

Contribution of Interpersonal Communication between Managers and Employed Breastfeeding Mothers on work Productivity: A Case of Isuzu Kenya

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Abstract

Interpersonal communication in the corporate world is a crucial component of support in the workplace for employed mothers who are breastfeeding and also to the organization in ensuring job satisfaction and productivity. Employee retention, morale, and overall productivity can all be affected if communication is impeded or inhibited. Studies have also shown that employed breastfeeding mothers continue to struggle on how to communicate with their immediate bosses. To understand this challenge, the primary role of this research was to establish the type of interpersonal communication used between the employed breastfeeding mothers and their managers in relation to work productivity. The study used qualitative research design with semi structured interview method of data collection. Respondents of this study were ten employed breastfeeding mothers from Isuzu East Africa Kenya who have children under four years and were working and breastfeeding at the same time within the period of the study and two supervisors who have directly supervised employed nursing mothers. Respondents were selected using the random purposeful sampling. The research findings established that the respondents used face to face and mobile or telephone communication to communicate and that technology has permeated every sphere of life and has played a significant role in revolutionizing communication strategies in general. However, face-to-face interpersonal communication reigns supreme in a situation where a section of the workforce require special consideration.

Key words: Interpersonal communication, support, employed breastfeeding mothers and work productivity.

1.0 Introduction

In order to have good performance, it is important for an organization to have effective communication at the work place .Managers who possess the ability to communicate well, can in a clear manner convey their ideas to give subordinates the ability to understand their needs and can make a positive contribution to the organization. Effective communication, including clear instructions, prompt delivery, and proper explanation, is an important consideration in strong co-operation between managers and employees (Szyszka, 2017).In the last few decades, there has been a significant growth in the number of women in the workforce who have young children around the world. In 2012, 67.8 percent of women having children who are below the age of six were employed, more than twice the percentage in 1976, when only 31.4% of women worked outside the home. With younger women joining the workforce, it is becoming increasingly important to pay attention to issues such as maternity leave, breastfeeding breaks and breastfeeding facilities or expressing breast milk at work (Rollins et al., 2016). International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention Maternity Protection Convention no.183 recommends at least 14 weeks of paid maternity leave ,at least one or two breaks daily or working hours for female employees are reduced to allow them breastfeed their babies and where it is possible, nursing services with adequate hygiene conditions are provided near their working place (ILO, 2017). In Kenya, however, the Employment Act of 2007 permits female employees to return to work after three months of childbirth. As a result, the time between returning to work after childbirth is crucial for ensuring that female employees continue to breastfeed (Moh, 2018).

As a result, after a three month maternity leave, many mothers return to work to combine work with lactation and at the same time ensure their work output is up to standard. Therefore, the only way for breastfeeding women to satisfy these crucial health need is for them to be able to nurse or express breast milk while working for a few months without being stigmatized by coworkers who might view the act of pumping milk at work as unprofessional. Coworker discrimination or stigma against breastfeeding employed mothers happens through subtle verbal and nonverbal communication. Women who need more breaks are seen as less productive (Zhuang et al., 2018).

Reducing breastfeeding obstacles for employed breastfeeding mothers by providing breastfeeding rooms and lactation breaks is one of the low cost solutions that can help minimize absenteeism and increase the effectiveness, dedication, and retention of the employee (Cesar et al., 2016). Previous studies have shown that most organizations often encounter challenges in formally supporting breastfeeding employed mothers. However, even though there are legal policies in place, they do not assure support for breastfeeding, neither do they determine how to obtain such assistance (Bridges, et.al., (1997): Brown, et al., (2001) and Stratton and Henry (2011).Instead, it is through interpersonal communication where employees negotiate and experience breastfeeding support at the workplace (Rose (2012): Turner and Norwood (2013): Burleson,et.al., (1994): Dunn,et al., (2004). Interpersonal communication talks about interactions in which two (or more) individuals exchange and develop relations (McCornack, 2013). Working together employees communicate collaboratively with colleagues, human resource staff (HR), and supervisors. It is through these interactions, that employees are able to learn whether their employer will support them, withhold their support, explain to them, challenge them, expand their support, or implement them (Brashers, 2001). Interpersonal communication is therefore a key component of workplace breastfeeding support.

Research objective

To establish the types of interpersonal communication applied between the employed breastfeeding mothers and their managers in relation to work productivity.

2.0 Research methodology

This research used a qualitative design to examine the contribution of interpersonal communication between employed breastfeeding mothers and managers at Isuzu East Africa -Nairobi. The data for this research was gathered using a semi structured interview. Interviews, as argued by Patton (2002), are vital and significant when we are unable to see people's feelings, thoughts, and intentions, as well as how they make sense of the world around them. To acquire a better understanding of the phenomenon, a purposeful sampling strategy was adopted.

Sampling

The target population in this research consisted of 228 respondents which was the total number of employees working in Isuzu Kenya at the time of the study. The researcher chose Isuzu Kenya because it is a company known to have fully fledged breastfeeding stations for its employees who are breastfeeding (Business Daily, 2019; Kepsa, 2018). The population included employed breastfeeding mothers who have benefitted from the established breastfeeding facilities and mid-level managers from Isuzu East Africa who have directly supervised the beneficiaries. The initial total sampling frame was sixteen but four respondents opted out forcing the researcher to interview 12. These were ten female employees who had children under the age of four and were working while breastfeeding and two mid-level managers who have directly supervised the employed breastfeeding mothers. 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted at the participants' convenience.

Three interviews were done over the phone, while nine were performed in- person, depending on the convenience of the participants. Purposeful sampling is frequently used in conducting qualitative research to allow the researcher identify and select samples that have rich information linked to the phenomenon of interest. This method was chosen by the researcher because it is the most cost- and time-effective sampling approach available.

Random purposeful sampling entails selecting a group of people who are suited to participate in the study (Coyne,1997, Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007) since targeting the entire population is impractical (Acharya, et al.,, 2013). Data collection started in early May, and ran until the middle of May 2021. To gain access to the participants, the researcher collaborated with the organization's leaders. The organization gave a list of individuals who met the eligibility criteria, and after obtaining the list, the researcher contacted each possible participant. Seven questions were posed to each participant. Interviews were conducted between seven to ten minutes and were captured with a recorder. The researcher transcribed each interview word for word (verbatim).Each of the questions was open-ended, with probes added as needed to study the perceptions of employed breastfeeding women in greater depth. Participants were also asked to answer four questions on their age, education level, seniority, and gender (for the managers).

3.0 Results and discussion

The information gathered from key informant interviews was transcribed and coded, the transcriptions were then subjected to a thematic analysis using the interpretational analysis method in line with the study objective which was to establish the type of interpersonal communication used between the employed breastfeeding mothers and their managers on work productivity. The researcher employed the interpretational analysis method to clearly identify themes and codes within the interviews. Braun and Clarke (2006) defined thematic analysis as a data analysis method. This will entail familiarizing the researcher with the data and identifying early patterns and themes by reading and rereading the transcribed text. Each participant was given a code name such as A, B, C, D, E, and so on in order to maintain their anonymity. These code names have nothing to do with the participants' actual features. Direct quotations were also used to convey the contributors' original viewpoints to the researcher.

The research team interviewed breastfeeding employed mothers and their direct managers and clarifications were given where necessary. Out of the total sample of 16 respondents, 12 were interviewed. Out of the 12 respondents, 10 were employed breastfeeding women and two managers of whom one was female and the other was male. The response rate from all the respondents represented 75% response rate.

Age of respondents

Age of respondents was taken as a very important variable in this study because it sheds light on the maturity and ability of the subjects in interpreting interpersonal communication in relation to work productivity. Again mature respondents are able to conceptualize issues concerning interpersonal communication and work productivity and subsequently undertake corresponding decisions. The findings on the ages of respondents were as outlined in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Distribution of respondents by age

Participant	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
Age	41	41	37	39	36	37	40	28	27	33	34	42
Age bracket	Frequency		Percentage%									
26-30	2		16.66									
31-35	2		16.66									
36-40	5		41.66									
41-45	3		25									
Total respondents	12		100									

Source: Researcher (2021)

The observations in table 3.1 demonstrate that of 12 respondents, 2(16.66%) respondents were between 26-30 years, 2(16.66%) were between 31-35 years, 5(41.66%) were between 36-40 years and 2 (16.66%) were between 41-45 years of age.

Going by the findings, indicated in table 3.1, respondents aged between 36.-40 years (41.66%) were the majority. This group was considered to have rich experience on the latest issues on interpersonal communication and work productivity, since they are in their active age of career. Those above 41years of age were 3(25 %) respondents.

According to Pew Research (2018), more women are waiting to have children later in life due to the fact that many are delaying marriage to pursue further education and participate more in the labour force.

Education level of respondents

Education is acknowledged worldwide as a powerful driver of social change in any society. Those with higher levels of education tend to adopt new ideas and innovation faster than those with low levels of education .In this sense, the respondents' education was viewed as a significant variable in this study. A person's level of education has a bearing on the ability to understand, access and understand interpersonal communication and work productivity. Table 3.2 summarizes the data of the respondents' educational attainment.

Table 3.2: Education level of respondents

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage %
Education level		
None	0	0
Primary	0	0
Secondary	2	16.66%
Tertiary	10	83.33%
Total	12	100

Source: Researcher (2021)

As shown in table 3.2 above, out of the sampled 12 respondents about 83.33% had tertiary education while only 16.66% had reached secondary level .None of the respondents stopped at primary school level and also none had zero education. These findings show that all the respondents 100% had tertiary and secondary education. These findings have an implication on the uptake and understanding of interpersonal communication and work productivity at Isuzu East Africa. The level of education has implications on other social economic activities like securing employment and proper understanding of interpersonal communication strategies and work productivity. Women with a greater level of education, on the other hand, have been reported to be more sensitive to the interpersonal communication messages because they pay greater attention to underlying meanings than males (Wood, 2009).

Gender of managers

Since men and women have different responsibilities, gender is sometimes seen as a major factor of social inequality. Men have more authority in society than women, which has led to gender being considered a significant part of the social realm. Women are thought to have a higher level of empathy and interpersonal relationship- building skills than (Matsa and Miller, 2014). This means employed breastfeeding mothers might find it easy to approach a woman boss compared to a male boss. This contradicts (Sheppard et al., 2013), who claimed that in the workplace, female to female conflict is much more problematic than male to male and male to female conflict. Table 3.3 below summarizes the findings on the gender of managers.

Table 3.3: Gender of managers

Gender	Frequency	Percentage %
Female	1	8.33
Male	1	8.33
Total	2	16.66

Source: Researcher (2021)

As shown in Figure 3.3 above only 1(8.33 %) female respondent was at the managerial position at Isuzu East Africa. Similarly, only 1(8.33%) male respondent has supervised an employed breastfeeding mother, meaning gender representation was equal at the managerial level. Similarly, a study by (Scarborough, 2018) concurs with the above findings that women are progressively working in the same occupations and positions as men.

Discussion

It was established that Isuzu East Africa uses interpersonal communication, the most commonly used being internal employee communication and client communication .Narrowed down, the company uses face to face, written communication, emails, corporate intranet platform, company notice board, memos , telephone calls and texting to communicate within and outside the company. Face to face and mobile communication being the most commonly used. At the same time, based on the outlook of this study, it was also discovered that Isuzu East Africa has constructed professional-managed play and sleeping rooms within child day-care facilities. There also exists facilities for refrigeration as well as facilities for storing bottles safely. There are also reserved breastfeeding moms' rooms available, which are fully equipped.

The following sub-headings have been used to organize the findings and debates related to this objective: Face to face communication at Isuzu Kenya and Mobile/telephone communication.

Face to face communication at Isuzu Kenya

When communicating face to face, one can measure an understanding of the conversation and the interest in it by observing expressions, poses and gestures. Facial expressions, posture, and gestures can be used to determine a person's understanding and interest in a conversation when conversing face to face in a manner that technological communication simply cannot. Face-to-face conversation develops a link of trust between people. It is a good method for discussion because the listener provides immediate feedback as expressed in the interviews below:

C: “Mmmh I feel like when I do a face to face communication ,I get a more accurate response from my supervisor ,i feel like when I am asking for permission to take time to go and express milk ,whatever we will discuss is more fulfilling to me if may be there is too much work and she is asking me to take some more time I understand because we are talking one on one and I see her facial expressions whether she is asking me to do more or she is understanding my situation”...(**33 year old mother of 2**)

E: “ **I prefer face to face communication ,I think that works well for my productivity .It helps me to understand and negotiate with my supervisor on when to take breaks because we have had an up-close kind of communication between me and my boss”.(37 year old mother of 2)**

K: “My boss (supervisor) often discuss face to face about breastfeeding schedules with me. This frankly makes a young mother who is breastfeeding, such as myself, feel at ease in the job, it is the kind of support that any working breastfeeding mother requires to successfully breastfeed and settle mentally at work”...(**28 year old mother of one**).

A: “We know from best practices that workplace flexibility is required to accommodate working nursing women. For example, we are aware that mothers often need two, three, or even four sessions of around 15-20 minutes each within an hour to pump milk, an open and honest communication between managers and these category of women will go a long way towards ensuring that they through this smoothly, most of the time we do these communication on a face to face basis so that we are able to understand each other well and reach a compromise that will not affect work productivity”... **(Female supervisor)**

B: “I prefer face to face communication when communicating with the employed breastfeeding mother, this is mainly because, when you talk to someone in person, you may show commitment, honesty, and sincerity that you can't express over the phone, text or chat. It conveys the other person's honesty and clear facial expressions. I am able to see whether the employee really means what they say through facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice, and volume among others”... **(Male supervisor)**

From the above findings, Face-to-face communication is recognized as a highly efficient channel since it allows for quick, brief interactions with instantaneous feedback to both team members. Second, nonverbal clues can aid in the communication of hazy notions that would otherwise necessitate long exposition in writing. According to (Battiston et al., 2017), being

physically closer helps coworkers to speak face-to-face, which is beneficial in situations where information is complicated and must be digested rapidly. The researchers (Battiston et al., 2017) also claim that when face-to-face communication is used, productivity is increased, and that this effect is stronger for urgent and difficult projects, homogeneous teams, and high-pressure situations. According to research conducted by Grunig, et al., (2002), face to face communication is the most effective method to create and develop solid relationships established on mutual respect and symmetrical discussion. However, (Kupritz et.al, 2011) are of a different opinion, they argue that, while the advantages of efficient face to face communication between managers and employees are extensively acknowledged, it is rather costly in terms of time spent on disruptions, arguments and long discussions.

Mobile phone/Telephone

From the interviews done at Isuzu Kenya, the telephone is an indispensable tool in the company's business. When brainstorming or when an employee's contribution is required during the session, employed breastfeeding mothers believe it is a superior communication tool than email. The employed breastfeeding mothers, use it when they want to make quick requests, inquiries or follow ups from their immediate supervisors. They do, however, point out that communicating over the phone has the disadvantage of a lack of nonverbal indicators and sometimes connectivity issues as captured by informants below:

H: “To me a phone call is the best interpersonal communication method I use when communicating with my supervisor. This is because the needs of a breastfeeding employed woman are just too many ,I have asked for permission so many times before so I often feel embarrassed talking to him face to face”.. **(40 year old mother of 3)**

D: “ I mostly consider using face to face or telephone conversations when communicating with my supervisor, I feel like I don't get immediate responses when using emails because of the many breastfeeding needs I have ,I feel like those emails get ignored therefore I would rather call or meet him face to face”..**(34 year old mother of one)**

F: “In most cases, I usually use emails when communicating with my boss on work related matters because the issues are more official, I also use email once in a while to make requests for my breastfeeding needs especially when I am requesting for a day or two to be away, otherwise I mostly use phone calls or face to face when my boss is around”.. **(39 year old mother of 4)**

M: “Mmm when talking to my boss I mostly prefer face to face because talking phone, you can't know the body language and facial expressions on the person that you're talking to compared if you're talking to him/her face to face. But sometimes when I have no time talking to him directly then I use the phone but talking to him face to face is more accurate”..**(27 year old mother of one)**

According to a related research done by Mano and Mesch (2012), e-mail has significant organizational and work performance benefits than mobile or face to face communication, however, the study also noted that, while lengthy mail provides critical information, it also causes information overload, which results in high levels of work stress and distress. The data that is sent must be deciphered, stored, retrieved, and managed.

Emerging themes

Empathy

From the study, empathy emerged as an important theme. Being empathetic means being able to understand other people's needs and being conscious of their thoughts and feelings. Sadly, it was long overlooked as a performance indicator as a soft skill (Centre for creative leadership, 2021). These arguments have been supported by the key informants as captured below:

C: “One time I was trying to express my situation to my female boss as a breastfeeding employed mother and she was able to listen to me and empathize with me because, she had had a baby the previous year so that made her try fit in my shoe, it was so encouraging I was able to go through my situation easily”... **(33 year old mother of 2)**

A study conducted by (Centre for creative leadership, 2021) analysed from 6731 managers in 38 countries found that empathy in the workplace is positively related to the performance of work in the workforce. Based on the results, managers who exercise empathy for direct reports are seen by their own bosses as better performers in their jobs. Throughout the sample the results are consistent: those managers who were rated empathically by subordinates were also rated by their own boss as highly effective.

Satisfaction

Employee satisfaction also came up as an emerging theme from the study. It was found to be one of the most effective ways of improving job satisfaction through establishing lines of communication between employees and their bosses, or between managers and supervisors. Satisfaction among employees means that employees are fully committed to their tasks and believe their efforts are appreciated. On the other side, if they don't feel that way about their work or how things are conducted within a company, it's a popular reason as to why employees to leave (Chron, 2020).

E:” I feel more satisfied working at Isuzu as a breastfeeding employed mother, because here even getting pregnant alone earns you more salary, and after that I get to enjoy the breastfeeding facilities and the policies that come with that, so I am more than satisfied...”**(37 year old mother of three)**

B:” If you look around very few companies offer what we offer to our female employees, so we have stood up in the market and also built our brand” **(Male supervisor)**

The above findings concur with Kaye and Evans (2000) argument that although money and profit are important to employees, they are more interested in challenging and work which is meaningful, good managers and learning and development opportunities. A similar study (Mayo, 2003) found that employees don't just care about money but are better encouraged by meeting their social needs while at work.

3.0 Conclusion and recommendation

The study discovered that face to face was the mostly popular form of interpersonal communication used to benefit the target groups in the study with majority agreeing that this form of communication has been used to their benefit, while email use was rated the least used form of interpersonal communication in that particular organization. In most cases, it has been established that emails cannot work well if a quick reply is required. When time is of the essence in communication, it is a much better approach to contact someone, send an instant message, a text or a phone call than writing an email. This validates the observations made by Schiavo (2007) that technology-mediated forms of interpersonal communication are more common in developed countries than in many developing countries, where more traditional modes of communication such as word of mouth may still be prominent. The respondents observed that they mainly use emails when it comes to communicating official matters since it is a critical tool for establishing transparency and accountability.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been suggested to stakeholders on the basis of the findings of this research:

This study's findings will enable policymakers in identifying communication gaps in order to improve support for employed breastfeeding mothers who return to paid work after maternity leave. However, more studies can also be done on communication in relation to work productivity basing on socio-economic status, marital status, ethnicity, education, or age. All of these can be linked back to interpersonal communication and the differences between people of various backgrounds in other communication styles. Similarly, a comparative study can be conducted on the interpersonal communication strategies used by organizations that have breastfeeding support systems for their breastfeeding employees and their managers and those organizations that do not have the breastfeeding facilities.

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