

The Role of Digital Communications in Enhancing Inclusivity and Diversity in the Workplace

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.8100102>

Received: 29 September 2024; Accepted: 04 October 2024; Published: 07 November 2024

ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of digital communication tools in promoting inclusivity and diversity within the workplace, specifically focusing on Qalby App, a company providing Islamic educational content. Through qualitative interviews with employees across various departments, the research identifies the types of digital tools used, such as Google Meet, WhatsApp, and Basecamp, and evaluates their effectiveness in enhancing communication, fostering inclusivity, and overcoming challenges related to hierarchy, personality differences, and age gaps. The findings reveal that while digital tools improve accessibility, streamline communication, and enable global collaboration, challenges still exist. These challenges must be addressed to maximise the potential of digital communication tools in promoting diversity and inclusivity. The study concludes by offering strategies for enhancing the use of digital tools to foster a more inclusive work environment.

Keywords: Digital communication, workplace inclusivity, diversity, collaboration, communication tools, Qalby App, global collaboration, hierarchical challenges, organisational communication.

INTRODUCTION

Digital communication tools play a crucial role in enhancing diversity and inclusivity in organisations. They facilitate collaboration, connect employees, and improve efficiency, ensuring everyone can participate fully. Shore and Chung (2022) emphasise that a diverse workplace fosters a culture that values all employees, allowing them to thrive without prejudice. This paper explores the effectiveness, challenges, and impacts of these tools on workplace inclusivity.

These tools include email, collaborative platforms, instant messaging apps (e.g., WhatsApp), video conferencing (e.g., Microsoft Teams), and social media (e.g., Facebook). They enable real-time communication and flexible interaction modes, essential for modern workforces (Jain et al., 2021). Organisations use them for internal and external communication, promoting inclusivity and diversity.

OVERVIEW OF THE ORGANISATION AND INTERVIEWEES

This section outlines the organisation’s vision, products, services, and background information about the interviewees, including their roles and experiences.

The Background of The Organisation

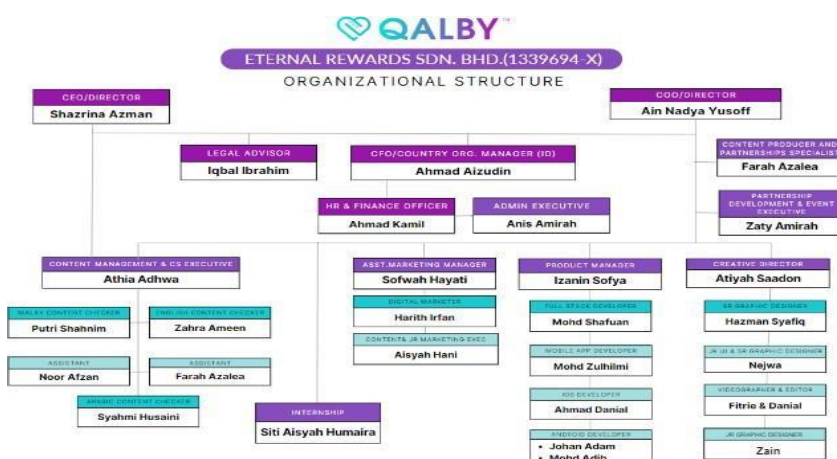


Diagram 1: Qalby App Organisational Chart

Qalby App, operated by Eternal Rewards Sdn. Bhd., is a mobile application offering trusted Islamic educational content. "Qalby," meaning "My Heart" in Arabic, serves as a comprehensive platform for accessing Islamic materials without the clutter of multiple apps. Its vision is to spread da'wah and promote the Qur'an and Sunnah globally. The tagline "Ignite Your Heart with The Light of Iman" reflects its goal of nurturing faith through key features such as Qur'an tagging, E-journaling, gratitude journaling, 'Ilm finders, community outreach, and essential Islamic tools like Qibla direction and Prayer Times.

The Background of The Interviewees:

- I. Interviewee 1: A female Administrative Executive with 5 years at Qalby, responsible for managing employee calendars, supervising operations, and maintaining confidentiality. Contact: admin@qalby.io.
- II. Interviewee 2: A female Content and Marketing Executive with 2 years at Qalby, overseeing content strategies and engagement on social media. Contact: aisyahhani.rv@gmail.com.
- III. Interviewee 3: A male Graphic Designer with 2 years at Qalby, tasked with creating visual materials for projects. Contact: ruzaini.alyousefi@gmail.com.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilised a qualitative approach to explore digital communication's role in enhancing workplace inclusivity and diversity. Data was collected through interviews with three employees from different departments, chosen via purposive sampling for varied insights. The interviews, conducted using WhatsApp's voice note feature, comprised 15 structured questions across five categories. Transcriptions were done using tools like 'notta.ai' and 'otter.ai' to ensure accuracy. The data was organised for thematic analysis, aiming for robustness in the qualitative findings.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section presents findings on how digital communication tools at Qalby App enhance inclusivity and diversity. The interviews highlighted communication tools' types, effectiveness, challenges, and their impacts on workplace diversity.

Types of Communication Tools Used: The tools at Qalby are categorised as internal, external, and hybrid communication tools, essential for daily operations and collaboration.

Internal Communication Tools: Google Meet and Zoom are primarily used for meetings and training, bridging the gap between remote and on-site employees (Burchardt & Maisch, 2019).

1. Excerpt 1: "...we are using Google Meet and Zoom. I think these are the two most used platforms right now" (IV1).
2. Excerpt 2: "WhatsApp is our major communication tool for management and executive communication" (IV2).
3. Excerpt 3: "Basecamp is efficient for uploading and tracking design tasks" (IV3).

Google Docs and Forms facilitate real-time collaboration and feedback (Shore & Chung, 2022).

External Communication Tools: Social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook engage clients and users, crucial for marketing and public image (Ganesh, 2024).

1. Excerpt 4: "We use Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok for audience interaction" (IV1).
2. Excerpt 5: "For marketing, we use platforms like Instagram and YouTube" (IV2).
3. Excerpt 6: "Emails are used for formal communications" (IV3).

Effectiveness of The Digital Communication Tools: These tools enhance communication efficiency and foster inclusivity.

Impact on Communication Efficiency: They streamline workflows and facilitate quick information sharing. Google Meet and Zoom support virtual meetings, ensuring participation regardless of location (Burchardt & Maisch, 2019).

1. Excerpt 7: “We use Google Meet for brainstorming and strategising” (IV1).
2. Excerpt 8: “WhatsApp allows for quick updates and direct communication” (IV2).
3. Excerpt 9: “Basecamp helps organise and track project progress” (IV3).

Role in Fostering an Inclusive Environment: These tools promote open communication, allowing all employees to participate in discussions.

1. Excerpt 10: “Google Meet and Zoom help include everyone in meetings” (IV1).
2. Excerpt 11: “WhatsApp fosters connectivity among team members” (IV2).
3. Excerpt 12: “Google Forms allows us to gather feedback and opinions” (IV3).

This inclusivity creates a supportive community where employees feel valued and empowered.

Challenges in Integrating Diversity into Digital Tools

This section discusses the difficulties employees face when integrating diversity into digital communication at Qalby. Employee backgrounds significantly influence communication and workplace dynamics. As noted by Smith and Fredricks-Lowman (2019), factors like discussion, socialisation, and organisational culture affect motivation. This study examines the experiences of Qalby employees in navigating digital tools amid diverse backgrounds.

Differences in Individual Personality

One challenge identified by interviewees is the variation in personalities among employees. Although there is little diversity in religion or race, personality differences impact communication effectiveness.

1. Excerpt 13: “Everyone has their own way of working. When someone has a different style, it can create difficulties in task execution.” (IV1)
2. Excerpt 14: “We’ve informed a colleague about a subject, but another person was unaware.” (IV2)
3. Excerpt 15: “Getting to know someone is essential. Some are sensitive, so I have to be careful with my words.” (IV3)

These excerpts illustrate that personality differences can hinder communication and collaboration. IV1 mentions difficulties working with someone who has a different task completion style. IV2 highlights lapses in communication, while IV3 emphasises the need to adapt communication based on individual sensitivities.

Additionally, gender dynamics may influence these experiences. IV1 and IV2 are female, while IV3 is male. Research indicates that females often display more emotional sensitivity than males (D’Amico & Geraci, 2022). The variation in personalities contributes to workplace culture and communication challenges, despite the benefits of digital tools. Addressing these differences is crucial for fostering bonding and inclusivity among employees, as emphasised by Patrício and Franco (2022).

Organisational Hierarchy and Age Gaps in Communication

The organisational hierarchy can also present challenges in digital communication. While hierarchy is necessary

for responsibility and decision-making (Burchardt & Maisch, 2019), it can hinder effective communication.

1. Excerpt 16: “I convene meetings with those involved in issues to address problems. Hierarchical differences can complicate decision-making.” (IV1)
2. Excerpt 17: “Remote employees sometimes don’t receive messages on time, even with WhatsApp as our primary tool.” (IV2)
3. Excerpt 18: “The age gap creates barriers when interacting with older higher-ups.” (IV3)

Despite the advantages of digital tools, hierarchical and age differences challenge communication efficiency. IV1 notes that hierarchy complicates decision-making, while IV2 mentions delays in message delivery to remote workers. IV3 highlights difficulties in engaging with older supervisors.

These examples show how diversity in hierarchy and age can hinder inclusive communication at Qalby. Misunderstandings may arise from generational differences in communication styles (Mehra & Nickerson, 2019), impacting job satisfaction and overall workplace dynamics.

Impact of Digital Communication on Diversity and Inclusion

The interviews reveal that digital communication significantly enhances diversity and inclusion. Digital tools improve accessibility, foster community, and facilitate global collaboration.

Enhance Accessibility

Enhanced accessibility is a key benefit of digital communication tools in promoting diversity.

1. Excerpt 19: “We primarily use Google and WhatsApp, which provide excellent accessibility.” (IV1)
2. Excerpt 20: “Instant messaging and real-time updates ensure everyone is informed and can participate.” (IV2)
3. Excerpt 21: “Basecamp allows access to work-related information and tracks progress.” (IV3)

IV1 emphasises the efficiency of Google and WhatsApp, facilitating seamless communication. IV2 highlights how instant messaging fosters active participation, while IV3 appreciates Basecamp’s transparency in tracking tasks. These tools ensure everyone can access necessary information and communicate effectively (Zamiri & Esmaeili, 2024).

Community Building

Digital communication tools are essential for fostering a sense of community.

1. Excerpt 22: “Easy-to-use features help us communicate often, strengthening team bonds.” (IV1)
2. Excerpt 23: “WhatsApp enables open communication, fostering a sense of community.” (IV2)
3. Excerpt 24: “Formal and informal groups help balance work and social interactions.” (IV2)
4. Excerpt 25: “I’m in a group where we discuss personal topics, not just work.” (IV3)

IV1 notes that frequent communication promotes unity and collaboration. IV2 mentions that WhatsApp creates a sense of belonging, while IV2 emphasises the importance of informal interactions in building relationships. These tools help create a supportive community where employees feel valued (Bonifacio, 2024).

Global Collaboration

Digital tools significantly enhance global collaboration.

1. Excerpt 26: “Group features keep team members updated on shared timelines.” (IV1)

2. Excerpt 27: “WhatsApp, Zoom, and Google Meet facilitate communication regardless of location.” (IV2)
3. Excerpt 28: “We engage in global collaboration through digital platforms.” (IV3)
4. Excerpt 29: “You can access information anytime, as long as you have internet.” (IV3)

IV1 highlights the importance of group features in coordinating global teams. IV2 discusses how digital tools eliminate geographical barriers, supporting remote and hybrid work. IV3 confirms that digital platforms foster collaboration, making work environments more diverse (Baptista, 2022). Access to information anytime enhances teamwork, regardless of location and schedule, ensuring all team members can contribute equally (Ganesh, 2024).

Strategies to Enhance Digital Communication and Diversity

Enhancing digital communication and fostering diversity require strategic approaches. Effective communication promotes inclusivity, ensuring all employees can participate and contribute to organisational goals.

The first strategy is to provide comprehensive training on digital tools, such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom, to improve employees' confidence and competence (Shore & Chung, 2022). Regular training sessions, along with resources like manuals and video tutorials, can help employees troubleshoot and maximise tool usage (Jain et al., 2021).

The second strategy involves establishing clear communication protocols. Implementing standardised platforms for specific tasks can enhance understanding and productivity (Satiman et al., 2023). Setting response timelines can minimise delays, particularly for remote workers, leading to a more organised work environment.

The third strategy is to choose appropriate communication tools based on workforce needs. Tools like Microsoft Teams and Zoom facilitate real-time engagement and support diverse communication methods, including messaging and video conferencing (Bits, 2024). Accessibility features, such as real-time translation, help mitigate language differences, while asynchronous tools like email accommodate various schedules.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant role of digital communication tools in fostering inclusivity and diversity. Tools such as Google Meet, Zoom, and WhatsApp enhance communication efficiency and collaboration across geographical barriers.

Training ensures all employees can engage effectively, while clear communication protocols streamline processes, reducing misunderstandings. However, challenges related to personality differences, organisational hierarchy, and age gaps persist. Addressing these challenges is essential for fostering an open culture.

The impact of digital communication on promoting diversity is evident in enhanced accessibility, community building, and global collaboration within Qalby App. These tools allow employees from diverse backgrounds to connect and contribute meaningfully.

In summary, the strategic use of digital communication tools, along with training and clear protocols, significantly enhances inclusivity at Qalby App. Future research should focus on exploring additional strategies to address remaining challenges and further improve digital communication's effectiveness in promoting diversity.

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