

From Conflict to Collaboration

Generational Dynamics in The Workplace

with Nicki Straza





Current State

- We are in a season of history when we have up to 5 Generations in the Workplace
- Technology is causing change in the workplace at record speeds
- In the next 8-10 Years - 25% of the Workforce is expected to retire
- The size of the available workforce is expected to shrink by 30% due to lower birth rates (less young people available to work)
- AI will have an increasing impact on the nature of work and access to entry-level jobs
- Economic and Political Uncertainty are impacting workers in the form of stress, job loss, financial stability etc.

What workplace challenges do you see as a result of these situations?



Generational Dynamics

What challenges do you see in the workplace when it comes to a multi-generational workforce?



Only 8% of organizations consider generational diversity a category of diversity.” - Megan Gerhardt

How Well do You Know the Generations?

01



Boomers

- Master Adapters
- Competitive
- Know life before colour TV
- Volunteer/Donor
- Loyal to Company
- Drive Wellness Ind.

02



Gen X

- Independent
- Know life before the internet
- Digital Pioneers
- Loyal to Leader
- Skeptical of Authority

03



Millennials

- Collaborative
- Know life before Social Media
- Loyal to Purpose
- Driven & Optimistic
- Financial Pressure

04



Gen Z

- Digital Creators
- Know life before AI
- Loyal to Causes
- Social Justice Advocates
- Mental Health Aware

Context, Not Character

1. Authority

- Early career experience taught each generation a different way to read authority, through titles, tenure, or competence.
- When leaders miss this, a different relationship with authority gets mistaken for disrespect.

2. Urgency

- What counts as “right away” was set long before someone joined your team.
- Urgency also creates vague instructions, assumptions, and missed context. This is useful information if you are expecting excellent work.

3. Trust

- Trust is built in the small moments: the moments when we are regulated, the moments when we listen, the moments when we remember a name and see a person rather than a task. **Building trust is key** for inter-generational communication to be effective.



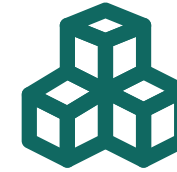
***“These tensions are rarely about age.
They are about context.” — Nicki Straza***

Key Areas of Conflict



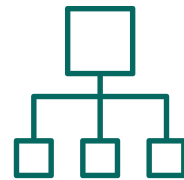
Emotional Intelligence

Each generation has strengths along the spectrum of emotional intelligence skills and put a different value on these skills. This is the biggest source of conflict.



Definitions of Words

Words like respect, work ethic, vulnerability, professionalism and psychological safety, have different meanings across generations.



Hierarchy vs Matrix Styles

Changes in the workplace, the workforce, the nature of work and the nature of choice have challenged the typical command and control hierarchies and complicated norms that were comfortable for older generations.



Communication Preferences

Communication has seen shifts from face-to-face to email or app-based communications like slack. Asynchronous communication is a new concept in the last 30 years.



Feedback Expectations

Generations have different expectations around feedback, in timing, formality, and whether it happens in public or private. Exploring that difference turns a frustration into a conversation about what truly helps someone grow.



Workplace Readiness

Young people are not arriving in the workplace as prepared as they have in the past. This is in part from changes in education, covid, & social media impact on mental/emotional wellbeing. This isn't their fault.



What is standing out to you so far?

Breakout Discussion



Key Skills for Navigating Generational Dynamics



Coaching Skills

Coaching skills are one of the best ways to build bridges between generations. Empowers leaders to be curious, lead with questions vs answers.



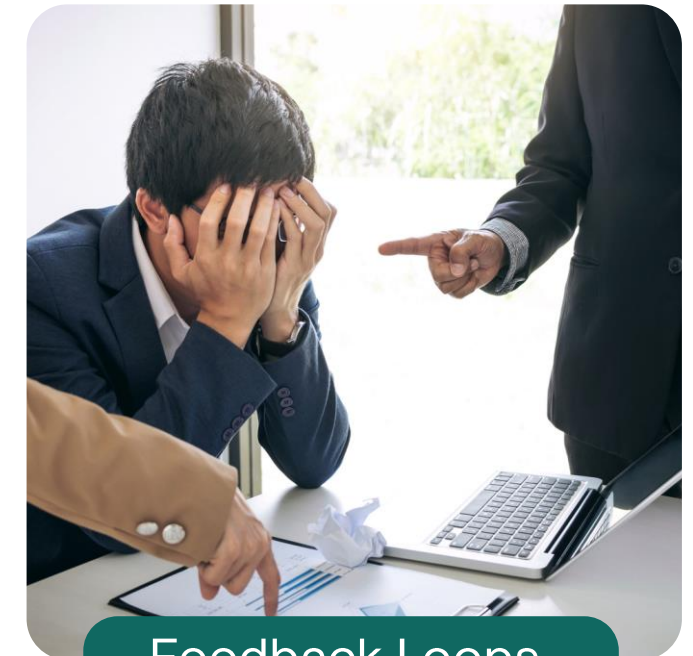
Psych Safety

Truly psychologically safe environments enable every generation to have a voice, the key is to understand what each generation needs to feel safe.



Mutual Mentoring

Mutual mentoring creates opportunities for relationships to be built across generations and for both sides to learn from each other.



Feedback Loops.

Consistent, safe, and clear feedback loops of both positive and constructive with opportunity for feedback in both directions, is a learning curve for all generations.

Coaching Skills

1. Shift from advising to inquiring

- Replace quick solutions with powerful questions such as “What have you tried?” or “What outcome are you hoping for?”
- This encourages critical thinking and self-efficacy, building long-term capability rather than short-term compliance.

2. Schedule consistent coaching touchpoints

- Integrate short, 15-minute “learning huddles” or reflection check-ins after key projects.
- Consistency normalizes coaching as part of the workflow rather than an occasional intervention.

3. Model a growth mindset

- Share your own learning curve and moments of uncertainty.
- It gives permission for others to learn openly and reinforces the message that progress, not perfection, drives performance.



“Coaching is unlocking a person’s potential to maximize their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them.”

— Sir John Whitmore

Psychological Safety

1. Reward candor, not just compliance

- Publicly acknowledge those who raise tough questions or name uncomfortable truths.
- Turn “speaking up” into a recognized leadership behaviour, not a career risk.

2. Lead with curiosity before judgment

- In moments of tension, start with “Tell me more about what led you to that perspective.”
- Curiosity interrupts defensiveness and signals respect across generational and positional lines.

3. Close the feedback loop

- When someone shares input, circle back to explain what was done with their insight.
- This reinforces trust that speaking up matters and prevents a culture of silence from taking root.



“Psychological safety is not about being nice or lowering performance standards, it’s about giving candid feedback, openly admitting mistakes, and learning from them.” — Amy C. Edmondson

The Four Stages of Psychological Safety

1. Inclusion Safety

- People feel accepted for who they are, without fear of rejection or humiliation.

2. Learner Safety

- People feel safe asking questions, giving and receiving feedback, and making mistakes while they grow.

3. Contributor Safety

- People use their skills and judgment to participate, with real autonomy to do meaningful work.

4. Challenger Safety

- People can question the status quo and propose new ideas without fear of retribution.



The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety
by Timothy R. Clark

Mutual Mentoring

1. Pair across generations intentionally

- Create mutual-mentoring partnerships (e.g., Boomer–Gen Z or Gen X–Millennial) focused on specific skills—technical, relational, or strategic.
- Frame it as two-way value exchange, not a hierarchy.

2. Structure storytelling opportunities

- Encourage “Lessons Learned” circles where each generation shares one insight that shaped their professional identity.
- These narratives build empathy and continuity of institutional wisdom.

3. Celebrate collaborative wins

- Recognize projects where cross-generational pairs achieved success together.
- Visibility reinforces that diversity of experience fuels innovation.



“One of the greatest values of mentors is the ability to see ahead what others cannot see and to help them navigate a course to their destination.” — John C. Maxwell

Feedback Loops.

1. Normalize two-way feedback

- Feedback, when approached from a place of mutuality rather than power over, is much more effective.
- Creating opportunities for giving and receiving feedback, when normalized, becomes a powerful tool for mentoring and continuous improvement.

2. Be specific

- General statements like "great job" do not help the team member know what to repeat.
- Offer feedback as quickly as possible after an observation rather than waiting for concerns to pile up.

3. Surface conflict early

- Consistent and frequent conversations around feedback allow the opportunity for conflict to surface early.
- Don't ignore small concerns. They will blossom into bigger issues. Dig in, understand and listen, and find mutual solutions early.



“The aim of argument and of discussion should not be victory, but progress.”

— Joseph Joubert

Breakout Discussion



Which one of these tools, if implemented, would have the most impact in your team?

**Coaching Skills, Psychological Safety,
Mutual Mentoring, Feedback Loop**

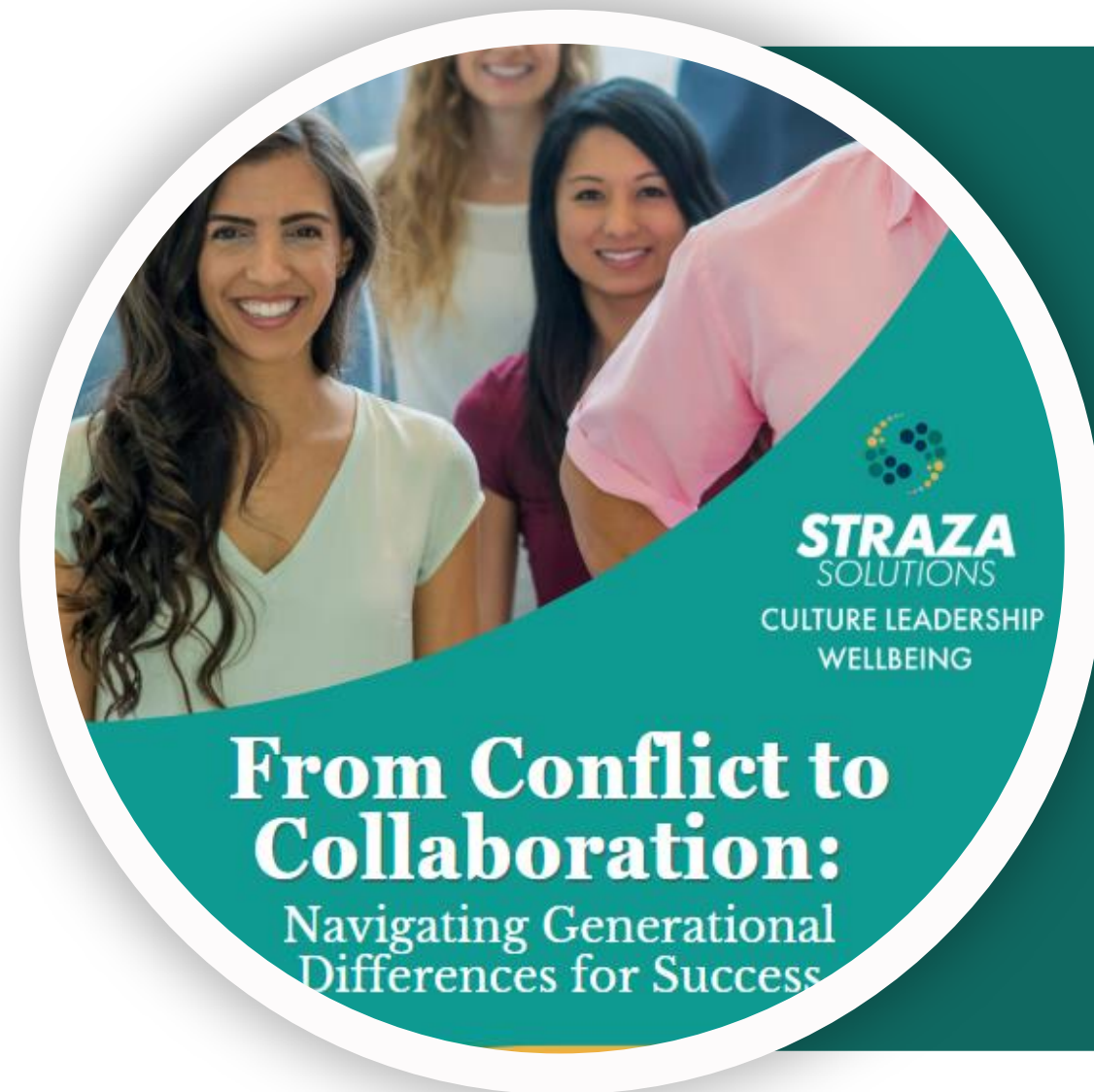




Questions?
Insights?
Learnings?



**Join my Mailing List and get my new Book
“From Conflict to Collaboration”**



THANK YOU



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*Thanks,
Nicki*