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## Adaptation of Cross-Cultural Communication in Jakarta Multinational Companies

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** This study aims to explore the experience of cross-cultural communication adaptation between local and expatriate employees at PT. XX Organizational culture in the company is the most important factor to help employees in the company to work efficiently and effectively in order to achieve company goals. **Research design, data and methodology:** The analysis methods used in this research are data reduction, data presentation, and drawing a conclusion. From this collaboration, the cultural adaptations arise due to the challenges for workers who have to work together with different cultural backgrounds. The method used is qualitative with a case study approach. Data collection methods used is employee interviews at PT. XX with triangulation conducted on 2 expatriates and 2 local employees. **Results:** Studies show that successful management is highly dependent on employees adapting to local culture and work situations. This process rarely runs smoothly because the persons in intercultural interaction do not use the same language and the lack of adaptation. **Conclusions:** . In order to maintain its existence, the company strives to expand its wings in the global market and establish partnerships to expand cooperation. PT. XX from South Korea cooperated with Krakatau Steel, a state-owned Indonesian company

**KeyWords :** Intercultural communication, Adaptation, Accommodation, Expatriate

**JEL Classification Code :** A10, A19, D8, D83

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### 1. Introduction

By the existence of globalization, multinational companies can more freely expand to other countries more freely with the aim to expand its operations, market share and so forth. Expatriates can become a bridge to achieve the company's goals in expanding its operations. An expatriate is an

employee sent by a company in a country to manage operations in a different country. Indonesia is one of the destinations of expatriates, one of the reasons is that Indonesia is a good income country for expatriates; one of the most expatriates in Indonesia comes from South Korea. According to the Directorate of Foreign Workers User (PPTKA) - DG Binapenta, there are currently around 7,368

expatriates from South Korea in Indonesia. That number makes South Korea the country with the third highest number of expatriates in Indonesia. Korean people in Indonesia work at PT. XX. PT. XX was founded in 1968 in South Korea. PT. XX is a multinational steelmaking company that has become a competitive steel producer. PT XX has been working with an Indonesian company, Krakatau Steel, since 2012 and has operated a steel mill project in the Cilegon area. Consisting of 42 employees which is a combination of expatriates from South Korea and local Indonesian employees.

Indonesians who work at PT. XX originated from different ethnicities, including ethnic of Padang, Batak, Javanese, and Sundanese. In other words, the employees at the company are multicultural. Every culture has a different system and of course there is inter-cultural communication that exists.

The way to communicate one another can not be separated from the language, rules, and norms that are owned by each individual. Communication that occurs between Korean and Indonesian citizen employees uses 3 languages, namely English, Indonesian, and Korean. In the daily life, at certain times at informal settings Korean citizens speak Korean as well as Indonesian citizens speak Bahasa Indonesia. From the cooperation that was established, there was a gap between employees, causing a separation or segregation between Korean employees and local employees in the company. The gap that occurs is the gap between cultures that causes communication within the organization was not going smooth and open between local and expatriate.

This is because there is no adaptation of 48 employees, which is a combination of Korean employees and Indonesian employees from both sides, so that each of them is contradictory. It could be seen from the internal communication of the organization itself, where Korean culture seems more dominant, and the expats who occupy the ranks of managers.

Cultural factors have an important role in creating behavior in organizations. This process rarely runs smoothly without problems, because in most situations, persons in the intercultural interaction do not use the same language (Mulyana, 2005). One of the problems faced is that expatriates often try to encourage and influence employees with the leadership culture and style and work style that the expatriates have, without any adjustments to the local culture. This can cause interpersonal conflicts and have a negative impact on the company due to mismatch of organizational behavior because migrants and indigenous people choose to stick to their own speech code while still interacting with the new culture they live in. (Martin and Nakayama, 2010). Therefore, adaptation is needed. Adaptation in intercultural

communication is a problem that needs to be solved when a person or group of people communicates with other parties of different cultures. Everyone has different motivations.

Previous studies published in many journals discussed the findings that differences in cultural backgrounds are factors that can cause misunderstandings. Sadia, Salleh, Kadir, Sanif (2016) in their research said intercultural communication was seen as one form of communication carried out by persons with different languages and backgrounds having their own challenges for the company in achieving its intended goals. Effective internal communication is very important because it influences the success of the organization and the ability of management in strategies to embrace employees in order to achieve goals. He & Liu (2010) in a journal review of cross-cultural barriers to communication in multinational companies, argue that people with different cultural backgrounds will have different job expectations as well in a multicultural environment. The best solution is that the subsidiary company should not force to follow the working procedures and communication in the holding company or country of origin. Because if this happens, employees will feel disrespected for the advice given and are reluctant to be open so that there will be obstacles in achieving company goals. The obstacles are influenced by several aspects, such as lack of mutual understanding, differences in expectations of managers and employees, differences in language, differences in goals at work.

Arifin (2019) in his research on intercultural communication between Indonesian and Vietnam students argues that language differences may cause conflicts and obstacles because of prejudice, stereotypes and labeling of a culture. Febiyana & Turistiati (2019) in their research on intercultural communication between Japan and Indonesia said that the obstacles occurred was caused by differences in language, habits, the appreciation of the time when Japan was monochronic while Indonesia was polychronic, and also the stereotypes of each nation.

Based on the explanation above, the presence of expatriates coming from South Korea in Indonesia, especially in PT. XX was interesting to study. It was supported by the fact that most of the employees at that company were expatriates having different culture background from the local employees. The researchers analyzed the intercultural communication in PT. XX, focusing on the adaptation of communication between Korean and Indonesian employees.

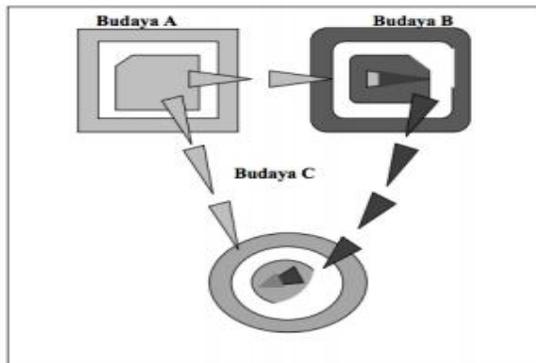
## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Intercultural Communication

Griffin (2006) in Febiyana & Turistiati (2019) said that cross-cultural communication is usually provided for theory and research comparing interpersonal variables such as conversation distance, self-disclosure, and conflict resolution styles in two or more different cultures.

Samover and Porter say intercultural communication has a main theme that distinguishes it from other communication studies, such as the relatively large differences in background experiences between communicators due to cultural differences.

Consequently, if there are two different people, communication behaviors and meanings are also different. The intercultural communication model according to Samover and Porter is as follows:



Source: communication Between Cultures  
**Figure 1:** Intercultural Communication Model

From the picture above it can be seen that Culture A and Culture B are relatively similar to being represented by a quadrilateral and not octagonal. Culture C, very different from culture A and B, is represented in a circular shape. In every culture there are other forms that are somewhat similar to the cultural form which means that the individual has been formed by that culture. Individual forms are slightly different from the cultural forms that influence them.

It shows two different things; first, there are other influences besides the culture that shapes the individual. Second, people in a culture still have different characteristics even though culture has a dominant role to influence individuals.

The arrows that are drawn show the sending of messages from one culture to another. When a message leaves the culture where it is encoded, the message contains the meaning desired by the encoder. This is indicated by arrows that leave a culture that contains the same pattern as the

individual patterns. When a message reaches a culture where the message must be encoded, the message undergoes a change in the meaning of the decoder culture has become part of the meaning of the message. The meanings contained in the original message have changed during the encoding phase in intercultural communication, because the vocabulary of communicative behavior and the meaning of the decoder do not contain the same cultural meanings as the encoder.

Gudykunts (2003) said that intercultural communication is seen as one of the inter-group communication types that includes various types of communication that may not be accommodated in intercultural communication groups, for example inter-generational communication, communication between members from different social class groups, communication between people with different tastes and even communication with the disabled.

From some of the definitions above it can be concluded that communication that occurs between people of different nationalities, groups, races, or language communities is called intercultural communication. Intercultural communication itself is a process of exchanging thoughts and meanings between people of different cultures.

In intercultural communication there is also inter-ethnic communication, that is, if there is a change of place or migration from one region to a different ethnic group. When someone intends to settle in the area they need to adapt in terms of customs, language, culture, and others.

Four factors that can inhibit intercultural communication are stereotyping, prejudice, ethnocentrism, and discrimination.

## 2.2. Accommodation Theory

Accommodation is the ability to adjust, modify, or regulate one's behavior in response to others. According to Howard Giles, Communication accommodation theory is a theory that focuses on a person's behavior in choosing to regulate or modify the way he communicates to the response obtained when communicating. When a person interacts in a communication, they will adjust their conversation, vocals, and behavior to accommodate other people involved in the communication. In other words, the assumption of accommodation theory is to minimize the social differences between themselves and their interlocutors.

There are three ways to adapt in accommodation theory, the most important thing in accommodation is that everyone has a choice in determining their communication attitude by means of convergence, divergence, and excessive accommodation. First, convergence is a strategy whereby

individuals adapt to the speed of speech, pauses, smiles, eye gazes, and other verbal and nonverbal behaviors. When people converge, they depend on their perceptions about the speech or behavior of others. In addition, convergence is also based on interest. If communicators are attracted to each other, they will converge in conversation.

Second, divergence; this method and strategy is one form of the actions to maintain differences between communicators. In this case, divergence is a strategy used to highlight verbal and nonverbal differences between communicators, or arguably this divergence is contrary to convergence. But it must be underlined that divergence is not a way to show disagreement; divergence is not the same as indifference. Someone makes a divergence to maintain their cultural heritage.

Third, over-accommodation; in this case, the communicator tries to over-accommodate in arranging, modifying, and responding to others.

Although communicators have good intentions, they are often misunderstood with bad intentions, especially harassing.

### 3. Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with the type of case study research. According to West & Turner (2013) A qualitative approach is related to social reality which is subjective.

Researchers do not do statistical analysis, but researchers summarize and analyze the results of interviews, observations, and literature studies.

Researchers use this type of case study research, where case studies are interpreted as the results of a particular case study. In this research, the case is how to adapt intercultural communication between Korean and Indonesian employees at PT. XX. To obtain data in qualitative research, case study data can be obtained from all parties concerned; in this case, each of the 2 employees of Korean and Indonesian citizens (a total of 4 people). Data collection techniques in research do through observation and interviews.

## 4. Research Results and Discussion

### 4.1. Company Profile

PT XX (headquarter) established in 1968 in South Korea, a multinational steel-making company has become the most

competitive and one of worlds's leading steel manufacturer. The company produces a wide range of high-end steel products such as steel coil, plate, wire, electrical sheet, and stainless steel, etc. used in many industries, such as general structures, gas, cylinder and pipe, automotive, shipbuilding, machinery, electronic devices, etc.

With its 25 and 29 of domestic and overseas subsidiaries and affiliates respectively, POSCO operates its business worldwide in steel, construction, architecture, IT, Research, Raw Material Development, etc. Around 110,000 employees representing 100 nationalities are working in 29 countries with one basic philosophy of Boundless Trust, the driven power of the Company to Co-operate and to grow together with all of our stakeholders, namely employees, customers, community, government, institution and many others. Move the World in Silence is our dynamic energy in opening the world's future and in securing the people's life.

PT XX, with its subsidiaries and affiliates have been in Indonesia for almost 20 years. The company cooperates with Indonesian State Owned Steel Company and successfully built and operates a mega project of Integrated Steel Mill in Cilegon Area.

PT XX in Indonesia was established in April 2015 with trading as the main core business. It's office is located at SCBD area. It has 24 local employees, 10 dispatchers and 8 non-staff members. The company has 2 division and 8 departments.

### 4.2. Intercultural Communication between Korean and Indonesian Employees at PT. XX

The research informants have different cultural backgrounds. There are Indonesian employees who came from the ethnic of Batak, Javanese, Sundanese, and Padang. Korean employees coming from Seoul have different cultures and also different accent contexts and speaking styles.

Before Korean employees joined Indonesia, they had no interest in learning Indonesian culture beforehand so that the company often applied the Korean way of working. In adaptation, Indonesian employees prefer to follow Korean to be safe. Based on the observations of researchers, Korean and Indonesian employees can communicate intercultural properly. Communication that is intertwined within the company tends to be low context communication where the way of working is individualized and no interfere in the affairs of others, communicate directly with one another, and involve less people in making decisions. Individualistic culture emphasizes individual goals, concern for self-face, and the identity attached to individuals (Hofstede in Samovar,

2010).

In the interview, there were similarities between informant 1 and informant 2 (Indonesian employees), that all Indonesian employees chose to be safe; in the sense of communicating as necessary and doing Korean tasks and commands to avoid problems. Korean employees in general tended to be rushed to do work which affects the way Indonesian employees work themselves. When Indonesian employees got directions from Korea that could not be easily understood, Indonesian employees chose to try to do what they could first. The communication used between Indonesian and Korean employees was English and Korean because there are some Indonesian employees who can speak Korean. But there are often misunderstandings because of different abilities in language.

From the results of this study, it can be realized that each of them maintains their respective cultures so that only a few adjustments are made. Communication used 3 languages namely Korean, English and Indonesian for everyday. The results of informants 3 and 4 of Korean employees had something in common, that is the difference in ways of working where Korea pushed to the last limit and hoped that anything they ask would be fulfilled immediately, while the Indonesian way of working is more relaxed.

Based on interviews with the four sources, it can be concluded that adaptation does not run smoothly because it is very contradictory.

The informant from Indonesia mostly tried to accept and followed the workings and rules with the Korean model and in the meantime from the Korean side focus on the direction given from the headquarter. There was a separation where each party persists on its own culture and minimizes interaction with one another, especially those of different cultures. Each party also prefers to have a closed relationship and keep a boundary between them.

#### **4.3. Barriers that Occur in Communication between Korean and Indonesian Cultures in PT. XX**

Barriers to intercultural communication can occur due to several things and as a result the communication is not effective and often becomes miss communication. One of the obstacles in communication is language.

Each informant, both Korean and Indonesian employees in the company has different mastery of English.

Misunderstandings in communication are very frequent because Indonesian employees do not understand very well

the instructions from Korean employees when Korean employees use English or Indonesian but the meaning and words have different meanings.

Secondly, it is a culture that the way to work has a very calm atmosphere and no interaction during work, and also undefined hours of work because the subordinate workers would not go home when the supervisor has not returned to home yet; it was also the problem of clarity when the direction given to Indonesian employees was rarely explained for what and why it was done in that way, thus the work is based on direction, and sometimes the employees also did not understand what they were doing.

It was also the culture shock experience coming from Korea's disciplined, detail oriented, and also Korea's on time working hours. On one side, Korea, encouraged from the headquarter superiors to encourage staff in Indonesia according to the directions given, gave such an impression to Korean employees; and to make Indonesian employees understand, Korean employees gave the task of making reports.

The third obstacle is character. There was a significant difference between Korean people that are temperamental, rushed, panic, and high self-esteem, and the Indonesian people character which always keeps anything relaxed, does not communicate in detail, and does not routinely provide updates for work.

#### **4.4. Stereotype**

Stereotypes occur from Indonesians to Koreans and vice versa. Korean stereotypes are hard, disciplined, rushed; do not like people who are lazy, more focused on the process than the results, and the rigid type of person. Indonesians are often stereotyped as friendly, smiling, relaxed at work; lack of initiative at work, cannot take a quick response, and had to move under direction.

From the results of this study, the authors found that among the employees of PT. XX, Indonesian and Korean employees kept trying to communicate and respect each other and to adapt to one another. Although it can be said that there was often a misunderstanding in communication at work, but personally, communication goes well even though there are still boundaries between them. Indonesian employees understand the biggest obstacle is in language and there is an effect where it is difficult to communicate; Furthermore, Korean people are closed. Korean employees understand the culture of Indonesians who go home on time from work, and take a bit longer time to work. It was found that both Indonesian and Korean employees were lack of socializing

time one to another. Thus, they appear to be closed and arrogant, observed by each other.

## 5. Conclusions

Based on the description and analysis described above, it can be concluded that:

1. Intercultural communication between Korean and Indonesian employees at PT. XX was relatively good.
2. The adaptation that was carried out was still not optimal because the relationship was still poor, and the efforts made from both parties were not optimal. To avoid some unimportant debate, Indonesian employees tend to choose to yield and follow the will of Korean employees.

The communication applied by Koreans also brings not only Korean identity but also the way they work to Indonesian employees. There was separation between them that still hold on to their own cultures. Furthermore, each of Indonesian and Korean people got a feeling to minimize the interaction and only want to interact when it is needed, so that each of them preferred to have a closed relationship.

3. There were some obstacles occurred in intercultural communication due to problems of language differences and understanding, the existence of stereotypes from each party, and also differences in character.

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