

Triggers of Conflicts and Mechanisms of Conflict Prevention in Organizations: Analysis of Factors and Classification

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ABSTRACT

Workplace conflict emerges from the interaction of interpersonal, structural, and cultural dimensions, often manifesting through personality clashes, procedural ambiguity, value differences, hierarchical friction, and language barriers. This study explores how this conflict triggers interrelate, how their frequency varies across generational cohorts, and what coping strategies employees employ in response. Quantitative analysis revealed that personality, process, and value conflicts frequently co-occur, while proactive conflict attitudes aligned with constructive resolution behaviors. Generational patterns showed Gen X and Gen Y report the highest levels of personality and process conflicts, whereas Gen Z showed heightened sensitivity to language-related tension. Qualitative insights revealed a distinct archetype - the so-called "Employee Devil" - who, despite high performance, undermines cohesion through manipulation of informal power structures. Together, the findings support a two-level prevention framework that combines structural interventions (e.g., process clarification) with relational strategies (e.g., inclusive leadership, early detection of toxic informal influence). The study contributes to organizational conflict scholarship by demonstrating how formal systems and hidden dynamics jointly shape team cohesion and by proposing practical tools for addressing conflict complexity.

Keywords: Organizational Conflict, Conflict Triggers, Conflict Prevention Mechanisms, Economic Factors, Organizational Psychology, Peace and Justice Strong Institutions

1. INTRODUCTION

Conflicts in organizations are not anomalies, but persistent, systemic phenomena rooted in the psychological, economic, and cultural fabric of modern work environments. As organizations grow increasingly diverse and technologically complex, understanding the multidimensional nature of conflict becomes essential to sustaining productivity and cohesion. The present study is grounded in the belief that workplace conflict does not arise solely from individual tensions but is often shaped by a constellation of structural inefficiencies, value misalignments, and intergenerational differences.

The overarching research question that guides this study is: **What are the key psychological and economic triggers of conflict in organizations, and how can these be effectively addressed through targeted conflict prevention mechanisms?** In addressing this question, we distinguish between the broader object of study - **conflict processes in formal organizational settings** - and the more specific subject of investigation: **the psychological and economic factors that trigger organizational conflict and the mechanisms employed to prevent such conflict.**

While traditional conflict models often isolate causes into categories such as interpersonal disputes or role ambiguity, emerging evidence suggests that these triggers are often interdependent. Psychological factors like personality traits, generational identity, and emotional intelligence intersect with economic and structural dimensions such as unclear procedures, rigid hierarchies, and informal power dynamics. In particular organizations in post-Soviet contexts such as Latvia exhibit a layered conflict ecology influenced by historical legacies, bureaucratic inertia, and shifting cultural expectations.

To explore these complex interactions, the study integrates quantitative survey data with qualitative interview insights. The survey focused on six conflict-related behaviors (Q6–Q11) and five conflict-coping styles (Q12–Q16), while the interviews illuminated informal influence patterns, including the emergence of a destabilizing figure colloquially termed the "Employee Devil."

Beyond organizational dynamics, this research contributes to the global discourse on peace and justice by aligning with **Sustainable Development Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**. Effective conflict prevention mechanisms are not only key to fostering productive workplaces but are also essential to promoting transparent and accountable institutions that uphold dignity, equity, and mutual respect.

The results of this study yield three key contributions. First, they highlight the clustering of personality, process, and value conflicts into a mutually reinforcing triad. Second, they reveal generational patterns in conflict perception and response, with Generation X and Generation Y reporting the highest levels of interpersonal and procedural tension. Third, they extend the literature to toxic influence by theorizing informal disruptors who act outside formal authority but have substantial impact on team dynamics.

In doing so, this paper proposes a dual-level framework for conflict prevention, one that incorporates structural redesign and

relational vigilance. Such a model enables organizations not only to manage conflict reactively but to anticipate and diffuse it through systemic awareness and inclusive leadership practices.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques. The combination of methods was chosen to gain a comprehensive understanding of conflict experiences in the workplace - capturing both statistical patterns across a broad employee population and deeper insights into managerial perspectives and interpretations. This approach enabled data triangulation and supported greater validity of findings.

2.1 Quantitative Component

The quantitative part of the study was based on a custom-designed online questionnaire distributed to employees of a Latvian company operating in the transportation sector. The organization employs approximately 1,400 individuals, and a total of 317 completed responses were obtained, representing around 23% of the workforce.

Although 70% of the organization's employees are male, the gender distribution among survey respondents was more balanced - 54% male and 46% female - likely reflecting higher female participation rates in research-related initiatives. The age range of respondents extended from 18 to 80 years. Rather than requesting exact age, participants were asked to indicate their generational cohort based on Twenge's (2023) [1] classification: Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1979), Generation Y / Millennials (1980-1994), and Generation Z (1995-2012).

The survey instrument was structured into multiple thematic areas related to organizational conflict, perceived inclusion, and communication. In particular, this study focused on a subset of 16 targeted items organized into two domains:

Conflict Triggers (Q6 - Q11): Measured on 4 - point Likert-type scales, assessing perceived causes of workplace conflict such as personality differences, unclear processes, communication breakdowns, hierarchical dynamics, language barriers, and value misalignment.

Conflict Response Styles (Q12 - Q16): Binary response scale with two forced choice answer options, these items explored respondents' habitual approaches to managing or reacting to conflict, including tendencies toward confrontation, avoidance, accommodation, or collaboration.

The aim was to examine associations between employee demographics (generation, tenure, managerial role) and conflict perceptions and resolution styles within a Latvian post-Soviet organizational context.

Quantitative analyses were performed using JASP (version 0.19.3). The following statistical techniques were applied:

Descriptive statistics for demographic and response distributions, Spearman's rank-order correlation for analyzing non-parametric associations between conflict triggers (ordinal variables),

Chi - square tests of independence and contingency coefficients to identify statistically significant relationships between demographic variables and binary conflict response styles.

Data collection occurred in May 2025. To ensure compliance with ethical standards and data security protocols, all responses were processed in accordance with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) [2].

2.2 Qualitative Component

To complement the quantitative data, a qualitative component was integrated into the study design. A total of nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with managers occupying roles at various organizational levels - from front-line supervisors to senior executives.

The interview protocol was built around six core thematic areas, which were informed by theoretical literature but designed to allow flexibility for emergent themes and unexpected insights. Particular attention was given to the perception and handling of toxic informal leadership, long-term employee behavior, and interpersonal dynamics surrounding conflict generation and escalation.

All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using Philipp Mayring's (2014) [3] approach to qualitative content analysis, which combines:

Deductive coding based on pre-established theoretical categories (e.g., types of conflict, leadership behaviors, intervention models), and

Inductive coding to surface latent or emergent concepts (e.g., informal power structures, emotional fatigue, behavioral contagion) rooted in the lived experiences of the interviewees.

This dual-layered analytic strategy allowed the study to not only test existing theory but also refine and extend it by grounding findings in the specific context of a post-Soviet Latvian organization.

2.3 Ethical Considerations

The study fully complied with established ethical guidelines for social science research. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Respondents were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

To preserve confidentiality, no personal identifiers were collected. The organization remains anonymous in all publications, and findings are reported in aggregated form. No identifiable individual or unit is disclosed in the analysis or data presentation.

2.4 Research Limitations

Despite its methodological rigor, the study is subject to several limitations:

- **Single-case limitation:** The research was conducted within one organization in the Latvian transportation sector. Therefore, the findings may not generalize to other national or industrial contexts.
- **Self-report bias:** Survey responses relied on self-assessment and may be influenced by social desirability or personal interpretation, particularly on sensitive topics like workplace conflict or managerial effectiveness.
- **Generational simplification:** While useful for analytical grouping, the generational framework [1] may obscure meaningful intra-generational differences, particularly when intersecting with factors like education, cultural background, or job function.
- **Limited qualitative sample:** Only nine interviews were conducted in the qualitative phase, which - though rich in content - may not fully represent the diversity of leadership experiences or conflict management styles across the organization.
- **Temporal specificity:** The data reflects organizational dynamics during a specific period (May 2025), and results may be influenced by transient events or leadership transitions not captured in the study.

3. LITERATURE OVERVIEW

Conflicts in organizational settings have been a subject of extensive academic scrutiny for decades. Their causes, dynamics, and resolution strategies reflect the complex interplay between individual, group, and systemic variables. This literature review seeks to provide a structured overview of key theoretical and empirical contributions relevant to conflict triggers and prevention mechanisms in the workplace. Special attention is paid to the intergenerational dimension, psychological and economic factors, and organizational culture.

3.1 The Nature of Workplace Conflict

Workplace conflict is broadly defined as “a process in which one party perceives that its interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party” [4]. Conflicts may arise at various levels - intrapersonal, interpersonal, intragroup, or intergroup - and may be either task-related, relational, or process-oriented [5]. Task conflict, which pertains to disagreements about work content or goals, is often considered beneficial when managed constructively, as it can promote innovation and critical thinking [6]. In contrast, relational conflict, rooted in personal incompatibility or negative emotions, tends to have a consistently detrimental impact on team cohesion and performance [7].

3.2 Psychological Triggers of Conflict

A significant body of literature underscores the role of individual psychological factors in conflict emergence. Personality traits such as neuroticism, authoritarianism, and low emotional intelligence have been associated with higher conflict proneness [8];[9]. Emotional regulation skills and conflict management styles also play a decisive role in shaping both the likelihood and the trajectory of conflict [10].

Perceptions of injustice or exclusion often serve as psychological triggers, especially in diverse workplace environments. According to organizational justice theory, perceived unfairness in resource distribution, procedural transparency, or interpersonal treatment can lead to conflictual behaviors or withdrawal [11].

Moreover, stress and burnout, frequently encountered in high-pressure or poorly managed workplaces, have been empirically linked to heightened interpersonal tensions and reduced conflict tolerance [12]. When employees are psychologically depleted, their capacity to engage in constructive dialogue and collaborative problem-solving diminishes.

3.3 Economic and Structural Conflict Drivers

While psychological factors matter, economic and organizational structures are also pivotal in generating conflict. Resource scarcity, competition for promotions, ambiguous job roles, and inequitable workload distribution are frequently cited in the literature as structural antecedents of conflict [13][14].

The principal-agent problem, common in hierarchical organizations, creates asymmetries in incentives and information that can foster distrust and disagreement between managers and employees [15]. Similarly, conflicting performance targets between departments (e.g., sales vs. operations) may institutionalize tension, especially in organizations lacking integrative coordination mechanisms.

Economic instability also exacerbates conflict potential. Downsizing, budget cuts, and performance pressures can intensify competition among employees, triggering protective or antagonistic behaviors [16]. In such settings, conflict often becomes a rational reaction to perceived threats to job security or career advancement.

3.4 Intergenerational Dynamics and Conflict

In recent years, intergenerational conflict has gained increasing scholarly and managerial attention, particularly in the context of multigenerational workforces. Organizations today may include employees from up to four generations - Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials (Y), and Generation Z - each shaped by distinct socio-economic, technological, and educational experiences [1] [17].

Differences in values, communication styles, technology use, and attitudes toward authority are among the most cited intergenerational friction points [18]. For instance, younger employees may prioritize flexibility and autonomy, while older cohorts may value stability and formal hierarchies [19]. These differences can lead to misunderstandings, mutual stereotypes, and even open conflict, particularly if managers lack the skills or frameworks to bridge generational divides.

Empirical research also suggests that perceived generational bias or favoritism can undermine trust and collaboration [20]. Thus, fostering intergenerational inclusion is critical to conflict prevention, requiring deliberate efforts in communication training, team design, and leadership development.

3.5 Process Management, Organizational Culture, and Stress as Conflict Catalysts

Emerging research emphasizes the importance of organizational process management and internal structural clarity in shaping employee experience and mitigating workplace stressors. Poorly defined processes and inconsistent procedures can be significant contributors to chronic stress, which in turn exacerbates conflict potential [21]. Their study demonstrated how deficiencies in internal process alignment directly impact employee stress levels, especially in complex and change-sensitive environments, such as public administration and service sectors. Stress, particularly when coupled with high ambiguity and low procedural transparency, becomes a fertile ground for interpersonal friction and miscommunication.

Closely related is the role of organizational culture in either buffering or accelerating conflict dynamics. Organizational norms that emphasize openness, fairness, and continuous learning tend to reduce conflict frequency and severity [22]. Conversely, rigid or hierarchical cultures where feedback is suppressed and innovation discouraged may increase employees' psychological distance from management and colleagues, thus creating conditions conducive to conflict. Cultural misalignment between individual values and organizational practices has been shown to hinder constructive dialogue and foster passive resistance or disengagement.

Furthermore, research on public sector governance highlights how the process approach, when treated merely as a bureaucratic formality rather than a meaningful framework for cross-functional collaboration, can limit its preventive potential regarding organizational tension [23]. This disconnect often results in miscommunication, duplication of effort, and ultimately, conflict between functional units. By institutionalizing procedural clarity and promoting cross-departmental alignment, organizations can create an infrastructure that supports not only operational efficiency but also psychological safety.

These findings suggest that conflict prevention is not merely a function of individual traits or interpersonal skillsets but is deeply embedded in how organizations manage their internal systems, define cultural expectations, and adapt their processes to human needs. A failure to recognize the systemic origins of conflict risks reducing resolution efforts to surface-level interventions.

3.6 Organizational Culture and Conflict

Organizational culture - defined as “the shared values, beliefs, and norms that influence how employees think, feel, and behave” - profoundly affects both the likelihood of conflict and its resolution pathways [24]. Cultures that encourage openness, psychological safety, and constructive dissent tend to experience lower levels of dysfunctional conflict and greater success in conflict resolution [25].

Conversely, cultures marked by hierarchy, fear of retribution, or lack of voice may suppress early conflict signals, allowing tensions to escalate unchecked [26]. The role of leadership is particularly salient in shaping conflict cultures. Transformational leaders who model empathy, transparency, and inclusive decision-making are more likely to foster collaborative conflict resolution climates [27].

Furthermore, language policies, ethnic diversity, and power asymmetries within organizational cultures can influence both the form and intensity of conflict. Research from multicultural settings highlights the risk of microaggressions, exclusion, or language-based marginalization as covert sources of conflict [28].

3.7 Conflict Prevention and Management Mechanisms

Prevention is widely recognized as more effective than reactive conflict resolution. Literature on conflict prevention mechanisms identifies several key interventions: clear job descriptions, participatory goal setting, inclusive communication practices, and regular feedback loops [29].

Training in emotional intelligence and conflict resolution skills has shown positive outcomes in reducing interpersonal tensions and promoting collaborative cultures [30] [9]. Additionally, mediation programs, ombudsman services, and HR-led early intervention systems have been found effective in diffusing tensions before they escalate [31].

Notably, digital communication tools - while enabling efficiency - can also introduce new conflict dynamics due to lack of non-verbal cues, increased misinterpretation, and the blurring of professional boundaries [32]. Organizations must therefore consider the evolving nature of workplace communication in their conflict management strategies.

The literature overview confirms that workplace conflict is a multifactorial phenomenon influenced by psychological dispositions, organizational structures, economic pressures, cultural norms, and generational dynamics. These factors interact in complex ways, shaping both the emergence and escalation of conflict. Effective conflict prevention, therefore, requires a systemic and inclusive approach that goes beyond interpersonal interventions and addresses institutional conditions that enable or constrain conflict behavior.

The present study aims to build on this theoretical foundation by empirically examining conflict triggers and prevention mechanisms within a real-world organizational setting, with a particular focus on intergenerational dynamics, perceived inclusivity, and structural process factors. By integrating insights from psychological, economic, and organizational perspectives, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive and practice-relevant contribution to the field of conflict management.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Building upon the theoretical insights presented in the literature overview (Section 3), this section presents the empirical findings of the study based on a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative survey data and qualitative insights from managerial interviews. The literature emphasized the

multifactorial nature of workplace conflict - highlighting psychological, structural, economic, and cultural dimensions as key conflict triggers [4] [5] [8]. It also underscored the critical role of organizational culture and leadership in shaping conflict dynamics and promoting effective resolution [21] [23].

Grounded in these conceptual foundations, the empirical analysis aims to examine how such factors manifest within a specific organizational context. The purpose of this analysis is to explore the frequency, causes, and dynamics of workplace conflicts, as well as the behavioral responses and organizational mechanisms involved in conflict prevention and resolution.

The survey included both structured and Likert - scale questions that captured perceived conflict triggers - such as interpersonal tensions, organizational structure, communication barriers, and value - based disagreements - as well as individual reactions to conflict situations.

To identify relationships among variables, descriptive statistics, quantitative analyses were performed using JASP (version 0.19.3). These quantitative findings were triangulated with insights from nine semi-structured interviews with managers at various organizational levels, enabling a nuanced understanding of both systemic patterns and subjective interpretations of conflict.

The following subsections examine the results in detail, organized by key themes: conflict triggers, conflict response strategies, and the mediating role of organizational culture and leadership.

4.1. Correlation Analysis of Conflict Triggers (Q6 - Q11)

To understand how different types of workplace conflicts interrelate, a Spearman’s rank-order correlation analysis was conducted on six variables: frequency of work-related disagreements (Q6), personality conflicts (Q7), conflicts caused by unclear processes (Q8), value-based conflicts (Q9), hierarchical/power-based tensions (Q10), and language barriers (Q11). All variables were measured on a 4 - point Likert scale.

The correlation matrix (see Figure 1) reveals several notable associations:

- The strongest correlation was observed between Q7 (personality conflicts) and Q9 (value - based conflicts) ($\rho = .623$), indicating that individuals experiencing personality clashes may simultaneously struggle with deeper ideological or generational differences.
- A strong correlation also emerged between Q7 (personality conflicts) and Q8 (process ambiguity) ($\rho = .503$), suggesting that interpersonal tension may increase in the presence of unclear procedures or structural vagueness.
- Additionally, Q9 (value - based conflicts) and Q10 (value conflict and hierarchy) were correlated at $\rho = .516$, and Q8 and Q10 at $\rho = .468$, both pointing to the significant role of procedural and hierarchical clarity in conflict prevention.
- Q6 (work-related disagreements) showed moderate correlations with Q7 (personality conflicts); $\rho = .552$, Q8 (conflicts caused by unclear processes; $\rho = .422$), and Q9 (value-based conflicts; $\rho = .441$), supporting the view that task-based conflicts often overlap with personal and structural dynamics.
- Q11 (language barriers) showed weak correlations across all conflict types, ranging from $\rho = .104$ with Q6 (work-related disagreements) to $\rho = .192$ with Q9 (value - based conflicts). This suggests that, in this organizational context, language is a secondary

contributor to conflict compared to personal, procedural, or hierarchical dimensions.

These results underscore the interconnected and multidimensional nature of workplace conflict triggers. Effective conflict prevention should therefore address both interpersonal relationships and organizational systems, emphasizing procedural clarity, inclusive communication, and emotional intelligence as critical levers for building resilient teams.

Figure 1. Correlation Matrix: Conflict Frequency and Causes (Q6-Q11)

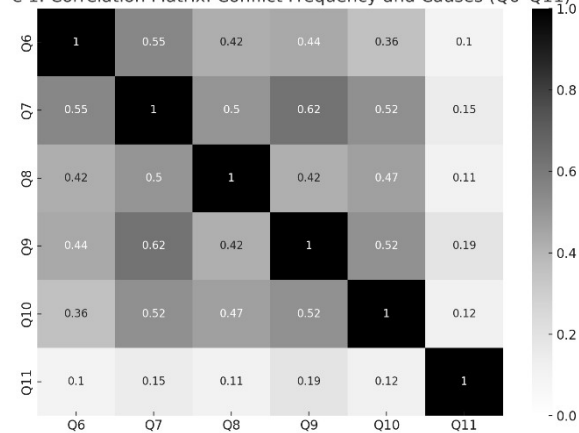


Figure 1: Correlation Matrix Q6-Q11

4.2. Conflict Coping Strategies: Chi-Square Association Analysis (Q12-Q16)

To better understand how employees' conflict coping styles relate to one another and vary across generations, chi-square tests were conducted for the five binary-coded items Q12-Q16. The analysis revealed several statistically significant associations (see Figure 2):

- A significant generational difference was observed for Q12 (Reaction to Disagreement), $\chi^2(3) = 14.933$, $p = .002$, Cramér's $V = .212$, indicating variation in initial conflict responses between age groups.
- A strong association emerged between Q13 (general conflict stance) and Q15 (resolving personal differences), $\chi^2(1) = 43.472$, $p < .001$, Cramér's $V = .347$, suggesting consistency between attitudes toward conflict and interpersonal behavior.
- Significant links were also found between:
 - Q13 and Q16 (submissiveness), $\chi^2(1) = 16.086$, $p < .001$, Cramér's $V = .220$
 - Q12 and Q16, $\chi^2(1) = 9.167$, $p = .002$, Cramér's $V = .168$
 - Q14 (considering others' interests) and Q15, $\chi^2(1) = 7.865$, $p = .005$, Cramér's $V = .156$

No significant associations were found between Q13 and Q14 or Q14 and Q16, suggesting that prioritizing others' interests may represent a distinct orientation rather than part of a broader coping schema.

Overall, the findings suggest that individuals' general openness to conflict is strongly aligned with their behavioral coping tendencies, reinforcing the view that conflict style is a coherent psychological construct.

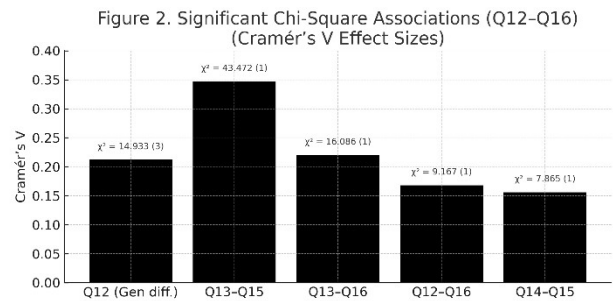


Figure 2: Significant Chi-Square Associations (Q12-Q16)

4.3. Generational Differences in Conflict Perception

To explore how perceptions of workplace conflict vary across age cohorts, a descriptive analysis was conducted for questions Q6 - Q11, which assess the frequency of different types of conflict. The responses were segmented across four generational groups: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y (Millennials), and Generation Z.

The analysis revealed that:

- Personality-based conflicts (Q7) are reported most frequently by Generation X and Generation Y, both with a mean of approximately 1.94. In contrast, Baby Boomers reported the lowest frequency ($M = 1.46$). This may indicate that mid-career professionals encounter or perceive more interpersonal friction, potentially due to competitive work environments or increased stress levels. Alternatively, Baby Boomers may possess more developed conflict management strategies due to experience.
- Process-related conflicts (Q8) also appear more frequently among Generation X and Generation Y groups, suggesting a sensitivity to operational inefficiencies or organizational ambiguity in these cohorts.
- Language barrier-related conflicts (Q11) were generally infrequent across all generations, with the lowest mean values overall. However, Generation Z showed a slightly elevated mean ($M = 1.26$), which might reflect a heightened sensitivity to linguistic nuances or intercultural dynamics among younger employees.

These generational patterns highlight the importance of tailored conflict prevention strategies, which consider not only organizational and structural factors but also age-related differences in conflict perception and response. Awareness of these dynamics can support more inclusive and adaptive human resource policies, particularly in multigenerational workplaces.

4.4. The Employee "Devil": A Qualitative Analysis of Hidden Conflict Agents in Organizations

Introduction: The dual nature of a problematic high performer. Within the empirical study on organizational conflict triggers and preventive mechanisms, a unique behavioral archetype surfaced across multiple managerial interviews: the so-called Employee "Devil". This term describes a paradoxical employee - highly skilled, professionally competent, and well-regarded by leadership - who simultaneously engages in covert behaviors that erode team cohesion and foster toxic microclimates. Such individuals often enjoy trust and status due to their tenure and perceived reliability, yet their actions behind the scenes - such as gossiping, discrediting others, controlling informal narratives, and forming exclusionary cliques - have corrosive

effects on psychological safety and employee retention. Unlike overt conflict instigators, the Employee “Devil” undermines others indirectly, leveraging their credibility to shape perception while avoiding accountability.

The concept aligns with academic constructs such as toxic competence [33], organizational misfits [34], and dark side leadership followers - employees who manipulate power from below [35]. In this study, nine managerial interviews were qualitatively analyzed using Philipp Mayring’s (2014) [3] systematic approach to uncover the strategies, motivations, and organizational risks posed by these hidden conflict agents.

A. Role typology: Passive vs. active employee “Devils”

Managers distinguished between two primary behavioral patterns:

- Passive “Devils” engage in subtle, persistent undermining - e.g., eye-rolling, sarcastic comments, or “grapevine updates” that seed doubt.
- Active “Devils” form cliques, deliberately isolate perceived competitors, and influence managerial decisions through curated information.

“There are employees who don’t openly sabotage others, but their silent negativity poisons the atmosphere slowly.”
(Resp. 3)

B. Motivations: Career stagnation and psychological displacement.

- In many cases, these employees had reached the upper limit of their role or salary band and expressed frustration - consciously or not- through disruptive behavior.

“They are excellent professionals who feel stuck. The ceiling has been reached, and they have nowhere to grow.”
(Resp. 5)

Financial limitations, lack of promotion opportunities, and feelings of being unrecognized often manifested as hostility toward newcomers or high-potential colleagues.

C. Mechanisms of influence: Informal leadership and perception management

Employee “Devils” often functioned as informal leaders, with deep knowledge of internal culture and peer networks. They:

- Controlled narratives by selectively sharing critical or distorted information.
- Manipulated emotional tone (e.g., mockery, grimaces, loaded jokes).
- Created factions or “in-groups” resistant to change or new leadership.

“When a new colleague joins, they immediately hear who’s supposedly ‘slow’ or ‘not competent.’ That judgment often comes from someone respected.”

(Resp. 8)

D. Organizational impact: Attrition, disengagement, and microclimate decay

The Employee “Devil” contributes to silent forms of conflict escalation:

- Undermining onboarding of new employees.
- Normalizing toxic humor and sarcasm.
- Spurring collective resistance to organizational change.
- Increasing turnover among younger or more qualified staff.

“We often learn about the real problem only when someone resigns and finally opens up.”

(Resp. 4)

E. Managerial dilemma: Valuable yet disruptive

Managers consistently acknowledged the paradox: the Employee “Devil” is often indispensable in terms of skills or historical

knowledge, but detrimental to team dynamics. Removing such individuals is difficult due to:

- Loyalty to upper management,
- Perceived irreplaceability,
- Fear of legal or reputational consequences.

“He won’t leave. He’s not happy here, but he’ll never leave. And we can’t really remove him without disruption.”
(Resp. 6)

Organizational Coping Strategies

Various approaches were described, ranging from:

- Dialogue and coaching, especially when the cause was personal frustration.
- Strategic role restructuring to break influence cycles.
- Team reshuffling to reduce dependency on toxic influence.
- Direct confrontation, although respondents noted this is often met with manipulation or deflection.

Some organizations have introduced business partners within HR, responsible for reading “soft signals” from departments and identifying toxic dynamics early.

The study authors conclude that the Employee “Devil” represents a complex internal conflict trigger, functioning not through open confrontation, but via covert social manipulation. Their behavior undermines inclusion, distorts feedback loops, and fosters mistrust. Although such actions may not violate formal policies, they contribute to a microclimate in which latent conflict thrives, and proactive cooperation deteriorates.

The study highlights the need for:

- Early detection mechanisms - such as anonymous pulse surveys and team check-ins - especially in hierarchical or legacy-driven organizations, where informal influence is harder to trace.
- Training for managers and team leaders on how to recognize and interrupt covert manipulative behaviors before they escalate.
- Conflict-resolution frameworks include informal social roles and emotional cues, in addition to formal grievance procedures.

This finding supports the broader thesis of the study: workplace conflict is rarely caused by structure alone - psychosocial undercurrents, driven by unmet needs, unaddressed stagnation, and informal hierarchies, are equally potent. Addressing these invisible dynamics is essential to building resilient and inclusive organizations.

5. DISCUSSION

Understanding the implications of workplace conflict requires moving beyond isolated statistical results to consider how different findings interact to illuminate broader organizational dynamics. This discussion section synthesizes the empirical results with theoretical frameworks from organizational psychology, conflict management, and institutional sociology. It explores how conflict triggers manifest in complex environments, how generational patterns influence response tendencies, and what practical lessons can be drawn to inform conflict prevention policy. In particular, the analysis emphasizes the interplay between formal structures and informal behaviors, including the disruptive potential of unregulated influence actors. Each subsection contributes to answering the study’s core research question: what psychological and economic factors

trigger conflict in organizations, and how can they be addressed through proactive mechanisms?

5.1 Interlocking Triggers

Quantitative correlations confirm that interpersonal (Q7), procedural (Q8), and value-based (Q9) conflicts often occur together, forming a pattern where one type of conflict tends to intensify the others (Spearman $\rho \geq .42$). When work processes are unclear, employees rely on personal judgment, which can lead to misunderstandings, personality clashes, and disagreements about what is right or fair. These findings show how small gaps in structure can quickly lead to bigger interpersonal issues, reinforcing the need for clarity and alignment in everyday operations.

5.2 Generational Dynamics

Descriptive findings indicate that Generation X and Generation Y experience the highest levels of conflict, particularly regarding personality ($M \approx 1.95$) and processes ($M \approx 1.76$). This may reflect mid-career tension between ambition and institutional friction. Generation Z shows heightened sensitivity to language barriers ($M = 1.26$), underscoring a need for inclusive communication policies.

5.3 The "Employee Devil" Paradox

Interview data reveal the destabilizing role of a covert influencer who, though technically competent, leverages informal networks to exacerbate conflict. This archetype mirrors toxic-leadership profiles but operates outside formal hierarchies. Their presence links structural ambiguity with emotional destabilization, demanding not only structural reforms but also social-signal monitoring.

5.4 Practical Implications

Organizations should:

1. **Codify critical processes** to reduce ambiguity-induced conflict.
2. **Implement generationally targeted interventions**, including assertive communication training for Boomers, emotional intelligence development for Generation X/Y, and language-inclusion measures for Generation Z.
3. **Establish early-warning systems** (e.g., stay interviews, anonymous feedback) to detect and address toxic informal influence before it spreads.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to identify the primary psychological and economic triggers of organizational conflict and to classify them in a way that informs effective prevention mechanisms. Drawing from both survey data and qualitative insights, we identified six core conflict triggers: interpersonal tensions (especially personality-based), procedural ambiguity, value misalignment, hierarchical rigidity, generational differences, and language barriers. Of these, three formed a statistically significant cluster - personality, process, and value-based conflicts - which commonly co - occur and reinforce one another in formal organizational environments.

These conflict triggers can be classified into three interdependent domains:

1. **Psychological triggers:** personality clashes, value differences, and generational identity.

2. **Structural triggers:** unclear procedures, hierarchical tensions, and ambiguous role definitions.
3. **Cultural and communicative triggers:** language barriers and informal power dynamics.

The study also uncovered the existence of informal influence archetypes, particularly the "Employee Devil," who exploits structural and cultural ambiguity to destabilize teams while maintaining high performance. This finding underscores the importance of not only addressing formal mechanisms but also monitoring and managing hidden dynamics within teams.

To counteract these complex sources of tension, the study proposes a dual-level conflict prevention framework:

- **Structural prevention:** clarification of roles, codification of procedures, and organizational transparency.
- **Relational prevention:** inclusive leadership, emotional intelligence development, and proactive identification of informal disruptors.

In doing so, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how conflict functions within contemporary organizations, particularly those operating in post - Soviet institutional contexts. It aligns with the goals of **Sustainable Development Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions**, by promoting practices that foster fairness, transparency, and resilience within teams. Future research should further test this framework across cultural settings, investigate the long-term effects of informal influence on organizational performance, and explore scalable interventions that balance structural clarity with relational adaptability.

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