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Communication Between Generation - Conflict Prevention and Management

Ballyhoura Development CLG

The Role of Open Dialogue and Social Interaction
in Conflict Prevention in the Workplace



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Centrum Wspierania
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The Role of Open Dialogue and Social Interaction in Conflict Prevention in the Workplace

Introduction

Our research results show that each generation rates itself as competent in various conflict prevention and management tools. The consensus across all generations was that “A Culture of Open Dialogue” is the most important factor in preventing conflict and in managing and addressing conflict when it does arise in the workplace. Regular Social Interaction was also highly rated as a tool for managing conflict in the workplace. All generations rated “Formal Policies” as being ineffective in the area of conflict management, reflecting a propensity to exhaust all other options before instigating formal procedures. Where respondents described being involved in conflict in the workplace they felt equally supported by colleagues of all generations.

Conflict Prevention Tools

Each participant in our survey rated the effectiveness of five different Conflict Prevention and Management Strategies for their generation and for all other generations. This facilitated a comparative analysis of self-perception versus perception by others for all four generations in the context of conflict management.

Survey results show that preferences for each of the tools below to be broadly similar across generations, with a Culture of Open Dialogue being the preferred strategy across all generations and Formal Conflict Resolution Policies to be the least preferred option. The strategies and tools were rated 1 – 5 as below

1. Culture of Open Dialogue
2. Regular Social Interaction
3. Regular Customised Feedback
4. Intergenerational Teams
5. Formal Conflict Resolution Policies

Participants also related real life experience of involvement in conflict, either as an instigator or a mediator.

Self-Perception v Perception by others in Conflict Management

The results of our survey indicate that while members of a generation may believe that their strengths and weaknesses lie in one particular area of conflict management this opinion is not necessarily held by co-workers of a different generation.

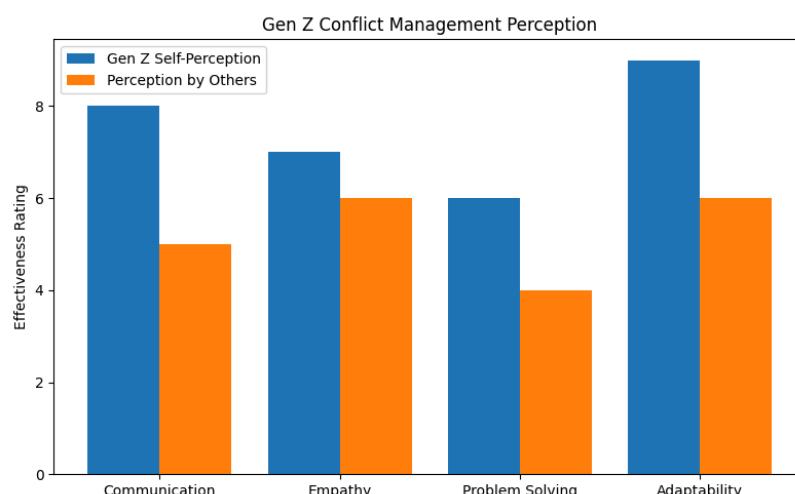


Gen Z and Millennials rated their effectiveness at conflict management significantly higher than the score attributed to them by all other generations while Boomers scored themselves lower than the perception of them held by other generations. Gen Z's self-perception was mostly in line with expectations of the other generations.

Gen Z

Gen Z rated Open Dialogue, Regular Social Interaction and Customised Feedback as being the most effective means of conflict prevention and management for their generation while scoring Customised Feedback as moderately effective, intergenerational teams as somewhat useful and formal policies as the least effective. All other generations agreed that Open Dialogue and Social Interaction were most effective means of conflict prevention for this generation.

Gen Z self-assessed their skills in communication, empathy, problem solving and adaptability much higher than the rating given to them by other generations, most notably in the area of adaptability.



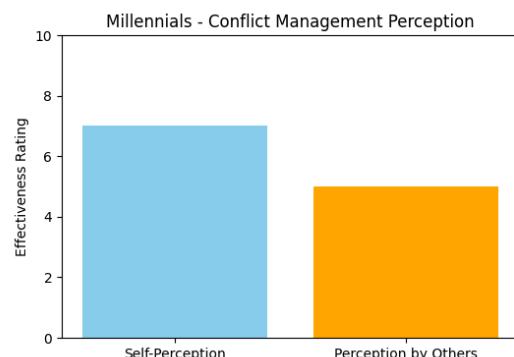


Millennials

Millennials rated the various conflict prevention and resolution tools in similar terms to Gen Z. Open Dialogue, Regular Social Interaction and Customised Feedback were considered the most effective means of conflict prevention and management for their generation while Customised Feedback was rated as moderately effective, intergenerational teams as somewhat useful and formal policies as the least effective.

Gen Z perceived Millennials as especially effective at using Open Dialogue and Social Interaction to prevent conflict. Baby boomers saw Millennials as more competent than them in Open Dialogue, Social Interaction and Feedback but less effective in participating in multi-generational teams and in the use of formal conflict resolution policies.

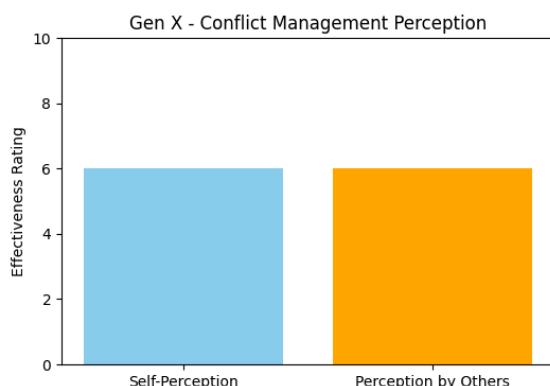
Millennials rated their overall conflict management skills at 7 out of 10, while the consensus among other generations was that millennials possessed average skills in this area at point 5 on the scale.





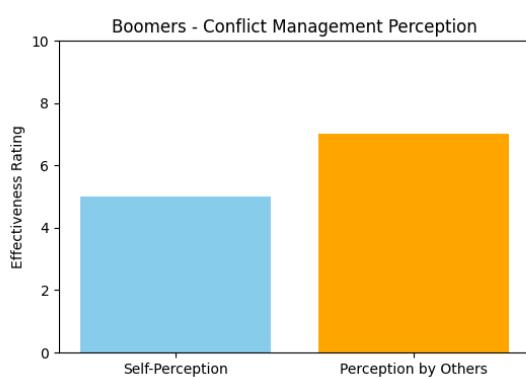
Gen X

Gen x rated each conflict management tool in the same order of importance as Gen z and Millennials, once again rating A Culture of Open Dialogue as most important and formal policies as least important. Aggregated results show that Gen X's self-perception is in line with others perception. However, this masks a subtle difference where Gen Z and Millennials perceived Gen X as being slightly less effective in conflict management than themselves while Boomers rated Gen x as being more competent than their own generation.



Boomers

Boomers rated each conflict management tool in the same order of importance as the other three generations. A Culture of Open Dialogue was rated as most important with Regular Social Interaction and Regular Customised Feedback rated equally important and formal policies as least important. Gen Z perceived Boomers as being less effective at working in Intergenerational Teams and in implementing Formal Conflict Resolution Policies.





Communication between Generations - Conflict Prevention and Management

The Role of Open Dialogue and Social Interaction

Generation: Gen Z

The Stereotype

Gen Z only communicate by instant message and are not interested in personal relationships.

Research Findings

Gen Z prefer digital communication and remote working.
Seek environments in which informality, co-operation and team work are central.
Value older workers lived experience and often look to millennial managers to set the tone of meetings and for guidance on workplace etiquette.

Strategies and Practical Advice

Create opportunities for socialising - informal lunch meetings, volunteering days, social gatherings.
Provide opportunities for intergenerational Skills Swap.
Offer Soft Skills training in group settings.





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Generation: Millennials

The Stereotype

Millennials are self contained and prioritise work life balance. They keep their work and personal life separate.

Research Findings

Millennials prefer collaborative and cooperative environments. Value team work and maintain an informal approach to communication.

Seek fluid , inclusive workplaces that maintain clarity around roles and responsibilities.

Strategies and Practical Advice

Encourage open and informal communication

Organise in person team building events

Create opportunities for colleagues working in different teams to come together to share experience

Group training in soft skills





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Generation: Gen X

The Stereotype

Gen X are seen as loyal employees who value personal relationships.

They seek recognition of their achievements.

Research Findings

Gen X appreciates teamwork and a cooperative work environment.

Higher tolerance for traditional hierarchical structures than their younger colleagues.

Thrive where clear roles and responsibilities are defined.

Need stability, clarity and co-operation.

Appreciate honest feedback.

Strategies and Practical Advice

Regular feedback.

Frank conversations around performance and opportunities for career development.

Offer opportunities for personal development in group contexts.





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Generation: Babyboomers

The Stereotype

Baby Boomers value structure and hierarchy.
Professionally and socially removed from younger colleagues in the workplace

Research Findings

Baby Boomers prefer structure.
Interested in fostering the transmission of knowledge and experience to younger colleagues.

Strategies and Practical Advice

Combine formal processes for the transfer of knowledge to younger colleagues with informal meetings and workshops
Two way sharing of skills eg. younger colleague mentors older colleague on digital collaborative tools while older colleague educates younger colleague on etiquette when dealing with external clients.





Key takeaways

Effective communication is a cornerstone of conflict prevention and resolution. Clear, respectful, and timely communication fosters mutual understanding, reduces misinterpretations, and promotes a culture of transparency and trust among employees.

Managing intergenerational workplace conflict involves

- providing clarity about appropriate communication channels
- agreeing appropriate response times
- identifying sources of conflict particularly identity and value-based conflict
- promoting open dialogue as a means of conflict prevention

Generational differences in preferred communication methods—such as Gen Z's reliance on instant messaging versus Boomers' preference for face-to-face interaction—can lead to misunderstandings, impact negatively on team dynamics and create operational inefficiencies.

Conflict stemming from cultural, generational, and ethical differences, are common in diverse teams and require proactive strategies to address. Across all generations, open dialogue and regular social interaction emerged as the most effective tools for conflict prevention, while formal policies were seen as less impactful. The research underscores the importance of fostering inclusive direct and indirect communication practices, encouraging mentorship across age groups, and promoting open dialogue.

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