

Research Report

The \$56B Cost of Generational Conflict

And How AI Can Fix It



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Why we conducted this research

In theory, employees in revenue-generating roles should be one of the biggest beneficiaries of AI. Their jobs are workflow-heavy, data-rich, and under constant pressure to do more with less. Yet industry analysis shows that while functions like engineering and marketing are already capturing measurable productivity gains from AI, revenue organizations are still in the earliest stages. Most teams are experimenting in pockets — not fundamentally changing how work gets done.

A major reason is the human layer. AI can redesign processes and automate low-value work, but real impact still depends on frontline adoption shaped by deeply ingrained habits, incentives, and attitudes toward technology.

In today's organizations, those attitudes span four generations — Baby Boomers (ages 61+), Gen X (ages 45-60), Millennials (ages 29-44), and Gen Z (ages 22-28) — who often disagree on how much to trust AI, how selling should work, and what “hard work” even means.

We launched this study to understand how those generational dynamics are shaping AI's impact inside revenue organizations. Where is AI already improving revenue performance? Where are underuse and resistance leaving real revenue on the table? And how much risk is created when age-diverse teams clash over tools, communication styles, and work-life expectations?

Our survey of 2,000 U.S. employees in revenue-generating roles uncovered a \$56 billion productivity loss driven by generational conflict. It also revealed where AI can play a transformative role — from codifying best practices and leveling skill gaps to supporting the transition into an AI-powered future that meaningfully increases revenue per employee.



Key findings at a glance

AI delivers value, but most employees in revenue-generating roles are leaving it on the table.

85% of survey respondents say AI boosts their performance. Yet nearly two-thirds (64%) aren't fully using the tools available to them — including 75% of Baby Boomers — signaling a major adoption gap.

Technology is tearing revenue teams apart.

60% of Baby Boomers say Gen Z's tech-first approach is destroying customer relationships. But Gen Z says Boomers' tech resistance is killing innovation (64%) and costing them deals (63%).

Communication clashes are draining revenue.

More than 8 out of 10 survey respondents have seen other generations lose deals because their communication style was out of sync with the customer. Many admit they don't always adjust their approach.

Work-life balance has become a fault line.

71% of Gen Z believes Boomers care more about hours logged than actual results. Most Boomers (64%) think Gen Z prioritizes work-life balance over business needs — yet younger generations, empowered by AI, report hitting their revenue targets more often.

Generational tension is eroding productivity at a massive scale.

70% of survey respondents on age-diverse teams say generational conflict hurts their productivity, reporting a loss of 5.3 hours each week. This adds up to nearly \$56 Billion in lost productivity per year for U.S. employers.

The fallout goes far beyond lost revenue.

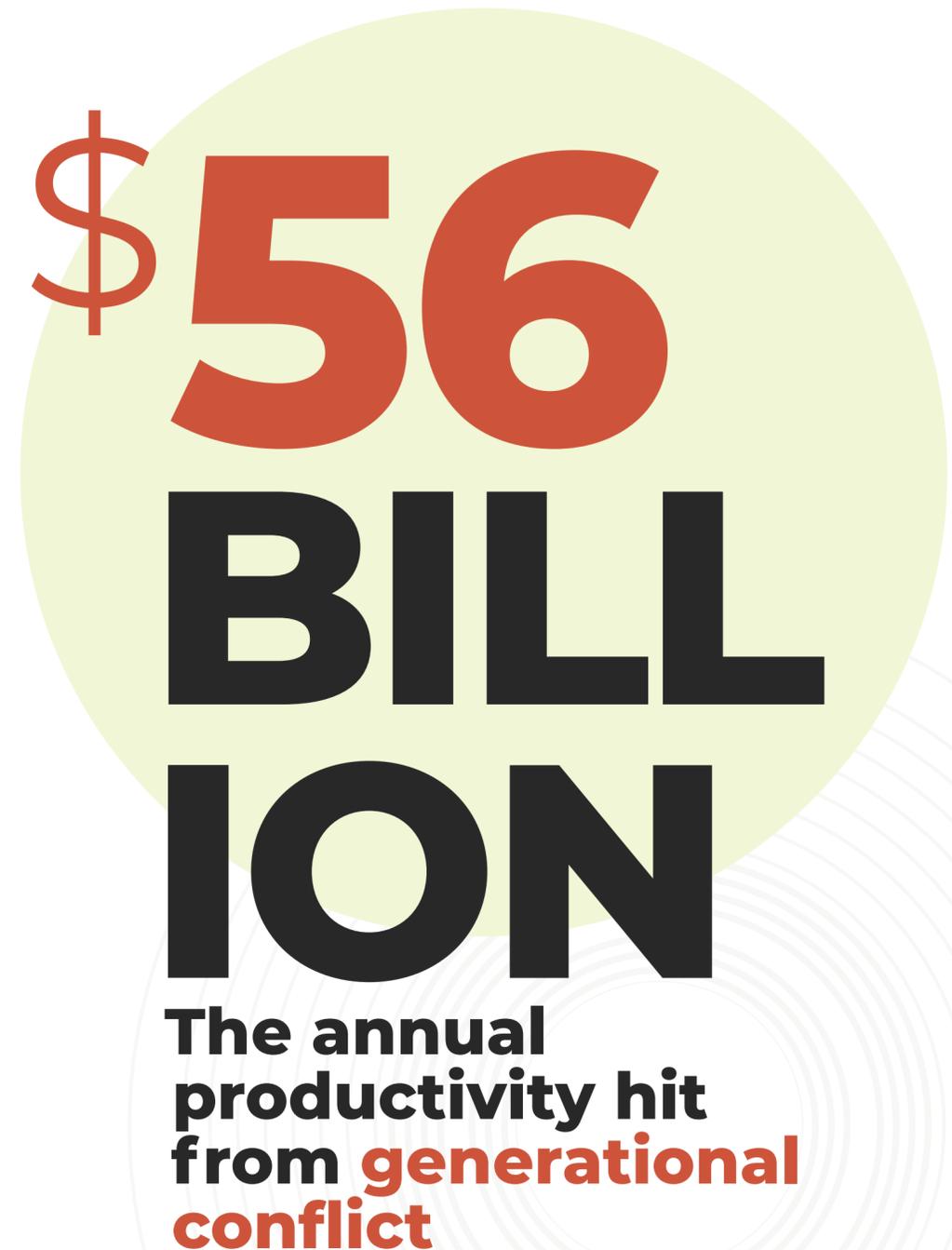
Both the youngest (54%) and oldest (36%) age groups say generational friction makes them more stressed and burned out. Nearly 40% of Gen Z survey respondents would rather be managed by AI than a Baby Boomer.

The clash between generations is driving some employees to quit.

Gen Z reps are so frustrated that 28% are looking for a new job where they can avoid Boomers. Meanwhile, 19% of Baby Boomers plan to retire early because they're tired of dealing with Gen Z.

AI can be a unifying force if used intentionally.

While technology fuels many of these generational tensions, employees of all ages see AI as a way to improve knowledge sharing (86%), bridge experience gaps (80%), and strengthen communication (79%).



AI's role in the modern workplace

How AI is powering revenue performance

AI is no longer a future-state experiment for revenue teams — it's already shaping how top performers work today. Nearly 7 in 10 people we surveyed (69%) say their company provides AI-enabled tools designed to improve revenue performance, from sales engagement and conversation intelligence to forecasting, coaching, and opportunity management.

Salespeople are feeling the impact. Overall, 85% report positive sentiments toward these technologies, citing real, tangible benefits — not abstract promises.

Among those using AI-enabled tools, the gains are clear and widespread. The vast majority say AI has improved their productivity (85%) and work-life balance or workload (85%), while also helping them better prioritize and organize their tasks (84%).

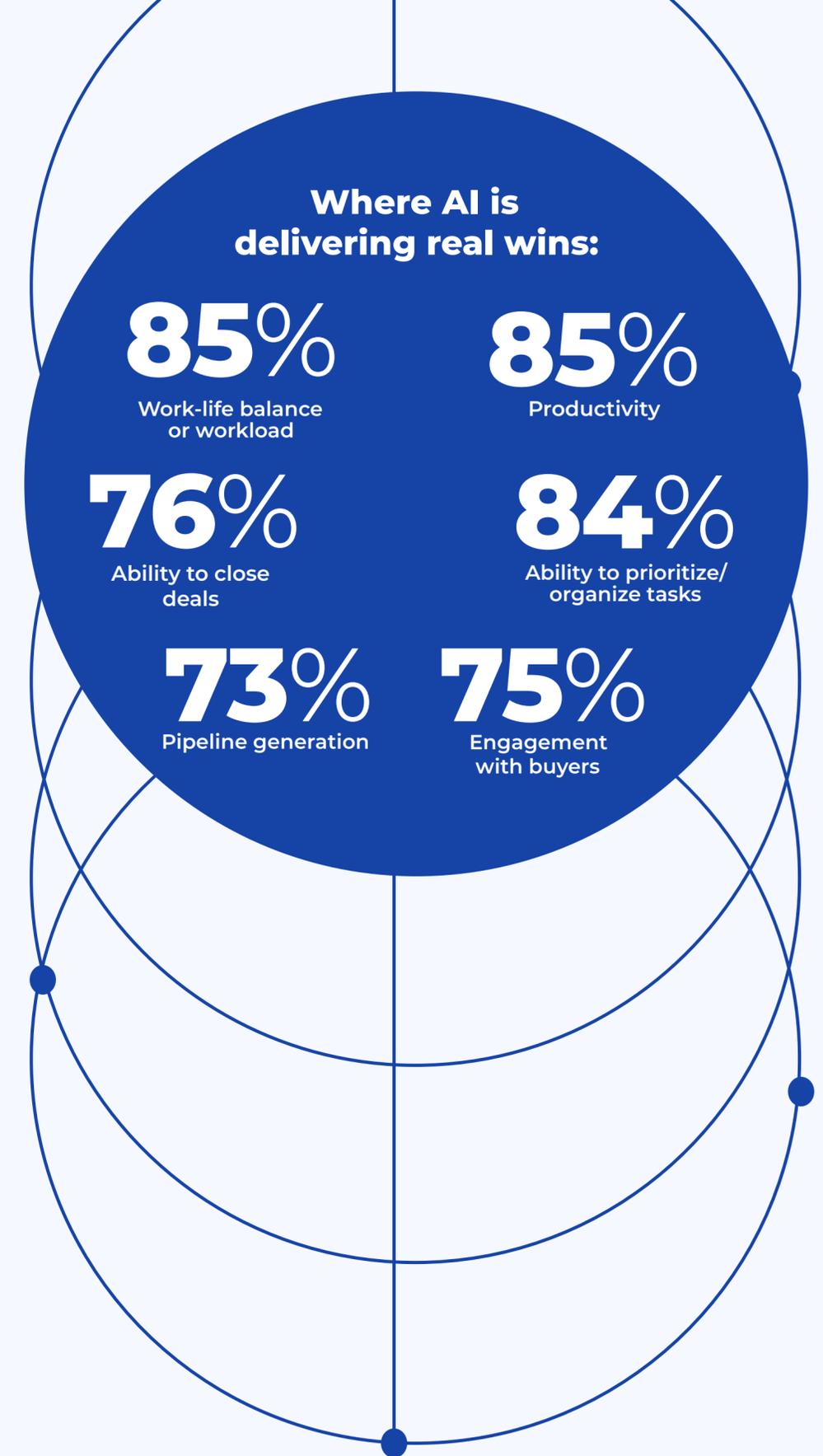
These efficiencies translate directly into stronger performance, with respondents reporting improvements in their ability to close deals (76%), engage buyers (75%), and build pipeline (73%).

The strongest signal comes from those who go all in. Salespeople who fully leverage their company's AI tools are far more likely to consistently hit their revenue targets.

85%

say AI-enabled technologies boost their performance at work.

Nearly all AI super-users (95%) identify as top performers, compared with just 77% of those who admit they're not making the most of AI — highlighting a stark performance gap between experimentation and mastery.



How AI is supercharging management

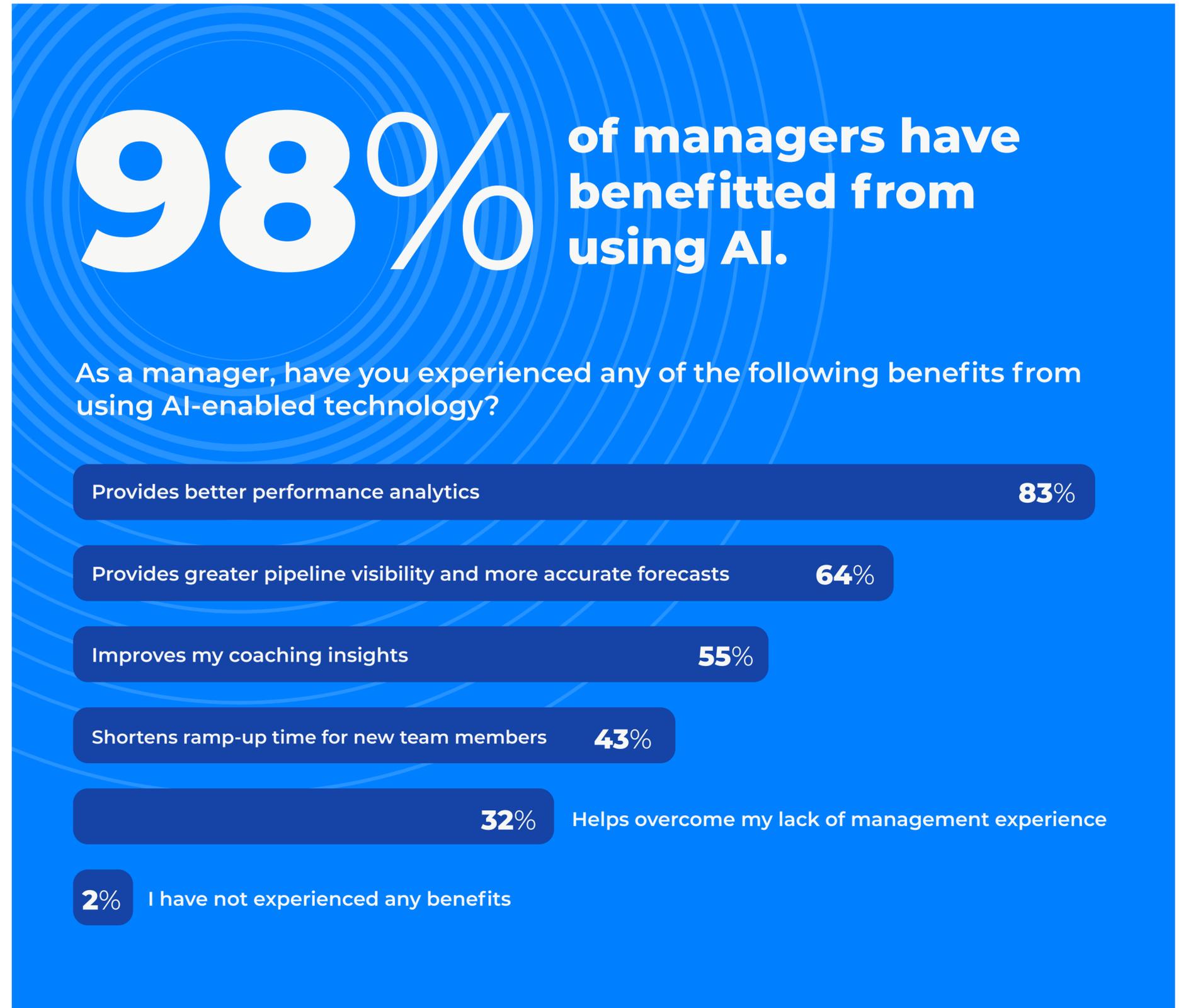
AI isn't just helping individuals — it's redefining what effective revenue leadership looks like. Managers who use AI report dramatically stronger results, saying their teams perform 47% better than teams they've managed without these technologies.

Managers using AI see nearly

50%

better performance from their teams.

The benefits are nearly universal. Almost all managers (98%) say AI helps them in at least one meaningful way. Many point to sharper performance analytics (83%), greater pipeline visibility, and more accurate forecasting (64%). Others say AI strengthens their coaching insights (55%), shortens ramp-up time for new team members (43%), and helps close experience gaps for newer managers (32%).



The AI readiness gap

While survey respondents recognize the benefits of AI, adoption isn't universal — particularly among older team members. Across all respondents with access to AI-enabled tools, 64% say they aren't using the full capabilities available to them. Among Baby Boomers, that number jumps to 75%.

Part of the reason is dissatisfaction with the tools themselves. More than half of respondents (54%) — including 70% of Baby Boomers — report they aren't fully satisfied with the AI technologies their company provides to boost sales performance.

Respondents cite several challenges: difficulties integrating AI with existing workflows (36%), limited customization options (25%), weak reporting and lack of actionable insights (19%), poor mobile functionality (18%), and general usability issues (14%).

In the sections that follow, we'll explore how generational differences shape AI adoption across three critical areas:

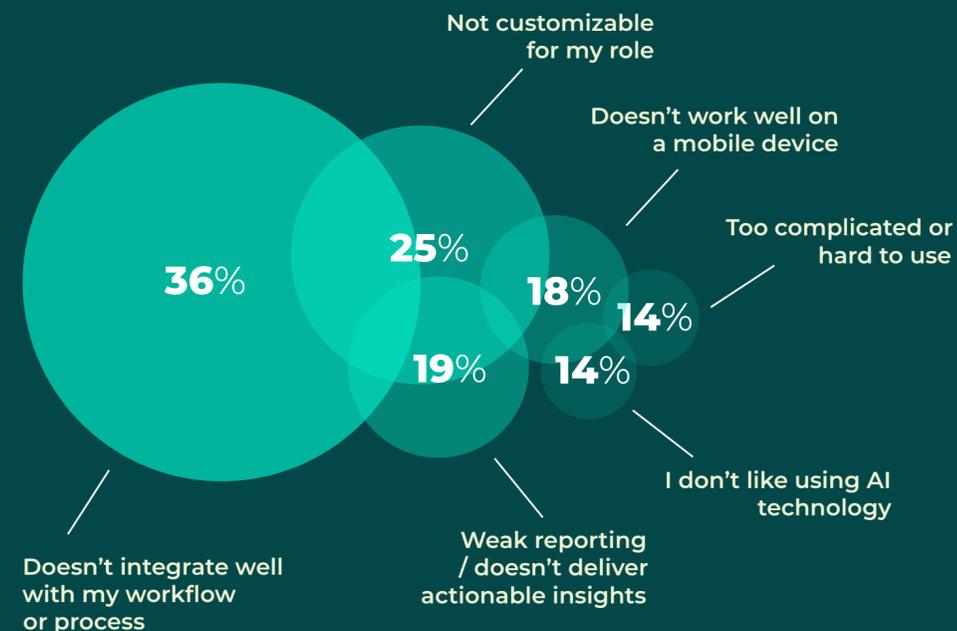
- Technology
- Communication
- Work-life balance

We'll also examine how generational conflict affects both employees and their organizations, and offer strategies to bridge the divide — ensuring every revenue professional, regardless of age or comfort level, can thrive in an AI-powered environment.

54%
say they aren't
completely satisfied
with these tools.

64%
say they aren't
making the most of
AI technologies.

Why aren't you satisfied with your company's AI technology?



“The tool my company uses is annoyingly complex and janky. Half of the time, it works, the other half...well, getting it to not send out bad responses is difficult, to say the least.”

Millennial

“I have been doing my job — and doing it very well — for 23 years. I really don't need AI to help me close deals or tell me how to do my job.”

Baby Boomer

The generational divide

Tension point 1: Clashing views on technology

AI is widely seen as a game-changer across generations — but not everyone agrees on how it should be used. Younger generations are often the biggest champions, embracing AI to streamline work and boost productivity. Older generations recognize its benefits too, but worry that overreliance on technology undermines customer relationships and feel traditional methods still matter.

These differences are fueling tension on cross-generational teams. For instance, most Baby Boomers say Gen Z's tech-first approach lacks the relationship-building (86%) and strategic thinking (77%) needed to drive business growth. Two-thirds (66%) feel Gen Z's approach isn't appropriate for complex deals, and 60% say it's destroying customer relationships.

Younger generations, meanwhile, think older generations aren't relying on technology enough. The majority of Gen Z believe Baby Boomers' tech resistance makes them less efficient (77%), slows down sales (70%), and hampers their ability to close deals — especially less complex ones (63%). Nearly two-thirds (64%) say Boomers' resistance to technology is killing innovation.

Baby Boomers think Gen Z's tech-first approach falls short



86%

Lacks relationship-building

77%

Lacks strategic thinking

66%

Not appropriate for complex deals

60%

Is destroying customer relations

Gen Z says Baby Boomers' resistance to technology is slowing them down



77%

Makes them less efficient

70%

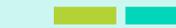
Slows the sales process

64%

Is killing innovation

63%

Affects their ability to close deals



“In general, I find that older generations struggle immensely with new concepts or technology. The business is inevitably going to modernize but they refuse to learn or seem incapable of it. It causes them to be on the whole slower than younger workers.”

Gen Zer

“In my industry, I often work with clients who don't understand AI technology, so it's important to complete deals using old school methods.”

Gen Xer

Tension point 2: The communication divide

Our survey shows a clear generational split in how revenue professionals communicate. Younger generations are embracing digital channels, while older ones stick with traditional, in-person interactions. For example, 75% of Gen Z and Millennials routinely use DMs or chat on social media to engage customers, versus just 49% of Baby Boomers. In fact, 61% of Boomers say they prefer in-person meetings for all deals.

While modern communication methods can drive efficiency, adaptability is key. Yet 59% of respondents admit they don't always adjust their approach based on deal complexity, and 49% don't tailor it to customer preferences.

These mismatches can directly impact revenue outcomes. In fact, over 8 in 10 respondents say they've watched reps from other generations lose deals because of mismatched communication styles — too formal, not formal enough, or simply out of sync with the customer.

AI adds another layer to the mix. Despite AI's reputation for making interactions feel less human, 83% of respondents believe it can enhance customer relationship-building in at least one way. But only 67% of Baby Boomers agree, highlighting yet another area where generational perspectives shape the sales experience.



“Younger employees rely on texting for every aspect of communication with clients versus picking up the phone and making connections.”

Baby Boomer

“It's very difficult to teach younger reps that no matter what level the sale is, there must be personal contact and relationships. But older sellers feel uncomfortable dealing with clients that don't want any personal meetings, just information.”

Gen X manager

83%

of respondents say AI can help build customer relationships. Older generations are less likely to agree.

How AI helps with relationship-building

Improves responsiveness to customer questions

46%

Supports consistent communication across touchpoints

40%

Helps understand customer needs more deeply

38%

Personalizes outreach and follow-ups

36%

AI can't help with relationship-building

17%

“Older generations expect me to work longer hours, but they don’t understand that I have young children and can’t always find extra childcare. To most of my senior management, it’s all work or nothing — it makes me not want to work.”

Millennial



Does prioritizing work-life balance hurt revenue?

Our research shows that Gen Z and Millennials are more likely than Baby Boomers to prioritize work-life balance over their company’s business needs — and they’re also the generations most actively using AI tools. Yet despite focusing on balance, younger team members put in just as many hours as their older colleagues and report hitting their revenue targets more consistently.

The takeaway: Working smarter, not longer, doesn’t just support well-being — it drives results, and AI is a key enabler of that efficiency.

Tension point 3: The work-life balance standoff

Younger generations are using AI to streamline their work and create more time for life outside the office. But slower AI adoption among older generations is driving a clash of expectations around work-life balance — adding yet another layer to generational tension, even though AI could reduce burnout for everyone.

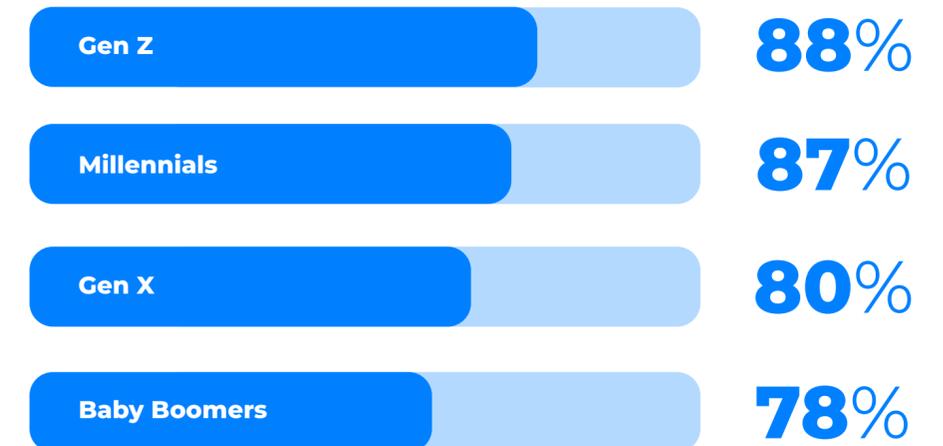
Here’s what Baby Boomers say: 64% think Gen Z’s work-life balance demands come before business performance, and 56% believe this results in lower-quality customer service. Over half (54%) feel Gen Z is destroying traditional workplace culture, and 67% have seen younger colleagues losing deals because of their work-life balance demands.

But Gen Z is pushing back: 72% say Baby Boomers’ fixation on working long hours doesn’t translate to better results, and 71% feel Boomers value hours worked more than actual performance results. Over half (56%) blame Boomers for today’s toxic work culture.

Younger generations also believe adhering to strict 9-to-5 working hours isn’t all it’s cracked up to be. Nearly two-thirds of Gen Z respondents (65%) have seen older colleagues lose deals because they sign-off at 5pm or refuse to work weekends. The result? A generational tug-of-war over how work gets done — and how AI can either bridge or widen the divide.

Despite prioritizing work-life balance, younger generations report meeting their targets more often.

In the past 12 months, how often did you meet your monthly/quarterly quota?



“The younger generations often disappear for long periods of time, call out from work, or are late. The older generations are often covering their jobs.”

Gen X manager

The cost of generational conflict

The productivity crisis

Generational differences aren't just a minor annoyance — they're a serious drag on productivity. Most respondents (88%) work on cross-generational teams or manage employees from multiple age groups. Differences in work pace, priorities, technology use, and communication styles can frequently result in delays, extra follow-ups, and wasted time. When these tensions escalate into conflict, stress and morale also take a hit.

The numbers are striking: 70% of employees on age-diverse teams say generational conflicts hurt their productivity, costing each seller an average of 5.3 hours per week. Across the U.S., that adds up to nearly \$56 billion in lost productivity every year.

Salespeople are losing 5.3 hours/week due to generational differences, costing U.S. employers nearly \$56 billion per year.

70% of respondents say generational conflict affects their productivity.

Do generational differences negatively affect your productivity?



“Sometimes it feels like older colleagues prefer sticking to traditional methods, while I’m trying to leverage newer tech and social platforms to drive sales. That disconnect can slow down collaboration or make meetings feel like a tug-of-war. It’s not personal — it just takes extra effort to get everyone aligned, which eats into time I could be spending with clients.”

Gen X manager

“Instead of selling/closing deals, reps spend time arguing and I have to call them into my office to resolve the conflict. So productivity is down not just by one employee, but three.”

Millennial manager

“The continuous arguments and disagreements make my work life unbearable.”

Millennial



When AI feels easier than a human co-worker

The situation has become so strained that some employees would rather work with AI than a human colleague. For example, 39% of Gen Z respondents would prefer an AI manager over a Baby Boomer — and remarkably, 25% of Boomers would rather work with AI than a Gen Z co-worker.

Beyond productivity: The true cost of generational conflict

The generational divide isn't only slowing individual performance — it's impacting teams, retention, stress, and even retirement plans.

Team impact: Respondents say age-related tension affects team morale (80%) and cohesion (79%), reduces team performance (75%), and even affects their team's ability to close deals (68%).

Retention risk: Despite today's tight job market, 28% of Gen Z say they're looking for a new job where they won't have to interact with Baby Boomers as much.

Early retirement: 19% of Boomers say they're planning to retire early because they're tired of dealing with Gen Z, negating reports that older workers are delaying retirement for financial reasons.

Stress & burnout: Both the youngest (54%) and oldest (36%) members of the sales workforce say interacting with other generations increases their stress and burnout levels at work.

Absenteeism: 35% of Gen Z and 17% of Baby Boomers have taken time off from work just to get a break from their multi-generational colleagues.

Nearly
4 out of 10
Gen Zers
would rather be managed
by AI than a **Baby Boomer.**

“My supervisor is younger than me but surprisingly doesn't like hybrid work — she questions why I'm not in the office more. I'm retiring because of her (in two months). I'm sick of it.”

Baby Boomer

Bridging the divide

Leverage multi-generational strengths

Our research highlights clear ways employers can reduce generational tension and boost team cohesion — starting with fostering mutual learning.

Helping employees recognize and appreciate the strengths of different generations is key. Nearly all survey participants (97%) agree that employees of varying ages can learn from one another, and 79% say they'd be interested in being paired with someone from another generation for mentoring or skill-sharing.

While younger employees often excel with technology, selling success requires more than just digital skills. About two-thirds of respondents say Baby Boomers outperform Gen Z in consultative selling and relationship-building, and they identify many other critical skills that older reps can pass on to the next generation. Supporting these cross-generational exchanges ensures that employees can thrive in a blended, AI-powered environment.

79% of respondents want to learn from their multi-generational colleagues or be mentored by them.



What younger generations can teach their older colleagues

72% Using technology and AI tools effectively

55% Social selling and digital outreach

42% Leveraging data and analytics in sales

38% Building a personal brand online



What older generations can pass down to the next generation

64% Building long-term customer relationships

63% Maintaining professionalism and resilience

43% Strategic selling and closing techniques

36% Navigating complex negotiations

“Sometimes generational differences cause communication gaps, but I try to stay open and learn from everyone’s perspective.”

Millennial

“Teaching my older coworkers how to use advanced technology can be a slow process, but that doesn’t upset me or make me dislike them. Yes, it takes time away from me doing my tasks, but I’m always happy to help.”

Gen Zer

Use AI as a generational equalizer

Technology can be a source of friction in the modern workplace — but when used effectively, it can also be part of the solution. Our research shows that AI is emerging as a powerful equalizer, helping to ease long-standing generational tensions and strengthen teams.

Here's how respondents see it making a difference:

- **Enables knowledge sharing:** 86% of respondents say AI can improve the spread of best practices, ensuring expertise isn't limited to the most seasoned employees and giving younger colleagues a platform to share their skills.
- **Bridges experience gaps:** 80% feel AI can level the playing field, providing real-time guidance for younger employees, helping less-seasoned managers perform confidently, and assisting veterans in identifying areas to improve.
- **Strengthens communication:** 79% believe AI can enhance cross-generational communication, bridging stylistic and technological divides to create a more connected workplace environment.

Together, these capabilities position AI as a unifying force — reducing friction, boosting collaboration, and enabling every team member to contribute at a higher level.

How AI bridges generational gaps



86%

Supports knowledge sharing and best practices



80%

Levels the playing field across experience levels



79%

Improves cross-generational communication

Empower employees on their AI journey

To ensure AI delivers real, meaningful impact revenue, our findings point to a clear opportunity: organizations that actively support employees through adoption — not just tool rollout — see the greatest returns.

The most forward-thinking companies recognize that AI enablement isn't one-size-fits-all and focus on building confidence, reducing workload, and driving real value.

Specifically, they know to:

Meet employees where they are.

Our research shows that sellers don't need to be AI power users to benefit. The key is helping each seller find the right balance of technology based on their role, experience, and readiness.

Encourage team members to use AI to reduce their workload.

Older generations, in particular, may need a nudge. Nearly 6 out of 10 Baby Boomers are struggling with burnout, yet they're less likely than their younger colleagues to say AI has improved their work-life balance.

Allow for gradual, incremental adoption.

We found that as employees use more features within their tools, their perceptions of AI become increasingly positive — reinforcing the value of a phased approach.

Provide targeted, ongoing training.

Some respondents say they avoid AI because they feel overwhelmed, don't understand the benefits, or haven't received enough support to get started.

Invest in best-in-class tools.

With 64% of respondents underutilizing AI, leaders must prioritize solutions that eliminate real user pain points — especially poor integration and limited customization.



Rebuilding alignment in the age of AI

This isn't just a story about AI adoption or generational differences — it's a wake-up call. Revenue teams are fracturing under the weight of misalignment, resentment, and a widening skills gap. As a result, billions of dollars are slipping through the cracks.

Yet amid this division, AI stands out as the one force with the potential to restore alignment. Not by replacing humans, but by equipping employees — regardless of age, tenure, or work style — with the tools, insights, and guidance they need to succeed.

AI doesn't just promise greater productivity. It may be the essential ingredient that keeps modern revenue organizations cohesive, competitive, and ready for the future.



Methodology

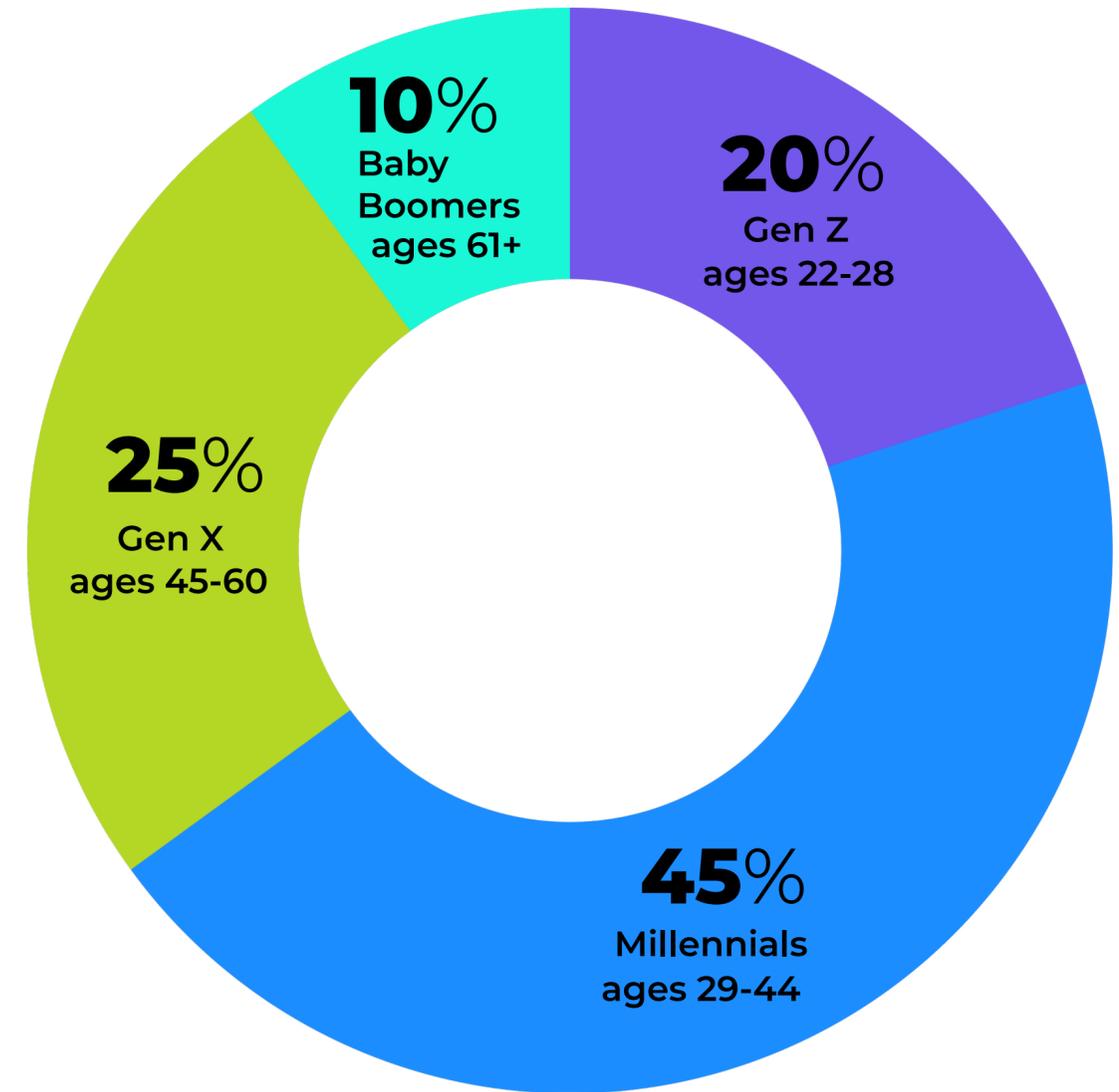
This report is based on a survey of 2,000 U.S. workers employed full-time at companies with at least 100 employees. Respondents included salespeople, account executives, sales managers, sales directors, VPs, and workers in similar revenue-generating roles.

The sample included a mix of respondents from all four generations. The survey was conducted in October and November of 2025, in partnership with independent research firm Workplace Intelligence.

How we calculated the \$56 Billion cost of generational conflict for U.S. employers:

We applied our survey findings to the 13.38M Americans working in “Sales and Related Occupations.” Since 88% of respondents say they work on cross-generational teams, that equates to 11.77M employees. Of those, 70% report that generational conflict hurts their productivity, meaning 8.24M workers are losing productive time. Respondents estimated an average 5.3 hours of productivity lost per week, which translates to 43.7M hours lost weekly, or 2.18B hours annually (assuming 50 working weeks). At an average wage of \$25.62/hour, this loss amounts to \$55.96B per year — nearly \$56 billion in productivity drained from U.S. companies.

Generational breakdown





About Clari + Salesloft

Together, Clari and Salesloft create a category-transforming AI company for revenue, building the foundation for a Predictive Revenue System — a system that guides revenue teams to accelerate growth . The new company combines the broadest dataset to drive revenue actions, capturing both structured and unstructured signals, with complete revenue orchestration capabilities to unlock new levels of AI-driven productivity, growth, and predictable revenue for customers around the world.

Thousands of the world's most successful companies — including Adobe, IBM, 3M, Zoom, and Shopify — trust Clari and Salesloft to drive predictable revenue growth.

Learn more: www.salesloft.com