



Unlocking Potential: The transferability of skills from Motherhood to the Workplace

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Abstract

The University of Phoenix (UOPX) and Motherly 2023 Mothers Overcome More™ report (M.O.M.™ report) highlights the often overlooked yet invaluable skills that mothers bring to the workforce. Beyond nurturing and caregiving, motherhood cultivates a diverse skill set crucial for modern workplaces. The report emphasizes the challenges faced by mothers, particularly those from lower-income backgrounds, while also shedding light on their exceptional abilities. Through extensive research, the M.O.M. Report identifies skills such as adaptability, resilience, communication, time management, and leadership as integral to the maternal experience. Despite this, discussions on workforce development frequently neglect to recognize the expertise gained through motherhood. This white paper aims to bridge this gap by exploring the intersection between maternal skills and professional demands. By advocating for the integration of these skills into the broader professional sphere, the research challenges traditional perceptions and underscores the significance of acknowledging and utilizing the talents of mothers in the workforce.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Introduction	4
Methodology	4
Results.....	5
Discussion	7
Conclusion	9
References	11

Introduction

Motherhood, often perceived solely through the lens of nurturing and caregiving, embodies a wealth of transferable skills essential to the modern workforce.

In its inaugural year, the University of Phoenix (UOPX) Mothers Overcome More™ (M.O.M.™) report chronicles the unique skills that mothers bring to the job market, as well as the disproportionate barriers faced by those at the lower end of the income spectrum (University of Phoenix, 2023, p. 6).

The M.O.M. Report sheds light on this understated yet invaluable aspect of the maternal experience. Through the research conducted with mothers about the multifaceted roles and responsibilities they shoulder, the M.O.M. Report underscores the profound impact of motherhood on developing skills that are not only applicable but highly sought after in professional settings.

In contemporary discourse, discussions surrounding workforce development and skills acquisition frequently overlook the profound and varied skill set acquired through motherhood. Yet, the journey of motherhood is a masterclass in adaptability, resilience, communication, time management, and leadership—qualities indispensable in today's rapidly evolving work landscape. Drawing from the rich tapestry of maternal competencies documented in the M.O.M Report, this white paper seeks to explore the intricate intersection among the transferable skills cultivated through the diverse tasks inherent in mothering and skills desired in the workplace. This research challenges the conventional perceptions and advocates for the recognition and integration of these skills within the broader professional sphere.

Methodology

The methodology of the M.O.M. Report involved conducting a 20-minute online survey targeting two distinct groups: lower-income moms (n=1,000) and middle- and higher-income

moms (n=500). All participants were U.S. adults aged eighteen and above who were either employed or seeking employment during the research period, which took place between July 19 and August 3, 2023 (University of Phoenix, 2023).

To ensure accuracy in categorization, researchers controlled for income levels, considering the varying cost of living across different regions. Rather than relying on national poverty thresholds, researchers utilized the University of Washington School of Social Work's Self-Sufficiency Standard, which calculates the income needed for families to afford necessities such as housing, childcare, food, and transportation (University of Phoenix, 2023; University of Washington, 2023). This standard is available for forty-one states and the District of Columbia and provides detailed calculations for various family types across different geographic areas. Researchers used U.S. Census data as a proxy where the Standard was unavailable or outdated.

Researchers employed a two-step approach when analyzing income data. This streamlined the analysis process by allowing them to establish accurate income thresholds based on the average income required for self-sufficiency in each region while accommodating higher-cost areas and household sizes (University of Phoenix, 2023).

Results

The data presents a comparative analysis of various skills acquired through motherhood across different income brackets. The percentage of proficiency of specific competencies as measured by mothers responding to the survey are presented based on income status.

In terms of *multitasking abilities*, 82% of lower-income mothers and 76% of middle- to higher-income mothers perceive themselves as proficient multitaskers. Similarly, regarding *flexibility*, 68% of lower-income mothers and 70% of middle- to higher-income mothers believe they have honed this skill through motherhood. When it comes to *budgeting*, 61% of lower-income mothers and 56% of middle- to higher-income mothers feel capable of managing

finances. In the realm of *problem-solving*, 74% of lower-income mothers and 68% of middle- to higher-income mothers consider themselves adept at finding solutions. *Time management skills* are recognized by 67% of lower-income mothers and 69% of middle- to higher-income mothers as strengths developed through motherhood. *Organization skills* are acknowledged by 58% of both lower-income and middle- to higher-income mothers. *Decision-making abilities* are noted by 71% of lower-income mothers and 64% of middle- to higher-income mothers. *Adaptability*, another crucial skill, is recognized by 63% of lower-income mothers and 66% of middle- to higher-income mothers. *Communication skills* are seen as strong points by 68% of lower-income mothers compared to 54% of middle- to higher-income mothers. Lastly, *stress management skills* are highlighted by 61% of lower-income mothers and 53% of middle- to higher-income mothers. Overall, the data suggests that while there are slight variations between income groups, mothers from both demographics perceive themselves as possessing a range of valuable skills acquired through their experiences in motherhood (University of Phoenix, 2023).

Further analysis reveals that both lower-income and middle- to higher-income mothers perceive their experiences in parenthood as highly relevant to the workplace. Approximately 90% of mothers from both income groups believe that motherhood equips them with skills that are applicable to their jobs, and around three-fourths of mothers, regardless of income, consider the skills acquired through motherhood to be more relevant than those gained through formal education (University of Phoenix, 2023).

However, despite this widespread agreement on the transferability of maternal skills, roughly half of mothers in both groups feel that these skills are not valued in the workplace. The study highlights various skills developed through motherhood, including multitasking, flexibility, time management, adaptability, and communication, which are considered essential soft skills in the workforce (Carnevale, Fasules, & Peltier Campbell, 2020; Fajaryati, Budiyo, Akhyar & Wiranto, 2020). Lower-income mothers, in particular, express a notably positive perception of the

communication skills acquired through motherhood, potentially providing them with a competitive advantage in the job market (University of Phoenix, 2023). Both lower-income and middle- to higher-income mothers cite multitasking, problem-solving, and decision-making as top skills acquired through motherhood. This emphasizes the broad consensus across income tiers regarding the transferability and value of maternal experiences in the professional realm (University of Phoenix, 2023).

Discussion

Motherhood is a multifaceted role encompassing a myriad of responsibilities that demand a diverse skill set. From the moment of conception, mothers embark on a journey that requires not only emotional fortitude but also practical prowess. The ability to navigate through the complexities of pregnancy, childbirth, and early childcare necessitates a high degree of adaptability and problem-solving acumen.

As mothers transition into the role of primary caregivers, they become adept at managing competing demands and multitasking with finesse. Balancing the needs of multiple children, household chores, and personal commitments fosters exceptional organizational skills and the capacity to prioritize effectively—an invaluable asset in any professional setting.

Moreover, communication skills honed through interactions with children, educators, healthcare providers, and extended family members are transferable to various workplace scenarios. Mothers develop the ability to convey complex ideas with clarity and empathy, fostering strong interpersonal relationships essential for collaboration and team dynamics.

The nurturing aspect of motherhood instills compassion, patience, and conflict resolution skills—qualities that are instrumental in fostering a positive work environment and mitigating interpersonal conflicts. Furthermore, the resilience cultivated through overcoming the myriad challenges inherent in parenting equips mothers with the tenacity to navigate through setbacks and adapt to change—an indispensable trait in today's volatile economic landscape.

Mothers Perspective on Transferable Skills Learned Through Motherhood

From the data presented, three observations can be drawn regarding mothers' perspectives on transferable skills learned through motherhood; specifically, (1) Consistent Perceptions of Skill Development, (2) Communication Skills Stand Out and (3) Challenges in Skill Valuation.

Consistent Perceptions of Skill Development

Across various skills such as multitasking, problem-solving, time management, and adaptability, there is a consistent perception among both lower-income and middle- to higher-income mothers that motherhood has honed these abilities. This indicates that regardless of socioeconomic status, the experience of motherhood fosters the development of valuable skills that are transferable to the workforce.

Communication Skills Stand Out

Lower-income mothers exhibit a notably higher perception of their communication skills compared to their middle- to higher-income counterparts. This suggests that the experience of navigating diverse interactions within the context of parenting has a pronounced impact on communication abilities, potentially giving lower-income mothers a competitive advantage in the job market where effective communication is highly valued.

Challenges in Skill Valuation

Despite the widespread recognition of the transferability of maternal skills, half of mothers in both income groups feel that these skills are not adequately valued in the workplace. This underscores a disconnect between the skills mothers perceive they possess and the recognition or utilization of these skills by employers. Addressing this disparity is crucial for leveraging the full potential of maternal experiences in the workforce and promoting inclusivity and diversity in professional settings.

Alignment of skills developed through motherhood with workforce skills.

Given the last observation and the focus of this white paper to challenge the understanding of the transferability of the skills developed in motherhood, it is important to highlight the alignment of the skills revealed in the M.O.M. report and the skills needed in the workforce. Five of the essential skills of motherhood are discussed and presented to demonstrate how they align closely with what employers typically seek in their workforce (Carnevale, Fasules, & Peltier Campbell, 2020; Fajaryati, Budiyo, Akhyar & Wiranto, 2020; Rios, Ling, Pugh, Becker, & Bacall, 2020). The skills include (1) multitasking, (2) problem solving, (3) time management, (4) adaptability and (5) communication.

Employers highly value employees who possess multitasking skills, as they are essential for efficiently managing multiple tasks and priorities simultaneously. Additionally, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) noted that problem-solving skills are highly sought after in the workforce, with critical thinking being identified as one of the top three skills (Grey, 2021).

Time management is indispensable for workplace productivity and meeting deadlines. Moreover, adaptability is increasingly crucial in today's rapidly changing work environment, as identified by the World Economic Forum as one of the top ten skills for success in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (World Economic Forum, 2024). Effective communication skills are equally vital for fostering collaboration, resolving conflicts, and building strong relationships, as emphasized by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) as one of the most important skills across all levels of employment (Society for Human Resources Management, 2018).

Conclusion

As we delve deeper into the nuances of the M.O.M Report and its implications for workforce development, it becomes evident that motherhood serves as fertile ground for cultivating a diverse skill set that transcends traditional boundaries. By recognizing and

harnessing the transferable skills embedded within the maternal experience, we can foster a more inclusive and resilient workforce poised to thrive in the face of evolving challenges.

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