COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES IN REMOTE WORK SETTINGS

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the technological tools and platforms that remote workers use for communication and collaboration, the communication challenges that remote workers face and strategies to overcome them and alsothe additional technological tools to enhance remote collaboration and effective communication in remote settings. The descriptive survey was conducted and the questionnaires were distributed via online administration. This paper explored Technological Acceptance Model and Technological Determinism theory as the theoretical ferments and foundations that underpinned this study. The study showed that respondents were satisfied with the effectiveness of the current tools/platforms for remote collaboration. The study also revealed that communication challenges that remote workers face rages from, Lack of Non-Verbal Cues, Communication Overload, Misunderstanding/miscommunication, Lack of Visual Context, Technical Issues and Accountability and Monitoring. The study found out that there is need for additional technological tools to enhance remote collaboration Thus, the paper concluded that effective remote communication requires ongoing effort and adaptation and to regularly evaluate what is working and what can be improved, and be open to trying new strategies to enhance collaboration and understanding. The study recommended that organizations should choose the right communication tools that suit their team's needs and establish clear communication guidelines for when and how to use each communication tool.

Keywords: Remote setting, Communication, Workers, Strategies, Technology.

Introduction

Modern technology's technological improvements have played a significant role in the emergence of the competitive job environment. Due to communication's incredible ability to connect lines around the globe, it has performed flawlessly, creating more options to enhance employee performance in the business world. According to Stacey Epstein, CEO of Zinc, the modern workforce is more flexible, interactive, and vibrant than ever before, and it is made up of a variety of generations with different communication choices.

The upgrades have given employees more options, especially those who work remotely or outside of a conventional office setting. It also describes a job structure where individuals work remotely from their homes or other convenient locations rather than going to a main office, connecting with coworkers and clients using information and communication technologies (Gajendran, 2016). Big companies, in particular, can benefit greatly from remote labor since it allows for more flexible scheduling of production (Stevens, 2021). Numerous international investigations that were conducted on it have produced favorable results.

In reality, as soon as employers first permitted workers to operate remotely from various locations, many of them recognized the possibility. This type of job has some benefits for both the employer and workers (Fernando, 2023). Incorporating a remote workforce also resulted in lower travel expenses (Flores, 2019). It also promotes increased levels of productivity and effectiveness. In fact, according to research by Global Workplace Analytics, more than two thirds of firms report increased productivity among their telecommuters.

Busch, E., Nash, and Bell (2011) claimed that as our world grows more global and diverse, firms have grasped the value of effectively recruiting, choosing and keeping top talent worldwide. In an effort to meet the demands of the expanding economic growth and worker requirements, businesses have progressively made the switch from the conventional in-office environment to a virtual workplace. However, working remotely has a negative effect on workers as well. For them, being alone could provide difficulties. The lack of social connections among employees may cause them to feel lonely. A worker can begin to feel bored and socially alienated as a result of the absence of direct contact (Busch, Nashand Bell, 2011). In recent years, remote work has grown increasingly popular and pervasive as a style of employment for many people and businesses. According to Battisti et al (2022), the popularity of remote work environments has been hastened by the development of technology and the COVID-19 pandemic. While working remotely has many advantages, like greater flexibility, more independence, and a better work-life balance, it also presents special communication issues that may make it more difficult to work collaboratively and produce as much as you could (Battisti et al, 2022).

Communication is the lifeblood of any organization, and effective communication becomes even more crucial in remote work settings where physical proximity is absent. According to Finnegan (2021), remote workers should significantly rely on technology to connect, cooperate, and share information with their coworkers since they lack in-person contact, casual discussions by the water cooler, or unexpected meetings.

By understanding these challenges and implementing appropriate strategies, individuals and organizations can harness the full potential of remote work, enhance productivity, and foster a strong sense of teamwork and collaboration even when working from different locations. In today's rapidly evolving global market, remote work has developed into a critical corporate tool that supports efficient operation. This method of carrying out job obligations appears to be common in contemporary firms, despite the fact that working outside the office has long been an option. According to Kowalski &Ślebarska, K. (2022), due to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, 14.2% of employees in Poland changed their current way of performing professional duties to a remote mode. In the public sector, almost every sixth employee worked remotely, whereas in the private sector, every twelfth person did so. 85.6% of employees reported working remotely five days a week, and 64% were likely to continue doing so even after returning to the office, especially because 44% of workers said that working from home did not affect their productivity. Each seventh employee mentioned three remote working days, and half of them said that enough work was done outside of the office primarily for two days.

Generally, employees find working from home productive, albeit managers are often concerned about maintaining job performance at least on the same level as office work. Since managers are in charge of planning and overseeing employees' work, it appears essential to examine how managers at various levels of management see the unprecedented introduction of remote working (Kowalski &Ślebarska, 2022). We chose to employ managerial perception since prior research had established the value of subjective performance indicators and their resemblance to internal performance that was measured objectively (Kowalski &Ślebarska, 2022).

This study will help us to examine the technological tools and platforms that remote workers use for communication and collaboration, to understand the communication challenges that remote workers face and explore strategies to overcome them and to also explore the additional technological tools to enhance remote collaboration and effective communication in remote settings. In this context, it is essential to understand the communication challenges that remote workers face and explore strategies to overcome them. Remote work requires intentional efforts to foster clear and efficient communication channels that can bridge the physical distance and create a cohesive and productive work environment. We will delve into some common communication challenges faced by remote workers and discuss strategies to address them. We will explore methods to establish effective communication channels, build trust among team members, facilitate meaningful collaboration, and ensure that everyone remains aligned and informed despite being physically dispersed.

Literature Review
Concept of Remote Work
Remote work, also known as telecommuting or working from home, refers to the practice of performing work duties outside of a traditional office environment. It entails working remotely with others while utilizing technology and digital communication tools to perform tasks. Due to recent advancements in technology, shifting workplace patterns and the need for flexibility and work-life balance, remote work has become increasingly popular (Battisti, Alfiero&Leonidou, 2022).

Whatever you choose to call it—telework, remote work, or whatever—this trend is here to stay. A type of job method known as working from home enables employees to do their duties remotely or outside of the office setting. Given that the unpredictable environment brought on by the COVID19 pandemic, numerous businesses have noticed a rise in the amount of their remote employees in recent years, and this trend will only continue. For individuals as well as companies, operating beyond the typical workplace environment presents fresh prospects and obstacles. In a very dynamic system of seamless correlations, motivations, and impacts, every facet is connected to the others. When it comes to fostering cultural support and acceptability for efforts promoting remote work, as well as for reducing the majority of dangers to teleworkers' well-being, managers' roles appear to be of utmost importance. Here are just a few important ways in which the leadership element can genuinely make an impact and set an organization's remote work practices up for success. Leading by example, setting clear expectations, communicating frequently, monitoring and modeling appropriate work behaviors, and being purposeful in creating opportunities for remote workers are just a few of the crucial ways mentioned above.

- Location Independence: As long as they have a strong internet connection, people can operate remotely from any location. Geographical limitations are removed by this flexibility, allowing people to reside in various towns, nations, or even work while traveling.
- Flexible Schedule: Remote work often provides more flexibility in terms of work hours. Instead of adhering to a traditional 9-to-5 schedule, remote employees can often set their own hours, as long as they meet their deadlines and fulfill their responsibilities.
- Increased Autonomy: Remote workers typically have more autonomy over their work environment and processes. They have the freedom to design their workspace, tailor their routines, and take ownership of managing their tasks.
- Communication and Collaboration: Remote work heavily relies on digital tools for communication and collaboration. Video conferencing, instant messaging, project management software, and cloud-based document sharing platforms facilitate seamless interaction and cooperation among remote team members.
- Productivity and Performance: While some individuals thrive in a remote work setup, others may find it challenging to stay focused and productive. Remote workers need self-discipline, time management skills, and a suitable workspace to maintain productivity and achieve their goals.

It is important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly accelerated the adoption of remote work globally, as organizations implemented remote work policies to prioritize the health and safety of their employees. This widespread shift has led to increased acceptance and normalization of remote work arrangements in various industries.

Concept of Communication

Communication is the act of exchanging data, notions, opinions, sentiments, or messages between people or organizations utilizing a variety of techniques and media according to Tran (2016). It is an essential component of human interaction and is essential for establishing connections, exchanging information, fostering relationships, and displaying feelings. In order for communication to be successful, both the sender and the recipient must be able

comprehend the message. Both spoken and written words, body language, facial expressions, gestures, and even the usage of technology and media platforms are included in this (Hezser,2017).

Sender (the individual who is beginning the conversation), message (the information being conveyed), channel (the dissemination method, such as spoken words, written text, email, or phone call), receiver (the person receiving the message), and feedback (responses or reactions to the message) are important components of communication. According to App (2023), efficient interaction calls for clarity, simplicity, empathy, active listening, and understanding of the audience's cultural and social context. Language limitations, diverse perceptions, emotional situations, and external distractions are only a few of the causes of misunderstanding. In interpersonal interactions, working environments, educational settings, diplomacy, and many other facets of life, effective communication skills are crucial.

There are different types of Communication. Some of them are: Verbal Communication, Non-Verbal Communication, Visual Communication, Written Communication, Interpersonal Communication, Group Communication, Mass Communication. A two-way process, effective communication involves sending and receiving messages. It calls for attentive listening, fluency in speech, empathy, and the capacity to modify communication techniques according to the audience and situation. Better personal and professional outcomes can result from developing good communication skills.

Communication Strategies

Effective communication is foundational to healthy working and personal relationships. Recognizing how and when to apply each style of communication will help you interact more efficiently (Coursera, 2022). Individuals interact in a variety of forms. By developing your communication skills and understanding how to overcome common communication obstacles that may be caused by language or cultural differences, you may improve your relationships in both your personal and professional life (Coursera, 2022).

Communication strategies refer to the various approaches and techniques individuals or organizations use to effectively convey information, ideas, and messages to others. Effective communication is essential in both personal and professional settings, as it promotes understanding, collaboration, and positive relationships.

Here are some communication strategies that can help improve communication:

- Active Listening: Pay full attention to what the other person is saying, and try to understand their perspective before responding. Engage with the speaker by nodding or providing verbal cues, which shows that you are actively listening.
- Clarity and Conciseness: Express your thoughts and ideas clearly and concisely. Avoid jargon or complex language, especially when communicating with a diverse audience.
- Empathy and Emotional Intelligence: Understand and acknowledge the emotions of others while communicating. Being empathetic fosters trust and strengthens relationships.
- Feedback: Encourage and provide constructive feedback to facilitate improvement and growth. Ensure that feedback is specific, actionable, and delivered in a respectful manner.

- Use of Visuals: Incorporate visual aids such as charts, graphs, or diagrams to enhance understanding and engagement, particularly when conveying complex information.

Remember that effective communication is an ongoing process that requires continuous improvement and adaptation to the specific needs of your audience and context.

Empirical Framework

Elshaiekh, Hassan; and Abdallah (2018) examined "The Impacts of Remote Working on Workers Performance". It was discovered that individuals who successfully work from home are said to be very self-motivated, self-disciplined, and to possess skills that gave them influence in bartering. The detrimental effects include time management demands, financial challenges, or uncertainty. loneliness due to lack of communication with coworkers, separation at work can cause you to feel excluded, disrupt your routine, and fail to promote yourself, lack of empathy from those who follow more conventional pathways. At the end of the day, it was difficult to switch off. in intimate relationships, and pressure.

According to Kaakandikar and Gawande (2023), the bounds of conventional workplace approaches have been redefined by the development of remote work and virtual teams, which has changed the international workforce. By examining important developments in technology and digital infrastructure, sociocultural shifts, and the effects of telecommuting on staff efficiency, participation, and work-life balance, this study examines the possible benefits of remote work and virtual teams. The paper outlined opportunities for increased productivity and efficiency, better work-life integration, enlarging talent pools through international hiring, and lowering administrative costs. The study also seeks to uncover and evaluate tough circumstances that remote workers and digital teams encounter, such as feelings of loneliness, problems juggling work and personal obligations, and managing disagreements. The study also looked at the advantages of remote work and virtual teams, including improved diversity, access to a larger talent pool, and better work-life integration, as well as how these factors affect organizational performance and competitiveness.

Panchuk (2023) noted that the effects of remote work on output, worker satisfaction, interaction, and leadership are taken into account. The advantages of working remotely were examined, including improved flexibility and employee satisfaction, decreased office rental expenses, and improved access to talent from around the world. The difficulties of managing remote teams are also taken into account. These include issues with staff inspiration, evaluation, and interaction, as well as a break from corporate culture and values. Practical suggestions for managing workers under situations of remote work are offered.

Theoretical Framework
Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) propounded by Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw (1989) is a theoretical framework that explains how individuals adopt and accept new technologies. It focuses on the factors that influence users' behavioral intentions and actual usage of technology. Although TAM is typically applied to various domains, including remote work settings, it does not directly address communication challenges and strategies specific to remote work. However, we can adapt TAM to discuss the acceptance of communication

technologies and explore strategies to overcome communication challenges in remote work settings.

According to TAM, individuals are more likely to accept and use a technology if they perceive it as useful. In the context of remote work, communication technologies must provide value by enhancing communication efficiency, facilitating collaboration, and overcoming geographical barriers. TAM suggests that users are more likely to adopt a technology if they perceive it as easy to use. Remote work communication technologies should be intuitive, user-friendly, and accessible across different devices and platforms.

Technological determinism theory

Technological determinism was propounded by Marshall McLuhan in 1962. It is a theory that suggests that technological advancements drive and shape social and cultural changes. When applied to communication challenges and strategies in remote work settings, technological determinism can help us understand how the adoption of new communication technologies influences the way people interact, collaborate, and overcome challenges in a remote work environment. In the context of technological determinism, the adoption and integration of communication technologies in remote work settings can shape how individuals and teams interact, collaborate, and overcome challenges. However, it's essential to remember that while technology plays a significant role, social and cultural factors also influence communication dynamics in remote work environments.

Methodology

With the help of Oshogbo people who had been purposefully chosen by the researchers, a descriptive survey was carried out. Online administration was used to disseminate the questionnaires. Additionally, we thought that given the degree of competence in age, thinking, and academic achievement of those selected, they could intelligently express their opinions on the subject under investigation. To extract the diverse responses' thoughts on the topic, the researchers used a structured questionnaire with closed-ended questions. A senior academic in mass communication was given a draft copy of the research tool to review and verify the contents in order to assure the validity of the instrument. The respondents were chosen using the convenience sampling technique. In Oshogbo city, the questionnaire was disseminated by research assistants. The questionnaire was also designed to capture answers on respondents' demographics, their perceived opinion on communication challenges that remote workers face.

Sample: Taro Yamane's formula was used to determine the sample size of this study;

$n = N/1+N(e)^2$

where: n= sample size

N = population

e = margin of error (0.05)

In the light of the above, the sample size for this research purpose is shown below:

= 750,000/1+750,000(0.05)*2

= 750,000/1+ 750,000 (0.0025)

= 750,000/1 + 1875 n

= 399.78 ≈ 400

Data elicited based on research questions are presented and analyzed using the SPSS statistical tool. Responses are either accepted or rejected based on the value of the weighted mean for each response. A mean of 2.51 and below is accepted, a mean of 2.50 to 3.50 is indifferent, while a mean of 3.51 and above is rejected.

Data Analysis
Four hundred (400) copies of questionnaire were distributed to the respondents. Out of the 400 copies distributed, only 384 copies were retrieved and they were all found useful. Thus, the presentation and analysis was based on the 384 copies. This is considered adequate because it represents 96% of the return rate of the questionnaire

Table 1: Gender

Variables	Frequency	Percent %
Male	189	49.2
Female	195	50.8
Total	384	100%

Table 1 shows the respondent's representation base on gender. Female represented 50.8% of the population studied.

Table 2: Responses on use of any technological tools or platforms for remote communication

Variables	Frequency	Percent %
Very high	186	48.4%
high	85	22.1%
Undecided	35	9.1%
Low extent	29	7.6%
Very low extent	49	12.8%
Total	384	100%

The data in table 2 shows that majority of respondent use of technological tools or platforms for remote communication was high. This is based on the fact that majority of the respondents agreed to that effect (48.4%).

Table 3: Tools or platforms used for instant messaging and real-time communication

Variables	Frequency	Percent
WhatsApp	166	43.2%
Facebook Messenger	32	8.3%
Telegram	67	17.4%
Zoom	98	25.5%
Google Chat	20	5.3%
Others	1	0.3%
Total	384	100%

According to the information in the table above, most respondents use, WhatsApp, Zoom, Telegram Facebook messenger and Google chat. This is due to the fact that more people than others used the aforementioned social media networking sites.

Table 4: Utilizing video conferencing platforms for team meetings

Variables	Frequency	Percent %
Very high	35	9.1%
high	27	7%
Undecided	79	20.6%
Low extent	184	47.9%
Very low extent	59	15.4%
Total	384	100%

The data in table 4 shows that respondent were notutilizing video conferencing platforms for team meetings. This is based on the fact that majority of the respondents said they utilized video conferencing platforms for team meetings to a low extent (47.9%).

Table 5: Satisfaction with the effectiveness of the current tools/platforms for remote collaboration

Variables	Frequency	Percent%
Highly satisfied	182	47.3%
Satisfied	73	19%
Can't tell	69	17.9%
Less satisfied	49	12.8%
Not satisfied	11	2.9%
Total	384	100%

The question in table 5 sought to determine the level of satisfaction with the effectiveness of the current tools/platforms for remote collaboration. The data showed that the respondents were highly satisfied with the platforms. This is based on the fact that majority of the respondents answered to that effect (47.3%).

Table 6: Responses on challenges faced when communicating with colleagues remotely

	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean
Lack of Non-Verbal Cues	172 (44.8%)	99 (25.8%)	38 (9.9%)	31 (8%)	44 (11.5%)	1.89
Communication Overload	191 (49.7%)	86 (22%)	41 (10.7%)	27 (7%)	39 (10.2%)	1.96
Misunderstanding/ miscommunication	211 (54.9%)	89 (23.2%)	29 (7.6%)	33 (8.6%)	22 (5.7%)	1.61
Lack of Visual Context:	202 (52.6%)	95 (24.7%)	31 (8.1%)	19 (4.9%)	37 (9.6%)	1.73
Technical Issues	217 (56.5%)	86 (22.4%)	24 (6.3%)	26 (6.7%)	31 (8.1%)	1.52
Accountability and Monitoring	199 (51.8%)	91 (23.7%)	34 (8.9%)	39 (10.1%)	21 (5.5%)	1.81
Grand Mean						**1.76**

5- Strongly Agree (SA), 4- Agree (A), 3- Neutral (N), 2- Disagree (D), 1- Strongly Disagree (SD)
A mean of 2.51 and below is accepted, a mean of 2.50 to 3.50 is indifferent, while a mean of 3.51 and above is rejected.

The respondents' average score of 1.76 indicates that they had faced challenges when communicating with colleagues remotely. This is based on the fact that the grand mean 1.72 because the mean fell below 2.51 thus it is accepted.

Table 7: Additional technological tools you believe would enhance remote collaboration

	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean
Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) Tools	211 (54.9%)	89 (23.2%)	29 (7.5%)	33 (8.6%)	22 (5.7%)	1.61
Interactive Whiteboard Tools	209 (54.4%)	92 (24%)	23 (6%)	29 (7.6%)	39 (10%)	1.70
Video Conferencing with Advanced Features	197 (51.3%)	96 (25%)	34 (8.8%)	27 (7%)	30 (7.8%)	1.74
Security and Privacy Tools	172 (44.8%)	99 (25.8%)	38 (9.9%)	31 (8%)	44 (11.5%)	1.78
Emotion Recognition Tools	217 (56.5%)	101 (26.3%)	17 (4.4%)	21 (5.5%)	25 (6.5%)	1.65
Cloud-based document collaboration	191 (49.7%)	86 (22.4%)	31 (8%)	37 (9.6%)	40 (10%)	1.83
Grand Mean						**2.09**

The respondents' average score of 2.09 indicates the additional technological tools respondents believe would enhance remote collaboration. This is based on the fact that the grand mean 2.09 because the mean fell below 2.51 thus it is accepted.

Discussion of Findings

The findings showed that the respondents are exposed to remote working. This is based on the fact that majority of the respondents answered to that effect. According to the information from data gotten, most respondents use, WhatsApp, Zoom, Telegram Facebook messenger and Google chat. This is due to the fact that more people used the aforementioned platforms for remote working. According to Battisti, Alfiero&Leonidou, (2022), remote has been on the rise due to recent advancements in technology, shifting workplace patterns, and the need for flexibility and work-life balance, remote work has become increasingly popular.

Also data showed that respondents were satisfied with the effectiveness of the current tools/platforms for remote collaboration. Although finding also showed that majority of respondents did not engage the use of video conferencing meeting. This goes to say that most remote work and collaboration does not utilize the opportunities of face to face real-time functionalities of remote working.

The data further showed that there is need for additional technological tools to enhance remote collaboration, This is based on the fact that majority of the respondents noted in the affirmative that Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) Tools, Interactive Whiteboard Tools, Video Conferencing with Advanced Features, Security and Privacy Tools, Emotion Recognition Tools, Cloud-based document collaboration were some of the additional technological tools needed to enhance remote collaboration. This is in line with Kaakandikar

and Gawande (2023), who found that the advantages of remote work and virtual teams, includes improved diversity, access to a larger talent pool, and better work-life integration, as well as affects organizational performance and competitiveness.

Data also showed that communication challenges that remote workers face rages from, Lack of Non-Verbal Cues, Communication Overload, Misunderstanding/miscommunication, Lack of Visual Context, Technical Issues and Accountability and Monitoring. This finding is in dissonance with that of Panchuk (2023) who noted that communicating with colleagues remotely offers numerous benefits, such as flexibility and the ability to work with individuals from diverse geographical locations. However, it also comes with its own set of challenges such as staff inspiration, evaluation, and interaction, as well as a break from corporate culture and values.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Remote working became particularly prominent during the COVID-19 pandemic when many businesses adopted it to comply with social distancing measures. As a result, remote work gained wider acceptance, and many organizations are now considering hybrid models that combine both remote and in-office work. Overall, remote working offers both opportunities and challenges, and its success depends on the right balance between technology, communication, flexibility, and clear expectations. Effective remote communication requires ongoing effort and adaptation. Regularly evaluate what's working and what can be improved, and be open to trying new strategies to enhance collaboration and understanding.

Some recommendations to enhance communication in a remote work setting:

1. Choose the right communication tools that suit your team's needs. This might include video conferencing software (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams), messaging apps (e.g., Slack, Microsoft Teams), project management tools (e.g., Trello, Asana), and file-sharing platforms (e.g., Google Drive, Dropbox).
2. Establish clear communication guidelines for when and how to use each communication tool. For example, use video calls for important discussions, instant messaging for quick updates, and email for formal documentation.
3. Set regular check-ins or schedule for regular team meetings to discuss progress, updates, and challenges. These meetings can help maintain a sense of connection and accountability among team members.
4. Use video calls because video calls offer visual cues and a more personal connection than just text. Seeing facial expressions and body language can help avoid misunderstandings and foster stronger relationships.
5. When on a call, give your full attention and avoid multitasking. This demonstrates respect and helps you understand colleagues' perspectives more accurately.
6. Use share screens or use visual aids during meetings to enhance understanding and engagement. Diagrams, charts, and slides can clarify complex ideas.
7. Create Virtual water cooler Moments which opportunities for casual conversations. Use dedicated chat channels for non-work topics, helping to replicate the "watercooler" interactions of an office.

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