

## 3 Global Trends Impacting Conflict At Work

By Anna Shields, Consensio, 29 February 2024

The workplace has experienced significant changes over the past few years. The growth of hybrid working has blurred the lines between work and personal life. According to Deloitte's 2024 Global Human Capital Trends, the workplace is not always a specific place, and many employees are no longer traditionally employed. This means boundaries are falling away. Technological developments and AI enable people to be more interconnected, yet reduced real-life social interaction means more disconnection. These global shifts affect how workers relate to each other and how conflict is dealt with when it arises. In this new, evolving landscape, three key global trends are particularly impacting conflict in the workplace.

### 1. A decline in emotional resilience

People seem generally more tired and busy. Many are leading more individualistic lives, and much of the sense of community felt during Covid has been lost. Feeling more isolated and less connected leads to people 'languishing' in and out of work. More workers are 'going through the motions' rather than being committed and engaged in their work life. Ipsos's 2023 Global Happiness report revealed that happiness is declining in Western countries, down 13% from 2022-2023. Emotional intelligence, or EQ, needed to manage emotions and overcome challenges, has also declined for the last three years. This drop in emotional health reduces employee resilience. When encountering a difficulty with a colleague, they are less likely to be patient and remain calm. Empathy, an essential aspect of managing conflict, is more difficult to feel when emotional reserves are low.

### 2. Team dynamics are shifting

There are also important shifts in how teams interrelate. The entrance of Gen Z into the workforce has brought with it a new set of values and expectations. The "first global generation" highly values work-life balance, remote working, and flexible leave. As leaders integrate this new generation, they are also managing some of the challenges of geographically dispersed teams. While workers appreciate the freedom of a hybrid working model, fostering team cohesion can be tricky when teams only work physically together 1 to 2 days a week, or not at all. In some cases, teams get stuck in the 'storming' phase of teambuilding, unable to move into the norming and performing stage, or at least not as quickly. Teams that work remotely can perform well, but the onus is on busy managers to have the time, skills, and confidence to support teams through these phases.

### 3. The impact of the global conflict landscape

On a macro level, people's perceptions and approaches to conflict are influenced by what they see in the world around them. Workers are receiving and being affected by real-time information and news from across the globe, which keeps the destructive elements of conflict front of mind. There is also the impact of how global leaders communicate on divisive issues; whether it's Donald Trump vs.

Nikki Haley sparring over the Republican nomination, or Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer's weekly debate at Prime Minister Questions. The 'attack and defend' strategy may win votes, but the opposite is true when managing conflict situations in real life. A difficulty with a colleague at work requires dialogue, listening, speaking to them directly, and being open to other perspectives. This is what leads to constructive resolution and a restorative way forward.

These three global trends may appear negative, but there are reasons for hope. Employees can develop emotional resilience, teams can learn the skills to navigate challenges, and leaders can become exemplars of healthy conflict. The technologies that are transforming the world can also be used to enhance skills in the workplace. The increasingly boundaryless workplace provides an opportunity to form deeper connections and relationships, without the barriers of the past.