

Managerial Activity in Conflict Management: Lessons from a Small Island State Using AI

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Abstract

Conflict is very often perceived as a negative issue to contend with in organisations, especially in the Maltese context. Malta is also a European Union Member State with a great influx of foreign workers as unemployment is only at 3%. For this reason, which came about in the last decade, examining conflict has become a relevant issue also because of the cultural issues and possible misunderstandings that foreign workers might bring about in organisations. Although conflict, at times, can be constructive, more often than not it may be also destructive. Resolving or managing conflict effectively requires implementing strategies that promote cooperation, inclusion and understanding. Using the concepts of Thematic Analysis, ChatGPT Version 4.0 was used to elicit themes from 41 individual, semi-structured interviews carried out with subordinates working in the Maltese industry. With regards to the management's role, two prominent themes were elicited; namely 'Proactivity versus Reactivity in Conflict Resolution' and 'Perceived Bias and Favouritism'. This paper aims to outline the innovative methodology used to elicit these themes and to discuss them within the context of a small island state which is increasingly becoming more diverse and cosmopolitan. It also aims to critically analyse these themes using existing literature and to propose ways in which conflict can be dealt with in a more effective manner.

Keywords: conflict, management, small island state, artificial intelligence

Introduction

Conflict is an inevitable aspect of organisational life, arising from differences in goals, perspectives, values and resource allocation (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2008). While some conflict can foster innovation and critical thinking (Jehn, 1995), unresolved or poorly managed conflict often leads to stress, reduced productivity and high turnover (Rahim, 2002). Malta provides a unique setting for studying conflict: a small island with a tight-knit labour market, where increasing workplace diversity intersects with traditional hierarchies and close interpersonal networks. This study seeks to explore how conflict is experienced and managed in this context, especially as organisations adapt to globalised labour flows.

Literature Review

The Nature and Implications of Workplace Conflict

Organisational conflict remains an enduring focus of management scholarship. Contemporary research underscores that while task conflict—differences in viewpoints or ideas—can foster innovation and performance (De Wit, Greer, & Jehn, 2012), relationship conflict—tension rooted in personal incompatibilities—is more likely to impair collaboration and increase stress (De Dreu, 2011). Studies increasingly recognise that conflicts rarely exist in pure form; rather, task disagreements can easily escalate into personal disputes when not managed effectively (Greer, 2017).

Recent empirical work has shown that employees' perceptions of procedural justice and interactional justice—fairness in how decisions are made and how respectfully people are treated—substantially moderate the impact of conflict on performance and well-being (Colquitt et al., 2020). This aligns with findings from the Maltese context, where participants frequently highlighted the importance of clear communication and respectful treatment to maintain trust during conflict.

In addition, the rise of remote and hybrid work arrangements (Wang et al., 2021) has introduced new complexities in conflict dynamics, including misunderstandings due to lack of informal contact and delayed feedback loops. This is particularly relevant in Malta's iGaming and knowledge industries, where remote teams are commonplace.

Managerial Approaches to Conflict Resolution

Rahim's (2002) influential model of conflict management styles—integrating, obliging, dominating, avoiding, and compromising—remains widely applied. However, more recent research has questioned simplistic typologies, suggesting that managers must dynamically adjust strategies according to situational demands and power asymmetries (Tjosvold, Wong, & Chen, 2014).

Meta-analyses indicate that integrative strategies, emphasising collaborative problem-solving and mutual gains, tend to produce better outcomes than avoidance or domination (De Dreu, 2008). For example, a study of European SMEs found that conflict resolution practices grounded in dialogue and joint decision-making predicted higher job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Meneses et al., 2017).

Yet, managers often default to reactive, avoidance-oriented strategies, especially in high-power-distance cultures where challenging authority is discouraged (Ayoko, Callan, & Hartel, 2008). Malta, with its historically hierarchical workplace structures, may be particularly susceptible to this dynamic.

Moreover, perceptions of managerial bias or favouritism can be especially damaging. Employees interpret biased conflict handling as a threat to their status and inclusion (Lind & van den Bos, 2002), increasing the likelihood of disengagement, presenteeism, or turnover (Naumann & Bennett, 2002).

Conflict in Diverse and Multicultural Workplaces

A key development over the past decade is the increasing emphasis on cultural diversity as both a source of creativity and of conflict potential. Culturally heterogeneous teams bring divergent norms, communication styles, and conflict expectations (Stahl et al., 2010). For example, research has shown that employees from low-context cultures (e.g., Northern

Europe) tend to prefer direct conflict expression, while employees from high-context cultures (e.g., Southern Europe, the Middle East) may view direct confrontation as disrespectful (Koeszegi, 2004).

Recent studies have highlighted the importance of cultural intelligence (CQ) among managers for mitigating cross-cultural misunderstandings (Ang, Rockstuhl, & Tan, 2015). High-CQ managers are more adept at recognising culturally rooted conflict triggers and adjusting their approaches accordingly.

Malta's unique position as a small, cosmopolitan labour market—with strong inflows of foreign workers particularly in iGaming, financial services, and healthcare—makes these insights especially relevant. As the data seem to indicate, cultural misunderstandings often intersect with perceptions of bias and reactivity in conflict management.

Technological Mediation and Conflict

Emerging literature also recognises that digital communication tools shape how conflicts emerge and are resolved. While technology facilitates flexibility, it also reduces the richness of cues necessary for nuanced resolution (Gibson & Gibbs, 2006). For example, remote employees may feel disadvantaged in conflict processes due to asymmetric access to information, delays in managerial responses, and lack of visibility (Wang et al., 2021).

Small Island Contexts

Research on small island economies underscores that relational embeddedness—dense social networks and repeated interactions—amplifies the effects of perceived fairness and trust (Baldacchino, 2007; Paci, 2022). In close-knit communities, managers' reputations are particularly salient, and conflict mismanagement can have cascading effects across teams and even industries.

Moreover, Maltese workplaces often maintain informality and personalisation in HR processes (Debono, 2015). While this can foster solidarity, it can also make transparent, structured conflict resolution more challenging.

Methodology

Methodological Approach

This study adopted Reflexive Thematic Analysis as conceptualised by Braun and Clarke (2023). Reflexive Thematic Analysis is a flexible and theoretically informed method for systematically identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning ("themes") within qualitative data. Unlike codebook or coding reliability approaches, Reflexive Thematic Analysis emphasises researcher reflexivity and interpretative engagement over mechanical coding consistency (Braun & Clarke, 2023).

This approach is particularly suited to exploring complex, subjective experiences such as workplace conflict. It enabled the authors to attend to both the content of participants' accounts and the meaning-making processes through which those accounts were constructed.

Epistemological Position

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The analysis was underpinned by a contextualist epistemology, situated between essentialism/realism and constructionism. From this position, the researchers recognise that experiences of conflict are shaped by both objective features of workplace practices (e.g., policies, managerial actions) and subjective interpretations informed by organisational culture and individual histories. Moreover, language does not merely reflect reality but also constructs and negotiates it, and one's own perspectives as researchers inevitably inform theme development.

The researchers do not claim to uncover a single "truth" about conflict in Maltese workplaces. Rather, the goal was to produce a plausible and insightful account of how participants understood and narrated conflict experiences, while acknowledging the researchers' role in shaping this account (Byrne, 2024).

Data Collection

The researchers conducted 41 individual semi-structured interviews with employees in a range of Maltese industries, including iGaming, healthcare, manufacturing, and professional services. Interviews were designed to elicit rich, detailed accounts of specific conflict incidents, emotional responses, perceptions of management practices, and cultural and organisational factors shaping conflict experiences. The interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, were audio recorded, and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis Process

Reflexive Thematic Analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021, 2023), was used as the analytical method for this study. This six-phase, recursive process emphasised the active and interpretive role of the researcher in identifying and analysing patterns of meaning across the dataset. The process began with familiarisation, during which the researchers immersed themselves in the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts and, where applicable, transcribing the interviews. This stage involved making initial observations and taking informal notes to capture early impressions and key nuances, ensuring a deep understanding of the content.

Following this, the researchers generated initial codes by systematically tagging segments of the data that appeared relevant to the research questions. These codes were developed inductively and reflexively, evolving as familiarity with the dataset deepened. Coding was not treated as a neutral or objective act but as a subjective and interpretative process shaped by the researchers' theoretical positioning and engagement with the material. Both semantic (explicit) and latent (underlying) meanings were considered in the development of codes.

In the third phase, the researchers began constructing initial themes by uploading the transcripts and using ChatGPT 4.0 to elicit themes based on the codes, which were developed identifying broader patterns of meaning. This stage was interpretative rather than descriptive; themes were not viewed as summaries of topics but as conceptual entities that captured key aspects of the data. Sub-themes were also developed where necessary to organise more complex thematic content. The initial themes reflected preliminary understandings that were further refined in the subsequent phase.

During the fourth phase, the researchers reviewed and refined the themes to ensure they accurately represented the coded extracts and the dataset as a whole. This involved

assessing the coherence and internal consistency of each theme, checking for sufficient supporting data, and revisiting coded material to confirm the validity of theme boundaries. Where necessary, themes were revised, merged, split, or discarded to strengthen the overall analytic framework.

Once a coherent set of themes was established, the researchers moved on to defining and naming them. This phase required articulating the core essence of each theme and its relevance to the research aims. Theme names were chosen to be concise and evocative, while definitions were refined to clearly express each theme's central organising concept. These definitions served as the foundation for the analytic narrative (Terry et al., 2023).

The analysis involved integrating the thematic findings with illustrative data extracts and producing an interpretative narrative that addressed the research questions. Throughout the entire process, the researchers engaged in ongoing reflexivity, critically considering how their own assumptions, positionality, and interpretive lenses shaped the development and presentation of the analysis (Nowell et al., 2023).

Reflexivity and Quality

Consistent with Reflexive Thematic Analysis principles, the researchers recognise that their own positionalities—including their professional backgrounds in organisational studies and familiarity with Maltese workplace culture—influenced their interpretation. The researchers engaged in reflexive dialogue throughout the process, considering:

- How their expectations about conflict in small island states shaped coding decisions
- Potential biases introduced by using AI tools to assist theme development
- The ways their roles as researchers and practitioners might lead them to privilege certain interpretations

Following Braun and Clarke's (2023) recommendations for demonstrating quality, the researchers prioritised transparency (clearly documenting analytic decisions), rigour (iterative theme development), and sensitivity to context (situating findings within Maltese organisational and cultural settings).

Analysis

This section presents a detailed exploration of the two central themes derived from the Reflexive Thematic Analysis of the interviews. In line with Braun and Clarke (2023), the analysis is both descriptive (summarising what participants said) and interpretative (considering why it was meaningful to them and what social and organisational contexts shaped those meanings). The findings are illustrated extensively with participants' own words to foreground their lived experience.

Theme 1: Proactivity vs. Reactivity in Conflict Resolution

This theme captures how the *timing, consistency, and intentionality* of management responses powerfully shaped how employees experienced conflict. A striking pattern was the emotional contrast between cases where managers acted early and transparently, and those where managers delayed action or imposed solutions unilaterally. While prior literature has highlighted the importance of early intervention (Jehn, 1995; Meneses et al.,

2017), these accounts underscore that in the Maltese context—where workplace relationships are often long-standing and personal—proactivity is particularly crucial to maintaining trust.

Sub-theme 1.1: Early Communication Prevents Escalation. In several cases, proactive communication prevented disagreements from becoming entrenched. One participant described a finance-marketing dispute over budget allocations:

“Management, particularly our CFO, took a proactive approach. She initiated a series of meetings to facilitate open communication between the finance and marketing teams. Additionally, a neutral third party, sort of a mediator, was engaged to assist in finding common ground... She was careful not to make the finance team look like party poopers, which helped.” (*Interview 1*)

This approach aligns with Meneses et al.’s (2017) argument that mediation and open forums promote constructive engagement, rather than defensive entrenchment. Notably, the participant highlighted the value of perceived neutrality—that is, the sense that management was not favouring one side.

By contrast, where communication was reactive or absent, employees described a spiral of frustration and speculation. A striking example came from a participant whose team was transferred between departments without prior notice:

“It was more the issue of not being consulted at all, you know?... You feel neglected and not respected... They basically moved around my team and I into these unfamiliar structures without prior acknowledgement or consideration.” (*Interview 2*)

This account illustrates what Colquitt et al. (2020) term interactional injustice—the sense of being excluded from processes that directly affect one’s work identity.

Sub-theme 1.2: Structured Processes vs. Improvised Responses. Participants also highlighted the importance of *clear, pre-established processes*. For example, one participant described how an early disagreement over workload allocation was resolved when management convened a formal meeting:

“The second disagreement was directly with them, and they had called in a meeting with the employees to make everything clear... We agreed to fulfill our duties solely, and should we wish to carry out the extra duties we could do so with extra pay.” (*Interview 3*)

Here, clarity about expectations and procedures defused resentment.

By contrast, a lack of process often left employees feeling that managers were improvising in ways that prioritised convenience over fairness. One healthcare professional described a sudden room reallocation:

“I was informed about this new service by my management, and they also told me they had sorted everything out prior to letting me know... Their solution was to advise me to work from home. Nothing else in this particular situation was done on their side.” (*Interview 4*)

The phrase “sorted everything out” suggests a managerial mindset of closure without consultation. As Braun and Clarke (2023) note, such *managerial monologues* can deepen conflict by denying employees’ sense of agency.

Sub-theme 1.3: Learning and Adaptation. While reactivity was widespread, a subset of organisations demonstrated the capacity to learn from prior conflicts and adapt. In the case of the remote part-time workers asked to cover public holidays, management initially responded punitively:

“She was very upset because she thought that we were like working behind her back... She started to text us saying she doesn’t see us as part of the team.” (*Interview 6*)

However, after further reflection and dialogue, the tone changed:

“After things calmed down, my boss and HR started updating us with the whole process... They realised they were in the wrong, and she scheduled a video call with all the information... Now, we will be paid double.” (*Interview 6*)

This resolution had longer-term benefits:

“We do have occasional meetings now... even one-on-one, because she wants to check with us... especially the ones who are not in the office every day.” (*Interview 6*)

This evolution—from reactive defensiveness to transparent dialogue—illustrates DeChurch and Marks’ (2001) concept of conflict transformation, where resolution processes reshape relational norms.

Sub-theme 1.4: The Emotional Texture of Proactivity and Reactivity. Emotions threaded through every account. Where managers acted proactively, employees described relief and renewed trust:

“I actually felt supported... It was not easy but knowing we were all heard helped.” (*Interview 1*)

Where management was reactive or absent, employees often reported compounded stress:

“It left me dreading going into work day after day.” (*Interview 2*)

“I kept justifying myself to clients... It really affected me, as I always aim to leave my clients satisfied.” (*Interview 4*)

These narratives resonate with Wang et al.’s (2021) research on how unresolved conflict in hybrid contexts leads to persistent *emotional load*—the sense that unresolved issues continue to shadow day-to-day work.

Theme 2: Perceived Bias and Favouritism

The second core theme illuminates the significance of perceived partiality in conflict handling, a pattern consistently identified as corrosive to psychological safety (Simons & Roberson, 2003). In Malta’s relatively small workplaces, such perceptions were often amplified by the closeness of relationships and the visibility of managers’ decisions.

Sub-theme 2.1: Unequal Treatment and Communication. Participants repeatedly contrasted fair treatment with arbitrary or inconsistent communication. One participant described feeling that management's efforts to appease marketing colleagues made the finance team look obstructive:

"The finance team are always seen as the party poopers... She had to tread carefully to avoid antagonising them." (*Interview 1*)

Another recounted how management's indiscriminate sanctions deepened divisions:

"They tried to resolve the conflict by punishing all staff... This created more conflicts and two factions." (*Interview 5*)

Such experiences underscore Lind and van den Bos's (2002) contention that *procedural fairness*—being treated as a valued contributor—is often more important to employees than the specific outcome of a conflict.

Sub-theme 2.2: Role Ambiguity and Double Standards. Part-time and remote workers often felt their contractual rights and boundaries were overlooked. One employee recounted:

"Every time there's a public holiday, they expect us part-timers to work... even though my contract said I shouldn't be working them... No one explained why." (*Interview 6*)

When the participant and colleagues requested clarification, their manager initially accused them of disloyalty:

"She said that if we're not being honest, then she doesn't see us as part of the team... even though we had asked her many times for a meeting." (*Interview 6*)

This account highlights what Ayoko et al. (2008) describe as *power asymmetry*: employees feeling that questioning expectations risks punishment, especially in cultures with strong hierarchies.

Sub-theme 2.3: Emotional Impact and Disengagement. Participants vividly described how perceptions of bias undermined motivation:

"It was very frustrating... You feel neglected and not respected... It made me and the rest of my team feel like we meant nothing to the company." (*Interview 2*)

"Disappointment turned to frustration... resulting in less motivation to work." (*Interview 3*)

Even where employees remained, such disengagement likely had consequences for performance and psychological well-being, echoing Naumann and Bennett's (2002) findings that unfair conflict management damages group cohesion.

Sub-theme 2.4: Constructive Reframing and Growth. Encouragingly, some participants identified positive learning and growth after conflicts were addressed:

"One key lesson was the importance of empathy and understanding... Conflict, when managed properly, can lead to positive change." (*Interview 1*)

Others described how relationships improved through conflict resolution:

“We now have occasional meetings... She understands the importance of communicating... especially with us who work remotely.” (*Interview 6*)

This echoes Stahl et al.’s (2010) assertion that culturally diverse teams can develop *stronger relational norms* if conflicts are surfaced and resolved transparently.

Sub-theme 2.5: The Weight of Silence. Importantly, the data also revealed that unaddressed perceptions of favouritism lingered, sometimes long after a conflict appeared resolved:

“Even though they seemed understanding, nothing was done... Things are still the same.” (*Interview 4*)

This inertia reflects what Braun and Clarke (2023) term *the sediment of experience*: the way unresolved injustice accumulates and subtly shapes future interactions.

Discussion and Implications

This study set out to understand how employees in Maltese organisations experience conflict and how management practices shape those experiences. Using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2023), the researchers identified two central themes—Proactivity versus Reactivity in Conflict Resolution and Perceived Bias and Favouritism—each with nuanced sub-themes illustrating how conflict dynamics unfolded. Below, the researchers discuss these findings in light of recent scholarship and draw out their implications for organisational practice and policy.

The Importance of Proactivity and Structured Conflict Resolution

A core finding was that proactive engagement and early communication consistently distinguished constructive conflict management from more harmful experiences. In cases where managers initiated open dialogue, involved mediators, and made explicit efforts to balance perspectives, employees reported feeling respected and supported, even when the conflict itself was stressful.

This finding supports Meneses et al. (2017) and De Wit et al. (2012), who argue that early intervention not only prevents escalation but also signals procedural justice. For example, participants who were consulted early in budget disputes or workload negotiations described greater trust in management, more willingness to compromise, and higher job satisfaction:

“Management... initiated a series of meetings to facilitate open communication... That made all the difference.” (*Interview 1*)

Conversely, reactivity—particularly when managers “sorted everything out” without consultation—undermined employees’ sense of control and belonging. Such reactivity is emblematic of what Braun and Clarke (2023) call “managerial monologues,” where decisions are presented as closed, effectively silencing those affected.

This study’s findings thus reinforce that structured, proactive conflict management is not merely procedural but relational, serving to protect the dignity and inclusion of employees.

The Erosion of Trust Through Perceived Bias and Favouritism

The second major theme—Perceived Bias and Favouritism—illustrates how partiality, inconsistency, or opacity in conflict handling created lasting damage.

When employees perceived that management prioritised certain departments (“the marketing team always got their way”) or failed to enforce consistent standards (“we were punished for others’ mistakes”), the result was often disengagement and emotional exhaustion:

“It made me feel like we meant nothing to the company.” (*Interview 2*)

These experiences echo Simons and Roberson’s (2003) findings that perceptions of unfairness damage not only performance but also employees’ willingness to communicate openly in future conflicts.

In the Maltese context, this dynamic was magnified by relational embeddedness—the closeness of networks in a small island setting (Baldacchino, 2007). Here, employees often knew colleagues and managers personally, making perceived favouritism particularly injurious to professional identities.

Remote Work as a Source of Hidden Inequities

A salient insight concerns how remote and hybrid work arrangements intensified the risk of reactivity and bias. Part-time and remote employees reported feeling excluded from communication loops, subjected to ad hoc expectations (“always expected to cover public holidays”), and scrutinised for raising legitimate concerns:

“She said we’re not part of the team... even though we asked many times for a meeting.” (*Interview 6*)

This aligns with Wang et al. (2021), who argue that hybrid work requires deliberate, visible practices of inclusion to prevent hidden inequities. The data demonstrate that without explicit protocols, remote workers may experience higher conflict stress and less clarity about entitlements.

Learning, Adaptation, and Conflict Transformation

Despite these challenges, several narratives showed that conflict can be a catalyst for positive change when handled reflectively.

Instances where managers acknowledged missteps, apologised, and implemented clearer procedures led to restored trust and more inclusive relationships:

“After they listened to us... she realised she was attacking us for no reason... Now we have regular meetings.” (*Interview 6*)

This resonates with Stahl et al. (2010) and Braun and Clarke (2023), who emphasise that transparent resolution processes can transform conflict into an opportunity for learning and cultural renewal.

Contribution to Theory and Practice

This study contributes to understanding organisational conflict in three ways. Firstly, it shows how proactive conflict management is relational rather than merely procedural—shaping belonging and trust. Secondly, it highlights the significance of perceived bias, especially in small communities with dense networks, and finally, it demonstrates that remote work exacerbates pre-existing vulnerabilities, requiring adapted policies. By situating these insights in the Maltese context, this work underscores that conflict management practices must be culturally and relationally attuned—not simply imported from generic HR templates.

Issues in the Use of ChatGPT 4.0: Lessons Learnt

ChatGPT was used to analyse interview transcripts to find patterns in the data and create themes and sub-themes using pre-established codes. Additionally, it was used to find relevant quotations in the transcripts. Moreover, it allowed for detailed analysis of the data which it did on request with prompts such as “provide more detail on [sub-theme name].”

While ChatGPT managed to come up with themes and sub-themes, it proved important to be familiar with the data as ChatGPT had a tendency to over-generalise by creating patterns based on a single interview. In fact, all the themes and sub-themes that ChatGPT produced were checked with the data. A solution to this limitation was to create a grid with summarised data from the interviews in order to verify that the sub-themes were not created using data from one or few interviews. Therefore, for each sub-theme, the grid was searched to check that it applied to multiple interviews. The grid included a row for each interview, and a column for each question. The codes from the interviews were copied onto this grid depending on the question that they answered. Moreover, ChatGPT 4.0 was not always successful in recognising all the data that fits a sub-theme, as it did not make connections between some data. Therefore, while ChatGPT was useful in finding overarching patterns in the data, it should not be the only tool used; familiarisation with the data is important and the creation of the grid served as a checklist to ensure that ChatGPT is including all relevant data.

Another issue was encountered when requesting interview quotations. On the one hand, the ability of ChatGPT to analyse the entire document to find relevant quotes about a particular sub-theme was important. However, this was done with caution. Some quotes were in fact irrelevant, or on the other hand, the chosen relevant quotes were not found in the original transcribed data. It was necessary to check the context of each quote, and the summary grid was used to check whether other interviews could be checked for a relevant quote. Moreover, some quotes were paraphrased by ChatGPT, by changing the grammar. The most troubling issue was that some quotes were actually made up by ChatGPT 4.0, and thus it is very important to check with the original transcript that the quotes did actually exist, and if no alternatives were found, to check the summary grid to find which interviews could have relevant quotes. It is worth pointing out that there was a tendency for the first requested quotes to be accurate, but after a few requests, quotes were being paraphrased, and eventually even made up. Additionally, continuously uploading the document helped to restart the process and find more accurate quotations.

Finally, it was unclear whether ChatGPT 4.0 could understand all the data. While the process of uploading the data and finding patterns took only seconds, a lot of preparation was made

beforehand. The interviews had to be written in clear English in order to ensure that ChatGPT 4.0 was able to analyse all the data. The summary grid was also uploaded to ensure that ChatGPT 4.0 'understood' what each interview was saying. When comparing the analysis of the interviews and the analysis of the summary grid, it was evident that ChatGPT 4.0 could understand most of what the transcripts portrayed as the main themes and sub-themes were similar. However, for the reasons previously mentioned, the summary grid has numerous benefits and it was worth investing the time to create it, rather than relying solely on ChatGPT 4.0. Therefore, while ChatGPT 4.0 has the benefit of finding patterns quickly, eliciting the necessary level of detailed analysis, and finding quotes, one should be mindful that it has numerous flaws. Therefore, it is important to invest time in making the transcripts clear, familiarising oneself with the data, and creating a summary grid. Caution should be taken when analysing the data and not to rely solely on artificial intelligence. Finally, while these limitations were found, it could be due to user error, and other versions of ChatGPT, or other artificial intelligence, could have provided additional benefits, or lessened some of the limitations. Despite its limitations, the benefits of ChatGPT cannot be ignored, and thus one needs to compare the benefits and limitations when considering its use in Reflexive Thematic Analysis.

Policy Recommendations

Based on these findings, the researchers propose the following policy and practice recommendations for Maltese organisations seeking to improve conflict management:

The establishment of formal conflict resolution frameworks would create clear protocols outlining how conflicts will be reported, acknowledged, investigated, and resolved. This would require documentation of key decisions and rationales to improve transparency. Moreover, there should be the provision of accessible information to employees (in multiple languages if necessary). The training of managers in inclusive and culturally-sensitive conflict practices is a must. Training should go beyond ensuring active listening skills, empathy, and perspective-taking, as well as cultural intelligence (Ang et al., 2015). Moreover, managers should be encouraged to reflect on how implicit biases influence their conflict responses. The communication channels for remote and part-time staff need to be strengthened. There should be explicit guidelines for workload expectations, availability, and entitlements as well as the implementation of regular check-ins with remote workers to surface emerging conflicts.

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