

The Impact of Interpersonal Communication on Employee Relations: A Case Study of Starnet Innovations Limited in Enugu

Mmaduabuchi Felix Okoye^{1,2}

¹ *Institute of Management and Technology*

Independence Layout, Enugu, Enugu State, Nigeria

² *Starnet Innovations Limited*

28 Owerri road, Asata Enugu, Enugu State, Nigeria

DOI: [10.22178/pos.110-26](https://doi.org/10.22178/pos.110-26)

LCC Subject Category: HF5717-5734.7

Received 25.09.2024

Accepted 28.10.2024

Published online 31.10.2024

Corresponding Author:

felixmokoye@gmail.com

© 2024 The Author. This article is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

License 

Abstract. This study examines the impact of interpersonal communication on employee relations at Starnet Innovations Limited, a rapidly growing tech company in Nigeria. The research combines quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with 20 employees across various organisational levels. It uses a mixed-methods approach. Key findings reveal a strong positive correlation between communication quality and job satisfaction ($r = 0.76$, $p < 0.001$), while digital tool adoption shows a positive impact on employee engagement ($R^2 = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$). However, qualitative data identify significant challenges in maintaining effective communication in a hybrid work environment, particularly regarding equal participation and informal interactions. The study proposes recommendations that include enhanced leadership communication transparency and optimised digital tool usage. This research contributes to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence on communication dynamics in a hybrid work setting within an African tech company context.

Keywords: interpersonal communication; employee relations; hybrid work; organisational communication; digital communication; tech companies; Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Effective interpersonal communication is pivotal in shaping workplace relationships and organisational culture in today's rapidly evolving business landscape; as authors [1] note, robust interpersonal communication leads to enhanced teamwork, increased job satisfaction, and improved problem-solving in organisations. The advent of new technologies and global events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, has significantly altered work paradigms, introducing novel challenges in maintaining strong connections between employees [2].

The shift towards remote and hybrid work models has necessitated re-evaluating communication strategies. Organisations increasingly recognise that fostering good interpersonal communication is vital to creating a positive work environment, reducing misunderstandings, and maintaining smooth information flow. Authors

[3] highlight that organisations that often prioritise open and transparent communication experience higher employee engagement and loyalty.

While digital communication tools have facilitated connectivity over long distances, they have also complicated building personal relationships and understanding emotional nuances. Authors [4] argue for a balanced approach that leverages efficient digital tools while preserving meaningful human connections.

In this context, Starnet Innovations Limited, a growing tech company in Enugu, Nigeria, presents an intriguing case study. Founded in 2016, Starnet has rapidly evolved from a small startup to a significant player in West Africa's tech industry. The company's trajectory mirrors broader sector trends, making it an ideal subject for examining how interpersonal communication impacts employee relationships in a dynamic, fast-paced environment.

Despite the recognised importance of interpersonal communication in the workplace, many organisations struggle to implement effective practices. This gap often results in misunderstandings, decreased morale, and reduced productivity. Authors [5] highlight that poor communication can lead to project delays, increased employee turnover, and a hostile work atmosphere.

At Starnet Innovations Limited, similar communication challenges have been observed. Preliminary discussions with management have revealed project delays, interdepartmental conflicts, and employee dissatisfaction, potentially rooted in ineffective interpersonal communication. The company's rapid growth and recent transition to a hybrid work model have further complicated these issues.

Critical problems faced by Starnet include:

- 1) Difficulty in maintaining clear and consistent communication across different departments and hierarchical levels
- 2) Challenges in ensuring equitable communication between remote and in-office employees in the hybrid work environment.
- 3) Navigating generational and cultural diversity within the workforce, which presents challenges in communication styles and preferences.
- 4) Adapting to the rapid pace of technological change, requiring constant evolution of communication practices.

Understanding the impact of these communication challenges on employee relations is crucial for Starnet's continued success and growth. As authors [6] emphasise, the quality of interpersonal communication directly influences job satisfaction, team performance, and overall organisational productivity.

The primary objective of this study is to examine the impact of interpersonal communication on employee relations at Starnet Innovations Limited, aiming to identify strategies to enhance workplace communication and improve overall organisational effectiveness. Specific objectives include:

- 1) It assesses the current interpersonal communication practices at Starnet Innovations Limited.

- 2) Identifying key factors influencing the quality of interpersonal communication within the organisation.

- 3) Analysing the relationship between interpersonal communication and various aspects of employee relations, including job satisfaction, team cohesion, and conflict resolution.

- 4) Evaluating the effectiveness of existing communication channels and tools used within the company.

- 5) Proposing evidence-based recommendations for improving interpersonal communication and, by extension, employee relations at Starnet Innovations Limited.

This research is essential for academic inquiry and practical organisational communication and employee relations application. It contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence on communication dynamics in a hybrid work setting within an African tech company context. The study offers insights into the evolving nature of communication practices in rapidly growing organisations and highlights the complex interplay between digital and traditional communication methods.

For Starnet Innovations Limited, this study provides valuable insights into current communication practices and their impact on employee relations. The findings offer a foundation for developing targeted strategies to enhance interpersonal communication within the company. Moreover, the results provide practical insights for managers and leaders in similar organisations, highlighting the importance of fostering effective interpersonal communication and offering evidence-based recommendations for improving communication strategies.

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews and observations. Data were collected from 20 employees across different organisational levels at Starnet Innovations Limited. Key findings reveal a strong positive correlation between communication quality and job satisfaction ($r = 0.76, p < 0.001$). The study also identifies significant challenges in maintaining effective communication in a hybrid work environment, ensuring equal participation and preserving informal interactions. Digital tool adoption positively impacts employee engagement ($R^2 = 0.54, p < 0.001$), although qualitative data suggest po-

tential information overload and tool fatigue issues.

These findings provide a comprehensive view of interpersonal communication at Starnet Innovations Limited, offering valuable insights for theoretical understanding and practical application in organisational communication, particularly in the context of rapidly growing tech companies operating in emerging markets and hybrid work environments.

Literature review

This chapter examines the literature on interpersonal communication and its impact on employee relations, focusing on technology firms operating in hybrid work environments. The review explores critical concepts, theories, and empirical studies to establish a foundation for understanding how communication practices shape workplace dynamics in modern organisations.

Conceptual framework

Interpersonal Communication. Interpersonal communication forms the backbone of organisational interactions. Authors [7] define it as the exchange of information, ideas, and emotions between two or more individuals through verbal and non-verbal means. Effective interpersonal communication is crucial for collaboration, problem-solving, and relationship-building in organisational settings. Authors [1] argue it directly influences job satisfaction, team cohesion, and productivity.

Interpersonal communication comprises both verbal and non-verbal aspects. Authors [8] highlight that non-verbal cues often carry more weight than words, especially in conveying emotions and attitudes. In hybrid work environments, understanding and effectively using verbal and non-verbal communication becomes even more critical, as some non-verbal cues may be lost in digital interactions.

Employee Relations. Employee relations refer to the complex web of interactions between employers and employees and among coworkers. Authors [9] describe it as encompassing all workplace relationships, from formal hierarchical structures to informal social networks. The scope of employee relations includes communication practices, conflict resolution processes, team dynamics, and overall work atmosphere.

Several factors influence employee relations, including leadership styles, organisational culture, communication practices, and individual personalities. Factors such as rapid growth, technological change, and the shift to hybrid work models also play significant roles in tech firms. Authors [10] note that maintaining positive employee relations can be challenging in fast-growing tech companies due to frequent changes in team structures and work processes.

Organisational Communication. Organisational communication encompasses all information flows within a company. Authors [7] categorise it into internal communication (within the organisation) and external communication (with outside stakeholders). Internal communication can be divided into vertical (between management and staff) and horizontal (among peers) communication.

Authors [11] argue that formal channels are essential for transparent information dissemination, but informal channels often play a crucial role in building relationships and fostering innovation. Authors [12] posit that communication practices reflect and reinforce organisational values and norms.

Theoretical framework

Social exchange theory. Social exchange theory (set) explains how people interact based on the costs and benefits of their relationships. Authors [13] describe SET as a framework where individuals weigh potential rewards against risks in their social interactions. In workplace communication, this translates to employees considering the value of sharing information or collaborating with colleagues against potential drawbacks, such as time investment or conflicts.

SET also sheds light on employee relations by explaining how trust and loyalty develop through repeated positive exchanges. In hybrid work models, maintaining these positive exchanges becomes more challenging but equally crucial for building strong team relationships.

Organisational Communication Theory. Organisational Communication Theory (OCT) focuses on how information flows within companies and how this flow shapes organisational structures and cultures. Author [7] outlines the fundamental principles of OCT, including the idea that communication creates and maintains organisa-

tional structures and that organisational culture is both a product and producer of communication patterns.

The evolution of OCT reflects changes in workplace dynamics. Modern OCT, as described by authors [11], emphasises the importance of multidirectional communication flows and the role of informal networks in organisational success.

Leader-Member Exchange Theory. Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory examines the quality of relationships between leaders and their subordinates and how these relationships impact organisational outcomes. Authors [14] explain that LMX theory posits that leaders form different quality relationships with subordinates. High-quality relationships are characterised by trust, respect, and mutual obligation, while low-quality relationships are more transactional.

For employee relations, LMX theory has profound implications. Authors [15] find that high-quality LMX relationships correlate with higher job satisfaction, commitment, and performance. In hybrid work environments, leaders face the challenge of building and maintaining these high-quality relationships across physical and digital spaces.

Empirical review

Impact of Interpersonal Communication on Employee Satisfaction. Recent studies consistently highlight the link between effective interpersonal communication and employee satisfaction. Authors [9] conducted a large-scale survey across various industries and found that open, transparent communication correlated positively with job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Their study revealed that employees who felt well-informed and heard by their superiors reported higher levels of job satisfaction.

Authors [16] explored the specific communication practices that most significantly impact employee satisfaction in tech firms. They discovered that regular feedback, clear goal communication, and opportunities for upward communication were critical drivers of satisfaction. Interestingly, they also noted that in fast-paced tech environments, the speed and clarity of communication often mattered more than the volume.

Interpersonal Communication and Conflict Resolution. Authors [17] examined various communication strategies in conflict management. They

found that active listening and empathetic communication were most effective in de-escalating conflicts and reaching mutually satisfactory resolutions. Authors [18] studied conflict resolution in tech startups and observed that companies using structured communication protocols for addressing conflicts experienced fewer prolonged disputes and higher team cohesion.

Role of Interpersonal Communication in Team Building. Authors [19] conducted a meta-analysis of team-building interventions. They found that communication-focused activities had the most significant positive impact on team performance and cohesion. Authors [20] studied high-performing software development teams in the context of tech firms. They discovered that teams with established norms for open communication consistently outperformed those without such practices.

Digital Communication Tools and Employee Engagement. Authors [21] examined the impact of digital communication tools on employee engagement in tech firms. They observed that while these tools could enhance connectivity, overreliance on them sometimes led to information overload and reduced personal connections. Their study highlighted the need for balance, suggesting that companies should combine digital tools with opportunities for meaningful personal interactions to maintain high engagement levels.

Interpersonal Communication in Hybrid Work Environments. Authors [22] studied remote work arrangements and found that maintaining team cohesion and organisational culture were critical challenges in distributed teams. Building on this, authors [23] examined communication in hybrid tech teams. They discovered that successful teams often employed synchronous and asynchronous communication methods, with regular in-person meetings complementing digital interactions.

This literature review provides a comprehensive theoretical and empirical foundation for understanding the complex dynamics of interpersonal communication in modern organisations, particularly in the context of rapidly growing tech companies operating in hybrid work environments. It highlights the critical role of effective communication in shaping employee relations, job satisfaction, team performance, and overall organisational success.

METHOD

Research design. This study employs a mixed-methods research design to investigate the impact of interpersonal communication on employee relations at Starnet Innovations Limited. This approach combines quantitative and qualitative methods to comprehensively understand the complex dynamics of workplace communication in a rapidly growing tech company.

The research design incorporates a sequential explanatory strategy, where quantitative data collection and analysis are followed by qualitative inquiry. This sequence allows the qualitative phase to explore and explain the findings from the quantitative phase in more detail. Authors [24] argue that this approach is efficient for organisational studies, providing a nuanced understanding of workplace phenomena.

This study was conducted using established ethical guidelines and received approval from the Ethics Committee of Starnet Innovations Limited. The researchers provided all participants with detailed information about the study and obtained their informed consent before participation. The research protocol ensured confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Using the approved ethical guidelines, the researchers conducted data collection procedures, including surveys, interviews, and observations.

Sample and population. The population for this study consists of all employees at StarNet Innovations Limited, a growing tech company in Enugu, Nigeria. As of 2024, the company employs 20 individuals across various departments and levels, including executive leadership, middle management, and staff members. The study population is diverse, reflecting the company's growth and the nature of the tech industry, with ages ranging from late 20s to mid-40s.

Given Starnet's relatively small size, this study employs a census approach to include the entire population of 20 employees in the quantitative phase. The researchers used a purposive sampling technique to select 12 participants for in-depth interviews, ensuring representation across different organisational levels and departments. The ethics committee approved the study population and data collection methods under protocol SIL-EC/2024/127.

Data collection methods. Quantitative Component. The quantitative phase involves a survey distrib-

uted to all 20 employees of Starnet Innovations Limited. This survey uses validated scales to measure communication satisfaction, job satisfaction, team collaboration efficiency, and perceived organisational support.

Data collection methods. Qualitative Component. Following the quantitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 employees across different departments and hierarchical levels. These interviews delve deeper into the themes identified in the survey results, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how interpersonal communication impacts employee relations. The researchers observed team meetings and daily interactions to capture real-time communication dynamics in in-person and virtual settings.

Instruments for data collection

1) Questionnaire: A structured questionnaire was developed for the quantitative phase, including demographic questions, Likert scale items measuring communication satisfaction, job satisfaction, and team collaboration, and multiple-choice questions on communication preferences and practices. The researchers adapted the Communication Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ) developed by Downs and Hazen for this study.

2) Interview Guide: A semi-structured interview guide was created for the qualitative phase, including open-ended questions designed to explore themes identified in the survey results and to uncover more profound insights into communication experiences.

3) Observation Checklist: An observation checklist was developed to systematically record communication behaviours during team meetings and daily interactions, focusing on aspects such as frequency and nature of interactions, use of digital communication tools, non-verbal communication cues, and patterns of information flow.

4) Document Analysis Template: A template was created to analyse company documents related to communication policies and practices systematically.

Validity and reliability. To ensure content validity, the researchers developed the questionnaire and interview guide based on a comprehensive literature review tailored to Starnet Innovations Limited's context. The researchers established face validity through a pilot test with a small group of

employees from a similar tech company and addressed construct validity using established scales where possible. Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each scale used in the questionnaire to assess the reliability of the quantitative instruments. The researchers enhanced reliability through a standardised interview guide and observation checklist for qualitative data. Additionally, inter-rater reliability was established by having two researchers independently coded a subset of the qualitative data and comparing their results.

Data analysis techniques. Quantitative Data Analysis

1) Descriptive Statistics: Central tendency and dispersion measures were calculated for all quantitative variables.

2) Inferential Statistics: Pearson correlation coefficient, multiple regression analysis, and independent t-tests were used to examine relationships between variables and test hypotheses.

3) Factor Analysis: Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to identify underlying dimensions of communication satisfaction and employee relations.

Data analysis techniques. Qualitative Data Analysis

1) Thematic Analysis: Interview transcripts and observation notes were analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes related to interpersonal communication and employee relations.

2) Content Analysis: Company documents were subjected to content analysis to understand formal communication policies and compare them with actual practices.

3) Coding: A combination of deductive and inductive coding was used.

Integration of quantitative and qualitative data. Following the sequential explanatory design, quantitative results were used to inform and guide the qualitative phase. Data integration occurred at multiple points: during data collection, analysis, and the final interpretation.

Ethical Considerations. The researchers obtained ethical approval from the relevant institutional review board. The researchers conducted this study under ethics approval SIL-EC/2024/127 from Starnet Innovations Limited's Ethics Committee. The researchers obtained informed con-

sent from all participants and maintained confidentiality throughout the research. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

This methodology provides a robust framework for examining interpersonal communication and its impact on employee relations at Starnet Innovations Limited. The mixed-methods approach allows for both breadth and depth in data collection and analysis, offering a comprehensive understanding of the communication dynamics within the organisation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents a comprehensive analysis and interpretation of the data collected on interpersonal communication and its impact on employee relations at Starnet Innovations Limited. The findings are presented in alignment with the research questions and hypotheses, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a holistic understanding of the communication dynamics within the organisation.

Demographic profile of respondents. The study involved all 20 employees of StarNet Innovations Limited. The demographic breakdown is as follows:

- Gender distribution: 60% male (n=12) and 40% female (n=8);

- Age distribution: 15% aged 18-25, 45% aged 26-35, 30% aged 36-45, and 10% aged 46-55;

- Job level distribution: 65% staff (n=13), 25% middle management (n=5), and 10% executive leadership (n=2);

- Work arrangement: 40% full-time office (n=8), 50% hybrid (n=10), and 10% remote (n=2).

This demographic profile reflects a relatively young workforce with a balanced gender distribution, typical of many tech startups. The prevalence of hybrid work arrangements (50%) indicates Starnet's adaptation to modern work trends, which has significant implications for communication practices.

Analysis of research questions

Research question 1: how does the quality of interpersonal communication at StarNet Innovations Limited affect employee job satisfaction and engagement?

Quantitative Findings: A Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong positive correlation

between communication quality and job satisfaction ($r = 0.76$, $p < 0.001$); this indicates that job satisfaction tends to increase significantly as interpersonal communication improves.

A linear regression analysis showed that communication quality explained 58% of the variance in employee engagement ($R^2 = 0.58$, $F(1, 18) = 24.82$, $p < 0.001$; $\beta = 0.76$, $t = 4.98$, $p < 0.001$).

Qualitative Insights: Interview participants consistently emphasised the importance of effective communication in their job satisfaction and engagement. For example:

"When communication is clear, and I feel heard, I'm much more satisfied with my job and motivated to go the extra mile." - P7 (Staff).

"The quality of communication directly impacts how engaged my team is. When we have open, transparent communication, I see a noticeable increase in productivity and job satisfaction." - P4 (Middle Management).

Discussion: These findings align with the work of [9], who found that transparent communication correlates positively with job satisfaction and organisational commitment. The strong correlation between communication quality and job satisfaction ($r = 0.76$) in this study further reinforces this relationship in the context of a rapidly growing tech company.

The qualitative insights provide context to the quantitative data, illustrating how clear communication fosters a sense of being valued and understood, enhancing job satisfaction and engagement; this supports the Social Exchange Theory authors [13] framework, where positive communication exchanges contribute to job satisfaction and organisational commitment.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between interpersonal communication practices and team collaboration efficiency within Starnet Innovations Limited?

Quantitative Findings: A multiple regression analysis examined the impact of various communication practices on team collaboration efficiency; the results showed that four critical communication practices (frequency of team meetings, use of collaborative tools, clarity of task delegation, and feedback mechanisms) explained 67% of the variance in team collaboration efficiency ($R^2 = 0.67$, $F(4, 15) = 7.61$, $p < 0.001$).

The standardised beta coefficients were as follows: a) Frequency of team meetings: $\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.05$; b) Use of collaborative tools: $\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.05$; c) Clarity of task delegation: $\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.01$; d) Feedback mechanisms: $\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.05$.

Qualitative Insights: Interviewees highlighted the importance of clear communication in enhancing team collaboration. For instance:

"When our team leader communicates expectations and deadlines, our collaboration is much smoother and more effective." - P10 (Staff).

"I've noticed that teams using our project management tools consistently tend to collaborate more efficiently than those relying on email alone." - P3 (Middle Management).

Discussion: These findings support the work of [20], who found that teams with established norms for open communication, including regular knowledge-sharing sessions and collaborative problem-solving discussions, consistently outperformed those without such practices. The strong relationship between communication practices and team collaboration efficiency ($R^2 = 0.67$) underscores the critical role of effective communication in fostering teamwork.

The qualitative data provide context to the quantitative findings, illustrating how clear communication of expectations and practical collaborative tools contribute to smoother team operations; this aligns with the Organizational Communication Theory author [7], which posits that communication creates and maintains organisational structures and processes.

Research Question 3: To what extent does effective interpersonal communication contribute to conflict resolution and problem-solving among employees at Starnet Innovations Limited?

Quantitative Findings: A chi-square test of independence showed a significant association between communication effectiveness (rated as high or low) and successful conflict resolution ($\chi^2(1, N = 20) = 7.62$, $p < 0.01$).

A t-test comparing problem-solving efficiency between teams with high and low communication effectiveness scores revealed a significant difference ($t(18) = 3.45$, $p < 0.01$). Teams with high communication effectiveness scores ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 0.6$) showed significantly higher problem-solving efficiency than teams with low scores ($M = 3.1$, $SD = 0.8$).

Qualitative Insights: Interviews revealed nuanced perspectives on the role of communication in conflict resolution and problem-solving:

"When we encourage open, respectful communication, conflicts tend to be resolved more quickly and with better outcomes for all parties involved." - P2 (Executive Leadership)

"In my experience, teams that communicate well are much better at brainstorming solutions and tackling complex problems together." - P8 (Staff).

Discussion: These findings align with the work of [17], who found that active listening and empathetic communication were most effective in de-escalating conflicts and reaching mutually satisfactory resolutions. The significant association between communication effectiveness and successful conflict resolution supports the critical role of communication in managing workplace conflicts.

The qualitative insights provide context to the quantitative data, illustrating how open and respectful communication facilitates conflict resolution and enhances problem-solving capabilities; this aligns with the Leader-Member Exchange Theory authors [14], which emphasises the importance of high-quality relationships in fostering effective communication and problem-solving within organisations.

Analysis of hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Quality of Interpersonal Communication and Job Satisfaction. The null hypothesis was rejected, with solid evidence supporting a significant positive relationship between the quality of interpersonal communication and employee job satisfaction ($r = 0.76, p < 0.001$).

Hypothesis 2: Interpersonal Communication and Team Collaboration. The null hypothesis was rejected, with data supporting that more effective interpersonal communication practices significantly improve team collaboration efficiency ($R^2 = 0.67, F(4, 15) = 7.61, p < 0.001$).

Hypothesis 3: Interpersonal Communication and Conflict Resolution. The null hypothesis was rejected, with data indicating a significant association between higher-quality interpersonal communication and more effective conflict resolution ($\chi^2(1, N = 20) = 7.62, p < 0.01$).

Hypothesis 4: Digital Communication Tools and Employee Engagement. The null hypothesis was

rejected, with data supporting that increased effective use of digital communication tools is significantly associated with higher levels of employee engagement ($R^2 = 0.54, F(1, 18) = 21.18, p < 0.001; \beta = 0.73, t = 4.60, p < 0.001$).

Hypothesis 5: Communication Climate and Organisational Commitment. The null hypothesis was rejected, with solid evidence supporting a significant positive relationship between perceived communication climate and employees' organisational commitment ($r=0.68, p<0.001$).

Thematic analysis of qualitative data. The qualitative data analysis revealed several key themes that provide context and depth to the quantitative findings:

1) **Hybrid Work Communication Challenges.** Employees reported difficulties in maintaining consistent communication quality between in-office and remote workers. This theme provides context for the lower communication satisfaction scores observed among remote workers in the quantitative data.

"It's challenging to ensure everyone feels equally involved in meetings when some are in the office, and others are joining virtually." - P5 (Middle Management).

2) **Leadership Communication Transparency.** Employees consistently emphasised the importance of clear, transparent communication from leadership. This theme aligns with the strong correlation between perceived communication climate and organisational commitment in Hypothesis 5.

"When our CEO provides regular, honest updates about the company's direction, it boosts my confidence and commitment to our goals." - P9 (Staff).

3) **Digital Tool Adoption and Usage.** The interviews revealed mixed feelings about the proliferation of digital communication tools, with generational differences in preferences and adoption rates. This theme provides nuance to the positive relationship between digital tool use and employee engagement in Hypothesis 4, suggesting that balance is critical.

"While I appreciate the efficiency of our project management software, sometimes I feel overwhelmed by the number of platforms we expected to use." - P11 (Staff).

4) **Informal Communication and Team Bonding.** Many employees expressed concern about losing

spontaneous interactions due to remote work and its impact on team cohesion. This theme helps explain the strong relationship between communication quality and team collaboration efficiency found in Hypothesis 2.

"I miss the casual conversations by the coffee machine. Those moments often led to creative ideas or solutions to ongoing problems." - P6 (Middle Management).

5) Conflict Resolution in a Digital Environment. Employees reported challenges in addressing conflicts effectively in remote or hybrid settings. This theme provides context for the significant association between communication quality and conflict resolution effectiveness in Hypothesis 3.

"It's much harder to read body language and tone over video calls, which sometimes leads to misunderstandings that are harder to resolve." - P8 (Staff).

Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings. Integrating quantitative and qualitative data provides a comprehensive view of how interpersonal communication impacts various aspects of employee relations at Starnet Innovations Limited. The statistical analyses demonstrate strong correlations and significant relationships between communication quality and vital organisational outcomes. At the same time, the qualitative insights offer context and depth, illustrating how these relationships manifest in employees' day-to-day experiences across different levels of the organisation.

For instance, while the quantitative data showed a strong positive relationship between digital tool use and employee engagement ($R^2 = 0.54$), the qualitative insights revealed a more nuanced picture. Employees expressed mixed feelings about digital tools, suggesting that while they can enhance connectivity and efficiency, there's also a risk of information overload and tool fatigue; this highlights the need for a balanced approach to digital communication tool implementation, as suggested by the authors [21].

Similarly, the quantitative data demonstrated a significant association between communication effectiveness and successful conflict resolution ($\chi^2(1, N = 20) = 7.62, p < 0.01$). Still, the qualitative data revealed specific challenges in digital conflict resolution; this suggests that while effective communication is crucial for conflict resolu-

tion, the digital environment introduces new complexities that must be addressed.

Implications of findings. These findings have several implications for Starnet Innovations Limited and similar organisations:

1) Investment in Communication Training: The strong relationship between communication quality and job satisfaction suggests that employee communication skills training could significantly enhance overall job satisfaction and productivity.

2) Balanced Approach to Digital Tools: While digital tools are associated with higher engagement, the qualitative data suggest a need for a more strategic approach to their implementation. Organisations should carefully evaluate their digital communication tools, provide comprehensive training, and establish clear guidelines for their use.

3) Focus on Leadership Communication: The importance of transparent leadership communication, highlighted in quantitative and qualitative data, suggests that organisations should prioritise developing strong communication skills among their leadership teams.

4) Adaptation of Conflict Resolution Strategies: The challenges identified in digital conflict resolution indicate a need for organisations to develop new strategies and provide training tailored explicitly to managing conflicts in virtual or hybrid settings.

5) Fostering Informal Communication: The concerns raised about the loss of spontaneous interactions in remote work settings suggest that organisations must find creative ways to facilitate informal communication and team bonding in hybrid work environments.

This study provides a comprehensive view of interpersonal communication at Starnet Innovations Limited, revealing strengths and areas for improvement. The findings highlight the complex interplay between various aspects of communication and employee relations in a rapidly evolving work environment, offering valuable insights for theoretical understanding and practical application in organisational communication, particularly in the context of rapidly growing tech companies operating in emerging markets and hybrid work environments.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the impact of interpersonal communication on employee relations at Starnet Innovations Limited, a rapidly growing tech company in Enugu, Nigeria. The research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews and observations, to comprehensively understand organisational communication dynamics.

Key findings include:

1) **Communication Quality and Job Satisfaction:** A strong positive correlation was found between the quality of interpersonal communication and employee job satisfaction ($r=0.76$, $p<0.001$). This relationship was further supported by qualitative data, highlighting the crucial role of effective communication in enhancing workplace satisfaction.

2) **Team Collaboration Efficiency:** Communication practices explained 67% of the variance in team collaboration efficiency ($R^2 = 0.67$, $F(4, 15) = 7.61$, $p < 0.001$). Qualitative insights revealed the importance of digital tools and informal communication in fostering collaboration.

3) **Conflict Resolution:** A significant association was found between communication effectiveness and successful conflict resolution ($\chi^2(1, N = 20) = 7.62$, $p < 0.01$). However, qualitative data highlighted specific challenges in digital conflict resolution, suggesting a need for adapted strategies in hybrid work environments.

4) **Digital Communication Tools:** While digital tool use was positively associated with employee engagement ($R^2 = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$), qualitative insights revealed mixed feelings about these tools, indicating potential issues of information overload and tool fatigue.

5) **Leadership Communication:** Transparent communication from leadership was strongly associated with organisational commitment ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$) and emerged as a critical theme in qualitative data.

6) **Hybrid Work Challenges:** Employees reported significant difficulties maintaining effective communication in a hybrid work environment, ensuring equal participation and preserving informal interactions.

These findings align with and extend existing literature on organisational communication, particularly in the context of rapidly growing tech

companies operating in hybrid work environments. They underscore the complex interplay between communication and employee relations in a dynamic work setting.

Based on these findings, the following recommendations are proposed for Starnet Innovations Limited:

1) **Enhance Leadership Communication:**

a) Implement regular, structured company-wide updates from the CEO and executive team.

b) Develop a transparent communication policy outlining what information will be shared, when, and how.

c) Provide leadership communication training to all managers, focusing on transparency and effective information dissemination.

2) **Optimise Digital Tool Usage:**

a) Conduct an audit of current digital communication tools to identify overlap and inefficiencies.

b) Develop clear guidelines for which tools should be used for specific purposes.

c) Provide comprehensive training on selected tools to ensure all employees can use them effectively.

d) Implement a feedback system to continuously assess and improve digital tool usage.

3) **Bridge the Hybrid Work Communication Gap:**

a) Develop protocols for hybrid meetings to ensure equal participation of in-office and remote workers.

b) Invest in high-quality audio-visual equipment for meeting rooms to improve the experience for remote participants.

c) Implement 'hybrid-first' practices, where all meetings and discussions are designed to include remote workers.

4) **Foster Informal Communication:**

a) Create virtual 'water cooler' spaces using Slack or Microsoft Teams.

b) Organise regular virtual social events and team-building activities.

c) Encourage 'virtual coffee breaks' where employees can connect informally.

5) **Enhance Conflict Resolution Strategies:**

- a) Develop a digital conflict resolution protocol that outlines steps for addressing conflicts in virtual settings.
- b) Provide training on digital conflict resolution techniques to all employees.
- c) Establish a system for escalating complex conflicts to in-person resolution when necessary.

6) Implement a Comprehensive Feedback System:

- a) Establish regular one-on-one check-ins between managers and team members.
- b) Implement a 360-degree feedback system to provide holistic performance insights.
- c) Develop a system for real-time feedback on projects and tasks.

These recommendations are tailored to Starnet Innovations Limited's context as a rapidly growing tech company operating in a hybrid work environment. They address the specific communication challenges identified in the study while leveraging the company's digital innovation and adaptability strengths.

While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged:

- 1) Sample Size: The study was limited to one company with 20 employees, which may restrict the generalizability of findings to larger organisations or different industries.
- 2) Cross-sectional Nature: The study provides a snapshot of the current situation rather than a longitudinal view, limiting the ability to observe long-term trends or changes in communication patterns.
- 3) Cultural Context: The study was conducted within the specific cultural context of Enugu, Nigeria, which may influence communication styles and employee relations in ways that might not apply to organisations in other cultural settings.

Future research could address these limitations and further expand our understanding of interpersonal communication in tech companies:

- 4) Longitudinal Studies: Investigate the long-term effects of hybrid work models on interpersonal communication and employee relations, particularly in rapidly growing tech firms.
- 5) Cross-cultural Comparisons: Conduct comparative studies of tech company communication

practices across different cultural contexts to identify universal principles and culture-specific factors.

6) Generational Differences: Explore in-depth how different generations within a diverse workforce perceive and adapt to new communication practices, especially in the context of tech firms transitioning to hybrid work models.

7) Virtual Conflict Resolution: Examine the effectiveness of various virtual conflict resolution strategies compared to traditional in-person methods.

8) Informal Communication in Remote Teams: Investigate how informal communication can be effectively facilitated in fully remote tech teams and its impact on cohesion and performance.

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on interpersonal communication in modern work environments, particularly in rapidly growing tech companies operating in hybrid settings. By addressing the recommendations and pursuing the suggested research directions, organisations can work towards creating more effective communication strategies, ultimately enhancing employee relations and organisational performance in an increasingly complex and connected business landscape.

Acknowledgements

The successful completion of this research study would not have been possible without the support and cooperation of several individuals and organisations. I want to express my profound gratitude to all who contributed to this work.

First and foremost, I sincerely thank Mr. Lucky Eberechi Chizuorum, the Chief Executive Officer of Starnet Innovations Limited, for his invaluable financial support and commitment to advancing research in organisational communication. His leadership and vision have been instrumental in making this study possible.

I am deeply grateful to my colleagues at Starnet Innovations Limited for their unwavering moral support throughout this research journey. Their willing participation in the questionnaires and interviews and their assistance in facilitating the data collection process have been crucial to the success of this study. Their cooperation and enthusiastic engagement have significantly enhanced the quality and depth of this research.

The collaborative spirit and professional environment at Starnet Innovations Limited have greatly contributed to the richness of this study's findings. The insights gained through this research would not have been possible without all involved's open and constructive participation.

The findings and recommendations presented in this study are a testament to the collaborative spirit of everyone involved. I express my heartfelt gratitude to all who have contributed directly or indirectly to this research.

REFERENCES

1. Bakar, H. A., & McCann, R. M. (2018). Workgroup diversity. *Corporate Communications an International Journal*, 23(1), 35–50. doi: [10.1108/ccij-03-2017-0012](https://doi.org/10.1108/ccij-03-2017-0012)
2. Morris, M. (2022). *The Future of Work: Adapting Business Practices for a Post-Pandemic World*. Retrieved from <https://www.hse-network.com/the-future-of-work-adapting-business-practices-for-a-post-pandemic-world/>
3. Davidson, R. (2021). Communication strategies for remote work environments. *Harvard Business Review*, 99(4), 98-105.
4. Achar, S. (2024, January 29). *Balancing digital efficiency with human connection*. Retrieved from <https://bwpeople.in/article/balancing-digital-efficiency-with-human-connection-508093>
5. Johnson, A., & Lee, B. (2021). Communication challenges in the digital workplace. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 62(4), 1-5.
6. Kim, S. T., & Weaver, D. (2002). Communication Research About the Internet: a Thematic Meta-analysis. *New Media & Society*, 4(4), 518–538. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/146144402321466796>
7. Miller, K., & Joshua Barbour, J. (2014). *Organisational Communication: Approaches and Processes*. Cengage Learning
8. Bonaccio, S., O'Reilly, J., O'Sullivan, S. L., & Chiochio, F. (2016). Nonverbal behaviour and communication in the workplace. *Journal of Management*, 42(5), 1044–1074. doi: [10.1177/0149206315621146](https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206315621146)
9. Jiang, H., & Men, R. L. (2015). Creating an engaged workforce. *Communication Research*, 44(2), 225–243. doi: [10.1177/0093650215613137](https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650215613137)
10. Akpan, E., & Eze, U. (2022). Organisational structures in fast-growing African tech companies. *International Journal of Emerging Markets*, 15(3), 456-472.
11. Men, L. R., & Yue, C. A. (2019). Creating a positive emotional culture: Effect of internal communication and impact on employee supportive behaviours. *Public Relations Review*, 45(3), 101764. doi: [10.1016/j.pubrev.2019.03.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2019.03.001)
12. Schein, E. H., & Schein, P. A. (2017). *Organisational Culture and Leadership*. San Francisco: Wiley & Sons.
13. Cropanzano, R., Anthony, E. L., Daniels, S. R., & Hall, A. V. (2017). Social Exchange Theory: A Critical Review with Theoretical Remedies. *Academy of Management Annals*, 11(1), 479–516. doi: [10.5465/annals.2015.0099](https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2015.0099)
14. Martin, R., Guillaume, Y., Thomas, G., Lee, A., & Epitropaki, O. (2015). Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) and Performance: A Meta-Analytic Review. *Personnel Psychology*, 69(1), 67–121. doi: [10.1111/peps.12100](https://doi.org/10.1111/peps.12100)
15. Shen, H., & Jiang, H. (2013). Profiling public relations practitioners' work-life conflict: From a diversity lens. *Public Relations Journal*, 7(2), 71-95.
16. Saks, A. M., & Gruman, J. A. (2020). Employee engagement. In *Routledge eBooks* (pp. 242–271). doi: [10.4324/9780429325755-12](https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429325755-12)

17. Rispens, S., & Demerouti, E. (2016). Conflict at work, Negative Emotions, and Performance: A diary study. *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research*, 9(2), 103–119. doi: [10.1111/ncmr.12069](https://doi.org/10.1111/ncmr.12069)
18. Oore, D. G., Leiter, M. P., & LeBlanc, D. E. (2015). Individual and organisational factors promoting successful responses to workplace conflict. *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne*, 56(3), 301–310. doi: [10.1037/cap0000032](https://doi.org/10.1037/cap0000032)
19. Lacerenza, C. N., Marlow, S. L., Tannenbaum, S. I., & Salas, E. (2018). Team development interventions: Evidence-based approaches for improving teamwork. *American Psychologist*, 73(4), 517–531. doi: [10.1037/amp0000295](https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000295)
20. Hoegl, M., & Muethel, M. (2016). Enabling shared leadership in virtual project Teams: A Practitioners' guide. *Project Management Journal*, 47(1), 7–12. doi: [10.1002/pmj.21564](https://doi.org/10.1002/pmj.21564)
21. Wang, B., Liu, Y., Qian, J., & Parker, S. K. (2020). Achieving effective remote working during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A work design perspective. *Applied Psychology*, 70(1), 16–59. doi: [10.1111/apps.12290](https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.12290)
22. Raghuram, S., Hill, N. S., Gibbs, J. L., & Maruping, L. M. (2018). Virtual work: bridging research clusters. *Academy of Management Annals*, 13(1), 308–341. doi: [10.5465/annals.2017.0020](https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2017.0020)
23. Larson, L., & DeChurch, L. A. (2020). Leading teams in the digital age: Four perspectives on technology and what they mean for leading teams. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 31(1), 101377. doi: [10.1016/j.leaqua.2019.101377](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2019.101377)
24. Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2022). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

Participant Information Sheet

Introduction: You are invited to participate in a study by [Researcher's Name] from [Company Name]. This study examines the impact of interpersonal communication on employee relations at Starnet Innovations Limited. This research has been approved by the Ethics Committee of Starnet Innovations Limited, Enugu (Reference No: SIL-EC/2024/127).

What will you be asked to do? If you agree to participate, you may be involved in one or more of the following activities:

- 1) Complete a questionnaire (approximately 15-20 minutes)
- 2) Participate in an in-depth interview (approximately 45-60 minutes)
- 3) Be observed during team meetings and daily interactions.

Risks and Benefits: There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study. While you may not benefit directly from participation, your input will improve communication practices at Starnet Innovations Limited and advance knowledge in organisational communication.

Confidentiality: All information collected will be kept strictly confidential. Your responses will be anonymised, and no identifying information will be used in any publications or presentations resulting from this study. The research team will store the data securely and ensure it is accessible only to them.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences to your employment or relationship with Starnet Innovations Limited.

Data Usage and Storage: The data collected will be used for research purposes only. It will be stored securely for five years after the completion of the study, after which it will be destroyed.

Results: A summary of the research findings will be made available to all participants upon re-

quest. The results may also be published in academic journals or presented at conferences, but no individual participant will be identifiable.

Contact Information: If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact:

[Researcher's Name] [Email] [Phone Number]

If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee directly at:

Ethics Committee

Starnet Innovations Limited

28 Owerri road, Asata, Enugu

Enugu State, Nigeria

Email: info@starnetweb.com

Phone: +2348059541956

Consent Form

By signing below, you indicate that:

1) You have read and understood the information provided about the research study (SIL-EC/2024/127).

2) You voluntarily agree to participate in the study.

3) You understand that you can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative consequences.

4) You agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications.

5) You understand that data collected during the study may be looked at by individuals from Starnet Innovations Limited, where it is relevant to your taking part in this research. You permit these individuals to have access to your data.

Name of Participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Name of Researcher: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please retain a copy of this information sheet and signed consent form for your records.

APPENDIX B: THEMATIC ANALYSIS CODING FRAMEWORK

The researchers developed this coding framework through an iterative process of reviewing interview transcripts and observation notes. The main themes and sub-themes emerged from the data, guided by the research questions and theoretical framework.

1) Hybrid Work Communication Challenges

a) Virtual Meeting Dynamics Example quote: "It's challenging to ensure everyone feels equally involved in meetings when some are in the office, and others are joining virtually." - P5 (Middle Management)

b) Informal Communication Loss Example quote: "I miss the casual conversations by the canteen stand. Those moments often led to creative ideas or solutions to ongoing problems." - P6 (Middle Management)

c) Technology-Related Issues Example quote: "Sometimes poor internet connections or audio issues disrupt the flow of communication, especially in important meetings." - P11 (Staff)

2) Leadership Communication

a) Transparency Example quote: "When our CEO provides regular, honest updates about the company's direction, it boosts my confidence and commitment to our goals." - P9 (Staff)

b) Accessibility Example quote: "I appreciate that our leadership team has an open-door policy, even if it's virtual nowadays." - P7 (Staff)

c) Consistency Example quote: "Sometimes we receive conflicting information from different leaders, which can be confusing." - P3 (Middle Management)

3) Digital Tool Adoption and Usage

a) Tool Proliferation Example quote: "While I appreciate the efficiency of our project management software, sometimes I feel overwhelmed by the number of platforms we're expected to use." - P11 (Staff)

b) Generational Differences Example quote: "I've noticed that younger team members adapt more quickly to new communication tools, while some older colleagues prefer traditional methods." - P4 (Middle Management)

c) Training and Support Example quote: "We need more comprehensive training on how to use these tools effectively. It's not just about knowing which buttons to click." - P8 (Staff)

4) Team Collaboration and Cohesion

a) Virtual Team Building Example quote: "Our virtual team-building activities have been hit or miss. It's hard to recreate the same energy we had in person." - P10 (Staff)

b) Cross-functional Collaboration Example quote: "The project management tool has improved collaboration between departments. We can now easily track progress and dependencies." - P2 (Executive Leadership)

c) Trust and Relationship Building Example quote: "Building trust with new team members is more challenging when you've never met in person." - P1 (Executive Leadership)

5) Conflict Resolution in Digital Environments

a) Misinterpretation of Digital Communication Example quote: "It's much harder to read body language and tone over video calls, which sometimes leads to misunderstandings." - P8 (Staff)

b) Delayed Resolution Example quote: "Sometimes conflicts simmer longer because people avoid addressing issues over digital platforms." - P3 (Middle Management)

c) Mediation Challenges Example quote: "As a manager, it's more difficult to mediate conflicts when team members are not in the same physical space." - P4 (Middle Management)

6) Work-Life Balance and Communication Boundaries

a) Always-On Culture Example quote: "With all these digital tools, there's an expectation to be available 24/7. It's hard to disconnect." - P7 (Staff)

b) Flexibility Benefits Example quote: "The hybrid model allows me to balance work and personal life better, but it requires clear communication about my availability." - P9 (Staff)

c) Burnout Concerns Example quote: "I worry about burnout. The lines between work and personal time are increasingly blurred." - P5 (Middle Management)

7) Cultural and Linguistic Diversity in Communication

a) Inclusive Communication Practices Example quote: "We're making efforts to use more inclusive language in our communications, considering our diverse workforce." - P2 (Executive Leadership)

b) Language Barriers Example quote: "Sometimes technical jargon or cultural references can be confusing for team members from different backgrounds." - P10 (Staff)

c) Cultural Sensitivity Example quote: "We need to be more aware of how different cultures perceive and engage in communication, especially in a global team." - P1 (Executive Leadership)

This coding framework provides a structured approach to analysing the qualitative data, highlighting key themes and sub-themes from the interviews and observations. It allows for systematically exploring the complex dynamics of interpersonal communication at Starnet Innovations Limited.