CHAPTER II

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

EXPERIENCES BETWEEN INDONESIAN EMPLOYEES AND TURKISH

MANAGERS

This chapter gives an overview of the important concepts and context for intercultural communication between Indonesian employees and Turkish managers in labour-intensive businesses. It begins with defining intercultural communication and showing how it is relevant in today's globalised workforce. The chapter then examines the unique characteristics of Indonesia's labour-intensive industries, particularly those involving foreign-owned companies, and emphasises the role of cultural diversity in these settings. It also addresses the communication styles, beliefs, and workplace rules common to Indonesian and Turkish cultures. By describing this context, the chapter tries to lay the understanding of the cultural processes explored in this study.

2.1 The Phenomenon of Intercultural Communication in the Workplace

Intercultural communication refers to the interaction between people from diverse cultural backgrounds, which is affected by both opportunities for learning and challenges like discrimination and stereotyping (Martin & Nakayama, 2018, pp. 3-4). In other words, intercultural communication is how people from different cultural backgrounds interact, understand one another, and deal with cultural differences . It includes both verbal and non-verbal ways of communicating, like how someone gives

instructions or responds in conversations. Thus, it involves recognising and adapting to diverse cultural norms, values, and communication styles to ensure mutual understanding.

In a globalised world as mobility increases, many workplaces are made up of people with those who have different religions, languages, ethnic backgrounds, and nationalities. This is especially common in foreign-owned companies or companies that have teams from different countries. As a consequence, good communication is crucial to gain better productivity in the company. If people don't understand each other because of cultural differences, it can lead to confusion, miscommunication, or problems that affect teamwork and productivity. Studies have shown that culturally diverse teams often exhibit lower cohesion, which can influence how team members communicate and collaborate (Samadi & Nixon, 2024, p. 825).

This issue becomes even more relevant in labour-intensive industries, where communication between managers and employees often involves task-oriented instructions and quick decision-making. In these settings, effective communication is essential not only for completing tasks efficiently but also for preventing conflict and maintaining harmonious working relationships, particularly in culturally diverse environments (Ferreira, 2006, p.278). If there is a misunderstanding due to poor communication, the job might be done incorrectly, and this can affect the company's performance or the quality of the product.

One employee, who currently works as a secretary in a Turkish-owned furniture company, shared a situation where there was a miscommunication due to unclear

instructions from her manager. She explained that he asked her to order something, but didn't clearly say when it was needed. She said, "*Dari bahasa [kurang jelas] saat diinstruksikan untuk memesan barang tetapi tidak disebutkan secara detail semisal untuk hari apa. Jadi, tidak saya pesankan karena tidak tahu kalau itu kebutuhannya mendesak. Namun, ternyata itu diperlukan secepatnya.*" (*From the way he speaks is unclear, he instructs me to order something, but he doesn't mention the details, like for which day. So I didn't order it because I thought it wasn't urgent, but turned out it was needed it quickly*). This shows how unclear or indirect communication can lead to misunderstandings, especially when the urgency or details aren't explained properly.

2.2 Labour-Intensive Workplaces in Indonesia

Labour-intensive industries are sectors that rely more on human labour than on advanced machinery or automation. Many existing industrial systems continue to rely largely on human labour as the foundation of their production processes, such systems are usually described as labour-intensive (Götz & Lazarova-Molnar, 2024, p. 647). In Indonesia, this includes small-scale furniture manufacturing companies, which are different from larger factories that use machines for mass production. Another characteristic includes having employees who might be working in teams, often doing repetitive tasks. For example, one participant mentioned that they coordinate directly with quality control to ensure the right materials are used and inspected properly, "*Ketika saya membahas bahan apa yang dibutuhkan, saya melaporkannya ke QC (quality control) dan Pak Sergio (manajer Turki)*" (*When talking about what materials*

are needed, I have to report to both the QC (quality control) and Mr. Sergio (Turkish manager)). Another mentioned receiving feedback regarding how the packing needed to be improved, "*Terkadang Pak Ismail (manajer Turki) memberi instruksi mengenai masalah packing yang kurang rapi*" (*Sometimes Mr. Ismail (Turkish manager) gave instructions, usually about packing not being neat enough*). While participants did not use the term 'repetitive,' the descriptions of their tasks, particularly in quality control and packing, show routine and standardised workflows.

Foreign-owned businesses have become increasingly common in Indonesia. One of the main reasons is that Indonesia offers lower production costs and is rich in natural resources. This has attracted investors from various countries to open or expand their businesses in Indonesia (U.S. Department of State, 2023, *Investment Trends* section). As a result, many local employees must adapt to the communication styles, expectations, and leadership approaches of foreign managers. This environment creates a unique dynamic in which intercultural communication plays a key role in ensuring smooth daily operations and effective teamwork.

Additionally, based on data made by Reuters, the rapid growth of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Indonesia, 744 trillion rupiah ($47.34 billion) in 2023, a 13.7% year-over-year increase, shows how worldwide business growth continues to affect the country's industrial sector. This has resulted in a significant growth in the number of foreign-owned businesses operating in labour-intensive industries, where intercultural communication between foreign management and local staff has become an important part of everyday operations.

2.3 Indonesian Workplace Culture

Workplace culture is defined as the shared values, beliefs, norms, and behaviours that control how things are done in a company. It affects how employees communicate, make decisions, and react to work events. According to Schein, it is the outcome of a group's accumulated learning over time as they solve problems and adjust to changes, which then becomes the "way things are done" and is taught to new members as the correct way to think and act (Pronk et al., 2025, p.2). In other words, workplace culture is more than surface-level procedures, in which it also involves deeper, usually unspoken or non-verbal assumptions that influence behaviour.

In Indonesian workplaces, certain cultural norms are often observed, such as hierarchical respect, harmony, and the use of indirect communication. These influence how people respond to authority, disagreement, and interact with employees daily. Understanding these characteristics is critical, particularly in multicultural settings where different expectations can lead to misinterpretation or tension. The following sections go over the important aspects of Indonesian workplace culture and how they influence actual work dynamics:

    a. **Hierarchy & Authority**

        Indonesian workplaces often follow a top-down structure, where decisions are made by those in higher positions and employees are expected to follow instructions without questioning them (Wulandaru, 2000, p.502).

This is related to Hofstede's concept of high power distance, which means that people in lower positions tend to accept unequal power distribution as normal. This dynamic also appeared in the interviews in which most participants shared how they mostly just accept instructions and don't give any opinions to the managers.

b. **Indirect Communication & Avoidance of Conflict**

Indonesian workplace culture is characterised by indirect communication, where individuals usually avoid confrontation, especially when interacting with superiors (Saputri & Saraswati, 2017, p. 291). This aligns with Hall's theory of high-context cultures, where communication relies on non-verbal cues and the surrounding context rather than explicit verbal messages. In this culture, tone, facial expressions, and social cues are as significant as the spoken words.

This was evident in one participant's response when asked whether she had ever disagreed with her manager by giving her opinion: "*Saya jarang memberi opini atau tidak sepakat dengan manajer karena seringnya saya diberi instruksi*" (*That rarely happens because he usually just gives commands*) implying a reluctance to speak up. She also admitted feeling nervous when communicating with her manager, especially in situations involving potential conflict. This behaviour aligns with Hall's theory of high-context communication, where messages are often implicit, and

Hofstede's observation that in high power-distance societies, subordinates rarely question authority figures.

c. **Group Orientation & Collectivism**

Indonesia is known for its collectivist culture, which prioritises group goals over individual needs. This cultural view emphasises loyalty to in-groups and teamwork as key elements of workplace empowerment (Wulandaru, 2000, p. 507). Hofstede's research shows that Indonesia scores high in collectivism, meaning people tend to see themselves as part of a group rather than as individuals.

One participant mentioned how she would eat with other Indonesian workers during lunch hours by stating, "*Saat jam istirahat, saya bergabung dengan karyawan Indonesia lainnya untuk membeli makan siang,*" reinforcing the tendency to form social bonds with peers from the same cultural background. These patterns illustrate how group orientation influences daily behaviour and emphasise a preference for in-group comfort over cross-cultural interaction.

These cultural characteristics: high regard for hierarchy, indirect communication, and group orientation, are deeply rooted in daily working behaviours. The interviews revealed that employees frequently avoid challenging authority. While these behaviours might contribute to a calm, respectful environment, they can also present problems when dealing with foreign supervisors who prefer greater directness or

assertiveness. This dynamic is especially crucial in Turkish-owned businesses in Indonesia, where cultural differences can affect daily interactions and workflow.

2.4 Turkish Managerial Culture in an Indonesian Context

Foreign managers frequently bring their own cultural values to the workplace, which can influence how they give orders, handle tasks, and interact with local employees. In Turkish-owned businesses in Indonesia, managerial culture has an impact on communication patterns and power dynamics. Turkish leadership is often characterised by a hierarchical and paternalistic style, where superiors are viewed as authority figures who expect loyalty, respect, and obedience. This structure typically limits lower workers' participation in decision-making and emphasises top-down instructions (Erciyes, 2019, p.3). These expectations may cause misunderstandings in multicultural environments where local employees are used to more collaborative or communication that considers relationships and social cues, rather than just blunt, top-down commands. As it has been mentioned previously that most of the participants stated how they just receive a top-down or directive approach where instructions are given without room for discussion or negotiation, contrasting with Indonesian norms that tend to be more consensus-oriented.

Another issue brought up was the lack of clarity in instructions. A participant shared:

"*Dari bahasa [kurang jelas] saat diinstruksikan untuk memesan barang tetapi tidak disebutkan secara detail semisal untuk hari apa. Jadi, tidak saya pesankan*

karena tidak tahu kalau itu kebutuhannya mendesak. Namun, ternyata itu diperlukan secepatnya."

(*From the way he speaks is unclear, he instructs me to order something, but he doesn't mention the details, like for which day. So I didn't order it because I thought it wasn't urgent, but turned out it was needed it quickly.*)

This points to communication problems that stem from language limitations and wrong expectations about how clearly tasks should be explained. In some cases, this also ties into broader language barriers. This was revealed by one of the workers that stated:

"*Biasanya manajer berkomunikasi menggunakan Bahasa Indonesia. Namun, beliau kurang fasih, terkadang komunikasi lisannya tidak jelas [tidak bisa dimengerti]*"

(*Usually, the manager communicates using Indonesian language. However, he isn't fluent, sometimes his written communication is hard to understand.*)

The interviews also reveal how power distance and emotional discomfort play a role in everyday interactions. Employees expressed hesitance when engaging with their managers, particularly when they might need to disagree. As one participant put it simply, "*Terkadang saya gugup saat berkomunikasi dengan manajer saya*" (*Sometimes, I feel nervous when communicating with my manager*). This kind of anxiety, especially around speaking up or challenging authority, aligns with Indonesia's high power-distance culture and highlights the psychological barriers local employees face when navigating foreign leadership styles.

Another aspect mentioned was the emotional impact of managerial stress. A participant mentioned:

"*Saat manajer memiliki banyak kerjaan atau stress, terkadang beliau meluapkan emosinya kepada karyawan, sehingga suasana kerja ikut terasa kurang nyaman.*"

(*When the manager has a lot of work or stressed out, he sometimes releases that stress onto the employees, which makes the work environment feel uncomfortable too*).

This suggests that emotional regulation by managers during high-pressure situations affects not only the mood of the workplace but also employee morale. Finally, there was a noticeable social gap between Turkish managers and Indonesian staff, particularly during informal moments like break time. As one employee stated, "*Saat jam istirahat, saya bergabung dengan karyawan Indonesia lainnya untuk membeli makan siang,*" (*During break time, I stay with the other Indonesian employees to buy lunch*). This implies that Turkish managers tend to remain separate from the rest of the staff in casual settings, limiting opportunities for bonding or building rapport.

These patterns, as described by Indonesian employees, highlight the workplace dynamics. While Turkish managers may intend to be direct or efficient, their leadership and communication styles may unintentionally cause confusion or discomfort for local staff. These insights show the importance of cultural sensitivity in leadership, especially in foreign-owned, labour-intensive industries where smooth communication and employee well-being are critical to daily operations.