

Working Lives Scotland: Workplace conflict puts strain on Scottish workers' health and job quality

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People who experience conflict in the workplace have lower job satisfaction and are more likely to experience poorer mental and physical health, according to the CIPD's Working Lives Scotland 2024 report.

Over a quarter of workers (28%) in Scotland have experienced conflict at work over the past year. Among those who reported at least one form of conflict, the most common forms were: being undermined or humiliated at work (48%), verbal abuse or insult (40%), being shouted at or having a heated argument (40%), or discriminatory behaviour (20%).

In response, the CIPD is calling for employers to focus on management training and address the underlying causes of conflict, such as poor people management practices and excessive workloads. Good quality people management practices are critical in creating supportive and inclusive work environments, where conflict can be reduced or resolved where it does occur.

The CIPD's Working Lives Scotland 2024 report – which surveyed over 1,000 workers in Scotland – provides an annual benchmark of fair work. It measures a wide range of job quality aspects, including the day-to-day experiences of workers and the impact of work on health and wellbeing.

The survey found only half (56%) of those who reported conflict were satisfied with their job, compared with 80% of those who didn't experience any conflict. It's also more common for employees who experienced conflict to say they are likely to leave their job in the next 12 months (31%) compared to

those who did not report any conflict (14%).

Those who experienced conflict also had less confidence in senior leaders' ability, less trust in them to act with integrity, and lower perceptions of managers to enable employee voice, highlighting the crucial importance of early action to address conflict at work.

Marek Zemanik, senior public policy adviser at the CIPD, the professional body for HR and people development, commented:

"While a healthy level of discussion and debate in a workplace can be valuable, our survey suggests that workplace conflict is often much more than this, harming the job satisfaction and wellbeing of far too many.

"Line management training should be a priority for employers, so managers can foster more positive relationships in their teams and address any conflict early on, before it has a chance to escalate. It's also important to pinpoint and address the underlying causes of conflict, including excessive workloads, exhaustion and pressure."

According to the CIPD's Working Lives Scotland 2024 report, of those who experienced workplace conflict in the past 12 months:

- Over a third (38%) said they always or often felt under pressure, compared with 12% of those who didn't experience any conflict.
- Of those workers who had experienced conflict at work nearly half (49%) felt that work impacts their mental health negatively, compared to just 16% of those who had not experienced any conflict.
- Under a third (31%) said they trusted senior leaders in their organisation to act with integrity, compared with 55% of those who did not experience any conflict at work.

The research also revealed the most common approach to address conflict was to simply 'let it go' (35%), followed by having a discussion with a manager or HR (22%). Just one in five people (18%) spoke with the other person involved in the conflict and one in ten (10%) decided to look for a new job.

Furthermore, the research highlights disparities between groups of employees. Incidences of conflict are considerably higher for women (35% experienced some conflict, compared with only 21% of men) and for disabled employees (39% experienced conflict, compared with 25% of non-disabled employees).

Zemanik adds: "Our findings show that when conflict does happen, a lot of it is simply let go, which may suggest a lack of confidence in senior staff to address these issues constructively. And so, the cycle of conflict stands to continue.

"Managers and senior leaders should encourage open and supportive work environments, where employees feel they have a voice and line managers feel empowered to have difficult conversations through effective training."

[Read the report](#)