



Communication Between Generation - Conflict Prevention and Management

Ballyhoura Development CLG

Communication Channel Confusion and
Response Expectations in the Workplace



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Centrum Wspierania
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Communication Channel Confusion and Response Expectations in the Workplace

Introduction

Due to different communication channels used by different generations miscommunication can occur in the workplace. These misunderstandings can lead to problems for team dynamics which manifest as frustration and tension between generations, reduced trust in colleagues' reliability, demotivation and breakdown in collaborations.

Operational Consequences arising from missed communication include missed deadlines due to overlooked or delayed responses, duplicated work where task updates aren't seen and project delays from misaligned time expectations.

In general, Gen Z & Millennials expect fast replies, often using instant messaging, however older colleagues may not perceive chat-based messages as urgent or official. Younger workers interpret delays as lack of engagement or respect. This presents a challenge to workplaces where colleagues from different generations work together.

Issues and Opportunities arising from Communication Channel Preferences

Our research shows many commonalities across the five participating countries in relation to generational preferences for different modes of communication.

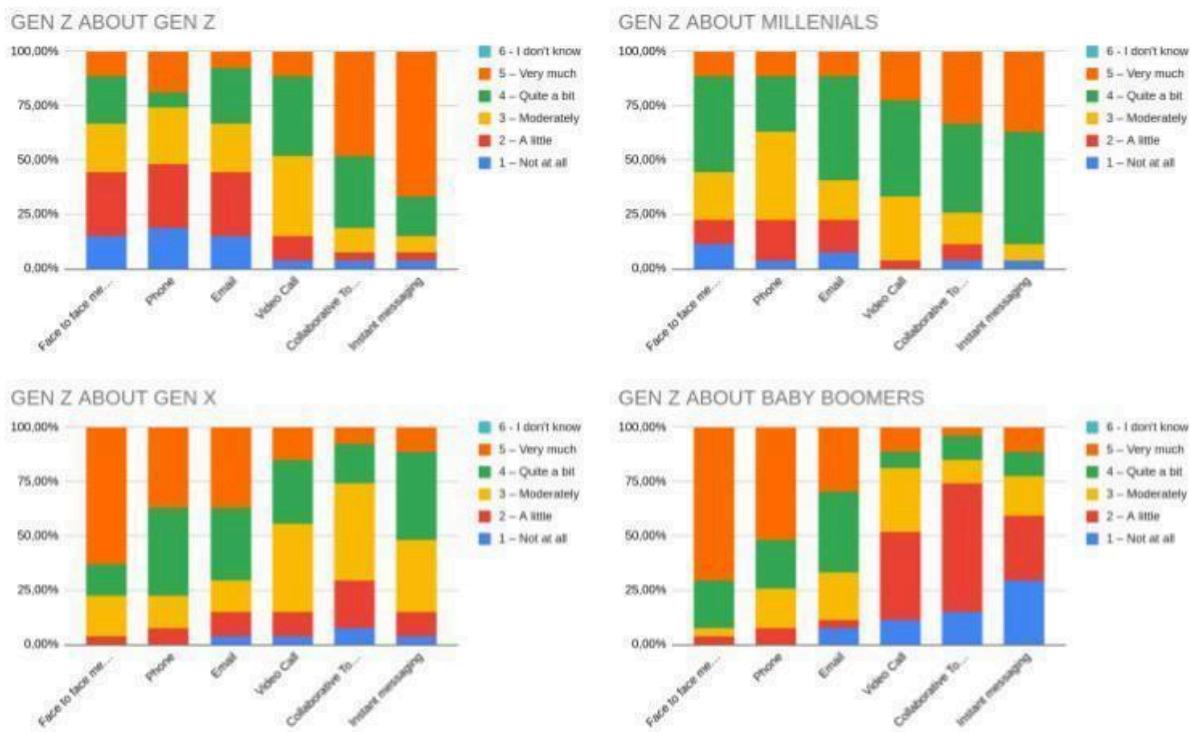
Millennials & Gen Z prefer instant messaging, texts, and social media and they gravitate toward visual platforms. However, they often lack confidence in face-to-face professional communication. Conversely Boomers & Gen X prefer to communicate face-to-face, by phone, and by email and are less likely to use instant messaging or social media.

The following charts illustrate how each generation ranks each of the following five modes of communication in importance

- Face to Face Meeting
- Phone
- Email
- Video Call
- Collaborative Tools
- Instant Messaging



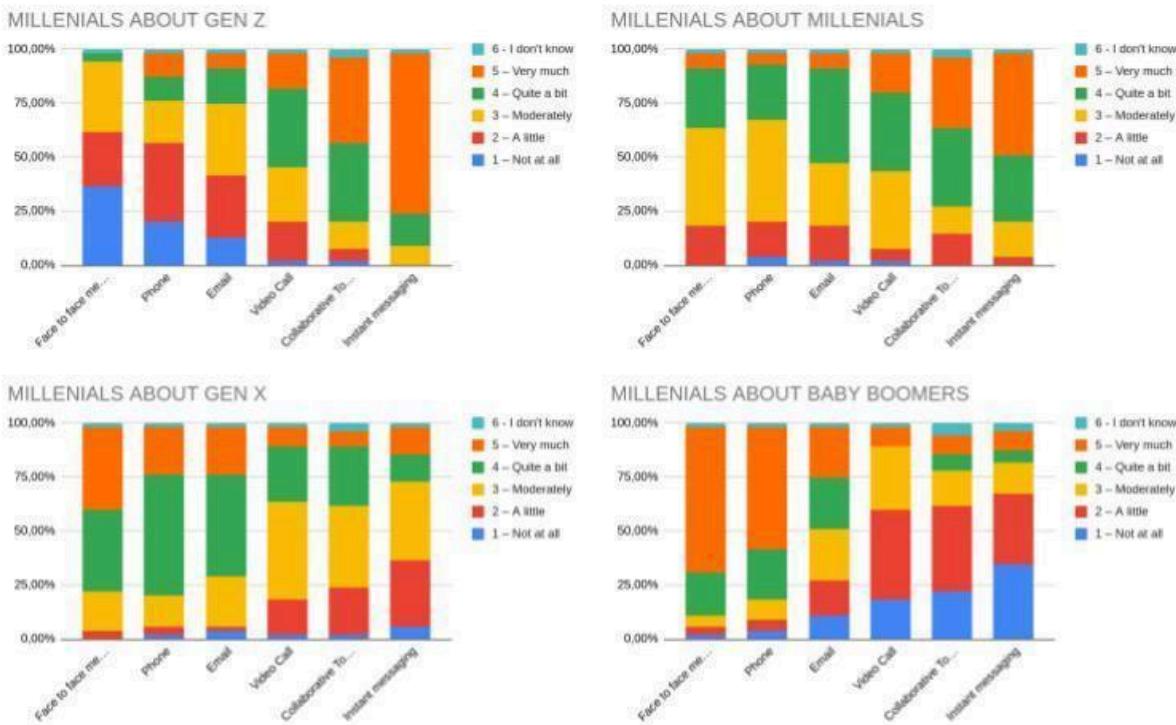
Gen Z



Gen Z places great importance on instant messaging and digital collaboration tools followed by video calls, with less importance attributed to traditional modes like meetings, email and telephone. They see Boomers as reliant on face to face meetings and telephone calls and see Millennials and Gen X having a balanced use of all modes of communication. Instances of misunderstanding reported include Gen Z sending instant messages and not getting a response from older workers, and older workers being uncomfortable with Gen Z attending online meetings without the use of a camera.



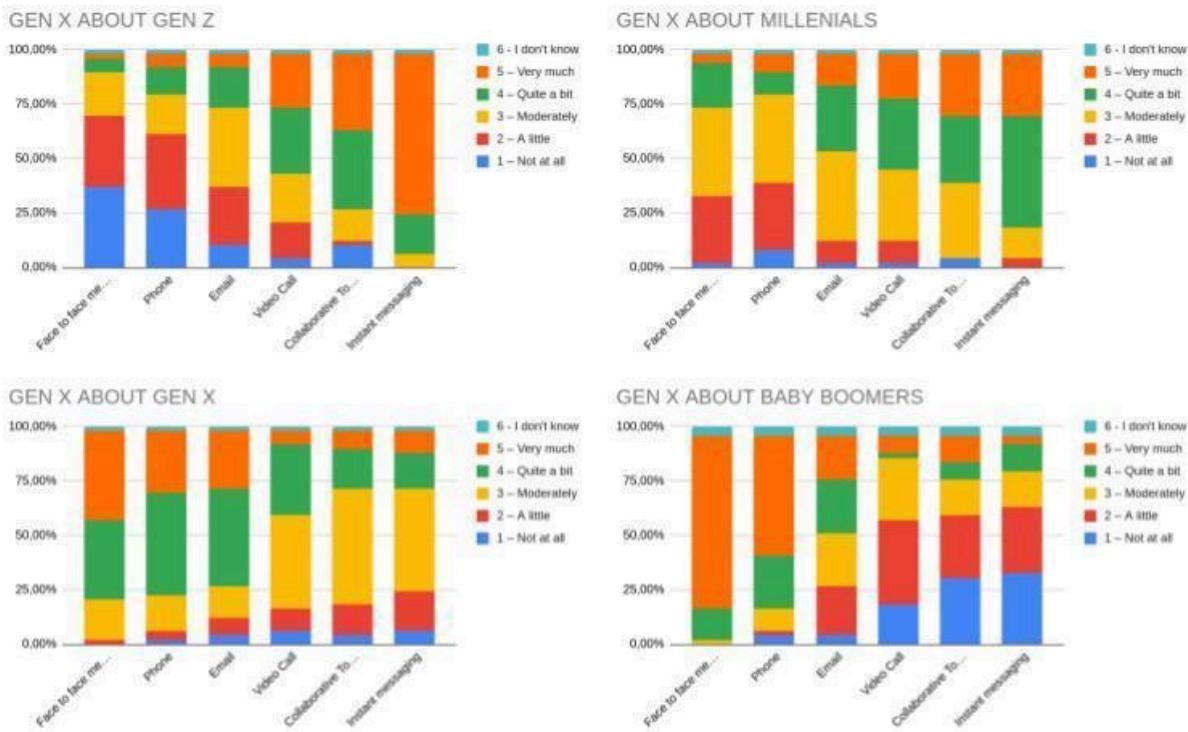
Millennials



Millennials occupy a middle ground in the area of communication with a balanced use of digital and traditional communication tools. They see Gen Z as highly digital and visually oriented, Gen X as more traditional and Boomers as very attached to traditional communication in the form of meetings and phone calls. Millennials reported instances where Boomers did not act on plans agreed during a phone call and insisted on having an in-person meeting on the same issue.



Gen X

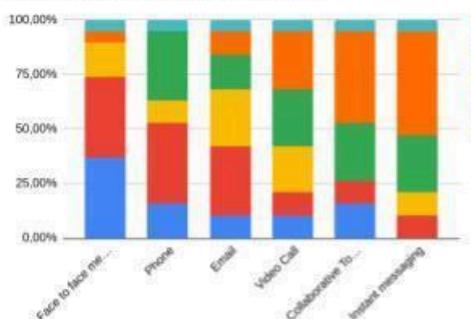


Gen X have an overall preference for email, phone and face to face communication, while also relying on video calls and collaborative tools for remote work. They perceive younger generations as more digitally dependent and Boomers as traditional communicators. Gen X survey participants have reported missed messages on collaborative platforms resulting in inadvertent delays in their work.

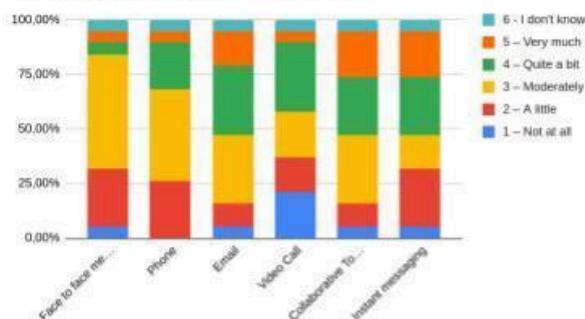


Baby Boomers

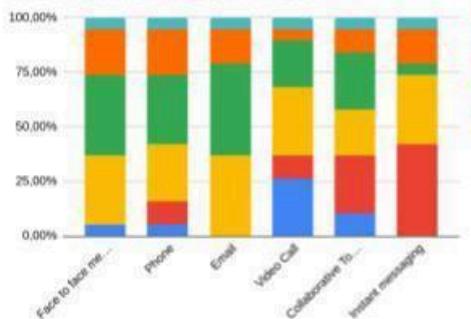
BABY BOOMERS ABOUT GEN Z



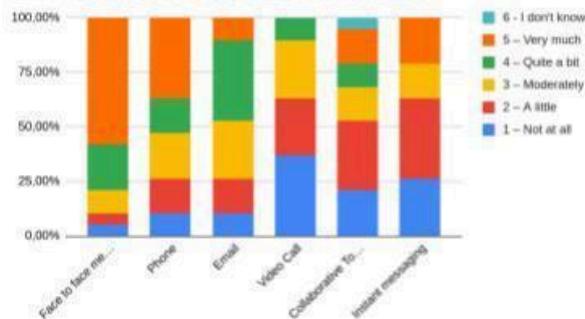
BABY BOOMERS ABOUT MILLENNIALS



BABY BOOMERS ABOUT GEN X



BABY BOOMERS ABOUT BABY BOOMERS



Baby Boomers assign high importance to face to face meetings and phone calls and less importance to digital communication. They acknowledge a stronger predisposition to digital communication among younger co-workers. Survey respondents reported issues where younger workers use informal instant messaging where they feel more formal communication is needed.

The aggregated results of our survey highlight a mismatch in digital tool usage between generations. This can be a barrier to effective communication and hinder cross generational collaboration. However, in organisations where there is a culture of openness this digital communication gap can provide an opportunity for cross generational collaboration. Younger workers frequently encourage older colleagues to familiarise themselves with instant messaging, social media and collaborative platforms.

There is also evidence of older generations taking on mentorship roles, teaching soft skills and encouraging verbal communication among younger colleagues. Gen Z and Millennial workers often seek guidance on workplace etiquette and frequently wait for older colleagues to set the tone of meetings. Younger generations can also mentor older colleagues in the area of politically correct communication.



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In addition to communication channel preferences, other factors such as level of formality, cultural differences, the nuances of indirect communication, nonverbal cues, speed of response and the perceived tone of verbal and written communication are significant across all countries. It is evident that there is no “one size fits all” approach to aligning expectations around response times and employers have to take a multi-faceted approach.



Generational cards



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Communication Channel Confusion and Response Expectations

Generation: Gen Z

The Stereotype

Gen Z communicate only through their phones and are addicted to social media.
Unskilled at conversations and phone calls
Prefer asynchronous communication like DM's and voice notes.
Favour short form visual communication.
Blur the lines between personal and professional communication

Research Findings

They prefer instant digital communication.
Expect brevity, speed and immediate replies.
May use Tik Tok style videos in lieu of formal presentations
Difficulty with understanding the tone of more formal communication.
Would like advice from older colleagues on workplace etiquette in the area of communications.

Strategies and Practical Advice

Provide clear guidance on which communication channels are appropriate for internal and external communication.
Manage expectations around response times for each of these communication channels.
Create cross generational mentorship opportunities.
For remote or hybrid working provide clear guidance around etiquette for online meetings.
Consider brief to-the-point messages as a form of efficiency, not bad manners.





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Generation: Millennials

The Stereotype

Millennials are tech savvy and informal, often using emojis in place of text.
Prefer instant messaging, texts, collaborative tools.
Prefer video calls in place of in person meetings.
Expect timely replies.
Value feedback.
Often get frustrated by older colleagues insistence on in person meetings.

Research Findings

Millennials occupy a middle ground in the area of communication preferences.
Adept at informal digital communication favoured by younger workers and value rapid responses.
Also use traditional communication with older workers.
Preference is for collaboration and they favour tools like Slack.
Value their time and often seek feedback.

Strategies and Practical Advice

Give and receive timely feedback if there is a communication misunderstanding.
Allow flexibility in communication styles.
Recognise the potential of millennials to bridge the digital communication gap between older and younger workers.





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Generation: Gen X

The Stereotype

Gen X are self-reliant and efficient.
Prefer direct communication such as email, phone and face to face meetings.
Sometimes blunt in their communication.
They can be resistant to change.

Research Findings

Gen X prefer email and phone communication.
Willing to attend face to face meetings but will use digital tools when that is more efficient.
Prefer not to blur the line between professional and personal communication.

Strategies and Practical Advice

Encourage transparency in communication.
Provide training in digital collaborative tools.
Do not micromanage, allow flexibility.
Provide direct and honest feedback.
Recognise longer form communication eg. email threads, minutes of meetings as a type of record keeping.





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Generation: Babyboomers

The Stereotype

Boomers are digitally incompetent.
Insistence on face to face meetings when an email or message would be more efficient.
Formal and very slow to respond.

Research Findings

Boomers are skilled at in-person communication
Experienced in the nuances of indirect communication.
Prefer phone calls and emails to instant messaging.
Sometimes ignore or delay responding to messages received through non-traditional communication channels.

Strategies and Practical Advice

Emphasise the benefits of digital communication in terms of efficiency.
Provide clear guidance on which digital communication channels are approved and set response times.
Encourage uptake of training in digital tools.
Provide opportunities for two-way skills exchange with younger digitally competent co-workers.





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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