Cross-Cultural Communication Challenges of Indonesian Remote Workers for Foreign Companies

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Abstract: -Remote work has been on the rise worldwide since 2019, largely accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates, about 260 million people, 7.9% of global employment, were remote workers in 2019 [1]. Indonesia has similarly experienced a significant surge in remote work adoption in recent years. Furthermore, at the height of Indonesia's lockdown, it is estimated that 46% of employees had to work from home under government restrictions.

While remote work offers numerous advantages, it faces many problems, such as different cultures between the workers and the company cause problem in building virtual teams; language barriers and lack of non‐verbal cues may create inefficiency in communication and improve team performance. The study has two main objectives: to identify the types of cross-cultural communication challenges faced by Indonesian professionals in remote international settings, to examine how cultural norms affect communication with foreign colleagues and managers . The data show that remote work provides benefits such as flexible scheduling, reduced commuting, and exposure to diverse work cultures. Discomfort with direct feedback from foreign colleagues, reflecting mismatches in cultural expectations for hierarchy. Language differences, tone misinterpretations, and synchronous‐asynchronous scheduling conflicts further complicated interactions. Feelings of isolation were common, as remote workers lacked spontaneous social encounters and found it difficult to build trust with colleagues.

Key-Words: - Cross-cultural communication, Cultural adaptation, Indonesian remote workers, Remote work, Virtual teams, Multinational companies

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1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Remote work has been on the rise worldwide since 2019, largely accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, working from home was relatively rare and as the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates, only about 260 million people, 7.9% of global employment, were remote workers in 2019 [1]. This changed abruptly in 2020 with the pandemic where at it's peak roughly 560 million people, more than double the 2019 figure, were working from home worldwide. In a global survey, 52% of respondents across 29 countries reported working from home during the COVID-19 lockdowns . Many advanced economies saw an even higher shift into remote work, for example, countries like Colombia, India, and South Africa has over 70% of workers at home in 2020 [2].

While some employees have since returned to the office, remote and hybrid work arrangements remain far more common than before 2019. Surveys and labour statistics confirm that even as the pandemic restrictions has eased, the share of people working remotely in 2021 - 2022 stayed well above the pre-pandemic numbers [3].

Indonesia has similarly experienced a significant surge in remote work adoption in recent years. Before 2020, fully remote work was virtually uncommon and a survey found only 4% of Indonesian respondents had worked remotely before the pandemic [4]. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, it had forced a rapid change to happen in the work force and then by late 2020 around 13% of Indonesian workers were working entirely from home, and an additional 41% were in hybrid arrangements splitting their time between home and the offices, showing that the share of Indonesians working at least partly remotely roughly doubled or tripled during the pandemic.

Official labor data reflects a similar jump with about 10.4% of salaried workers in Indonesia working from home as of August 2020, whereas virtually none did pre-pandemic [5]. Furthermore, at the height of Indonesia's lockdown, it is estimated that 46% of employees had to work from home under government restrictions. Although many have since returned to the office for work, remote work remains far more prevalent than before the pandemic. A 2024 workforce survey reported that 42% of Indonesian workers now hold jobs that can be done remotely where there was only up to 37% the year prior [6]. Among those with remote capable jobs, most have embraced the flexible set ups and about 70% are working in a hybrid set up and 10% are fully remote working, compared to only single digit percentages reported before the pandemic. This demonstrated a lasting shift in work culture globally.

Notably, Indonesia's remote work growth includes a trend of local talent working for international companies. Global firms are increasingly hiring Indonesian professionals as remote employees or contractors, given Indonesia's large, skilled labor pool. Tech and digital industries lead this movement with Indonesians in demand internationally for roles such as software engineering, graphic design, data analysis, customer support, and digital marketing [7]. Services that enable cross-border remote employment, for example, Professional Employer Organizations (PEOs) or "employer of record" platforms have also seen more use in Indonesia as foreign companies tap into Indonesian talent without needing a local office [8]. Indonesia's adoption of remote work has accelerated since 2019, both in domestic context and through cross-border employment.

Alongside the rise in actual remote employment, there is clear evidence of growing interest among Indonesian workers in securing remote jobs with overseas companies. Surveys show that the idea of working remotely for a foreign employer has become highly attractive and sought after in Indonesia.

A primary motivator is the financial benefit by holding a remote job with an international company, Indonesian professionals can often earn higher salaries that are frequently paid in stronger foreign currencies without leaving their home country [9]. For example, tech workers in Indonesia might command much higher dollar-denominated incomes working for U.S. or European firms, compared to local companies all while still living at home. This wage appeal, combined with Indonesia's relatively lower cost of living, makes foreign remote positions especially lucrative. In addition, many Indonesians see remote foreign jobs as a way to gain more international experience and skills without emigrating as they can collaborate with global teams and learn multinational business practices, yet still remain close to family and community [10]. This set up is an ideal balance of professional growth and personal ties. Cultural values in Indonesia tend to emphasize family proximity and work–life balance, so the ability to "earn in dollars from home" has broad appeal. Surveys in Indonesia consistently find that workers prize flexibility in work location and report improved well-being when they have the option to work from home [10]. All these factors contribute to a strong push among Indonesian workers to seek out remote employment with foreign companies. Indeed, Indonesian online job portals now routinely list remote positions with some companies explicitly advertising "Work From Home" as a job benefit.

While remote work brings new opportunities, Indonesian professionals employed by international companies often face significant cross-cultural communication challenges in these virtual work environments. Remote teams are commonly distributed across different countries, meaning Indonesian workers must regularly communicate with foreign colleagues or clients who may have very different linguistic and cultural backgrounds from them. One main difficulty is the language barrier as Indonesian remote workers typically have to use English which is the lingua franca in most global businesses, instead of their native Indonesian. Communicating complex ideas in a second language can be a daunting task with one study noting that Indonesian employees often "find it difficult to communicate professionally with foreign clients" and that this challenge increases when they must operate in English [11].

Even when Indonesians are proficient in English, subtle nuances or idioms in communication can lead to misunderstandings in emails and calls. Miscommunication risk is especially high when it comes to text-based channels like chat or email as communication indicators like tone and intent can be lost in the message. Tools like automatic translators are sometimes used to bridge language gaps, but they still tend to be inaccurate translations and can distort meaning and create confusion [11]. Another major challenge stems from differing communication styles and cultural norms. Indonesian workplace culture tends to value polite, indirect communication and harmony and it is considered impolite in Indonesia to openly contradict someone or say "no" directly [12]. As observers note, people often avoid saying an outright "no" and instead preferring to express

disagreement vaguely or through silence in order to save face [13]. Likewise, a verbal "yes" from an Indonesian colleague might simply mean "I understand" rather than true agreement [14]. These high-context, less direct communication norms can clash with the more direct and explicit communication style common in, for example, American or Western European business culture. An Indonesian employee might hesitate to speak frankly or voice concerns on a conference call, whereas a Western teammate could interpret that silence or a polite "yes, noted" as full agreement and such mismatches can easily lead to misunderstandings if not recognized. Research confirms that cultural differences in direct vs. indirect communication and in the interpretation of feedback or criticism are a frequent source of friction in global virtual teams [11]. Indonesian workers may need to adjust to foreign colleagues who are more blunt or quick to debate, while those colleagues must learn to read between the lines for Indonesians' more subtle cues. Without this mutual understanding, misinterpretations are likely.

Non-verbal communication and context also add another layer of complexity in this type of work environment. In face-to-face interaction, Indonesians rely on context, body language, and tone to convey meaning when conversing. For instance, it is customary to maintain a calm demeanor as raising one's voice or showing open anger is very rare in Indonesian professional settings as it is seen as rude and disrespectful [15]. Even direct eye contact with superiors is often limited and staring too intently can be seen as disrespectful. These implicit cultural cues can be lost or misinterpreted in virtual communication as remote work primarily occurs via video calls, voice calls, or text, where body language and facial expressions are either not visible or can appear differently on screen. The absence of in-person cues means colleagues from other cultures might misconstrue Indonesian workers' intentions. For example, an Indonesian's thoughtful pause or gentle tone might be mistaken for uncertainty and their lack of direct eye contact on a video call could be read by someone from a more forthright culture as a lack of confidence, when in fact it is a sign of respect [15]. On the other hand, Indonesians may also find foreign colleagues overly forthright or blunt, not realizing that in those cultures directness is not meant to offend and is a norm when conversing. These non-verbal and stylistic differences require careful adjustment on all sides. Practical and logistical factors in remote work can further exacerbate and enhance cross-cultural communication issues.

Time zone differences are another common challenge with Indonesian remote employees when collaborating and working in multicultural virtual teams. Due to the time zone differences, it can lead to asynchronous schedules and odd working hours for the Indonesian remote workers, and these odd schedules can cause delays when it comes to getting feedback or scheduling virtual meetings [16]. Coordinating across different time zones also means fewer opportunities for live discussions with the addition of technology and connectivity challenges as not all remote workers in Indonesia have access to reliable high-speed internet, especially outside big cities, which can disrupt and cause problems with video meetings [17]. Even with good infrastructure and high speed internet, remote work relies on digital communication platforms such as Slack or Zoom, and navigating these platforms in a second language along with different cultural context can be another hurdle to jump over.

1.2 Research Gaps

The thesis demonstrates that remote cross‐cultural communication is influenced by cultural values [18], individual capabilities and perceptions of connection (Social Presence). Empirical studies reveal that misunderstanding arises from conflicting communication styles, language barriers and lack of non‐verbal cues, and that cultural intelligence and accommodation improve team performance. Social presence, meanwhile, reduces isolation and fosters trust. Yet the literature is dominated by Western contexts, research on Indonesian professionals working remotely for foreign companies remains sparse. Existing studies rarely examine how Indonesian workers interpret hierarchical cues, negotiate face in digital spaces or experience social presence when interacting with Western colleagues. Furthermore, most research focuses on employees' perspectives and neglects the employers' role in setting communication norms and providing support [19]. This thesis addresses these gaps by exploring Indonesian remote workers' experiences and analyzing how cultural dimensions, individual capability and social presence shape their interactions. By doing so, it offers practical insights for organizations aiming to build inclusive and effective cross‐cultural virtual teams.

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this thesis are:

1. To identify the types of cross-cultural communication challenges experienced by Indonesian remote workers employed by foreign companies.

2. To analyze the strategies employed by Indonesian remote workers to overcome or navigate these challenges.
3. To explore how cultural communication norms, such as hierarchy, indirectness, and time orientation, affect communication between Indonesian workers and foreign colleagues or managers.
4. To provide context-sensitive recommendations for improving cross-cultural communication in remote team settings involving Indonesian professionals.

1.4. Significance of the Study

In terms of theoretical significance, this research contributes to the existing literature on cross-cultural communication and remote work by shining light on the specific perspectives of Indonesian remote professionals. By applying a combination of theories including Hofsted's Cultural Dimensions, Hall's communication Theory, Trompenaar's Cultural Value Orientations, Cultural Intelligence or CQ[20], and Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) and provides an analysis of how cultural norms intersect with virtual workplace communication [21].

In terms of practical significance, the findings from this research offers insight to multiple stakeholders. Remote team leaders and HR managers, for example, can use the insights in this study to improve communication practices and foster inclusivity within their team. For Indonesian professionals, both those entering or currently working in global virtual teams, can enhance their cross-cultural communication skills. Additionally, policy makers along with educators involved in the workforce, particularly within the Indonesian context, may find the findings in this study valuable for shaping future training programs.

2 Literature Review

The widespread adoption of remote work has intensified intercultural collaboration and placed new demands on communication [22]. Scholars note that remote work eliminates geographical boundaries but makes cultural differences, such as direct versus indirect communication, more apparent. In virtual settings, employees often rely on digital tools that remove non-verbal cues and informal social exchanges, which can lead to misunderstandings and isolation [23]. High‐intensity telecommuting can decrease job satisfaction and reduce coworker support [24]. To understand how Indonesian professionals navigate these challenges when working for foreign companies, it is essential to draw on established theories of culture and communication and to examine recent empirical studies on global virtual teams. This chapter reviews five major frameworks of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Trompenaars and Cultural Intelligence (CQ), Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) and Social Presence Theory and identifies gaps in current research.

2.1 Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Remote Communication

Geert Hofstede's model defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind" and argues that national cultures differ on several value dimensions [18](Hofstede, 2011). The original four dimensions, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism–collectivism and masculinity–femininity, describe how societies vary in hierarchy, risk tolerance, group orientation and gender role expectations [25]. Later studies added long‐term orientation and indulgence–restraint. For example, high power‐distance cultures expect deference to authority and formal communication, whereas low power‐distance cultures favor egalitarian relationships [26]. In collectivist societies, group harmony and indirect communication are valued, while individualist societies encourage self‐expression and direct feedback. Masculine cultures prioritize competition and achievement, whereas feminine cultures emphasize cooperation and quality of life. High uncertainty‐avoidance cultures seek clear rules and structured communication, whereas low uncertainty‐avoidance cultures tolerate ambiguity and informal interaction. These dimensions provide a baseline for analyzing intercultural interactions and have been widely applied to management and communication research.

Hofstede's dimensions help explain why remote teams struggle with communication. When team members from low power‐distance, individualistic cultures interact with colleagues from high power‐distance, collectivist cultures, misunderstandings arise about who should speak, how feedback should be delivered and how decisions are made [27]. In asynchronous environments such as email or chat, high power‐distance workers may hesitate to voice concerns, while individualists may interpret silence as agreement [28]. Similarly, collectivist cultures may avoid direct criticism to preserve harmony, leaving individualists unaware of issues until they become serious. Research on multicultural virtual teams shows that the lack of prosodic and non‐verbal cues in computer‐mediated communication makes it harder

for members to read implicit messages and manage conflict [29], language differences, norms of politeness and perceptions of time further complicate collaboration [30] (Bhagat & Steers, 2009). For Indonesian workers, often part of a high power‐distance, collectivist and high‐context culture, these factors may lead to reluctance to challenge foreign managers or to misunderstand direct criticism [31]. In the absence of cultural awareness, remote interactions can foster misinterpretations, decreased trust and reduced team effectiveness.

While Hofstede's model remains influential, it has been critiqued for treating cultures as static and homogenous [32]. Cultures evolve through globalisation, technology and individual experiences, thus, researchers caution against applying national scores to individuals. Scholars advocate combining Hofstede's dimensions with other frameworks that account for relational dynamics and media effects [33]. Nevertheless, empirical studies confirm that power distance, individualism–collectivism and masculinity–femininity continue to predict communication preferences and conflict styles in virtual teams [21]. For example, a cross‐continental survey of remote workers found that misunderstandings often stemmed from direct versus indirect communication and varying comfort with hierarchy [21]. Recognizing the explanatory power and limitations of Hofstede's dimensions helps researchers interpret the experiences of Indonesian remote workers and highlights the need for cultural sensitivity in digital collaboration.

2.2 Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's Seven Dimensions

Trompenaars and Hampden‐Turner expanded cultural analysis by introducing seven dimensions that capture how people apply rules, relate to others and perceive time [34]. Universalism versus particularism describes whether societies emphasize consistent rules or adapt them to relationships; individualism versus communitarianism contrasts personal autonomy with group allegiance, specific versus diffuse differentiates cultures that separate personal and professional spheres from those that integrate them, neutral versus emotional distinguishes restrained expression from open display of feelings, achievement versus ascription contrasts status based on accomplishments with status based on age, gender or lineage, sequential versus synchronous time compares monochronic to polychronic time orientation, and internal versus external control assesses whether people believe they can shape their environment or must adapt to it [34]. These dimensions complement Hofstede's model by focusing on relational norms and time perception.

In remote work, Trompenaars' dimensions illuminate diverse expectations. Universalist cultures, common in northern Europe and North America, value formal contracts and standardized procedures, their remote meetings follow structured agendas and timelines. Particularist cultures, typical in parts of Asia and the Middle East, adapt agreements to relationships, expecting flexibility when circumstances change. Diffuse cultures merge personal and professional life; colleagues may inquire about family and expect longer introductions before business, whereas specific cultures separate work from personal matters. Emotional cultures openly display feelings through tone and gestures, which may be lost in text‐based communication, while neutral cultures prefer restrained expression [33]. Sequential‐time cultures adhere to punctuality and linear schedules, expecting quick responses, whereas synchronous‐time cultures multitask and tolerate delays. Research on multicultural virtual teams notes that differences in time orientation, emotional expression and status attribution can cause frustration if not discussed [34]. For Indonesian employees, who often belong to particularist and diffuse cultures, remote interactions with universalist, specific and achievement‐oriented colleagues can feel impersonal or transactional. Awareness of these dimensions helps team members interpret behaviour and adjust expectations.

Scholars emphasize that Trompenaars' model is most useful when used diagnostically to tailor interventions rather than to label cultures [26]. Management strategies such as adaptation (recognizing differences and adopting others' practices), structural intervention (reconfiguring teams to minimize conflict), managerial mediation and removal of problematic members are recommended to address cultural conflicts [35]. Recent research on cross‐cultural project teams urges exploring how specific dimensions affect collaboration in different industries and calls for comparative studies across contexts. Nuno Baptista's conceptual review notes that static models like Hofstede and Trompenaars should be supplemented with intercultural competence training and dynamic frameworks to account for the evolving nature of culture [29]. For Indonesian remote workers, understanding Trompenaars' dimensions can foster empathy and guide communication strategies; however, organizations must also provide training and leadership support to translate this knowledge into practice.

2.3 Cultural Intelligence (CQ) and Virtual Team Performance

Cultural Intelligence (CQ) refers to a person's ability to function effectively in diverse cultural contexts and comprises cognitive, motivational and behavioral components. Cognitive CQ involves knowledge of norms and practices across cultures; motivational CQ captures the desire to learn about and engage with other cultures; behavioral CQ reflects the capacity to adapt verbal and non‐verbal behaviors. Studies on global virtual teams show that high motivational CQ enhances social integration and task performance [20].

In a survey of global virtual team members, those who were curious about other cultures and willing to interact across differences reported smoother collaboration and greater satisfaction [20]. Conversely, low CQ was associated with misunderstandings, frustration and decreased trust. Because digital communication limits contextual cues, CQ enables individuals to interpret subtle signals, recognize cultural norms and adjust their language and tone.

Empirical research links CQ to leadership and decision making. A study of virtual teams in the United Arab Emirates found that cultural intelligence, transformational leadership and task conflict positively influenced decision‐making processes, whereas relationship conflict had a negative effect [33]. Leaders who demonstrated high CQ facilitated open discussions, navigated cultural differences and encouraged constructive debate [34]. Another quantitative study reported that members with high motivational CQ experienced better social integration and stronger team performance [35]. These findings suggest that CQ not only helps individuals adapt but also fosters inclusive climates that support innovation. In the context of Indonesian professionals working for foreign companies, CQ may be particularly important because it allows them to interpret direct feedback from Western managers without perceiving it as disrespectful and to convey feedback in a culturally appropriate manner.

Organizations can cultivate CQ through training, international assignments and inclusive leadership. Nuno Baptista argues that cross‐cultural virtual teams need structured interventions, such as workshops, mentorship and reflective practices, to develop intercultural competence [33]. The remote work survey by Qudus and Bello highlights the importance of cultural competence training and inclusive leadership for improving morale and reducing attrition [21]. Furthermore, digital literacy complements CQ; employees must learn to convey empathy and clarity through text, video and collaborative platforms [41]. As remote work becomes the norm, organizations should invest in programs that enhance both cultural and technological skills. By fostering high CQ among Indonesian workers and their foreign colleagues, companies can mitigate miscommunication, build trust and leverage cultural diversity for innovation.

2.4 Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) in Remote Work

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) explains how individuals adjust their communicative behavior, speech rate, accent, vocabulary, tone and non‐verbal cues, to align with or distance themselves from others. Convergence involves modifying one's communication style to reduce social distance and seek approval [34], whereas divergence involves emphasizing differences to assert identity or maintain distance. Developed from Speech Accommodation Theory, CAT argues that people adapt consciously or unconsciously to achieve interpersonal goals. Four assumptions underpin CAT: (1) similarities and differences in speech arise from cultural and individual experiences; (2) people evaluate conversations by perceiving others' speech and behavior; (3) social status and belonging influence accommodation, individuals often converge toward those with higher status; and (4) social norms guide accommodation choices [35].

In intercultural communication, CAT provides a lens for understanding how individuals manage identity and relationship. Gallois et al. note that accommodation can serve interpersonal goals such as inclusion and affiliation [36], while non‐accommodation highlights differences. In family contexts, for instance, parents and children converge or diverge based on age, religion and ethnicity. In global virtual teams, convergence may involve simplifying language, avoiding idioms, slowing speech or adopting colleagues' jargon. Divergence may occur when speakers maintain their native accent or communication style to assert identity or resist assimilation [36]. They observe that convergence tends to occur when interacting with individuals perceived as having higher status or expertise. However, over‐accommodation can seem patronizing, while under‐accommodation may signal disrespect, so balanced adaptation is crucial.

Digital communication intensifies accommodation challenges. The absence of non‐verbal cues in email or chat makes it harder to gauge how much convergence is needed. Research on multicultural virtual teams reports that the lack of

prosodic features and non‐verbal signals increases misinterpretations and delays feedback. CAT suggests that communicators should explicitly discuss norms, such as response time, tone and formality, to avoid misreading brevity as hostility or deference as disengagement. Qudus and Bello's survey found that language barriers and non‐verbal communication gaps exacerbate misunderstandings in remote teams. Additionally, Presbitero's study shows that CQ enhances accommodation, individuals with high CQ are better able to adjust their communication to suit different cultures and mediums [36]. For Indonesian remote workers, learning when to converge (e.g., using direct language with Western managers) and when to preserve cultural norms (e.g., using polite forms of address) can improve interactions. Leaders should model inclusive communication by speaking clearly, avoiding slang and inviting feedback.

2.5 Social Presence Theory and Digital Collaboration

Social Presence Theory explores how individuals perceive the presence of others in technology‐mediated communication. Early theorists Short, Williams and Christie defined social presence as the "degree of salience of the other person" in an interaction [37]. They argued that media differ in how much they convey the "realness" of the other person; richer media such as video calls provide stronger social presence than text. Recent researchers describe social presence as a psychological phenomenon in which people perceive others as real and feel connected to them [38]. Some emphasize media attributes, while others highlight social and individual factors. They propose a comprehensive framework that integrates Social Information Processing theory, Construal Level Theory and Telepresence Theory to explain how impressions, psychological distance and a sense of being in the same virtual space affect social presence. They define social presence as perceiving others as physical "real" persons in technology‐mediated communication.

Empirical studies link social presence to group cohesion, efficacy and performance. In a study of virtual learning groups, Park and Lee found that social presence is determined by the extent to which participants recognize others through interaction and are aware of residual relationships [38]. They report that feedback and collaborative learning increase social presence and that high social presence promotes group cohesion and group efficacy. The same study shows that social presence mediates the relationship between group cohesion and academic performance: groups with high social presence achieve better outcomes. Rogers and Lea argue that raising group identity awareness enhances social presence in online cooperative learning. These findings suggest that social presence is not merely a media characteristic but a relational construct shaped by interaction patterns, group identity and feedback mechanisms.

Social presence is critical for remote work because it reduces isolation and improves trust. Low social presence can lead to social isolation and decreased well‐being. Studies of remote workers show that feelings of loneliness and lack of social exchange are common job demands [48]. Social presence of managers and peers, manifested through regular check‐ins, video meetings and informal conversations, can mitigate these feelings and foster collaboration. In global virtual teams, social presence helps team members compare notes, correct misunderstandings and build trust. However, remote interactions across time zones and cultures challenge social presence: asynchronous communication limits immediacy, and differences in communication style may make messages seem impersonal. [37]. argue that low social presence adversely affects transactivity and collaborative knowledge construction. Thus, organizations should design digital environments that enhance social presence by encouraging synchronous interactions when possible, providing rich media options and fostering group identity. For Indonesian remote workers, social presence may require managers to acknowledge cultural holidays, invite informal check‐ins and provide clear feedback, thereby reinforcing psychological connection despite physical distance.

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3. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore cross-cultural communication challenges faced by Indonesian remote workers employed by foreign companies. A qualitative approach is appropriate because it focuses on collecting non-numerical, in-depth data to understand people's opinions and experiences [39]. Such an approach enables the researcher to gain insight into participants' perspectives and lived experiences. The research is guided by interpretivist principles, aiming to understand how Indonesian remote employees experience and navigate communication across cultures. Accordingly, the methodology is designed to answer the research questions through rich, contextual data. This chapter details the qualitative research design, participant selection, data collection procedures, ethical safeguards, data analysis techniques, strategies for ensuring trustworthiness, and methodological limitations.

3.1 Research Design

This study utilizes an exploratory qualitative design with an inductive approach and aligning with the goal of examining participants' lived experiences in depth. Qualitative methods allow researchers to explore concepts and experiences in detail [39], making them best for uncovering nuanced communication challenges. The study does not begin with a hypothesis and rather builds understanding from the ground up with inductive reasoning based on participants' narratives.

Thematic analysis was chosen as the primary analysis strategy for this study. Thematic analysis is a flexible qualitative method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or "themes" within data [40] and the [40] framework for thematic analysis was followed. This method allows for organizing and describing the data in rich detail without being bound to a pre-existing theory [41]. In other words, thematic analysis offered a straightforward way to discern common themes in participants' stories of cross-cultural communication, providing a descriptive account of their experiences rather than aiming to develop a new theory Given the exploratory nature of the research questions, this approach was ideal for illuminating recurring communication issues and adaptation strategies reported by the remote workers.

3.2 Participant Selection

The population of interest for this study is Indonesian professionals working remotely for foreign companies. A purposive sampling strategy was used to deliberately recruit individuals who could provide relevant information on the phenomenon. Inclusion criteria were defined to ensure participants have sufficient experience with cross-cultural remote work. The criteria for participation were:

- Indonesian remote worker – the participant is an Indonesian national employed in a remote capacity.
- Minimum 3 months tenure – the participant has at least three months of experience working remotely in the current foreign company (to ensure they have faced real workplace communication scenarios).
- Employed by a foreign company – the participant's employer is a company headquartered outside Indonesia that hires the participant as a remote employee.

For clarity, a "foreign company" in this context refers to an organization based overseas or outside Indonesia but can have a headquarters in Indonesia, and that engages Indonesian professionals to work remotely as part of its workforce. All participants were employees not employers, focusing the study on the employee perspective. Only the employees' viewpoints were included because they were more accessible and because the research focus is on the lived experience of Indonesian workers navigating cross-cultural communication. This deliberate choice meant that managerial or foreign colleagues' perspectives were not directly captured and was most focused on delving deeply into the employees' personal experiences of challenges and adaptation without broadening the scope to multiple stakeholder groups.

A total of 15 participants took part in the study. This sample size was determined based on practical considerations and the point of data saturation. Binus University requires students, who do a qualitative research, to interview at least 12 participants to reach saturation. Each participant met all inclusion criteria, confirming they had relevant experience with cross-cultural remote work. The participants were diverse in terms of their professional fields, providing a range of contexts for cross-cultural interaction. However, all shared the common context of being Indonesians embedded in a foreign organizational culture.

Selection of participants was conducted via professional networking, or professional working platforms, primarily LinkedIn. An announcement or direct outreach message was used to invite Indonesian remote workers fitting the criteria to participate in the study. Interested individuals underwent a brief screening to verify that they met the inclusion criteria, for example, confirming their employer's location outside Indonesia and their duration of employment. This purposive selection method leveraged LinkedIn's search and networking capabilities to identify suitable candidates. Where necessary, a snowball technique was also employed, with initial participants being asked if they could refer colleagues or acquaintances who matched the study criteria. Through this combination of LinkedIn outreach and referrals, the target sample of 15 qualified participants was obtained. All participants volunteered for the study and provided informed consent.

3.3 Participant Profile

A total of 15 participants were involved in this study, all of whom worked in multicultural remote teams. They were selected through purposive sampling based on specific criteria and each had at least 3 months of experience working remotely with colleagues from different cultural backgrounds. This ensured that every participant had first-hand insights into the challenges and dynamics of communicating in a remote, multicultural work environment.

The participants ranged in age from 20 - 45 and included both men and women, reflecting a diverse mix of perspectives. All participants were proficient in English, although for many it was a second language. They were drawn from organizations in industries such as information technology, finance, and consulting, where global virtual teamwork is common. By capturing a variety of roles, cultural backgrounds, and professional experiences, the participant profile provided a rich foundation for examining the research questions. The diversity of this group is important because it strengthens the relevance of the findings and the themes identified are not tied to one specific company or culture but resonate across different cultural combinations and remote team setups.

3.4 Data Collection

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with each participant. Specifically, question themes were drawn from Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Trompenaars' cultural values, Hall's high-context vs. low-context communication theory, the concept of Cultural Intelligence (CQ), and Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT).

Each interview was conducted in English. Conducting the interviews in English avoided the need for translation and back-translation, and it allowed participants to express the exact terms and phrases they use in their work communications. The interviews were carried out one-on-one in a virtual setting via zoom call, given that the participants were geographically dispersed.

3.5 Ethical Consideration

This study was conducted in accordance with standard ethical guidelines for research involving

human participants. Before each interview, participants underwent an informed consent process. They were provided with a plain-language information sheet explaining the purpose of the research, what participation entailed, and any potential risks or benefits. Key points such as the voluntary nature of participation, the right to withdraw at any time, and assurances of confidentiality were explained. Participants then gave their consent verbally during the interview recording.

3.6 Data Analysis

The collected interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the established procedure outlined by [54]. Thematic analysis is a method for systematically identifying and interpreting patterns within qualitative data. In practice, this involved several iterative stages of coding and theme development, conducted both manually and with the aid of qualitative analysis software "NVivo".

Each transcript was coded in its entirety, resulting in a set of initial codes for every meaningful unit of text. Codes were sorted and grouped on NVivo and also visually to see how they could form subcategories and themes. In this stage, an initial thematic map was created, outlining possible themes and sub-themes emerging from the data.

By using NVivo, the analysis process was also well-documented. NVivo's project logs and memo functions served as an audit trail, recording the evolution of codes and themes. The result of this process is a set of key themes that illuminate the cross-cultural communication challenges and adaptations of Indonesian remote workers.

3.7 Trustworthiness and Validity

In qualitative research, it is crucial to establish the trustworthiness of the study, the equivalent of validity and reliability in quantitative research [42]. This study implemented several strategies to ensure the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings. This member checking process allowed participants to verify that their intended meaning was correctly captured, thereby increasing the truthfulness of the data [43]. Furthermore, while the study primarily relies on interview data, the credibility of interpretations was strengthened by comparing findings with existing literature and theory, ensuring that the identified themes resonated with known constructs in cross-cultural communication research.

Additionally, the use of NVivo software contributed to dependability by systematically organizing the data and coding. The NVivo project file contains the evidence of all codes and theme development, which supports the stability of findings over the course of analysis.

3.8 Finding and Discussion

This section presents the qualitative findings from the interviews, organized by the four major themes that emerged during data analysis. Each theme represents a significant aspect of the participants' experiences with cross-cultural communication in remote work. Direct quotes from participants are included to illustrate and substantiate each theme, providing authentic examples in their own words. The themes and sub-themes are as follows:

Theme 1:
Communication Challenges in Remote Cross-Cultural Work
1. *Cross-Cultural Communication Differences* – differences in language and communication style across cultures that create misunderstandings.
2 Remote Work Challenges –
are issues inherent to remote collaboration (like time zones and lack of face-to-face contact) that compound communication difficulties.

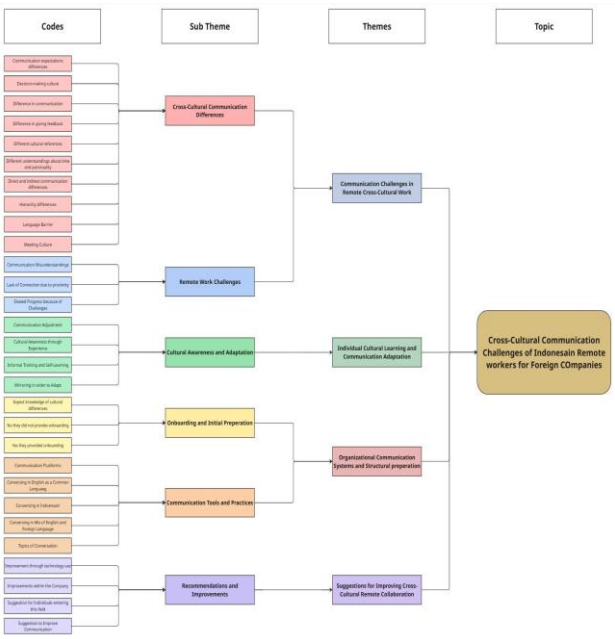
Theme 2:
Individual Cultural Learning and Communication Adaptation – how individuals learn and adapt their communication to bridge cultural gaps.

Theme 3:
Organizational Communication Systems and Structural Preparation
1. Onboarding and Initial Preparation
The role of organizational onboarding and training in preparing staff for cross-cultural remote communication.
2 Communication Tools and Practices
The tools, platforms, and communication norms established by organizations to support remote cross-cultural teams.

Theme 4:
Suggestions for Improving Cross-Cultural Remote Collaboration participants' recommendations for practices or initiatives to enhance communication and teamwork across cultures in a virtual context. Each theme is detailed below with supporting

evidence from participant interviews. These findings highlight both the challenges faced and the strategies used or proposed to improve communication in remote cross-cultural settings.

Figure : Thematic graph of the codes



Theme 1: Communication Challenges in Remote Cross-Cultural Work

Two sub-themes emerged within these challenges: differences in cross-cultural communication styles and challenges inherent to the remote work format that exacerbate communication issues, for example, time zone differences, lack of non-verbal cues. Participants often found that what might be a minor miscommunication in a co-located or same-culture team could become a more serious obstacle in a remote, multicultural team.

1. Cross Cultural Communication Differences

All participants noted that cultural differences in communication styles led to misunderstandings at some point. This sub-theme refers to the variety of ways people from different cultural backgrounds express themselves, interpret messages, and expect communication to occur. Common issues included variations in directness or indirectness, formality, and the use of language, especially when team members were non-native speakers of the working language. Several participants described scenarios where the same message was interpreted differently because of cultural context:

> *"Sometimes I felt a colleague was being too blunt in emails, but I realized it was just their culture's direct style and not meant to offend,"* explained one participant (Participant 5).

In this example, what initially seemed like rudeness was actually a cultural norm for direct communication. Conversely, participants from more direct cultures sometimes misread the subtler cues of more indirect communicators. One team member might say *"I will try to get to it"* and a colleague from another culture might interpret that as an agreement to definitely complete the task, whereas it was actually a polite way to signal uncertainty. Such indirect phrasing led to confusion about commitments in the project.

Language differences also posed challenges. Even though English was the official language for all teams in this study, not everyone shared the same level of fluency or comfort. Participants reported needing to clarify meanings of words or phrases and being careful with idioms or slang. A participant noted the following:

> *"We had misunderstandings simply because of language nuances or a joke or idiom would fall flat or cause confusion, so I often had to rephrase emails to make sure everyone understood,"* (Participant 2).

This quote illustrates how seemingly simple communication could become complicated in a cross-cultural context. What one person intended as humor or a casual comment might be taken literally or not understood at all by someone from a different background. Participants came to recognize that words carry different connotations across cultures. For example, the word "yes" might not always mean full agreement in some cultures. It could just mean acknowledgement. Such differences in interpretation and expectations often required follow-up conversations to ensure everyone was on the same page.

In summary, cross-cultural communication differences, whether in directness vs. indirectness, language use, or norms of politeness and formality, were a prevalent source of challenge. Participants learned that without conscious effort to understand these differences, team members could easily misinterpret each other's intentions. These findings highlight the importance of cultural awareness, when team members recognized these differences, they could adjust their expectations and avoid taking misunderstandings personally. However, when unaddressed, these differences frequently led to

frustration, delays, or even mild conflicts as people struggled to communicate effectively.

Theme 2:
Individual Cultural Learning and Communication Adaptation

The second theme highlights positive strategies: how individuals proactively learn and adapt to improve cross-cultural communication in their remote teams. Despite the challenges described in Theme 1, participants also shared many examples of personal growth and initiative. They recognized that effective collaboration required mutual understanding and flexibility, and thus they engaged in various forms of cultural learning and adjusted their own communication styles as needed. This theme did not have formal sub-categories, as the ideas tended to overlap around the general concept of personal adaptation. Key aspects include participants educating themselves about other cultures, being mindful and changing their communication approach, and learning from experience to avoid repeating miscommunications.

Several participants described deliberately educating themselves about colleagues' cultures. This ranged from informal efforts, like paying attention to colleagues' stories or asking polite questions about customs, to more structured ones, such as reading articles about a particular culture or even using the company's resources (if available) on cultural awareness. One participant shared a particularly illustrative story:

> *"After a few early misunderstandings, I started actively learning about my teammates' cultures. I'd ask them about their holidays and traditions, and I even learned a few greetings in their language. It helped build a personal connection and cleared up some miscommunications,"* (Participant 6).

By showing interest and respect for their colleagues' backgrounds, participants like the one above found teammates became more open in explaining their viewpoints. This not only prevented some misunderstandings but also fostered goodwill, colleagues appreciated the effort, which in turn improved overall communication. Another participant mentioned keeping a simple "cheat sheet" of culturally appropriate phrases or things to avoid, which they compiled after embarrassing moments like using an idiom that didn't translate well.

Adaptation also meant modifying one's own communication style. Participants realized that effective communication is a two-way street: it was not only about others accommodating them, but also about them adjusting to others. For example, a team member from the U.S. who was naturally very direct in giving feedback learned to soften her approach when working with Asian colleagues, prefacing criticism with more positive comments to align with a more indirect communication norm. She noted that this change avoided hurt feelings that had occurred earlier in the project. Conversely, a participant from a high-context (indirect) culture practiced being more explicit and transparent in communicating with Western teammates, to avoid leaving them uncertain about his meaning.

Participants also talked about being patient and asking for clarification more often. Rather than assuming silence meant agreement, they learned to double-check:

> *"I've started explicitly asking, 'Did that make sense?' or 'Should we clarify further?' at the end of discussions,"* said one interviewee.

This habit allowed any confusion to be addressed immediately, rather than letting misunderstandings linger. Additionally, several individuals mentioned adapting the language they use for instance, avoiding local slang, idiomatic expressions, or complex jargon that might not be widely understood. One participant (Participant 2) explained that after realizing some colleagues struggled with idioms,

> *"I switched to clear**,** simple English and I pause more during meetings to give others time to voice questions."*

These adjustments made communication more inclusive and ensured everyone could follow along.

In summary, Theme 2 shows that participants were not passive victims of cross-cultural communication problems; many became active agents in bridging the gap. Through self-directed cultural learning and conscious communication adjustments, they improved their team's communication climate. This individual adaptability often developed over time, sometimes catalyzed by an early mistake or misunderstanding that served as a learning experience. The findings under this theme illustrate the importance of personal initiative and cultural intelligence: team members who invest effort in understanding each other and flexing their communication style were able to

collaborate more smoothly despite cultural differences and physical distance.

Theme 3:
Organizational Communication Systems and Structural Preparation

Beyond personal efforts, participants highlighted the role of the organization's systems and structures in shaping cross-cultural remote communication. Theme 3 captures how company-level practices especially in onboarding new remote employees and in the communication tools/norms provided can either support or hinder effective collaboration. The experiences shared by participants show that while individual goodwill is important (Theme 2), the organizational context sets the stage for how easy or difficult it is to communicate across cultures. Two clear sub-themes emerged here: (a) Onboarding and Initial Preparation for cross-cultural remote work, and (b) Communication Tools and Practices instituted by the organization.

3.9 Onboarding and Initial Preparation

This sub-theme refers to the training or orientation, if any, that participants received from their organization to prepare them for working in a cross-cultural, virtual team. Participants' experiences varied: a few reported having some form of cross-cultural training or briefing when they joined their teams, while others said they received little to no preparation on this front. Almost all participants agreed that onboarding is a crucial moment to set expectations and teach skills for effective remote cross-cultural communication and that in their cases, more could have been done.

Those who did not receive much cultural onboarding often felt the gap once they started working. One participant noted:

> *"My orientation was all about IT setup and HR policies; there was nothing about cultural differences. I basically learned by trial and error once I started collaborating with our overseas offices,"* (Participant 8).

This quote illustrates a common scenario where companies focus on technical onboarding but overlook preparing employees for the human communication aspect of global teamwork. Participant 8's "trial and error" comment highlights that the absence of guidance can lead to initial mistakes that might have been avoidable. Several participants echoed that sentiment, expressing that early guidance on cultural norms of key regions they work with would have been very helpful.

On the other hand, a few participants did mention positive examples of onboarding. One interviewee, Participant 9, shared that their company's HR department had organized a short workshop on cross-cultural communication as part of the hiring process. In that workshop, they discussed common cultural differences and provided tips for remote collaboration, such as being mindful of time zones and holidays, or strategies like rotating meeting times.

> *"It was brief but effective it made me aware from day one that I should expect differences and be patient,"* Participant 9 recalled.

This proactive approach by the company made new hires more confident and culturally aware when they started interacting with the team. Participants universally felt that organizational preparation is important. Many suggested that even if a full training isn't feasible, companies should provide resources or a guidebook on cross-cultural teamwork for newcomers. In the absence of formal training, some participants relied on mentors or buddy systems informally. For instance, one person was paired with a more experienced colleague who could answer questions about interacting with the broader global team. That kind of support helped them adjust faster.

In essence, the findings in this sub-theme show that onboarding sets the tone. When companies invest in cross-cultural preparation during onboarding, participants felt more equipped and made fewer cultural missteps. When companies neglected this area, employees eventually learned on their own , but not without some avoidable misunderstandings. This underscores a clear opportunity at the organizational level to improve cross-cultural communication by starting with good preparation.

3.10 Communication Tools and Practices

The second sub-theme under organizational support involves the tools and communication practices that organizations put in place for their remote teams. All participants had access to a variety of digital tools to facilitate communication, such as email, instant messaging apps, and video conferencing platforms. However, the effectiveness of these tools depended on how they were used and if there were established team norms around them. Participants discussed both the benefits of having

robust communication technology and the challenges when practices were not consistent or well-thought-out.

On the positive side, participants generally agreed that having multiple communication channels available was crucial. Real-time chat allowed quick check-ins across continents, and video calls helped put faces to names and convey tone better than text. One participant described their team's toolkit:

> *"We use Slack for our daily quick chats and Zoom for weekly meetings. Having those tools definitely makes it easier to connect quickly across time zones,"* (Participant 4).

In this participant's experience, the organization's adoption of modern collaboration tools enabled faster and more direct communication than email alone. Several participants noted that the informality of chat made people more inclined to ask small questions or clarify things immediately, which can prevent miscommunications from festering. Video meetings, while sometimes hard to schedule across time zones, were valued for complex discussions because seeing each other's expressions added context that text could not provide.

However, participants also pointed out challenges and inconsistencies in communication practices. One major issue was lack of clear guidelines on which channel to use for what purpose. For example, in some teams, everything was done over email, leading to long threads and slow responses, even when an instant message could have resolved an issue in minutes. In other teams, important decisions might be discussed in a quick chat but not documented, leaving out those who were offline. The absence of a structured approach sometimes led to confusion or missed information. As one participant, Participant 2, explained,

> *"We hadn't set any rules on communication. Some people would message me on Skype, others on WhatsApp, and official stuff on email – it was all over the place. I occasionally missed updates because I wasn't actively monitoring one of those apps."*

This quote underlines how multiple tools, without agreed-upon usage norms, can backfire.

Language and communication style in tools was another aspect. Even though English was the working language, participants mentioned their organizations often declared an "official language" policy but didn't necessarily support those who were less fluent. In practice, this meant teammates had to be considerate and often simplify language or repeat information, as mentioned earlier in Theme 1. One participant noted that their team eventually adopted a practice of summarizing any long meeting or email in bullet points at the end as a way to ensure clarity for non-native speakers. This kind of practice was *informally* developed by the team; it was not an organizational mandate, but participants felt it could be a useful standard for all teams if management encouraged it.

Lastly, participants touched on how the organization's culture of communication influenced them. If managers and leaders modeled open, frequent communication, the team tended to follow suit and communicate more, which helped bridge cultural divides. In contrast, in companies where leadership was mostly silent or only communicated formally, remote team members felt less comfortable reaching out, exacerbating the sense of distance. A few participants highlighted the benefit of having regular all-hands video meetings or informal virtual coffee chats instituted by their organization, saying these practices humanized colleagues and made it easier to communicate later for work tasks.

In summary, Theme 3 shows that organizations play a pivotal role by providing the right tools and establishing clear communication practices. Tools alone are not enough it's how teams are guided to use them that matters. Effective structural support can greatly reduce the friction in cross-cultural remote collaboration. Participants' experiences suggest that when organizations are deliberate about these systems, teams have an easier time overcoming the challenges noted in Theme 1. When such support is lacking, much depends on individual efforts and luck, and miscommunications become more likely.

Theme 4:
Suggestions for Improving Cross-Cultural Remote Collaboration

The fourth and final theme aggregates the suggestions and recommendations participants offered for enhancing communication and collaboration in cross-cultural remote teams. These suggestions stem from their first-hand experiences of what worked, what didn't, and what they wished had been in place. Many of the recommendations directly address the challenges outlined in Theme 1 and complement the adaptive strategies in Theme 2 and the structural insights in Theme 3. Notably, participants' suggestions often involved organizational initiatives and team practices that

could be implemented to foster better understanding and efficiency.

One of the suggestions was to implement Formal Cross-Cultural Training. Almost all participants recommended some form of cultural sensitivity or communication training as part of employee development. They believed that workshops or training sessions during onboarding would help team members understand each other's cultures and communication styles better. This could include training on basic cultural dimensions, common communication pitfalls, and how to handle misunderstandings constructively.

"Having a short guide for newcoming interns on communication's do's and don'ts would be quite helpful. Also, regular check-ins from the supervisor to share concerns or clarify tasks would make things easier for new interns."

Establish Clear Communication Guidelines, as Participants suggested that organizations develop clear guidelines or best practices for remote communication. For example, a guide could outline which channels to use for urgent vs. non-urgent discussions, expected response times for emails/messages, and norms like "always clarify assumptions" or "don't hesitate to ask if something is unclear." By setting a standard, teams would have a reference for resolving ambiguity. Some even proposed having a team agreement at the start of a project to discuss and set these norms collectively.

"I like to see more of cultural onboarding with all my team members. Just so not just like new hires from outside of the US or because like sometimes the burden of adapting with them like falls mostly on non-Western employees."

While tools are available, participants recommended making better use of technology features to bridge gaps. This includes encouraging more frequent use of video calls ,to see expressions and build rapport, and using tools like shared documents or collaboration platforms to keep everyone in the loop. One suggestion was to use real-time translation or subtitle features in meetings if language is a big barrier acknowledging that these tools are not perfect, but can help. Another idea was scheduling messages so that colleagues don't get pinged at odd hours to respect time zone differences.

"I would say we would, because like I said, there are I think there was some certain tools online right now that that mimics the Google Meet, it allows you to have the avatar of you in that, you know, virtual space so that they see, OK, you're in your table. And then if you're not in your table, then they would then they would know that, oh, OK, now for this not in the table, then maybe let's try have a chat."

To improve cross-cultural understanding, participants highlighted the importance of informal bonding. Suggestions included arranging virtual team-building activities, cross-cultural sharing sessions , and virtual "water cooler" chat rooms for casual conversation. Some participants felt that if the company or team lead initiated a culture of occasional non-work interactions, it would create a more comfortable environment where people are less afraid to communicate. In cases where possible, periodic in-person meet-ups or exchanges were considered extremely valuable even an annual meetup could solidify relationships and improve subsequent remote communication.

"I guess more of like the informal check-ins or virtual coffee chat to build rapport and reduce misunderstandings from only past interaction."

Improve Scheduling and Time Zone Management: Given the struggles with time zones, participants suggested more equitable scheduling practices. For instance, rotating meeting times so the same people are not always inconvenienced, or even maintaining a shared calendar that clearly shows everyone's local time to avoid confusion. A couple of participants advocated for asynchronous communication tools like discussion boards or recorded video messages for topics that don't require live meetings, allowing people to respond on their own schedule while still conveying tone through video when needed.

"I think having even more opportunities for informal check-ins or team-building activities could help strengthen our connections. Also, maybe a bit more training or resources on cross-cultural communication could be helpful"

These suggestions reflect a combination of organizational policy changes and team-level agreements. Participants essentially call for a more proactive and structured approach to cross-cultural remote collaboration: training people, setting them

up with guidelines and tools, and encouraging an environment of openness and continuous learning. They expressed optimism that with such measures in place, many of the difficulties they faced could be reduced for future teams. Notably, these recommendations also align with best practices advocated by experts in global teamwork emphasizing training, clarity, use of technology, and team cohesion.

4 Discussion of Key Findings

Research on multicultural virtual teams notes that such conflicts often stem from differences in individualism–collectivism and power distance. In high power‐distance, collectivist societies like Indonesia, communication tends to be cautious and indirect; junior staff defer to authority and avoid public disagreement. Western companies, by contrast, usually operate with lower power distance and higher individualism, encouraging staff to speak up and prioritize efficiency.

Participants also highlighted differences in time orientation and task urgency. In Hofstede's framework, cultures high in uncertainty avoidance emphasize planning, punctuality and detailed instructions, whereas low uncertainty‐avoidance cultures tolerate ambiguity. Several interviewees recounted feeling pressured when foreign colleagues demanded rapid responses; they found it challenging to adapt their slower, relationship‐driven workflow to fast‐paced expectations. Studies on remote work confirm that digital tools amplify these tensions: the absence of informal conversation channels means that task requests often come without nuance, increasing the likelihood of miscommunication. Moreover, differences in emotional expression can lead to misinterpretation. Some cultures view outward enthusiasm as unprofessional, while others see it as engagement, this mismatch can exacerbate confusion.

Hall's high- versus low‐context theory further explains why Indonesian remote workers felt frustrated. High‐context cultures rely on shared understanding, implicit cues and relationship history; low‐context cultures emphasize explicit, direct messages. Digital platforms strip away tone, gesture and environment, forcing high‐context communicators into a medium that favors low‐context norms [55]. As a result, Indonesian employees may perceive written directives as abrupt and struggle to infer subtext. Without face‐to‐face interaction, they cannot "read the room" or glean intent from body language. This finding echoes broader literature on virtual teams, which stresses that technology alone cannot recreate the richness of in‐person communication; misalignment between cultural communication preferences and media richness can harm collaboration. Understanding this helps explain why some participants avoided raising concerns: they lacked the non‐verbal reassurance and gradual rapport‐building characteristic of high‐context exchanges.

To function effectively in such environments, Cultural Intelligence (CQ) and adaptive leadership become critical. CQ refers to an individual's capability to understand and adapt to cultural differences; research shows that high motivational CQ improves social integration and team performance in global virtual teams [33]. When interactions are purely task‐oriented and scheduled, employees struggle to connect on a personal level. High‐intensity telecommuting correlates with decreased job satisfaction and feelings of loneliness. These experiences show that even when teams maintain frequent meetings, the quality of interaction, specifically, opportunities for informal bonding, matters greatly for employee well‐being.

Hall's high/low context theory again offers insight: in high‐context cultures, relationships and trust are built through shared experiences and non‐verbal cues. Digital platforms provide fewer opportunities for this type of engagement, leading to weaker "social presence." Social Presence Theory, originating from Short, Williams and Christie and later refined, defines social presence as the degree to which communicators perceive each other as real people in mediated interactions [56]. Recent research emphasises that social presence is a psychological phenomenon shaped by sociability (the medium's capacity to enable social interaction) and social space (the group's norms and relationships). Our participants' accounts support these notions: they emphasised that text messaging and structured meetings do not convey warmth or spontaneity, making colleagues feel distant. Without the "social space" created by casual conversations, the medium's sociability cannot compensate. This explains why some interviewees suggested scheduling virtual coffee chats to foster familiarity; they intuitively sought to enhance social presence.

Isolation also intersects with Social Identity Theory. In multicultural virtual teams, national and cultural identities become salient when people have limited interpersonal cues. Participants sometimes felt like outsiders during discussions when humour, idioms or work norms reflected a foreign majority. According to Social Identity Theory, individuals categorise themselves and others into groups, deriving self‐esteem from in‐group membership

and sometimes exhibiting bias against out‐groups. When Indonesian employees perceive their foreign colleagues as an out‐group, they may hesitate to participate or internalise negative feedback more deeply. Conversely, foreign managers may inadvertently form cliques with culturally similar peers. This dynamic can exacerbate feelings of exclusion and further erode social presence. It underscores the need for leaders to cultivate a shared team identity that transcends national lines, emphasizing common goals and mutual respect.

Addressing isolation requires deliberate social‐presence enhancement and inclusive practices. The literature recommends using richer media (video calls over emails), creating informal virtual spaces and explicitly recognizing personal milestones. Managers should schedule regular check‐ins with no set agenda, encourage non‐work discussions and acknowledge cultural holidays. Additionally, investing in cultural intelligence training can help team members interpret indirect cues and appreciate different communication norms. By combining technological solutions (e.g., consistent video use) with socio‐cultural interventions (e.g., mentorship programmes and cross‐cultural workshops), organisations can reduce feelings of isolation. Building social presence and a cohesive group identity supports not only employee well‐being but also collaboration and innovation in remote, multicultural teams.

5 Conclusion

The findings confirmed that Indonesian professionals working in global virtual teams encounter a complex interplay of cultural differences, from communication styles and language nuances to hierarchy and social norms, which can hinder mutual understanding if left unaddressed. At the same time, the research highlighted the capacity for adaptation and learning, as individuals developed strategies to bridge cultural gaps and as teams gradually adjusted practices to become more inclusive. By doing so, the study not only answered what challenges occur, but also why they matter and how they can be mitigated. The following part describes how the findings answer the objectives outlined in Chapter 1:

1. Cross-cultural communication challenges experienced by Indonesian remote workers.
It is evident that cross-cultural communication competence is a critical pillar for the success of remote working arrangements in an increasingly globalized workforce. For Indonesian remote workers, mastering this competence involves both acquiring knowledge of other cultures and advocating for one's own cultural perspective within international teams. The overarching reflection from this study is that cultural difference is not a trivial or peripheral aspect of remote work; it is central to how remote teams function.

2. The strategies employed by Indonesian remote workers to overcome or navigate these challenges.
The cultural differences must be understood and respected in the communication between team members to achieve a richer collaboration and innovation. When they are ignored, even the best technical infrastructure and individual talents can fail to produce desired outcomes due to friction and misunderstanding.

3. How cultural communication norms affect communication between Indonesian workers and foreign colleagues or managers.
In the communication process the text messaging and structured meetings do not convey warmth or spontaneity, they make colleagues feel distant. Without the "social space" created by casual conversations, the medium's sociability cannot compensate. This explains why some interviewees schedule virtual coffee chats to foster familiarity and enhance social presence.

4. Improving cross-cultural communication in remote team settings involving Indonesian professionals.
It is evident that cross-cultural communication competence is a critical pillar for the success of remote working arrangements in an increasingly globalized workforce. For Indonesian remote workers, mastering this competence involves both acquiring knowledge of other cultures and advocating for one's own cultural perspective within international teams. By understanding and addressing cross-cultural communication challenges, Indonesian remote workers can take an essential step toward more harmonious global collaboration and unlock the full potential of a connected, diverse workforce.

6 Suggestions of Future Research

Future studies should recruit participants from a wider range of backgrounds, including rural workers, blue‐collar employees and those with varying levels of education. Including a more diverse sample would reveal whether the challenges and strategies identified here are shared across contexts or specific to urban workers. Researchers might also explore gender, age and socioeconomic differences to

determine how these factors shape remote work experiences.
Involving quantitative data and analysis may enrich the study and give a broader perspective to the reader.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A - Interview Guide / Question List

Background & Context

1. Can you describe your current position and your daily responsibilities as a remote worker?
2. How long have you been working remotely for a foreign company, and what is the country of origin?
3. How often do you communicate with your foreign colleagues or supervisors?
4. What language(s) do you usually use in work-related communication?

Perceived Cultural Differences

5. What cultural differences have you noticed between your working style and that of your foreign colleagues?
6. How would you compare your current company's expectations for communication to those of a typical Indonesian workplace?
7. Have you experienced differences in how direct or indirect your colleagues are when giving feedback or instructions?
8. Are there any moments where you felt your message was misunderstood due to cultural or language differences?
9. How do your colleagues typically handle conflict or disagreement? Is that different from how you'd expect it in Indonesia?

Workplace Communication Patterns

10. How is feedback usually delivered in your team? Is it formal/informal, direct/indirect?
11. Do you ever feel uncomfortable expressing disagreement or asking for clarification?
12. Have you noticed differences in how meetings are run or how decisions are made?
13. Do you feel that hierarchy or status influences who gets to speak or be heard in meetings?

Adaptation and Communication Strategies

14. Have you had to change your communication style to work effectively with your team? If so, how?
15. Do you ever find yourself adjusting your tone, body language, or message depending on who you're speaking with?
16. Can you describe a time when you changed how you communicated in order to avoid conflict or misunderstanding?
17. Are there situations where you feel the need to "mirror" or imitate the way your colleagues speak or behave?
18. What aspects of cross-cultural communication do you feel you've gotten better at with experience?

Support Systems and Tools

19. Does your company provide training or onboarding about working in a cross-cultural or remote environment?
20. Have your managers or team leaders helped you navigate communication challenges?
21. What digital platforms do you use for communication (e.g., Slack, Zoom)? Do these help or make things harder in cross-cultural communication?

Impact and Reflection

22. How do communication challenges affect your performance or productivity?
23. Have cultural misunderstandings ever affected your motivation or engagement?
24. What improvements would you like to see to make communication smoother in your team?
25. If you were training someone new for your position, what advice would you give them about communication in a cross-cultural team?

Appendix B - Participant Profiles Table

PROFILE OF INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS					
Initials	**Job Role**	**Industry**	**Company Origin**	**Experience (Months)**	**Experience Type**
A.W.	Digital Marketer	Real Estate	Singapore	8	Past
C.A.	Business Development Intern	Consulting	Singapore	3	Past
C.S.	Marketing and Communications Intern	Advertising	Australia	6	Past
D.P.	Financial Analyst	Consulting	Singapore	7	Current
J.S.	Technical Virtual Assistant	Digital Marketing	Denmark	4	Past
N.C.	Inventory Management Staff	Logistics	UK	12	Current
R.P.	Financial Analyst	Consulting	Singapore	12	Current
S.G.	Digital Marketer	Advertising	USA	24	Current
S.M.	UX Designer	Tech	USA	30	Current
T.D.	Consultant for Foreign Clients	Consulting	Netherlands	12	Current
T.J	Marketing Intern	Advertising	Korea	3	Current
T.N.	Digital Marketing Specialist	Tech	Netherlands	14	Past