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Cross-Cultural Misalignment in Global Virtual Teams: How Low-Power Distance Temporary Employees Interpret High-Power Distance Virtual Leadership

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Iscte – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

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BUSINESS SCHOOL

Department of Marketing, Operations and General Management

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Resumo

A transição para estruturas organizacionais remotas intensificou os desafios da colaboração em Equipas Virtuais Globais (GVTs). Este estudo investiga a quebra operacional que ocorre quando trabalhadores de culturas de Baixa Distância ao Poder/Baixo Contexto são integrados em estruturas de liderança de Alta Distância ao Poder/Alto Contexto. Através de uma abordagem qualitativa interpretativista, foram realizadas entrevistas semiestruturadas a oito profissionais para explorar como a distância digital amplifica o atrito cultural e corrói a "Confiança Rápida" (*Swift Trust*).

Os resultados identificam um "Vácuo de Informação" como catalisador de falhas operacionais. A ausência de contexto físico leva à má interpretação do silêncio da gestão, desencadeando ansiedade profissional. A evidência revela que estes trabalhadores adotam uma mentalidade de redundância, recorrendo à alternância adaptativa de tarefas como estratégia racional de mitigação de riscos, em vez do contraproducente "Cyberloafing". Este ciclo de distanciamento resulta numa perda mensurável de velocidade, caracterizada por atrasos e retrabalho técnico.

Para mitigar estes desafios, propõe-se o quadro de "Confiança com Barreiras de Segurança" (*Guardrail Trust*). Defende-se uma transição do controlo passivo de alto contexto para uma comunicação proativa dos parâmetros do projeto. Ao estabelecer referências operacionais claras desde o início, os líderes podem colmatar a lacuna contextual, restaurar a agência da gestão e garantir a sustentabilidade do desempenho no espaço de trabalho virtual moderno.

Palavras-chave: Equipas Virtuais Globais; Comunicação Intercultural; Alternância Adaptativa de Tarefas; Confiança com Barreiras de Segurança; Liderança Virtual

Códigos de Classificação do Sistema JEL: M12; M16

Abstract

The transition to global remote organizational structures has intensified the challenges of cross-cultural communication and collaboration in Global Virtual Teams (GVTs). This study investigates the operational breakdown occurring when temporary employees from Low-Power Distance (PDI)/Low-Context cultures are integrated into High-PDI/High-Context virtual leadership structures.

Using an interpretivist philosophy, this qualitative study utilizes semi-structured interviews with eight remote professionals to explore how digital distance obscures non-verbal cues, amplifies cultural friction and erodes "Swift Trust". The findings identify an "Information Vacuum" as a primary catalyst for operational failure. In the absence of a physical context, managerial silence and information asymmetry is systematically miscoded by remote subordinates, triggering cognitive appraisals of power and professional anxiety. Empirical evidence reveals that these employees adopt a mindset of managerial redundancy and engage in adaptive task-switching as a rational, work-related risk-mitigation strategy, rather than the counterproductive "Cyberloafing" traditionally cited in literature. This cycle of miscoding and withdrawal results in a measurable loss in task velocity, characterized by systematic market lag, technical rework, and the asymmetrical distribution of blame.

To address these challenges, this study proposes a framework of "Guardrail Trust." Advocating for a shift in the executive node from a passive, high-context gatekeeping, to a proactive, explicit communication of project parameters. By establishing clear operational benchmarks and communication paths at the project outset, leaders can bridge the contextual gap, restore managerial agency, and ensure performance sustainability in the modern virtual workspace.

Keywords: Global Virtual Teams; Cross Cultural Communication; Adaptive Task-Switching; Guardrail Trust; Virtual Leadership

JEL Classification: M12; M16

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

The rapid and widespread adoption of remote and virtual work environments has fundamentally reshaped the modern organizational landscape. While remote workflows have historical precedents, the global spread of COVID-19 in 2020 and subsequent quarantine regulations imposed by governments significantly accelerated and normalized this shift across multinational organizations, gaining significant popularity among employees (Wienclaw, 2024). Empirical evidence suggests that during this period, the transition from traditional in person work to remote work significantly altered team communication patterns and dynamic (Maurer et al., 2022). Post-pandemic, these temporary remote solutions have evolved into permanent organizational structures for their utility in enhancing employee productivity, work-life balance, and connectivity (Yang, 2024). Previous studies using Hofstede's (2011) cultural frameworks have typically focused on traditional, in-person environments, creating a gap within the modern workplace where teams may never meet in a face-to-face capacity (Taras et al., 2011).

Multinational organizations increasingly rely on geographically dispersed and culturally diverse groups assembled to meet deadlines and complete tasks in time-constrained environments (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999; Barrett, 2025). According to a 2024 white paper from the World Economic Forum, an estimated 73 million people work jobs that are considered fully digital and global, and this number is expected to grow by 25%, to a total of 92 million jobs (World Economic Forum, 2024). These jobs range from high-income roles such as software developers and executive suite roles to mid-level and lower-wages jobs like graphic designers and customer service, allowing firms to leverage international talent pools across borders to maintain a competitive advantage (Contreras et al., 2020).

However, the integration of a globally diverse team introduces divergent cultural experiences, work expectations, and communication styles which complicate international business operations. Virtual settings introduce unique problems, which set them apart from traditional, in-person working environments, specifically: reduced nonverbal cues, increased reliance on asynchronous communication, and the physically distributed nature of the virtual settings (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999; Gibson & Gibbs, 2006). Due to these modern working conditions, employees from cultures with low Power Distance Index (PDI), which favor egalitarianism and open dialogue, increasingly collaborate with teams from high-PDI cultures, who expect formalized hierarchy and top-down communication (Yahiaoui et al., 2021; Almegren, 2025; Abbate et al., 2025). In these settings, trust acts as a vital substitute for traditional coordination, yet the lack of shared history makes this trust inherently fragile (Meyerson et al., 1996; Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999). These environments produce "contextual gaps," defined as the distance between a sender's intentional cultural meaning and the receiver's interpretation of information (Gammelgaard, 2010), making it difficult to decode intent and hierarchical respect.

In such temporary virtual contexts, digital communication becomes "fate-forming" (Barrett, 2025). This term describes how, in the absence of a physical space in which to infer cultural norms and repair misunderstandings, a single digital interaction permanently determines an employee's reputation because it is the primary "observed action" used by supervisors and peers to judge another's reliability and competence the absence of physical proximity (Gammelgaard, 2010; Barrett, 2025). The inability to mitigate these misunderstandings through informal interaction increases the risk of conflict and the erosion of trust, directly leading to measurable outcomes, such as behavioral withdrawal and a decline in team performance (Zakaria et al., 2020; Ülbeği & İplik, 2025).

To examine these challenges, this study utilizes two foundational frameworks. First, Hofstede's (2011) Cultural Dimensions, specifically the variable of Power Distance Index (PDI) to isolate hierarchical friction, and Hall's (1976) High- and Low-Context Communication Theory, to evaluate operational failures when situational cues are stripped away by digital mediums. By applying these foundational theories to the modern virtual context, this study exposes the specific vulnerabilities that emerge when cultural expectations collide with digital limitations. Specifically, this study addresses the operational challenge of how cultural friction in these settings impacts team performance, behavioral withdrawal, and the sustainability of "Swift Trust" (Yusof & Zakaria, 2025). By examining these dynamics, the study identifies the specific mechanisms through which cultural mismatches degrade task velocity in temporary virtual teams.

1.2 Problem Statement and Research Gap

The core problem addressed by this study is the operational breakdown that occurs when temporary employees from Low-Context/Low-PDI cultures integrate into High-Context/High-PDI virtual leadership structures. In these low-cue environments, the reduction of non-verbal signals creates a transparency gap where cultural behaviors are miscoded as professional failures (Mihhailova, 2009). Unlike traditional office settings, virtual teams lack the informal physical opportunities for an employee to observe and decode a manager's hierarchical expectations through casual, low-stakes interaction (Fayard & Weeks, 2007; Himawan et al., 2022). In the absence of this space, existing organizational research (Shachaf, 2008: Hayati & Sinha, 2024; Liu, 2025) suggests vertical friction can manifest in three primary operational failures:

1. Informational Ambiguity and Process Loss: The distance between a manager's high-context intent and an employee's literal interpretation, or the "contextual gap," leads directly to operational inefficiency. Without the ability to ask clarifying questions informally, employees are forced to guess the "weight" of a manager's suggestion, resulting in a cycle of rework, project delays, and a loss in task velocity (Shachaf, 2008; Tylnyi et al., 2024).
2. Strategic Silence and Adaptive Task-Switching: Silence in vertical digital communication is often a "fate forming" action (Barrett, 2025). While a High-Context manager may use "Strategic Silence," representing a deliberate choice to withhold communication as a means of maintaining

hierarchal distance, save face, or signal implicit disapproval without direct confrontation (Hayati & Sinha, 2024), a Low-Context employee may interpret this lack of communication and micro-interaction as hostility, incompetence, or indifference (Wasiman, 2025). This triggers behavioral withdrawal and adaptive task-shifting often categorized as "Cyberloafing" (Ülbeği & İplik, 2025), but empirical evidence suggests is as a professional risk-mitigation strategy.

3. Informational Asymmetry and Managerial Redundancy: As "swift trust" erodes, teams experience an asymmetry of information access where the virtual filter restricts project context to the executive node. This leads to managerial redundancy, where temporary employees begin to bypass silent or unresponsive leadership to maintain project momentum, decoupling from the managerial relationship and relying on lateral, peer-to-peer, or individual workarounds to sustain task velocity.

While foundational literature has identified trust as a primary risk factor in virtual teams (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999), a critical gap remains regarding the vertical dynamics within temporary teams. Most cross-cultural research assumes a period of long-term adaptation in a traditional in-person environment or focuses on peer-level conflict in virtual teams; however, there is little research on how communication and vertical power dynamics interact in virtual teams. This observation is further identified by Caputo et al. (2022), whose bibliometric analysis of virtual team conflict highlights a continued need for research into the specific cultural antecedents of breakdown in these virtual environments.

1.3 Research Aim

The aim of this study is to investigate the perceptual and communicative processes between the High PDI/High Context virtual leadership and Low PDI/Low Context temporary employees, exploring the factors that either mitigate or trigger operational friction and the breakdown of swift trust, and the subsequent impact on team performance.

1.4 Research Questions

1.4.1 Main and Sub-Research Questions

Main Research Question: While the literature has identified cultural diversity as a risk factor in global teams, how do temporary employees from Low-PDI/Low-Context cultures perceive and rationalize the communicative behaviors of High-PDI/High-Context virtual leadership, and how does this impact team performance?

Sub-Questions (RQs)

- RQ1: How do temporary Low-PDI/Low-Context employees interpret "Strategic Silence" from managers within the low-cue virtual environment?
- RQ2: In what ways do misinterpretations of this silence and indirect communication trigger behavioral withdrawal or adaptive task-shifting among temporary Low-PDI/Low-Context employees?

- RQ3: How does the resulting cycle of silence and withdrawal impact the perceived team performance and task velocity of the temporary virtual team?

1.5 Significance and Expected Contributions

1.5.1 Theoretical Significance

This research bridges the gap between Intercultural Communication Theory (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2011) and Virtual Team Operations (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999). While existing literature extensively and clearly demonstrates that macro cultural differences do exist, there is limited research on the specific virtual mechanisms that disrupt the manager-employee relationship in temporary virtual teams. By integrating the "Contextual Gaps" framework (Gammelgaard, 2010) with the concept of "Swift Trust" (Meyerson et al., 1996; Yusof & Zakaria, 2025), this study identifies how specific managerial behaviors, such as "Strategic Silence", influence the erosion of trust. This extends the current understanding of behavioral withdrawal (Ülbeği & İplik, 2025) and team fragmentation (Liu, 2025) by reframing these as defensive, reactive responses to a perceived lack of leader agency, rather than isolated character failures. Furthermore, it applies the concept of "Fate-Forming Interactions" (Barrett, 2025) to the initial stages of the employee-manager relationship, providing a new temporal perspective on vertical trust.

1.5.2 Managerial Contributions

As the workforce shifts towards "temporary systems" (World Economic Forum, 2024), managers can no longer rely on the established norms of long-term relationship building to secure and enhance performance. This research moves beyond general cultural sensitivity training by identifying specific friction points between Low-Context/Low-PDI short-term employees and High-Context/High-PDI virtual leadership operating in a low-cue virtual environment. The study will equip managers with the tools necessary to:

1. Mitigate Interpretive Bias: by recognizing that a subordinate's withdrawal or "Cyberloafing" may be a rational risk-mitigation strategy in response to managerial silence or informational ambiguity, rather than a lack of commitment.
2. Standardize Virtual Micro-Interactions: By highlighting the necessity of frequent, explicit communication by leadership to maintain psychological presence and bridge the Power Distance gap in a low-cue environment.
3. Prevent Structural Isolation: By identifying how the shift to private communication channels (fragmentation) excludes short-term employees from the decision-making loop, leading to a decline in task velocity.

1.6 Thesis Structure and Overview

This dissertation is organized into five Chapters, structured to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the interaction between virtual leadership and temporary employees impacts team performance.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Establishes the context of the study, outlining the rise of virtual work and the specific risks of vertical cross-cultural friction. It defines the research problem, specifically how the "transparency gap" leads to measurable process losses.

Chapter 2: Literature review and Theoretical Framework

Establishes the theoretical foundation for this study by critically reviewing the literature on Hofstede's Power Distance Index (PDI) and Hall's high- and low- context communication theory. This chapter synthesizes these foundational theories with the research context of virtuality and temporal constraints, utilizing modern frameworks of "Swift Trust" (Meyerson et al., 1996; Yusof & Zakaria, 2025) and digital communication patterns to explain how managers navigate power and face-saving in virtual spaces. It integrates the concepts of "Fate-Forming Interactions" (Barrett, 2025) to explain how the "Virtual Filter," defined as the digital and physical distance that obscures traditional managerial cues, amplifies the impact of managerial silence, and lack of "Leadership Micro-Interactions" (Wasiman, 2025) triggers specific behavioral outcomes, leading to the degradation of team performance and task velocity.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Details the research design, justifying the choice of a qualitative interpretivist methodology. This chapter describes the use of semi-structured interviews to capture the employees' perceptions and rationalizations of managerial communication and digital power dynamics. It outlines the thematic analysis method used to map these perceptions to specific operational failures like cyberloafing or project bottlenecks.

Chapter 4: Findings

Presents the empirical data collected from the interviews. It is organized by key themes, directly addressing the research questions regarding the interpretive burden of managerial silence and hierarchy, the fragility of trust, and the impact of digital micropolitics on the structural isolation of employees in asynchronous/synchronous digital communication channels.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Interprets the findings in relation to the literature and vertical theoretical framework established in Chapter 2. It discusses the implications of leadership agency and digital power in virtual spaces, offers actionable recommendations for managers to mitigate "fate-forming" errors, acknowledges limitations of the research, and suggests avenues for further research into remote leadership.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter establishes the theoretical foundation for the study by reviewing and analyzing key literature relevant to operational friction and communication dynamics in Global Virtual Teams (GVTs). It begins with a critical analysis of two foundational cultural frameworks, Hofstede's Power Distance Index (PDI) and Hall's (1976) High- and Low- Context Communication Theory. While these models provide the baseline for understanding cultural dynamics, this review argues that they must be reexamined within the specific constraints of a low-cue virtual setting.

The core contribution of this chapter is the development of an integrated theoretical lens (Section 2.3) that addresses the shortcomings of these traditional models, by incorporating the influence of a low-cue virtual environment. Specifically, this section explores how the reduction of "social affordances" (Fayard & Weeks, 2007) and non-verbal cues create "contextual gaps" (Gammelgaard, 2010), forcing employees to rely on "Swift Trust" (Meyerson et al., 1996; Yusof & Zakaria, 2025) as a substitute for traditional communication and relationship building.

In these environments, communication becomes "fate-forming" (Barrett, 2025) because it serves as the primary "observed action" (Barrett, 2025) from which a team judges a member's predictability, competence, and respect for hierarchy. Consequently, this review moves beyond general theories of adaptation to identify the specific mechanisms of operational failure. It integrates modern research on "Digital Micropolitics" (Zhuang, 2025), "Strategic Silence", and behavioral withdrawal (Ülbeği & İplik, 2025) to explain how cultural mismatches in Power Distance and communication context result in informational ambiguity (rework), behavioral withdrawal, and team fragmentation. This synthesis culminates in the presentation of a Conceptual Model of Operational Friction (Section 2.5), which maps the trajectory from cultural and communication antecedents to specific process losses.

2.1 Foundational Theories of Cultural Dynamics

Understanding the core operational challenges faced by temporary short-term employees within GVTs relies on two cultural dimensions which shape and govern expectations and patterns of communication: Hofstede's Power Distance Index (PDI) and Hall's High- and Low-Context Communication Theory. While PDI defines the hierarchical structure and distribution of power, Hall's theory defines communication methods used to navigate that power. In virtual teams, these two dimensions do not work in isolation; rather, they intersect to create specific "observed actions" (Barrett, 2025) that determine team trust.

2.1.1 Hofstede's Power Distance Index (PDI): Hierarchical Expectations and Authority

Hofstede's (2011) cultural dimensions framework remains one of the most influential models for understanding and comparing/contrasting national cultures. Geert Hofstede identified reoccurring value

patterns distinguishing national work cultures. These values are separated into six dimensions: Power Distance, Individualism versus Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity versus Femininity, Long-Term versus Short-Term Orientation, and Restraint versus Indulgence. Among these six dimensions, Power Distance is particularly relevant for analyzing workplace hierarchy and authority. Power Distance Index (PDI) is a measure of how less powerful members within a society will accept and expect uneven distributions of power ranging from 0 to 100. Lower scores on the PDI indicate less tolerance for uneven distribution of power and a preference for shared authority, and conversely, higher scores indicating expectation of uneven distribution of power and hierarchical control.

- High-PDI Cultures: In cultures with high PDI, hierarchical relationships are formalized, decision-making is centralized, and communication tends to flow downward (Hofstede, 2011). Examples of High-PDI countries include Russia, China and other Asian nations, as well as many Arab, and South American countries (Groff, 2023).
- Low-PDI Cultures: In cultures with Low-PDI, equality is emphasized and hierarchy tends to be more vertical and decentralized. Communication is expected to be egalitarian, participatory, and open to questioning (Hofstede, 2011). Examples of Low-PDI countries include, but are not limited to, Austria, New Zealand, and Scandinavian countries (Groff, 2023).

Application to Virtual Teams

Previous research applying Hofstede's model has shown consistency regarding PDI and leader/follower expectations, feedback styles, and employee autonomy (Taras et al., 2011; Yahiaoui et al., 2021; Abbate et al., 2025). In high-PDI environments, subordinates are less likely to challenge managerial decisions and authority figures, and expect management to give direct orders, whereas in low-PDI environments, subordinates expect consultation and management to be accessible and open to questioning (Hofstede, 2011). In the specific context of virtual teams, the effectiveness of decision-making and the quality of leadership are heavily influenced by how these power dynamics intersect with the leader's ability to provide a psychologically safe and inclusive environment (Davidaviciene & Majzoub, 2022).

The differences in expectation can become salient in multicultural virtual teams where members must collaborate while having differing expectations from and towards management (Abbate et al., 2025). In High-PDI virtual relationships, PDI determines the subordinate's expectation of leader agency. As such, High-PDI subordinates often refrain from task initiation until explicit managerial direction has been provided, viewing proactive behavior as a violation of hierarchical norms (Abbate et al.,2025). This creates an immediate cultural mismatch between the Low-PDI employee and High-PDI team, as the absence of proactive behavior can be miscoded by the Low-PDI employee as a lack of competence or disengagement rather than a cultural deference to authority. Conversely, the High-PDI leader may view the Low-PDI employee's initiative as a challenge to their status.

For this study, Power Distance becomes an essential lens to explore how operational friction arises when employees from low-PDI cultures integrate into high-PDI virtual teams.

Critical Review and Virtual Limitations

Despite its long use and stability as a theory, a critical limitation of PDI for this study has been its historical application to traditional in-person work environments. In virtual settings, hierarchy is often less visible, creating a "transparency gap" (Mihhailova, 2009) because the cues which typically signal hierarchal structures, such as office location or seating arrangements, are stripped away.

Recent scholarship how PDI manifests in these low-cue environments, primarily through the analysis of communication patterns and silence. Like Zakaria et al. (2020), Hayati and Sinha (2024) identify "silence" as a primary marker of High-PDI in virtual teams. Rather than a sign of disengagement, they define this as a deliberate strategy for "conflict avoidance" and emotional regulation from the High-PDI individual. Furthermore, Shachaf (2008) observed that PDI influences channel selection; High-PDI teams prefer synchronous channels to capture non-verbal authority clues, whereas Low-PDI teams view asynchronous as more efficient.

Critically, Şahin et al. (2024) argue that cultural values do not operate in isolation within GVTs. They demonstrate that PDI effects are often amplified or moderated by other cultural dimensions on GVTs, specifically Collectivism and Gender Egalitarianism. This amplification/moderation creates complex behavioral patterns, meaning that a single cultural dimension cannot predict the operational outcome of a GVT.

These findings suggest that while PDI is a valid theoretical construct, the low-cue nature of the virtual environment obscures the cues that would otherwise be easily interpreted in an in-person environment. Without clear visual reminders of status, Low-PDI employees may unintentionally speak too informally, while High-PDI members might withdraw into "strategic silence". Therefore, PDI cannot fully explain the phenomenon in isolation and must be integrated with a communication framework that explains how these rules are encoded, or missed, in a virtual environment. This theoretical limitation necessitates an investigation into how these hierarchical markers are replaced by digital communication patterns, specifically the interpretation of managerial behaviors in the absence of physical cues.

2.1.2 Hall's High- and Low-Context Communication Theory: The role of Implicit and Explicit Cues

Hall's (1976) theory of high- and low- context communication provides an essential framework for understanding how members of different cultures convey and interpret meaning through both verbal and non-verbal cues; arguing that cultural differences in communication are rooted in how much meaning is carried by the situational context as opposed to explicit language.

- High-Context Cultures: Communication tends to heavily rely on implicit understanding, shared experiences, and non-verbal cues such as tone, silence, eye contact, and body language. Such cultures often assume a shared social or cultural background, allowing much of the message to remain unspoken and inferred from context. Examples of high-context cultures include many Asian nations, Latin America, France, and Portugal, as well as many Muslim-majority nations (Sheposh, 2025).

- Low-context Cultures: Communication is direct, explicit, and unambiguous (both verbal and written). The words themselves carry more meaning than the situational context. Examples of low-context cultures include the United States and Canada, Northern Europe, and Germany (Sheposh, 2025).

Intersection with Power Distance

Notably, many high-context cultures also tend to score higher on Hofstede's Power Distance Index (PDI), reflecting a shared emphasis on hierarchy, social roles, and respect for authority (Hofstede, 2011). Conversely, low-context cultures tend to score lower on PDI, favoring open and direct communication, and more egalitarian interactions across hierarchical levels. This intersection between communication styles and power distance highlights how cultural norms shape expectations, in feedback, participation, and collaboration in multicultural work environments.

Critical Review and Virtual Limitations

Despite its influence, some scholars have argued that previous research has relied too heavily on nationality as a proxy for culture, overlooking situational and contextual factors that influence communication even within cultures considered low-context (Kittler et al., 2011). This observation emphasizes the need to examine how communication manifests within specific contexts, particularly in virtual environments where traditional contextual cues are reduced. In virtual teams, communication generally occurs through digital channels, either asynchronous (email and direct messaging), which limit verbal and visual cues, or synchronous, (video conferencing), which can constrain cues due to technical limitations and reduced conversational flow (Gibson & Gibbs, 2006; Shachaf, 2008).

Crucially, for temporary, short-term employees, who are operating on a compressed timeline, the traditional period of adaptation is effectively removed. In the absence of physical closeness, the virtual environment lacks the social cues necessary to sense the norms of a space without direct instruction (Fayard & Weeks, 2007). Consequently, the boundaries of hierarchy are blurred, requiring team members to infer levels of authority and group participation through limited digital interactions.

Operational Consequence: The Misinterpretation of Silence and Directness

The restriction on socialization means that communication friction carries immense operational weight, as there is less time to build trust and adapt to cultural norms. High-context communicators may struggle to interpret tone, intent, and/or hierarchy in written communication, while low-context communicators may perceive indirect messages, silence, and/or delayed responses as signs of disengagement and dissatisfaction (Shachaf, 2008; Zakaria et al., 2020).

Hayati and Sinha (2024) argue that in digital environments, High-Context members often utilize "silence" as a strategic tool for conflict avoidance and as a sign of respect. However, without a shared physical space to decode this silence, it is frequently misinterpreted. Although high-context members often utilize silence in digital environments as a strategic tool for conflict avoidance and a sign of respect, the lack of a shared physical space to decode this interaction causes frequent misinterpretation (Hayati & Sinha, 2024). While the high-context reality uses silence to avoid conflict or show deference

to hierarchy, the low-context perception interprets this delayed response or indirect message as a sign of professional disengagement or discomfort (Shachaf, 2008; Zakaria et al., 2020; Hayati & Sinha, 2024).

Furthermore, research suggests that when low-context individuals express opinions "as honest as possible," they are often perceived as "too harsh" by high-context counterparts who prioritize hierarchical harmony and indirectness (Zakaria et al., 2020). In response to this perceived aggression, High-Context members often revert to "conflict avoidance" strategies, effectively withdrawing from the dialogue. These instances of misinterpretation can jeopardize team trust and cohesion, leading to team fragmentation (Shachaf, 2008). Informal channels are often reserved for an in-group of colleagues who share established relationships; consequently, high-context members who remain silent are effectively locked out of these informal loops, missing critical context not shared through formal communication channels (Shachaf, 2008). This dynamic amplifies contextual gaps, converting minor cultural misunderstandings into permanent operational bottlenecks (Gammelgaard, 2010), leading to the first research question of this study:

RQ1: How do temporary employees from Low-PDI/low-context cultures interpret "Strategic Silence" from managers within the low-cue virtual environment?

2.2 Research Context: Virtuality and Temporal Constraints

A single cultural framework is insufficient to analyze global virtual teams, requiring an integrated approach (Shachaf, 2008). Synthesizing Hofstede's PDI and Hall's Contextual Communication is crucial because these two frameworks cover distinct, yet overlapping dimensions of human behavior: PDI dictates structure and expectations of authority, while Contextual Communication dictates manner and explicitness in which information is exchanged. Both dimensions are deeply influenced by cultural norms and work in tandem to shape team dynamics.

However, this study argues that these cultural forces cannot be analyzed in isolation. Tylnyi et al. (2024) emphasize that the dynamics of cultural interaction are fundamentally altered by the virtual environment, creating unique challenges that do not exist in face-to-face settings. Consequently, these forces must be examined within the specific, constrained context of the temporary global virtual team. This virtual environment does not merely transmit cultural differences; it strips away the context needed to interpret them accurately. The stripping away of context focuses this study on two primary constraints:

1. The "Low-Cue" Setting: The removal of physical observation, which forces teams to rely digital communication patterns as proxies for competence.
2. The Temporal Constraint: The lack of long-term history, which forces reliance on fragile "Swift Trust", leaving no time to recover from initial cultural missteps.

2.2.1 The Virtual Environment as a Low-Cue Setting

To understand the operational friction in GVTs, it must be recognized that Power Distance and Contextual Communication rarely operate in isolation. A significant correlation exists between high-PDI cultures and High-Context communication styles, where maintaining social harmony and "saving

face" are paramount (Hofstede, 2011). Conversely, low-PDI cultures typically correlate with low-context communication, where egalitarianism is supported by explicit and direct verbal exchanges, which aim to minimize ambiguity for both the speaker and listener. This cultural intersection is heavily amplified by the virtual medium. Because high-PDI cultures prioritize maintaining the status quo and perpetuating role hierarchies, virtual environments can induce immediate structural stalls; high-PDI members may pause while awaiting explicit leader agency to preserve hierarchy, whereas low-PDI members expect to exercise proactive agency to maintain project momentum (Hofstede, 2011; Abbate et al., 2025; Şahin et al., 2024).

This results in a "cultural mismatch" (Zakaria et al., 2020). For a low-context individual, directness is a tool for transparency and efficiency. However, in a High-Context/High-PDI team, this same directness can be perceived as a violation of established hierarchical norms, resulting in a "loss of face," defined as the degradation or loss of social standing or authority in a public setting, for those in power, or as aggressive by colleagues (Zakaria et al., 2020). Conversely, a high-context employee's silence (intended as a respectful way of disagreement) is interpreted by a low-context colleague as "withholding information" or incompetence (Zakaria et al., 2020).

In traditional face-to-face settings, direct, low-context communication is tempered by non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions, tone of voice, or body language, which signal respect and acknowledgement of established hierarchy (PDI). These cues act as "softeners" that prevent directness from being interpreted as a lack of respect (Zakaria et al. 2020). However, in virtual teams, the lack of a shared physical space diminishes these signals (Fayard & Weeks, 2007). This lack creates a "transparency gap" (Mihhailova, 2009), which is the inability to observe the structural and social boundaries that define authority within an organization. In a physical office space, a temporary hire from a low-context culture can rely on non-verbal "softeners" (Hall,1976) to decode hierarchical weight of instructions, i.e. a manager's casual tone, or casual follow-up at one's desk. However, in the low-cue virtual environment, the hire is forced to interpret a high-context manager's suggestions and inquiries through a literal lens. Without the physical context to signal authority, these directives are often miscoded as optional, leading to a breakdown in project delays or perceived insubordination.

Furthermore, while physical offices often provide spaces that allow employees to control the boundaries of their conversation (impromptu and/or off-the-record conversations) to resolve friction privately and informally, virtual communication often creates a permanent written record. The use of private asynchronous methods of communication to resolve conflict, such as email or messenger programs, largely strip "softeners" away and solidify the context in text. As a result, the explicit nature of low-context communication can be perceived as harsh, aggressive, or disrespectful by high-context/high-PDI counterparts who rely on those missing cues to interpret intent and soften the interaction (Zakaria et al. 2020).

The virtual environment does not merely facilitate communication; it also acts as a filter which may amplify friction between differing cultural expectations. For the temporary employee from Low-

PDI/Low-context culture operating on a High PDI/High-Context virtual team, this means that communication "errors" are not only more likely to occur but are also harder to correct without the benefit of informal micro-interactions found in physical workplaces (Wasiman, 2025). Consequently, the virtual environment converts a simple stylistic difference into operational friction directly leading to the behavioral outcomes discussed in Section 2.4.

2.2.2 The Temporal Constraint: "Swift Trust" in Temporary Virtual Teams

Within temporary global virtual teams, traditional processes of building trust through shared history and social interaction in a physical space are unavailable due to the lack of a physical environment and time pressure. Consequently, these teams must rely on "Swift Trust," a form of trust built upon the perception of a teammate's reliability and professional competence (Meyerson et al., 1996). Jarvenpaa and Leidner (1999) argue, this form of trust is highly fragile in virtual teams due to lack of face-to face interaction. Gardner et al. (2022) found that in virtual environments, swift trust is formed through "transference," or the reliance on digital proxies (e.g., reputation, referral sources, or initial profile quality) to assess trustworthiness. They found that this transference-based trust allows members to bypass the slow process of relationship building by transferring the "role" or "profile" directly to the individual. In a vertical context, this transference is the primary mechanism through which a manager grants autonomy to a temporary team member. However, because team members cannot observe each other in a shared space, they must bridge "contextual gap," which is the distance between the sender's intended cultural meaning and the receiver's interpretation (Gammelgaard, 2010).

The fragility of swift trust is compounded by an inability of an employee to fully internalize and adapt to organizational and cultural norms due to the constraints of limited contract duration and physical distance (Himawan et al., 2022). Unlike permanent employees, who have the time to gradually adapt to new cultural norms, short-term employees often only have weeks to decode complex organizational behaviors. This gap makes cultural missteps more dire, as there may be insufficient time to repair trust, affecting team overall efficiency.

In traditional offices, neutral physical spaces (e.g. the photocopier room, canteen, etc.) provide a legitimate opportunity for observing hierarchical nuances outside of high-pressure tasks to observe how the manager acts with others, decoding the unspoken Power Distance (Hofstede, 2011) norms of a High-PDI team (Fayard & Weeks, 2007). With the loss of the shared physical space, the hire is forced to learn the manager's hierarchical expectations through high-stakes, task-based communication, where a single mistake in tone or directness can be viewed as a permanent flaw rather than a cultural learning curve. In these low-cue environments, digital communication becomes the primary "observed action" (Barrett, 2025). Because there is no time for long-term relationship repair, these initial exchanges become "fate-forming". When a manager's high-context silence is miscoded by a low-context employee as incompetence rather than a moment of thought and reflection, or a hire's Low-PDI/Low-Context directness is miscoded by a manager as insubordination, the lack of a neutral space for relationship repair

results in a barrier to collaboration, causing the anxious employee to disengage as a form of risk mitigation (Ülbeği & İplik, 2025). This leads to the second inquiry of this study:

RQ2: In what ways do misinterpretations of this silence and indirect communication trigger behavioral withdrawal or adaptive task-shifting among temporary Low-PDI/Low-Context employees?

2.3 Operational Outcomes: Behavioral Withdrawal and Team Performance

This section examines the tangible operational consequences of the frictions established in the preceding chapters. In temporary virtual systems, the breakdown of trust and communication does not remain a psychological state but becomes a measurable decline in team cohesion and project output.

2.3.1 From Ambiguity and Silence to "Cyberloafing"

As established in Section 2.3.2, the misinterpretation of Strategic Silence or high-context communication often forces low-temporary employees into a state of informational ambiguity. In a High-Context/High-PDI team, instructions and responses to operational inquiries are often implicit. A leader may use a polite suggestion ("It might be good to look at X") or non-committal answers ("We might be able to do that") to convey a mandatory order or a way to politely deny a request in order to maintain social harmony. A low-context employee may decode these responses as optional or positive. Shachaf (2008) identifies this mismatch as a primary driver of process loss in virtual teams. When operational friction persists in vertical virtual relationships, the result is rarely open conflict. Instead, it manifests as behavioral withdrawal, frequently triggered by "Strategic Silence". In High-PDI/High-Context environments, silence can be used as a deliberate tool of authority or face-saving.

In the context of virtual leadership, this creates an enormous interpretive mismatch: The High-PDI/High-Context manager may use silence to signal hierarchical distance or subtly indicate a request is inappropriate. By becoming a "silent reader", the manager believes they are maintaining harmony by withholding direct negative feedback (Zakaria et al., 2020) or using silence as a space for contemplation (Hayati & Sinha, 2024). However, the Low-PDI/Low-Context employee interprets the silence as a managerial bottleneck, as was found in Shachaf's (2008) study where participants were confused and frustrated waiting for clarification from High-Context/High-PDI partners. Zakaria et al. also note that silence is frequently perceived as hostility by low-context communicators.

To mitigate the risk of proceeding on incorrect assumptions, employees often adopt behavioral withdrawal, specifically manifesting as "Cyberloafing," defined as the diversion of effort from work related digital tasks to non-work activities (Ülbeği & İplik, 2025). The result is a cycle of inefficiency and rework. If the task is completed incorrectly, the high-context leader feels ignored, and the employee feels blindsided by the subsequent negative feedback. This can also be felt in the opposite direction; a low-context employee may interpret a noncommittal answer as a positive confirmation, leading to a misalignment on project scope. When a High-PDI manager's ambiguity and silence cause a Low-PDI employee to pause work, the manager does not see a confused employee, but one who is failing to deliver

on a task. Conversely, the employee decodes the manager's lack of feedback not as a cultural preference for distance, but as a lack of professional competence or indifference (Wasiman, 2025). This cycle of mutual miscoding effectively shatters the swift trust afforded to each, resulting operational bottlenecks.

2.3.2 Team Fragmentation: Private versus Public Channels

The ultimate consequence of the cycle of withdrawal and silence is the degradation of overall team performance. In temporary virtual teams, performance is dictated by Task Velocity, or the speed at which a team can align and execute a task within a compressed time frame without the friction of constant clarification (Shachaf, 2008). When trust collapses between a manager and an employee due to mutual miscoding of directness/indirectness and silence, the team experiences Team Fragmentation, forming in- and out- groups (Liu, 2025). In diverse virtual teams, these subgroups often align along cultural or linguistic lines among peers (Liu, 2025), but it is most damaging when it occurs between the leadership and the temporary employee.

As Zakaria et al. (2020) observed, High-Context members often retreat from the main group chat, preferring to communicate via private messages or other messaging services (e.g., WhatsApp, Kakao Talk, WeChat, etc.) with culturally and communicatively similar colleagues. Shachaf (2008) notes that leaders may move decision making to the private spaces to maintain harmony and avoid the "aggressive" directness of low-context members. This mirrors the findings of Gibbs et al. (2020), who argue that subgroups are "discursively constructed" through such interactions, effectively moving the team's decision making into opaque, private channels. The temporary, Low-Context employee is left in the official, formal channels (e.g., email), which are now devoid of real decision-making power. Gibbs et al. highlight that this structural exclusion creates a status imbalance. Because the employee has been isolated, they are unaware of real-time shifts within the project.

This fragmentation results in significant process loss (Shachaf, 2008). Decisions are delayed, approvals are withheld, and the temporary employee's output becomes irrelevant, as they are excluded from meaningful information exchange. In temporary teams, where time is a constraint, there is rarely a way to bridge this gap. This lack of alignment leads directly to the final inquiry of this study:

RQ3: How does the resulting cycle of silence and withdrawal impact the perceived Team Performance and Task Velocity of the temporary virtual team?

2.4 Conceptual Framework of Virtual Operational Friction

This section synthesizes the proceeding literature into a conceptual framework (Figure 2.1) that illustrates the trajectory from cultural antecedents to operational outcomes. This framework highlights how the Virtual Research Context dictates how hierarchical expectations and communication styles are processed.

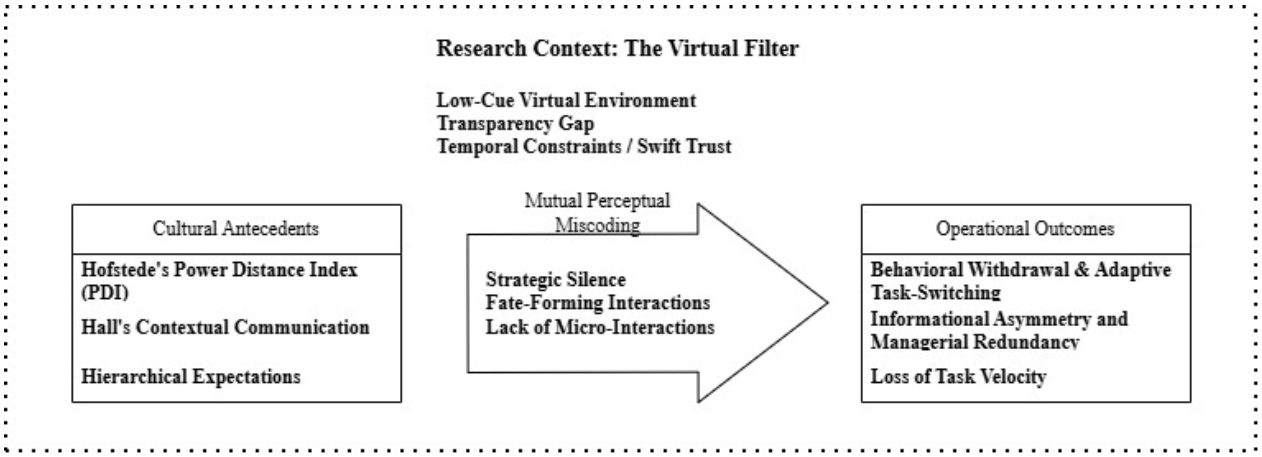


Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework of Virtual Operational Friction: The effect of the Virtual Filter on Cultural Communication and Team Performance.

2.4.1 The Logic of the Framework

The model follows a linear progression to explain the breakdown of cooperation between Low-PDI/Low-Context temporary employees and High-PDI/High-Context managers in operating on Global Virtual Teams:

1. The Virtual Research Context: In alignment with the study's research context, the virtual environment is positioned as the boundary. It does not create cultural traits, but its "low-cue" and temporal constraints strip away the non-verbal softeners normally used to prevent cultural misunderstanding.
2. Cultural Antecedents (Inputs): Hofstede's (2011) PDI and Hall's (1976) Contextual Communication serve as the baseline variables. These represent the "hidden" expectations in the vertical relationship.
3. Mutual Perceptual Miscoding (Process): This serves as the central mechanism of the framework. Within the virtual filter, a transparency gap leads to a cycle where managerial "Strategic Silence" and a lack of micro-interactions are miscoded as professional failures or indifference, becoming an operational bottleneck.
4. Operational Outcomes (Results): This stage is defined by behavioral withdrawal and adaptive task-switching, resulting from Informational Asymmetry and Managerial Redundancy, culminating in the subsequent loss of Task Velocity.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study is to investigate the operational friction that occurs when temporary employees from Low-PDI/Low-Context cultures join Global Virtual Teams with High-PDI/High-Context leadership structures. As established in the conceptual framework (Section 2.5), the virtual environment acts as a virtual filter that removes non-verbal "softeners", leading to a transparency gap and the subsequent miscoding of cues.

This chapter outlines the qualitative roadmap used to address the research questions presented in Chapter 1. It details the interpretivist research philosophy, the justification for the research design, the specific criteria for participant selection, data collection via semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis. By documenting these steps, this chapter ensures the methodological rigor and ethical integrity of the study as it seeks to bridge the gap between cultural perception and operational outcomes.

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the complex interactions between cultural identity and operational performance in temporary Global Virtual Teams. Following the "research onion" framework as proposed by Saunders et al. (2023), the philosophy underpinning this research is Interpretivism, using an Inductive approach to theory development, employing a Qualitative Mono-method to collect and interpret data.

3.1.1 Research Philosophy: Interpretivism

The study is underpinned by an interpretivist research philosophy. An interpretivist philosophy is appropriate for this study as it directly deals with "different people of different cultural backgrounds, under different circumstances and at different times" making different meanings, "…and so create and experience different social realities" (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 150). Since the "Virtual Filter" and "Strategic Silence" are not objective physical laws but are instead experienced and interpreted differently by each employee based on cultural background, an interpretivist lens is necessary. This allows the researcher to enter the social world of the participants and understand their unique interpretation of their feelings of isolation and exclusion.

3.1.2 Approach to Theory Development: Induction

The study utilizes an inductive approach to theory development. This approach is specifically chosen for two reasons. First, while there is existing literature on cultural dimensions (PDI) and communication context, the specific interaction between Strategic Silence and Task Velocity within the compressed timeline of a temporary virtual team is relatively under-explored. Second, an inductive approach allows for the discovery of new avenues of future research or nuanced communication patterns which a deductive approach may overlook. By moving from the specific narratives of the participants to the

broader thematic patterns, the study ensures that the findings are grounded in the actual lived experiences of the temporary employees.

3.1.3 Methodological Choice: Qualitative Mono-method

This study adopts a qualitative mono-method choice. This choice is aligned with this study's focus on the nuances of communication and cultural interaction. Because the "Virtual Filter" and "Strategic Silence" are phenomena rooted in perception and communication rather than statistical trends, a qualitative approach is needed to capture the depth of participants' experiences. By committing to a mono-method design, in this case, semi-structured interviews, the researcher can ensure a focused and consistent interpretivist analysis required to understand how cultural and communication miscoding leads to behavioral withdrawal in global virtual teams.

3.2 Participant Selection

This study utilized purposive sampling. Specifically, a heterogeneous purposive sampling approach was employed to capture a diverse range of industries while maintaining a focus on the core cultural friction points.

3.2.1 Inclusion Criteria

To ensure the data captured the specific dynamics of the virtual filter, participants were required to meet the four following criteria:

- Cultural Origin: Originating from a Low-PDI/Low-Context culture.
- Leadership Context: Reporting to a manager from a High-PDI/High-Context culture.
- Project-Based Status: Holding a temporary role, such as a third-party contractor or an internal employee assigned to a time-bound, temporary project team.
- Virtual Environment: Working primarily in a remote capacity where communication was mediated by digital platforms.

For the purposes of this study, participants were categorized using Hofstede's (2001) relative PDI scores and Hall's (1976) context classifications. Participants were considered to be from Low-PDI/Low-Context cultures if their national PDI score was below the 50. Conversely, the leadership context was defined as High-PDI/High-Context if the manager's national culture score was above 50.

3.2.2 Sample Size and Saturation

The actualized sample size for this study was eight participants. While Guest et al. (2006) caution that larger sample sizes may be required for highly heterogenous groups, they conclude that a sample size of six to twelve interviews typically suffice when the aim is to understand common perceptions and experiences among a group sharing a highly defined social experience. Although this study's participants represented various professional industries, (e.g., cryptocurrency, copywriting, and design), which introduced a degree of professional heterogeneity, the sample remained conceptually homogeneous because every participant shared the specific operational experience of navigating the virtual filter under

the same cultural power dynamics. Based on the depth and richness of the gathered narratives, it was determined that eight interviews were sufficient to reach empirical thematic saturation, as subsequent data collection yielded redundant conceptual codes.

3.2.3 Final Participant Profiles

To provide transparency regarding the diverse demographics and professional backgrounds of the study participants, Table 3.1 presents the Participant matrix. This Matrix outlines the participant ID, professional domain, cultural background, the region/background of leadership, and the primary digital channels used for their professional communication.

Participant Profiles					
ID	Professional Domain	Employee Background	Leadership Region	Primary Digital Channels	Duration
P01	Project Management	U.K.	China	WeMeet, Email, Miro	38 mins
P02	Social Media Content Creation	United States	Mexico	Slack, Email, Zoom	16 mins
P03	Creative Project Management	United States	Dubai (UAE)	Teams	29 mins
P04	Copywriting	Ireland	Gulf State Regions	WhatsApp, WhatsApp Voice Notes, Email	38 mins
P05	Crypto Sales & Comms	United States	Singapore	Google Meets, Slack, Telegram	37 mins
P06	Director of Operations for Travel Company	United States	Japan (B2B Context)	WhatsApp, Various Messaging Apps	27 mins
P07	Creative Production	United States	Brazil	Teams, WhatsApp	30 mins
P08	Crypto Growth and Business Development	United States	India	Telegram, Discord	41 mins

Table 3.1 Participant Profile Matrix

3.3 Data Collection and Interview Protocol

Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted via a synchronous video conferencing platform, specifically Google Meet.

3.3.1 Selection of Synchronous Video Conferencing

The choice to conduct interviews virtually was both a practical necessity and a methodological strategy. As identified by Archibald et al. (2019), videoconferencing platforms such as Zoom and Google Meets offer significant advantages for qualitative research, including convenience and the ability to mitigate geographical distance between the researcher and participants.

Crucially, Archibald et al. argue that synchronous video technology can effectively replicate many aspects of face-to-face interviews (2019). These tools allow for real-time interaction between the researcher and participant, where the researcher can respond to verbal and nonverbal cues, such as facial expressions and gestures. This visual connection is key for establishing rapport and building the connection necessary for an interpretivist study. Furthermore, by utilizing the same digital channel that defines the participants' work environment, the interview setting remained contextually relevant to the professional phenomenon being investigated.

3.3.2 Interview Protocol and Thematic Phrases

The interviews followed a semi-structured format allowing for greater flexibility within the interviews. This flexibility was essential to allow participants to lead the researcher to "surprising facts", such as specific instances of cultural miscoding that were not anticipated in the initial framework.

The interview guide was structured into three distinct thematic phases to ensure a logical flow and to build the necessary rapport before addressing sensitive professional frustrations:

- Phase 1: Establishing the Virtual Context

  These opening questions focused on the participant's professional role and their initial perceptions of the digital communication tools used within their temporary team.
- Phase 2: Identifying the Virtual Filter and Miscoding

  These questions probed for specific instances where a lack of non-verbal "softeners" or explicit context led to ambiguity between the employee and their High-PDI manager.
- Operational Outcomes

  The final questions explored the behavioral results of these interactions. Specifically, the researcher utilized probing questions to seek evidence of how participants interpreted managerial "Strategic Silence" and whether this triggered the participant's own behavioral withdrawal or "Cyberloafing". This phase focused on the perceived impact of these dynamics on Task Velocity and team cohesion.

By using this phased approach, the researcher was able to move beyond surface-level descriptions to capture the underlying emotional and behavioral responses to cultural friction in a virtual environment.

3.3.3 Transcription and Data Integrity

To ensure the accuracy of the data, all participants were recorded with participant consent and transcribed using the AI-powered transcription service Otter.ai. While AI transcription offered high speed and efficiency, the researcher followed a rigorous verification process to maintain data integrity and satisfy the requirements of an interpretivist study.

Each transcript was manually reviewed and cleaned by the researcher while listening to the original audio recordings. This step was crucial for correcting any technical jargon, identifying cultural nuances in speech, and ensuring that the hesitations or emphasis in the participants' responses were accurately captured. To protect participant anonymity and adhere to ethical standards, all personally identifiable information, such as names and specific company identifiers, were redacted during this phase and replaced with pseudonyms. Participants were assigned a standardized alphanumeric code ranging from P01 to P08 to maintain strict database continuity between the raw transcripts and the final analysis. All raw audio and unredacted transcripts were stored in a password-protected device to ensure data security.

3.4 Data Analysis and Integrity

To analyze the collected data, the study employed Reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA). This approach was chosen for its theoretical flexibility, allowing the researcher to integrate the inductive findings from the interviews with the existing deductive concepts of High-PDI and Low-Context communication.

3.4.1 The Six-Phase Analytic Process

The analysis followed the recursive six-phase framework established by Braun and Clarke (2006) to ensure a rigorous and transparent interpretation of the data. The systematic application of this coding framework ensured the integrity of the data interpretation process. A comprehensive master coding

dictionary, detailing all initial open codes is provided in Annex A. The secondary axial mapping used to derive the thematic groups is documented in Annex B.

1. Familiarization: This involved reading and re-reading the transcripts while re-listening to the original audio recordings. This phase allowed the researcher to become deeply immersed in the participants' narratives.
2. Coding: Initial codes were generated by labeling segments of data relevant to the research questions.
3. Generating Initial Themes: In this phase, codes were clustered into broader patterns of meaning.
4. Reviewing Themes: The researcher checked the candidate themes against the entire dataset to ensure they accurately represented the participants' experiences and the "Virtual Filter" phenomenon.
5. Defining and Naming Themes: Each theme was refined to capture its essence. Themes were named to reflect the lived reality of participants.
6. Write Up: The final phase involved weaving together the analytic narrative and data to illustrate how cultural friction leads to fragmented team dynamics.

3.4.2 Ensuring Quality and Integrity

In place of traditional quantitative measures like "reliability", this study prioritized credibility and transferability (Saunders et al., 2023). Credibility was maintained through a rigorous transcription verification process. Transferability was established by providing a detailed account of the research context and setting, participants, and cultural dynamics. This ensures that while the findings are specific to this study, they provide sufficient detail for other researchers to assess the relevance to similar organizational settings. Furthermore, participant confidentiality was strictly maintained through the use of pseudonyms, and the data was stored on a secure device to ensure compliance with ethical data management standards.

3.5 Use of Artificial Intelligence

In line with the guidelines on the use of Artificial Intelligence issued by the ISCTE Conselho Científico (2026), this section outlines how AI was used in the preparation of this thesis. Google Gemini was used as a support tool for editing, language polishing, and initial data organization. Specifically, the tool helped rephrase sentences, correct grammar, and improve the overall clarity and structural flow of the text across the entire manuscript. Additionally, it was used during the early stages of data analysis to assist with explorative code mapping and organizing thematic frameworks.

To protect participant confidentiality and comply with both GDPR and ISCTE's research regulations, no raw data was ever fed into the AI. No interview audio recordings, full transcripts, or personally identifying information were uploaded to any AI platform. All primary data was collected, anonymized, and analyzed entirely by the researcher using reflexive thematic analysis. The final interpretations, arguments, and conclusions remain the sole intellectual responsibility of the author.

Furthermore, all academic references and citations used throughout this document were verified manually to guarantee accuracy. The specific details regarding the use of AI tools are formally declared in the “Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in Academic Work” form, which is provided as Annex C.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings derived from the thematic analysis of eight semi-structured interviews (P01–P08) with remote professionals from low-PDI/Low-Context cultures working in international, asynchronous environments with superiors based in High-PDI/High-Context Cultures. This research sought to investigate how these employees navigate the "Virtual Filter".

Central to the findings is the "Information Vacuum", defined here as the period of silence or ambiguity following a subordinate's outreach to a superior. The data suggests that in the absence of face-to-face interaction, managerial silence is rarely perceived as a neutral event. Instead, it triggers a sequence of cognitive appraisals and behavioral adaptations that significantly influence both the professional relationship and project outcomes.

The analysis of the data resulted in four primary themes, which provide a structured answer to the research questions (RQs) guiding this study. These themes follow a chronological and psychological progression:

- Theme 1: Cognitive Appraisals of Managerial Silence (RQ1): Explores the internal process where participants interpret silence through the lenses of power, industry norms, or personal anxiety.
- Theme 2: Behavioral Responses to Asynchronous Communication Gaps (RQ2): Documents the actions participants take to mitigate silence, including task switching, digital withdrawal, bypassing hierarchy, and/or lateral "reconnaissance."
- Theme 3: Performance Erosion and the Velocity Penalty (RQ3): Examines the tangible impacts of these communication gaps, such as milestone delays, technical rework, and the "scapegoating" of remote talent.
- Theme 4: Intercultural Friction in Instructional Clarity (Main RQ): Investigates the underlying cultural and linguistic tensions, such as high-context vs. low-context communication styles, that exacerbate the effects of the Virtual Filter.

Table 4.1 summarizes the Final Thematic Framework used to organize the analysis:

Theme	Sub-theme	Mapped Axial Codes	Participants
Theme 1: Cognitive Appraisals of Managerial Silence	Sub-theme 1.1: Silence as a Power Dynamic and Hierarchy Marker	Executive Distance, Privilege of Silence, Channel Asymmetry, Powerplays, Face-Saving Defense, Silence as a Symptom of Power	P03, P04, P05, P06, P08
Theme 1: Cognitive Appraisals of Managerial Silence	Sub-theme 1.2: Normalizing Silence as Industry/Cultural Norms	Normalization of Standard Latency (24-48 hrs), Ritualized Stand-ups, Time Zone Logistics, High Volume Communication Buffers	P01, P02, P03, P05, P06, P07, P08
Theme 1: Cognitive Appraisals of Managerial Silence	Sub-theme 1.3: Catastrophizing and Personal Anxiety in Information Vacuums	Existential Threat, Remote Ghosting, Performance Anxiety, Structural Ambiguity, Physical Stress Reactions, Catastrophizing Silence, Virtual Filter Anxiety	P04, P06, P08
Theme 2: Behavioral Responses to Asynchronous Communication Gaps	Sub-Theme 2.1: Disengagement and Digital Withdrawal	Multi-Project Buffering, Task Shifting, Boundary Enforcements, Transactional Communication, Contract Termination, Boundary Maintenance, Relational Erosion	P02, P03, P04, P05, P06, P07
Theme 2: Behavioral Responses to Asynchronous Communication Gaps	Sub-Theme 2.2: Bypassing and Managerial Redundancy	Downward Chain Verification, Rerouting Inquiries, Target Subordinates, Lateral Team Overlap, Systemic Multi-Node Messaging, Managerial Redundancy	P01, P03, P05, P08
Theme 2: Behavioral Responses to Asynchronous Communication Gaps	Sub-Theme 2.3: Lateral Alignment and 'Reconnaissance'	Collective Sense-Making, Horizontal Peer Networks, Reverse-Engineering Goals, Roundabout Fact Gathering, Closed Group Realignment, Lateral Information Scavenging	P01, P03, P05
Theme 3: Performance Erosion and the Velocity Penalty	Sub-Theme 3.1: Structural Bottlenecks, Rework, and Systemic Market Lag	Milestone Failures, Extended Deadline Drift, Cost Absorption, Unbilled Labor Investments, Guesswork, Compounding Rework Loops, Timeline Expansion, Exhaustive Production Rework, Devastating Crypto Lag	P01, P02, P03, P04, P06, P08
Theme 3: Performance Erosion and the Velocity Penalty	Sub-Theme 3.2: Asymmetrical Accountability and Face-Saving Burdens	Public Reprimands, Weaponized CC'd Emails, Remote Scapegoating, Fall-Guy Apologies, Localized Events, Isolated Praise Channels, Scapegoating, Falling on the Sword, Asymmetrical Accountability	P01, P04, P08
Theme 4: Intercultural Friction in Instructional Clarity	Sub-Theme 4.1: Cultural Bluntness vs. Softened Professionalism	Unfiltered Directness, ConversationalPadding Elimination, Interpersonal Abrasiveness, Relational Warmth Balancing, Artificial Corporate Formatting, Regional/Cultural Bluntness, Equitable Poise / Softened Professionalism	P01, P02, P03, P05, P07, P08
Theme 4: Intercultural Friction in Instructional Clarity	Sub-Theme 4.2: High-Context Instruction vs. Clarity Gaps	Jigsaw Briefings, Disorganized Threads, Platform Proliferation, Parameter Guesswork, Bilingual Translation Ambiguity, Conceptual Misalignment, Jigsaw Briefing, Linguistic Misalignment	P01, P02, P04, P06, P08

Table 4.1 Final Thematic Framework

4.1 Theme 1: Cognitive Appraisals of Managerial Silence

The first research question how temporary low-PDI/low-context employees interpret "Strategic Silence" from managers within the low-cue virtual environment. The following sections detail how the "Information Vacuum" is appraised as a marker of power, normalized as a professional standard, or internalized as a source of existential anxiety.

4.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Silence as a Power Dynamic and Hierarchy Marker

Within this sub-theme, participants from low-PDI/low-context cultures appraise managerial silence and communication choices through the lens of authority. Within the "Information Vacuum," the power imbalance is magnified, leading participants to interpret a manager's preference for certain channels or their absence from daily digital chatter as a marker of organizational rank and status.

Executive Distance and the Privilege of Silence

P03 described a large gap in seniority, reporting to a Chief Creative Officer (CCO) based in Dubai. She appraised his lack of typical digital presence as a sign of his high-level noting: "*I do, always assume that the people... at his level, are just very busy... because they are very powerful*." (P03). In the absence of physical proximity, this executive distance influenced channel selection; P03 observed, "*I don't think he ever responded via email... I only got responses on a video call*." (P03). During these video calls, she referred to his direct, no-nonsense feedback as "*executive language*." Rather than "*judgmental language at all*" (P03). While she found him "*jovial*" and "*kind*" during video calls, he would simply provide blunt feedback and then "*peace out*," leaving the meeting early. Because the project was "*a high-profile project with celebrity talent...*" with "*very high oversight*," P03 normalized this brevity, rationalizing that senior executives use silence and brevity as tools for power and efficiency, and granular day-to-day communication was not expected (P03).

The Founder's Buffer

Similar to P03, P05 and P08 collaborated with startup founders in the cryptocurrency sector and appraised their superiors' communication latency as a consequence of being in a high-power position.

P05 recognized that the power distance inherent in a startup's hierarchy meant the founder was not a peer who could be expected to respond to every message, essentially appraising the silence executive privilege. As P05 recalled, "*I would always get an answer within 24 hours, and they would often acknowledge that they had seen the message but were too busy to respond and wanted to wait until the call if it was super urgent*." (P05). This normalization is reinforced by P08 who had experienced a "*good, solid 24 hours*" of non-responsiveness and attributed the silence to travel or even just forgetting rather than professional disregard.

One-Way Channels as a Management Tool

P04 focused on how their managers' or clients' communication choices directly impacted the workflow. Working as a copywriter for clients across the Gulf States, P04 noticed that leadership heavily favored using informal, one-way channels to issue directives, routinely sending instructions via 15-minute WhatsApp voice notes over weekends, or which were received late at night (often around 4:00am). However, when tracking project progress, these managers demanded formal documentation over shared files. P04 interpreted this communication asymmetry as a structural "*powerplay*" (P04).

Defensive Silence and "Face" in B2B Hiring

P06 provided a unique perspective on the power dynamic, where he acted as the "Low-PDI Client" attempting to hire an Independent Contractor from a high-PDI culture. When P06 pushed for clarity or a yes/no commitment, the contractor responded with silence. P06 interpreted this delay not as laziness, but as a hierarchical defense mechanism and/or negotiating tactic. The lack of communication delayed the project schedule, leaving P06 waiting for unpredictable updates as the project deadline approached.

Summary of 1.1

In summary, sub-theme 1.1 demonstrates that for low-PDI remote employees, silence carries structural meaning. Whether interpreted as an indicator of executive status or intentional control mechanism over the workflow, the information vacuum is consistently evaluated by participants as an expression of organizational rank.

4.1.2 Sub-theme 1.2: Normalizing Silence as Industry/Cultural Norms

This sub-theme identifies a "temporal neutral zone" where participants de-escalate the potential stress of a communication gap by reframing it as a standard professional reality. In these instances, silence is appraised not as a signal of hierarchy or neglect, but as a baseline expectation of global, asynchronous work.

The 24–48 Hour "Neutral Zone"

For many participants, the appraisal of silence was governed by a specific temporal threshold, where a delay was only categorized as an operational gap once it exceeded a certain duration 24 to 48 hours, as noted by P01, P02, P03, P05, P06, P07, and P08. P01 established a "maximum latency" window based on the fast-paced nature of the project and time differences between the teams, noting she did not start searching for hidden meaning in the silence until threshold had passed. As P01 explained, "*I would give*

24 hours before I'd be concerned, because they're quite quick in their responses" (P01). Until that point, communication delays were appraised as normal operational lag.

The Daily Stand-up/Meeting as a Buffer

A key factor in the normalization of silence was the presence of ritualized, synchronous touchpoints. For participants who had access to daily meetings, namely P01, P05, P07 and P08, the "Information Vacuum" was appraised as a temporary delay rather than an absolute communication breakdown. This is seen most strikingly in the strategy used by P05 who relied on live check-ins to bypass asynchronous non-responsiveness, stating, *"If I didn't get a direct response, then I would just badger the shit out of them on the on the daily stand up"* (P05).

Time Zone Differences

Participants also used geography and empathy to justify silence, effectively removing any personal or hierarchical ill will from the lack of response. Both P01 and P06 cited the logistics of working across vastly different time zones. By attributing the silence to the clock rather than intent, they were able to maintain neutral appraisal of the relationship.

Field-Based and Cultural Normalization

Participants often used their specific industry or the manager's background to justify the silence. P03 utilized her extensive background in project management to rationalize the CCO's behavior appraising the slow response times as a standard industry practice for high-level creative direction. As P03 noted, "*I don't assume they're going to respond to every email, and certainly not timely regardless of culture... I don't necessarily expect instantaneous responses*" (P03).

Similarly, P05 normalized the lack of communication by analyzing the founder's workload. While he originally interpreted the silence of having a disrespectful subtext, he later contextualized the sheer volume of notifications leadership balances, noting that, "*if I get… 40 unique messages, and not 40 messages, but 40 chat rooms, like 40 unique updates in chat rooms on a daily basis, this founder is probably getting 150*" (P05). He concluded because of the sheer volume of messages, the founder was physical unable to respond to every prompt and inquiry.

Summary of 1.2

The accounts of P01, P02, P03, P05, P06, P07, and P08 collectively demonstrate that structural and industry-specific norms and actions serve as buffers against the ambiguity of the "Virtual Filter". In these scenarios, communication delays are not appraised as threats or deliberate assertions of power; rather they are normalized as operational constraints. Participants aligned their expectations with these realities either through institutional rituals like daily meetings or by maintaining an accepted asynchronous response window to accommodate time zone differences.

4.1.3 Sub-theme 1.3: Catastrophizing and Personal Anxiety in Information Vacuums

In this sub-theme, the "Virtual Filter" acts as a psychological amplifier. For participants, particularly those in precarious roles or high-pressure environments, the absence of communication is not seen as a norm or a hierarchy signifier, but as a "fate-forming" action or signal. Without physical cues, such as seeing a manager's smile or their busy desk, participants fill the "Information Vacuum" with worst-case scenarios.

The Existential Threat and "Ghosting"

P08 provides the most acute form of catastrophizing within the study, illustrating the importance of "Swift Trust" through communication on a remote team. As a new employee lacking the non-verbal safety cues of an office, he interpreted managerial silence through the virtual filter as a "fate-forming" signal leaving him highly vulnerable to the psychological toll of the "Information Vacuum". This communication blackout, which he described as being "*ghosted*" by the organization was interpreted as a possible sign of imminent termination. Without the ability to see his manager's physical context, he assumed the silence was a calculated move to phase him out of the project, stating, *"I didn't hear from [Manager] for two days... you just think, 'Okay, I'm being fired."* (P08). Lacking this context, P08 saw the two-day communication blackout not as a personal crisis for his boss, but as a calculated professional rejection leading to a state of high-performance anxiety, where he felt he had to over-perform simply to maintain his role.

Weekend Voice Notes and the Shift of Accountability

For P04, catastrophizing was a reaction to what they appraised as structural ambiguity within the "Information Vacuum". Because instructions frequently arrived as long, unstructured voice notes at irregular hours, the working environment lacked a clear, searchable archive, forcing P04 to "decode" what their superiors wanted. When the project parameters shifted, the lack of written records meant that the operational risk and blame were pushed downstream, as P04 noted, "*There is mixed messages, I'd say, all the way down that network. And then it gets to my person I report to, and it becomes WhatsApp, voice notes over the weekend... everything changes... I get blamed.*" (P04). This lack of clarity was not just an intellectual burden but also caused a genuine physical stress response with P04 sharing, "*Like, there were some days where I wear a Fitbit and my heart rate... goes through the roof.*" (P04).

Summary of 1.3

The experiences of P08 and P04 reveal that when the virtual filter blocks context, participants do not simply wait for data; they fill the information vacuum with narratives of professional threat. Whether manifesting as interpersonal anxiety centered on sudden termination or structural anxiety focused on blame and ever-changing parameters, an unmanaged information vacuum transforms managerial silence from a minor logistical delay into a source of real psychological and physiological strain.

4.2 Theme 2: Behavioral Responses to Asynchronous Communication Gaps

While Theme 1 explored the internal cognitive and emotional adjustments participants made while navigating the "Virtual Filter", Theme 2 examines the practical and behavioral tactics they executed when faced with an active communication vacuum. The data reveals that participants do not remain stagnant during period of managerial silence, instead they execute practical workarounds to manage their daily assignments and maintain project momentum.

4.2.1 Sub-Theme 2.1: Disengagement and Digital Withdrawal

Sub-theme 2.1 describes a protective behavioral strategy where participants mentally or digitally withdraw from communication channels when faced with an ongoing information vacuum. When faced with an ongoing information vacuum, participants employ strategies that may be superficially misidentified in traditional literature as "Cyberloafing". However, the empirical data from this study demonstrates that this behavior is more accurately categorized as adaptive task-switching. Rather than engaging in unproductive or personal activity stemming from a bottleneck caused by an unresponsive manager, participants adapt by shifting to alternate professional tasks, setting work/life boundaries, or decreasing relational contact. Thus, what might appear to be a lack of commitment is, in reality, a professional risk-mitigation strategy to sustain performance metrics.

Shifting to other projects

When an asynchronous gap creates an operation stall, participants managing multiple active projects handle the delay by redirecting their focus to other assignments. This allows them to absorb operational bottlenecks without affecting their broader daily output. P03 explained this further: "*During work hours… I typically work on between like six and 10 projects… so I never lack for things to do*." (P03). P02 followed a similar pattern of behavior, opting to pivot to other work tasks: "*I just did a different task, different work task... because I felt like I needed that clarification before moving on.*" (P02). This pattern is also explicitly demonstrated by P07 at a team level. When a channel stalled and halted progress on a specific project, P07 described an immediate transition: "*at that point we would just pivot to other immediate needs... and then detour back to that project*." (P07).

Boundary Maintenance and Compartmentalization

When communication gaps extend past standard working hours or conflict with focus areas, participants use deliberate disconnection to separate their person schedules from work schedules. P03 demonstrated this behavior by maintaining a clear work life distinction: "*During non-working hours… I would just move to more personal tasks… non work related*" (P03). P03 further noted how the asynchronous nature of the medium allowed them to step away from active monitoring rather than staying chained to a screen waiting for updates: "*I might have, like, scrolled on my phone... thankfully... I don't have to stay at my computer late if I'm waiting for a response.*" (P03). Similarly, operating within a highly intense start-up environment, P05 maintained personal boundaries by treating his schedule with rigid structural

discipline, separating tasks based on set temporal boundaries: *"[I'm a] Robot with my schedule... I have areas for deep work and I have areas for comms... I don't do comms when I'm doing deep work."* (P05).

Conflict Avoidance and Relational Erosion

When communication vacuums become a chronic element of the working relationship, participants alter how they interact within the channel, prioritizing transactional communication over active clarification. P04 utilized polite speech and agreement as a protective mechanism to avoid additional friction or unproductive work stemming from a vague communication channel: "*I would just say thank you, even though I didn't really understand what the message was... rather than ask for clarification*." (P04). When the structural clarity of the channel completely broke down over the project, P04 insulated themselves by adopting a focus on the compensation and transactional nature of the work: "*I don't take a person at all... they keep paying me, so it doesn't really matter to me at all*." (P04).

For P05, the chronic baseline of unresponsiveness eventually damaged the structural relationship itself. When faced with an unresponsive manager, P05's immediate internal reaction was to pivot or self-source: "*So the immediate response was, bro, I have so much work to do. I don't care. I can work on something else, or I'll figure it out myself*." (P05). This ultimately led to a deliberate reduction in contact over time: "*I just kind of, I did talk to them less, because I just didn't feel like, what's the point?*" (P05). Finally, P06 demonstrated the extreme endpoint of this relational erosion within a business-to-business context. When managing an independent contractor whose response lag repeatedly stretched out, the persistent communication vacuum completely broke down professional trust, leading to an eventual termination of the working relationship: "*We should have ripped the band aid off quick. And it ended up being like a slow, long, painful, like peeling the bandaid away*." (P06).

Summary of 2.1

The experiences of P02, P03, P04, P05, P06, and P07 collectively demonstrate that disengagement and digital withdrawal serve as practical behavioral adaptations against the ambiguity of the virtual filter. Whether by shifting onto other active projects, enforcing temporal boundaries, or permanently severing contact with an unresponsive coworker, participants actively protect their professional stability. When the information vacuum caused by the virtual filter blocks collaboration, these workers choose to disengage from the silence to maintain their personal productivity and peace of mind.

4.2.2 Sub-Theme 2.2: Bypassing and Managerial Redundancy

Sub-theme 2.2 identifies active behavioral responses where participants intentionally route around an unresponsive manager to keep a project moving. When the virtual filter creates a bottleneck at the leadership tier, workers routinely deploy both vertical and horizontal workarounds rather than waiting indefinitely within an information vacuum.

Technical Rerouting and Downward Chain Verification

In high velocity settings, persistent communication vacuums force workers to look for information elsewhere, systematically moving along parallel or downward organizational channels for relevant

project specifications. P05 demonstrated this by routing an unresponsive co-founder to collect necessary project specifications directly from the relevant team noting that, "*functionally, like I just stopped working with him... I had to lean more on, like, the engineers directly... it's not his job to give me context for everything*." (P05). To protect himself from getting stuck in a structural bottleneck, P05 deployed a redundant messaging strategy across multiple nodes simultaneously to guarantee a response: "*Hit rate was 50... if I need information, like, I'm not going to take a 50% gamble... [you need to] reach out to a bunch of bunch of guys to get what you need.*" (P05).

This systematic rerouting is mirrored in more structured agency and corporate environments, where bypassing an executive roadblock requires targeting staff immediately below the silent manager. P03 used this downward strategy when waiting for executive sign-offs from her Chief Creative Officer, actively targeting staff immediately below him to secure updates: "*When I'm typically waiting for a response... I will ping their underlings. Basically, I'll go down, I'll go up the hierarchy right underneath them.*" (P03). P08 deployed an identical behavioral pattern during communication blackouts from leadership, targeting different tiers below the manager to find context: "*Typically, I'll try to go down the chain to see if anybody has any other... clarifying response.*" (P08). This approach is also supported by P01, who handled communication response latency from a director by moving laterally across available team channels, stating, "*I would often then reach out to people around him.*" (P01).

Summary of 2.2

The accounts of P01, P03, P05, and P08 demonstrate that when executive communication lines go dark, participants treat the silent leadership layer as an operational bottleneck and deploy active bypassing strategies to maintain project velocity. This structural bypassing manifests as a combination of vertical and horizontal workarounds, including targeting junior staff directly below the manager, contacting operational teams, and utilizing redundant messaging across multiple contacts simultaneously to guarantee responses.

4.2.3 Sub-Theme 2.3: Lateral Alignment and 'Reconnaissance'

Sub-theme 2.3 focuses on a horizontal, peer-based behavioral response where participants turn to colleagues at their own organizational tier to navigate a communication vacuum. Instead of attempting to bridge vertical gaps or routing around hierarchies, workers collaborate sideways. to decipher ambiguous direction or decode periods of managerial silence.

Collective Sense-Making and Peer Reconnaissance

When a manager's baseline instructions are obscured by translation errors, vague parameters, or absolute silence, participants handle the ambiguity by initiating highly focused, collaborative meetings to align on a trajectory and clarify project expectations. P01 detailed this proactive behavior, explaining that when instructions from a foreign design director arrived with confusing parameters, the immediate team established an internal session to reverse-engineer the project goals and, "*...identify the top three*

[outcomes] that we think they were triangulating towards." (P01). Rather than excluding leadership, P01's strategy involved shifting the entire interaction layer into a smaller group dynamic which included the relevant managers on the high and low PDI teams, describing it as, "…*a sort of emergency meeting... small, tight team... to be able to speak very openly and honestly*." (P01). This collaborative intervention allowed the operational team and leadership to directly reconcile misaligned expectations, turning a static information vacuum into an active session of information exchange.

Participants backed up these formal working sessions with informal peer-to-peer networking, using horizontal networks as a system to check project standing and gather missing operational facts roundabout ways. P03 highlighted this verification strategy used to mitigate hidden risks or blind spots created by a silent executive layer, stating, "*I do a lot of recon. I do a lot of like communication with people at my level... to make sure nothing's gonna go wrong.*" (P03). Similarly, P05 relied on this lateral network when primary vertical reporting lines went dark, noting that "*if I couldn't get an answer from one co-founder, I could always count on someone else on the team... get the information roundabout way*." (P05).

Summary of 2.3

The data from P01, P03, and P05 shows that lateral alignment and reconnaissance serve as vital workarounds to overcome the ambiguity of the virtual filter and information vacuum. Participants relied heavily on collective communication loops, either by establishing a tight, closed meeting between leadership and relevant teams, or by utilizing peer networks to pull data in roundabout ways.

4.3 Theme 3: Performance Erosion and the Velocity Penalty

Theme 3 addresses the operational, administrative, and structural consequences of the communication gaps within the "Virtual Filter". The data reveals that the virtual filter inflicts a measurable penalty on projects, causing timeline slippages, technical rework, and uneven distribution of professional accountability.

4.3.1 Sub-Theme 3.1: Structural Bottlenecks, Rework, and Systemic Market Lag

This sub-theme integrates project timeline expansions and extra work that is a consequence of a manager's slow response time, forcing remote workers to guess project requirements and parameters. Because virtual teams often rely on final approval from the leadership node to proceed, a manager's silence acts as an unexpected bottleneck, slowing down daily tasks and expanding deadlines.

Timeline Slippage and Executive Approval Roadblocks

When breakdowns in communication occur within large-scale, cross-regional projects, the lack of timely executive feedback within high PDI hierarchies can cause immediate milestone failure, significantly compounding operational delays and threatening project profitability. P01 documented a severe example of this operational stall during a cross-continental AI design exploration project with a design director based in China. When communication and feedback loops hit an extended bottleneck, the workflow ground to a halt for nearly a month: "*Three weeks. It was three weeks... a significant amount of time.*"

(P01). Crucially, this timeline stall inflicted a direct financial penalty on the organization. P01 revealed that the communication gap essentially held previous billing cycles hostage; "*any of the work that went before would not be paid for if we didn't move forward."* (P01). To mitigate this revenue loss, the team was forced to absorb the cost of the velocity penalty by utilizing unbilled labor to unlock the structural bottleneck, commenting, "*needed to invest that to at least get paid for the work that we completed... we did a significant amount of work, which unlocked six other pieces of projects.*" (P01).

This pattern of ongoing deadline drift is supported by P06, who noted that extreme communication latency on basic operational queries from a colleague in Japan effectively tripled standard production timelines, explaining that she would "*wait like five days on average, sometimes like a week and a half, sometimes two weeks,*" turning a basic task into a month-long process (P06). Consequently, this extreme latency triggered an ongoing deadline drift, making it impossible for remote operators to accurately forecast deliverables or maintain momentum.

In addition to these stalls and slips, these structural can be driven by centralized authority structures within high PDI environments, where staff are blocked from proceeding until securing manual validation from a single, high-demand executive node. P03 highlighted this dynamic when coordinating a campaign under a Chief Creative Officer based in Dubai. Even though no project milestones were missed and the project was delivered on time, she noted that the project could have moved faster if her team did not require as many manual approvals.

Instructional Ambiguity and Retrospective Correction Penalties.

When project briefs lack explicit parameters, remote employees often move forward using their initial understanding and best assumptions rather than stopping work completely. P02 experienced this while handling creative updates. Instead of stopping to request clarification on an ambiguous brief, she completed her work based on initial assumptions. The disconnect was only exposed after the submission, resulting in rework: "*I thought I understood, and then when I double checked... the manager said, like, actually, this is what we mean*." (P02). While the resulting timeline lag was minor for P02, this instructional ambiguity causes devastating effects in other fields.

Due to a misinterpretation of vague instruction, P08 spent days building a system component that was incompatible with a new system framework. The misalignment was only exposed after the work was submitted, when his manager noted that he had forgotten to communicate the actual system constraints to P08. Because the error was not caught early, P08 was forced to redo the entire project, requiring a three-day turnaround to "*redo everything, retest everything, send everything back out.*" (P08). He later described this delay as "*devastating*" to the project because it desynchronized a coordinated multi-product marketing launch (P08).

This pattern matches operational penalties observed by P04 working for clients across the Gulf States. The combination of a vague brief and a slow feedback loop similarly resulted in days of wasted production time, pushing the final deliverables past the campaign timeline "*by four days because of the redo."* (P04).

Summary of 3.1

In summary, sub-theme 3.1 demonstrates that vertical communication breakdowns convert high-context silence and instructional ambiguity into quantifiable process losses. Whether manifesting as frozen billing milestones (P01), multi-week deadline drift (P06), or catastrophic delays which miss market launch windows (P04, P08), working within an information vacuum systematically degrades task velocity and inflates structural operational risks.

4.3.2 Sub-Theme 3.2: Asymmetrical Accountability and Face-Saving Burdens

Sub-theme 3.3 examines the uneven distribution of organizational credit and professional accountability that occurs within the virtual filter. When leadership nodes remain silent or provide ambiguous directives, remote subordinates are forced to navigate the operational risks independently. The data reveals that when the project fails, the blame is frequently made public within the organization, requiring the subordinate to engage in face-saving rituals or "fall on the sword" to protect the manager's reputation. Conversely, when a project succeeds, the credit is claimed by senior leadership, leaving the remote worker's contributions to be acknowledged through more subtle gestures of praise.

Performative Blame and Remote Scapegoats

When distributed projects encounter milestone failures, the process of assigning accountability is frequently handled through public channels and reprimands to establish authority boundaries. P08 commented on this asymmetrical dynamic of accountability while working under Indian leadership, noting that "…*if it goes good, 100% it was, you know, the co-founders, if it goes bad, 100% it's on you*." (P08).

This pattern of public accountability is reinforced by P04 under high-PDI Gulf State leadership, where operational mistakes were broadcast through CCed emails: "*But then when it's something went wrong, it's train wreck. It becomes a big group email where this is not acceptable. We expect more from this*." (P04). P04 recounted a time where "*I was basically being... lambasted, [they] CCed everybody. See, for some reason [they] saw as a power play to basically belittle me.*" (P04). Furthermore, because the remote worker is geographically isolated from the face-to-face client interaction, the subordinate functions as a convenient scapegoat even when the operational missteps were outside of their power/scope. P04 was repeatedly required to shield his manager's reputation from external clients by drafting formal apology letters noting, "…*I would be kind of stood up as the fall guy, and I would apologize and say I misunderstood… even though… there was no real communication*." (P04).

Crucially, both participants noted that these public call outs function entirely as temporary events, rather than permanent disruptions to employment status and hierarchical standing. Once the acknowledgement of the error occurs, the working dynamic returns to its normal baseline without ongoing professional penalties. P08 noted that the team would "*air it out and then just move on*" (P08), while P04 rationalized the practice as a necessary transactional cost of remote freelancing: "*I've learned*

that that's the culture… it's for them to save face… I don't take it as any kind of like, 'oh, you're done doing your job.'…they keep paying me, so it doesn't really matter to me at all." (P04).

Praise in High-PDI Structures

While public blame follows a highly visible, collective format, both P04 and P08 reported that success and positive reinforcement was systematically restricted to private, informal channels. P08 noted that under Indian leadership, explicit public recognition for a successful project was rarely given, compared to the visible validation typically given in Western business environments, wherein when "*a salesperson hits their target, we give them like, a plaque, and we put them up on a wall, and everybody knows*." (P08). In high-PDI systems, accomplishment is communicated through quiet, subtle signs of approval that the team implicitly understands: "*he may not have called you out by name… But he knows, the team knows, he knows you know… there will be a gesture towards you in some way…it's kind of like an unspoken thing.*" (P08).

This practice of isolating positive reinforcement matches the experience of P04, saying, "*When it was positive, it was it was basically a thumbs up... it's always on a WhatsApp, like, great job. It's never just big CC, you know, you did a great job.* (P04). Together, these accounts demonstrate that within the virtual filter, a lack of public praise from high-PDI management does not indicate a lack of awareness or appreciation. Instead, it reflects a structural norm where private communication channels are utilized for individual validation, while public channels are reserved for establishing hierarchical power and accountability.

Summary of 3.2

The experiences of P04 and P08 demonstrate a distinct pattern in how feedback is managed based on project outcomes. The data shows that successful output and praise are kept on private channels, while operational mistakes and failures are systematically handled in public. Additionally, the findings show that remote workers are sometimes called upon to take responsibility for project issues that occurred outside of their immediate control. However, participants reported that these public reprimands function entirely as temporary, localized events, after which the team immediately moves on to the next project without permanent changes to the day-to-day working dynamic.

4.4 Theme 4: Intercultural Friction in Instructional Clarity

Theme 4 shifts the analytical focus from communication gaps and response delays to the direct task instructions and verbal delivery styles experienced by participants during active workplace exchanges. This section presents the empirical data regarding how participants navigate varied instructional formats, multi-platform monitoring, and language nuances during cross-cultural interactions.

4.4.1 Sub-Theme 4.1: Cultural Bluntness vs. Softened Professionalism

Sub-theme 4.1 captures the interpersonal and emotional delivery styles of distributed management through the virtual filter. Because remote work strips away physical presence and casual spaces, the directness of a manager's verbal or written feedback becomes magnified. The findings reveal a sharp

contrast between management baselines characterized by radical, unfiltered directness and those with accommodating and softened professionalism.

Managerial Directness and Interpersonal Support

In low-cue virtual environments, high-PDI managers frequently utilize unfiltered directness to deliver critiques or accelerate workflows, forcing low-PDI subordinates to rapidly recalibrate their professional baselines. P08 commented on this directness while working under Indian leadership, noting that the communication style cut directly through standard, low-PDI boundaries: "*working with Indians, you learn very quickly that they're extremely blunt... immediately to the point... Westerners perspective, it can be... very abrasive.*" (P08). He rationalized that this abrasive baseline stemmed from a cultural desire to eliminate extraneous conversation to accelerate workflow: "*Westerners, we will banter. There's like, a lot of banter... verbal foreplay... formalities... In India, they want to cut through all that*." (P08). This drive for efficiency would often manifest as short verbal interjections designed to interrupt a lengthy explanations and signal a desire to compress the interaction: "*they'll do this thing where... it's very... normal for them to go, Yeah, okay, okay, okay, okay. And they're trying to get you through it to tell you, like, Hey, shut up*." (P08).

A closely matching pattern of intense unfiltered language was reported by P05, under Singaporean leadership. P05 described a blunt, yet non-hostile communication style used by the CEO. He further stated the CEO was, "*...the most blunt person I've ever met… I thought he was a fucking asshole, but he knows that, I told him to his face... And he's like, I'm sorry, but you're just gonna have to figure that out*." (P05). Initially P05 found this level of extreme directness uncomfortable: "*In the very beginning, it was very jarring, and I really disliked it… that level of emotional honesty, and that level of like intellectual honesty was was something that was very weird for me at first*" (P05). However, P05 reported that over time, his perception of this blunt feedback shifted as he saw the benefits of the transparency in this communication style: "*now I feel like I'm much more blunt as a result of having worked with him.*" (P05). Although the relationship deteriorated due to interpersonal differences, this baseline allowed for intense debates where the sharp critiques were insulated by a casual emotional delivery: *"...Even when we fought, it was never really heated... words were very cutting, but the tone was very relaxed*." (P05).

Crucially, this pattern of immediate, unfiltered review and delivery frequently coexists with personal warmth and supportive behaviors. P03 reported that an executive based in Dubai delivered highly direct feedback that bypassed lengthy explanations, stating, "*[K] was fairly blunt... he would very bluntly state his feedback... 'that's not working... keep it simple.*'" (P03). P03 noted that this direct feedback focused on optimizing outputs rather than engaging in personal character critiques using an "*executive language of, hey, do this. Keep it simple. Let's not complicate it with XYZ.*" (P03). However, this directness was balanced by personal compassion: "*while he was very blunt, he was also very kind and compassionate…and jovial. And then there was just like, Okay, peace out. And just like, left the meeting, like, kind of early… here's my feedback. Do it. I'm gone.*". (P03). She recalled an interaction

where he inquired about the health of someone on the team: "*He asked about someone having recovered from covid, which was like, so sweet, okay?*" (P03).

This supportive baseline is supported by P07 under Brazilian leadership, who noted her supervisor maintained an approachable demeanor while setting high expectations, describing her as "*very straightforward, but very kind, very precise with what she needed*" (P07), as well as P02, whose Mexican manager utilized conversational accessibility, noting he was "*very bubbly and talkative*" (P02).

Friction via Over-Professionalized Feedback

While participants demonstrated an ability to adapt to both direct bluntness and relational warmth, unique interpersonal friction spikes when leadership attempts to impose an artificially detached or overly formal corporate tone. P01 documented this specific breakdown while working for a remote team based in London, on a project with Chinese leadership, noting that rigid feedback formatting created immediate emotional distance: "*The project lead from the manager side not being the right individual... she over professionalized her feedback.*" (P01).

Summary of 4.1

The data within sub-theme 4.1 documents distinct differences in how remote workers experience the emotional and interpersonal delivery of management communication. Two primary styles emerged from the data: an unedited and direct delivery that eschewed conversational pleasantries, and an approachable delivery characterized by personal warmth and politeness. Interpersonal friction was noted on both ends of the spectrum, occurring when communication was initially perceived as abrasive or when it became artificially formal and over-professionalized. Ultimately, participants described these varied communication approaches as distinct day-to-day baselines that they adjusted to in an effort to keep their project tasks moving forward.

4.4.2 Sub-Theme 4.2: High-Context Instruction vs. Clarity Gaps

Sub-theme 4.2 focuses on the clarity of the work instructions themselves. Because temporary remote workers do not have face-to-face onboarding, they generally rely on briefs delivered via digital channels to understand their tasks. The data shows a clear gap between managers who hand off the work through scattered, unstructured channels and temporary professionals who describe a need for explicit, structured directions to get their work done without constant backtracking.

Scattered Tracking and "Jigsaw Briefing"

When task instructions are delivered through informal or disorganized messaging setups across multiple communication platforms, project parameters become fragmented. Instead of receiving a clean, centralized brief, remote workers must track down scattered threads across different applications to extract core requirements. P04 experienced this struggle while writing copy for campaigns under various Gulf State managers, reporting that task assignments regularly arrived as a disorganized chain of messages where a brief was simply, "*a long list of threads forwarded... sporadically and informal and confusing,*" (P04). This unorganized communication style required P04 to spend hours parsing through

an "*absolute plethora of voice notes... random forward messages and screenshots... impossible to really entangle*," describing the morning routine as, "*waking up to a podcast every morning... [that would] take up two hours to [transcribe]... ramblings of someone driving a car for like, maybe 11-12, minutes.*" (P04).

Because no single source of information existed for the project, P04 manually reconstructed his own parameters using AI tools. When operational errors occurred due to this scattered formatting, management deflected accountability, making it "*my fault for not being able to Jigsaw the whole thing together... it was impossible... without [AI], because the voice notes I just transcribe... I would build a rough brief for me, because there was no brief before that.*" (P04). This multi-platform friction is supported by P06, who noted that because remote professionals already navigate multiple communication channels, attempts by clients to expand or alter the digital layout create immediate resistance: "*We're just like, if we can't use WhatsApp, what are we gonna like? We're not gonna download another app to have a conversation with you. We all have 20 apps on our phone to communicate that all do things*" (P06). When instructions lacked essential details entirely, workers resorted to guesswork to maintain deadlines, as seen when P02 managed a social media project under Mexican leadership: "*I wasn't sure what they wanted for that video... it was just a little vague... they didn't have like anything details, so I had to make it up*." (P02).

Linguistic Misalignment and Translation Ambiguity

A second pattern of instructional confusion occurs when instructions are complicated by literal translations of documents and communication. P01 faced this challenge while managing an AI project split between teams in London and China. She noted that the translated instructions were highly confusing to work with on a day-to-day basis because *"most instructions were confusing... as much as they came in with Chinese and English language translations.*" (P01). To resolve these clarity gaps, the operational team held separate, isolated sessions away from the client just to decipher what the work requirements actually meant before they could even start production: "*Our team would work separately from the client team to make sense of the instruction.*" (P01).

Language and instructional barriers also disrupted daily work coordination for P06, who noted that cross-border communication frequently suffered from unclear messaging: *"My messaging to her, and her messaging to me... her messaging to me, was a little at times unclear. I think part of it was linguistic.*" (P06).

Summary of 4.2

The data within sub-theme 4.2 reveals a distinct mismatch between how tasks are handed off by remote leadership and how they are handled by temporary workers. The findings show that when instructions are delivered through scattered channels the responsibility of sorting out the actual requirements falls entirely on the worker. This forces remote workers to manually reconstruct their own parameters or hold isolated interpretation sessions to clear up translation gaps. Ultimately, the data indicates that

participants identify communication medium disorganization and linguistic barriers as primary factors that disrupt daily workflow clarity.

4.5 Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 presented the direct empirical findings of this study, tracking how temporary Low-PDI/Low-Context employees navigate and respond to the communication behaviors of remote High-PDI/High-Context leaders across four core themes.

- **Theme 1** showed that managerial silence in virtual workspaces can cause intense overthinking, ranging from normal adjustments to daily response lags all the way to severe anxiety and worst-case scenarios when the communication blackout lasts too long.
- **Theme 2** outlined how workers handle these communication gaps, showing that they protect their schedules by shifting to other concurrent projects or using active bypass strategies like messaging lower-level team members to keep their tasks moving forward.
- **Theme 3** detailed the performance costs of these delays, documenting expanded project timelines, heavy amounts of repetitive rework, and the asymmetric blame remote workers accept to help their managers save face.
- **Theme 4** focused on direct communication friction, contrasting the impact of unedited regional bluntness with softened professionalism, while showing the workflow costs of scattered "jigsaw briefings," multi-platform tracking, and document/communication translation ambiguity.

Together, these four sections show the daily adjustments, behavioral compromises, and workflow impacts that define the temporary remote working experience. These real-world patterns form the direct foundation for Chapter 5, where these findings will be analyzed.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of Chapter 5 is to analyze the empirical experiences of the Participants by filtering them through the theoretical intersections of cultural power dynamics and virtual constraints. Specifically, the findings detailed in Chapter 4 are interpreted through the lenses of Hofstede's Power Distance Index (PDI) and Hall's Context theory, while accounting for the unique limitations of the low-cue virtual environment and the "Swift Trust" required to maintain operational efficiency.

The evidence demonstrates that cross-cultural remote work is not merely plagued by random, isolated misunderstandings. Instead, it operates as a predictable, and self-enforcing loop where leadership communication failures directly cause employee psychological anxiety. This anxiety forces workers to adopt behavioral defense mechanisms to preserve their profession standing and working relationship, which ultimately detracts from the team's velocity. This chapter systematically breaks down each stage of this friction loop to resolve the proposed sub-questions before finally answering the main research question.

5.1 Psychological Appraisals of Managerial Silence (Resolving RQ1)

The Asymmetrical Power of Silence

Within Virtual Environments, whomever controls the communication cadence inherently holds a higher position in the hierarchy. This control over digital cadence reflects what Zhuang (2025) identifies as "the micropolitics of… digital interactions", where people in positions of power assert authority through delayed or restrictive response patterns. When High-PDI managers withhold updates, take days to reply, or as in the case of P04, send messages at inconvenient times for the remote worker, forcing them to wake up to "a podcast every morning" via unstructured "WhatsApp voice notes over the weekend" (P04), they structurally reinforce their authority, intentionally or unintentionally. This behavior directly clashes with the expectations of low-PDI employee, who operate under the assumption of flat, egalitarian and reciprocal communication styles. This stylistic mismatch creates an immediate power imbalance, forcing the remote employee to feel the hierarchy before the work is even started and throughout the length of the project. This structural friction occurs because the low-PDI employees expect decentralized authority and open communication. Instead, they encounter strategic silence and centralized control that, as noted by Abbate et al. (2025), alters a follower's perception of leader agency and psychological safety withing the team.

The 24-to-48 Hour Emotional Buffer

When the communication line goes silent, employees initially deploy a variety of logical explanations to rationalize the latency and protect themselves from immediate stress. The empirical data highlights a consistent temporal baseline window of non-responsiveness of 24-to-48 hours across the participant matrix. As P01 observed, an employee will typically "give 24 hours before I'd be concerned",

establishing a temporary operational response window where silence does not yet carry negative meaning. Within this window, silence was rationalized and assigned to a variety of operational factors including regional time differences, heavy executive workloads, weekend personal boundaries, or even cultural differences. This framing and normalization is necessary for the employee to maintain focus and assume professional goodwill.

However, the normalization is strictly time-bound. Once this threshold is breached without acknowledgement, the foundation of the relationship fractures and a severe mental shift occurs, setting the stage for deeper anxiety. This breakdown occurs because global virtual teams rely heavily on "Swift Trust", which is fundamentally fragile and built on the mechanism of perceived predictability of communication loops in remote teams and the transference of a manager's executive profile. When asynchronous text-based communication loops are delayed beyond this acceptable threshold, it becomes a "fate-forming" operational failure and the "Swift Trust" is broken. Without physical cues or real-time feedback to repair meaning, the information vacuum forces low-PDI employees to interpret the silence as a sign of professional isolation or failure.

Breaking the Threshold and Catastrophizing

After the 48-hour threshold is broken, the employee's rationalization falls apart, giving way to acute anxiety. Because the majority of daily communication occurs via text-based, asynchronous channels that inherently strip away physical cues, such as vocal tone, facial expressions, and body language, creating a low-cue filter that Gibson and Gibbs (2006) note obscures traditional relational baseline indicators, the manager's prolonged non-responsiveness morphs into an absolute information vacuum. In this void, the fragile foundation of swift trust is fractured. Operating without feedback, subordinates appraise this communication blackout as an intentional assertion of structural power from the high-PDI manager. Consequently, they begin catastrophizing, interpreting the silence as an implicit negative critique. In the absence of explicit context, the remote employee perceives the prolonged silence as being "ghosted by the organization" (P08). Rather than viewing the delay as an oversight, the low-PDI remote worker assumes they are failing, ultimately "being fired" or "phased out" (P08), triggering a sudden panic regarding the final project outcome or contract termination.

5.2 Mechanics of Behavioral Withdrawal and Cyberloafing (Resolving RQ2)

Reconnaissance and Communicative Bypassing

When a prolonged silence from the executive node prevents an employee from continuing their primary task, typically due to the need for executive clarification or milestone approval, a serious operational bottleneck occurs. Rather than halting their workflow, low-PDI employees will proactively engage in administrative reconnaissance, bypassing the silent executive node to hunt for data and updates from the relevant teams, or peers hierarchically positioned at the same level. This manifests as a deliberate strategic choice where, as P03 illustrated, the worker will intentionally "ping their underlings... [and] go

up the hierarchy right underneath them" to extract parameters hidden by the information vacuum. In some instances, this communicative bypass extends laterally to individuals occupying the same hierarchical level as the manager. Recognizing that waiting in an unresponsive channel carries a "50% gamble" on a response, subordinates proactively route inquiries around the roadblock to "get the information roundabout way" (P05). Crucially, this bypassing is not motivated by a disrespect for authority, rather it is a proactive attempt to maintain project momentum in a low-cue environment. This supports the assertion by Gibson and Gibbs (2006) that virtual team efficacy relies on a communication climate where proactive problem-solving takes precedence over rigid adherence to traditional structural boundaries. The calculated rerouting of cognitive focus and physical energy away from the stalled channel represents the initial, observable stage of operational and behavioral withdrawal. However, if these actions fail to clear the bottleneck caused by the executive node, they execute adaptive task-switching, pivoting their physical hours into alternative client streams or parallel company tasks.

The Practical Shift to adaptive task-switching

Rather than treating this forced downtime resulting from a silent executive node as an opportunity for traditional "cyberloafing" or shirking work responsibilities, the empirical evidence demonstrates that participants actively shift to other work-related tasks and concurrent project streams. Because these remote workers operate in a temporary capacity within the organization/project, they are judged on their output and rely heavily on timelines. This practice of adaptive task-switching becomes an essential skill to maintain visible productivity and remain on top of demanding schedules.

This proactive task-switching stands in stark contrast to traditional literature, which outlines cyberloafing as a workplace deviance where employees intentionally waste company time and resources on non-work activities, e.g. personal emails, social media, shopping, gambling, etc. thereby hurting organizational performance. As Ülbeği and İplik (2025) note, classic models define cyberloafing as a counterproductive behavior that inherently degrades commitment and task efficacy. Furthermore, this literature attributes cyberloafing to be more prevalent in low-power distance cultures, operating under the assumption that low-PDI workers have less fear of the organizational hierarchy and are more comfortable engaging in unproductive behaviors on the company's time.

However, the empirical data in this study reveals a paradox. While the employees are indeed low-PDI, they are not exploiting the company's time engaging in personal tasks, regardless of the lack of immediate oversight. Instead, because they are trapped within the high-PDI manager's information vacuum, they are forced to switch to other productive, work-related company tasks or parallel project streams. Due to the nature of many of the participants' roles, they managed this operational friction by handling "between like six and 10 projects" simultaneously, ensuring they "never lack for things to do" (P03) when a specific vertical channel stalls. In these virtual contexts, cyberloafing is a professional and rational economic defense mechanism used by the employee to protect their performance metrics from executive inefficiency.

Leadership Redundancy

As administrative reconnaissance and adaptive task-switching stabilize into a new operational baseline, a profound shift occurs in how employees perceive leadership. Because the low-PDI worker has learned to successfully self-source data without executive input, the silent manager is no longer seen as a critical guide or supervisor. Instead, the executive node is increasingly appraised as a structural roadblock or an administrative redundancy. As P05 bluntly concluded, under this regime of chronic non-responsiveness, the traditional "manager doesn't really exist" and is functionally bypassed because "it's not his job to give me context for everything". While this perceived redundancy allows the employee to operate with a higher degree of practical autonomy, which can sustain or even increase task velocity, it simultaneously hollows out the traditional manager-subordinate relationship. This empirical reality mirrors the conclusions and observations of Mihhailova (2009) relating to leadership in virtual settings; when leadership fails to establish a consistent and predictable communicative presence, virtual teams suffer from alignment challenges that degrade accountability. Furthermore, this decoupling introduces severe vulnerabilities into task execution; when workers rely on lateral assumptions in place of formal executive sign-offs. This leads to situations where workers realize they "needed to double check" but choose instead to guess, later noting "that was one of those where I messed up" (P08), escalating the risk of incorrect execution, ultimately generating operational penalties that can cascade through the wider organization.

5.3 Operational Penalties and Team Performance Erosion (Resolving RQ3)

Structural Bottlenecks, Technical Rework, and Systemic Market Lag

The first macro-level operational penalty arises when prolonged silence from the executive node forces employees into prolonged periods of task idleness. As employees wait for executive approval or clarification, critical project milestones are frozen; extending the project past their projected deliverable dates. This timeline slippage is rarely minor; as P01 experienced when navigating vertical review delays, a single communication freeze can trigger an exhaustive "three weeks... a significant amount of time" of absolute deadline drift. When remote employees attempt to bypass this bottleneck by using lateral assumptions, it may result in misaligned execution. Once the high-PDI executive node reengages and rejects the misaligned output, the team is forced to redo the task, requiring extensive rework. Subordinates find themselves trapped in a cycle of "exhaustive production rework" (P08), forced to discard entire iterations because late-stage feedback reveals they proceeded on fundamentally incorrect assumptions.

This rework incurs a significant penalty on time and monetary cost in inflated billable hours for the organization and stalling the workflows of dependent cross functional teams. Ultimately, when the team is trapped in the loop of task rework, overall project delivery slips, culminating in a systemic market lag that can cause the organization to miss critical windows of opportunity. These compounding operational penalties demonstrate that cross-cultural communication friction in virtual environments is not just an

interpersonal inconvenience, but a direct, quantifiable threat to organizational competitiveness and agility. This alignment of operational drag with structural friction supports Shachaf's (2008) empirical conclusion that while cross-cultural virtual structures offer global resource advantages, their inherent communication vulnerabilities pose a severe risk to task effectiveness, directly translating intercultural misunderstandings into tangible organizational process losses.

The Social Cost (Asymmetric Blame & Saving-Face)

In addition to material costs, these communication failures impose a severe relational penalty characterized by an asymmetrical distribution of social blame and institutional face-saving. When project milestones are missed or errors occur due to executive silence, the resulting accountability is assigned lopsidedly; criticisms are frequently weaponized across public channels, visibly damaging the remote worker's reputation in the moment. Conversely, when praise is given by the high-PDI manager, it is communicated through private channels. This creates a distinct relational vacuum where, as P08 observed, "if it goes good, 100% it was... the co-founders, if it goes bad, 100% it's on you".

In the most extreme cases, the structural vulnerabilities introduced by geographic distance allow the high-PDI manager to use the remote worker as a convenient scapegoat, shifting blame onto the remote worker for operational errors entirely outside of their control. P04 illustrated this lopsided pressure vividly, recalling instances where they were "asked to send a letter of apology to the client... stood up as the fall guy" for communication breakdowns they did not cause. Remarkably, empirical evidence shows that remote workers adapt to this asymmetrical equilibrium as a survival strategy to preserve the working relationship. The low-PDI employee absorbs the blame, shifting the burden of responsibility away from the high-PDI manager and allowing them to 'save-face'. Once this face-saving ritual is complete, the working relationship between the remote employee and high-PDI manager reverts to 'business as usual'. Because the underlying communication failure is never fully addressed, the loop resets, setting the stage for the next cycle of blame and face-saving. This cyclical performance mirrors what Zakaria et al. (2020) describe as navigating divergent intercultural communication styles in virtual teams, where maintaining relational harmony and preserving the superior's "face" takes precedence over objective accountability. Subordinates engage in what Liu (2025) identifies as a form of non-confrontational conflict switching and accepting a skewed interpersonal dynamic as a transactional cost of remote work to ensure contract longevity.

5.4 Intercultural Friction in Instructional Clarity (Resolving Main RQ)

Unedited Bluntness versus Softened Professionalism

Intercultural friction is highly visible in the linguistic and stylistic choices of the executive node. High-PDI managers will often utilize a direct, unedited, and stripped-down communication style, initially interpreted by low-PDI remote workers as bluntness. This form of communication lacks the conversational padding typical of western corporate environments. From a low-PDI perspective, this lack of relational cushioning can be perceived as "extremely blunt... and very abrasive" (P08), disrupting

the expected baseline of conversational politeness. Even though low-context employees are actively seeking clear explanations and collaborative boundaries to guide their tasks, the rapid and context-heavy communication they receive can be interpersonally jarring. This stylistic disconnect creates immediate communicative friction, forcing the employee to initially expend additional cognitive energy to decode the manager's tone. This tax on cognitive processing stems from what Kittler et al. (2011) identify as the classic mismatch between high- and low-context communication styles, where the compressed message format of the sender forces an explicit-seeking receiver to manually deconstruct the underlying relational intent.

However, over time, a significant behavioral adaptation occurs. As the low-context employee acclimates to their manager's linguistic baseline, they begin to appreciate the bluntness and no-nonsense directness as an efficient mechanism for eliminating ambiguity, and in some cases adopt this to their future communications on different teams and tasks even after completing the project. In fact, empirical evidence from P02, P03, and P07 reveals that when this unedited bluntness is paired with absolute structural clarity and explicit directives, these managers are viewed by the remote workers as exceptionally effective leaders. As P03 observed, once the linguistic baseline is established, an executive who can simply "show up to a meeting, give immediate gut feedback" is valued because their unedited critique "only impacted the project in positive ways". This micro-level adjustment demonstrates what Zakaria et al. (2020) describe as successful intercultural accommodation in virtual teams, where distant collaborators consciously shift their interpretative lenses to align with divergent communication styles.

The Structural Paradox of Jigsaw Briefings & Translation Friction

While a manager's tone can be linguistically direct, the structural delivery mechanisms can be paradoxically indirect and delivered as snippets across a variety of digital communicative platforms. This operational contradiction manifests into "jigsaw briefings," a fragmented instruction model wherein critical task parameters, instructions, and milestone expectations are never consolidated into a centralized, comprehensive format, but instead are delivered as disjointed snippets across a variety of digital communicative platforms. As P04 articulated, a subordinate must constantly monitor a chaotic digital spread, forced to track instructions across "Slack... email... WhatsApp... [and] a shared document" just to piece together a single cohesive directive. This structural indirectness forces the low-context remote employee to expend significant cognitive and administrative energy to manually collect, decode, and assemble the scattered components to parse the underlying task the high-context manager wants them to complete. This operational barrier aligns with Kittler et al.'s (2011) review of context-heavy communication, which notes that high-context actors naturally favor multi-layered, implicit, and highly distributed information networks because they assume the overarching structural context is already collectively understood by the network. This dispersion shifts the structural burden of project organization onto the subordinate, creating an inefficient operational friction that stands in stark contrast to the manager's no-nonsense verbal style.

Furthermore, this friction is intensified when operating across native language baselines. As empirical evidence notes, a distinct linguistic decoding tax is imposed on the low-PDI team. This manifests not only as literal word-for-word decoding where remote workers are forced to "translate word by word" (P08), but also as a deeper conceptual misalignment within translated documentation. As P01 observed, even when documentation arrives with bilingual "language translations," the instructions remain fundamentally "confusing" because the underlying operational logic is mismatched. For instance, P01 highlighted a recurring contradiction where managers requested a completely "new character" design while simultaneously providing "existing designs," leaving the low-context team paralyzed and unsure whether to innovate or replicate. To mitigate this, subordinates are forced to invest unbilled hours hosting independent, internal "working session[s]... to work through each of our own questions to figure out what the outcomes could be" and identify the top options they think the executive is "triangulating towards" (P01). Consequently, low-context remote employees are forced to translate and visually map out communication piece by piece just to guess the correct operational parameters, severely elevating the risk of translation error and ultimately resulting in misaligned task execution.

5.5 Implications and Recommendations

Based on the empirical findings of this study, organizations operating with cross-cultural, distributed remote teams must transition away from unstructured communication styles and move toward highly structured and institutionalized protocols. To mitigate operational bottlenecks, relational friction, and structural fragmentation identified in this research, the following recommendations are proposed and organized by stakeholders.

5.5.1 Organizations: Establishing Structural Protocols

Institutionalize and Standardize Communication Response Times and Paths: Organizations should establish clear response windows for asynchronous communication through SLAs (Service Level Agreements). These SLAs should mandate a maximum 24-to-48-hour turnaround time for executive signoffs on critical milestones and provide a structured escalation path of alternative organizational contacts for immediate clarification. This helps stabilize and maintain "Swift Trust" by providing remote employees the predictability required to maintain task velocity without needing to guess managerial intent. Doing so, the organization removes the structural bottleneck that triggers employee detachment and adaptive task-switching, ensuring project velocity is maintained without forcing remote workers to make unverified assumptions.

Implement Centralized Briefing: To eliminate the operational friction of "jigsaw briefings" and piece-by-piece translation, organizations should mandate that all task parameters, deadlines, and project expectations be consolidated into a centralized tracking architecture. Restricting the distribution of instructions across parallel, disjointed chat applications ensures that low-context employees have immediate and unfragmented access to explicit task parameters. This mitigates the waste of significant

cognitive and administrative energy which is a result of manually synthesizing disjointed instructions (a primary driver of process loss and systematic market lag).

5.5.1 Leaders and Managers: Moving from Silence to Agency

Establish a Framework of "Guardrail Trust": While managerial redundancy is a consequence of communication failures, it is not the inherent state of a virtual relationship. To minimize the executive node being a project bottleneck, leaders must move away from passive gatekeeping and adopt a framework of "Guardrail Trust" This shifts the manager's role from passive gatekeeper to active architect of project parameters, thereby restoring their agency and relevance within the project workflow. Rather than relying on organic, high-touch oversight or falling into periods of absolute silence, remote leadership should define explicit operational boundaries, benchmarks, and thresholds upfront, within the remote worker is granted execution autonomy. By establishing these parameters from the beginning of the project, managers can provide the "contextual bridge" that low-context employees lack in virtual settings, reducing the frequency of miscoded intent and preventing the initial stages of behavioral withdrawal.

Normalization of Symmetric Feedback: This framework must normalize objective and symmetric feedback loops. To eliminate the reputational vulnerability remote workers currently face and must adapt to, both constructive critiques and professional praise must be structural, documented, and aligned within the established guardrails. This protects the employee from undue scapegoating, removes the need for face-saving actions, and maintains task velocity without structural fragmentation caused by asymmetrical blame. This approach also ensures that project evaluations are based on objective outcomes rather than "fate-forming" impressions that are subjective.

5.5.2 Subordinates: Navigating Virtual Ambiguity

Proactive Information Reconnaissance: Subordinates can mitigate the impact of a silent executive node by engaging in proactive, transparent reconnaissance. By framing the act of information gathering from peer-to-peer networks as a project-velocity tactic rather than a challenge to hierarchy, remote workers can maintain alignment even when the executive node is temporarily unresponsive. This rationale shifts the employee's role from a passive victim of managerial silence to an active stakeholder. By sourcing their own project context, subordinates take greater ownership of their tasks and become more deeply integrated into the project, demonstrating a high level of initiative valued by High-PDI leadership.

Work Boundary Signaling: To protect against the psychological and physiological stress identified in the findings, employees should utilize deliberate boundary signaling, notifying others within the organization blocks of time where they are available and unavailable for contact. This protects the employee's "deep work" or personal time periods from constant asynchronous distraction while

simultaneously signaling professional discipline, which helps align the subordinate's work habits with the expectations of High-PDI leadership.

5.6 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Although this study provides significant qualitative insights into the mechanics of intercultural friction and structural loops within virtual teams, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the empirical data set lies on a specific, sample size of eight qualitative participants. While this sample size allowed for a deep thematic analysis and extraction of nuanced behaviors and experiences, the findings may not be immediately generalizable to massive, multi-layered multinational organizations or other sectors operating under different structural dynamics. Second, the study focused heavily on a specific cross-cultural dyad of high-PDI executive nodes and low-PDI remote workers. Consequently, the specific behaviors and adaptation strategies identified here may manifest differently in low-PDI organizational structures.

Further research should expand upon this framework to validate and scale these qualitative insights. First, researchers should deploy large-scale quantitative methodologies to test the correlation between executive silence thresholds and the precise inflation of technical rework hours across broader demographic samples. Second, future studies should investigate how the introduction of automated and possibly AI driven tracking systems alter or mitigate the effect of the "jigsaw briefings" paradox and piecemeal translation. Finally, empirical attention should be directed toward testing the scalability of "Guardrail Trust" introduced by this study, evaluating its efficacy in minimizing structural fragmentation across cultural dyads and varying degrees of geographic dispersion.

5.7 Conclusion

The findings of this study confirm that the integration of Low-PDI/Low-Context temporary employees onto Global Virtual Teams (GVTs) with High-PDI/High Context virtual leadership creates a predictable cycle of operational frictions. This research has demonstrated that within the low-cue environment of the "Virtual Filter", managerial silence and information asymmetry is systematically miscoded by remote subordinates as professional indifference or incompetence.

This study has reframed the behavioral responses by remote employees not as individual character failures, but as rational, calculated, and adaptive defense mechanisms. By shifting from the traditional view of "Cyberloafing" to the empirical reality of adaptive task-switching, this research highlights how remote workers attempt to maintain project velocity in the face of an unresponsive executive node. These behaviors, while often effective in the short term, can lead to expanded project timelines, technical rework, and the degradation of "Swift Trust" in the long term.

Ultimately, this thesis argues that the breakdown of team performance in these environments is a byproduct of the structural ambiguity inherent within the "Virtual Filter". By establishing a framework of "Guardrail Trust", organizations can mitigate these risks. Moving from a model of silent, high-touch

oversight to transparent and explicit parameter setting is a necessity for maintaining task velocity in a globalized, temporary workforce. As the organizational landscape continues to shift towards temporary digital systems, this research offers insights to minimize cultural friction, restore managerial agency, and ensure the sustainability of performance in the modern virtual workplace.

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Annex A: Master Coding Dictionary

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
P01	**0:32**	"I was the business lead for an AI design exploration project... mixture of a team based in London that worked with a team based in China."	**Cross-regional collaboration**	Senior Creative / Director	1. Professional Roles & Context	Managing creative/technical teams across the UK and China.
P01	**1:29**	"He was based in China, Chinese and was the design director for mobile experiences."	**International management**	Senior Creative / Director	1. Professional Roles & Context	Reporting to a manager from a different cultural/national background.
P01	**2:38**	"Video meetings were done on Chinese software called we meet... daily work check ins and work shares... use Miro."	**Digital tool selection**	Digital Tool Stack (WhatsApp, Discord, Teams)	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Use of specific software (WeMeet, Miro) to bridge geographical gaps.
P01	**3:30**	"Most instructions were confusing... as much as they came in with Chinese and English language translations."	**Translation-induced ambiguity**	Linguistic Misalignment	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Confusion arising from bilingual documentation or literal translations.
P01	**3:30**	"We would often create a session together with the client team to... identify what the desired outcomes were together."	**Collaborative sense-making**	Linguistic Misalignment	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Proactive sessions to align on goals due to vague instructions.
P01	**3:30**	"Wanting us to create a new character, but	**Contradictory briefing**	Linguistic Misalignment	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Visual references conflicting with verbal/written instructions.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
		providing us with existing designs... weren't sure whether it was completely new or if the design direction would need to be taken."				
P01	**3:30**	"Create a working session internally, first with our teams... identify the top three [outcomes] that we think they were triangulating towards."	**Internal triangulation**	Lateral Information Scavenging / Reconnaissance	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Pre-meeting prep to narrow down possible interpretations of vague tasks.
P01	**5:46**	"Our team would work separately from the client team to make sense of the instruction."	**Parallel processing**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	Separating the "sense-making" phase from the "execution" phase.
P01	**6:23**	"We tell them upfront, that we work out in the open, so that when there is confusion... it's easy for us to be able to pick up."	**Radical transparency**	High Directness / Professionalized Directness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Setting an explicit expectation of open communication to mitigate future errors.
P01	**7:27**	"Requirements were more complex to explain... we would then create videos to help us ask questions or to show certain things."	**Asynchronous video demo**	Video-Enhanced Presence / Power Flex	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Using visual/recorded media to bypass language barriers in technical tasks.
P01	**9:25**	"Because of the language barrier and the cultural barrier, there is a general	**Perceived bluntness**	Constructive Bluntness / Blunt Oversight	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Interpreting directness as a result of linguistic or cultural differences.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
		[tendency]... slightly more blunt than than you're used to."				
P01	**9:25**	"I can also tell that that you know, you can tell that clients are making the effort to not be as direct."	**Conscious softening**	High Directness / Professionalized Directness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Recognition that the client is intentionally moderating their natural style.
P01	**10:22**	"The tone was always a bit more rushed, a bit more direct... received a very clear and direct communication around some of the work, not landing... this is unacceptable."	**Direct negative feedback**	High Directness / Professionalized Directness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	High-stakes feedback delivered bluntly without extensive explanation.
P01	**10:22**	"they've assumed suddenly 10 days worth of work would come out tomorrow... when it's only four days worth of work together."	**Temporal misalignment**	Chronemic Friction / Misaligned Chronemics	8. Productivity & Rework	Disconnect between actual time spent and client's perceived progress.
P01	**10:22**	"Some assumptions in our way of working that we make, and there's some that they make that remain unsaid until the final outcome."	**Implicit assumptions**	Normalization of Standard Latency (24-48 hrs)	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Misalignment caused by unstated expectations on both sides.
P01	**12:35**	"He was generally very good at replying. But I would give 24 hours before I'd be concerned, because	**Baseline responsiveness**	Normalization of Standard Latency (24-48 hrs)	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Establishing a "normal" response window based on previous interactions.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
		they're quite quick in their responses"				
P01	**12:35**	"I would often then reach out to people around him"	**Proxy communication**	Downward Chain Verification / Underling Pinging	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Contacting the manager's immediate team to circumvent direct silence.
P01	**13:53**	"The manager would always respond within 24 to 48 hours"	**Maximum latency**	Latency / Extreme Latency	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Identifying the upper limit of acceptable delay for a response.
P01	**15:05**	"I understood there's a very clear hierarchy... if I needed something more urgently... I would then find someone more senior to me to reach out to the manager."	**Hierarchical leverage**	Scapegoating / Remote Talent Scapegoating	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Using seniority/rank to bypass silence and motivate a response.
P01	**15:05**	"In the tricky, complicated projects, the manager was always a lot more hands on... When the teams were working well... the manager wouldn't make any comment."	**Interventionist vs. Passive oversight**	Constructive Bluntness / Blunt Oversight	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Silence as a sign of trust; active engagement as a sign of concern.
P01	**17:32**	"I would always ask for clarification."	**Compulsory clarification**	Persistent Probing / Aggressive Follow-Up	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	A personal rule to never leave a confusing instruction unaddressed.
P01	**17:53**	"I would be very direct... try and find a way to make the response simple and not be too verbose."	**Communication simplification**	High Directness / Professionalized Directness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Stripping away "fluff" to ensure clarity in cross-cultural queries.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
P01	**17:53**	"we misnomers on things where we don't recall things the same name... but they mean different things."	**Semantic dissonance**	Linguistic Misalignment	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Identical terminology carrying different meanings in different contexts.
P01	**19:22**	"where possible, we would switch to doing other pieces of work... but often you could leave that and continue with everything else."	**Adaptive task-switching**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	Pivoting to adjacent tasks to maintain productivity during silence.
P01	**20:02**	"yes, you wouldn't disengage."	**Sustained engagement**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	Refusal to stop working or distract oneself despite bottlenecks.
P01	**20:41**	"I make it very clear what's being sacrificed as the time goes by... every day that we miss will jeopardize our outcomes."	**Time-cost transparency**	High Directness / Professionalized Directness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Using the threat of missed outcomes to force managerial decisions.
P01	**22:17**	"There's a hierarchy internally at our client team... if it doesn't come back quickly, it does stall our work."	**Internal review bottlenecks**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	Delays caused by the client team's own internal approval hierarchy.
P01	**22:17**	"manager would step... outside of the realm of all the work... and contact me directly to say I am waiting... So I can't come back to you yet."	**Direct status disclosure**	High Directness / Professionalized Directness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Manager bypassing standard channels to provide personal explanations for silence.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
P01	**24:47**	"We had a sort of emergency meeting... small, tight team... to be able to speak very openly and honestly."	**Back-channel alignment**	Lateral Information Scavenging / Reconnaissance	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Shrinking group size to facilitate "real" talk and problem-solving.
P01	**24:47**	"negotiating additional work that is unpaid for but enables us to move to the next phase of additional paid for work."	**Strategic unbilled labor**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	Performing free work as a leverage point to secure future paid phases.
P01	**24:47**	"The person with me can talk the right language to the client and even make a quick hand sketch."	**Peer-to-peer technical talk**	Senior Creative / Director	1. Professional Roles & Context	Using technical peers to communicate via visuals/sketches.
P01	**28:45**	"it also allows him to speak very clearly and openly and honestly... we're all looking for a solution, because we're all in a problem right now."	**Problem-centered honesty**	High Directness / Professionalized Directness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Shared crisis acting as a catalyst for transparent, honest communication.
P01	**28:45**	"Where can we find a compromise what needed to get us to the next phase of work, and how can we support you in that way?"	**Compromise-seeking**	Strategic Compliance / Transactional Resignation	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Negotiating minimum requirements to unblock the next project stage.
P01	**28:45**	"Governance meetings where the senior team ensure that the day to day team have a clear runway."	**Governance as buffer**	Scapegoating / Remote Talent Scapegoating	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Using senior-level meetings to clear obstacles for the operational team.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
P01	**31:13**	"Three weeks. It was three weeks... a significant amount of time."	**Timeline slippage**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	Quantification of delay caused by communication/review gaps.
P01	**31:13**	"any of the work that went before would not be paid for if we didn't move forward, so we needed to invest that... unlocked six other pieces of projects."	**Loss-mitigation investment**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	Investing extra time to protect existing revenue and unlock future opportunities.
P01	**33:15**	"The project lead from the manager side not being the right individual... she over professionalized her feedback."	**Incompatible feedback style**	High Directness / Professionalized Directness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Formalized feedback causing friction compared to "open" feedback.
P01	**36:03**	"Understand that the the culture is not individualistic as we are... getting that feedback from from the group is important."	**Collectivist feedback**	Linguistic Misalignment	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Recognizing that feedback often represents group consensus.
P02	**0:39**	"I was working in the social media team... my manager was residing in Mexico."	**Remote-first collaboration**	Project/Program Management	1. Professional Roles & Context	Operating in a distributed team with a manager based in Mexico.
P02	**1:11**	"From Mexico... That was also their cultural background."	**Cross-cultural reporting**	Transnational/ Regional Liaison	1. Professional Roles & Context	Reporting to a manager with a Mexican cultural background.
P02	**3:36**	"We used zoom... and we used Slack."	**Multimodal digital communication**	Digital Tool Stack (WhatsApp, Discord, Teams)	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Balancing synchronous video (Zoom) with asynchronous text (Slack).

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
P02	**4:15**	"Yes, so we had daily zoom meetings, and we also use the slack to communicate everything. So that was all the texts."	**Standardized communication routine**	Synchronous Coordination (Daily Stand-ups)	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Establishing a consistent rhythm using video for meetings and Slack for all text.
P02	**4:49**	"No, I think he was pretty clear a lot, if anything that was confusing, it was what the company wanted in social media, and maybe he didn't know exactly how to convey what the higher ups wanted, but I don't think it was anything cultural difference or like language barrier or anything like that"	**Strategic ambiguity/Filter failure**	Hierarchical Buffering / Validation Dependency	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Confusion attributed to high-level company goals rather than manager's personal traits or culture.
P02	**5:25**	"I wasn't sure what they wanted for that video... it was just a little vague... they didn't have like anything details, so I had to make it up."	**Instructional vagueness**	Briefing Self-Reliance / Jigsaw Briefing	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Lack of specific details in creative briefs forcing employee improvisation.
P02	**6:52**	"I messaged them asking a question that I need an answer... later on, found out it was because they got into an accident."	**Unforeseen communication blackout**	Latency / Extreme Latency	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	A sudden lapse in responsiveness caused by a legitimate personal emergency.
P02	**7:26**	"That manager was very bubbly and talkative. He talked a lot."	**High-engagement persona**	Equitable Poise / Softened	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Managerial style characterized by frequent verbal communication.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
				Professionalism		
P02	**7:53**	"he's usually quick to at least read or like, react and or answer."	**Reaction-based reliability**	Normalization of Standard Latency (24-48 hrs)	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Expecting digital "reactions" (emojis/read receipts) as a baseline for active presence.
P02	**8:40**	"I would say, I always ask for clarification."	**Active clarification seeking**	Persistent Probing / Aggressive Follow-Up	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	A consistent habit of verifying instructions before proceeding.
P02	**8:55**	"Did you feel comfortable asking for clarification... Yes."	**Psychological safety**	Equitable Poise / Softened Professionalism	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Feeling empowered to admit confusion without fear of judgment.
P02	**9:31**	"Maybe 24 hours."	**Maximum response latency**	Normalization of Standard Latency (24-48 hrs)	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	The longest recorded delay in managerial feedback.
P02	**9:57**	"I just did a different task, different work task... because I felt like I needed that clarification before moving on."	**Task-switching dependency**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	Pausing a specific task due to missing info while remaining productive elsewhere.
P02	**10:39**	"If it's not in a few, like within the hour, maybe a few hours."	**Standard response expectations**	Normalization of Standard Latency (24-48 hrs)	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	A typical communication cycle of 1–3 hours.
P02	**11:06**	"I have a schedule of when I want to post things, so if I don't get the answer, I have to delay the post and reschedule."	**Downstream scheduling impact**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	Silence causing a ripple effect on social media publishing timelines.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
P02	**11:51**	"Oh, yeah, it happens, yeah, the redo"	**Normalized rework**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	Accepting redoing work as a standard part of the creative process/miscommunication.
P02	**11:58**	"When I had the answer, I had to maybe change the video a little bit, because I misinterpreted what they want."	**Post-clarification rework**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	Redoing portions of a creative task after the manager refined the brief.
P02	**12:23**	"Topic, especially because it was credit repair, and that's not something that I was well versed in... misinterpreted something from that information."	**Domain knowledge gap**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	Lack of expertise in a specific niche contributing to misinterpretation.
P02	**12:56**	"I thought I understood, and then when I double checked... the manager said, like, actually, this is what we mean."	**Illusory understanding**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	Proceeding with work based on a false sense of clarity until feedback is given.
P02	**13:56**	"Just by like, a day... I think it was minor."	**Quantified minor delay**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	A 24-hour project delay perceived as having a low overall impact.
P02	**14:32**	"I think we could have had maybe a call instead of texting... texting through slack could have been like confusing."	**Medium-message mismatch**	Medium-Specific Silence (e.g., Email Silence)	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Identifying text as a poor medium for complex or confusing instructions.
P02	**15:00**	"I guess that was just the culture of the	**Cultural preference for text**	Informal Medium Dominance /	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Organizational norms prioritizing asynchronous messaging over synchronous calls.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
		company was to use mostly slack."		Voice Note Use		
P02	**15:30**	"I just maybe felt he was really busy."	**Self-censorship out of respect**	Strategic Compliance / Transactional Resignation	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Refraining from calling a manager to avoid interrupting their perceived workload.
P03	**0:30**	"I work with an agency team and a client team... I coordinate with a creative team... implement their ideas."	**Multi-stakeholder coordination**	Multi-stakeholder Coordination	1. Professional Roles & Context	The producer role as a central hub for various internal and external teams.
P03	**1:42**	"He lived in Dubai, but I believe he was of Iranian descent... chief creative officer."	**Cross-continental leadership**	Cross-Continental / Regional Management	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Managing approvals from an executive based in a significantly different time zone.
P03	**2:13**	"There's about two levels of seniority... he has quite a bit of authority... final sign off."	**Executive hierarchy distance**	Executive Hierarchy Distance	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	The impact of high-level authority on project approval flow.
P03	**2:59**	"I would interact with them [lower creatives] the most with teams chats, but [K] is at such a high level, we really only called him in for approvals and feedback."	**Tiered digital engagement**	Tiered Digital Engagement	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Using instant messaging for peers, but reserving video calls for executives.
P03	**3:40**	"[K] was fairly blunt... he would very bluntly state his feedback... 'that's not working... keep it simple.'"	**Unfiltered executive feedback**	Constructive Bluntness / Blunt Oversight	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Direct, "no-nonsense" critiques focusing on asset performance.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
P03	**3:40**	"during our video meetings, he was very blunt. And then that's to be expected. I expect that from people at that level"	**Level-based expectations**	Constructive Bluntness / Blunt Oversight	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Accepting bluntness as an inherent trait of high-level executive seniority.
P03	**4:01**	"We did simplify a lot of our videos based on his feedback, really, to, like, the betterment of the story."	**Constructive bluntness**	High Directness / Professionalized Directness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Direct feedback being perceived as an improvement to the final product.
P03	**5:13**	"I was a little initially intimidated... adjusted his schedule... he was very jovial, actually, genuinely, very kind."	**Contradictory persona**	High Directness / Professionalized Directness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Expectation of harshness from seniority vs. the reality of a kind demeanor.
P03	**5:13**	"normally people in seniority are very harsh. He was, while he was very blunt, he was also very kind and compassionate."	**Compassionate seniority**	High Directness / Professionalized Directness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Softening professional bluntness with personal empathy (e.g., checking on health).
P03	**5:13**	"Here's my feedback. Do it. I'm gone."	**Efficient feedback exit**	Efficient Feedback Exit	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Brief, high-impact participation in meetings followed by immediate departure.
P03	**6:36**	"This was a high file, high profile project with celebrity talent... extraordinary... makes sense that there was very high oversight."	**High-stakes oversight**	High-Stakes Project Oversight	1. Professional Roles & Context	Increased executive presence due to project prestige.
P03	**6:36**	"At no point was there any attack on anyone's character... no judgmental language at all. It was	**Professionalized directness**	High Directness / Professionalized Directness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Distinguishing between "blunt" feedback on work and personal attacks.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
		simply like an executive language."				
P03	**9:04**	"This is my first project with Dubai... I'm normally the highest ranking person on those projects... he was the first CCO from Dubai I've ever worked with"	**Novel high-level exposure**	Cross-Continental / Regional Management	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Transitioning from being the lead to being subordinate to an international executive.
P03	**9:50**	"I don't think he ever responded via email... I only got responses on a video call."	**Medium-specific silence**	Medium-Specific Silence (e.g., Email Silence)	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Total absence of email communication paired with active video participation.
P03	**9:50**	"Sometimes I don't want [a response], because... I'm scared... a senior producer doesn't necessarily want all my projects to be overseen by a CCO."	**Aversion to executive scrutiny**	Executive Hierarchy Distance	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Feeling a sense of relief when high-level managers remain silent.
P03	**11:14**	"A day, maybe two days... typically in my field... within like four working hours... a little longer."	**Latency exceeding industry norms**	Normalization of Standard Latency (24-48 hrs)	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Executive response time being slower than the standard 4-hour window.
P03	**12:55**	"I tend not to push creatives typically need extra time."	**Creative process allowance**	Detouring	8. Productivity & Rework	Granting managers more time for feedback out of respect for "creative" work.
P03	**13:39**	"I typically assumed that it was the account or client engagement... I typically assumed best intent."	**Attribution of delay**	Normalization of Standard Latency (24-48 hrs)	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Assuming external factors or "best intent" rather than blaming the manager.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
P03	**14:35**	"I do, always assume that the people... at his level, are just very busy... because they are very powerful."	**Silence as a symptom of power**	Silence as a Symptom of Power / De-prioritization	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Interpreting slow communication as a marker of high rank and a busy schedule.
P03	**14:35**	"I don assume they're going to respond to every email, and certainly not timely regardless of culture... I don't necessarily expect instantaneous responses."	**Field-based normalization**	Normalization of Standard Latency (24-48 hrs)	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Viewing slow responses as a standard industry practice for executives rather than a cultural slight.
P03	**15:42**	"I felt his feedback was clear,"	**Feedback lucidity**	High Directness / Professionalized Directness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Absence of confusion due to the direct nature of the executive's comments.
P03	**15:42**	"His people underneath him have worked with him a lot more than I have, and so I also trusted on their experience."	**Reliance on institutional knowledge**	Hierarchical Buffering / Validation Dependency	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Using the expertise of the manager's long-term team to interpret feedback.
P03	**16:16**	"I don't push back unless there's like a time element. And thankfully, his feedback was simplification, so it did not have necessarily have a time implication."	**Strategic non-resistance**	High Directness / Professionalized Directness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Choosing not to challenge feedback when it aligns with or speeds up the timeline.
P03	**16:57**	"When I'm typically waiting for a response... I will ping their underlings. Basically, I'll go	**Hierarchy-based workarounds**	Downward Chain Verification / Underling Pinging	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Using immediate subordinates to verify project alignment during executive silence.

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		down, I'll go up the hierarchy right underneath them."				
P03	**16:57**	"While waiting for response, I would have pinged like [Redacted]... check with account and see, make sure everyone has given me as much approval as possible."	**Incremental approval gathering**	Incremental Approval Gathering	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Advancing the project by securing lower-level sign-offs while waiting.
P03	**17:53**	"During work hours, I just work... I typically work on between like six and 10 projects... so I never lack for things to do."	**Multi-project Working**	Adaptive Task-Switching / Detouring	8. Productivity & Rework	Using a high volume of alternate tasks to fill time during feedback delays.
P03	**17:53**	"I mean, we do all wait for the higher ups. And he is the highest level you can get, besides the CEO"	**Universal stakeholder waiting**	Executive Hierarchy Distance	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	The necessity of the entire production team pausing for top-level approval.
P03	**18:29**	"During non working hours... I would just move to personal tasks... non work related"	**Personal life compartmentalization**	Boundary Maintenance / Work-Life Compartmentalization	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Moving to non-work activities once the standard workday ends.
P03	**18:54**	"I might have, like, scrolled on my phone... thankfully... I don’t have to stay at my computer late if I’m waiting for a response."	**Boundary maintenance**	Boundary Maintenance / Work-Life Compartmentalization	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Refusing to extend working hours despite pending international feedback.
P03	**20:19**	"waiting for a response always affects, like, the	**Daily workflow disruption**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	Internal frustration caused by delays even when final deadlines are safe.

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		timeline of the day. I like to deliver things early."				
P03	**20:19**	"We did not deliver late... everything did get delivered exactly on time... but it does affect my daily schedule."	**Schedule impact vs. Deadline safety**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	Silence disrupting daily workflow but not jeopardizing final milestones.
P03	**21:20**	"I do make sure that everyone else at my level, and maybe even the level one up... is aligned... all on the same page"	**Lateral alignment security**	Detouring	8. Productivity & Rework	Reducing anxiety about executive silence by confirming consensus with peers.
P03	**21:20**	"I do a lot of recon. I do a lot of like communication with people at my level... to make sure nothing's gonna go wrong."	**Information "reconnaissance"**	Lateral Information Scavenging / Reconnaissance	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Active peer-level communication used to de-risk the project.
P03	**22:37**	"I don't feel like any of our time was wasted again... because he was blunt, which I appreciated... It was fairly simple"	**Appreciated efficiency**	Constructive Bluntness / Blunt Oversight	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Valuing bluntness because it prevented wasted time and clarified the path forward.
P03	**23:29**	"especially at the very end... it is a little bit like holding your breath waiting... For that approval."	**Anticipatory anxiety**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	High-tension waiting periods for final high-level sign-offs.
P03	**24:36**	"An email response quicker would have been great or not needing even them for	**Efficiency trade-offs**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	Identifying executive bottlenecks as the primary barrier to project speed.

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		approval would also make it faster."				
P03	**25:28**	"Once you get to a certain level... they are in high demand for meetings... easier for them to show up to a meeting, give immediate gut feedback, and then you kind of lose them."	**"Gut" feedback preference**	High-Stakes Project Oversight	1. Professional Roles & Context	Senior leaders favoring synchronous feedback over digital documentation.
P03	**26:46**	"They [underlings] certainly were not intimidated or shocked at the feedback, because they knew him so well, and so we were well prepared."	**Protective peer shielding**	High Directness / Professionalized Directness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Experienced team members preventing bluntness from disrupting the project.
P03	**26:46**	"even though he had some feedback... it only impacted the project in positive ways, and we were still able to deliver on time."	**Positive critique outcome**	High-Stakes Project Oversight	1. Professional Roles & Context	Managerial intervention resulting in a better quality product without timeline damage.
P04	**0:32**	"I work freelance projects across a range of community written communications... range of Gulf States."	**Transnational Freelancing**	Freelance/Contractor Role	1. Professional Roles & Context	Managing high-volume copy projects across multiple Middle Eastern countries from a remote base.
P04	**2:14**	"75% of my projects do my manager is [From GCC Country],	**Regional Managerial Demographics**	Cross-Continental / Regional Management	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Primary reporting lines to local nationals or regional expatriates in the MENA cluster.

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		and the other 20% is Arab expatriates."				
P04	**2:53**	"So they are quite professional, and they are quite well versed in how to brief and manage creative talent. So I found working directly with them quite clear."	**Managerial Competence**	High Directness / Professionalized Directness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	High-level local managers often share Western educational backgrounds, facilitating smoother technical communication.
P04	**2:53**	"Arab expatriates who are from the Levant... once they throw you under the bus... a lot of the blame gets placed on you if something goes wrong."	**Scapegoating Remote Talent**	Scapegoating / Remote Talent Scapegoating	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Remote/freelance status being utilized by middle managers as a buffer against accountability.
P04	**4:32**	"He was a middle manager, and his boss was [From GCC Country], and I was directly underneath him."	**Hierarchical Buffering**	Hierarchical Buffering / Validation Dependency	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Friction often occurs at the middle-management layer rather than with the ultimate project owner.
P04	**5:35**	"I don't think I've ever used slack once... it's usually WhatsApp and email and voice notes a lot."	**Informal Medium Dominance**	Informal Medium Dominance / Voice Note Use	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Reliance on WhatsApp over structured project management tools (Slack).
P04	**5:35**	"Thank God for AI, because it can be transcribed the voice notes. But like, a few years ago, it was a nightmare. It used to take up two hours...	**Technological Mediation**	Technological Mediation (AI for Transcribing)	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Using AI tools to manage the time-intensive process of extracting briefs from oral feedback.

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		they just do. I feel like to give feedback over the phone rather than directly an email."				
P04	**5:35**	"Waking up to a podcast every morning... take up two hours to [transcribe]... ramblings of someone driving a car for like, maybe 11-12, minutes."	**Low-Fidelity Briefing**	Low-Fidelity Briefing (Voice Note Briefs)	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Lengthy, unstructured voice notes as a primary source of project instructions.
P04	**5:35**	"They tend to try and keep things on phone conversations and not through email... So there's no paper trail."	**Audit-Trail Avoidance**	Audit-Trail Avoidance	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Strategic use of oral/voice communication to avoid a documented record of specific instructions.
P04	**6:40**	"it just became apparent that the work relationship was breaking down because of these voice notes, because because of the time difference, and because they... was actually working for [High-PDI Asian Country]."	**Relational Erosion**	Relational Erosion	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Continuous use of inefficient communication mediums contributing to the collapse of the professional partnership.
P04	**6:40**	"So generally, Friday mornings, Saturday mornings, like 4am I'd receive, you know, 15 minutes of voice notes... and then during the meeting on Monday, I'd be told	**Chronemic Friction**	Chronemic Friction / Misaligned Chronemics	8. Productivity & Rework	Receiving massive workloads during off-hours, followed by verbal rejection of work that followed the recorded notes.

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		directly to my face, that's not what they wanted, even though I had, like, transcriptions of notes."				
P04	**6:40**	"it was just a very messy and then in that team, someone else was brought in, same thing happened. And it just... ended up breaking down as a client, to be honest."	**Systemic Failure**	Execution Gap / Planning Divergence	8. Productivity & Rework	Repetitive communication patterns leading to team turnover and eventual loss of the client account.
P04	**9:18**	"this is gonna make it's a bit of a wasp test, because the [GCC Country] office was taking care of it originally, and that completely broke down with a very unprofessional email directed at a [person]... telling [them] that [they] didn't understand anything."	**Public Professional Shaming**	Power Play / Public Professional Shaming	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Harsh, written reprimands for perceived misunderstandings leading to staff resignation.
P04	**9:18**	"there is mixed messages, I'd say, all the way down that network. And then it gets to my person I report to, and it becomes WhatsApp, voice notes over the weekend... everything	**Cascading Misinformation**	Linguistic Misalignment	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Information distortion across a network resulting in the executor receiving blame for a moving target.

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		changes... I get blamed."				
P04	**11:07**	"Cced everybody. See, for some reason [they] saw as a power play to basically belittle me."	**Public Reprimand**	Public Team Call-Out	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Utilizing group email CCs as a performative tool to show authority publicly.
P04	**11:07**	"When it was positive, it was it was basically a thumbs up... but then when it's something went wrong... big group email."	**Asymmetrical Feedback Exposure**	Asymmetrical Accountability / Matter-of-Fact Blame	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Praising privately/informally while criticizing publicly/formally.
P04	**13:25**	"Then it was you didn't understand. I sent you this on... it was just like in was my fault for not being able to Jigsaw the whole thing together."	**Jigsaw Briefing Failure**	Briefing Self-Reliance / Jigsaw Briefing	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	The burden of synthesizing fragmented information being placed on the subordinate.
P04	**13:25**	"They were afraid to say if it was good or bad, until someone else [higher up] told them."	**Validation Dependency**	Hierarchical Buffering / Validation Dependency	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Managers withholding feedback until they receive a cue from senior leadership.
P04	**13:25**	"it was impossible... without [AI], because the voice notes I just transcribe... I would build a rough brief for me, because there was no brief before that."	**Briefing Self-Reliance**	Briefing Self-Reliance / Jigsaw Briefing	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Worker using technology to build their own documentation in the absence of a formal brief.
P04	**13:25**	"Absolute plethora of voice notes... random	**Information Fragmentation**	Briefing Self-Reliance /	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Project "briefs" delivered as a disorganized collection of digital artifacts.

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		forward messages and screenshots... impossible to really entangle."		Jigsaw Briefing		
P04	**15:14**	"this specific project manager is very, very responsive, as in, within seconds... I don't think a message your name has gone more than more than a few minutes without being responded to"	**Hyper-Responsiveness**	Digital Tool Stack (WhatsApp, Discord, Teams)	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Immediate digital feedback loops from a specific manager contrast with broader client issues.
P04	**16:23**	"I would just say thank you, even though I didn't really understand what the message was... rather than ask for clarification."	**Conflict Avoidance**	Conflict Avoidance / Performing Politeness	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Performing politeness to mask confusion and avoid managerial defensiveness.
P04	**17:34**	"I asked for clarification, what [them] no problem... I feel very comfortable asking for clarification, and very, also very comfortable suggesting other ways of doing things"	**Constructive Agency**	Briefing Self-Reliance / Jigsaw Briefing	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	High psychological safety allowing for peer-level negotiation with a specific manager.
P04	**19:01**	"Because I work on so many different projects, I just moved on to a different project... until [clarification arrived]."	**Multi-Project Task Switching**	Adaptive Task-Switching / Detouring	8. Productivity & Rework	Minimizing downtime during communication gaps by pivoting to other freelance contracts.

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P04	**19:27**	"They felt urgency on their side, so they'd answer very quickly as well."	**Shared Urgency**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	Rapid response times driven by the client's own deadline pressures.
P04	**20:34**	"As a writer, I generally try to finish something first... I generally do not like to jump between because it's just it's hard to write for."	**Cognitive Flow Protection**	Boundary Maintenance / Work-Life Compartmentalization	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Resisting immediate pivots back to a task to maintain tone-of-voice consistency.
P04	**22:03**	"Like, there were some days where I wear a Fitbit and my heart rate... goes through the roof and the timeline for today,"	**Physiological Stress Response**	Post-Crisis Resentment / Physiological Stress	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Communication-driven pressure manifesting as physical health metrics (elevated heart rate).
P04	**22:03**	"Working until, you know, 9 or 10pm which would be over nearly midnight in [GCC Country]... 15-16, hour days."	**Time Zone Extension**	Chronemic Friction / Misaligned Chronemics	8. Productivity & Rework	Working extremely long hours to bridge the gap between Ireland and the Gulf.
P04	**23:12**	"So they say... April 24 inshallah. And then that means probably mid May"	**Extended Deadline Drift**	Timeline Expansion / Extended Deadline Drift	8. Productivity & Rework	"Inshallah" as a linguistic marker for significant, multi-week project delays.
P04	**23:12**	"Deadlines are generally missed... God willing, which means it won't happen, basically."	**Cultural Deadline Flexibility**	Cultural Deadline Flexibility (Inshallah)	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Normalizing project delays as a cultural standard.
P04	**24:42**	"time we finally get to bill them, it'll be a year later... 12-15, times the hours that	**Accrued Labor Cost**	Timeline Expansion / Extended Deadline Drift	8. Productivity & Rework	Project delays leading to massive hour-overages that are difficult to invoice.

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		were originally billed or originally allocated"				
P04	**24:42**	"Billing... is becoming very difficult... but if we say, here's the fee... they say, Well, it hasn't been published yet."	**Outcome-Based Payment Delay**	Governance / Legal Bottlenecks	8. Productivity & Rework	Clients refusing to pay until publication, despite worker-led completion of tasks.
P04	**26:08**	"we work on live documents... there is just so many cooks in the kitchen... 15 different people commenting... I wasn't sure who was more senior and who I should whose comment I should act. Because they were they were contradictory."	**Feedback Saturation/Conflict**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	Fragmented authority in shared documents making it impossible to prioritize contradictory edits.
P04	**27:57**	"I've reviewed, please see comments on document... whereas... I found some of the comments were not germane at All to the topic... so I didn't ignore them, and nothing ever happens."	**Redundant Review Activity**	Redundant Messaging Strategy	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Stakeholders providing non-essential feedback to appear involved without intending further engagement.
P04	**27:57**	"Ask someone for input, they feel the need to put something in there so they look	**Performative Editing**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	Stakeholders providing frivolous comments to demonstrate active participation.

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		like they've done a job."				
P04	**29:32**	"Bottleneck might be an out of office... senior [national] that was generally maybe not present."	**Executive Absence Bottleneck**	Silence as a Symptom of Power / De-prioritization	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Long-term administrative silence caused by extended holidays of high-level nationals.
P04	**29:32**	"they were out office... I'm not talking about out of office for a day or two... they were going skiing and coming back in three weeks"	**Chronic Managerial Absence**	Silence as a Symptom of Power / De-prioritization	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Project momentum stalling due to long-term, non-responsive out-of-office status.
P04	**30:50**	"the frustration comes afterwards, when you realize that they didn't really care about it, because three months later they Yeah,"	**Retrospective Feedback Frustration**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	Post-task realization that high-intensity effort was rendered irrelevant by subsequent project silence.
P04	**31:43**	"A brief is kind of a long list of threads forwarded... sporadically and informal and confusing."	**Briefing Informality**	Low-Fidelity Briefing (Voice Note Briefs)	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Lack of a formal, consolidated briefing document.
P04	**33:08**	"If you play a quiet, supportive role, you'll succeed... if you're a bit more voice first or you push back, you generally don't survive long."	**Strategic Compliance**	Strategic Compliance / Transactional Resignation	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Adopting a submissive professional stance to ensure contract longevity.
P04	**35:05**	"It's a temporary thing... as long as the checks keep coming	**Face-Saving Ritual Acceptance**	Falling on the Sword / Face-Saving Rituals	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Normalizing scapegoating as a temporary cultural performance to preserve the manager's reputation.

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		in... they can drive as many busses... it's just for them to save face. It's never... oh, you're done doing your job. You know, it's just, just, guys blame, move on."				
P04	**35:05**	"Letter of apology to the client... I would be kind of stood up as the fall guy... it's for them to save face."	**Face-Saving Ritual**	Falling on the Sword / Face-Saving Rituals	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Worker providing formal apologies for things they didn't do to preserve the manager's reputation.
P04	**36:29**	"It's just a lot easier to blame me because I'm so far away and you know, so,"	**Remote Scapegoating Efficacy**	Scapegoating / Remote Talent Scapegoating	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Remote distance making the worker an easy target for blame due to a lack of face-to-face interaction with clients.
P04	**36:32**	"I don't take a person at all... they keep paying me, so it doesn't really matter to me at all."	**Transactional Resignation**	Strategic Compliance / Transactional Resignation	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Accepting unfair blame as a professional cost of high-paying international work.
P05	**0:42**	"I've had multiple jobs simultaneously... at certain points, I've worked on three different temporary projects at the exact same time."	**Parallel Employment**	Sales & Technical Leads	1. Professional Roles & Context	Managing multiple remote roles concurrently within the same industry.
P05	**1:58**	"Singaporean team... [X] co founders, [X] Singaporeans, one Korean... younger than me."	**Intergenerational/Cross-Cultural Management**	Cross-Continental / Regional Management	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Reporting to a younger, primarily Singaporean founding team as an American.
P05	**2:44**	"Manager doesn't really exist in our industry. It's kind of	**Industry-Specific Hierarchy**	Perceived Flat Hierarchy /	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Perception of leadership as decision-making power rather than traditional management.

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		more like people who call the shots."		Interpersonal Flatness		
P05	**3:31**	"Three tools we use, Google meets, we use Slack and we use telegram."	**Segmented Digital Stack**	Digital Tool Stack (WhatsApp, Discord, Teams)	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Utilizing specific tools for meetings, formal comms, and urgent/informal comms.
P05	**3:45**	"Video calls every single day for one hour... and we talk all fucking day on telegram and or Slack."	**Synchronous/Asynchronous Overload**	Tiered Digital Engagement	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Combining daily mandatory video stand-ups with constant digital messaging.
P05	**4:52**	"In addition to the five hours of calls that I had every week, I had like, another 36 hours of calls every week on just like clients."	**Call-Heavy Workflow**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	Extreme volume of video/phone interaction totaling over 40 hours weekly.
P05	**6:26**	"Singaporeans in general. Their communication style, very direct, no bullshit."	**Regional Bluntness**	Regional/Cultural Bluntness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Cultural directness associated with the Singaporean work context.
P05	**6:26**	"I thought he was a fucking asshole, but he knows that I told him to his face... And he's like, I'm sorry, but you're just gonna have to figure that out."	**Reciprocal Bluntness**	Relaxed Brutality / Brutal Honesty	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Subordinate expressing negative character judgments directly to a founder without termination.
P05	**6:26**	"in the very beginning, it was very jarring, and I really disliked it, but over	**Management Style Assimilation**	Relaxed Brutality / Brutal Honesty	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Adopting the blunt traits of a difficult manager despite initial personal dislike.

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		time, I actually started to adopt parts of his personality in my own management style."				
P05	**6:26**	"he was, he was constantly talking about what he wanted, about every little detail, big or small. And I, again, I grew to respect it."	**Micromanagement Respect**	Micromanagement Respect	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Gaining respect for a leader's extreme attention to detail and relentless pursuit of goals.
P05	**6:26**	"Singaporeans in general, baseline, even if they were kind, were very blunt. This specific person was blunt, plus, I mean, died on every hill."	**Extreme Persistence**	Relaxed Brutality / Brutal Honesty	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Combining regional bluntness with an uncompromising, "die on every hill" managerial philosophy.
P05	**7:55**	"I felt that his comments were always on point and quite insightful. But whenever it was something outside of his wheelhouse... I often felt like he did not understand how human interaction worked."	**Wheelhouse Credibility Gap**	Relaxed Brutality / Brutal Honesty	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Respecting blunt feedback in technical areas but questioning it in social/sales areas.
P05	**7:55**	"No, I am not going to message this person again after I just messaged them 30 minutes ago... but he'll go ahead and do that shit anyways."	**Social Boundary Friction**	Boundary Maintenance / Work-Life Compartmentalization	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Manager ignoring standard social interaction norms in favor of aggressive persistence.

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P05	**8:15**	"They filter, like they kind of based on context... you have to be a little bit of a hard ass to get what you want."	**Contextual Directness**	Regional/Cultural Bluntness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Strategic use of bluntness and persistence to achieve professional goals.
P05	**11:16**	"That's something that would bother the shit out of me. It's like, I would leave a message with a very specific and it was, it would happen with two of the co founders, not with the rest."	**Selective Non-responsiveness**	Latency / Extreme Latency	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Specific leaders frequently ignoring targeted messages while others remain responsive.
P05	**11:16**	"The subtext of him ignoring my message is that... yours is not important."	**Silence as De-prioritization**	Silence as a Symptom of Power / De-prioritization	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Interpreting a manager's lack of response as a signal of the worker's low status/importance.
P05	**13:34**	"so I would always get a answer within 24 hours, and they would often acknowledge that they had seen the message but were too busy to respond and wanted to wait until the call if it was super urgent,"	**Synchronous Deferment**	Normalization of Standard Latency (24-48 hrs)	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Acknowledging a message but delaying the actual response until a scheduled meeting.
P05	**13:34**	"If I didn't get a direct response, then I would just badger the shit out of them on the on the daily stand up... Yo, read my shit."	**Aggressive Follow-Up**	Persistent Probing / Aggressive Follow-Up	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Utilizing mandatory meetings to force responses from non-responsive managers.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
P05	**14:30**	"Certainly not more authoritative, but more distant."	**Distancing Effect of Silence**	Distancing Effect of Silence	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Silence causing emotional or professional distance rather than reinforcing power.
P05	**15:15**	"I didn't ask [for clarification] because... I cannot chase down every single question I have right now... I might as well just use [the stand up]."	**Efficiency-Based Silence**	Silence as a Symptom of Power / De-prioritization	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Intentionally choosing not to clarify via text due to the high volume of other active tasks.
P05	**16:44**	"So the immediate response was, bro, I have so much work to do. I don't care. I can work on something else, or I'll figure it out myself."	**Dismissive Resilience**	Strategic Compliance / Transactional Resignation	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Ignoring managerial silence by relying on high workload and self-sufficiency.
P05	**16:44**	"If I couldn't get an answer from one co founder, I could always count on someone else on the team... get the information roundabout way."	**Lateral Information Scavenging**	Lateral Information Scavenging / Reconnaissance	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Bypassing a silent manager to gather data from peers or other leaders.
P05	**16:44**	"I just kind of, I did talk to them less, because I just didn't feel like, what's the point?"	**Communication Withdrawal**	Relational Erosion	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Reducing interaction with non-responsive managers as a rational response to low "hit rates".
P05	**18:17**	"Robot with my schedule... I have areas for deep work and I have areas for comms... I don't do	**Compartmentalized Productivity**	Boundary Maintenance / Work-Life Compartmentalization	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Protecting "deep work" periods by intentionally ignoring all communication tools.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
		comms when I'm doing deep work."				
P05	**20:04**	"I need to submit documentation to a partner... Until I can get those answers, those questions answered, I cannot progress on that documentation."	**Critical Path Documentation Block**	Critical Path Dependency / Documentation Block	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Managerial silence specifically halting the completion and submission of partner-facing documents.
P05	**21:19**	"so, like an email, email is, like the worst form of communication. The information bandwidth is so slow."	**Medium Bandwidth Rejection**	Medium-Specific Silence (e.g., Email Silence)	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Actively criticizing email for its inability to handle the high pace of industry communication.
P05	**21:19**	"if you just get on a call... or you write messages... they would probably be the equivalent of writing like, 50 emails... downloaded in a single 10 minute session."	**Synchronous Efficiency Advantage**	Synchronous Coordination (Daily Stand-ups)	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Using calls and instant messaging to bypass the slow, iterative nature of traditional email.
P05	**21:19**	"Because the delays were only a matter of hours, like we're not really talking about... video messages really accelerate the pace of our work."	**Digital Acceleration**	Normalization of Standard Latency (24-48 hrs)	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	View that modern digital tools minimize the perceived impact of communication delays.
P05	**23:15**	"My work was self contained... the only thing that I'm constraining is	**Isolated Output Bottleneck**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	Delays primarily affecting the worker's individual metrics rather than the broader team.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
		revenue per month, but then that... doesn't affect anybody else."				
P05	**23:59**	"We realized... he did not do any of the things that we had asked... he was not very responsive [beforehand]."	**Unresponsive Non-Compliance**	Execution Gap / Planning Divergence	8. Productivity & Rework	A manager's prior silence foreshadowing a failure to follow project instructions.
P05	**23:59**	"I had to fly, like an emergency flight... hire that same camera crew again, and then do it as an interview style."	**Physical Remediation**	Physical Remediation (Emergency Flight)	8. Productivity & Rework	Traveling internationally to physically manage a task that failed due to poor remote communication.
P05	**23:59**	"I blew up... you dumb motherfucker... not a word of appreciation for the whole thing."	**Post-Crisis Resentment**	Post-Crisis Resentment / Physiological Stress	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Verbalizing extreme frustration after fixing a costly mistake caused by a manager.
P05	**27:36**	"But it wasn't like, was I worried about my job... this team would they kind of the co founders kind of set the tone. And the co founders... are very brutally honest with each other."	**Atmospheric Brutal Honesty**	Relaxed Brutality / Brutal Honesty	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Reduced job insecurity due to a pervasive team culture of aggressive transparency.
P05	**27:36**	"Permissive... even when we fought, it was never really heated... words were very cutting, but the tone was very relaxed."	**Relaxed Brutality**	Relaxed Brutality / Brutal Honesty	2. Managerial Style & Directness	A communication style involving harsh insults delivered with a calm, conversational tone.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
P05	**29:59**	"My co founders were difficult, but they were never unethical... never expected of me [to save face]."	**Ethical Consistency**	Perceived Flat Hierarchy / Interpersonal Flatness	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	High personal friction existing alongside a refusal to engage in deceptive face-saving practices.
P05	**31:31**	"functionally, like I just stopped working with him... I had to lean more on, like, the engineers directly... it's not his job to give me context for everything."	**Managerial Redundancy**	Managerial Redundancy (Bypassing Manager)	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Functionally bypassing a non-responsive manager by going directly to technical sources.
P05	**31:31**	"Hit rate was 50... if I need information, like, I'm not going to take a 50% gamble... reach out to a bunch of bunch of guys to get what you need."	**Redundant Messaging Strategy**	Redundant Messaging Strategy	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Sending the same query to multiple people to ensure at least one response.
P05	**31:31**	"the structure is so flat in the company, it I always felt comfortable asking. I didn't always ask. But it wasn't a comfort issue. It was more or a power distance issue."	**Flat-Structure Accessibility**	Perceived Flat Hierarchy / Interpersonal Flatness	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Feeling comfortable asking questions due to lack of power distance, even when choosing not to ask.
P05	**34:20**	"Meetings... could have been 15 minutes... you'd be like, Why are we all in the same call?"	**Meeting Dilution**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	Large, unfocused calls that waste time for specialized sub-teams.
P05	**34:20**	"I would rather be doing literally anything else than	**Administrative Fatigue**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	Resentment toward repetitive reporting tasks in a high-bandwidth environment.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
		updating on CRMs again."				
P06	**0:58**	"I usually have people report to me from around the world... My managers are in the United States."	**Global-Local Reporting**	Senior Creative / Director	1. Professional Roles & Context	Balancing international subordinate/lateral management with domestic (US) reporting lines.
P06	**2:12**	"I would say it's an equal standard because it's business to business."	**Lateral B2B Communication**	Multi-stakeholder Coordination	1. Professional Roles & Context	Communicating in an "equal status" capacity rather than a vertical hierarchy.
P06	**2:27**	"WhatsApp is key, zoom as well. Email platform that we use, we also use CRM software and other softwares... Flight booking software, the internet,"	**Diverse Technical Stack**	Digital Tool Stack (WhatsApp, Discord, Teams)	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Utilizing a wide variety of software including CRM, booking tools, and social messaging for operations.
P06	**3:02**	"Whenever I have the chance, I always turn my video on. I view that as kind of like a bit of a power flex in a positive way."	**Video-Enhanced Presence**	Video-Enhanced Presence / Power Flex	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Using video to project personality, authority, and non-verbal cues.
P06	**3:02**	"I can communicate more of my personality when with my message, facial expressions and my hand gestures... I feel that it's more effective to speak with video"	**Non-Verbal Richness**	Video-Enhanced Presence / Power Flex	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Valuing video for the ability to convey intent through expressions and gestures.
P06	**3:02**	"I also am a big fan of audio notes on WhatsApp... instead of a email... I could	**Audio vs. Textual Clarity**	Informal Medium Dominance /	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Favoring voice notes over written text to ensure nuance and speed in informal communication.

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		quickly and clearly voice my thought... and have them understand more of what I'm trying to communicate."		Voice Note Use		
P06	**5:31**	"My messaging to her, and her messaging to me... her messaging to me, was a little at times unclear. I think part of it was linguistic."	**Linguistic Misalignment**	Linguistic Misalignment	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Communication friction caused by the use of the participant's native language as a partner's second language.
P06	**5:31**	"There was also different levels of urgency, so I felt like prioritizing was a little difficult."	**Urgency Variance**	Chronemic Friction / Misaligned Chronemics	8. Productivity & Rework	Friction arising from differing perceptions of project speed and priority.
P06	**6:22**	"I asked her to fill out a rough itinerary... she didn't follow through... left out the pricing component... she said, like, 'this will be planned when we arrive.'"	**Execution Gap/Planning Divergence**	Execution Gap / Planning Divergence	8. Productivity & Rework	A failure to follow specific documentation requests, replaced by a "figure it out later" approach.
P06	**7:32**	"It wasn't dismissive. It was. It was we weren't aligned on our perception of urgency."	**Misaligned Chronemics**	Chronemic Friction / Misaligned Chronemics	8. Productivity & Rework	Reframing perceived dismissiveness as a fundamental mismatch in how urgency is viewed.
P06	**7:55**	"I kept asking for clarification."	**Persistent Verification**	Persistent Probing / Aggressive Follow-Up	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Repeatedly seeking clarity when instructions remain vague or incomplete.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
P06	**8:23**	"Communication problems with one of my colleagues in Japan... took her a long time to respond to simple asks... projects ended up taking three weeks [instead of one]."	**Asynchronous Lag/Response Bottleneck**	Latency / Extreme Latency	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Protracted project timelines caused by a colleague's slow response rate.
P06	**9:46**	"she wanted to renegotiate her compensation... there was a big lack in time and urgency... she needed time to think about her response and process it"	**Negotiation Processing Time**	Latency / Extreme Latency	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Lengthy delays in communication attributed to the other party's need for internal processing.
P06	**9:46**	"several months later, she says, I want to renegotiate my position. And it took her a long time to say what she wanted."	**Delayed Financial Ask**	Latency / Extreme Latency	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	A significant gap between the start of a role and the request to change terms, followed by slow communication.
P06	**9:46**	"After thinking about everything, she said... I want to know... how blunt I can be. And we said... please be as honest as you need to... we can hear difficult things."	**Establishing Radical Honesty**	Establishment of Radical Honesty	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Negotiating the boundaries of direct communication within a professional setting.
P06	**9:46**	"She was also quite, in My opinion, condescending of how we operated our business, and had was direct and blunt...	**Pedagogical/Critical Tone**	Pedagogical/Critical Tone	2. Managerial Style & Directness	A contractor adopting a blunt, condescending tone regarding company operations and tools.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
		suddenly throw in, like wanted to totally change the platform."				
P06	**9:46**	"Wanted to totally change the platform... because WhatsApp was related to meta and had concerns about data security... ethical questions about like genocide."	**Tool-Based Ethical Friction**	Tool-Based Ethical Friction	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Refusal to use standard communication apps based on personal ethical or security concerns.
P06	**12:51**	"She would wait like five days on average, sometimes like a week and a half, sometimes two weeks."	**Extreme Latency**	Latency / Extreme Latency	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Multi-week silence in a project-based environment.
P06	**13:19**	"after three or four days of no response, I would send a follow up email. She would respond four or five days later. Thank you for your patience. I needed time to think."	**Forced Follow-up Cycle**	Persistent Probing / Aggressive Follow-Up	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	A pattern of several days of silence requiring proactive outreach only to receive further delays.
P06	**13:42**	"Negotiating tactic. And I also think it was just maybe lack of experience from her part... felt like maybe she was a little nervous on how to proceed"	**Tactical/Inexperienced Silence**	Catastrophizing Silence	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Silence interpreted as either a negotiation strategy or a result of professional insecurity.
P06	**13:42**	"Some of it also could have been that she... has other jobs out there... I also understand that she	**Multi-Responsibility Mitigation**	Adaptive Task-Switching / Detouring	8. Productivity & Rework	Rationalizing delays by acknowledging the other party's competing work and research needs.

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		has other responsibilities... part of it may have been research."				
P06	**13:42**	"we can't really expect you to email us back right away if we're not requiring that expectation either."	**Managing Expectations**	Normalization of Standard Latency (24-48 hrs)	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Acknowledging that without explicit response-time requirements, rapid replies cannot be mandated.
P06	**16:09**	"Please Don't pressure me into making a quick decision if I'm not ready... I don't appreciate you trying to rush me into signing a contract."	**Resentment of Urgency**	Post-Crisis Resentment / Physiological Stress	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	The colleague perceiving standard deadline follow-ups as unwelcome "pressure" or disrespect.
P06	**16:09**	"I think there may have also been... issues in her life... I think there were certainly some external like mental health factors that were affecting her, her workability."	**Extrinsic Behavioral Influence**	Post-Crisis Resentment / Physiological Stress	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Attributing poor communication and performance to personal drama or mental health issues.
P06	**17:30**	"Frustrating, because even the times that we spoke on the phone... she was very repetitive... a half hour conversation was an hour and a half."	**Verbal Circularity**	Post-Crisis Resentment / Physiological Stress	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Inefficient synchronous communication characterized by repetition and extended duration.
P06	**17:30**	"hopefully this gets wrapped up by the end of the week, and it continued for three or	**Timeline Expansion**	Timeline Expansion / Extended Deadline Drift	8. Productivity & Rework	Repeated failure to meet internal target dates, leading to month-long extensions of single tasks.

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		four more weeks, you know."				
P06	**18:17**	"I immediately got on a call with [my boss]... I gossiped with my colleague... why won't you just tell us what she wants?"	**Vent-Based Processing**	Vent-Based Processing / Gossiping	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Immediate lateral/upward venting used as a coping mechanism for communication frustration.
P06	**18:58**	"Deadlines were being passed... creating a larger sense of urgency... doesn't look good on us when we say to our clients that we're going to deliver."	**Reputational Risk**	Execution Gap / Planning Divergence	8. Productivity & Rework	Internal communication failure threatening the company's external credibility with clients.
P06	**20:04**	"Ultimately decided to sever our working relationship... had to go through another interview process... find another person to fill her spot."	**Contractual Termination**	Strategic Compliance / Transactional Resignation	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Communication failure leading to the total collapse of the working relationship.
P06	**21:14**	"Experience in the tourism world, but not... in this like negotiating position of also, like navigating Japanese cultural norms and American cultural norms."	**Cultural Navigation Gap**	Third-Culture Complexity	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Inexperience in balancing contrasting cultural professional norms.
P06	**22:43**	"No, I think we just hired a bad employee or a bad independent contractor."	**Employee Suitability Assessment**	Strategic Compliance / Transactional Resignation	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Attributing issues to a fundamental lack of fit rather than just cultural or communication gaps.

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P06	**23:03**	"Yeah, a day of two days is normal for for my line of work,"	**Normalization of Standard Latency**	Normalization of Standard Latency (24-48 hrs)	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Defining the industry baseline for "normal" response times as 24–48 hours.
P06	**23:57**	"I checked in with her several times... if she needed any training or help... I even messaged her separately and gave her a little advice... how to communicate with our bosses."	**Proactive Mentorship/Support**	Pedagogical/Critical Tone	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Attempting to mitigate communication issues through extra training, check-ins, and unofficial advice.
P06	**23:57**	"just so you know, it's not like a really great look if that it's taking you so long to respond. Like, don't be afraid to ask for what you want."	**Perception-Based Coaching**	Pedagogical/Critical Tone	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Advising the subordinate on how their silence is perceived by leadership and encouraging directness.
P06	**23:57**	"we're just like, chill people... who just want to enjoy work, and we don't want to, like, have this unnecessary drama going on, you know?"	**Informal Organizational Culture**	Virtual Filter Anxiety / Out-Group Self-Consciousness	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Emphasizing a "chill" business environment as a reason to avoid dramatic or delayed communication.
P06	**23:57**	"We should have ripped the band aid off quick. And it ended up being like a slow, long, painful, like peeling the bandaid away."	**Delayed Resolution**	Strategic Compliance / Transactional Resignation	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Regret over not terminating a non-responsive relationship sooner.
P06	**25:37**	"Third Culture kid perspective... family is, I believe,	**Third-Culture Complexity**	Third-Culture Complexity	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Recognizing that multi-cultural backgrounds complicate professional norm alignment.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
		Indonesian and Korean. But she was raised in the United States... then working in a totally different culture."				
P07	**0:51**	"The formal role... was a contingent worker, so essentially, I was a contractual like freelancer... for a total of, like, about 12 or 13 months."	**Contingent Freelancing**	Freelance/Contractor Role	1. Professional Roles & Context	Long-term contractual engagement within a large corporate structure.
P07	**1:46**	"facilitating, like creative incentives... liaison between creative teams... partnering brands, as well as like large scale events... specifically in Brazil."	**Cross-Regional Liaison**	Transnational/ Regional Liaison	1. Professional Roles & Context	Serving as a bridge between diverse creative and production teams for international events.
P07	**3:11**	"My immediate supervisor... LATAM at the time... from Brazil... from [Brazilian City]."	**Regional LATAM Management**	Project/Program Management	1. Professional Roles & Context	Reporting to a Brazilian manager within a regional division of a global company.
P07	**4:19**	"We use teams and we use WhatsApp... WhatsApp mostly"	**Dual-Platform Communication**	Digital Tool Stack (WhatsApp, Discord, Teams)	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Primary reliance on WhatsApp for daily coordination alongside formal platforms (Teams).
P07	**4:35**	"Daily meetings, team meetings, one on ones... we did meet regularly face to face... unless... heads down on projects."	**Hybrid-Digital Rhythm**	Synchronous Coordination (Daily Stand-ups)	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Balancing regular video/synchronous meetings with text-based focus periods.

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P07	**5:21**	"overall, she was, she was very she had very good outside manners... she was never overly blunt,"	**Softened Professionalism**	Equitable Poise / Softened Professionalism	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Manager maintaining polite and professional social "manners" even in a remote setting.
P07	**5:21**	"very straightforward, but very kind, very precise with what she needed... familiar with the language and workflow."	**High-Precision Professionalism**	Equitable Poise / Softened Professionalism	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Respecting a manager's directness when paired with kindness and shared professional language.
P07	**6:19**	"She was always very direct,"	**Clear Directness**	High Directness / Professionalized Directness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Consistent and unambiguous communication of needs and expectations.
P07	**6:39**	"she was very well traveled... worked with so many teams... managerial directorial roles... carry herself in a very... respectable way."	**Experienced Leadership Perception**	Cross-Continental / Regional Management	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Attributing managerial competence and respectability to extensive international experience.
P07	**7:47**	"You know, she's she was very professional, very respectful, but friendly."	**Balanced Professionalism**	Equitable Poise / Softened Professionalism	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Maintaining a demeanor that is simultaneously authoritative and approachable.
P07	**7:47**	"personality and demeanor that allowed me to feel that I could... see her as like a mentor... I felt confident that I could, you know, go, go to her for for advice."	**Mentorship Safety**	Equitable Poise / Softened Professionalism	2. Managerial Style & Directness	High psychological safety allowing the manager to be viewed as a professional guide.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
P07	**8:49**	"I never, I never reached out to her when she was on PTO. The culture of the company was very respectful towards people's personal time,"	**Culture of Time Respect**	Boundary Maintenance / Work-Life Compartmentalization	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Reciprocal respect for personal time fostered by organizational norms.
P07	**8:49**	"she would constantly update her calendar for lunch, times when she would go home and spend time with her daughter... she would kind of Alert, alert me."	**Transparent Boundary Setting**	Boundary Maintenance / Work-Life Compartmentalization	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Manager proactively sharing their schedule and family commitments to manage availability.
P07	**8:49**	"she never, she never left to me waiting for a response. I think that we had a very good understanding of professional and personal boundaries."	**Synchronized Responsiveness**	Normalization of Standard Latency (24-48 hrs)	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Reliability in communication coupled with a shared understanding of when to engage.
P07	**10:05**	"I wouldn't say that I felt uncomfortable reaching out. If anything, I just wouldn't tag her or mark it important, if I knew that that was... precious time for her,"	**Conscientious Outreach**	Perceived Flat Hierarchy / Interpersonal Flatness	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Feeling safe to communicate but choosing non-intrusive methods to protect the manager's personal time.
P07	**10:05**	"I don't remember ever having, like an emergency where I had to reach her during her personal time. But if I did, you	**Pre-emptive Communication**	Normalization of Standard Latency (24-48 hrs)	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Sending messages during off-hours not for immediate action, but to ensure they are seen later.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
		know, it was just to, kind of like, be ahead of the game."				
P07	**10:05**	"I would mention it in the in the teams chat, but not tag her or mark it urgent, just so that she wouldn't disrupt her personal time."	**Selective Notification Etiquette**	Tiered Digital Engagement	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Avoiding intrusive digital alerts (tags/urgent markers) during a manager's personal hours.
P07	**11:09**	"she always took the time to check teams and answer any concerns or questions."	**Consistent Team Presence**	Normalization of Standard Latency (24-48 hrs)	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Managerial habit of reviewing and addressing all team communications once active.
P07	**11:36**	"more frequently she would let me know directly... if the rest of the team was curious... I would fill in for her."	**Status Proxy**	High Directness / Professionalized Directness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Directly communicating availability to key subordinates who then act as information buffers for the team.
P07	**12:34**	"significant delay on one of the projects... was a little bit out of our control. It was more budgetary."	**External Project Stalling**	Daily Workflow Disruption	8. Productivity & Rework	Project delays attributed to high-level financial decisions rather than communication failures.
P07	**13:01**	"at that point we would just pivot to other immediate needs... and then detour back to that project."	**Strategic Project Detouring**	Adaptive Task-Switching / Detouring	8. Productivity & Rework	Maintaining productivity by shifting focus to secondary tasks during primary project delays.
P07	**14:09**	"HOUSEKEEPING: checking up on the statuses of the different phases... house keeping."	**Housekeeping Tasks**	Housekeeping Tasks	8. Productivity & Rework	Using downtime to perform administrative maintenance and project status checks.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
P07	**14:09**	"take a 30 minute, one hour break, and, you know, go get a workout or have some lunch... and then come back."	**Flexible Disengagement**	Boundary Maintenance / Work-Life Compartmentalization	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Taking personal breaks during low-volume periods when waiting for non-urgent feedback.
P07	**15:28**	"delays that we... encountered had to do with, like legal overseeing... changed things a bit by, like a day or two."	**Governance Bottlenecks**	Governance / Legal Bottlenecks	8. Productivity & Rework	Minor delays (1-2 days) caused by formal legal and compliance reviews.
P07	**18:19**	"having to pressure a little bit for for answers and setting up calls... create a little bit of urgency in their reviews."	**Active Urgency Generation**	Persistent Probing / Aggressive Follow-Up	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Using synchronous calls to force external departments to prioritize reviews.
P07	**19:29**	"we had, like, equal power. It really didn't [matter] unless it was coming from like, a... C level exec... [Manager] and I had like, equal power."	**Parallel Leverage**	Perceived Flat Hierarchy / Interpersonal Flatness	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Subordinate and manager having similar ability to pressure external departments for answers.
P07	**20:27**	"I think she communicated with everybody. I mean, one on one, I'm not really sure... but, I mean, she communicated with everybody"	**Broad Communication Reach**	Perceived Flat Hierarchy / Interpersonal Flatness	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Managerial behavior characterized by interacting across the team regardless of specific rank.
P07	**21:11**	"always very, very level headed with everyone."	**Equitable Poise**	Equitable Poise / Softened	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Consistent, calm communication style regardless of a team member's rank.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
				Professionalism		
P07	**21:52**	"she she made that work experience ideal."	**Idealized Work Environment**	Equitable Poise / Softened Professionalism	2. Managerial Style & Directness	High overall satisfaction with the workplace attributed to a specific manager's style.
P07	**21:52**	"Treats everyone very, very kindly. She can be firm when she needs to be but only in like times of urgency."	**Situational Firmness**	Equitable Poise / Softened Professionalism	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Balancing overall kindness with the ability to exert authority during high-pressure moments.
P07	**21:52**	"she set the bar very high for my own expectations of work culture."	**Cultural Gold Standard**	Equitable Poise / Softened Professionalism	2. Managerial Style & Directness	A positive managerial experience defining the participant's ideal work environment.
P07	**22:51**	"I only felt [hierarchy] when it came down to waiting on approvals... availability... reviews and approvals."	**Hierarchy of Approval**	Hierarchical Buffering / Validation Dependency	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Hierarchy only becoming visible during formal gatekeeping and sign-off phases.
P07	**23:58**	"I guess, like in an interpersonal sense, it felt flat. There was no sense of like intimidation or inferiority."	**Interpersonal Flatness**	Perceived Flat Hierarchy / Interpersonal Flatness	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Socially flat hierarchy allowing direct access to high-level leaders without intimidation.
P07	**23:58**	"there was an awareness of of like, their positions and their relevance in the company, and the	**Awareness of Leverage**	Awareness of Leverage	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Recognition of rank and organizational power despite an informal social atmosphere.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
		leverage that they held in their roles."				
P07	**23:58**	"everyone on the team was Really cool. I mean, I could go directly to the director... and he was cool with it... no sense of like inferiority."	**Direct Executive Access**	Perceived Flat Hierarchy / Interpersonal Flatness	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	High-level leadership remaining accessible for immediate personal or professional pings.
P07	**24:50**	"without feeling like, Oh my gosh. Am I? Am I overstepping? Am I, you know, am I being like, too aggressive? No. I mean, like, everyone was very, very casual and just very collaborative,"	**Absence of Overstepping Anxiety**	Perceived Flat Hierarchy / Interpersonal Flatness	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Lack of concern regarding hierarchical boundaries when engaging in casual or collaborative communication.
P07	**27:58**	"misunderstanding... dis- a little bit of A disconnect on what was permitted... designing logos... branding standards."	**Cross-Regional Brand Friction**	Governance / Legal Bottlenecks	8. Productivity & Rework	Conflict between regional creative expression and global branding standards.
P08	**0:33**	"I joined the [team]... growth and business development, but has expanded from there."	**Role Expansion**	Sales & Technical Leads	1. Professional Roles & Context	Professional responsibilities evolving beyond initial growth/BD scope.
P08	**1:39**	"born in Saudi Arabia, but culturally speaking, you know, more identifies with India."	**Transnational Cultural Identity**	Cross-Continental / Regional Management	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Managerial identity shaped by heritage rather than birth country.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
P08	**3:11**	"it’s kind of funny. It’s ubiquitous. So there’s no question, Telegram, Discord, for sure."	**Crypto-Ubiquitous Tools**	Digital Tool Stack (WhatsApp, Discord, Teams)	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Reliance on Discord and Telegram as industry-standard communication platforms.
P08	**3:34**	"get into a voice chat, share screens, kind of all of us do a round table... Kanban board where we work through... different projects."	**Synchronous Remote Coordination**	Synchronous Coordination (Daily Stand-ups)	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	High-bandwidth daily stand-ups using screen sharing and visual tracking tools.
P08	**4:24**	"working with Indians, you learn very quickly that they’re extremely blunt... immediately to the point... Westerners perspective, it can be... very abrasive."	**Perceived Abrasive Bluntness**	Regional/Cultural Bluntness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Cultural directness interpreted as "abrasive" or tense by Western team members.
P08	**5:23**	"Westerners, we will banter. There’s like, a lot of banter... verbal foreplay... formalities... In India, they want to cut through all that."	**Banality vs. Efficiency**	Banality vs. Efficiency (Western Banter vs. Indian Directness)	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Tension between Western social rapport (banter) and Indian task-focused directness.
P08	**5:23**	"as a Westerner, you just feel like you're trying to, like... I want to make sure I'm clear... that's kind of what we're used to."	**Clarity Seeking Norms**	Regional/Cultural Bluntness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Western tendency to over-explain to ensure mutual understanding.
P08	**5:23**	"they’ll do this thing where... it’s very... normal for them to go, Yeah, okay, okay,	**Aggressive Affirmation**	Regional/Cultural Bluntness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Rapid verbal agreement used to signal comprehension and stop the speaker.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
		okay, okay. And they’re trying to get you through it to tell you, like, Hey, shut up."				
P08	**5:23**	"over there, it’s not rude. It’s just them saying, I understand you."	**Reframing Rudeness**	Regional/Cultural Bluntness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Interpreting interruptions as signals of efficiency rather than disrespect.
P08	**6:49**	"It is both a assertive kind of like, I'm your boss kind of thing as well as you’re over explaining."	**Dual-Purpose Interruption**	Regional/Cultural Bluntness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Interruptions functioning as both power moves and efficiency corrections.
P08	**7:45**	"he stopped me, but he thought he understood... once he thought, he basically thought it was something completely different."	**Illusory Comprehension**	Regional/Cultural Bluntness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Misalignment caused by cutting off explanations before full technical grasp.
P08	**9:50**	"There has been moments... nothing crazy, but it has been like two days... technically is significant."	**48-Hour Silence**	48-Hour Silence / Significant Response Gaps	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Identifying 2-day delays as "significant" in a fast-paced technical environment.
P08	**10:32**	"Probed him again. That’s just the kind of person I am. Probed him a few times."	**Persistent Probing**	Persistent Probing / Aggressive Follow-Up	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Proactive, repeated outreach to elicit responses during manager silence.
P08	**10:32**	"I’m all the way over here, and I’m the only American based guy... I was the afterthought, the emergency was	**Remote Afterthought**	Virtual Filter Anxiety / Out-Group Self-Consciousness	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Feeling like a secondary priority due to geographical and cultural distance.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
		the the actual, real deal."				
P08	**11:35**	"Honestly, I mean, there's so many things running through my head. Actually, I'm fired."	**Catastrophizing Silence**	Catastrophizing Silence	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Fear of termination triggered by sudden communication gaps.
P08	**11:35**	"I thought maybe it was performance based... you get self conscious... you're not kind of like part of this group who they're all Indians themselves"	**Out-Group Self-Consciousness**	Virtual Filter Anxiety / Out-Group Self-Consciousness	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Performance anxiety rooted in being the sole cultural outsider.
P08	**11:35**	"some of the team also just aren't very good with written English... Challenging. Verbally, they're fine, but written English, they can get a little jar... messed up."	**Written Language Barrier**	Written Language Barrier	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Friction caused by varying proficiencies in written versus verbal English.
P08	**13:32**	"you're not kind of like part of this group who they're all Indians themselves... you can be a little isolated."	**Inter-Cultural Isolation**	Virtual Filter Anxiety / Out-Group Self-Consciousness	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Social and professional isolation resulting from cultural homogeneity of the core team.
P08	**13:32**	"I could say something that I don't even think is insulting, but it is... step on somebody's toes... definitely makes it a	**Virtual Filter Anxiety**	Virtual Filter Anxiety / Out-Group Self-Consciousness	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Heightened worry about unintentional offense due to lack of physical cues.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
		lot worse when you're in a virtual space, because I can't read body language."				
P08	**13:32**	"Indian style of like managing... Everybody's kind of like on a level playing field. So that is strange."	**Perceived Flat Hierarchy**	Perceived Flat Hierarchy / Interpersonal Flatness	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Observing a lack of rigid traditional structure in the management style.
P08	**16:31**	"American style... structured... clear direction... guardrails. With, you know, their style of things. It's much more relaxed... very not structured."	**Structure Mismatch**	Perceived Flat Hierarchy / Interpersonal Flatness	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Conflict between Western expectations of "guardrails" and a relaxed startup style.
P08	**16:31**	"guidance they they don't really have,"	**Guidance Deficit**	Perceived Flat Hierarchy / Interpersonal Flatness	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Perceived lack of formal managerial direction in the current environment.
P08	**16:31**	"something I actually like is that if you have an idea own it... follow all the way through."	**Total Project Ownership**	Perceived Flat Hierarchy / Interpersonal Flatness	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	High autonomy allowing for end-to-end management of personal initiatives.
P08	**18:29**	"I mean, it's basically like, if it goes good, 100% it was, you know, the co founders, if it goes bad, 100% it's on you. No question, there is that dynamic."	**Asymmetrical Accountability**	Asymmetrical Accountability / Matter-of-Fact Blame	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Leaders receiving credit for success while subordinates absorb 100% of the failure.
P08	**18:29**	"if it goes bad, 100% it's on you... They kind of expect you to	**Falling on the Sword**	Falling on the Sword / Face-Saving Rituals	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Expectation of public individual accountability for project failures.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
		die on the sword... eat crow for sure."				
P08	**19:41**	"they don't hold any ill will... just save face and move on. Yep, it's like a very like matter of fact."	**Matter-of-Fact Blame**	Asymmetrical Accountability / Matter-of-Fact Blame	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Public blame as a "face-saving" ritual that does not cause lasting relational damage.
P08	**21:23**	"basically you get called out on the team... let's all acknowledge that this was a mess up. We know it was you."	**Public Team Call-Out**	Public Team Call-Out	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Explicit, group-level identification of mistakes in team meetings.
P08	**21:23**	"he knows the team knows, he knows you know... there will be a gesture towards you... unspoken thing."	**Unspoken Recognition**	Perceived Flat Hierarchy / Interpersonal Flatness	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Implicit success signals that replace overt Western-style public accolades.
P08	**21:23**	"we're weird in America where we're like... salesperson hits their target, we give them like, a plaque... over there, They're like, great job, What's next?"	**Accolade Aversion**	Perceived Flat Hierarchy / Interpersonal Flatness	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	High-efficiency "move-on" culture versus American formal recognition.
P08	**23:18**	"I absolutely will not do that if it is genuinely not my fault... but they know if it is my fault, I will... fall on that sword."	**Fault-Based Accountability**	Asymmetrical Accountability / Matter-of-Fact Blame	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Refusal to accept blame for others' errors while taking full personal accountability.
P08	**23:58**	"[Manager] has tried [to push off blame], and some of the other team members... but	**Universal Blame Shifting**	Asymmetrical Accountability / Matter-of-Fact Blame	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Recognizing blame-shifting as a common professional behavior across cultures.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
		that really happens everywhere."				
P08	**24:42**	"Yeah, it's like every day, [Manager] wants you to just go with it. Okay?"	**Expectation of Autonomous Action**	Risky Executive Agency / Trial-by-Fire	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Managerial desire for subordinates to act without constant clarification.
P08	**24:42**	"nothing to do... with a power distance... it's more of I want to show him that I have the initiative."	**Initiative Performance**	Risky Executive Agency / Trial-by-Fire	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Choosing silence/action over clarification to prove competence and talent.
P08	**24:42**	"I actually really enjoy, like being thrown into the fire... I want to know if I'm going to sink or swim."	**Trial-by-Fire Preference**	Risky Executive Agency / Trial-by-Fire	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Thriving in high-pressure, ambiguous technical scenarios as a self-test.
P08	**24:42**	"So we actually argue a lot about a lot of stuff... They do very much. So love a robust debate."	**Culture of Robust Debate**	Regional/Cultural Bluntness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	High psychological safety for aggressive verbal disagreement and negotiation.
P08	**26:52**	"I mean, whatever it might be, and maybe sometimes I have to ask for forgiveness because I did it wrong, but then it informs my next decision."	**Forgiveness vs. Permission**	Risky Executive Agency / Trial-by-Fire	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Acting without approval to move projects forward, accepting potential future rework.
P08	**26:52**	"Instead of asking for, like, all the details... I'll just say, I'm I'll get it done."	**Minimalist Affirmation**	Regional/Cultural Bluntness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Providing brief, positive responses to reduce managerial cognitive load.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
P08	**26:52**	"I try to be introspective... put myself in his shoes. Figure out what he would want from me... do they want a bunch of questions?"	**Managerial Empathy**	Investigative Cultural Empathy	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Using perspective-taking to proactively reduce friction and questioning.
P08	**26:52**	"we have a guy who's basically like this hilarious sounding board, and he's just negative about everything... looking forward to how he tears it apart."	**Hostile Sounding Board**	Regional/Cultural Bluntness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Finding professional humor and value in consistently negative feedback styles.
P08	**29:15**	"Maybe 24 hours... there is definitely times where I'll get a good, solid 24 hours... He was traveling. He may, may have forgotten"	**Occasional Response Gaps**	Normalization of Standard Latency (24-48 hrs)	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Acceptance of 24-hour silences as byproducts of travel or oversight.
P08	**30:19**	"Typically, I'll try to go down the chain to see if anybody has any other... clarifying response."	**Downward Chain Verification**	Downward Chain Verification / Underling Pinging	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Bypassing silent managers by seeking answers from lower-level team members.
P08	**30:19**	"I'm probably... risking your career, but I'll make the call... he's appreciated it actually."	**Risky Executive Agency**	Risky Executive Agency / Trial-by-Fire	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Making critical high-level decisions during manager absence; often rewarded.
P08	**32:06**	" misunderstood what I said, you're supposed to build that on top of our API... I was like, would have	**Late-Stage Correction**	Exhaustive Production Rework	8. Productivity & Rework	Receiving critical technical redirect only after substantial project completion.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
		been nice to know (sarcastic)."				
P08	**32:06**	"I mean, clearly he even admitted, like, Oh crap. I didn't realize. I didn't put that in there."	**Managerial Fault Admission**	Regional/Cultural Bluntness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Rare instance of leadership acknowledging their role in communication failure.
P08	**33:09**	"that week we were supposed to go out with... all three together... swap it around... Devastating."	**Devastating Crypto Lag**	Devastating Crypto Lag	8. Productivity & Rework	Major marketing and technical failure resulting from a three-day delay.
P08	**34:50**	"you have to, like, redo everything, retest everything... make sure that when it's actually being used in a production environment."	**Exhaustive Production Rework**	Exhaustive Production Rework	8. Productivity & Rework	Labor-intensive re-validation process required after brief or technical changes.
P08	**35:19**	"Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, to capture people's attention. Thursday, Friday. Everybody's checked out... intellectually... they're off somewhere else."	**Chronemic Attention Cycle**	Chronemic Friction / Misaligned Chronemics	8. Productivity & Rework	Aligning high-value work with days of peak audience attention.
P08	**36:32**	"it's just one of those classic moments. It was great. It's a great learning experience."	**Constructive Failure Framing**	Constructive Failure Framing	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Categorizing costly professional errors as pedagogical learning moments.
P08	**36:32**	"You know, ask you don't sometimes there is moments where you really, genuinely do	**Recognition of Clarification Necessity**	Risky Executive Agency / Trial-by-Fire	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Recognizing the situational limits of autonomous action versus clarifying needs.

Participant	Timestamp	Raw Excerpt (Coded Text)	Initial/Open Code	Descriptive Code	Group/Topic	Conceptual Label/Memo
		need to ask for clarity. And that was one of those where I messed up"				
P08	**37:05**	"I mean, every time, it's just be more explicit, okay, it's be more clear."	**Desired Explicitness**	Regional/Cultural Bluntness	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Explicit instructions identified as the key to increased project velocity.
P08	**37:48**	"very similar in the like Spanish culture, how they have, like, machismo... male bravado... and they talk about that."	**Managerial Masculinity**	Managerial Masculinity/Bravado	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Perceiving elements of male bravado as a core cultural component of leadership.
P08	**37:48**	"the cow thing. I didn't... realize that they were Hindi... frequently, like a dummy, just talking about it and forgetting that to them, it's a sacred animal."	**Unintentional Religious Offense**	Unintentional Religious Offense	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Accidentally referencing sacred cultural topics due to religious ignorance.
P08	**37:48**	"investing a little bit of your personal touch into figuring out what your co workers kind of culture is about... religious and everything else. It helps."	**Investigative Cultural Empathy**	Investigative Cultural Empathy	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Proactively learning about colleagues' norms to facilitate professional transitions.

Annex B Axial Coding Guide

Final Thesis Theme Target	Group/Topic (Original)	Descriptive Codes	Source/Participant
Theme 1: Cognitive Appraisals of Managerial Silence	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Executive Hierarchy Distance	P03
Theme 1: Cognitive Appraisals of Managerial Silence	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Silence as a Symptom of Power / De-prioritization	P03, P04, P05
Theme 1: Cognitive Appraisals of Managerial Silence	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Latency / Extreme Latency	P01, P02, P05, P06
Theme 1: Cognitive Appraisals of Managerial Silence	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Normalization of Standard Latency (24-48 hrs)	P01, P02, P03, P05, P06, P07, P08
Theme 1: Cognitive Appraisals of Managerial Silence	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	48-Hour Silence / Significant Response Gaps	P08
Theme 1: Cognitive Appraisals of Managerial Silence	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Catastrophizing Silence	P06, P08
Theme 1: Cognitive Appraisals of Managerial Silence	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Distancing Effect of Silence	P05, P06
Theme 1: Cognitive Appraisals of Managerial Silence	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Medium-Specific Silence (e.g., Email Silence)	P02, P03, P05
Theme 1: Cognitive Appraisals of Managerial Silence	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Virtual Filter Anxiety / Out-Group Self-Consciousness	P06, P08
Theme 1: Cognitive Appraisals of Managerial Silence	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Post-Crisis Resentment / Physiological Stress	P04, P05, P06
Theme 2: Behavioral Responses to Asynchronous Communication Gaps	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Persistent Probing / Aggressive Follow-Up	P01, P02, P05, P06, P07, P08
Theme 2: Behavioral Responses to Asynchronous Communication Gaps	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Downward Chain Verification / Underling Pinging	P01, P03, P08
Theme 2: Behavioral Responses to Asynchronous Communication Gaps	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Lateral Information Scavenging / Reconnaissance	P01, P03, P05

Final Thesis Theme Target	Group/Topic (Original)	Descriptive Codes	Source/Participant
Theme 2: Behavioral Responses to Asynchronous Communication Gaps	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Managerial Redundancy (Bypassing Manager)	P05
Theme 2: Behavioral Responses to Asynchronous Communication Gaps	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Redundant Messaging Strategy	P04, P05
Theme 2: Behavioral Responses to Asynchronous Communication Gaps	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Incremental Approval Gathering	P03
Theme 2: Behavioral Responses to Asynchronous Communication Gaps	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Boundary Maintenance / Work-Life Compartmentalization	P03, P04, P05, P07
Theme 2: Behavioral Responses to Asynchronous Communication Gaps	9. Coping & Psychological Impact	Conflict Avoidance / Performing Politeness	P04
Theme 3: Performance Erosion and the Velocity Penalty	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Scapegoating / Remote Talent Scapegoating	P01, P04
Theme 3: Performance Erosion and the Velocity Penalty	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Falling on the Sword / Face-Saving Rituals	P04, P08
Theme 3: Performance Erosion and the Velocity Penalty	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Asymmetrical Accountability / Matter-of-Fact Blame	P04, P08
Theme 3: Performance Erosion and the Velocity Penalty	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Power Play / Public Professional Shaming	P04
Theme 3: Performance Erosion and the Velocity Penalty	3. Power Dynamics & Blame	Public Team Call-Out	P04, P08
Theme 3: Performance Erosion and the Velocity Penalty	4. Communication Gaps & Silence	Critical Path Dependency / Documentation Block	P05
Theme 3: Performance Erosion and the Velocity Penalty	8. Productivity & Rework	Daily Workflow Disruption	P01, P02, P03, P04, P05, P07
Theme 3: Performance Erosion and the Velocity Penalty	8. Productivity & Rework	Chronemic Friction / Misaligned Chronemics	P01, P04, P06, P08
Theme 3: Performance Erosion and the Velocity Penalty	8. Productivity & Rework	Timeline Expansion / Extended Deadline Drift	P04, P06

Final Thesis Theme Target	Group/Topic (Original)	Descriptive Codes	Source/Participant
Theme 3: Performance Erosion and the Velocity Penalty	8. Productivity & Rework	Exhaustive Production Rework	P08
Theme 3: Performance Erosion and the Velocity Penalty	8. Productivity & Rework	Devastating Crypto Lag	P08
Theme 3: Performance Erosion and the Velocity Penalty	8. Productivity & Rework	Execution Gap / Planning Divergence	P04, P05, P06
Theme 3: Performance Erosion and the Velocity Penalty	8. Productivity & Rework	Adaptive Task-Switching / Detouring	P03, P04, P06, P07
Theme 4: Intercultural Friction in Instructional Clarity	2. Managerial Style & Directness	High Directness / Professionalized Directness	P01, P03, P04, P07
Theme 4: Intercultural Friction in Instructional Clarity	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Constructive Bluntness / Blunt Oversight	P01, P03
Theme 4: Intercultural Friction in Instructional Clarity	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Regional/Cultural Bluntness	P05, P08
Theme 4: Intercultural Friction in Instructional Clarity	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Relaxed Brutality / Brutal Honesty	P05
Theme 4: Intercultural Friction in Instructional Clarity	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Equitable Poise / Softened Professionalism	P02, P07
Theme 4: Intercultural Friction in Instructional Clarity	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Pedagogical/Critical Tone	P06
Theme 4: Intercultural Friction in Instructional Clarity	2. Managerial Style & Directness	Efficient Feedback Exit	P03
Theme 4: Intercultural Friction in Instructional Clarity	5. Strategies for Gaps & Briefs	Briefing Self-Reliance / Jigsaw Briefing	P02, P04
Theme 4: Intercultural Friction in Instructional Clarity	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Low-Fidelity Briefing (Voice Note Briefs)	P04
Theme 4: Intercultural Friction in Instructional Clarity	6. Digital Tools & Rituals	Informal Medium Dominance / Voice Note Use	P02, P04, P06
Theme 4: Intercultural Friction in Instructional Clarity	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Linguistic Misalignment	P01, P04, P06
Theme 4: Intercultural Friction in Instructional Clarity	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Written Language Barrier	P08

Final Thesis Theme Target	Group/Topic (Original)	Descriptive Codes	Source/Participant
Theme 4: Intercultural Friction in Instructional Clarity	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Banality vs. Efficiency (Western Banter vs. Indian Directness)	P08
Theme 4: Intercultural Friction in Instructional Clarity	7. Cultural & Linguistic Factors	Cross-Continental / Regional Management	P03, P04, P05, P07, P08

Annex C: Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools in Academic Work

INSTITUTO UNIVERSITÁRIO DE LISBOA

Form

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools in Academic Work

1. Declaration and Transparency

☐ No AI tools were used in the manuscript.

☑ AI tools were used in the manuscript and:

- ☑ I have explicitly declared the use of AI tools in the manuscript.
- ☑ I have indicated the name of the tool and, where possible, the version.
- ☑ I have clearly described the purpose for which the AI was used (e.g. linguistic review, analysis support, preliminary organisation, data simulation).

2. Authorship and Responsibility

☑ I take full responsibility for the text, data, analyses, interpretations and references.

3. The Use of AI in Writing and Scientific Content

☑ AI was not used to fabricate data, empirical results or conclusions.

☑ Any text generated or rewritten with the aid of AI has been critically reviewed by me.

☑ All references and citations have been checked manually (there are no fictitious or inaccurate references).

4. AI as Part of the Method (Tick only if applicable)

☐ The use of AI as part of the method was justified from the perspective of knowledge production.

☐ The procedures have been described clearly and transparently.

☐ Limitations, potential biases and human interpretative decisions have been made explicit.

5. Qualitative Research, Interviews and Ethnography (Tick only if applicable)

☑ AI did not have access to full interview transcripts, field notes, ethnographic diaries or participant observations.

☑ AI was not used to generate discourse, empirical narratives or simulated ethnographic descriptions.

Any AI support for qualitative analysis (e.g. exploratory suggestions for codes or themes) was:

- ☑ Described in the Methodology section;
- ☑ Interpreted and validated by the researchers;
- ☑ Used in accordance with the terms of informed consent.

6. Data Protection and Ethics

☑ No personal, sensitive or identifiable data was entered into AI tools.
☑ The use of AI complies with the ethical standards of scientific research and with the applicable data protection legislation.

Date: 23/06/2026

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