



## Management of Intergenerational Conflict in the Workplace and Its Impact on Employee Relations

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### ABSTRACT

Intergenerational conflict in the workplace stems from differences in values, work preferences, communication styles, and adaptability to technology among Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. This qualitative descriptive study examines the forms, impacts, and management strategies of such conflicts. Findings reveal that these conflicts manifest in communication mismatches, work-life balance expectations, and varying technological adaptability, leading to interpersonal tension, reduced productivity, and fragmented workplace dynamics. Effective management through open communication, intergenerational training, and collaborative projects can transform conflicts into opportunities for innovation and synergy. The study highlights practical recommendations for managers and HR professionals and contributes to theoretical discussions on managing generational diversity. Future research should quantitatively explore the link between generational conflict and organizational performance.

## INTRODUCTION

Generational conflict in the workplace has increasingly become a concern as the modern work environment grows more age-diverse. Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z working together bring distinct characteristics, values, and work styles. These differences often become sources of tension within teams, including approaches to work, communication, and adaptation to technology. For instance, older generations may prioritize loyalty and hierarchy, while younger generations value flexibility and technology-driven innovation. While such conflicts can occasionally be constructive, they may also create interpersonal tensions that harm employee relationships if not properly managed.

Generational conflict can be triggered by various factors. Differences in values and work priorities are a primary cause, where older generations often emphasize dedication and long working hours, whereas younger generations prioritize work-life balance. Additionally, variations in work style preferences – such as formal approaches among older generations compared to the flexibility favored by younger ones – frequently lead to friction. Another significant factor is adaptability to technology. Generations raised in the digital era tend to master new technologies more quickly than their predecessors, often perpetuating stereotypes about intergenerational competence. Communication styles also play a critical role, as younger generations are more comfortable with digital communication, while older generations often rely on face-to-face interactions or phone calls.

The importance of managing generational conflict cannot be overlooked, as it affects not only productivity but also the quality of employee relationships. Poorly managed conflicts can lead to disharmonious working relationships, decreased team performance, and the creation of a non-conducive work environment. However, when addressed with effective strategies, generational conflicts can be leveraged as opportunities to enhance cross-generational collaboration, drive innovation, and foster an inclusive work environment. Strategies such as open communication, intergenerational training, and leveraging the unique strengths of each generation are essential in creating harmonious and productive workplace relationships. Thus, managing generational conflict is key to ensuring the sustainability and success of organizations in today's modern era.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *The Concept of Generational Conflict*

Generational conflict in the workplace refers to differences in values, attitudes, and behaviors among distinct age groups that can trigger tension and miscommunication in professional environments. These differences are often rooted in the unique socio-historical backgrounds of each generation, shaping their perspectives on work, technology, and social interactions.

### 1. Definition of Generational Conflict and Characteristics of Each Generation

Baby Boomers (1946–1964) Born after World War II during a population boom, this generation is known for their hard-working, loyal nature and appreciation for stability and hierarchy within organizations. Baby Boomers typically possess a strong work ethic and value achievement through consistent effort.

### 2. Generation X (1965–1980)

Growing up during a period of technological and economic transition, Generation X is characterized by independence, flexibility, and adaptability. They value work-life balance and are often skeptical of authority. This generation is also referred to as "The Latchkey Kids" due to the frequency of unsupervised childhoods, fostering self-reliance.

### 3. Generation Y or Millennials (1981–1996)

Raised alongside rapid technological advancements, Millennials are collaborative, tech-savvy, and seek purpose in their work. They prioritize flexibility, personal development, and constructive feedback. This generation is known for multitasking and quick adaptation to technological changes.

### 4. Generation Z (1997–2012)

Born in the era of the internet and social media, Gen Z is highly digitally connected, innovative, and socially conscious. They value authenticity, inclusivity, and have high expectations for technology integration in the workplace. This generation is also highly adaptive to new technologies and demonstrates significant awareness of global issues.

The diverse characteristics of these generations can become sources of conflict if not managed effectively. For example, differences in communication preferences – such as Baby Boomers favoring face-to-face interactions and Gen Z preferring instant messaging or email – can lead to misunderstandings and tension among employees. Understanding these generational characteristics and implementing inclusive management strategies are critical for fostering a harmonious and productive workplace environment.

## ***Causes of Generational Conflict***

Generational conflict in the workplace often arises from fundamental differences among age groups. These factors include differences in communication styles, work values, technological adaptability, and managerial preferences, all of which significantly influence workplace dynamics and interpersonal relationships.

### 1. Communication Differences

Each generation has distinct communication preferences, often leading to miscommunication and misunderstandings. Baby Boomers, for example, prefer direct or face-to-face communication, viewing it as the most effective way to build workplace relationships. In contrast, Millennials and Gen Z are more comfortable with digital communication, such as email, chat, or technology-based applications. Older generations may perceive these methods as impersonal, while younger generations consider them faster and more efficient, creating tension when communication styles clash (Kapur, 2020).

## 2. Differences in Work Values

Work values are a major factor distinguishing generations in the workplace. Baby Boomers prioritize stability, loyalty, and structured hard work, whereas Millennials and Gen Z emphasize flexibility, work-life balance, and meaningful work. For instance, Gen X and Millennials tend to seek jobs that offer opportunities for growth and learning, while Baby Boomers focus more on long-term achievements and company loyalty (Sessa et al., 2007). These differences can lead to tension, especially when older generations perceive younger generations as lacking dedication, while younger generations feel misunderstood by their older colleagues.

## 3. Technological Adaptation

Technology represents one of the most significant generational divides. Millennials and Gen Z, who grew up in the digital era, excel at adopting and utilizing new technologies. Conversely, older generations, such as Baby Boomers and some of Gen X, often face challenges in keeping up with technological advancements, which can lead to frustration on both sides. Younger generations may feel impatient with the learning pace of their older counterparts, while older employees may feel pressured by the constant demand to learn new technologies (Twenge, 2010).

## 4. Managerial Style Differences

Generational differences also influence leadership styles and managerial preferences. Older generations typically value hierarchical structures and formal management approaches, whereas younger generations prefer collaborative leadership and more egalitarian work environments. Baby Boomers may be comfortable with directive management styles, while Millennials and Gen Z value managers who act as mentors and provide autonomy. These differences can lead to conflict when generational expectations and needs are not met (Deal et al., 2010).

### ***Impacts of Generational Conflict***

Generational conflict in the workplace has complex and varied impacts, both positive and negative. Differences in values, work preferences, and communication styles can generate tension but also create opportunities for innovation and improved collaboration.

#### 1. Positive Impact: Innovation Through Diverse Perspectives

The presence of multiple generations in the workplace offers opportunities to leverage diverse perspectives for problem-solving and innovation. Older generations contribute experience, stability, and rich historical insights, while younger generations bring creativity, a willingness to experiment, and a deep understanding of modern technology. Cross-generational collaboration can result in more comprehensive and innovative solutions, as each generation approaches problems from unique viewpoints. For example, research by Gratton and Scott (2016) indicates that well-managed intergenerational teams are more innovative due to the combination of experience and technological expertise, enabling novel approaches to business challenges.

#### 2. Negative Impact: Workplace Disharmony and Productivity Decline

Conversely, generational conflict can disrupt interpersonal relationships and team harmony. Misalignments in values and communication styles often lead to misunderstandings, escalating into more severe tensions. For instance, Baby Boomers may view younger employees as disrespectful of hierarchy or lacking dedication, while younger generations may perceive older employees as inflexible or resistant to change. This dynamic can create a non-conducive work environment, reduce trust among employees, and hinder team collaboration.

Unresolved conflicts can also directly impact productivity. A study by Mencl and Lester (2014) found that poorly managed intergenerational conflicts contribute to decreased team performance, as employees' energy is diverted from their primary tasks. Prolonged tension can increase stress levels, lower job satisfaction, and negatively affect employee retention and organizational efficiency.

### *Approaches to Managing Generational Conflict*

Managing generational conflict requires strategic approaches to minimize negative impacts and maximize the positive potential of generational diversity in the workplace. Effective strategies include open communication, cross-generational training, and structured collaboration, all aimed at creating an inclusive, harmonious, and productive work environment.

#### 1. Open Communication

Transparent and open communication is fundamental to managing generational conflict. Creating spaces where employees from different generations can express their views and expectations without fear fosters understanding and mutual respect. This approach involves tailoring communication methods to each generation's preferences. For instance, Baby Boomers might prefer face-to-face meetings, while Millennials and Gen Z may lean towards digital platforms. Research by Gursoy et al. (2008) highlights that communication tailored to generational preferences enhances cross-generational understanding and fosters better workplace relationships.

#### 2. Cross-Generational Training

Cross-generational training helps employees understand differences in values, work styles, and communication preferences. Such training can include cultural awareness sessions, interpersonal skill workshops, and mentoring programs that pair employees from different generations. For example, Gen Z can provide training on new technologies for Baby Boomers, while Baby Boomers share insights on experience and decision-making stability. Lyons and Kuron (2014) found that cross-generational training not only improves understanding but also strengthens collaboration and synergy in the workplace.

#### 3. Collaboration

Encouraging cross-generational collaboration is a key strategy for leveraging generational diversity within teams. By promoting teamwork among employees from various generations, organizations can create synergies that capitalize on each generation's strengths. For example, in project teams, Baby Boomers can offer strategic experience, Gen X can contribute managerial skills, Millennials can provide innovative perspectives, and Gen Z can bring superior

technological expertise. Such collaboration requires leaders who can integrate unique generational skills while ensuring that every voice is heard and valued. Research by Gratton and Scott (2016) emphasizes the importance of cross-generational collaboration in fostering inclusive and innovative workplace environments.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Type of Research***

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach. This approach is chosen as it is well-suited for obtaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of generational conflict in the workplace, including its causes, impacts on employee relationships, and the management strategies employed. Qualitative descriptive research enables the exploration of perspectives, experiences, and dynamics among employees from various generations in detail. As noted by Creswell (2014), qualitative research is particularly appropriate for exploring complex social phenomena through the collection of data based on direct experiences and interpretations.

### ***Research Subjects***

The research subjects are employees from different generations working in organizations with cross-age structures, including Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. Subjects are selected using purposive sampling to ensure generational diversity relevant to the research theme. The selection criteria include their involvement in cross-generational teams, experiences with generational conflict, and their roles within the organization.

### ***Data Collection Techniques***

Data are collected using the following methods:

1. **In-depth Interviews**

Interviews are conducted with employees from various generations to understand their experiences related to generational conflict, their perspectives on its causes, impacts, and proposed solutions. A semi-structured interview technique is employed to allow flexibility in exploring relevant issues.

2. **Participant Observation**

The researcher observes the workplace to examine interactions among generations, communication patterns, and dynamics in everyday work situations. This observation aims to complement the data obtained from interviews.

3. **Documentation**

Relevant documents such as company policies, internal reports, or meeting records reflecting cross-generational dynamics within the organization are also collected.

### ***Data Analysis***

The data collected are analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within data. In this study, the data analysis process involves the following steps:

1. Transcribing data from interviews and observations.
2. Initial coding to identify emerging themes, such as causes of conflict, impacts of conflict, and management strategies.
3. Categorizing key themes relevant to the research objectives.
4. Interpreting the data to produce in-depth and contextual conclusions.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Forms of Generational Conflict**

This study identifies various forms of generational conflict in the workplace through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The findings reveal that generational conflicts often arise due to differences in values, work preferences, communication styles, and adaptability to technology. These conflicts are evident in cross-generational team dynamics, interpersonal interactions, and responses to organizational changes. Below is an elaboration of the forms of conflicts based on case studies and participant narratives:

#### **1. Value Conflicts**

Baby Boomers often express frustration with younger generations' work patterns, which are perceived as lacking loyalty to the organization and favoring flexibility. A Generation X team manager commented:

"I often see younger employees, especially Gen Z, focusing more on work-life balance than completing tasks with full dedication. This sometimes makes older team members feel they are less serious."

On the other hand, Millennials and Gen Z lament that older generations often fail to understand the importance of work-life balance. This tension affects not only interpersonal relationships but also overall team productivity.

#### **2. Communication Preferences**

Differences in communication preferences frequently lead to misunderstandings. Baby Boomers and some Generation X employees prefer direct communication or formal meetings, while Millennials and Gen Z favor digital communication such as emails or chat applications. A Gen Z employee shared:

"I find it more efficient to use apps like Slack for communication, but sometimes my boss insists on long meetings, which waste time discussing things that could be handled through short messages."

These mismatched expectations often slow down workflows, as each generation has different views on what constitutes effective communication.

### 3. Technology Adaptation

Technological adaptability is another significant source of conflict. Younger generations, particularly Gen Z, feel frustrated when older generations struggle with adopting new tools. Conversely, Baby Boomers and Generation X feel pressured by the constant demand to keep up with rapidly evolving technology. A Baby Boomer supervisor admitted:

"I find it challenging to keep up with all the new tools the team uses. Sometimes, I feel left out because they assume I won't understand what they're talking about."

This technological gap fosters negative stereotypes – young employees are seen as impatient, while older employees are viewed as inflexible – further exacerbating tensions in collaborative environments.

### 4. Managerial Style Expectations

Older generations, like Baby Boomers, tend to value hierarchical structures and clear authority, whereas younger generations prefer egalitarian and flexible work environments. A Millennial participant remarked:

"I prefer managers who act as mentors rather than bosses giving orders. Sometimes, I feel that my opinions are not taken seriously by the older members of the team."

These conflicting expectations about leadership styles create dissatisfaction and escalate conflicts when neither side seeks to understand the other's perspective.

## Case Studies and Participant Narratives

In one case study, a technology company with a multi-generational team reported that value conflicts and technological adaptation were major issues. Younger employees felt the existing work culture was rigid, while older employees perceived younger colleagues as not valuing company rules and procedures. The conflict was addressed through cross-generational training involving open discussions about values and work expectations.

A Generation X participant noted improvements after the training:

"Now, I better understand the younger generation's perspective. I've also learned to use new technology they recommended, which has significantly improved my work."

## Impact of Generational Conflict on Employee Relationships

Generational conflict significantly impacts workplace relationships, including team dynamics, productivity, and the social environment. Based on empirical data from interviews, observations, and document reviews, the impacts can be categorized as follows:

### 1. Work Relationships

Generational conflicts often result in interpersonal tensions that disrupt team harmony. Older generations, like Baby Boomers, frequently feel that younger generations lack respect for established hierarchies and procedures. Conversely, Millennials and Gen Z express frustration with rigid work practices. This tension impairs collaboration and exacerbates communication issues. A Gen Z participant shared:

"Sometimes I feel my ideas are not taken seriously just because I'm younger. It discourages me from contributing more in team discussions."

## 2. Productivity

Poorly managed generational conflicts can lead to decreased productivity. Employees experiencing cross-generational tensions tend to feel less motivated, which negatively impacts individual and team performance. For example, miscommunication regarding tasks or responsibilities often leads to suboptimal outcomes. Studies indicate that disharmonious cross-generational teams take longer to complete projects due to misaligned work styles and expectations.

## 3. Workplace Social Environment

Workplaces dominated by generational conflict often lack inclusivity, leading to age-based cliques. This isolation hinders the development of supportive relationships among employees. A Generation X participant noted:

"I find it hard to connect with my Gen Z colleagues because they mostly communicate through apps and rarely engage in direct discussions."

However, when managed well, generational conflict can become an opportunity to foster a more inclusive and dynamic workplace.

## **Strategies for Managing Conflict**

The study evaluates organizational approaches to managing generational conflict and identifies several effective strategies:

### 1. Cross-Generational Training

Cross-generational training has proven effective in mitigating generational conflict. These programs aim to enhance employees' understanding of generational characteristics, values, and work preferences. In one case, a technology company reduced generational tensions through training that included open discussions, case simulations, and cross-generational mentoring. A Generation X participant noted:

"I now better understand the younger generation's perspective, which helps me collaborate with them more effectively."

### 2. Open Communication

Open communication reduces misunderstandings among generations. Successful organizations facilitate cross-generational dialogue through forums or regular meetings where employees can share ideas and clarify expectations. Well-facilitated communication fosters mutual respect and builds trust within teams.

### 3. Flexible Managerial Styles

Organizations that adapt managerial styles to generational preferences are more effective at managing conflict. Managers who balance mentoring for younger employees with the structured guidance expected by older employees foster greater collaboration and satisfaction.

#### 4. Project-Based Collaboration

Encouraging cross-generational collaboration on projects is another effective strategy. Organizations promoting teamwork across generations report increased creativity and productivity. Such projects utilize the strengths of each generation, such as Baby Boomers' experience, Generation X's managerial skills, Millennials' innovation, and Gen Z's technological expertise.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATION

### Conclusion

This study identifies that generational conflict in the workplace is triggered by differences in values, work preferences, communication styles, and adaptability to technology. Such conflicts significantly impact employee relationships, productivity, and the social environment at work. When poorly managed, these conflicts can lead to disharmony, reduced motivation, and the emergence of negative stereotypes between generations. However, when effectively addressed through strategies like open communication, cross-generational training, and project-based collaboration, generational conflicts can be leveraged as opportunities for innovation and enhanced synergy in cross-generational teams.

### Practical Implications

This study offers practical recommendations for managers and HR professionals to foster generational synergy in the workplace:

#### 1. Cross-Generational Training

Organizations should implement cross-generational training programs to enhance understanding and empathy among employees from different generations.

#### 2. Flexible Leadership Approaches

Managers should adopt flexible leadership styles that consider the work preferences of each generation.

#### 3. Facilitating Open Communication

Companies need to facilitate open communication through discussion forums or regular meetings to prevent misunderstandings.

By adopting these measures, organizations can create an inclusive work environment, boost productivity, and strengthen collaboration among generations.

### Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the body of research on generational conflict and workplace relationships by highlighting the forms of conflict, their impacts, and management strategies. The findings enrich existing literature by providing a qualitative perspective on cross-generational dynamics in the workplace, particularly in the context of modern organizations. Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of understanding generational diversity as a strategic asset in organizations, which is relevant for both academics and practitioners in human resource management.

## Recomendation

The study recommends further research using a quantitative approach to measure the relationship between generational conflict and work productivity. Quantitative research can help identify correlations or causal links between generational conflict and performance indicators such as team effectiveness, employee retention, or job satisfaction. Additionally, studies across various industry sectors could provide broader insights into cross-generational workplace dynamics.

Such future research would complement these qualitative findings and provide a stronger foundation for managerial decision-making.

## ADVANCED RESEARCH

Still conducting further research to gain deeper insights into Management of Intergenerational Conflict in the Workplace and Its Impact on Employee Relations.

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