Bowman and Ambrosini, 2003); and “adaptive capacity” (Wang and Ahmed, 2007).
can be connected to the integration of new resources. Any rupture or change in the competencies (view in its broad definition) of older generations is likely to lead to an adaptation of the existing resources. Finally, only desired transfers contribute to the development of dynamic capabilities.

In sum, intergenerational differences - in terms of representation, attitudes, and behaviour or in terms of knowledge and competencies - can lead to cooperative or conflicting relationship among generations, and thus, influence the effective transfer among generations. This transfer can be descendant (from the older to the new) or ascendant (from the new to the older). The descending transfer leads to the leveraging and exploitation of existing resources, whilst the ascendant transfer supports the integration of new resources. The adaptation of the existing resources refers to any change in older generations competencies. In order to contribute to dynamic capabilities, the intergenerational transfer should be in accordance with the organizational strategy.

2. Methodology

A case study

We draw on a qualitative case study to illustrate different types of generations and their intergenerational issues defined in the previous section. The case study design is adapted to gain a deep understanding of generational diversity in an organization, by taking into account the contextual history and the problems at issue (Eisenhardt 1989; Yin 1989).

More specifically, we chose to analyse the case of SNCF (Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer) - the French national state-owned railway company – as an “extreme case” study. Indeed, SNCF (Société Nationale des Chemins de fer) is a French national state-owned railway company, which has undergone several changes over the past few years.

At a macro level, the European market liberalization in the last few decades has led Railways around the world to different styles of reform at different speeds. Freight activities were opened to international competition in 2006 and international passenger transport activities in 2010 to all European countries. France is currently studying the issue of opening up competition for the activity of passengers at the national level.

To adapt itself to the new environmental conditions, the SNCF has engaged in a deep modernization process of organizational reforms, which are characterized by their size,
diversity and acceleration over time. To take a general overview of these reforms it is best to outline the major strategic, structural and technological changes.

From a strategic point of view, the top management promotes a customer-oriented management transforming the organizational culture and identity.

The organizational structure adapted to the new environment by setting up the separation between track operations and that of train, with the creation in 1997 of a track entity called RFF (Réseau Ferré de France). RFF became the owner and manager of the railway infrastructure while the SNCF became a Railway Company and continues to maintain the system and traffic management for RFF. In the 2000s, the SNCF accounting was separated into different divisions. Currently, SNCF consists of five divisions: “SNCF Infra” is the infrastructure division of the SNCF which carries out track and other infrastructure maintenance, design and construction. The “Department of Railway Circulation” (DCF) has been responsible for traffic and circulation management on behalf of Réseau Ferré de France, since 2010. This independent entity, which forms part of SNCF, guarantees fair and completely transparent access to the network for all railway companies. SNCF Proximités is responsible for urban, commuter and regional passenger transport. SNCF Voyages is responsible for long distance and high-speed passenger services. SNCF Geodis is the rail and general freight logistics section of the SNCF. Gares & Connexions was created in April 2009 for station management, land management, and land development.

Finally, the SNCF is also at the heart of major technological changes with the creation of large computerized control units. All these strategic, structural and technological changes create cohorts at organizational and occupational levels.

In addition, the organizational context of SNCF exacerbates generational phenomena: the strong railroader identity puts forward identity categorization mechanisms, which can generate intergenerational tensions. Restructuring patterns generate a de-synchronization of different levels of generation. For example, a lot of older employees have been reclassified and have to learn a new job. Lifetime employment causes different generations to meet in the organization and have no other option than to cooperate together. Finally, the demographic structure of the SNCF also suggests a generational polarity due to a hiring freeze in the 1990s.

Data collection
Data was collected in 2012, relying mainly on forty-two interviews conducted with employees from various units. This diverse selection of employees was obtained in order to provide a better reliability of collected data.

Four Human Resource managers from different units were interviewed: proximités, voyages, matériel, infra (matériel is a transversal domain in charge of the maintenance of trains). They gave us a deep understanding of strategic, structural and technological evolution of their unit. For each unit several teams of three members were selected. Each team comprises an intermediate manager (DPX) and two operators: a long-term or an older operator, and a junior or younger operator. We have chosen to interview an intermediate manager and two of his agents to improve our data findings with this triangulation. All agents have undergone the same initial training (filière transports mouvement). Those from the unit “infra” are switchtenders, others do switching operations or give trains departure in stations.

Data collection relied mainly on semi-structured interviews, completed by several internal documents and archives, which allowed us to understand the general background of these organizations. Interviews lasting 60-90 minutes in average were electronically recorded and fully transcribed.

**Coding method**

The interview data were analysed thematically with the qualitative analysis software NVivo 9, referring to the nine facets of generation resulting from our conceptual framework.

First, each sentence referring to a strong difference among groups of employees was selected. Then, in an interpretative perspective, we questioned to what extend this difference was related by the employee to a) a generational dimension(s) (age/cohort) and b) a generational level (societal/organization/occupation). This first step led to the identification of generational facets in the organization. This encoding is not based on the vocabulary employed by individuals, but rather on the characterization of the generational dimension and level of analysis that we identified as being more or less evocated. To ensure this classification, we examined how individuals explain their differences. When an individual referred to the accumulation of experience, we classified the verbatim in age dimension. When he/she mentioned the nature of this difference, we classified it in cohort dimension. We also look at which level of generation this difference was related. As a reminder, the purpose of this classification was not to isolate the interrelated generation effects, but rather to shed light on the generational dimension and level of analysis that one can use so as to identify the most
salient generational issue at stake. When people did not provide an explicit cause to the difference, we did not retain the verbatim. We only retained differences that were recalled by at least two persons.

After distinguishing generational facets, we identified c) generational issues mentioned by interviewees relating to the unique character of each generation – representation, attitudes and behaviours or dotation - and d) intergenerational issues relating to intergenerational relationships: ascendant/descendant transfer, cooperation/conflict. Finally, we identified how the top and the middle management these intergenerational relationships considered these intergenerational relationships: it was e) desired or undesired.

3. Main results

The analysis of generational diversity in SNCF confirms the different facets of generations in the work place; their generational imprints and their intergenerational issues. While generational imprints refer to three different levels - societal, organizational and occupational level - they occur in three domains: organization, work and work-group domains. We will now present each of the generational facets according to these three different levels, and these three domains.

3.1. Generational imprints and related intergenerational issues with the age dimension

Age dimension at the societal level: the chronological age of individuals

Age dimension at the societal level refers to the chronological age of individuals, from their birth up to now. The demographic structure in SNCF context is characterized by a polarization of age groups around a group of young employees (less than 40 years older) and another group of older individuals (more than 40 years older). This results in a significant generational gap as pointed out by Human Resource managers of the company.

The generational differences at the societal level appear in all of the domains of work, organization and group.

Younger and older employees describe themselves as having differences of attitude and behaviour at work: younger employees are considered by both generations to be more dynamic than older employees. Results also show different representations of work and the organization. Younger employees especially, are said to bring in new and fresh insight with regard to the representation of the work and the organization. In any case, these differences do
not have any negative influences on intergenerational relationships. Rather, these generational imprints appear to complement one another. Young employees’ dynamism and fresh insight are transferred to older employees and thus stimulating them.

“*There is no intergenerational conflict between employees. The young bring their energy with them, they stimulate the older ones, and it boosts them*”.

“*It is interesting to work with young people, if only because of the human standpoint. It brings another vision, to know what a twenty years older guy thinks, compared to me, forty-years older, whether it be about the company or about anything else*”.

Finally, referring to interpersonal attitude within the work group, younger employees declare to have more informal relationships than the older generation. However, younger employees remain respectful when talking to older employees. Even if generations are described as being different in terms of interpersonal attitudes, this does not compromise the cooperation between these two age categories.

“*There is more respect when we talk to the older. We say hello (…)With the younger, we likes to have fun.*

**Age dimension at the organizational level: years of services in the organization**

The age dimension at the organizational level refers to years of service spent in the organization. Because of the culture of lifetime employment with relatively low turnover, many employees have more than twenty-years of service in SNCF. However, the distribution of age at the organizational level is also the consequence of the past inconsistent levels in recruitment. Because of the reorganization and staff reduction, the recruitment rate decreased during in nineties, and has however recently picked up again. As a result, the age dimension at the organizational level is polarized into two groups, with an important group of older-timer incumbents on the one hand, and a group of newcomers emerging with the new wave of recruitment.

Differences in years of service in the organization clearly refer to differences in terms of knowledge about the organization. The older generation is knowledgeable about the functioning of their organization and the various kinds of organizational procedures, whilst the newcomers have little knowledge about them.

*The older transmit his competencies about railway environment, and also his experience.*

*We teach them how to get along, how to negotiate the company, the functioning of the works council, the travel facilities, the medical service.*
This is not about how an organization works in general, but about the local knowledge of how we work in the organization, with its history and with its members. Thus, the intergenerational issue here is clearly that of a descendant transfer, from the incumbent to the newcomer. When a new recruit joins the organization, the manager or senior colleague will explain how the organization functions.

**Age dimension at the occupational level: years of experience in an occupation**

Age dimension at the occupational level corresponds to years of service in that occupation. Differences in generational imprints appear here in terms of knowledge and skills in the domain of work, which leads to both positive and negative intergenerational issues.

The positive aspect is regarding the cascading of knowledge from experienced veterans to apprentices. The expert teaches the novice the adequate gestures, the particularities of the job, the subtle difference between casual tasks and those, which should be occasionally accomplished, the norms, and the tricks for doing the job.

“We transfer the particularities of the job, if he doesn’t know the duties; the daily tasks, the functioning of the activity, and the tasks which are more occasional. When he arrived, I transferred him the little I know, the all I know. If he needs, we try to transfer all we can”.

“I think we try to give them (newcomers) soon the entire keys points to prevent them from getting into pain, with beads of sweat on their brows. You need all the key points, all the little tricks”.

This descendent knowledge transfer from the older expert to the newcomer benefits the newcomer, who values the expert’s knowledge, and which will ultimately enhance the overall quality of organizational output. In any event, these differences are not only a matter of degree of mastery, but also concern the knowledge domain: while the older generation possesses tacit knowledge resulting from work experience, the new generation can bring with them theoretical and explicit knowledge acquired through training or other experiences. These intergenerational complementarities create opportunity for reverse knowledge transfer.

“This recruit coming from other services bring their experience with them”.

“Younger are sometimes useful. They can contribute when they have worked before and have another experience, they can know for example how to take down an engine, have a background in electricity. We can ask them. Sometimes, it’s useful”.

While these complementary intergenerational relationships present rich opportunities for reciprocal knowledge transmission, the organization appears to hinder these opportunities in some cases. The problem resides in the lack and deficiency of resources provided by the
organization to allow the transmission to take place, or the inadequacy of the managerial tool made available.

“Nobody really take care of new recruits. We have no more instructor agent and it’s not good, there is no more transmission. It’s cruelly lacking in the work place”.

“I think it is quite good that he is getting trained by us. He should not be trained on the area of Bordeaux cause the condition are different, but he should learn here in his work place...”.

Although relatively rare, the older generation withholders information needed by the new one, because the rareness of the knowledge he possesses gives him relative advantage over others.

“There are some who don’t want to give their little secrets. It is the extra talent, the added value. I remember when I went to see the supervisor, telling him I was stuck and had no explanation for it, he did but he didn’t explain anything, saying he was too busy and that he will show me later. It is the same thing in the PCC. Regulators had to enter codes to say why a train was late and what its origin was. He had created the program but he was almost the only one who knew the program. He went to the hospital and he died. To make the program evolve, they had to seek out ... There’s a lot of that kind at the SNCF, and probably in other company. It’s the small value: “Go to see Mr. so-and-so. He knows.” When someone asks me, I show him how to do”.

“Me, I have never been trained. When I arrived in the company, my boss told me: « Me, I struggled at first. So you’ll struggled as well. Nobody trained me. I’ll not train you!”.

The non-transmission of knowledge from the older generation to the new one not only causes organizational troubles, but it also prevents the newcomer’s training and his/her social integration in the group.

“When I arrived, I was put in front of a computer and I had to handle things alone. The atmosphere was bad at the point that, three month later, I wanted to leave. […] When the leader remarked on the person who was supposed to show me, if he didn’t like it, he stud up and left. I really suffered from that experience, at the point that I arrived at vomit. I also took it upon myself. It was not viable. I was incapable of producing anything. […] For several days I remained stuck in front of my screen asking myself if it was good if I took a decision”.

The descendent transmission can also have negative influence, as the quotation below attests. The older can give the newcomer advice at a too early stage regarding his training progression.

“Older employees say « if you do this this way or this way, it will be better, you know”. But it is not always good. The young just arriving should first get used to theory applied to practice”.

Table 2 below presents generational imprints and their related intergenerational issues for the age dimension.
3.2. Generational imprints and related intergenerational issues with the cohort dimension

Cohort dimension at the societal level: nature of experience in the society

At a societal level, two kinds of cohort differences are highlighted.

The first concerns a difference of attitude and behaviour within the work group, vis a vis the work and the organization. Generation Xers considers the Millennium to be more individualistic and less supportive in their relationship with colleagues in the group. For example, the activity of maintenance, which consists in repairing coach, is organized into the day and the night shift. Members of older generation have developed very close relationships between them, and do not hesitate to help each other whenever demanded. When one of the team takes over the previous one, they find the trains prepared for them by the previous team. Conversely, the new cohort thinks less about the next shift, and even relegates work to another. They also miss the time when employees had lunch together. For older generations, new generations are not well integrated in the group because they isolate themselves by using their Smartphone at work all the time.

“We, older, we used to have some snacks together, we got on well together. The young ones just sit in their corner with their mobiles, their games. It’s not the same mentality”.

Boomers and Xers are also tired of seeing the attitude and behaviours of the Millennium at work which they judge irresponsible.

“Now we have less work. The young, when they hook in trains during eight hours, they are knackered. After a week, they are sick. When they don’t want to come, they call saying they are sick. When the alarm rings, they can’t move. They call at 8 am to say that they’re off, and there is nobody to replace them”.

"Youngsters, forget about it. Not all! I wouldn't say they act like they are at a Club Med, although pretty close. I like someone who gets busy. There are so many youngsters who just sit and wait, they get going at the last minute. I don't like it. [The youngsters coming in today aren't like you when you first started?] Not at all”.

Their differences also lie in their attitudes toward their employment relationship with the organization. While the Boomers and Xers consider their job and belonging to the organization as some kind of vocation and choice, the Millennium manifests a consumerist approach to their employment.
“Before, it was a vocation to join this company. The father or the grandfather, or the mother... Now, they join for job security, or because it’s uneventful. I think that’s what they think”.

“The Young are in logic of employment consumption. If it doesn’t fit them, they say goodbye. They will do something else or get back to studies”.

These differences can lead to intergenerational misunderstanding and conflicts. Thus, the intergenerational issue for managers is to ensure cooperation and cohesion among generations.

The second generational issue concerns the difference of knowledge and competencies among generations. Having grown up with new technologies, Millennium tends to be more at ease with new technologies than Gen Xers; this highlights the role of new generations in their process of adaptation to new technologies. Similarly, the Millennium feels useful and valued in this key role.

[Are you at ease with the new computer technology in general?] “The more I can do without it, the better it is. It may be about my generation. I have never been really interested in that. The young are more at ease! When I don’t understand, I ask them”.

The managerial issue at stake is thus the cooperation and the ascendant transmission of these skills in computer technology. Millennials often help the Boomers in tasks related to computer technology, and also teach them how to use them.

Cohort dimension at the organizational level: nature of experience in the organization

The cohort dimension at the organizational level corresponds to a group of individuals who have organizational experience of the same nature. SNCF having gone through a lot of types of organizational changes, the temporal imprints left on employees were found through intergenerational differences in the vision of organizational, group, and work related phenomenon.

First, the liberalization of the market leads to a transformation of the SNCF as a public service company to a private company, creating intergenerational differences in the vision of organizational identity and organizational change. The older cohort is attached to the former organizational mission of public service, whereas the new organizational identity as a private service company is rather natural for newcomers. Similarly, the older cohort questions the relevance of new organizational structures, contrary to the new cohort who has never experienced the former organizational structure.
“The older ones are aware of that. Not the newcomers. Maybe because they are new and they fit the mould more easily than us. They don’t have the vision of SNCF that we had. They are more fatalist: «today we are asked for green, tomorrow we will be asked for orange. Why not? I just do it. We question more”.

“Some people tell me the SNCF has changed, that it used to be much more humane, that there were more relationships. When I arrived, it was already like this. I don’t see the change (...) I don’t see big changes unlike a person with twenty years of organizational experience who will say that the SNCF is not anymore what it was before”.

These intergenerational differences do not necessarily lead to intergenerational conflict, but the managerial issue at stake is to transform the mentality of the older cohort now considered as obsolete for the organization. Most of the time, changes come through progressively along with the retirement of the older cohort. However, their representations also change in contact with the new cohort who stimulates them.

“Young ones came along, who have not known the period before 2003. Tim, for example, has been here for two years […] he doesn’t question the merit of the RFF existence. Now we have to evolve with it. The older draft evaders, who wouldn’t work with RFF, have now left for retirement”.

“They have no idea of what came before them (...) For them, there is no frustration, no questioning of what preceded them. They have always progressed with the RFF above them”.

“It’s tough for many. They were familiar with the old family-like SNCF. It seems like they have taken the RFF for the enemy. They go against any decision taken by the RFF”.

Organizational cohort differences are also observed in the habit of organizational change. For a long time, organizational changes in SNCF used to be rather rare and of incremental nature, whereas the organization has since the last decade experienced a lot of change with the restructuring of freight transport and the separation of the SNCF into various divisions. Thus, the older cohort who compares with the past is tired of the repetitive change that creates instability and reduces visibility of their situation in the organization. On the other hand, the new organizational cohort who has arrived in an ever-changing context does not seem to question this situation very often.

“Doing and undoing is still working”.

“At the SNCF, doing and undoing we know how to do!”.

“We put things in motion and then we go into reverse”.

“The frequent and recurring restructurings that the company is going through, it remains a disruptive point”.

“Those just arriving only know this”.
"From the public company that actually changes a lot. This changes rapidly. Ultimately, once we leave our trade, we are lost (...) In one's own trade, one manages to keep up (...) These days, I have no visibility on the overall enterprise. I got a small book, a year and a half ago, which presented the entire SNCF enterprise. If I look at it today, I'm sure half of it is obsolete".

Accordingly, while the intergenerational cooperation is hampered by the weariness of some of the older, newcomers can play a key role in stimulating and making the older cohort accept the ongoing organizational change.

It is important to note that in some cases, the persistence of older habit has a good reason.

One of these organizational changes consists in the development of contracting relationships between organizational units which used to be cooperative: while employees simply used to call their colleagues in the other unit when needed, they now have to go through an intermediary who will establish a contractual act among units. However, though this contractual relationship is subject to a new instruction from the top management, only few employees really apply it because they judge it inappropriate. Formally, the older cohort tries to follow the instruction but they often cannot do otherwise than by-passing the rules in order to accomplish their work correctly. This behaviour, forbidden from the top management, is also contaminating some of the new cohort who agree with the position of the older cohort, while others just apply the new instruction.

“There are some people who have difficulties, still keeping former methods. When we arrived, we were tolder that we have to do with the RFF. We follow that. There are some persons who will do in other way because it will be more rapid. We will have the information more rapidly by calling the company directly. We should not. They will tell us what to do for which train. By going through the RFF, the time it arrive at the company and come back, we can lose a lot of time. We are just enough in some period. We need the information as quick as possible to have the train circulate. I happened to do that. I try to do it the less possible, but sometimes we have to”.

Finally, organizational change also takes place in the design of career evolution within the company, making the career progression much more rapid while at the same time limiting the range of opportunities in professional evolution. The older cohort develops a sense of bitterness and frustration regarding the narrowing of their career evolution possibilities. They also find the new rapid process of promotion unfair compared to what they have experienced. For the new organizational cohort, they do not seem to realize these changes in the career evolution.

“This guy now wants to get the C qualification. I waited twenty years to be qualified C. Now young get the qualification C after only two years”.

"29th EGOS Colloquium in Montreal, July 4–6, 2013"
“The creation of EIC and of the DCF... many operators feel themselves fragmented since the separation in divisions”.

These differences do not affect intergenerational relationship among employees but rather lead to a feeling of disappointment and frustration regarding the company.

Cohort dimension at the occupational level: nature of experience within the occupation

Cohort dimension at the occupational level refers to the group of people who have experienced occupational experience of the same nature, because of their common temporal localization. The series of organizational change the SNCF has gone through also produce changes at the occupational level. A lot of occupations have seen their mission and activities evolve, thus creating different cohorts at the occupational level. Generational imprints are especially strong relating to the representation of the work, the knowledge and competences at work, and in the behaviour towards colleagues and vision of legitimate managers in workgroup.

The intergenerational differences in behavioural routines at work are largely related to the transformation of the organizational strategy and culture. One of the consequences is the emphasis put on client oriented services with the respect of regularity in the delivering of the service, while most of the intention used to be devoted to the security. As a temporal imprint of this evolution, the older occupational cohort appears to steel focus on security while the new cohort pays more attention on the regularity of the service. While the older cohort does not really feel like going out to meet clients and respond to their questions, the new cohort does not ask any question about it.

"Everyone was aware of the necessity to change with the arrival of competition. I'm going to speak on behalf of the inspectors. It's a caricature, but many neglected customer service because they were told that their primary role was security. We worked on this shift, we were all convinced it had to be done. The complications came a bit from the body politic, a reluctance based on anxiety".

Sometimes, the new cohort attitudes and behaviour can stimulate the older cohort and pull the entire group to the new organizational orientation. However, the ascendant transmission is not so easy, and often it rather results in statut quo - with each generation keeping its own vision, attitude and behavior - or in a contamination of undesirable practices to the new generation.

Paradoxically, regarding the intergenerational differences in terms of behaviours towards their own security, the new cohort is more respectful of the new instructions. In their arrival, the
new cohort is tolder about the new security standards and the dangerous though persisting habits of the older cohort. If well managed, they can be a powerful way to break away from bad habits, to inject good practices and stimulate the entire work group.

“A newcomer gives the opportunity to reinvest good practices. It is a way of retraining the older. When there are huge wave of newcomers, we know that if we are good at risk management with them, we will succeed to fully renovate practices”.

“I think that new recruits, when well managed, well trained, put with the right people and if the message is clear from the beginning, they can pull the group. For example, I have got two young girls in the reception desk with fixed-term contract. I ask reception agent to get out inspecting the train. To see them getting out gave impulsion to others. Now, people get out”.

However, as the previous cases, newcomers do not always have the sufficient legitimacy to impose on new practices and thus, are not systematically able to ensure the ascendant transfer. What they can do at best is not to yield the incentives of the older cohort. To encourage the implementation of good practice, the support of the management appears to be crucial.

“Whenever, some agents cross the railway whereas it’s forbidden. I can’t stand it when clients do that. Technically, I have nothing to report them, no power over them except to tell them that it is not well. When I see agents doing this, as a young and newly recruited woman, I don’t really have the profile to tell about it”.

“The newcomer won’t teach an incumbent, but he will remind him. As a new graduate from a purely academic training, he can have the kind of “you don’t do the right gesture”. Unfortunately, most of the time, the answer will be “I have been in the railway for thirty years; you won’t teach me my job”.

Cohort differences at the occupational level can also be identified in terms of knowledge and competences at work. These differences are often due to the evolution the occupation itself, as well as to the evolution of experience required to work for an occupation. In general, the older cohort has a wider range of skills than the new cohort, because the variety of task related to the occupation used to be larger before; the scope of the activity having been reduced, the new cohort is coming out of a specialized training. In the same vein, the new cohort in the DCF has a much more limited visibility of the work, because they passed directly to the computerized unit without getting through the field work at the station. The older cohort who has gone through this grounded experience knows well how it works, and thus are capable of producing a much more quality work. These differences in knowledge and competences lead to opportunity of intergenerational cooperation. The older generation helps the new one when necessary, and take advantage of these opportunities to share their
knowledge with them. However, knowledge gained from experience is often of tacit nature, and thus, can be hardly transferred.

“The fact that they haven’t experienced the field work is a problem that is felt in the quality of work. When you have been on the field, you have some sensibilities when you trace (the trajectory of the train). You see the crossing at grade. You will know, for example, that a traveler (train) will move more rapidly than a fret (train). You have obvious logics when you have been on a job, which you won’t have otherwise. However good the employees are, and how good may be the training given to them, there would be always some sensibility that they won’t have”.

The results also show a cohort differences at the occupational level in terms of representation about what is a legitimate manager. During the past decade, manager used to have a significant field experience before settling a manager position. Accordingly, the older cohort does not give credence to new manager without field experience. Indeed, the lack of knowledge of new manager can cause some difficulties.

“I met a manager from a higher education establishment; was brilliant but had no clue about the job: that was extremely hard”.

“Here, I arrived with already some years older, with some level within SNCF. My arrival is not necessarily badly perceived. I am railway man. However, for a young who will arrive from a higher education, in charge of older veteran, it sure it must be hard for him. He has to make his mark”.

Finally, it also appears differences of attitude and behaviours towards change in the working conditions. For the older generation who often relies on internalized routines and skills, change in work practices can be perceived as something challenging their experience gained from years of experience. Changes threaten their statute by making their knowledge obsolete, and they risks being put in competition with newcomers. Quite the reverse, the young generation sees work practice changes as opportunities for training and promotions.

“What they (the older ones) have learned through their whole life becomes obsolete. The young see opportunities in it, a change in profession. And the TGV is the prestige, new material, new installations, maybe also promotion because of new training, new competencies”.
3.2. The role of intergenerational relationship in the dynamic of organizational evolution

In this section, we summarize the salient points of our results and reflect on how generational diversity leads the dynamic of organizational evolution.

In the previous section, we have illustrated different facets of generational diversity in the workplace, and their related intergenerational issues. As a whole, the results confirm that intergenerational relationships affect intergenerational transfers. Intergenerational relationships take different forms, ranging from cooperative relationships to conflicting relationships, according to the complementary or competitive relationship between generational differences. The resulting intergenerational transfers are considered as enriching, when they are desired by the management; or contaminant, when they are undesired. Desired transfers contribute to the dynamic capabilities of the organization.

Regarding the age dimension, intergenerational differences was broadly cooperative, thus leading to enriching transfer. The ascendant transmission was noticed in the societal and occupational levels, with the new generation bringing dynamism and new insight (societal level) or fresh knowledge from outside (occupational level), thus stimulating and influencing the older generation. Sometimes, the complementary attitudes and visions at the societal level did not systematically lead to transfer, but contributed to the balance and synergies in the workplace. The descendant transfer was mainly observed in the organizational and occupational levels, with the older generation transferring knowledge and competences to the new one. However, despite the complementarities of generational imprints, the descendant transfer happened to be inhibited when the organization failed to implement adequate managerial tools. It was, for example, the case of the older generation who did not want to give its secret to the new generation, or that of the lack of necessarily means to monitor the descendant transmission.

Intergenerational relationships were much more contentious concerning the cohort dimension, because of their generational imprints were competitive for the most of the time. Most often, the older cohort generational imprints dealt with representations, attitudes, behaviours and knowledge which has turned obsolete because of the change in the rule of the game, whereas the new cohort was bringing with them the up-do-date practices instilled by management. The older cohort was rather reluctant to change their practices that make up their generational identity, which resulted in power game between generations.
The contentious intergenerational relationships were leading to the enriching transfer, to the contaminant transfer or to the status quo, depending on the power balance between generations. Most of the time, this power balance was favoured by legitimacy gained from seniority, from the relative size of the generation, and from the managerial support. Accordingly, the power balance sometimes resulted in descendant contamination, with the older generation transferring the former vision of the organization or the work, or in enriching ascendant transfer with the new generation succeeding transferring them the new vision of the organization or work. The status quo was maintained at the societal and occupational level, regarding representations, attitudes and behaviours relating to the organization, the work or the group. We have illustrated the status quo with the example of a young employee, as a new occupational cohort, in making older cohort respect the new security norms. Her youth and little experience in the occupation and the fact that she was in minority, explain all together her lack of legitimacy. This was rather problematic concerning the difference in the representation of what is a good manager (occupational level), because manager his/herself was totally discredited in the eyes of the older generation, because of his/her lack of field experience.

In the cohort dimension, the rare case with cooperative intergenerational relationship was at the societal level, when the older cohort had no choice but to cooperate with the new generation, to learn the use of new technology from them. There is also the example at the occupational level, when the older generation transfer their knowledge gained from their former experience, to the new generation who was not given the opportunity to learn them, because of changes in career progression design. In both of the case, intergenerational transmission appears as a remedy to the lack of organizational support in the development of knowledge and skill.

All these results give us a better understanding of the intergenerational process in the workplace and its link with the organizational dynamic. To sum up, our findings show that differences in generational imprints – representations, attitudes and behaviours, knowledge and competencies – create social self-categorization. The generational imprints of different social groups - which form different generations – may be view as competitive or complementary each other. These differences are reflected in the intergenerational relationships. When individuals feel complementary each other they tend to cooperate, and conversely, when they feel in competition each other, they are more likely to enter into
conflict with one another. While cooperative intergenerational relationships lead to enriching descendant/ascendant transfer or status-quo, conflicting intergenerational relationships generate a balance of power among generations. The result of this balance of power may be enriching ascendant transfer, contaminant descendant transfer or status-quo between generations. While ascendant transfer lead to organizational continuity, descendant transfer lead to organizational change. Finally, the organizational change and the organizational continuity may be desirable or undesirable by the top management depending on how they qualify the intergenerational transfer: enriching or contaminant.

Figure 1 illustrates the link between intergenerational and organizational issues in the workplace

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to assess how generational diversity in the workplace participates to the dynamics of organizational continuity and change. More precisely, we have investigated to what extend the intergenerational differences in the workplace lead to particular type of intergenerational relationships, which, in turn, influence the intergenerational transfer. The opportunities and challenge related to intergenerational transfer are assessed regarding the organizational dynamic of continuity and change.

Theoretical contributions

Seven theoretical contributions of this paper can be highlighted. First, our paper put forward the need to rethink the concept of generations in the workplace. By developing a generic definition of generation as a “group of people localized in a chronological order within a social system” we reconcile age and cohort dimensions while distinguishing them: age refers to the accumulation of experience, and cohort refers to a difference in the nature of this experience. This definition could enrich the literature on generations, which still suffers for a lack of shared definition (Parry and Urwin 2011; Djabi and Shimada 2012). Moreover, although some previous studies (Joshi & al., 2010, 2011;
Sturman, 2003; Wade-Benzoni, 2002, 2003) have suggested the variety of generational facets in the workplace, no study to our knowledge has integrated these different levels and dimensions into one coherent conceptual framework. We believe that age and cohort are both relevant categories to express issues relating to time lag between employees, especially in a dynamic environment, but that they need to be analysed in their full complexity. The claim that not only the evolution of the society, but also the organizational and occupational dynamic produce generations in the workplace is a very innovative and core idea of this paper. In our framework of generational diversity, an individual can belong to different generational facets at the same time. The individual is seen in its entire complexity, at the crossroads of different temporality, far from the dominant stereotyped visions. Our findings confirm the relevance of these different generational facets based on different levels (society, organization and occupation) and dimensions (age and cohort) in the workplace: these time stamps all make sense. Thus, our framework contributes to the literature by showing that this view of generation in its diversity is critical for understanding relations among employees in the workplace.

Second, while the literature identifies generational imprints (e.g. Tempest 2003; Cennamo and Gardner 2008; Twenge 2008; Ng, Lyons et al. 2012) and recognizes the ambivalence of intergenerational relationships (Perry, Kulik et al. 1999; Le Roux 2006; Flamant 2007; McGuire, By et al. 2007; Deyoe and Fox 2011; Cogin 2012), the link between the two has not been theorized to our knowledge. In this paper, we explain the antecedents of cooperative or conflicting intergenerational relationships by the relative positioning of generational imprints: complementarities between generational imprints lead to cooperative intergenerational relationships while competition between them leads to contentious intergenerational relationships.

Third, to characterize the influence of one generation to another, we have developed the concept of descendant (from the older to the new) and ascendant transfer (from the new to the older). While there is a rich literature on descendant transfer (e.g. Abattu and Lamotte 2005; Ashworth 2006; Kapp 2007; Ebrahim, Saives et al. 2008; Ball and Gotsill 2010; Stevens 2010; Harvey 2012), the ascendant transfer has not gained much attention (see, for exception: Abattu and Lamotte 2005; Tempest 2003). Our paper draws attention to the importance of ascendant transfer, especially in changing context.

Fourth, our study makes connections among intergenerational and organizational issues. While the matter of continuity and change is at the core of intergenerational relationships
managerial issues at stake are to guide and control this dynamic to a desired end. By linking intergenerational transfer to the concept of dynamic capability, this paper provides the dynamic of generation with an organizational and managerial perspective. In particular, our findings indicate that intergenerational transfer can lead to either desired or undesired results, from the organizational viewpoint. Then we introduce the concept of enriching transfer to refer to intergenerational transfer in line with organizational intention, and the concept of contaminant transfer to deal with intergenerational transfer which comes in contradiction with organizational intention. This differentiation concerns the descendant as well as ascendant transfer. This is a crucial distinction which shows that generational imprints and intergenerational transfer are neither good nor bad in itself. This turns into positive or negative phenomenon, according to the organizational strategy and its evolution. In other words, intergenerational transfer is enriching or contaminant in regard with organizational strategy. Then the managerial issue at stake is to avoid contaminant transfer while encouraging enriching transfer, in order to control its dynamic.

In this way, we also contribute to the literature of DC by shedding light on how concretely the process of resource transformation translates into the practice. Literature on DC has been criticized as being mysterious and confusing (Winter 2003), too abstract and difficult to manage (Danneels 2008). In particular, the very process of resource transformation which constitute the core of the theory remains rather vague (Felin and Foss 2005; Abell, Felin et al. 2008; Regnér 2008), this leading to the remark of DC as a black box: we do not know where it comes from, nor how actions and interaction at the individual level result to organizational outcomes (Abell, Felin et al. 2008; Foss, Husted et al. 2010; Foss, Heimeriks et al. 2012). By analyzing the resource-transformation process through the lens of intergenerational transfer, we have offered a micro analysis about how DC can manifest itself in practice. This way, we respond to the call for more micro analysis in the analysis of DC (eg. Salvato 2003; Felin and Hesterly 2007; Foss 2007; Regnér 2008; Foss, Husted et al. 2011), and follow Felin and Foss (2005; 2006)' argument that organizations being composed of individual, it is important to know who are these individual and what they bring to the organization. More specifically, our results show that the dynamic of resource transformation at the micro level is dialectical (Van de Ven and Poole 2005). While DC insists on the need for change and adaptation, our analysis on intergenerational transfer show the need of continuity for performing successful change. The results also indicate what is hindering and driving the resource-transformation process at
the micro level, insisting particularly on the vital role of management in harmonizing and/or creating synergies among generational differences. They also show the importance of identity and power related factors in the transformation process. Finally, regarding the debate over the idiosyncrasy of DC (Eisenhardt and Martin 2000; Ambrosini and Bowman 2009), our results bring strong support to the contextual embeddedness of DC. Even though some regularities may be identified in the management of the process of resource-transformation, issues related to intergenerational transfer are specific to each context.

Managerial implications

Be aware of organizational and occupational imprints

Our results suggest that organizations produce generations. Managers may act on organization and occupational imprints. The more managed organizational and occupational change is, the less intergenerational relationship will be conflicting. Generational diversity is unavoidable and generations are formed continuously even when the change is continuous. Indeed, there will always be differences among individuals cause by distinct experiences in terms of nature or accumulation. But, these generations will be formed in a more or less “traumatic” manner and managers have a key role to play in this perspective.

By connecting intergenerational issues and organizational continuity and change, this study also shows how strategic is the Human Resources Management. Generational topic is is a particular concern for HRM, who deals with recruitment, team constitution, professional mobility and career paths definition etc. It is also an important issue for intermediate managers in promoting transfer opportunities and reducing contamination and conflicts.

Managing the generational diversity

The challenge of organizations is to promote an enriching transmission rather than contaminating transmission and cooperation rather than conflict. How to do concretely? In what follows, we suggest a few examples of guidelines for action.

Managers should regulate the organizational socialization of newcomers in organization or in the job. To avoid contaminating transmission, intermediate managers should choose very carefully their tutors. Managers should mainly rely on employees who have learned and internalized new routines to integrate newcomers. This is also a good way to recognize competencies of older generations and help them to accept organizational change.
Managers should encourage generational diversity in work groups to ensure reciprocal transmissions. In a descendant perspective, managers should take advantage of older generations whose practical competencies and polyvalence appear to be very useful for new generations particularly in case of disturbances. Moreover, mentoring may also help this generational transmission. Furthermore, several individuals belonging to different generations – for example an organizational experimented employee but new in its position- might make the intergenerational transmission easier. Managers should also ensure the diversity of team members to not create divisions between two antagonising groups.

New societal cohort should have the opportunity to transfer their competencies to previous generations. For example, Danone a big French company in agro-food industry has seen emerged a dispositive of reverse mentoring on employees initiative.

Our results highlight the problem of legitimacy of intermediate managers. Organizations should reflect on which aspect the legitimacy is based and adapt the profile of its managers accordingly. In the SNCF Company, mangers could feel more confortable and less controversial if they may have an additional practical training.

Top management teams should belong to different generations. Indeed, Director of Human Resource Manager and intermediate manager claim that generational diversity teams leads to the best long-timers results in terms of change capacity and continuity.

**Limitations and future research**

Several limitations should be noted.

The first one would be to resort to a single-case study. To be sure, our inclusion of different types of employees—from different units, working in a variety occupations, with different status, with a difference in their accumulation of experience and age—introduced some diversity. Nevertheless, the impact of the French cultural context, added to the fact we deal here with a state-owned company raises questions about the generalizability of our findings to other populations. One may think that our analysis framework could constitute a fruitful basis for understanding more difficult contexts. Future research should assess our arguments with diverse samples in different organizational contexts. Indeed, even if we consider that all the elements of our last model may be seen whatever the organizational context, the results of conflicting and cooperative relationships between generations could be different in other contexts. For example, if the new cohort was a larger group, individualistic behaviour might be transferred to the older generation, while it would be not adequate to a collaborative work.
Thus, we might also have a link between conflicting intergenerational relationships and ascendant contaminant transfer. Therefore, in the line of the study conducted by Joshi and al. (2010), future research is needed to develop the understanding of our framework in different contexts. It could be interesting to replicate our study in firms in difficulty and having to implement redundancy plans, in a less hierarchical context, and also in an organization that has known only continuous changes. Many questions might be asked: how does the weight of each generational facet vary from case to case? Depending on the context, is the content of the transmission among generation different?

Second, even if our results was confirmed by different groups: Human Resources Managers, Intermediate manager and operators, some differences are not share by both generations. One might wonder about the real or stereotypical character of these differences. Thus, future research should supplement interviews with observations to confirm these differences.

Third, if our methodology makes the generations more visible, it also overwrites the generational diversity having appeared in time. For most of verbatim, only two generations are mentioned. That is an interesting finding by itself, but everyone knows that the reality is more complex and that more than two generations coexist at the same time. Thus, future research should examine with subtlety these differences.

Fourth, our results show the mediator effect of the relationship among generations: complementary or competitive. Competitive relationship leads to a balance of power, which determines the intergenerational results. This notion of “balance of power” raises still a lot of questions: is it a quantitative balance of power? Is it based on the persuasive power of members or on the support of the hierarchy? More research along these lines would help to understand how generations interact and influence each other.

Five, the contamination has to be deeply analysed. Sometimes, contamination processes are symptomatic of organizational problems. Many intermediate managers and operators told us that the transmission of older knowledge was unavoidable given the unsuitability of new rules. As such, we recommend further exploration of why employees continue to transmit their knowledge and competencies and how the organization could detect and solve these kinds of dilemmas.

Sixth, even if some employees consider their representations, attitudes, behaviours, knowledge and competencies have changed over time into contact with other generations (intergenerational results influence generational imprints), this cross-sectional methodology
cannot capture the generational dynamic over time. This study is a part of a broader longitudinal study, which will attempt to investigate this point.

Finally, even if it was not our initial focus, our results offer a better understanding of the organizational socialization process. Following the recommendations of authors (Chao et al., 1994; Jaujard, 2011; Nicholson, 1984; Saks & Ashforth, 1997a), our study highlights the ongoing process of socialization for established organizational members. Thus, our results show the reciprocal processes of socialization among generations. The “Resocialization” of older generations by newcomers is likely to become more frequent as individuals undergo job and organization changes throughout their careers. Organizational socialization of new employees by established might also be viewed in its negative aspect when insiders contaminate new employees and transfer older knowledge and competencies. Finally, although there is a rich literature on organizational socialization, in our knowledge, only one study (Hart & al., 2003) examines organizational socialization in a context of change. Authors in the organizational socialisation literature consider implicitly the organizational context in a static perspective. Our results show that intergenerational transmission and socialization contribute to organizational continuity and change following or not the organizational strategy. Thus, future research should focus on the organizational socialization in a context of organizational change.

References


Appendix

Table 1. Six facets of generational diversity in the workplace

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Age (individual dynamic)</th>
<th>Cohort (collective dynamic)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Societal cohort</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Length of service in organization</td>
<td>Organizational cohort</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Length of service in an occupation</td>
<td>Occupational cohort</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Generational imprints and intergenerational issues at work for the age dimension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chronological age</th>
<th>Older</th>
<th>Younger</th>
<th>Generational imprints</th>
<th>Intergenerational issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Detachment</td>
<td>Dynamism</td>
<td>Difference of attitude and behaviour at work</td>
<td>Cooperation (different vision and attitude) Ascendant transmission (dynamism and motivation)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accustomed to the way of doing</td>
<td>Take a new look to the way of doing</td>
<td>Difference in the vision of the work and organization</td>
<td>Ascendant transmission (new insight)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A certain degree of mutual respect and distance between colleagues</td>
<td>Informal and funny relationships between colleagues</td>
<td>Difference of behaviours among groups</td>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational seniority</th>
<th>Knowledge about the functioning of the organization</th>
<th>Little knowledge about the functioning of the organization</th>
<th>Difference of organizational knowledge and skills</th>
<th>Descendant transmission (knowledge about the organization)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Possession of practical and tacit knowledge, internalized theoretical knowledge</td>
<td>Possession of theoretical, explicit and « fresh » knowledge or another knowledge</td>
<td>Difference of work competencies</td>
<td>Descendant transmission (knowledge and skills at work) Ascendant transmission (new knowledge and representations) Problem of transmission (deficiency of resource provided by the organization, inadequacy of the managerial tool, withholding information, inappropriate time)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Occupational seniority | | | | |
|-----------------------| | | | |
| | | | | |
Table 3. Generational imprints and intergenerational issues at work for the cohort dimension

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Societal cohort</th>
<th>Previous cohort</th>
<th>New cohort</th>
<th>Generational imprints</th>
<th>Intergenerational issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collectivism</td>
<td>Individualism</td>
<td>Difference of attitude and behaviour in interpersonal relationships (group)</td>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implication</td>
<td>Lack of implication</td>
<td>Difference of attitude and behaviour at work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job as vocation</td>
<td>Consumerist approach to job</td>
<td>Difference of attitude vis-à-vis the organization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very at ease with new technology</td>
<td>At ease with new technology</td>
<td>Difference of knowledge and competencies in work</td>
<td>Ascendant transmission</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(knowledge about new technology)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public service oriented practice</td>
<td>Client related practice</td>
<td>Difference in the vision of organizational identity</td>
<td>Descendant contamination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(former vision of organizational mission, functioning and change)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant questioning of</td>
<td>No questioning of organizational change</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ascendant transmission</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organizational change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(new vision of organizational mission, functioning and change)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have known the previous</td>
<td>Have known only the SNCF in</td>
<td>Difference in the vision of organizational change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organizational stability and a</td>
<td>change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>multitude of changes during the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>last decade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accustomed to cooperative</td>
<td>Accustomed to contractual</td>
<td>Difference in the vision of relationship among units</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationship among units</td>
<td>relationship among units</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Occupational cohort | Slow pace of promotion through organizational boundaries Accustomed to a variety of occupation during career | Fast pace of promotion through organizational boundaries Career more partitioned | Difference in the vision of work evolution inside organization | -  
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------  
| Behavioural routines focus on the security of the public in priority, the regularity comes next | New behavioural routines focus on the regularity and their own security | Difference of behavioural routines at work | DESCENDANT CONTAMINATION (Neglecting regularity and their own security)  
ASCENDANT TRANSMISSION (Focus on regularity and security) | DESCENDANT TRANSMISSION (Knowledge gained from the experience of the field)  
CONFLICT  
| Polyvalence | Specialization | Difference of competencies and knowledge at work |  
| Hands-on experience | No hands-on experience |  
| Manager position requires hands-on experience (practical experience) but no diplomas | Manager position doesn’t require hands-on experience (practical experience) but diplomas | Difference in the vision of a legitimate manager (group) |  
| See changes as threats | See changes as opportunities | Difference in the vision of work change |  


Figure 1. Relation between intergenerational and organizational issues in the workplace