Intercultural Communication Challenges and the Coping Strategies Among Fresh Graduates in the Vuca Era

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ABSTRACT

Higher education has provided a set of curriculum to equip graduates with complete skill sets to enter the industry. Hard skills, as well as soft skills, are inseparable components for graduates to acquire. Industries today have rapidly changed due to the advancement of technology. Almost every aspect of life is going digital; therefore, graduates have to adapt to the simultaneous and continuous changes. In this situation, intercultural communication competence is one of the skills that will accommodate the fresh graduate to face and overcome challenges in the industry, especially in the VUCA era. All industrial players should adapt to the working cultures and adopt the advanced technological changes. This study explores the experience of fresh graduates in the industry regarding intercultural communication challenges and their coping strategies to overcome the situations. The phases of their adaptation towards the work environment will be addressed as well to understand the context better. Interviews were conducted to explore and understand their experience which eventually categorised to identify strategies that could accommodate the continuously changing situation. This study will contribute to the preparation of graduates to enter the workforce as the study found that there are three main challenges faced among fresh graduates regarding skill mismatch, lack of experience, and career adaptability. Furthermore, intercultural communication competence has contributed to their adaptation and coping strategies towards those challenges in their first job.

Keywords: *Intercultural competence, fresh graduate, soft skills, VUCA, coping strategies.*

INTRODUCTION

Intercultural communication competence is applicable in various circumstances, including the context whereby technology plays a role in the changes that force individuals to adapt to it. In the recent situation, technology has brought rapid changes in so many levels of human activities. It leads to what is to be addressed as VUCA, as an acronym for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity that effectively represents the intricate, ever-evolving, and constantly shifting environment within which the field of education functions (Guo & Cheng, 2019). VUCA term has been adopted and modified by numerous corporations to depict the rapid pace of technological progress, necessitating rapid changes in management. Furthermore, it has represented the complex and constantly shifting environment.

In addition, Industrial and technological progress holds a significant role in the VUCA era. Thus, organisations, companies, and institutions have been compelled to be able to prepare for the swift transformations in environment and technology. The VUCA era depicts situations that lead to uncertainty and are volatile, and confusing (Wirapraja & Aribowo, 2018). Industries have experienced several stages of revolutions driven by significant technological advancement. In higher education, curricula are developed to give graduates

the full set of skills they need in the industry. In fact, the Covid-19 pandemic is a great example to pinpoint forced adaptation that has occurred globally. In that situation, everyone had no other options but to quickly adapt and adopt new ways of communicating and functioning for their day-to-day businesses.

Gen Z (1997-2013) are among the current fresh graduates who are entering the labor market (Schroth, 2019). A workplace they entered could be characterised by characteristics like data-driven decision-making, direct feedback, collaboration, open work cultures, and the adoption of various technologies by which adaptability is a compulsory skill among fresh graduates. Work readiness is one of many factors that should be acquired by fresh graduates to enter the workforce (Sagita et al., 2020). The work environment significantly influenced career adaptability among fresh graduates which could lessen the turnover in an organisation (Mohammad et al., 2020). Referring to this, the work environment is related to the cultures constructed within which leads to the working flow mechanism, organisational cultures and interactions, and participation in multicultural teams.

Technology has advanced so quickly that industries today have undergone significant changes. In this digital sphere, fresh graduates should be able to adjust to the constant changes that are occurring in their environment, as well as when it is related to the business and industry. Intercultural competency is one of the abilities that will enable the recent graduate to confront and overcome challenges faced in their workplace, particularly in the VUCA era. This narrative draws a gap line from the previous studies whereby the focus of this study falls in the intercultural communication challenges and coping strategies among fresh graduates.

Greater Jakarta, also known as JABODETABEK (Jakarta, Bogor, Tangerang and Bekasi), has an important role in spurring the growth of the economy, government, as well as culture (Tjahjono et al., 2020). Due to its high population of commuters who travel daily from several areas such as Bogor, Depok, Tangerang and Bekasi to Jakarta, it becomes the most suitable area to conduct this study as business and economic growth. The job, and other opportunities are available in the area which attract fresh graduates to pursue their future career in that city.

In view of the above description, intercultural communication is the competency that is seen to be important and required to face and overcome challenges in the industry for fresh graduates. Therefore, understanding challenges faced during their attempt to seek for proper occupation becomes the main objectives of this study. In this paper, the results of investigation towards the challenges encountered by fresh graduates in their chosen profession and their coping mechanisms are discussed.

LITERATURE REVIEW

VUCA

The VUCA era has not only disrupted the aspect of education, but also the diverse aspects of all human existence. This means that organisations, companies, and institutions from various fields are disrupted due to the existence of today's technology. For instance, the education field during the VUCA era faced numerous significant challenges, such as economic uncertainty, accountability, globalisation, and new technologies. The process of learning nowadays should come up with new methods that include the usage of technology to increase the quality of education. This is in line with the argument from Waller et al. (2019) that educational institutions should work to improve their ability to adapt and alter new knowledge, information, and change models.

VUCA effectively characterised the fourth industrial revolution, occurring within the context of global integration, where artificial intelligence and advanced technologies are reshaping and changing nearly every aspect of human life; social, economy, and so forth. In the era of big data, the conventional manual operating model within the assessment industry has been entirely disrupted. With the rapid advancement of technologies such as artificial intelligence, the internet, big data, cloud computing, and blockchain, it has presented both opportunities and challenges to the assessment sector (Cerya et al., 2021). Leveraging big data technology can lead to cost savings, risk mitigation, and enhanced assessment accuracy. These situations lead to the adaptation compulsion among individuals who use technology.

The advancement of technology offers numerous benefits. For instance, in the field of education, technology can serve as learning infrastructure, a source of teaching materials, a repository of research information, a tool for acquiring skills and competencies, and a medium for consultation. In the economic field, technology can create opportunities for new businesses, streamline communication with customers, and expand and facilitate the dissemination of information to potential consumers.

In the social and cultural field, technology provides advantages by facilitating communication and relationship-building with others, as well as making it easier to access valuable information. In a broad and positive perspective, digital transformation technologies, including Cloud, Internet of Things, Blockchain, Artificial Intelligence, and Machine Learning, make up a substantial portion of what organisations are embracing as part of their transformation initiatives. This has led to the discussion of rapid technological changes in the industries.

Rapid Changes in the Industries
Industries form the foundation of a nation's economy, and the world has already experienced three industrial revolutions in the past, each driven by significant technological advancements over the last three centuries (Cerya et al., 2021). PWC Report in 2017 stated that introduction of mechanical machines started Industry 1.0 in the eighteenth century; followed by electricity-powered Industry 2.0 in the nineteenth century; and more recently the computer and internet-enabled Industry 3.0 in the twentieth century (Sivathanu & Pillai, 2018). Furthermore, in the twenty-first century, Industry 4.0 heralds the innovation of both smart business and smart factory (Shamim et al., 2016, as cited in Sivathanu & Pillai, 2018). Pandemic has actually accelerated the advancement of communication technology within a short period of time (Asnawi, 2022).

As discussed in the previous subsection, the VUCA era is characterised by globalisation, where the development and utilisation of technology play a crucial role. It can be said that the extensive development and use of technology have ushered in the VUCA era, characterised by uncertainty and constant change. This is closely related to the concept of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which is believed to have commenced in the 21st century, according to the World Economic Forum. Schwab (2017, as cited in Lee et al., 2018), states that it is a revolutionary change characterised by the ubiquitous and mobile Internet; cheaper, smaller, and stronger sensors; and artificial and machine learning. This discussion related to the understanding of the fourth industrial revolution.

The fourth industrial revolution is defined as a revolutionary change that occurs when information technology spreads widely and is utilised by all industries. In other words, it is a result of the broad dissemination of information technology. Therefore, there is a significant

connection between technology and the market when it comes to the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The future society shaped by the Fourth Industrial Revolution is anticipated to undergo numerous unprecedented changes (Lee et al., 2018). In this regard, it is crucial to sharpen our logical understanding to cope with emerging social issues related to productivity, employment, quality of life, as well as the ethical and social dilemmas arising from this industrial revolution (Sivathanu and Pillai, 2018). This is because technology is undergoing a rapid innovation process, with developments like the Internet of Things (IoT) connecting physical objects to the digital world. This has significant implications for real-time data organisation, which requires substantial storage capacity, often facilitated by cloud technology.

Furthermore, it's not just technology that is innovating; employees entering organisations are also changing with generational shifts. There are noticeable differences between generations such as Millennials and Gen Y. For example, Gen Y or Z tends to rely more on the internet, social media, and smartphones. Chandra (2021) explained strategies taken by students, including engaging in online courses to acquire technical skills, assisting their parents' businesses, participating in creative activities, exploring new hobbies, voluntarily internship, and even occupying themselves with scrolling through internet and social media as the ways to cope with academic stress.

In another perspective, these actions can be seen as students utilising their emotional intelligence to redirect boredom and counteract depressive thoughts as they try to cope with the challenges posed by the ongoing pandemic situation. This is also related to the changes in technology that they faced rapidly. Coping with the technology rapid changes in the industry has proven to be essential for both individuals and organisations, let alone when we refer to the economic industry. The economic industry is part of the Fourth Industrial Revolution due to the extensive and rapid technological developments. Technological disruption in the financial industry has compelled companies to adapt to ever-evolving technology trends. This has led to digital transformation in the economic aspect, giving rise to what is known as the digital economy. Whether one likes it or not, this disruption has forced digital transformation to take place.

The massive technological advancements have significantly impacted the economic industry, which has been further accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Harayama (2017) argued that information and communication technology has rapidly become a driving force in digital transformation, reshaping the industrial landscape. One form of digital transformation in the business industry is the proliferation of e-commerce businesses. Therefore, digital transformation has introduced complex and interconnected influences on society's economy.

Consequently, all stakeholders, including policymakers and business owners, must be capable of creating and designing new strategies as a way to cope with the expanding business competition in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Furthermore, the banking and insurance industries must face the reality of the emergence of new financial companies known as Financial Technology (Fintech). The industrial revolution 4.0 era has brought digital technology to the social-economy society and transformed the digital economy.

The advantages offered by Fintech lie in providing quick and convenient customer services that meet customers' expectations and needs to the maximum extent (Harayama, 2017). As a result, traditional banking institutions are at the forefront of having to undergo digital revolutions. To address this issue, optimisation of both internal and external business aspects is essential. In this context, strengthening the internal aspect, particularly through

digital transformation of Human Resources (HR), becomes the key to success because it has the potential and capability to transform HR into a more efficient entity. This condition should be taken into account by fresh graduates for them to prepare themselves to enter the workforce with the current rapid changing situation. Therefore, work readiness is the next topic to highlight.

Work Readiness

Work readiness is important among the fresh graduates to ensure their readiness to succeed in the working world (Sagita et al., 2020). Moreover, Caballero and Walker (2010) have pointed out that there is a gap between the expectations of companies and the personal and interpersonal skills possessed by new graduates. In Indonesia, companies tend to prioritise the potential and competencies of prospective employees for specific roles during the selection process, regardless of their level of readiness. Although work readiness can indeed have a significant impact on success in the workplace.

Docherty and Fernandez (2014, as cited in Sagita et al., 2020) emphasise that companies require employees who can quickly adapt and mobilise their skills. The success of individuals and effectiveness in daily life depends on the readiness of individuals of any age to be open to any changes and innovation in a global world (Žegunienė, 2021). Success in the workplace could bring individuals to a higher level whereby leadership skills are required. Ability to adapt with socio-cultural changes quickly is one of the key points a leader should acquire (Mulyana et al., 2022). Therefore, adaptability, we could address the proper term for this, is something to be addressed seriously for fresh graduates to acquire as they hold their degree and enter the industry.

New Work Environment

In today's work environment, the influence of the VUCA era, which is closely tied to the concept of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, is quite prominent. This environment is dominated by the use and advancement of technology. Additionally, the expectations of employees entering organisations in the present day largely come from Generation Y or Z, which means they tend to rely heavily on technology. Workplaces characterized by the dominance of these new generations are marked by features such as collaboration anytime and anywhere, an open work culture, instant feedback mechanisms, and data-driven decision-making.

Moreover, since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a massive digital transformation that has required individuals, whether they liked it or not, to adapt rapidly, both in schools and corporate settings. The outbreak has made working from home (WFH) the new norm for millions of employees in the EU and across the globe. As a result of the pandemic, many workers and employers had to make a sudden switch to remote work, often without prior preparation. Due to the pandemic, approximately 50% of Europeans worked from home (at least partially), in contrast to the 12% who did so prior to the emergency (Ahrendt et al., 2020, as cited in Sagita et al., 2020). This is not an easy situation when we are most of the time doing the conventional way of going to the office for work, and meeting with people face to face for coordination and communication during the working hours. Yet, working from home by force should be done and some adjustments should be made. And it is not easy.

Not long after that, Italy and other European countries swiftly adopted and implemented home confinement measures as a way to reduce the spread of the Covid-19 virus. This change introduced a new norm, working from home (WFH), which has now become a work culture in various institutions. The implementation of WFH, of course, comes with its advantages and disadvantages. Generally, the adoption of WFH requires time, processes, preparation, and adaptation for organisations to function effectively, and for employees to maximise their performance. However, the Covid-19 outbreak has substantially forced most organisations to adopt this way of working, often without providing employees with the necessary skills required for remote work (Molino et al., 2020; Vander Elst et al., 2017, 2020; Wang et al., 2021).

Another peculiarity of working from home (WFH) during the pandemic is that employees often have to share their workspace with their families, which can potentially disrupt their work environment. This is because disruptions from spouses or children may occur while at home. For instance, working parents may need to provide meals three times a day while also completing their job tasks. Parents may also need to supervise and assist their children in attending online classes and completing their assignments. Such disruptions can create family-work conflicts that may not have occurred before, and these conflicts can increase stress levels, negatively affecting employee performance and work engagement.

Therefore, having control over and adapting to the work environment can have a positive impact on employee satisfaction. A previous study conducted on teleworkers discussed that it's important to note that control over the work environment is positively related to job satisfaction, while distractions during work can lead to dissatisfaction with the work environment (Lee & Brand, 2005). While the era of VUCA presents a significant challenge for fresh graduates entering the workforce in organisations. This is due to the increasingly high level of competition, where fresh graduates are not only competing with other new graduates but also with individuals who have prior work experience. Furthermore, the skills possessed by fresh graduates sometimes do not meet the expectations and needs of companies, making it even more challenging to secure employment. These skills may include the ability to work, organise, build relationships, and other attributes that they may not have acquired during their college education

The emergence of the VUCA era is also accompanied by the increasing presence of Generation Y and Z, which is expected to make up a significant portion of the workforce. Meanwhile, companies now demand that employees be proactive, collaborative, able to thrive under pressure, work effectively and efficiently, and quickly adapt. Fresh graduates, primarily consisting of millennials and Generation Z, dominate various workplace cultures today. Furthermore, there is a recent trend or phenomenon among these generations, particularly Generation Z, to seek work environments that are easy, less demanding, free from stress, and not overly challenging. They tend to prefer quitting their jobs and becoming unemployed rather than facing excessive stress and workloads. It could be said that Generation Z, which comprises a significant portion of fresh graduates, tends to avoid adapting to challenging, stressful, and less fulfilling work environments.

Interestingly, such work environments are often associated with the characteristics of today's company culture, which is on the rise in the era of globalisation. Therefore, millennials and Generation Z preferring unemployment over workplace unhappiness is influenced by subjective factors such as attitudes and norms. These attitudes and norms are, in turn, influenced by other factors such as workload and work-related stress, which impact

unhappiness in the workplace and ultimately contribute to this phenomenon. And these are related to the ability of individuals to adapt.

Additionally, Priyono and Nankervis (2019) identified a substantial gap in Indonesia between the industrial requirements and the capabilities of new graduates. These gaps lie in self-confidence, character, personal integrity, analytical skills, problem-solving, communication and teamwork, time management, work sequences, creativity, and team orientation (Sagita et al., 2020). Certainly, training and development play essential roles in enhancing the skills, knowledge, and abilities of individuals. It is evident that training and development can significantly impact the career adaptability of fresh graduates.

Career adaptability is a crucial aspect for workers, especially fresh graduates, as they begin their careers in a company to maintain their interest and engagement in the workplace. According to Savickas (1997, as cited in Chen et al., 2020) career adaptability can definitely be readiness for accepting or handling predicted work that is given by the company and they're participating in the whole work to be done and it also the method how they manage the change of working conditions. There are various factors that can influence one's career adaptability, including job satisfaction, training and self-development, as well as the work environment.

The work environment plays a significant role in enhancing employees' career adaptability, and individuals need to adapt to their careers to improve their lives. Additionally, possessing adequate emotional intelligence can help individuals adapt effectively in unstable and constantly changing environmental conditions, particularly within the work environment. According to Goleman (1998), emotional intelligence (EI) and its competencies are a prerequisite for the preservation of mental health in stressful situations and lack of emotional intelligence in such an unstable environment may be the cause of a failed outcome with questionable future consequences.

Having a high level of emotional intelligence does not mean that an individual will never experience stress or anxiety about the issues they face in life. Instead, it means that they are more aware of their problems, situations, and their own emotions, enabling them to better control and manage their circumstances. It can be said that individuals with adequate emotional intelligence tend to have self-control and self-management skills and are less easily shaken by stress or anxiety resulting from their surrounding environment, especially in the work environment. In other words, having good emotional intelligence can help an individual thrive and adapt well to the challenges of the work environment. Hartono and Atmaja (2021) stated that the Human Resource Management (HRM) function is a key factor in a company's success in adapting to the digital era. Human Resource Management (HRM) plays a pivotal role in creating digital habits within a company, preparing digitised human resources, and developing digital capabilities within the company.

The understanding of different cultural perspectives on leadership communication is essential to multicultural countries (Lynn-Sze & Ahmad, 2017), and it is in various social circumstances including professional milieu. Ridaryanthi (2021) highlighted the importance of intercultural communication skills in the adaptation process among migrant workers, furthermore, the intense pace of life requires individuals to be able to adapt with the global change and innovation which are unavoidable (Žegunienė, 2021).

Kim (2001) highlighted that human beings are open systems whereby they could go through a learning process which is very dynamic and involves various cultures to adopt and adapt with. This study also sees the current study context within that perspective. Therefore,

the readiness, and willingness to learn new culture, and adaptability skills are some of the competences required by fresh graduates, not only to compete but also to survive. Based on the literature, the concepts of VUCA, rapid changes due to technological advancement, work readiness and adaptability are referred to in this article.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using a qualitative approach with a constructivist point of view. Interviews were held as data-gathering techniques to certain informants with defined characteristics. A purposive sampling technique was applied for informant selection following these criteria: a) Bachelor's degree holders graduated within the past 3 years, b) located in the Greater Jakarta, c) had their first job, and d) informants considered Gen Z (1997 – 2013). The following are list of informants of this study:

Tabel 1: Details of informants

Initials	Graduate Year	Occupation	Location
PTH	2023	√	Greater Jakarta
IH	2021	√	Greater Jakarta
PT	2022	√	Greater Jakarta
RN	2022	√	Greater Jakarta
SR	2023	√	Greater Jakarta
EA	2023	√	Greater Jakarta
NA	2023	√	Greater Jakarta
SC	2023	√	Greater Jakarta
FH	2022	√	Greater Jakarta
HI	2022	√	Greater Jakarta
YS	2023	√	Greater Jakarta

Interviews were conducted based on several thematic questions related to the objective of the study. To fulfill the aim of this paper, categorisation of interview data will be grouped based on 1) their experience in seeking for a job, 2) challenges faced, 3) the suitability of the current job description, 4) challenges during seeking and doing their current job, 5) coping mechanisms. Intercultural adaptation point of view was also employed as a guide for the data selection and interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges for the fresh graduates are regarding seeking the job that fits their academic qualifications. They need 2 months to 1 year time to get into their first job, or their current job. They have to send more or less 60 to 100 applications before they get their first job. The main factors regarding job-seeking experience are the skill mismatch, basic requirements that sometimes do not meet theirs, range of salary that does not fit the basic needs, as well as location. Furthermore, there are several categories withdrawn from the data analysis as follows:

Skill Mismatch
Several of the informants have matched their academic qualifications and their first or current job, however, the others indicate differently. The Fresh graduates are well aware of the mismatch of their academic qualifications with their first job. The skill mismatch occurs due to several reasons; the changes in industry demands, evolving job roles, or the field of interest among the graduates are too general to fit with various fields of work. One of the reasons

behind youth unemployment in Indonesia is the mismatch between the skills possessed by university students and the labor market skills demand, referred to as the skill gap (Dewanto & Pritasari, 2023). This becomes a crucial gap highlighted by higher education to overcome.

The competitive job market can make fresh graduates stand out and secure employment that matches their academic qualifications. The advancement of technology can make employment more challenging among the fresh graduates to find suitable job opportunities in their respective field. Due to the skill mismatch, it leads to difficulties in finding suitable jobs. Dewanto and Pritasari (2023) stated further that according to experts, the high rate of youth unemployment is frequently due to the inability of educational institutions to produce graduates who possess employability skills.

> I am currently actively seeking for a full time job related to content creation and social media management, yet the basic requirement does not meet the skill set they (the organisation) required... [RN]

Singh et al., (2014) stated that generic skills among graduates are important which relate to their employability. Even though the academic background does not really match the current job they have, yet the organisational experience, or additional experiences, have equipped them with sufficient skill sets to start their first job. As stated by SR regarding his first job:

> As a graduate in communication studies majoring in Public Relations, my academic background does not directly relate to my current job scope. However, my experience in handling social media accounts has helped me to cope with my current work. [SR]

However, some of the informants in this study have gotten jobs which fit their academic background, and most of it related to new media. Referring to the fact that they have to use the new technology and application, in this case social media, they still have to ensure that what they have learned and known will fit with the work requirements or brief given to them. In other ways, whether or not the academic background suits the job scope, individuals have to adapt with the need of their job descriptions and requirements; updated skills as technology rapidly changed, software acknowledgement, and so forth. This situation led to the experience they have as the complement of their academic qualifications.

Speaking about skill mismatch, actually there are 21st century critical skills that fresh graduates could refer to (Hartati & Riniati, 2022). To ensure that fresh graduates are equipped with adequate critical skills, individuals, as well as a set of curriculums, should be continuously developed. Therefore, equipping oneself with a sufficient critical skill set could accommodate the lacking in practical skills if the company seeks for specific ones in their industry. By doing so, the skill mismatch issue could be managed. Yet, another thing would be considered as challenges, i.e. experience.

Lack of Experience

As fresh graduates, most of them have minimum working experience. During their education time, most of them could only have one opportunity for doing an internship as it is part of the requirements in their university. As inexperienced employees, this condition leads to the ability to cope with the work environment easily. With the new technology applied to their

particular work, they need to go the extra mile to comprehend the system to utilise it on a day-to-day basis.

> I have to use accountancy-based software [PTH]
> ...This is SAP technology to integrate all data into one...yet, theory and practical are two separate things [PT]
> Trello and NAV are two unfamiliar software applied, yet I can manage to use them [IH]
> I work using computer-based technology and sensors... [SC]

The challenges in the workplace are not only regarding the work and environment itself, but also regarding how digital technology takes part in the process of work. Due to that matter, individuals should be able to run side to side at the same pace with rapid technological advancement. RN stated that technological development forces individuals to upskill themselves continuously. This argument relates to Chandra (2021) who sees some students engage in online courses to gain technical skills, and participate in various creative activities by exploring new hobbies, as well as take up the available opportunities such as participating in internships to cope with stress.

However, experience gained when they pursue their education has contributed to lessen the challenges and gaps in doing their task during work. As a matter of fact, having the ability to understand intercultural communication processes in a certain situation is actually the experience that companies need to seek from their new comers in the organisation. Working on skill development is something related to intercultural competency that is associated with understanding culture and communication in the business environment (Tuleja, 2021), therefore, it is an important variable that should be put into account when referring to experience. Soft skill in communication is not less important compared to the hard skills that are usually addressed in a job interview.

Intercultural Communication Challenges
Referring to today's working world, the internet is a somewhat prominent tool to connect the industries around the globe. People use the internet for communication in their business or industry. The face-to-face interaction is different from internet-based communication or interaction. The current global society shows that the labor market is expanding; this attracts individuals to travel or enables organisations to have more multicultural organisational context which employability includes for those who come from different cultural backgrounds (Žegunienė, 2021). This situation affects individuals, in this study, regarding their habits and mentality. As the bottom line, how the organisation culture set up in the company could challenge them in so many levels of interactions. In this situation, intercultural communication is one of key competencies that is important to overcome challenges in the initial work place for fresh graduates.

> The change in daily habits and mentality... [SR]
> Mentality is the most different thing I felt if I should compare between university and working life. [NA]

The habit and mentality stated by the informants are related to the preparation they had before entering the workforce. In this study, intercultural communication is referred to how individuals understand the workplace cultural background and how they adapt with it in their day-to-day basis interactions and work-related-communication. Moving to a new place with a new culture could create confusion and unpleasant feelings due to uncertainty. Habits and mentality that have been shaped for years should fit with the current cultural norms and values. It is not something that is easy to handle. Moreover, if individuals have insufficient skills and competency to cope with the situation because it is not just technology that is innovating; employees entering organisations are also changing with generational shifts (Chandra, 2021).

> One of the differences that distinguish human and technology is attitude. [IH]
> …first and foremost is the working culture and working environment in the new workplace. [FH]
> Adapt with the workplace is somehow challenging…and it affects how I work. [YS]

RN found difficulties to cope with the working culture which requires fast response, fresh and innovative ideas within a short period of time, unfamiliarity with the industry, and attention to details that meticulously need to be taken care of to affect the flow of work. With the rapid advancement of technologies such as artificial intelligence and the internet, it provides both opportunities and challenges to the assessment sector (Cerya et al., 2021). As for the informants' experience, they have to adopt AI based tools to assist their work. This situation not only requires individual awareness but also competence in order to cope with it. Other than that, they have to adopt a certain application to do their job, which needs their ability to understand the program and use it properly, as stated by PTH, IH and SC in the previous section.

> Freedom to give opinion through social media causing confusion in defining whether the news/information is valid or hoax. [PT]
> …the company encourages employees to use ChatGPT to assist with some of the tasks to make it more effective. [EA]
> On my duty, I usually use ChatGPT to compose a script for KOL content brief. [NA]

In order to cope with their future workplace experience, informants of this study stated that they explore some information through social media regarding tips as fresh graduates. However, the information is somehow overwhelming for some of them. In Addition to this, Lee et al. (2018) argued that the future society should anticipate themselves to experience various unprecedented changes in the rapid technological advancement.

Moreover, those who use LinkedIn to seek job opportunities feel peer pressure due to their friends, or acquaintances, achievement. Since individuals tend to share their achievements through a LinkedIn account, it creates pressure for some of the informants. They admitted that deep inside they feel happy for those friends who got their achievement. However, they feel worried about their own future and targets.

Career Adaptability
Adaptability is the main key to new things in front of us. Specifically within the context of this study, adaptability in career is one of the keys for fresh graduates to cope and survive in their working placement (Mohammad et al., 2020). With the rapid technological advancement, and development of society, it is important to be more adaptable for every individual (Chen et al., 2020). Besides, the culturally diverse and changing world in the digital era has underlined the importance of intercultural adaptation skills to handle any possible situation in a workplace. Adaptability in this case is related to 1) interaction in the work environment, and 2) adopting and using new technology as support. Furthermore, it will relate to adaptability in career and could help individuals adapt to changes when coping with their role in their workplace. Informants discussed how the work situation during the interviews, as follows:

> ...it's the working flow (that I found difficult) ...report and actual site action give me pressure at work. [PTH]
> With the situation (at work), I have to re-learn and learn new things. [PT]
> We have to adapt to the remote working system [IH]
> As a fresh graduate, I am obliged to master the supporting system for working. [RN]
> The work is not as what I have expected… [SR]

They could see that the mentality in the professional world is different. Therefore, they should be able to handle pressure, stay focused, and have eagerness to learn new things. Besides, attitude is one of the prominent requirements for them to adapt to the industry. The working environment plays a significant role in enhancing employees' career adaptability, and individuals need to adapt to their careers to improve their lives. Individual adaptability skills can definitely be readiness for accepting or handling predicted work that is given by the company. By doing so, they're participating in the whole work to be done and it is also the method how they manage the change of working conditions.

In the VUCA era, individuals who are able to adapt with the cultural differences in their environment can quickly respond to shifting cultural dynamics. Besides, they can also adjust with the market demands and global trends, which in today's world, changing is part of our daily phenomenon for technology to keep on advancing. In the interconnected world, individuals who possess strong intercultural communication skills are better equipped to overcome cross-cultural encounters and eventually adapt to the work environment.

Apprehension
Informants believe that some of their skills or work could be done by AI or technology. No matter how much they love their job, they have to cope with technological advancement and offer a better option for the employer that could benefit them.

> ...at some point, our role in the industry could be replaced by technology. [PT]
> ...I tend to be passive in the early time of my working experience, it is due to observing the way of working, the culture, and situation in my work environment. [FH]
> ...being experience and having competencies [SR]
> ...competition and comparing what I have (skills and competencies) with others. [HI]

Overcoming the above challenges and apprehension among the fresh graduate requires perseverance, adaptability, as well as a proactive approach to career planning and development. The success of individuals and effectiveness in daily life depends on the readiness of individuals of any age to be open to any changes and innovation in a global world (Žegunienė, 2021). These requirements are best to be fulfilled not only by individual accomplishment, but also a solid career development program conducted by the organisation through the Human Resource department to ensure the program will align with their career goals and lead to work satisfaction.

Coping Strategies
The common answers related to what they should do regarding challenges faced are skill improvement, knowledge expansion, ensuring a good attitude and mentality as an employee, and being loyal and focused.

> We have to improve our skills and expand our knowledge. Develop the creative and innovative self, utilise technology wisely by playing a role not only as technology users but also as part of (the content) creators as well. [RN]
> ...attitude. I believe that attitude is important in the workforce. [IH]

It is interesting when the informants highlighted what is lacking in the current social-cultural situation as the reflection of today's youngsters in the workforce. Furthermore, RN admitted that peer pressure is one of unavoidable things in the workplace. Values shared among individuals through digital media could affect their expectation and interaction.

> The important preparation for the workforce is mental and skills… [PTH]
> We have to enhance our skill and competency, have a good attitude, be loyal, and show respect to others… And hard work plus zero mistakes. [IH]
> Keep on upskilling and expanding the knowledge, as well as being creative and innovative in using technology. [SR]

Referring to the work environment, it has an influence on career adaptability among fresh graduates which could lessen the turnover in an organisation (Mohammad et al., 2020). By reflecting to the informant response, skills and attitude are factors highlighted to be improved. And referring to it, the work environment is related to the cultures constructed within which leads to the working flow mechanism, organisational cultures and interactions, and participation in multicultural teams. Therefore, ability to adapt, and with proper attitude and behavior, will be prominent.

Challenges faced are categorised into 1) skill mismatch, 2) lack of experience, and 3) intercultural adaptability for their career. Meanwhile, they have certain apprehension towards their future career regarding the ability to adapt in the work environment and using the supporting technology needed for their job. With these conditions, to thrive in the current rapidly changing industry, fresh graduates should not only focus on what they have studied but also have a strong will to continuously learn in the ever-changing situation. In the VUCA era, individuals should be able to adapt and seek more opportunities for their skill development.

For educational institutions, preparation for fresh graduates is prominent, aside from the curriculum and hard skills they gain from the classroom or practical during the education period. The skills possessed by fresh graduates sometimes do not meet the expectations and needs of companies, making it will be challenging for employment. Intercultural communication training should be taken into consideration to be conducted for students before they graduate. Inkaew (2022) stated that a six-hour training could equip individuals with intercultural communication awareness. Understanding different cultural backgrounds in the workplace needs such an awareness for them to eventually adapt and adopt new things to cope with the working situation. This preparation could contribute to job adaptability which will be beneficial for both individuals as for their future career success, and organisation (Mohammad et al., 2020).

Besides, universities could also enhance the curriculum with a multicultural based approach to ensure that students get intercultural and cross-cultural experience during their study time. This curriculum could equip the students with intercultural competence when they enter the workplace and have to adapt with the changing environment locally and globally. The rapid changing due to technology advancement has brought the variations of job scope, which the students could creatively see the opportunities and adopt the changing trend in the workforce. The implementation of Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) is one of the ways that could be developed and continuously practiced to ensure university graduates possess valuable employability skills which relate to the 21st century skill sets (Dewanto & Pritasari, 2023).

For individuals, preparation should be made from college time. Actively applying for an internship and gaining experience from it could help in seeking a proper job in the future. Fresh graduates must find it is difficult, if not impossible, to have academic qualifications along with the suitable skill set and experience when they first apply for the job they desire. However, currently, there are hundreds of internship opportunities that students could apply and try to get for their plus point when applying for a job when they have graduated. *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* program which initiated by the Ministry of Education of Indonesia has provided MSIB program or *Magang dan Studi Independen Bersertifikat* (Certification for Internship and Independent Study Program) which give opportunity for students to gain experience outside the classroom or university.

As for preparing coping strategies, Human Resource Management (HRM) also plays a pivotal role in creating digital habits within a company. The HRM can prepare digitised human resources, and develop digital capabilities within the company (Hartono and Atmaja, 2021), it is to ensure that individuals involved in the organisation have similar coping strategies as others. Mentorship opportunities can offer invaluable insights for newcomers in an organisation for their career and professional development as the mentor can help them to navigate the complexities in their job and provide constructive advice to cope with challenges faced as their learning curves. From the mentorship, knowledge sharing and learning will be continuously experienced which will further enhance their professional growth and career adaptability.

As a result, intercultural competence can be acquired from their experience to ensure their work readiness and the present organisation to provide the training for better career adaptability. Cultural adaptability involves the ability to adjust with one's communication style, behavior, cultural set up in the work environment, as well as mindset to accommodate cultural differences and challenges in the work environment. Referring to these findings, universities, company, and individuals should work side to side simultaneously to

accommodate the condition by 1) encouraging students to pursue internships during their study time, 2) providing relevant training for intercultural and career adaptability purposes, and 3) individuals are fully aware in developing their employability skills and knowledge.

CONCLUSION

Based on the study conducted, it is concluded that there are at least three (3) main challenges faced by fresh graduates in coping with their new responsibility as an employee and playing a new role as a mature individual which is 1) skill mismatch, 2) lack of experience, and 3) adaptability. Therefore, gaining more experiences from internships, having an intense mentorship, and keeping informed regarding the updates of global and industry trends may be the coping strategy to face the VUCA era among fresh graduates. This study contributes to the preparation of graduates to enter the workforce as well as the employers that need to prepare for the arrival of those fresh graduates. Future study can be conducted by focusing on the well-being among the fresh graduates in their workplace regarding the adaptation process.

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