

Emotional Intelligence, Mindfulness and the Multigenerational Workforce:

An Analytical Report for the Senior Management Team

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1. Introduction

This report responds to the Senior Management Team's request for an analytical account of emotional intelligence and mindfulness ahead of the strategic planning meeting in September 2026. It is written for a decision-making audience and is therefore organised around what the evidence will and will not support, rather than around the popular literature.

Section 2 critically evaluates how employees can apply the core components of emotional intelligence to improve performance, collaboration and well-being, drawing on the Mayer and Salovey ability model, Goleman's mixed model and Bar-On's emotional-social intelligence model, and applying each to communication, conflict management, leadership and decision making. Section 3 examines the multigenerational workforce, setting the characteristics attributed to Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z against the meta-analytic evidence and assessing how emotional intelligence and mindfulness support inclusive recruitment, management and retention. Section 4 concludes with seven recommendations.

The central argument is that emotional intelligence and mindfulness are valuable but frequently oversold, that their benefits are conditional on job design and organisational climate, and that their most defensible application is the construction of a psychologically safe environment in which employees are managed as individuals rather than as members of a demographic category.

2. Task One: Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace

2.1 Defining the construct: three competing traditions

Salovey and Mayer (1990, p. 189) defined emotional intelligence as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions". The formulation conceals a construct still contested three decades later, and any credible evaluation of applied EI must begin by acknowledging that the three dominant models describe measurably different things.

The Mayer and Salovey (1997) ability model treats EI as a cognitive aptitude comprising four hierarchically arranged branches: perceiving emotion, using emotion to facilitate thought, understanding emotion, and managing emotion. Assessed through maximum-performance tests with scored answers such as the MSCEIT, it behaves psychometrically like an intelligence and correlates modestly with general mental ability. Goleman's (1995, 1998) framework is a mixed model: his four domains of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management aggregate emotional abilities with dispositional

traits including achievement drive, optimism and adaptability. Bar-On's (1997, 2006) emotional-social intelligence model is broader still, organising fifteen competencies under five composites: intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, adaptability, stress management and general mood, which the revised EQ-i 2.0 restructures as self-perception, self-expression, interpersonal, decision making and stress management (Multi-Health Systems, 2011). Figure 1 sets the three side by side, and Figure 2 renders Goleman's framework as the two-by-two matrix of self versus other and recognition versus regulation that underpins it.

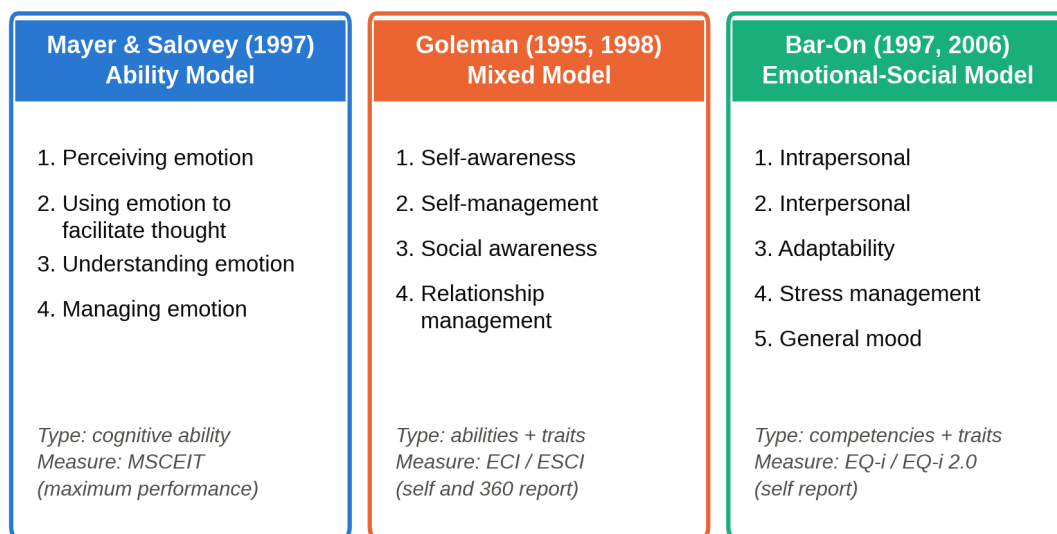


Figure 1: The three principal models of emotional intelligence compared

Adapted from Mayer and Salovey (1997), Goleman (1998) and Bar-On (2006).

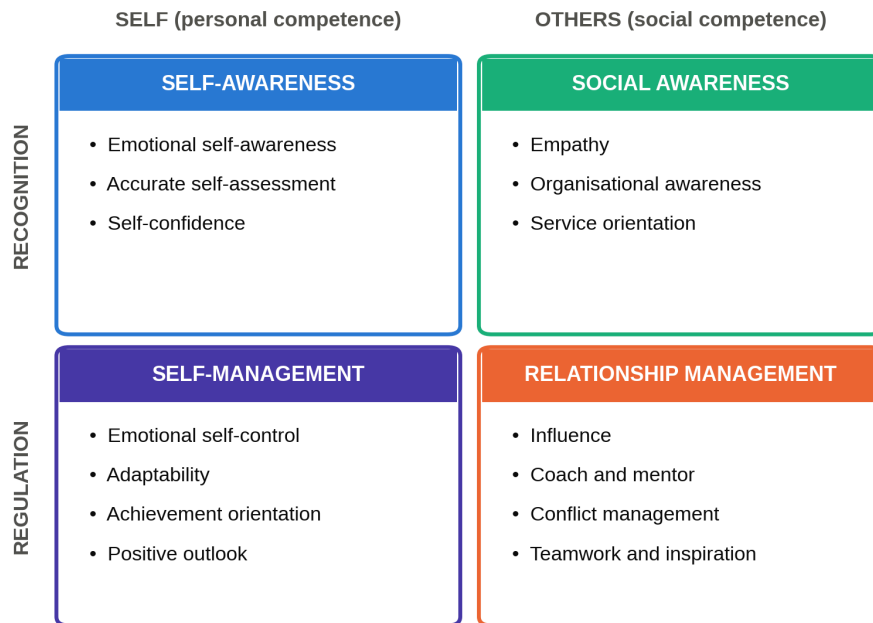


Figure 2: Goleman's emotional intelligence framework as a two-by-two matrix
Adapted from Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002).

Table 1: Comparative evaluation of the three principal models of emotional intelligence

Criterion	Mayer and Salovey (1997)	Goleman (1995, 1998)	Bar-On (1997, 2006)
Conception of EI	A cognitive ability that processes emotional information	A set of learned competencies underpinning workplace effectiveness	A cross-section of emotional and social competencies and facilitators
Structure	Four hierarchical branches	Four domains, around twenty competencies	Five composites, fifteen subscales
Assessment	Maximum-performance test (MSCEIT)	Self and multi-rater report (ECI, ESCI)	Self report (EQ-i, EQ-i 2.0)
Principal strength	Conceptual precision; discriminant validity from personality	Practical vocabulary for leadership development	Breadth; strong links to wellbeing and adaptation
Principal limitation	Weak incremental validity over cognitive ability ($\Delta R^2 = .004$)	Conflates ability with disposition; commercially driven	Substantial overlap with the Five Factor Model

Compiled from Mayer and Salovey (1997), Goleman (1998), Bar-On (2006) and O'Boyle et al. (2011).

Critically, these are not interchangeable. O'Boyle et al. (2011) classified EI research into three measurement streams and found that ability tests, self-reported ability measures and commercial mixed models each correlated with job performance at around $\rho = .24$ to $.30$, yet only the self-report and mixed streams added incremental validity over cognitive ability and the Five Factor Model ($\Delta R^2 = .052$ and $.068$, against a non-significant $.004$ for ability testing). The pattern is more stark for attitudes: Miao, Humphrey and Qian (2017) report a corrected correlation of just $.08$ between ability EI and job satisfaction, against $.39$ for mixed EI. Figure 3 summarises these findings. The most parsimonious reading is that mixed models predict

well partly because they measure personality under a different name, which is precisely Locke's (2005) objection that EI has become so elastic a construct as to be conceptually invalid. Employees and organisations should therefore treat EI as a family of related but distinct capabilities rather than a single trainable quantity.

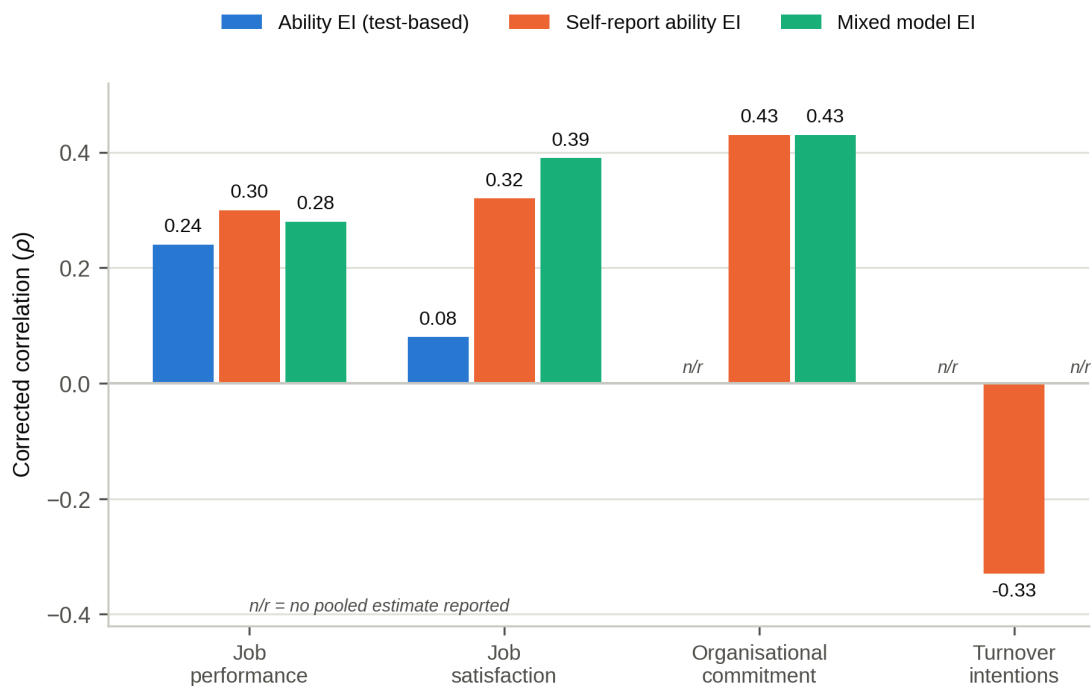


Figure 3: Meta-analytic corrected correlations between emotional intelligence and workplace outcomes, by measurement stream

Data from O'Boyle et al. (2011) and Miao, Humphrey and Qian (2017).

2.2 Emotional intelligence and effective communication

The applied value of EI is clearest in communication, where perception and empathy do most of the work. The first branch of the ability model, accurately perceiving emotion in faces, voices and behaviour, allows an employee to detect that a colleague's terse email reflects workload pressure rather than hostility, and to respond to the cause rather than the symptom. Bar-On's interpersonal composite adds empathy and social responsibility, while Goleman's relationship management domain supplies the behavioural repertoire of influence, listening and difficult feedback.

Practically, this translates into disciplined listening. Covey's (1989) injunction to seek first to understand is an EI prescription in ordinary language, and the common barriers to listening, including rehearsing a reply, filtering and mind-reading, are failures of attentional control rather than of technique. The Johari Window (Luft and Ingham, 1955) offers a useful device here, because it locates the employee's blind self as territory accessible only through feedback from others, making the solicitation of feedback an act of self-awareness rather

than of politeness. Structured feedback practices operationalise self-management and empathy simultaneously: they open by asking the recipient for their own assessment, stay factual, and address the effect of a behaviour rather than the character of the person.

One popular claim warrants scepticism. The figures that communication is 7 per cent words, 38 per cent tone and 55 per cent body language derive from Mehrabian's (1971) narrow experiments on conveying feelings through single words, and cannot be generalised to workplace communication. An emotionally intelligent communicator attends to non-verbal signals, but the evidence does not support treating verbal content as marginal.

2.3 Emotional intelligence and conflict management

Conflict is where the self-management domain earns its keep. Goleman's (1995) account of the amygdala hijack, in which the limbic system initiates a threat response before the prefrontal cortex appraises the situation, explains the familiar experience of reacting in a way one later regrets. The applied insight is the widely cited space between stimulus and response (Covey, 1989): the emotionally intelligent employee uses the interval to label the emotion, which itself dampens amygdala activation, before selecting a response.

Mapping EI competencies onto established conflict-handling styles clarifies why this matters. Integrating approaches, which produce the most durable agreements (Rahim, 2002), make the heaviest simultaneous demands on emotion perception, empathy and impulse control, because the negotiator must hold their own position while modelling the other party's underlying interest. Avoiding and dominating styles are cheap in EI terms but expensive in relational consequences, as Figure 4 shows. Bar-On's inclusion of impulse control and reality testing within decision making is apposite, since much workplace conflict escalates through misattribution, where an employee treats an emotionally coloured interpretation as fact.

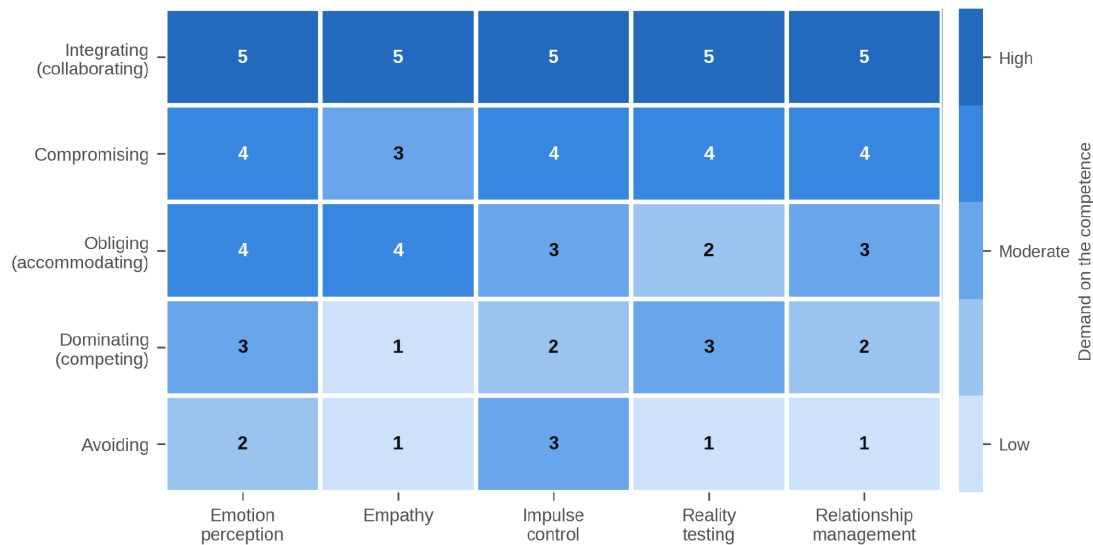


Figure 4: Demands placed on emotional intelligence competences by each conflict-handling style

Author's analysis, applying the competence structures of Mayer and Salovey (1997) and Bar-On (2006) to the conflict styles set out in Rahim (2002).

2.4 Emotional intelligence, leadership and psychological safety

Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002) argue that leaders are the emotional guides of their groups, distinguishing resonant leaders who attune to collective mood from dissonant leaders whose misreadings leave teams unsettled. The mechanism they propose, emotional contagion, is well evidenced, and meta-analytic work supports a relationship between leader EI and subordinate attitudes, with self-report and mixed EI correlating .43 with organisational commitment and $-.33$ with turnover intentions (Miao, Humphrey and Qian, 2017).

The most defensible organisational case runs through psychological safety. Edmondson (1999) demonstrated that team learning behaviour depends on the shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking, and Frazier et al. (2017), synthesising 136 samples, confirm robust associations with engagement, information sharing and task performance. Leader behaviours that build it, framing work as a learning problem, acknowledging fallibility and responding to bad news without blame, are expressions of self-awareness, self-management and empathy. This reframes EI for a senior management team: its value lies less in the leader's emotional poise than in the climate that poise makes possible.

Scepticism remains warranted. Antonakis, Ashkanasy and Dasborough (2009) argue that the evidence for EI as a distinct predictor of leadership effectiveness is weaker than popular accounts imply, and that much of the observed relationship is attributable to personality and cognitive ability. EI matters for leadership, but not to the extent the trade literature claims.

2.5 Emotional intelligence, collaboration and well-being

Collaboration and well-being are frequently treated as soft by-products of EI, but the causal pathway is specific. Emotion regulation reduces the daily hassles that erode commitment over time, and Hülshager et al. (2013) found in a diary study that daily mindfulness predicted lower surface acting, lower emotional exhaustion and higher job satisfaction, with a self-training intervention reproducing the effect. Surface acting, the effortful simulation of emotions one does not feel, is the mechanism by which emotionally demanding roles deplete employees; deep acting, in which the employee genuinely reappraises the situation, is far less costly, and the capacity to reappraise is precisely what the fourth branch of the ability model describes. Well-being and performance are therefore not competing goals but linked through the same regulatory competence.

At team level, the benefit operates through predictability: colleagues who regulate their emotional expression are easier to approach with problems, which increases the flow of information about errors and risks and improves collective decision quality. This is the mechanism Edmondson identifies, observed from the individual side.

2.6 Emotional intelligence and decision making

Emotions are not noise to be filtered out of decisions. The second branch of the ability model, using emotion to facilitate thought, recognises that affective states direct attention and shape cognitive style, with positive mood supporting divergent thinking and mildly negative mood supporting careful, detail-focused analysis. The risk is mood-congruent judgement, where an incidental emotional state contaminates an unrelated decision, as when frustration from a difficult meeting hardens a recruitment judgement an hour later. Bar-On's reality testing, the capacity to check subjective interpretation against objective evidence, is the direct antidote, and impulse control governs the timing of decisions.

2.7 What the evidence supports, and what it does not

Three qualifications should temper any organisational investment. First, EI predicts performance conditionally. Joseph and Newman (2010) found that ability EI correlated $\rho = .26$ with performance in high emotional labour roles but only $\rho = .01$ where such demands were low, making EI a job-relevant capability rather than a universal one. Figure 5 illustrates this contingency. Second, EI is morally neutral. Côté et al. (2011) showed that emotion-regulation knowledge amplifies the individual's underlying disposition, strengthening prosocial behaviour among those with strong moral identity but interpersonal deviance among those high in Machiavellianism. Emotional skill can be weaponised, which argues for

pairing EI development with explicit ethical framing. Third, developability varies: Goleman's assertion that EI is virtually all learned is better supported for the habit-level competencies in mixed models than for ability EI, which behaves like a stable aptitude.

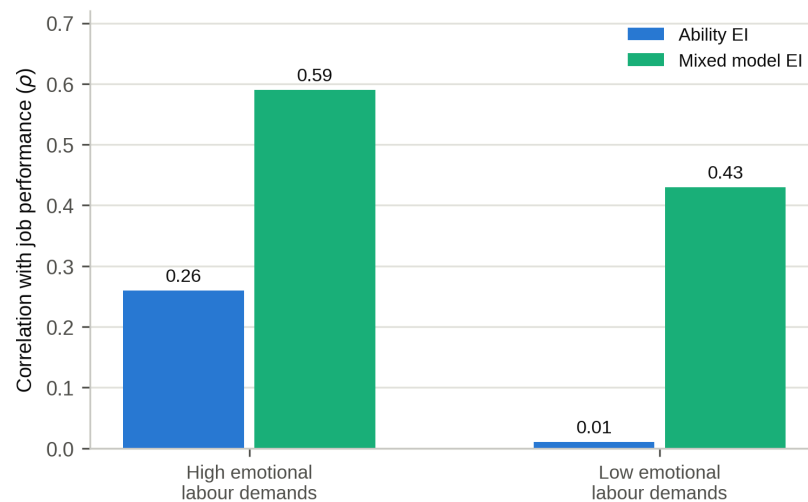


Figure 5: Emotional labour as a moderator of the emotional intelligence and job performance relationship
Data from Joseph and Newman (2010).

For employees, the practical implications remain substantial: reflective journaling, disciplined pausing before responding under provocation, active solicitation of feedback to shrink the blind self, and empathic enquiry before advocacy. For the organisation, the return is realised through the team climate these behaviours produce rather than through individual performance alone.

3. Task Two: Managing a Multigenerational Workforce

3.1 The generational premise and its evidential status

Four generations now work alongside one another for the first time, and 73 per cent of senior UK leaders report a multigenerational workforce (Work Foundation, 2024). Generation X is conventionally dated to births between 1965 and 1980, Millennials to 1981–96 and Generation Z to 1997–2012, although these boundaries are conventions, not findings. Figure 6 shows UK employment by cohort, with Generation X and Millennials together accounting for roughly three-quarters of those in work (Statista, 2023).



Figure 6: UK employment by generational cohort, 2022

Data from Office for National Statistics figures reported in Statista (2023).

The evidence base, however, is weak, and this is where most treatments of the topic fail. Ravid, Costanza and Romero (2024), meta-analysing 143 samples covering over 158,000 employees, found generational differences in work values, job satisfaction, commitment, engagement, work-life balance and burnout to be small to negligible, with most effect sizes below $\delta = .20$ and several pairings statistically equivalent to zero. Their qualitative analysis is more damaging still: 69 per cent of published studies offered generation-based practice recommendations regardless of whether their own data supported them, and the authors call for a moratorium on birth-year operationalisations of generation. Figure 7 plots these ranges against conventional benchmarks, replicating Costanza et al. (2012). Observed differences are largely confounded with age, career stage and period effects: a 25-year-old in 2026 and one in 1996 differ in labour market conditions as much as in cohort.

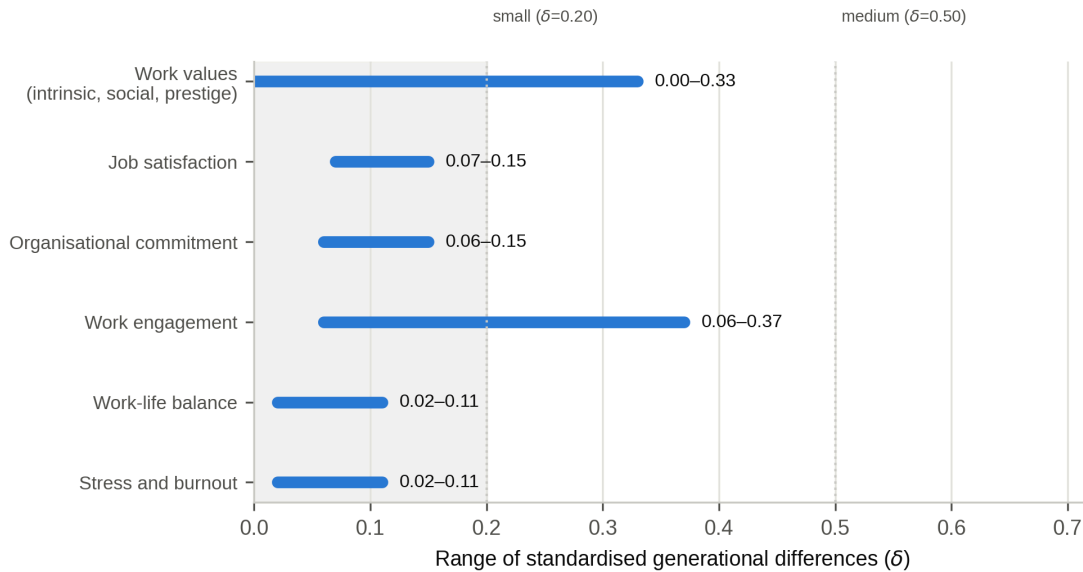


Figure 7: Range of standardised generational differences across seven work outcomes, against conventional benchmarks

Data from Ravid, Costanza and Romero (2024), synthesising 143 samples and over 158,000 employees.

The SMT should therefore treat the generational lens as a heuristic for surfacing variation in preference, not a basis for segmenting people. Managing to the stereotype risks age discrimination liability under the Equality Act 2010 and self-fulfilling prophecy, whereby employees labelled as disloyal are managed in ways that produce disengagement.

3.2 Reported characteristics and expectations

With that qualification in place, the tendencies commonly reported in practitioner research are set out in Table 2 and Figure 8.

Table 2: Characteristics commonly attributed to the three cohorts, with an assessment of the supporting evidence

Dimension	Generation X (1965–80)	Millennials (1981–96)	Generation Z (1997–2012)	Evidence
Core values	Autonomy, self-reliance, outcome over presence	Purpose, development, work-life integration	Authenticity, transparency, mental health	Weak
Communication	Email and scheduled meetings; direct	Blended; frequent informal check-ins	Asynchronous, visual, rapid	Weak
Motivation	Job security, flexibility for caring duties	Progression, recognition, meaning	Financial stability, skills, wellbeing	Mixed
Technological adaptability	Competent; adopted digital tools mid-career	High; early adopters	High, though 82% vs 81% daily AI use shows near-parity	Contested
Managerial implication	Grant autonomy; avoid micromanagement	Provide development and rationale	Provide clarity, feedback and psychological safety	Apply individually

Practitioner characterisations compiled from Work Foundation (2024) and Deloitte (2026); evidential status from Ravid, Costanza and Romero (2024).

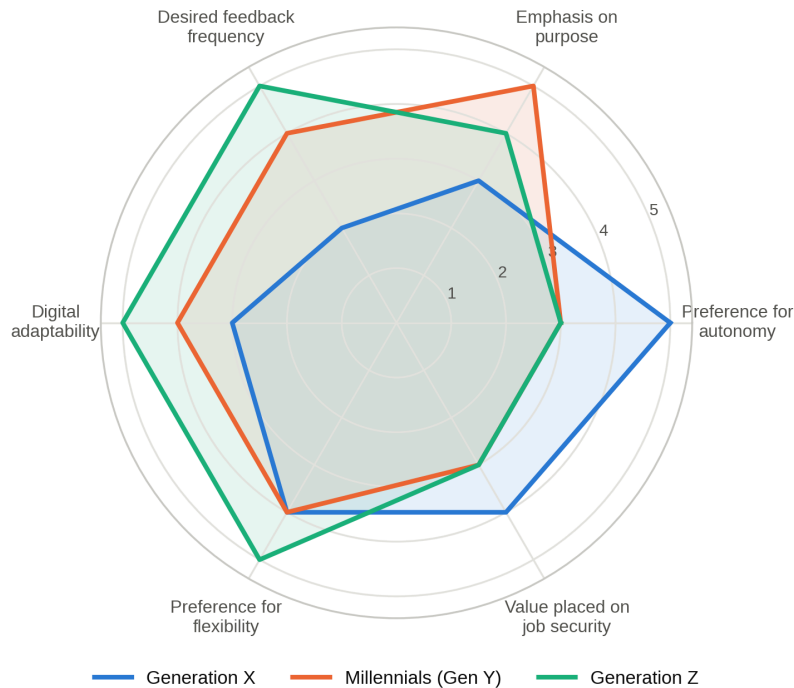


Figure 8: Generational tendencies as commonly reported in practitioner research

Author's synthesis of practitioner characterisations. Presented as reported tendencies; Ravid, Costanza and Romero (2024) find little empirical support for differences of this magnitude.

On values, Generation X is characterised by a preference for autonomy and outcome-based judgement, formed in a period of restructuring that weakened expectations of job security, and carries disproportionate caring responsibility. Millennials are associated with purpose, development and feedback frequency, and Generation Z with authenticity, pay transparency and mental health provision. Deloitte's (2026) survey of 22,595 respondents across 44 countries, including 806 in the UK, found work-life balance to be the leading career goal for both younger cohorts, cited by 20 and 24 per cent, ahead of financial independence. Notably, 84 per cent of Generation Z and 73 per cent of Millennials express interest in leadership, yet identify stress and burnout as the principal barrier, cited by 50 and 49 per cent. This contradicts the stereotype of younger workers as uncommitted.

On communication, the reported pattern is a gradient from email and scheduled meetings towards asynchronous messaging, though the Work Foundation (2024) finding that 39 per cent of leaders report difficulty with cross-generational collaboration says as much about managerial confidence as employee behaviour. On motivation, financial pressure is a cross-generational constant: 41 per cent of Generation Z and 43 per cent of Millennials in the UK live paylip to paylip, and around 46 per cent of each have deferred major life decisions for financial reasons (Deloitte, 2026). On technological adaptability, the digital-native assumption requires qualification, since 82 per cent of Generation Z and 81 per

cent of Millennials report daily workplace use of artificial intelligence, a near-identical figure that undermines any age-based competence hierarchy. Figure 9 presents the UK data.

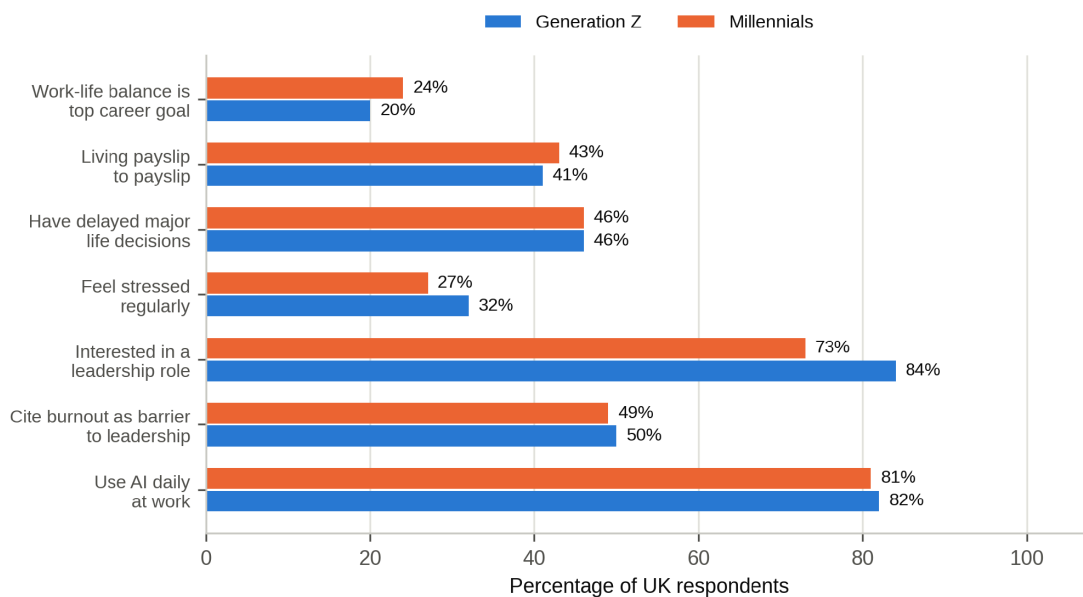


Figure 9: Attitudes and circumstances of UK Generation Z and Millennial respondents

Data from Deloitte (2026), UK sample n = 806.

3.3 Impact on organisational effectiveness

Age diversity is an asset only under specific conditions. Li et al. (2018) found that it improves organisational performance through accumulated human and social capital, with indirect effects of $\beta = .26$ and $\beta = .12$, but that the human capital pathway was strongly moderated by age-inclusive management, ranging from $-.14$ where such management was weak to $.51$ where it was strong. Age diversity is therefore a latent resource that inclusive management converts into performance and poor management into faultlines. UK practice appears closer to the latter, with only 18 per cent of organisations including age in EDI policies and 13 per cent operating age champion schemes (Work Foundation, 2024).

3.4 Applying emotional intelligence and mindfulness

The argument for EI and mindfulness here is not that they help managers apply generational insights more sensitively, but that they are the corrective to generational thinking, because both direct attention to the individual rather than the category. Kabat-Zinn's (2013) definition of mindfulness as paying attention on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgementally is, applied to people management, an instruction to suspend the stereotype. Figure 10 maps interventions across the employment lifecycle.

	RECRUITING	MANAGING	RETAINING
Emotional intelligence lever	Structured, criteria-based interviews; diverse panels; age-neutral advertising	Empathic enquiry into individual preference; reverse mentoring pairs	Regular one-to-ones on career intent; manager feedback capability
Mindfulness lever	Deliberate pause before scoring; noticing the first impression	Present-moment attention in meetings; protected thinking time	Non-judgemental listening in stay conversations; workload awareness
Intended outcome	Wider, fairer candidate pool; reduced similarity bias	Psychological safety; information sharing across age groups	Lower turnover intention; sustained engagement across cohorts

Figure 10: Emotional intelligence and mindfulness interventions across the employment lifecycle
Author's synthesis.

In recruitment, the relevant EI competences are social awareness and reality testing. Advertisements screened for age-coded language, structured interviews and diverse panels reduce the similarity bias by which panels favour candidates resembling themselves. Mindfulness before interviewing has a specific function: unconscious bias operates fastest under cognitive load, and attentional slowing creates space in which an automatic judgement can be examined.

In management, empathy and relationship management support practices that treat preference as individual. Reverse mentoring, in which a younger employee coaches a senior colleague on digital tools while receiving organisational knowledge in return, converts a presumed deficit into reciprocal exchange and builds social capital. Management by walking about, framed as availability rather than surveillance, generates the informal contact through which preference becomes visible. Above all, managers should ask each report how they prefer to receive feedback rather than infer it from age.

In retention, the evidence points to the manager relationship. Self-report EI correlates $-.33$ with turnover intentions (Miao, Humphrey and Qian, 2017), and the Deloitte (2026) finding that burnout deters ambitious younger employees from seeking promotion indicates that workload design, not generational messaging, is the retention lever. Flexible working serves Generation X caring responsibilities and Generation Z wellbeing expectations simultaneously, an argument for universal rather than segmented policy.

3.5 The limits of the intervention

Mindfulness should not be oversold to the SMT. Bartlett et al. (2019), meta-analysing 23 randomised controlled trials, found moderate benefits for stress ($g = .56$), anxiety ($g = .62$) and wellbeing ($g = .46$), but concluded the data were insufficient to support any claim about work performance; Hafenbrack and Vohs (2018) found across 14 experiments that induced mindfulness reduced task motivation without improving performance. Figure 11 summarises the trial evidence. There is also a legitimate concern that mindfulness training can be used to make employees more tolerant of structural problems such as chronic understaffing. Mindfulness complements fair workload, transparent progression and inclusive policy; it does not substitute for them.

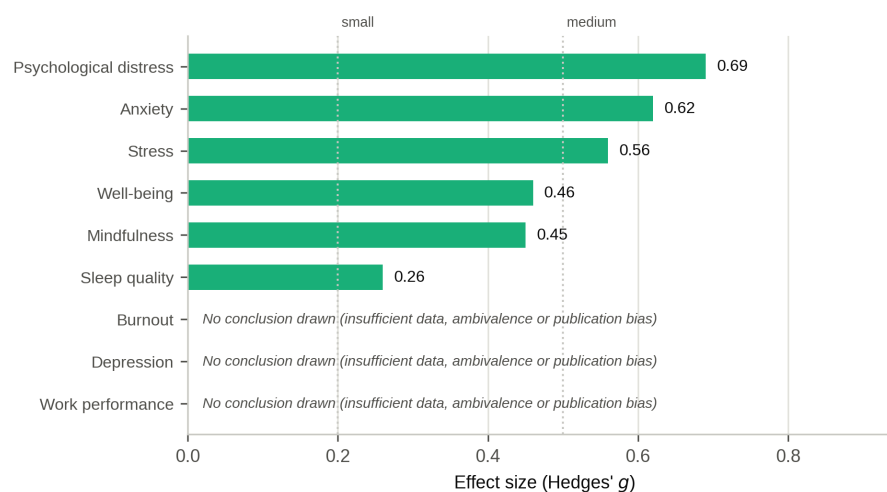


Figure 11: Effect sizes from randomised controlled trials of workplace mindfulness training
Data from Bartlett et al. (2019), 23 randomised controlled trials.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Emotional intelligence is a real and useful construct, but it is neither a single thing nor a universal advantage. The three dominant models measure materially different phenomena, and the commercial mixed models that dominate corporate practice owe much of their predictive power to their overlap with personality. Where emotional intelligence demonstrably earns its place is in roles with high emotional labour demands, in the quality of communication and conflict handling, and above all in the psychological safety that emotionally skilled leadership creates. That climate effect, rather than any individual performance gain, is the strongest business case available to the Senior Management Team.

On the multigenerational workforce, the evidence is uncomfortable for much of the practitioner literature. Generational differences in work values, satisfaction, commitment and engagement are small, inconsistent and confounded with age and career stage, so

designing policy around cohort stereotypes risks discrimination liability and self-fulfilling prophecy for little analytical gain. The value of emotional intelligence and mindfulness here is that they replace the category with the individual.

Mindfulness warrants investment on wellbeing grounds, where the randomised evidence is reasonably strong, but should not be presented as a productivity intervention, and never in place of addressing workload or progression. Table 3 sets out the recommendations that follow.

Table 3: Recommendations to the Senior Management Team

No.	Recommendation	Evidential rationale
1	Prioritise emotional intelligence development for roles with high emotional labour demands, rather than applying it uniformly across the organisation	EI predicts performance at $\rho = .26$ in high emotional labour roles but $\rho = .01$ in low ones (Joseph and Newman, 2010)
2	Assess emotional intelligence using validated instruments and treat commercial mixed-model scores as indicative rather than diagnostic in selection	Mixed models overlap substantially with personality; ability EI adds little incremental validity (O'Boyle et al., 2011)
3	Make psychological safety an explicit measure in leadership appraisal and the annual climate survey	Meta-analytic evidence links psychological safety to engagement, information sharing and task performance across 136 samples (Frazier et al., 2017)
4	Pair emotional intelligence training with explicit ethical framing and 360-degree feedback	Emotion-regulation knowledge amplifies both prosocial and deviant behaviour depending on moral identity (Côté et al., 2011)
5	Abandon generation-based segmentation in recruitment and retention policy; design universal flexible working and progression policies instead	Generational differences are small to negligible and confounded with age and career stage (Ravid, Costanza and Romero, 2024)
6	Introduce age-inclusive management practices, including reverse mentoring and age within the EDI policy	Age diversity improves performance only where age-inclusive management is strong (Li et al., 2018); only 18% of UK organisations include age in EDI policy (Work Foundation, 2024)
7	Offer mindfulness provision on a voluntary basis and evaluate it against wellbeing outcomes, not productivity targets	Trial evidence supports wellbeing and stress benefits but is insufficient for work performance (Bartlett et al., 2019)

Author's synthesis.

Together, these measures would shift the emphasis from training individuals in emotional technique towards designing the conditions in which emotionally intelligent behaviour is rational, safe and rewarded. That is the change most likely to sustain the improvement in morale, communication and conflict resolution the recent climate survey identified.

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