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## The effect of communication tools on employee performance in public universities, Kenya

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### Abstract

This research investigated how communication tools impact employee performance in public universities across Kenya. The study was grounded in two theoretical frameworks: the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model and the Social Exchange Theory. A cross-sectional research design was employed to gather data from a target population comprising 26,630 employees across Kenyan public universities. The sample size, determined using Krejcie and Morgan's formula, consisted of 384 respondents. The sampling procedure involved stratified sampling to categorize respondents into teaching and non-teaching staff, followed by proportionate allocation within each stratum, and finally, simple random sampling was used to select participants from each group. Data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive analysis included the use of means, standard deviations, and percentages, with results presented in tables and charts. For inferential analysis, linear and multiple were conducted to examine the strength and nature of the relationships between communication tools and employee performance. The results demonstrated that communication tools significantly and positively influenced employee performance, as shown by a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.725 and a coefficient of determination (R<sup>2</sup>) of 0.526. These findings indicated a strong, positive relationship, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis initially proposed by the study.

**Keywords:** Communication tools, employee performance, public universities, job demands-resources model, social exchange theory

### Introduction

#### Background of Study

Employee performance has become a critical focus for organizations worldwide, as it directly impacts productivity, competitiveness, and overall success (Pradhan & Jena, 2017)<sup>[19]</sup>. In the swiftly changing landscape of international business, organizations are continuously looking for creative methods to enhance employee performance and accommodate changing work environments (Mache, Servaty, & Harth, 2020)<sup>[11]</sup>. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the adoption of new work practices, particularly hybrid working practices, has significantly influenced employee performance (Wang, Liu, Qian, & Parker, 2021)<sup>[23]</sup>. As organizations navigate these changes, understanding the elements influencing worker performance in hybrid work settings has grown to be essential for maintaining organizational effectiveness and growth (Galanti, Guidetti, & Mazzei, 2021)<sup>[6]</sup>.

Communication tools encompass a range of digital solutions designed to support information exchange and real-time interaction across distributed teams. Key constructs within this category include digital communication tools, virtual meeting platforms, project management software, and cloud-based document sharing systems. Digital communication tools facilitate rapid and flexible text-based interactions through email, chat applications, and instant messaging platforms Darics (2012)<sup>[4]</sup>. Virtual meeting platforms allow teams to conduct interactive meetings through audio, video, and real-time chat features, fostering synchronous collaboration regardless of location. Project management software provides structured environments for planning, tracking, and coordinating tasks and resources across teams examples include Trello, Asana, and Microsoft Project. Cloud-based document sharing, on the other hand, supports accessibility and co-editing of files from any location, enhancing version control and real-time contribution. Evidence from industry reports indicates that organizations leveraging advanced communication technologies report higher levels of employee productivity and satisfaction Forrester (2020)<sup>[5]</sup>. Tools such as Slack and Microsoft Teams integrate messaging, file sharing, and other collaborative functions, making

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them central to maintaining workflow efficiency in hybrid teams. As communication demands evolve, the role of these tools continues to grow, warranting further examination of their contribution to employee performance and organizational outcomes.

Evidence suggests that comprehensive and clearly communicated management policies enhance both employee satisfaction and productivity. For instance, McKinsey & Company (2021) found that organizations with well-articulated remote work policies experienced improved performance outcomes and higher engagement levels. Furthermore, (Kipkosgei, Kangogo & Kiprotich 2015) <sup>[9]</sup> highlighted that work-life balance policies—especially those supporting family responsibilities—are significant drivers of job satisfaction. Complementing this, Mugagga and Kabonesa (2013) emphasized the value of continuous staff development through training programs and educational opportunities, which directly enhance performance by equipping employees with relevant skills. These components of management policy play a vital role in shaping the success of hybrid work practices, underscoring the need for responsive, inclusive, and adaptable policy frameworks to optimize employee performance in the modern workplace.

### Objective of the Study

To explore the effect of communication tools on employee performance in public universities, Kenya.

### Research Hypothesis

H<sub>02</sub>: Communication tools has no significant effect on employee job performance in public universities, Kenya.

### Theoretical Review

#### Conservation of Resource Theory

The Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory was first proposed by Stevan E. Hobfoll in 1989 <sup>[8]</sup>. It has since been refined and expanded upon in various contexts, particularly organizational and occupational psychology. The theory has been widely applied in studies of workplace stress, resilience, and performance, including more recent empirical work by Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl, and Westman (2014) <sup>[7]</sup>.

The Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, introduced by Hobfoll (1989) <sup>[8]</sup>, posits that people are driven to acquire and protect valuable resources like time, energy, and social support. Stress arises when these resources are threatened or lost, or when efforts to gain them fail (Hobfoll, 1989) <sup>[8]</sup>. The theory highlights that resource losses have a stronger psychological impact than gains, making loss prevention critical (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014) <sup>[7]</sup>. It also emphasizes that both personal and environmental resources influence resilience and sustained performance.

However, COR theory is not without limitations. It tends to prioritize external and material resources, sometimes neglecting intrinsic motivations such as values and purpose (Hobfoll, 1989) <sup>[8]</sup>. Additionally, resource categories are context-dependent and difficult to measure uniformly, and the theory's assumption of consistent reactions to resource loss overlooks individual differences in coping and psychological flexibility (Halbesleben *et al.*, 2014) <sup>[7]</sup>. Furthermore, the model may not fully capture the complexities of collectivist or highly relational cultures, where social exchange may not align with resource logic (Hobfoll, 2001).

COR theory remains highly relevant to Kenyan public universities, where resource constraints and evolving work models require effective strategies for employee engagement. It provides insight into how hybrid work supports resource conservation (Miller & Davis, 2024) <sup>[13]</sup>, how communication tools improve efficiency (Anderson & Thomson, 2024) <sup>[1]</sup>, and how management and team dynamics promote well-being and productivity (Roberts & Mertonez, 2024) <sup>[20]</sup>. Marta, Bioliz, and Turska (2023) <sup>[12]</sup> show that resource fluctuations in hybrid settings influence burnout and disengagement. Overall, COR theory underpins efforts to enhance resilience, reduce stress, and improve collaboration in resource-limited environments.

### Empirical literature

#### Communication Tools on Employee Performance

Yulianto, Irawan & Diana (2024) <sup>[24]</sup> conducted a quantitative descriptive study to explore the influence of interpersonal communication on employee performance within public accounting firms in South Jakarta. The researchers used descriptive research design and employed questionnaire-based data collection from a sample of 62 employees, a relatively small but focused sample that allowed for in-depth examination within a specific professional context. The use of simple linear regression analysis enabled the authors to identify a statistically significant positive relationship between interpersonal communication and job performance. This methodological approach was appropriate for establishing the direction and strength of the association but did not account for more complex relationships or intervening variables. While the findings underscore the importance of open dialogue and self-disclosure in enhancing employee understanding and feedback mechanisms, the study did not explore potential mediators or moderators such as organizational culture, leadership style, or team dynamics. Moreover, the cross-sectional design limited insights into causality or the sustainability of communication-driven performance improvements over time. Future research could address these gaps by employing longitudinal or mixed-method designs to examine how interpersonal communication interacts with contextual or psychological variables to influence performance in dynamic work environments.

Saraih, Azmi, Sakdan, and Amlus (2019) <sup>[21]</sup> conducted a methodologically rigorous study to examine the effects of interpersonal communication and task design on employee job performance in a Malaysian manufacturing company. Employing a quantitative survey research design, the study drew on a sample of 152 respondents from a single organization, allowing for focused, context-specific analysis. Data were collected using a standardized questionnaire with Likert-scale items, enabling the quantification of employee perceptions across the constructs of job performance, interpersonal communication, and task design. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data, while Pearson's correlation analysis revealed statistically significant positive relationships between job performance and both interpersonal communication ( $r = .53$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and task design ( $r = .54$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Despite the robustness of the findings, the cross-sectional nature of the design limits causal interpretation. Moreover, the study did not apply multivariate analysis techniques, such as regression or structural equation modeling, which could have uncovered underlying pathways or mediators. Future research is encouraged to investigate moderating or

mediating variables, such as leadership style or employee engagement, to better understand the mechanisms linking communication and task design to performance.

Otuokere, Osuala, and Emerole (2024) <sup>[18]</sup> explored the effect of communication tools on remote workforce management and operational efficiency in MTN and Globacom in South-South Nigeria. Employing a descriptive survey research design, they administered structured electronic questionnaires via Google Forms. From a workforce of 8,479, a sample size of 800 was calculated using Taro Yamane's formula, with 773 valid responses analyzed. Data analysis utilized descriptive statistics and simple linear regression. The study found that communication tools significantly improved operational efficiency by enhancing coordination, timely information flow, and employee productivity in remote work environments. However, the research focused solely on quantitative data and did not explore qualitative aspects such as employee experiences or challenges. Additionally, it did not assess the long-term effects of digital communication on well-being and organizational culture. The authors recommend that future studies adopt mixed-methods approaches and broaden the scope to other sectors and regions for a more comprehensive understanding.

Mahmbo (2022) <sup>[11]</sup> explored the relationship between information and communication technology (ICT) and human resource management (HRM) efficiency in the Littoral Delegation of Secondary Education in Cameroon, using an exploratory research design appropriate for early-stage investigations. The study involved 100 respondents from both management and junior staff levels, providing diverse perspectives on ICT utilization. Although specific data collection tools were not detailed, structured questionnaires or interviews were likely used. The study found a significant positive relationship between ICT use and administrative HR functions such as recruitment, placement, compensation, and census. However, it revealed no significant impact of ICT on strategic HR areas like training and development, HR planning, and evaluation, highlighting a gap in the effective integration of ICT into long-term HRM strategies. The absence of deeper analysis into organizational or contextual barriers represents a methodological limitation. Mahmbo recommends that future studies adopt mixed-methods approaches to uncover the factors hindering strategic ICT adoption and to offer a more nuanced understanding of its role in public sector HRM.

Damain (2022) investigated the effect of communication on employee performance in selected engineering companies in Arusha, Tanzania, using a descriptive survey research design. The study involved a sample of 144 respondents, likely selected through either simple random or purposive sampling. Data were collected via structured questionnaires, enabling the quantification of employee perceptions related to communication practices—namely central route communication, peripheral route communication, and open communication. Descriptive statistics summarized the general trends, while inferential techniques explored associations between communication styles and employee performance. The findings revealed that central route communication, which emphasizes strong messages and employee involvement, positively influenced performance. Similarly, peripheral communication improved employee attitudes and beliefs, while open communication enhanced trust and respect, contributing to overall performance gains. However, a key methodological gap was the study's limited

analysis of the underlying mechanisms linking communication to performance. It did not investigate how or why different communication strategies yield distinct outcomes, nor did it apply advanced statistical modelling such as mediation or moderation analysis. Future research could address this by employing mixed-methods or longitudinal designs to uncover deeper organizational or psychological processes influencing performance outcomes over time.

Kwizera (2018) <sup>[10]</sup> conducted a study on Organizational Change and Employee Performance in Commercial Banks in Bujumbura, Burundi, using a cross-sectional research design to assess how structural, strategic, and technological changes impact employee performance. The study targeted 163 employees, with 104 valid responses collected through structured questionnaires. Data analysis employed descriptive statistics and regression analysis. Findings revealed that structural change accounted for 56.8% of performance variance ( $R^2 = 0.568$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), strategic change 47.2% ( $R^2 = 0.472$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), and technological change 51.4% ( $R^2 = 0.514$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), all indicating significant influence. While the study offered key insights into organizational change, it did not examine the specific role of communication tools in performance outcomes. The study highlighted the need for future research to explore the impact of digital communication tools—such as emails, instant messaging, and video conferencing on employee performance in the Burundian context, utilizing a mixed-methods approach and extending analysis to other sectors beyond banking.

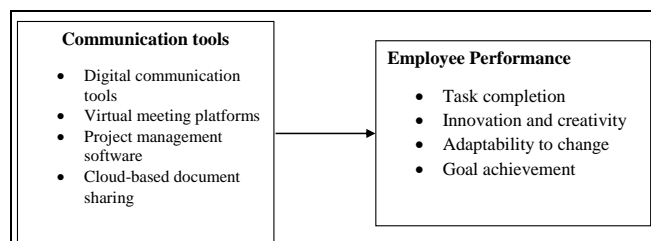
Otieno, Waiganjo, and Njeru (2015) <sup>[17]</sup> examined the effect of employee communication on organizational performance in Kenya's horticultural sector using a cross-sectional survey design. The study targeted 14 flower farms in Naivasha, selected from the Kenya Flower Council directory (2013), with a sample size of 2,460 employees obtained through stratified sampling. Structured questionnaires were used for data collection, and both descriptive and inferential statistics, including correlation and regression analyses, were employed in data analysis. Findings revealed that 65% of respondents strongly agreed that communication facilitates information and opinion exchange, and 63% agreed it improves operational efficiency, contributing to enhanced performance. A significant positive correlation was found between employee communication and organizational performance (Pearson coefficient = 0.466,  $p < 0.001$ ). Horizontal communication had the strongest positive impact, while upward and diagonal communication showed weaker effects, and downward communication was negatively correlated with performance. The study focused solely on traditional communication methods, excluding digital tools, and did not utilize advanced statistical modeling. The authors recommend future research explore digital communication platforms and adopt longitudinal designs to assess long-term effects.

Njuki, Mwangi, Wanjiru, Mwirigi, and Campus (2014) <sup>[16]</sup> conducted a descriptive case study to explore the relationship between marketing communication tools and sales performance in Mombasa public service bus companies in Kenya. The study focused on 21 bus companies, offering an industry-specific analysis of how promotional strategies impact commercial outcomes. Using a descriptive research design, the study aimed to identify patterns and associations without manipulating variables.



Data were likely gathered through structured questionnaires or interviews on marketing practices such as advertising, sales promotions, personal selling, and public relations, and their perceived effects on ticket sales. Findings revealed a positive correlation between higher advertising budgets and increased ticket sales, with advertising and sales promotions identified as the most influential tools. Public relations had minimal impact, and personal selling had a moderate effect. However, the study's focus was limited to sales performance, excluding other metrics such as profitability and customer retention. The authors suggest future research include multidimensional performance indicators and use longitudinal or experimental designs to better understand the causal effects and strategic implications of marketing communication in service sectors.

### Conceptual framework



Source: Researcher's Own Conceptualization (2023)

Fig 1: Conceptual Framework

### Research methodology

Accordingly, this research study did adopt a cross-sectional survey research design. A cross-sectional research design involves collecting given data from many different respondents at a single point in time. On the other hand, survey researches are data collection methods and techniques which involve asking individual questions to produce statistics about the characteristics of the population. It is conducted by administering a structured questionnaire that may either be oral or written to a given number of respondents and their responses forming the data (Saunders *et al.*, 2014 [22]; Cooper & Schindler, 2011) [2]. This study targeted a population of 26, 630 employees working for public chartered universities and public university constituent colleges in Kenya. The sample size was determined by use of the Krejcie and

Morgan formulae of 1970 (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003) [15], to be 384 respondents. The Krejcie and Morgan formulae of 1970 is of form;

$$n = \frac{Z^2 pq}{d^2}$$

Where:

n = desired sample size (for a target population > 10,000 employees),

z = standard normal deviate at the required confidence level=1.96

p = the proportion in the target population estimated to have the characteristics being measured = 0.5; q = 1- p and

d = the level of statistical significance, set at = 0.05

Normally,

$$n = \frac{1.96^2(0.5 \times 0.5)}{0.05^2}$$

$$n = 384 \text{ respondents}$$

### Presentation and discussion of findings

#### Response Rate

This study targeted a sample of 384 respondents who included the academic and non-academic staff, to whom 384 questionnaires were self-administered. However, 342 questionnaires were returned successfully. This gave a response rate of 89.06 per cent. Mugenda and Mugenda (2012, 2003) [14, 15], did suggest that a response rate of 50 per cent in a descriptive survey is very adequate, 60 per cent is good, 70 per cent and more is very good, while 80 per cent and above response rate is excellent.

Table 1: Response Rate Distribution

Number of Questionnaire	Frequency	Percentage
Administered	384	100
Returned	342	89.06
Unreturned	42	10.94

Source: Field Data (2025)

### Descriptive statistics

#### Descriptive Statistics for communication tools

Table 2: Communication Tools

	1= SD, 2= D, 3= N, 4= A, 5=SA	1%	2%	3%	4%	5%	mean	Std dev.
1	Virtual meeting platforms allow for effective team collaboration and decision-making	0.6	2.3	8.2	38.6	50.3	4.36	.783
2	The management software helps me stay organized and manage tasks efficiently	1.6	3.5	9.2	43.3	42.4	4.23	.812
3	Cloud-based document sharing tools protect security and confidentiality	2.6	4.1	9.4	38.4	45.6	4.26	.831
4	Digital communication tools make collaboration easier with colleagues	0.6	3.2	7.6	39.2	49.4	4.34	.803
5	Virtual meeting platforms facilitate clear communication and understanding	3.6	3.5	8.2	38.5	46.3	4.29	.814
6	Confident in using management software for tracking progress	0.8	3.5	9.9	42.5	43.3	4.25	.821
7	Cloud-based document sharing tools make access and sharing of information easy	1.6	3.5	7.6	39.9	47.4	4.31	.831
8	I find it easy to communicate quickly and efficiently using digital communication tools	2.6	2.9	5.3	41.0	48.2	4.30	.805

Source: Field Data (2025)

The findings in table 4.2 showed that a majority (50.3%) of the respondents strongly agreed that virtual meetings allow for effective team collaboration and decision making within

the public universities in Kenya. Furthermore, 38.6% of the respondents agreed with the said statement. However, 2.3% and 0.6% of the respondents disagreed and strongly

disagreed with the statement, respectively. Only 8.2% of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. The study returned a mean score of 4.36 and a standard deviation of 0.783. Similarly, the results in table 4.2 indicates that 43.3% of respondents agreed that the management software helps them stay organized and manage their tasks efficiently. Further, 42.4% of respondents strongly agreed with this statement. In contrast, only 3.5% disagreed, with a mere 1.6 % strongly disagreeing with the said statement. 9.3% could neither agree nor disagree with the same statement. The response gave a high mean score of 4.23, and a standard deviation of 0.812. Table 4.2 shows that a majority (45.6%) of the respondents strongly agreed that cloud-based document sharing tools protect security and confidentiality of information within public universities in Kenya. Moreover, 38.4% of respondents simply agreed with this statement. However, 4.1% disagreed, 2.6% strongly disagreed, and 9.4% neither agreed nor disagreed. The study produced a mean score of 4.26 and a standard deviation of 0.831.

In Table 4.2, 49.4 per cent strongly agreed that digital communication tools within public universities in Kenya make collaborations easier among colleagues. Furthermore, 39.2 per cent of respondents agreed with this statement, while 7.6 per cent could neither agree nor disagree with the said statement. On the other hand, only 3.2 per cent disagreed, with a paltry 0.6 per cent strongly disagreeing with the said statement. The responses gave a mean score of 4.34 and a standard deviation of 0.803, reflecting higher variability in responses. Table 4.14 shows that a majority (46.3%) of the respondents strongly agreed that virtual meeting platforms facilitate clear communication and understanding among the stakeholders in public universities in Kenya. Additionally, another 38.5 per cent agreed with this said statement. However, 3.5 per cent disagreed, while another 3.5 per cent strongly disagreed with the same statement. Nonetheless, 8.2 per cent of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the said statement. The responses for the declarative statement returned a mean score of 4.29, and a standard deviation of 0.814. According

to the findings in table 4.14, a majority (43.3%) of the respondents strongly agreed that the employees within public universities in Kenya have confidence in the use of management software for the tracking process. Moreover, another 42.5 per cent of respondents simply agreed with this statement. Conversely, only 3.5 per cent of the respondents disagreed with the statement, while another 0.8 per cent simply disagreed with the same statement. However, 9.9 per cent of those who participated in the study could neither agree nor disagree with the statements. This response gave a mean score of 4.25 and a standard deviation of 0.821.

In Table 4.2, 47.4 per cent of respondents strongly agreed that cloud-based document sharing tools make the access and sharing of information easy. Similarly, another 39.9 per cent of the respondents could only agree with the statement, while a paltry 1.6 per cent of the participants strongly disagreed with the statement. In addition, another 3.5 per cent of the respondents simply disagreed with the same statement. Nonetheless, 7.6 per cent of the respondents could not agree or disagree with the said statement, which gave a high mean score of 4.31 and a standard deviation of 0.831. The findings in table 4.14 show that a majority (48.2%) of respondents strongly agreed that they find it easy to communicate quickly and efficiently using digital communication tools within public universities in Kenya. In addition, 41.0 per cent of those who participated in the study did agree with the said statement. However, 2.9 per cent disagreed, with another 2.6 per cent strongly disagreeing with the declarative statement. On the contrary, 5.3 per cent of the respondents remained indifferent to the statement, opting to neither agree nor disagree to it. Therefore, the responses gave a mean score of 4.30, and a standard deviation of 0.805.

### Regression Analysis

This study further carried out a regression analysis by fitting the linear regression models for the data. Regression analysis was carried out for the predictor variables (communication tools) on employee performance in public universities in Kenya.

**Table 3:** Communication Tools and Employee Performance

Model Summary							
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics		
					R Square Change	F Change	Sig. F Change
1	.725 <sup>a</sup>	.526	.523	.54068	.525	101.187	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), communication Tools

The results shown in table 4.3 indicate the amount of variation on the dependent variable (employee performance) as explained by the independent variable (communication tools). These findings revealed the correlation coefficient of R value of 0.725 and the coefficient of determination,  $R^2 = 0.526$ . This implies that 52.6 per cent of the corresponding change in employee performance can be explained by communication tools. Furthermore, these results gave the F-

test value of 101.187,  $p < 0.01$ . This was an adequate value to support the goodness of fit of the regression model that explains the variation in employee performance. Hence, this confirms the usefulness of communication tools as a factor effecting the performance of employees in public universities in Kenya. Table 4.27 shows the unstandardized coefficients of communication tools.

**Table 41:** Communication Tools' Coefficients

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	1.674	.374		5.013
	Communication tools	.730	.074	.725	10.549

a. Dependent Variable: Employee performance

Based on the findings in table 4.27, the standardized coefficients  $\beta$  value of the computed scores of communication orientation strategy was 0.725 with a t-value of 10.549, at  $p < 0.05$ . Since the obtained t-value is greater than +1.96, the estimated regression model that was obtained in table 4.27 is significant and feasible. Further, with a  $p < 0.05$  then, it suggests that for every 5 per cent increase in communication tools there was a predicted increase in the percentage of employee performance of zero. Hence, having achieved the set objective, the study rejected the null hypothesis stating that;  $H_{01}$ : communication tools has no significant influence on employee performance in public universities in Kenya.

## Conclusions and recommendations

### Conclusions

This objective sought to determine the effect of communication tools on the performance of employees in Public Universities in Kenya. Communication tools were also measured by a total of 8 questionnaire items on which the respondents were asked to give the extent to which they agreed with the declarative statements. Similarly, the findings in table 4.26 did indicate that communication tools had positive and significant effect on employee performance in public Universities in Kenya ( $R = 0.725$ ). Furthermore, the coefficient of determination obtained in the linear regression model summary table 4.26, did show that communication tools could explain a variation of 52.6 per cent in the performance of employees in Public Universities in Kenya. Therefore, from these findings, it can be determined that communication tools as a variable, it has a positive, strong and significant correlation with employee performance, and hence, this study also rejected the corresponding null hypothesis that was formulated.

### Recommendations

The findings of this research study also show that communication tools as an independent variable is positively and significantly correlated with the performance of employees in Public Universities in Kenya. Therefore, this research study recommends that all Public Universities should enhance the adoption of communication tools by investing in high-quality communication infrastructure, such as having a stable internet connectivity, updated hardware, and reliable digital platforms, which will ensure that there is seamless integration of virtual meetings, collaboration tools, and management soft wares to enhance work efficiency. Similarly, a robust security framework should be established in order to protect sensitive University information. This includes implementing data encryption, multi-factor authentication, regular security audits, and clear privacy policies to mitigate cybersecurity threats and ensure compliance with data protection regulations. Further, Public Universities should adopt a user-driven approach by involving employees in the selection and implementation of communication tools.

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