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A Systemic Model To Augment Consulting Competencies For Success In a Remote And Multicultural Work Environment

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**A SYSTEMIC MODEL TO AUGMENT CONSULTING COMPETENCIES FOR
SUCCESS IN A REMOTE AND MULTICULTURAL WORK ENVIRONMENT**

A dissertation submitted

by

Sagar Sharma

to

THOMAS JEFFERSON UNIVERSITY

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF MANAGEMENT

in

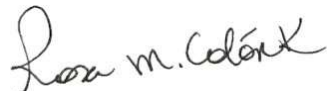
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April 28, 2022

**A SYSTEMIC MODEL TO AUGMENT CONSULTING COMPETENCIES FOR
SUCCESS IN A REMOTE AND MULTICULTURAL WORK ENVIRONMENT**

Sagar Sharma

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation aimed to identify gaps in the consulting core competencies and challenges faced in remote and multicultural work environments. The survey research method was utilized to gather consultants' input on core competencies and challenges based on their experiences. This research was only applicable to those consultants who could perform their roles and responsibilities in a remote and multicultural work environment.

Based on the research analysis, a core competency framework is shared to enhance consultant's core competencies to make them successful. The shared framework can help understand some of the industry's critical problems and provide valuable knowledge that will help look at them from a different angle. As a result, consulting organizations can maximize their consultants' competencies to sustain their consulting brand and provide remote business continuity to their valuable clients. This research will benefit the consulting organizations, consultants, and clients operating in a remote and multicultural work environment. Additionally, future consultants can capitalize on this research by entering the consulting industry in the forthcoming years.

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2022

DEDICATION

Joining this doctoral program and completing the dissertation was the most challenging and rewarding decision I have ever made in my career. I am grateful for all the relationships I have built with my faculty members, coaches, advisors, and peers along this program journey. This program has taught me a lot and widened my knowledge horizon to use these skillsets throughout my career. My overall experience with Jefferson's DSL program has been phenomenal, and I am grateful for all the support that I have gotten from my loved ones to complete this program.

Throughout the DSL program's journey, I was able to advance in my career with the help of the knowledge cultivated through various theories, models, and concepts. Indeed, Jefferson's DSL program is a step toward academic and organizational enlightenment in my career.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I want to extend immense gratitude to my dissertation advisor, Dr. Rosa M. Colon-Kolacko, for her expertise and support for the entire dissertation journey. I genuinely appreciate her encouragement, knowledge, and guidance in completing this program. She had full faith and believed in my abilities to complete this program. Dr. Colon-Kolacko, I can't thank you enough for helping me complete this dissertation.

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Finally, a big thank you to my wife, Kumud, who believed in me and supported me throughout the program journey. I want to thank my son, Agastya, for letting me complete my dissertation instead of playing with him. I am so excited to have you at my graduation ceremony. Also, I want to thank my mom, dad, and sister for their love and support throughout my life. This dissertation would not have been possible without everyone's love and support.

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CHAPTER: 1

INTRODUCTION

As part of globalization, many industries are progressing rapidly toward remote and multicultural work environments. The terms remote and multicultural need to be defined to clarify the meaning and purpose of this study. A remote work environment (RWE) includes employees who work from home (WFH) and are not required to go into their employer's office (onsite facilities) to conduct job responsibilities. A multicultural work environment encompasses employees from diverse cultural backgrounds, which comprise different ethnicities and speaking various languages aside from English.

In today's modern world of information technology (IT), working in a remote and multicultural work environment poses many benefits and challenges for the organization and its employees. Flores (2019) conducted a study and surveyed 43 remote workers to gather data on the benefits and challenges related to working remotely and its impact on remote workers. It revealed having more flexible hours as the top benefit and collaborating/communicating with others as the top challenge of remote working. Additionally, "separating work and home life was selected to be the most difficult part of being a remote worker" (Flores, 2019, p. 40).

Furthermore, combining the aspect of remote with multicultural work environments in one given role creates complications requiring further evaluation. From an employee's standpoint, a remote and multicultural work environment creates constraints such as access to technology, an isolated work environment, cultural and language barriers. From the organization's standpoint, a remote workforce builds hesitation and doubt about the employee's productivity and efficiency (Sen et al., 2021).

The emergence of COVID-19 caught organizations off guard, and the WFH model was introduced widely to protect everyone due to health and safety concerns (Ipsen et al., 2021). Implementing a remote work environment overnight raised concerns for industries and

organizations. Whether any of the organizations had a contingency plan, the WFH model was implemented to protect the general population from the COVID-19 infection. With the dire need to continue conducting business as usual, many organizations implemented the WFH to sustain operations.

Background

In 2020, COVID-19 forced the entire world to adopt new ways of coping with the pandemic's human and economic impacts (Dreger, 2020). All global industries, companies, and organizations had to respond to a sudden, unforeseen crisis for humanity. The pandemic challenged and halted various contingency strategies organizations had in place and advised the restriction of social interaction to limit the spread of COVID-19 (Kirby, 2020). The entire workforce faced a dilemma as exposure through close contact endangered careers, resulting in intensive lockdowns (Sault, 2020). The lockdowns pushed organizations to enable their workforces to work remotely to restrict the spread of COVID-19 (Dua et al., 2020).

According to the World Health Organization (2021), employees had to take extra measures to protect themselves from unforeseen contamination in addition to their work responsibilities. This unexpected crisis changed how many industries conducted their business and pushed the global economy to cope with the emergent need for a remote work environment. Galanti et al. (2021) explained that employees and employers were forced to transition to remote work with little warning. Remote work became a helpful solution for most non-healthcare-related organizations coping with the pandemic (Galanti et al., 2021). Many organizations took advantage and immediately rolled out a remote work environment to sustain their operations.

Savić (2020) argued that the worldwide COVID-19 outbreak compelled businesses to innovate and transform the way they conduct their work. Amid the pandemic, working onsite has shifted to work from home (WFH). The sudden need for work from home has stressed “the digital transformation of the workforce and the evolution of the work environment at an unprecedented speed” (Savic, 2020, p. 101). Digital transformation has been an ongoing topic for many

organizations and their leaders. Most organizations understood the importance of transforming themselves in the digital space; however, when COVID-19 struck, many businesses realized they were unprepared to move quickly into that space (Savić, 2020). On the other hand, organizations with enhanced IT capabilities are better positioned to survive these unprecedented circumstances and overcome the short and long-term challenges that will inevitably follow (Savić, 2020).

Like other businesses, consulting organizations had to suspend all face-to-face activities and adapt to remote activities organization-wide (Patil & Banodkar, 2020). This change was necessary to deal with the unforeseen disruptions that severely impacted the economy and almost caused an economic crisis (Bauer et al., 2021). Consulting organizations and their clients shifted to virtual interactions to follow government guidelines regarding safety (Todd, 2021). The overall goal for consulting organizations was to limit social interaction and develop an emergent strategy to survive the deadly infection. Most consulting organizations were on the verge of adapting to a remote work environment and advancing their IT capabilities to be better equipped to help their consultants focus on client-related activities.

Problem Statement

According to Dua et al. (2020), COVID-19 imposed unprecedented restrictions on travel, physical interactions, and forced companies and consumers to change the way they operate. As a result, consulting companies implemented a complete WFH model to restrict the spread of a deadly disease. He, Zhang, and Li (2021) stated that working remote posed various challenges for multicultural consultants, such as lack of trust due to working in an isolated environment; communication problems due to inefficient communication tools or language barriers; scheduling difficulties due to different time zones; and low productivity due to work stress or poor time management. While these challenges existed before the pandemic, travel and face-to-face collaborations were not restricted, and remote and hybrid work was an option.

According to Pak et al. (2020), losing the ability to travel or be present onsite for critical interaction generated major challenges during pandemic lockdowns. Among these challenges

were lack of face-to-face collaboration, isolated work environments, and decreased work productivity (Pak et al., 2020). Additionally, remote work requires individuals to be proficient in modern technology, especially computers (PC and laptops) and smart devices (tablets and smartphones), to interact with customers and colleagues (Freeman, 2017). In other words, remote employees must be tech-savvy, so they feel comfortable executing their work requirements through a computer. This need for technological acumen led to various advantages and disadvantages depending on the work environment or team setting.

In a multicultural team environment, some employees feel comfortable working from home, and some struggle due to the overwhelming requirements of technology, or cultural and language barriers (Chen et al., 2006). A remote work environment adds flexibility to increase productivity, but at the same time, in a multicultural organization, it is hard to level the playing field for all employees (Chen et al., 2006). In a multicultural remote work environment, organizations sometimes fail to understand the specific limitations of individual employees. For example, various communication styles can disrupt remote work interactions, and personality styles such as introverts find it difficult to express themselves normally in a remote format (Chen et al., 2006).

Additionally, the remote work environment imposed various challenges on organizations, demanding enhancement of IT infrastructure to cope with the unforeseen challenges for business operations (He, Zhang, & Li, 2021). Organizations had to ensure that they provided work-related tools such as laptops, cell phones, headsets, or granted access to personal devices so employees could conduct all business activities (He, Zhang, & Li, 2021; Schumacher, 2021). Organizations also had to ensure that employees used secure remote connections to ensure the safety of all proprietary and client data with wireless devices (He, Zhang, & Li, 2021). In addition, organizations had to muddle through cyber-attacks and ransomware threats to protect the organization and client's data while employees performed their duties outside the organization's controlled work environments (He et al., 2021; Jordan & Olson, 2020). These technology

enhancements to support the remote work environment pushed the consulting industry to aggressive spending to implement the specific measures immediately (LaBerge et al., 2020).

A remote and multicultural work environment adds many benefits to an organization. However, a remote and multicultural work environment creates challenges that can impact the growth of employees. The challenges listed above are notable in the consulting industry. Amidst the Great Resignation, organizations struggle to understand the primary reason for employee resignations. In addition, the cost and effort of hiring new employees are putting pressure on organizations and affecting client relationships due to the massive turnover (Baldwin, 2021).

According to Baier et al. (2020), companies must utilize active learning throughout the process of rebuilding and adjusting in the wake of COVID-19. The pandemic thrust the business world roughly a decade into the future in a digital sense. As such, businesses must prioritize learning, and learning how to learn, to remain competitive and draw in the best talent (Baier et al., 2020). Automation will be critical in the near future as people continue to work from home in large numbers. Because technology evolves rapidly, companies must account for the need for employees to continually update their skills. Skill-building must be a priority from bottom to top within organizations that function heavily in virtual spaces. Businesses that foster learning as part of their internal culture will fare best in the post-pandemic world.

Significance of the Study

Shifting to a remote work environment raised a new dilemma for organizations and demanded a drastic change. Working remotely is not a recent phenomenon, but conducting business operations remotely was an awakening for various industries (King, 2020). Many organizations factored work-from-home in their contingency strategy to ensure business continuity. Work-from-home became one of the most extraordinary benefits organizations provide to their employees to cope with work-life balance (Routley, 2020). Employees who needed a break from long commutes could manage their work while traveling for client activities or manage personal affairs using the work from home benefit. In essence, a work-from-anywhere (WFA)

model was well tested and thought through for most organizations. Most organizations saw significant savings in operational expenses when their employees worked remotely.

Furthermore, before COVID-19, as technology had advanced so far and so fast, several organizations debated the WFH model to cut operational expenses and realize the productivity increase by remote employees (Alicia et al., 2018). Millennials and Gen Z opted for the remote or hybrid work environment (Bruner, 2021). From a holistic standpoint, the organizations and their employees favored the WFH model as long as there were no disruptions to their business model (Chen, 2021). So, what went wrong when the COVID-19 lockdown forced many workforces to act remotely to mitigate the risk of a high rate of unforeseen infectious disease?

This dissertation aims to identify gaps (if any) in the consulting core competencies and challenges faced in remote and multicultural work environments. The goal is to survey consultants to gather their input on core competencies and challenges based on their experiences. Based on the study findings, the researcher will propose a systemic model to overcome the gap in consulting competencies to benefit consulting organizations and consultants.

The proposed consulting competencies model will be limited to problem-solving, creative thinking, time management skills, and virtual team collaboration in a remote and multicultural work environment. The initial thinking is to leverage various frameworks, models, and tools that can help understand some of the industry's critical problems and provide valuable knowledge that will help look at them from a different angle. An enhanced combination of multiple frameworks, models, and tools can provide different perspectives and lenses to enhance core competencies.

Problem-solving and Creative Thinking

From a high level, problem-solving is the process of understanding the type of problem and its resolution. In other words, to resolve a problem, decision-making is a key that helps solve the problem. Creative thinking means thinking outside the box, inventing new ways to carry out tasks, solve problems, and meet challenges. It can also mean bringing a fresh, sometimes

unorthodox, perspective to address the organization or client's requirements. Creative thinking helps to look at the issue from different angles and use the right tools to mitigate the issues.

Everyone has different capabilities of thinking and performing specific tasks. Many frameworks and models can strengthen these competencies. But what can help consultants to look at this competency from different angles are the following frameworks. The two frameworks that can help these components are the Cynefin framework and the DIKW pyramid.

Cynefin Framework

Cynefin framework described by Snowden & Boone (2007), classifies contexts that include environmental, cultural, and other situations in which problems and opportunities are presented as simple, complicated, complex, and chaotic. As noted in Figure 1.1, the "ordered" context contains simple and complicated problems. And the "unordered" context contains complex and chaotic problems.

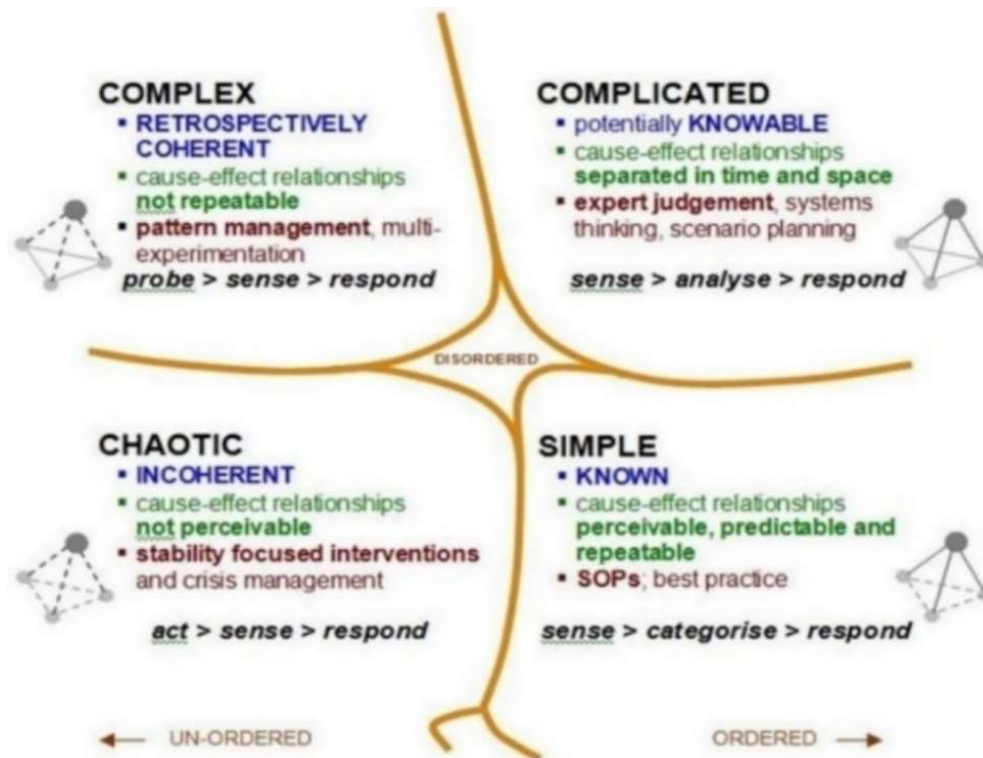


Figure 1.1: Cynefin Framework by Snowden and Boone (2007)

According to Snowden, a significant number of organizations today qualify as complex. Their situation may change in short but irregular, unpredictable cycles, requiring the organization to adapt internally accordingly to avoid degradation. Complex contexts are often unpredictable; instead of controlling the situation or finding a plan of action, it's often best to be patient and look for patterns through which a solution will emerge to deal with the complexity. In the new worldview of complexity – a change in worldview is fundamental to engaging with interactive complexity. Complexity is a condition that is dynamic and, to a large degree, unknowable and irreducible to simple elements. The manifestation of the complexity is unclear in which activities are relevant, and it is not apparent how or to what extent these activities are interdependent. The environment to a decision-maker appears ill-structured, dynamic, and uncertain.

Often, organizations fail to categorize the challenges they face in their routine. Solving various types of challenges requires a different set of tools and experts. Cynefin framework helps distinguish between various types of problems, and based on experience, experts can address those problems with the appropriate methods and tools.

DIKW Pyramid

Ackoff's (1989) "From data to wisdom pyramid" (AKA DIKW Pyramid) learning model breaks down the decision-making for every layer of the organization, from front-line workers to the C-Suite executives. It all depends on the data, which generates information for the managers to make a strategic proposal to the organization in converging or diverging the business operation to succeed in the industry.

Every data point collectively makes an impactful set of information, eventually creating knowledge that can help executives formalize their decision-making in problem-solving. Pittman (n.d.) stated that "information is the meaning of these sensory stimuli (i.e., the empirical perception). For example, the noises that I hear are data. The meaning of these noises (e.g., a running car engine) is information" (p. 106). This process provides a greater depth of

understanding to the organization in problem-solving. With that understanding, organizations gain wisdom to make strategic decisions to succeed and sustain the business over a long period.



Figure 1.2: DIKW Pyramid by Ackoff (1989)

Making better decisions is a process in which a decision is a deliberate act of cognitive selection of an alternative in the hope, expectation, or belief that the actions envisioned in carrying out the selected alternative will accomplish specific goals. In the content of the learning model, data is a vital input for decision making because it helps create information that provides info on know-what, where, when, and who elements. Then set of information provides know-who elements to formalize the knowledge. Further, structured knowledge generates know-why elements to formulate an understanding that articulates wisdom in problem-solving (see Figure 1.2).

From the Cynefin framework, we can identify such challenges as complex or retrospectively coherent, which “means that, in hindsight, it’s easy to explain why things happen in a complex environment. Yet it is impossible to predict them ahead of time” (Caddell 2008). As remote and multicultural work environments evolve, we need to understand how to continuously address its challenges and gather data to help with decision-making.

Time Management

“What is important is seldom urgent, and what is urgent is seldom important.”

~ Dwight D. Eisenhower

Time management is the process of understanding the urgency of the matter and its importance. Invajy (2021) mentioned that “people often do not discriminate between what’s “urgent” and what’s “important.” Both words often seem interchangeable to most people, but there is a significant difference between them. The difference builds the basic fundamental structure of the time management matrix. Notably, the Eisenhower Decision Matrix was employed by Stephen R. Covey who labeled it the Time Management Matrix (Invajy, 2021).

Eisenhower Matrix

The Eisenhower matrix is a valuable time management tool for getting things done by organizing tasks, duties, and responsibilities according to their importance and priority. It also helps separate less urgent and important tasks that should be delegated or skipped.

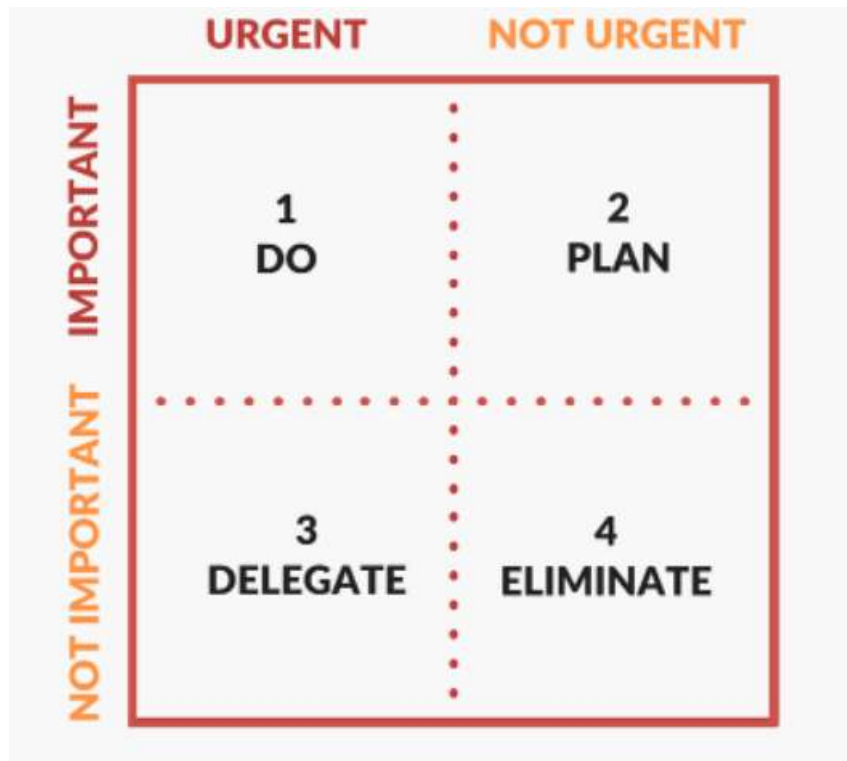


Figure 1.3: Eisenhower Matrix by Eisenhower (1954)

As noted in Figure 1.3, the Time Management Matrix is divided into quadrants based on importance and urgency, which assists in dividing all actions and putting them into one of four categories of the matrix (Invajy, 2021). When working on a to-do list, two questions should be addressed: Question:1 – “Is it urgent?” and Question:2 – “Is it important?” Based on the answers, the correct quadrant can be selected (Scott, 2022).

Tasks in Quadrant 1 are both urgent and important. These critical tasks need to be completed as soon as possible (Scott, 2022). For example, answering a time-sensitive email that is urgent and important for the business. Tasks in Quadrant 2 are important but not urgent. These tasks require time and dedication because these tasks align with long-term goals (Scott, 2022). For example, attending an asynchronous training session is important, but can be completed later.

Tasks in Quadrant 3 are urgent but not important. When something is urgent, but it is not, it is usually an outside source of distraction (Scott, 2022). “This common mistake often occurs when someone asks you to do something that does not directly benefit you or get you closer to achieving your goals” (Scott, 2022). For example, if you are in the middle of working on a project and the phone rings, you don’t have to answer it. These tasks can be delegated to someone else. It may seem urgent, but other people can handle such tasks. Tasks in Quadrant 4 are neither urgent nor important. These tasks are simply busywork, and if they can be eliminated, it will free up time to invest in quadrant 2 tasks. For example, playing video games or binge-watching television are time-consuming and distract from important and urgent tasks.

In a remote and multicultural work environment, it is crucial to focus on the list of tasks that are important and urgent for the job and the organization. When focusing on quadrant 1 or 2 tasks, often, it is easy to procrastinate—having a list of tasks to do that seem equally urgent and important but can’t seem to get them all done. Having back-to-back meetings or extraneous administration tasks can prevent a consultant from focusing on important and urgent tasks. Protecting the work schedule from unnecessary meetings and admin tasks can help consultants

work on top priority items that add value to the organization. In the end, it is all about the revenue that the consultant generates for the organization.

Virtual Team Collaboration

Effective communication and collaboration are vital to being successful in a virtual workplace. Often, communication is a crucial aspect of productive collaboration, and lack of communication can impact team dynamics and collaboration. Crafting a robust remote team environment begins with free, open, and frequent communication.

Various tools and models can help team members and organizations enhance their communication and collaboration styles. HBDI assessment can add a different perspective to help consultants think and collaborate differently. Lack of understanding of your own and others' work styles can cause a disjointed team environment. Harnessing own and others' strengths and weaknesses can help consultants and organizations grow and be more productive.

HBDI Assessment

The tool that can help with creative thinking and understanding thinking patterns work is Herrmann Brain Dominance Instrument (HBDI) assessment. HBDI described the Whole Brain Thinking framework, which "focuses on showing people how to use their whole brain—not just the parts they feel most comfortable with. It acknowledges that while different tasks require different mental processes, and different people prefer different thinking, organizations will get better results when strategically leveraging the full spectrum of thinking available" (Herrmann-Nehdi, n.d.).

HBDI assessment highlights the strengths and weaknesses of four proposed/metaphoric quadrants: rational, intellectual, intuitive, and instinctive (see figure 1.4). Rational focuses on the right side of the brain, where strengths are analytical and practical, which means relying on logic and fact-based info to execute your tasks. Intuitive focuses on the left side of the brain, where strengths are experimental and relational skills, which means relying on long-term vision and

interpersonal info to execute tasks. Intellectual focuses on the top side of the brain, where strengths are analytical and experimental skills, which means relying on a logical and long-term vision to execute tasks. Instinctive focuses on the bottom side of the brain, where strengths are practical and relational skills, which means relying on results-driven and interpersonal skills to execute tasks.

In quadrant A (blue quadrant), the thinking style is analytical-driven. Individuals in this quadrant are goal and specification driven. They look for process improvement opportunities and believe in enhancing processes to their fullest potential. Analyzing and problem-solving skills are the key strengths of this quadrant. In quadrant B (green quadrant), the thinking style is practical-driven. Individuals in this quadrant are actions and tasks driven, focusing on implementing the ideas and solutions. Organizing and executing tasks is the key strength of this quadrant.

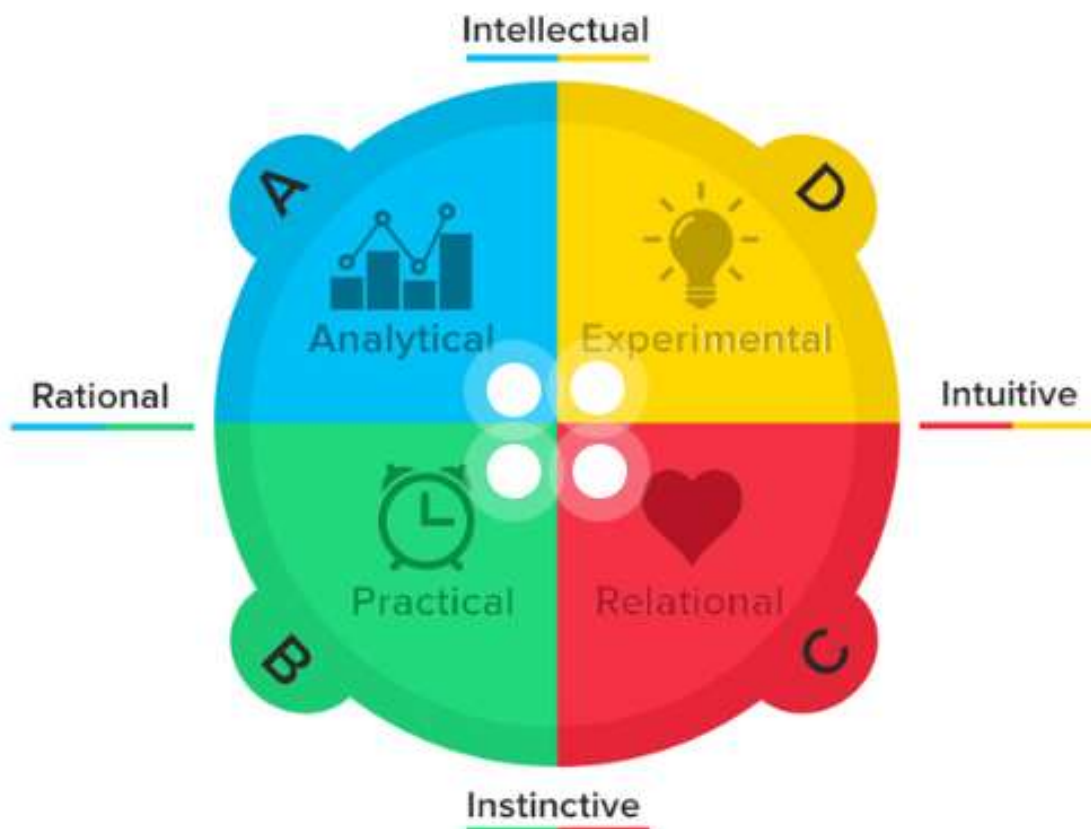


Figure 1.4: HBDI – Four Quadrant Graphic by Herrmann-Nehdi (n.d.)

In quadrant C (red quadrant), individuals are relational and focus on interpersonal skills. Building teams and getting involved in the teams are the key strengths of this quadrant. In quadrant D (yellow quadrant), individuals focus on the vision of the goals. Building strategy and conceptualizing the ideas is the key strength of this quadrant.

Concisely, the blue quadrant focuses on “What”; the green quadrant focuses on “How”; the red quadrant focuses on “Who”; and the yellow quadrant focuses on “Why” aspects of the goals. The blue and green quadrant dominated individuals are the left-brainers, and yellow and red quadrant dominated individuals are the right-brainers.

The above categorization of the skillset can define everyone’s strengths and weaknesses. Every individual has different capabilities, and it is essential to understand all team member’s strengths and weaknesses when forming a team. Everyone brings a different level of problem-solving, creative thinking, collaboration, and communication styles to the team. Leaders and team members need to encourage one another’s style and maintain everyone’s strengths and weaknesses accordingly. This can help build a robust team dynamic that adds value and generates higher productivity.

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

The inclusion criteria for the research are based on the participants’ employment or experiences. The anticipated input of this research is that all potential participants in the survey will answer questions openly and candidly. All participants will provide genuine input into the research, and there are no underlying interests or motives, such as using the research for their gain. The number of participants is large enough for this research to reach a valid conclusion. There may be unknown factors in the participants’ employment or experiences resulting in a partial bias in the research responses.

The Anticipated Outcome of the Study

This dissertation's primary focus is to help consultants succeed in a remote and multicultural work environment. Enable them to understand what core competencies can strengthen their skill set and what challenges to mitigate to execute a remote engagement. Based on the research findings, researcher will propose a systemic model that can enhance consulting competencies in a remote and multicultural work environment.

This dissertation will develop the research questions, comprehensive literature review, leverage appropriate research method, analyze the study findings, and present the conclusion. To execute this dissertation, the following committee has been formed to aid in the dissertation goals:

- **Dissertation Chair/Supervisor – Dr. Rosa Colon-Kolacko**
 - Adjunct Professor, DMgt in Strategic Leadership, School of Continuing and Professional Studies, Thomas Jefferson University.
 - Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer at Tuft Medicine
- **Committee Member (Internal Reader) – Dr. Shelley Osagie**
 - Dean, School of Continuing and Professional Studies, Thomas Jefferson University
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CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research conducted to date on the remote work environment and its emergence pre- and post-COVID-19 focuses on impacts and benefits on various industries. Work from home became a reality during COVID-19, and many researchers have explored how it has meshed with the current realities of our economy. Several researchers have conducted work-from-home (WFH) research with consulting organizations to see if there have been any benefits or impacts in a remote consulting engagement. Additionally, the remote work environment setting will be compared with the multicultural work environment to see if there is any correlation between the consulting competencies of the organizational consultants. This literature review explores the work from home and consulting competencies research to understand factors impacting consultants' competencies in a remote and multicultural work environment.

Pre-COVID-19 Remote Work

Various terms associated with remote work include telecommuting, working remotely, virtual work, e-work, e-commuting, digital nomads, and freelancing. Jack Nilles, a NASA engineer, coined the term telecommuting in his 1973 book, *The Telecommunications-Transportation Tradeoff* (Gupta, 2020). According to Nilles, people commuting to work was the primary cause of traffic congestion and fuel consumption (Gan, 2015). Nilles envisioned working remotely as a potential solution to major societal problems like resource consumption, urban sprawl, and endless traffic jams (King, 2021). However, Nilles was realistic. He understood that companies of his time were in no position to implement remote work on a large scale. In order for that to happen, Nilles argued, employees' job tasks had to be self-contained, and companies needed access to sophisticated telecommunication infrastructure that allowed seamless data transfer (Gan, 2015). By 1979, this prospect was attracting popular attention. For example, Frank Schiff, writing in *The Washington Post*, outlined the positive effects of telecommuting, such as lowering national

gasoline consumption, traffic congestion, air pollution, as well as mental and physical stress (King, 2021).

What Nilles foresaw in the early 1970s has become reality. Computers and the internet have transformed the way we work. These elements have been a vital part of the technology that has acted as the catalyst to evolve our workplaces (Gan, 2015). Moreover, Nilles pointed out that organizational cultural changes were far more critical to implementing telecommuting. This appears to be changing, according to King (2021), because management and employees alike recognize telecommuting's virtues beyond simply those outlined by Schiff four decades ago. Work from home has shown many benefits, such as expanding the potential talent pool, decreasing operational costs, and continuous operations during emergencies. Given the outcomes, implementing a corporate-wide work-from-home policy has much appeal. There is still a long way to go, however. Gan (2015) believes that WFH still has a long way to go before reaching its potential. The main reason for this is that many organizations believe there is a downside regarding the remote employees as they will be less involved, unproductive, and under-utilized (King, 2021).

One important study conducted by Marciano (2019) focused on the barriers shaping employees' and employers' attitudes towards telework. The author leveraged Berger and Luckmann's 1966 theory of social institutionalization to the onsite working paradigm to understand how it compares to the adoption of telework. Marciano (2019) argues that conventional industry-wide standards for evaluating work focus on "productivity, improving productivity, and rigid boundaries between work/lifetime" (p.267). From workers' standpoint, the possibility of telework was accompanied by fears of lower pay, isolation in the home, and apprehension at seeking a supervisor's approval to work remotely; managers, on the other hand, worry that switching to remote work will undercut productivity, undermine their oversight of employees they supervise and create barriers between those who can work remotely and those whose jobs make that

impossible (Marciano, 2019). At the time of her study, Marciano, like many of her colleagues at the time, felt there was not yet sufficient data to recommend solutions to these problems.

As the practice has expanded, WFH has proven controversial for many organizations; some believe it is beneficial for their growth and productivity, while others believe it affects their organizational culture. Given that work from home is here to stay, businesses and their employees need to adapt and evolve their work responsibilities. Various WFH models have been researched among all industries; the question is whether they add value or impact the organizational values contingent upon how society copes with the pandemic. Many organizations are spending millions of dollars to understand how they should redesign their work practices moving forward. Similarly, many researchers have been researching this topic pre-pandemic to see how they can achieve agility in the organizations and attract top talent in the industry.

The Emergence of a Remote Work Environment During COVID-19

COVID-19 forced millions of employees to adapt rapidly to working remote, usually alone. According to the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), disruptions caused by COVID-19 led to an astonishing digital transformation in the space of just a few months (cited in Li, 2021). This transformation, Li (2021) argues, revealed the importance of understanding how “human behavior and culture” shape the actions of both employees and customers (p.1). Companies seeking to endure this transformation without losing ground must use all the resources at their disposal. In Li’s (2021) view, the digital transformation must make use of all planning resources such as “good journey mapping and on-boarding” so that no one gets left behind during these unsettled times (p.1).

Once the pandemic was in full swing, the efficacy of having their entire workforce working from home became a top priority for many organizations. This, according to Yarberry and Sims (2021), has curtailed “efforts to remain engaged and consequently impede career development and progress” (p. 237). They emphasize that employees in a WFH setting require the same support as they would in a traditional workplace, including the chance to exchange ideas and feel

supported and an overall sense of belonging (Yarberry & Sims, 2021). At the same time, Yarberry and Sims (2021) believe that how workers manage the challenges of working from home by remaining engaged and self-motivated reveals a great deal about their individual attitudes toward their careers.

Savić (2020) emphasizes the need for a “digital workforce mindset” in his exploration of COVID’s immediate and sweeping effect on businesses and the resulting shift of workforces to the digital space (p.103). He points out that, due to the urgency of the situation, companies were forced to undergo digital transformation at a much-accelerated pace (Savic, 2020). This transformation brought together the old and the new, engendering greater awareness of the transformative power of technology. Arguing that COVID altered “the nature of work, its variety, volume, velocity, and value,” he highlights how operations, technology, and management strategy were forced to evolve rapidly due to changing circumstances in the nature of work (Savic, 2020, p.103). Digital transformation entails more than just funneling new technologies into the workplace. When done correctly, it makes companies more durable and less subject to fluctuations in the market, especially in times of great uncertainty (Savić, 2020). In Savic’s (2020) view, those who open themselves to the digital mindset recognize how quickly technology can alter human interactions, speeding up growth rates and making companies more agile.

Galanti et al. (2021) also conducted a study on working from home during the pandemic to analyze the impact on employees’ remote work productivity, engagement, and stress. They point out that COVID-19 had forced millions of people to stay home and made WFH the new way of working. Many employees were obliged to share their workspace with family members, such as family members and young children, which impacted remote employees’ work and private lives (Galanti et al., 2021). Their research utilized Arnold Bakker and Evangelia Demerouti’s Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, developed in 2006 and published in *The Journal of Managerial Psychology*. Noting the JD-R model’s premise that particular occupations and have corresponding demands and resources which shape how well employees do their jobs, Galanti

et al. (2021) assert that WFH is a crucial opportunity to give a competitive advantage to sustain and improve remote employees' performance. Galanti et al.'s (2021) central conclusion is that communication is vital between employees to prevent them from feeling isolated and that organizations must encourage employees to keep the work and life spheres separate so that workers have sufficient time to recover and remain productive.

Narayanamurthy and Tortorella (2021) also studied how COVID-19 affected employee performance and specifically how industry 4.0 (I4.0) base technologies shaped that performance. They found that while COVID-related changes in work do affect performance, those changes can be moderated through the use of digital service organizations (Narayanamurthy & Tortorella, 2021). The study's result indicated that employees working from home during COVID worried most about job security, the challenges of working in a home environment, and internet connectivity, but that much of this anxiety can be alleviated when companies utilize appropriate technologies (Narayanamurthy & Tortorella, 2021).

Lenka (2021) also focused on how COVID has upended the traditional work environment and warns that ineffective and inefficient methods of dealing with the associated challenges can have grave consequences for an organization. She argues that the resulting challenges "should be addressed efficiently through practical solutions which can help the organizations worldwide fight the economic uncertainty in a much better way" (Lenka, 2021, p.2677). Lenka (2021) sees particular difficulties arising for companies spread across multiple time zones and those which rely heavily on teamwork and collaboration. Collaboration in the virtual space must be encouraged and adequately facilitated to keep employees engaged and active. If it is, according to Lenka (2021), a WFH model can significantly benefit companies as it "contributes towards employee engagement, motivation, innovation, better work-life balance, increased performance, and mental well-being" (p. 2678).

COVID-19 Remote Work: Early Returns

Dubey and Tripathi (2020) conducted an opinion study to analyze the general population’s sentiments on Twitter regarding the WFH concept. They used the Twitter API to collect 100,000 tweets worldwide, containing #WorkFromHome or #WFH for the data analysis. The study revealed that 73% of respondents felt positive about working from home, and 27% saw it as negative (Dubey & Tripathi, 2020). More specifically, upwards of 60% of tweets examined contained good attitudes about WFH indicating “trust, anticipation, and joy,” while a smaller number expressed “fear, sadness, anger, and disgust” (Dubey & Tripathi, 2020, p.17).

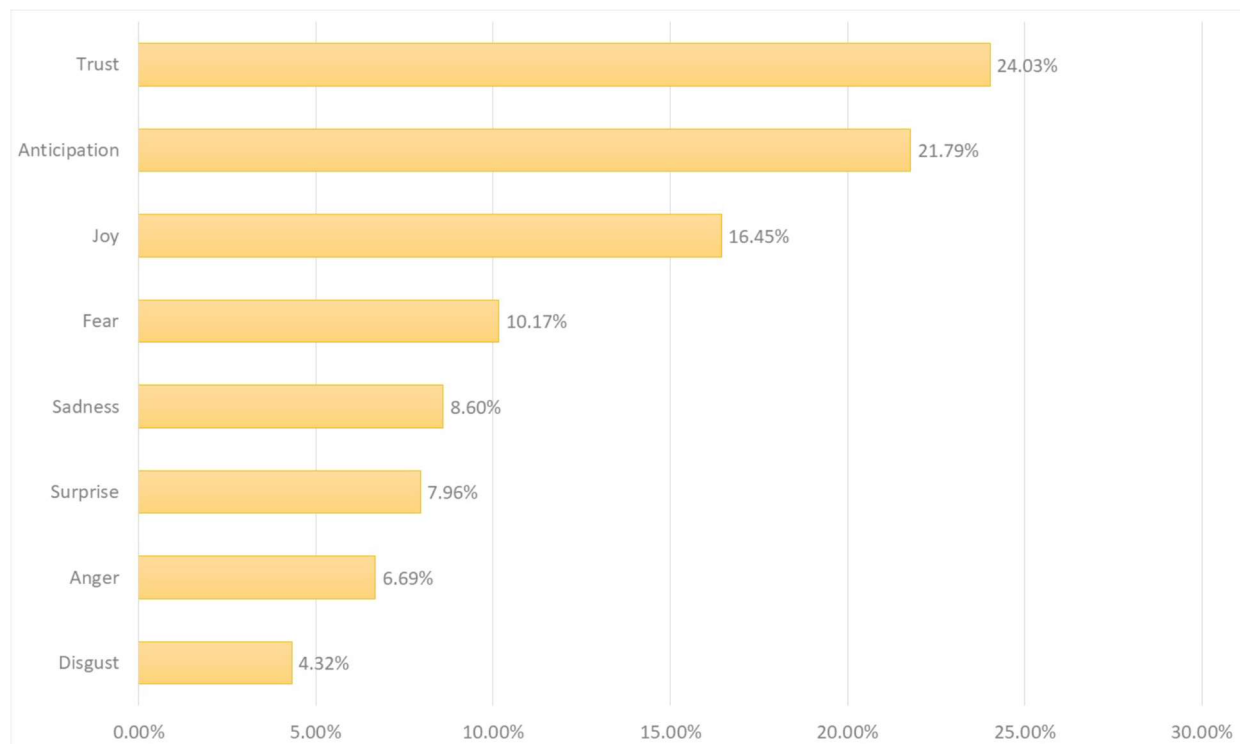


Figure 2.1: Sentiment Analysis of Tweets for Work from Home – (Dubey and Tripathi, 2020)

Park, Jeong, and Chai (2021) conducted a similar study analyzing remote e-workers’ challenges and success factors in times of COVID-19 and how human resource development (HRD) can help these workers cope with their struggles. The challenges, including building a

network with coworkers, lacking communication with colleagues, and feeling less connected with the organization, are causing career stagnation and professional development. According to Park, Jeong, and Chai (2020), employees are more motivated to stick with their present career when they feel valued and supported by coworkers and supervisors and possess a clear sense of how the work they are doing enhances the company's success. Moreover, HRD professionals specifically can play a critical role in remote work environments to help the organizations build a more sustainable career culture. Park, Jeong, and Chai (2020) argue that human resource professionals can aid employees working remotely who are struggling with psychological health as well as longer-term uncertainty about the direction of their careers after COVID-19.

Koekemoer et al. (2021) conducted a study exploring the relationship between leadership behavior, team effectiveness, technological flexibility, work engagement, and performance within the context of the COVID-19 lockdown in South Africa. They began by developing a cross-sectional quantitative survey that gathered data from 229 participants. The study indicated that work engagement was crucial for ensuring employee success in a remote setting (Koekemoer et al., 2021). According to Koekemoer et al. (2020), measuring how well employees will react to the rapid transition to remote work during the pandemic often correlated with the level of leadership they received. They recommended that organizations and their leadership should nurture their employees and provide job-related resources during this challenging time, resulting in positive performance outcomes.

Remote Work and the Consulting Industry

In his book, *The World's Newest Profession*, Christopher McKenna (2006) shared a history of management consulting in the twentieth century. Examining the consulting profession, McKenna picks up on the question raised by Peter Drucker: "why do organizations need external consultants to help them?" (quoted in McKenna, 2006, p.9). The simple answer is consultants bring expertise does not present within an organization to help resolve internal problems (McKenna, 2006). McKenna cites two preconditions that open the way for consultants to benefit

an organization. First, the problem in question is one that, if taken on internally, will be expensive and cumbersome to solve; second, the consultant who is brought in possesses industry-specific knowledge and experience and has probably faced this particular problem before (McKenna, 2006). Organizations faced with these sorts of problems, those that are non-systemic and, once solved, are unlikely to reoccur, can calculate the economic value of purchasing the services of a consultant or training their own people to deal with the problem. In McKenna's (2006) view, the value of consultants becomes apparent when that type of simple economic calculation is possible.

A study conducted by Alicia and Constanța (2018) focused on the entrepreneurial viability of consulting and how consulting has affected the landscape of entrepreneurial business. The researchers found that consulting plays a more significant and more complex role than in most organizations' earlier stages of social evolution. Alicia and Constanța (2018) noted that remote work offers "new opportunities to develop and use personal and knowledge assets" (p.257). With the growth of WFH models, consultants are presented with an opportunity. According to Alicia and Constanta (2018), consultants are particularly valuable when they can facilitate the introduction of new technologies to companies undergoing the transition to remote work. Though their study was conducted before COVID and the subsequent explosion of remote work, their conclusion that "the traditional limits of consultancy are expanding" is more relevant now than ever (Alicia & Constanta, 2018, p.261).

The Multicultural Work Environment in a Remote Setting

With the proliferation of remote work, it is essential to consider how culturally diverse organizations are adjusting to meet the particular challenges they might experience in the virtual format. Multicultural workplaces have been the subject of study for more than two decades now. However, relatively little has been written about how the increase in people working from home has affected multicultural workplaces. One study by Mihailova (2009) examined the cultural dynamics within a company under joint Estonian/Russian ownership, most employees of which work remotely. Her findings, based on surveys of employees in various departments, suggested

that satisfaction with remote working arrangements tended to have little to do with the national and ethnic differences of the employees themselves. Instead, she discovered, those who expressed dissatisfaction with virtual work were heavily concentrated in particular departments and seldom cited cultural differences in voicing their complaints (Mihhailova, 2009).

A more recent study by Chekwa (2018) examined how minority groups in modern workplaces can potentially get left behind as companies move toward remote work. Chekwa based his study on the notion that organizations, where communication between managers and employees is already problematic, are more likely to struggle with the transition to virtual work. Minority employees, he argued, “need greater socialization opportunities to network with organizational members” (Chekwa, 2018, p.219). Highlighting extensive previous research, Chekwa (2018) argues that socialization across ethnic lines within workplaces is statistically rare and that organizations that manage to bridge this gap often do so through targeted networking opportunities. Additionally, he emphasizes the importance of workplace friendships which usually evolve through interactions during an unstructured time in the office (Chekwa, 2018). For companies that move to virtual work platforms, there is a greater likelihood that minority groups will feel isolated and undervalued. Chekwa (2018) concludes his study by stressing the need for companies to take a proactive approach to foster employee interaction in virtual spaces so that the isolation of working remotely is mitigated, especially among minority employees whose race, ethnicity, or nationality might make them feel like outsiders to begin with.

Crucial Skillsets for Remote Work

Conventional thinking might suggest that establishing a remote work environment requires nothing more than ensuring that employees have the necessary technology at their disposal to work off-site. However, in the view of Gurchiek (2020), giving employees the tools to work from home was merely the first step. A smooth-running remote work operation must not be overly rigid. For instance, managers should be opened to giving employees greater flexibility in task completion (Gurchiek, 2020). As long as work is done on time, there is nothing to be gained from

micromanaging when component tasks of a larger process are completed. One facet of remote team functioning that often requires adjustment is meeting length and format. According to Gurchiek (2020), employees who are already spending most of their workday looking at computer screens are less likely to find meetings productive and useful when it is simply more time spent gazing at a screen. Communication is just as vital in a virtual workplace, however managers should be prepared for interactions to be shorter and more pointed (Gurchiek, 2020). Flexibility of expectations is, therefore, highly important. Individual team members should not be expected to communicate every single piece of information in one phone call. WFH requires adjustment to a different set of expectations, especially in the realm of interactions between coworkers.

Succeeding in a remote work setting requires that workers possess certain critical skills. According to Liu (2020), remote workers must learn to be collaborative problem-solvers. Because remote work is often team-oriented, it is essential that employees coordinate and collaborate just as well in the virtual workplace as they would in a traditional setting. Time management is also critical. Those working remotely should adhere to a regular schedule and not allow themselves to be drawn into working excessively long hours or putting in extra time on projects simply because they have access to those projects at home (Liu, 2020). Working from home by its very nature demands that employees be digitally competent. Liu (2020) stresses the need to ensure that time is included for team members to stay abreast of technology they use on a day-to-day basis. Finally, it is vital that oral communication is not abandoned simply because written communication is more common in WFH settings. Employees who talk to one another regularly are more attuned to each other's emotions and more connected to the flow of work (Liu, 2020).

One way in which remote teams are similar to traditional in-office teams is that they function best when attention is paid to the strengths of each member. Conn (2021) asserts that this is only possible when mutual trust exists between team members and team leaders. Remote team members need to feel that they are being appropriately utilized; simply assigning random tasks to random team members regardless of their individual strengths does not foster a sense

of trust. Ensuring that team members are tasked according to their particular skills demonstrates that a team's leader knows the members as people, instead of seeing them as interchangeable parts (Conn, 2021).

As remote work has become the norm, it is increasingly evident that, aside from conventional workplace skillsets, remote employees need to be self-starters. Maurer (2020) reinforces the importance of communication and collaboration. However, he adds two important characteristics: adaptability and self-motivation. Those who work remotely must be capable of adapting to their new workplace realities, Maurer (2020) argues. Losing the structure and rigors imposed by a traditional workplace can leave people feeling adrift and less motivated. The WFH setting offers many temptations as well as numerous distractions. Remote employees must therefore learn to navigate those obstacles and develop a mindset that motivates them to stay on task without anyone looking over their shoulders (Maurer, 2020).

Those who work remotely as part of a team may face a different set of challenges from those whose virtual workday consists primarily of functioning alone. According to Park (2021), establishing trust and building relationships with remote employees are two of the biggest challenges for managers and team leaders. The basic person-to-person interactions through which good working relationships form in a traditional workplace often are not feasible when team members do not share a common space. Park (2021) argues that crafting a good remote team environment begins with free, open, and frequent communication. Obviously, in a virtual workplace, employees do not have the luxury of getting to know each other in breakrooms or during idle moments. However, in Park's (2021) view, it is no less important that remote team members have opportunities to get to know each other, even if that means giving them more leeway to chat informally during work meetings. Additionally, regular feedback is critical, perhaps even more so than in a traditional workplace. Employees need to be apprised of their contributions to the team, what they are doing well, and areas for improvement (Park, 2021). Most importantly, remote teams flourish or stagnate based on the degree of trust team members share with each

other and with team leaders. Park (2021) stresses the need for transparency, noting that team members cannot be expected to throw themselves willingly into a project when they do not feel they are being given all the necessary information. Without trust and a free exchange of ideas and information, team members are more likely to work at cross-purposes or, worse still, undermine one another.

Two skills that serve workers well in traditional workplaces are equally important for employees working from home. According to Panagopoulou (2022), critical thinking and problem solving are vital attributes for those working virtually. Remote employees must have the capacity to manage their time effectively. In other words, they must be able to think critically about what distractions might arise in their home office and how to work around those. Panagopoulou (2022) describes the host of non-work-related diversions and personal responsibilities people are surrounded by when they begin working from home and argues that employees who are good critical thinkers can devise a way to work around those challenges. Domestic tasks can easily draw one's attention away from work and quickly lead to diminishing productivity. Problem-solvers adjust their surroundings in whatever way is necessary to minimize overlap between domestic and professional responsibilities and remain productive working in a remote setting (Panagopoulou, 2022).

Conclusion

The above is a brief summary of the relevant literature concerning remote work. What is needed now is to explore and see if the workforce is better adapting to the tech evolution and prepared to sustain consulting roles moving forward. There is much room for research, particularly research related to how remote work is affecting multicultural workplaces. What is clear at present is that no one model or technique will solve the challenges facing businesses functioning in the virtual space; we need an enhanced framework to develop a new way of working. Workforce trends are shifting, and the new generation has different expectations from the work they perform.

Among consultants, challenges related to multiculturalism are at the forefront of their roles and jobs. Adapting to American work culture in the face-to-face environment was comparatively less challenging. Now being remote, how can one learn and apply? How can the virtual work environment teach one person to learn and apply it over a virtual collaboration? What competencies are learned and what is missed? It is possible that the consulting industry is falling behind. Foreign professionals are fascinated by the US work culture, and they want to migrate to fit in that ecosystem. But now, being remote does raise a question: do they need to live and work in the US, or can they work from overseas? Does this approach help the workforce in any way? Does this help and hurt the workforce needs?

The technology and consulting industry is booming, and looking for as much talent as it can find. The overall economy and workforce are skewing towards the remote model much faster than anyone predicted. The transition to remote work is going to create significant holes in the economy and industry. No one knows what will happen post-pandemic and when this shift will balance out. In the meantime, it is critical to develop a clearer understanding of the challenges facing the modern, multicultural workforce as it migrates rapidly into the remote workspace.

CHAPTER: 3

METHODOLOGY

Chapter-3 aims to evaluate the study's problem statement, propose the research questions associated with the problem, outline the scope of work (SOW), and identify the main stakeholders that can benefit from the study. Based on these components, research methods will be proposed to conduct the study and gather data to validate the proposed hypothesis. Also, this chapter will outline the research design, participation criteria, and method of data analysis to conduct the study.

Overall Problem

A remote and multicultural work environment adds many benefits to an organization. However, it also creates challenges that can impact the growth and productivity of employees, such as lacking face-to-face interaction; difficulty to build trust and relationships virtually in an isolated environment; difficulty to communicate and collaborate with multicultural teams; burden of work/life balance. Many consulting organizations claim that a remote and multicultural work environment is the right way to do business and the future of consulting organizations (Hancock, 2021).

To enable the consultants and help them succeed in a remote and multicultural work environment, the researcher will investigate if there are any gaps in the current core competencies and what challenges impact consultants' success in a remote and multicultural work environment. The researcher will propose a systemic model to enhance the core competencies to mitigate such challenges based on the findings. The proposed consulting competency model will be limited to problem-solving, creative thinking, time management skills, and virtual team collaboration in a remote and multicultural work environment.

To investigate this further, the researcher has formulated research questions to test the hypothesis of this study.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

The following research questions have been formulated:

1. What core competencies and challenges can impact a consultant's success in a remote and multicultural work environment?
2. How to enhance core consulting competencies to help succeed in a remote and multicultural work environment?

The hypothesis for this dissertation is that enhancing core competencies can benefit consultants, consulting organizations, and clients to succeed in a remote and multicultural work environment.

Research Method

The proposed method for this dissertation is survey research on analyzing the consultant's competencies in a remote and multicultural work environment. The objective of the survey research is to let consultants reflect on their current or past experiences and share their best practices or challenges in a remote and multicultural work environment. Using survey research will reveal whether or not the consultant's current core competencies are effective in a remote and multicultural work environment. The researcher will collect and analyze the consultant's feedback on core competencies and challenges faced in a remote and multicultural work environment.

The survey research for the dissertation will contain 15-21 survey questions on the consultant's approach to a remote and multicultural work environment. Multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions will be proposed to gather dissertation data to assess consulting competencies and challenges faced in the industry. The formulated questions will include the consultant's background, core competencies, and challenges faced in a remote and multicultural work environment. The survey will be introduced to the selected audiences, professionals with consulting experience who have handled multiple remote and multicultural work engagements.

The survey will be completely anonymous, and participation in the survey will be entirely voluntary, and participants can end their participation at any time throughout the survey. Participants' names and personal information will not be identified or associated with any specific responses, and it will not appear in any published materials which result from this research. Any information shared via participation will remain strictly confidential. The goal is to have 100+ participants share their feedback on their current or past remote and multicultural work environments.

Scope of Work

The scope of work is limited to consulting organizations and consultants in a remote and multicultural work environment. The dissertation will evaluate the core competencies and challenges faced in a remote and multicultural work environment. Multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions will be proposed to gather dissertation data to assess consulting competencies that can benefit the main stakeholders: consulting organizations, consultants, and clients in a remote and multicultural work environment.

The proposed consulting competencies model will be limited to problem-solving, creative thinking, time management skills, and virtual team collaboration in a remote and multicultural work environment. The existing consultants and upcoming newcomers can leverage the proposed systemic model for their current or future work.

The Main Stakeholders

This dissertation is based on consulting organizations, consultants, and clients in a remote work environment. These are three main stakeholders to benefit from the outcome of this dissertation. The dissertation data will be gathered from the consultants in the field, and the proposed analysis can help all three stakeholders. The consulting organizations will benefit from hiring such talent that can excel in a remote and multicultural work environment. The clients will benefit from engaging such consulting organizations that promote such talent. Lastly, this

dissertation will allow the existing consultants to enhance their competencies and help newcomers develop proposed competencies.

Survey Design

The survey consisted of 15-21 multiple-choice, Likert-scale, or open-ended questions. The survey was divided into four sections; the first section covered participants' backgrounds and opinions about the core competencies and challenges faced in the remote and multicultural work environment. This section consisted of fifteen questions, and all questions were made mandatory to collect the participant's responses to test the hypothesis of the study. The second section was optional and requested participants to share their best practices and challenges faced in a remote and multicultural work environment. The purpose was to see if anything was missed in the previous multiple-choice or Likert-scale questions. Before proceeding further, participants were asked to see if they were willing to participate in the optional open-ended question. If they selected yes, they were asked to share their response, and if they selected no, they were asked to skip to the next section.

The third section requested information about the participants' demographics, which included three questions regarding ethnicity, country of origin, and sexual orientation. Even though the survey was anonymous, it was important for the researcher to understand the participants' demographics to see if there was any correlation between the participant's backgrounds and their input about the core competencies and challenges. Lastly, the fourth section was optional and requested participants' feedback about the survey. All three optional sections helped the researcher add additional context to the shared data on remote and multicultural work environments. See Appendix C for survey questions.

After the survey design was completed, the researcher used the Qualtrics software to build and launch the survey via a unique survey link to conduct research. The survey link was included in an email sent to the participants informing them of the study. The output data from the completed survey was captured by utilizing Qualtrics software.

Participants

The survey was targeted at current and former colleagues with consulting experience. Also, the researcher targeted LinkedIn connections to request their participation in the survey. Both approaches helped gain participants' interest to take part in the survey research.

A formal communication message was drafted to explain the survey's purpose and approach to educate the participants on why they are requested to participate and how the data will be used in the research study. The goal of the communication was to deliver verbal consent to each potential participant and ensure their participation was a volunteer and their feedback was anonymous. See Appendix B for the survey email sent out to the potential participants.

Method of Data Analysis

This research's data output and analysis were generated using the Qualtrics software dashboard section "data & analysis." The final data was exported in MS Excel and PowerPoint files. The data was then validated by sorting the surveys based on the completion of all questions. The sorted data were analyzed by summarizing the data and identifying patterns to identify the core consulting competencies and their challenges in a remote and multicultural work environment. The researcher analyzed the pattern of the participants to see if they had any trends in sharing their feedback—the final version of the data used in the dissertation report. See Chapter-4 for the detailed analysis.

Conclusion

The WFH model is here to stay, and it is necessary to ensure that most organizations have this as their top priority. The emergent need for a remote and multicultural work environment is evolving, and the organizations have realized operational gains and employee productivity throughout the pandemic. Most Fortune 500 companies have decided to keep the WFH model for most of the organization, which will change how the consulting industry operates moving forward.

This study will help consulting organizations and their consultants and clients embrace the WFH model and sustain their business continuity.

The chapter's goal was to document the research methods used and identify the research questions. Additionally, understand the framework of the survey research and implementation strategy. Chapter Four aims to provide the study results and findings, and Chapter Five will provide the conclusion.

CHAPTER: 4

RESEARCH RESULTS

Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher will present the gathered quantitative data from Consulting Competencies in Remote and Multicultural Work Environment survey. The researcher's goal was to target a large audience and gather a large sample of data. A wide variety of consulting audiences was targeted for the research to conclude the hypothesis and research questions. Given the limited time of the study, the survey was live for approximately 18 days, and 185 participants volunteered to share their feedback.

Survey Results

The survey targeted 275 potential participants via email and a personal message over the LinkedIn platform. The researcher received a positive response and feedback on the participation request. The survey was launched on March 08, 2022, and closed on March 25, 2022. The chart below (Figure 4.1) shows the daily participation rate during the length of the survey.

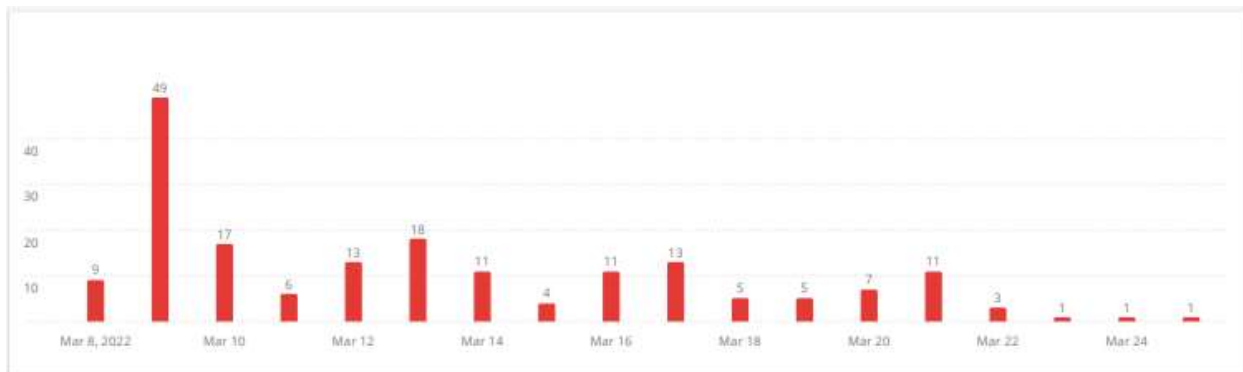


Figure 4.1: Survey's Participation Count

Within the first three days, 75 participants took the survey and shared positive feedback about the questions and format of the survey. The main objective of the survey's design was to keep the questionnaire short and straightforward so participants do not feel overwhelmed while participating.

A total of 185 responses were collected and out of which 153 participants fully completed the required portion of the survey (Figure 4.2).



Figure 4.2: Survey’s Completion Count

Furthermore, the survey was posted on LinkedIn to generate additional volunteer participation to increase the participation count. The survey did receive a high number of views, but very few participants came from LinkedIn posting (Figure 4.3).

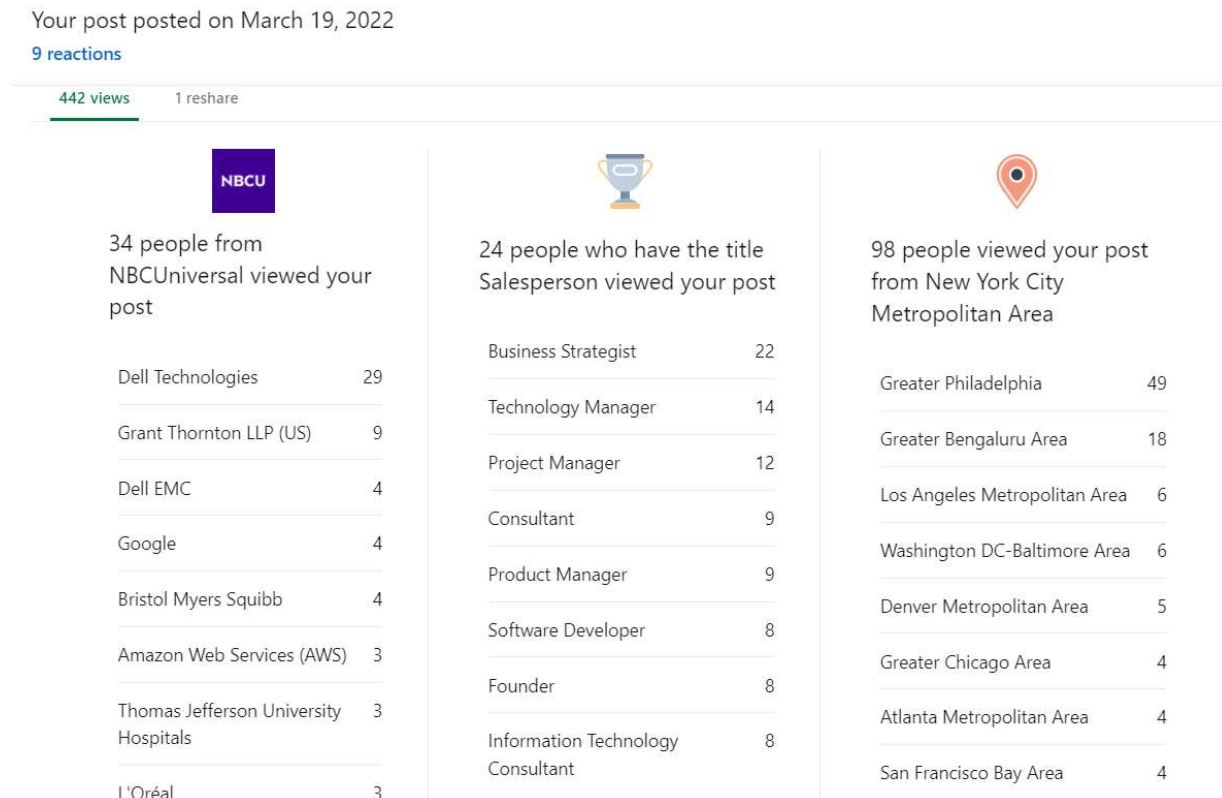


Figure 4.3: Survey’s Stats on LinkedIn

The survey was divided into four sections; the first section covered participants' backgrounds and opinions about the core competencies and challenges faced in the remote and multicultural work environment. This section consisted of fifteen questions, and all questions were made mandatory to collect the participant's responses to test the hypothesis of the study. Also, in the first question, the researcher added an opening statement and some key definitions to ground the audience. The goal was to help participants read and understand the purpose and key definitions of the survey before proceeding further.

Opening Statement

Welcome and thank you for participating in this survey. This survey research aims to gather input from the industry's experts and use it towards the dissertation study to understand the remote and multicultural work environments. Based on the analysis, a potential consulting model/framework will be proposed to share the best practices and potential enhancements for remote and multicultural work environments. Please note that your participation and feedback are anonymous. Also, when answering the open-ended questions, avoid any names and details that might be confidential to your current or former experience.

Key definitions for the survey

Consultant – a person who gives professional or expert advice in a particular area of expertise. Various consultants offer advice in organizational management, program/project management, process improvement, change management, finance, economics, accountancy, human resources, marketing, engineering, technology, or law. Consultant roles can be either internal (Process/People/Technology SME; direct full/part-time employee who helps on ad hoc projects) or external (works for a consultancy firm or self-employed/freelancer who works on W2/1099/C2C engagements) team members in an organization.

Remote Work Environment (RWE) – the term delineates employees who work from home (WFH) and are not required to go into their employer's office (onsite facilities) to conduct job responsibilities.

Multicultural Work Environment – the term characterizes employees from diverse cultural backgrounds, which comprise different ethnicities and speaking various languages aside from English.

Following the opening statement, a set of questions were asked, which framed the participant’s background and level of experience to conclude the participant’s opinion about the core competencies and challenges faced in a remote and multicultural work environment.

Q2 - Identify your consulting experience?

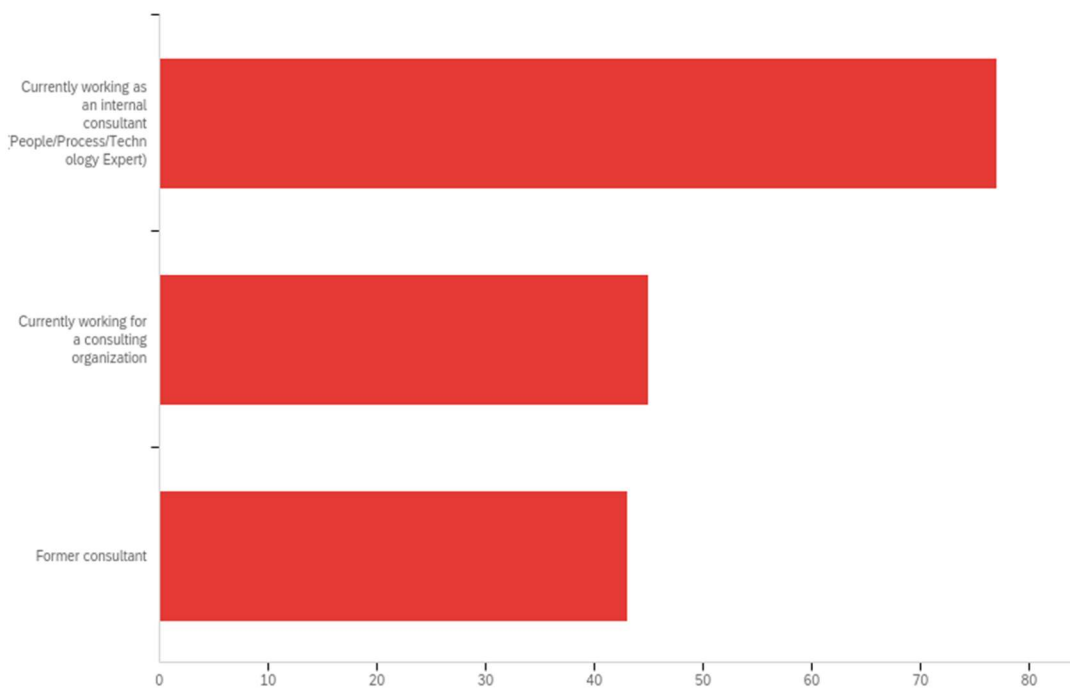


Figure 4.4: Survey Question-2

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Currently working as an internal consultant (People/Process/Technology Expert)	41.62%	77
2	Currently working for a consulting organization	24.32%	45
3	Former consultant	23.24%	43
4	No consulting experience	10.82	20
	Total	100%	185

Table 4.1: Question-2 Stats

Question-2 asked participants to share their consulting experience, and four categories were proposed for the participants to choose from. A total of 185 participants responded to this question, out of which 77 participants selected “currently working as an internal consultant (People/Process/Technology Expert);” 45 participants selected “Currently working for a consulting organization;” 43 participants selected “Former consultant;” and 20 participants selected “No consulting experience.” The first three options took participants to the next question, and the fourth option ended the survey. The purpose of the fourth option was to exclude the participants who didn’t have a consulting background from this survey. A total of 160 participants proceeded further to the next question. The chart above (Figure 4.4 and Table 4.1) represents the data.

Q3 - What best describes your role?

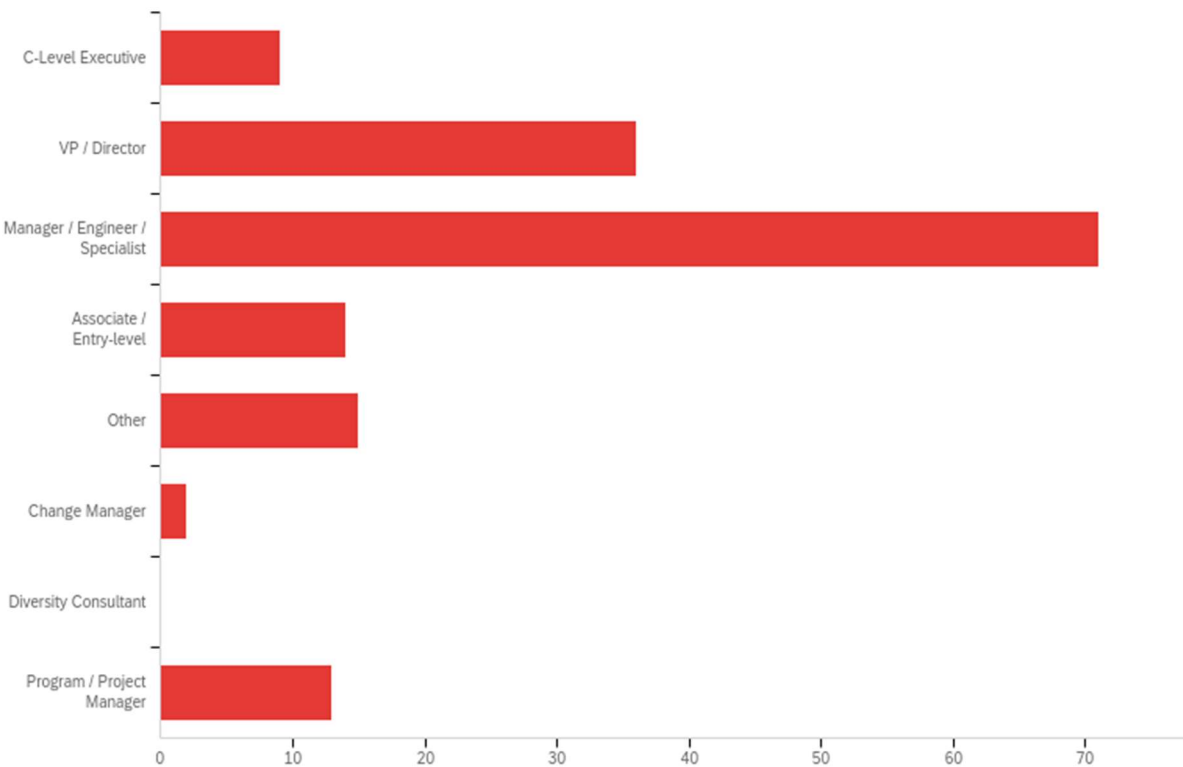


Figure 4.5: Survey Question-3

#	Answer	%	Count
1	C-Level Executive	5.63%	9
2	VP / Director	22.50%	36
3	Manager / Engineer / Specialist	44.38%	71
4	Associate / Entry-level	8.75%	14
5	Other	9.38%	15
6	Change Manager	1.25%	2
7	Diversity Consultant	0.00%	0
8	Program / Project Manager	8.13%	13
	Total	100%	160

Table 4.2: Question-3 Stats

Other - Text
Principal / Partner
Academic Advisor
Coaching C level
Process Consultant
Presentation and Communication Coach
Crisis Consultant
Health Care Consultant
Product Owner
Architect
Sales Account Executive
Business Change Enablement Solution Leader
Accommodations Consultant

Table 4.3: Question-3 Stats

Question-3 asked participants to share their role type. Various role categories were proposed to participants to choose their current role. From C-Level to Entry Level, Specialty roles such as Project Manager, Change Manager, and Diversity Consultant was added. A total of 160 participants responded to this question. The majority of the participants held managerial to senior C-Level roles, which shows the participants had plenty of experience to share their knowledge about the remote and multicultural work environment.

Out of 160 participants, 15 selected other fields and shared their current roles. An additional option was added for the participants to share their role type in the open text. Roles such as process consultant, health care consultant, crisis consultant, and accommodation consultant were added. The chart above (Figure 4.5, Table 4.2 and 4.3) represents the data.

Q4 - Number of years spent in consulting roles

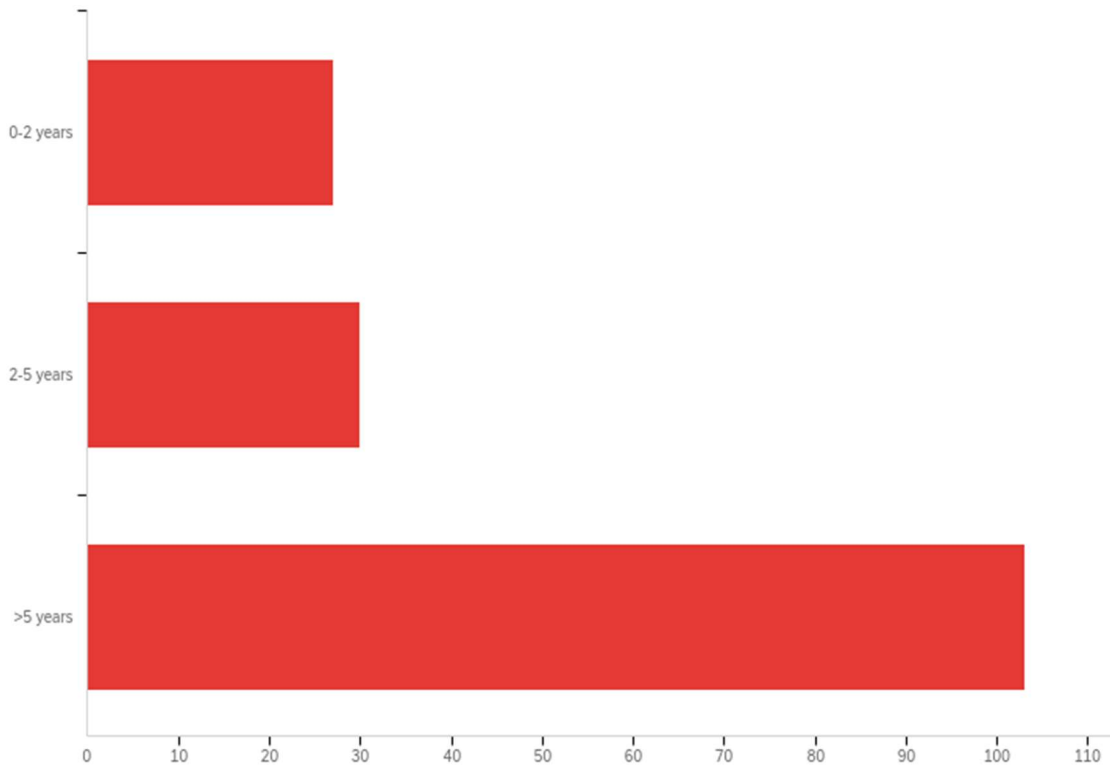


Figure 4.6: Survey Question-4

#	Answer	%	Count
1	0-2 years	16.88%	27
2	2-5 years	18.75%	30
3	>5 years	64.38%	103
	Total	100%	160

Table 4.4: Question-4 Stats

Question-4 covered the number of years spent in consulting roles. Out of 160 participants, 103 participants mentioned they had over five years of experience, and 57 participants mentioned less than five years of experience. The chart above (Figure 4.6 and Table 4.4) represents the data.

Q5 - Describe your consulting experience?

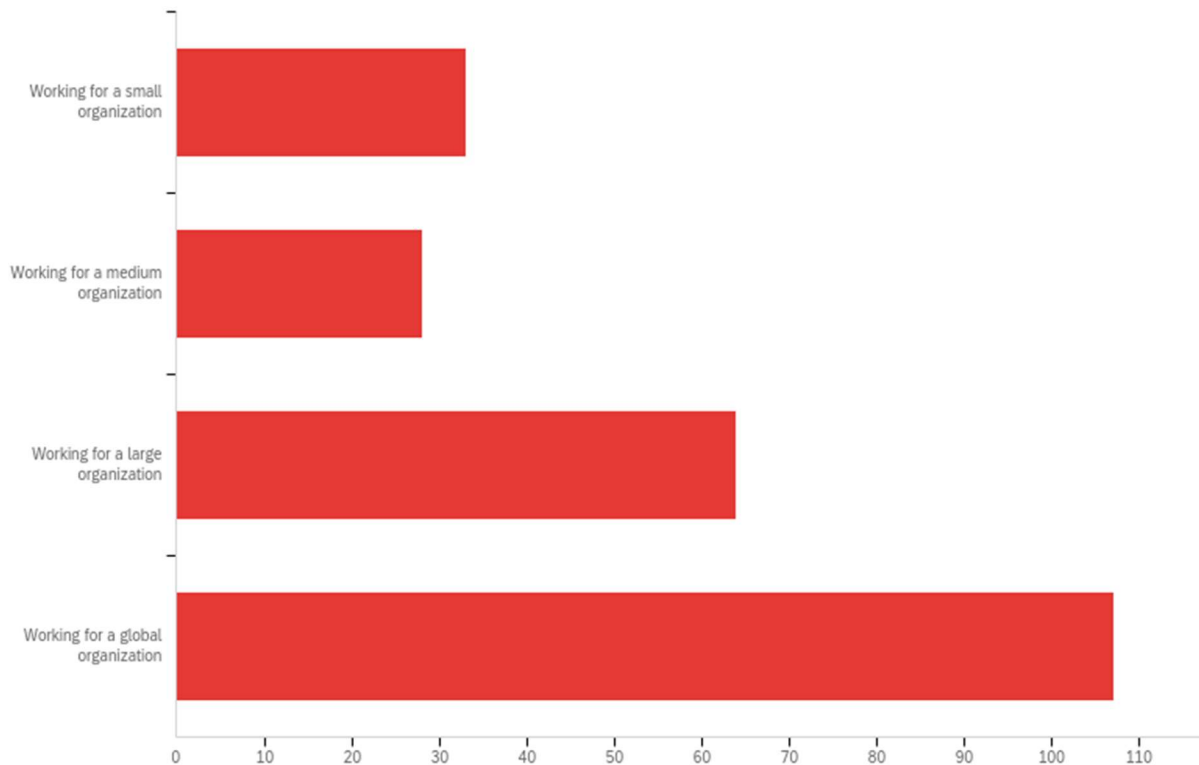


Figure 4.7: Survey Question-5

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Working for a small organization	14.22%	33
2	Working for a medium organization	12.07%	28
3	Working for a large organization	27.59%	64
4	Working for a global organization	46.12%	107
	Total	100%	232

Table 4.5: Question-5 Stats

Question-5 covered the organizational size of the participant's consulting company. Most of the participants selected multiple options, and as a result, a total of 232 responses were captured. The majority of the participants mentioned working for a global organization. The chart above (Figure 4.7 and Table 4.5) represents the data.

Q6 - Are you currently working in a remote work environment?

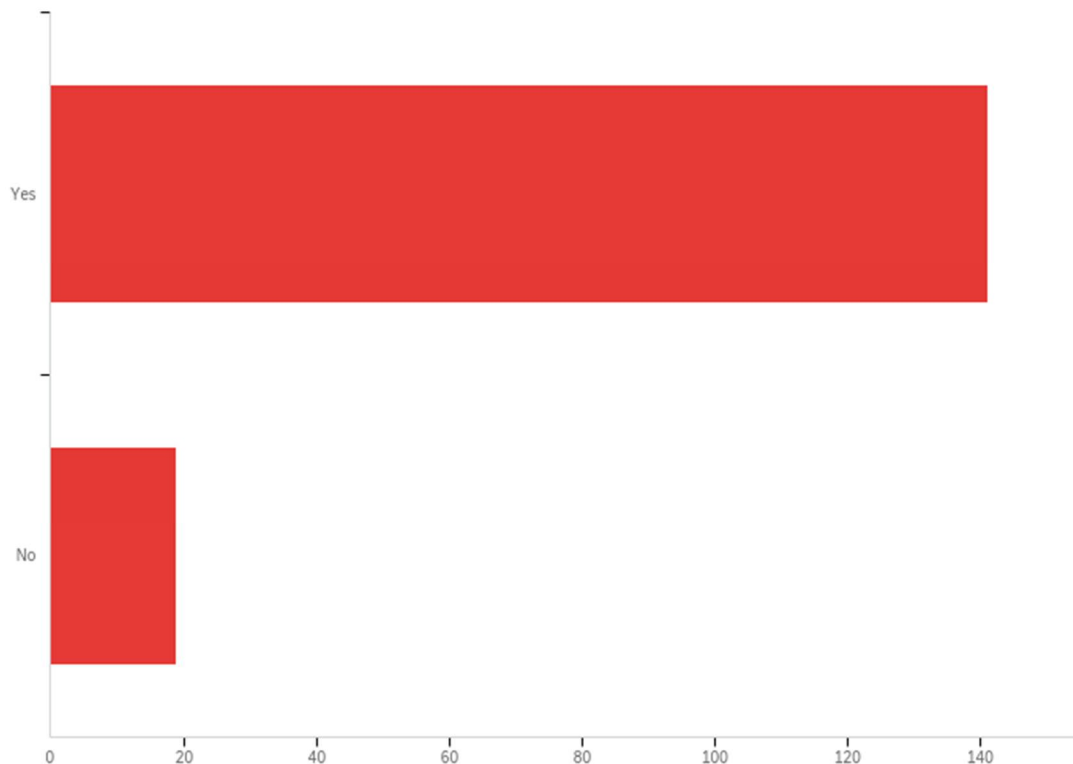


Figure 4.8: Survey Question-6

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	88.13%	141
2	No	11.88%	19
	Total	100%	160

Table 4.6: Question-6 Stats

The question-6 asked whether or not participants worked in a remote work environment. This question aimed to see if the participants had remote work experience. Out of 160 participants, 141 participants answered yes, and 19 said no. The 19 participants had to answer an additional question, which asked if they had any former experience working in a remote work environment. The chart above (Figure 4.8 and Table 4.6) represents the data.

Q7 - Do you have any former experience working in a remote work environment?

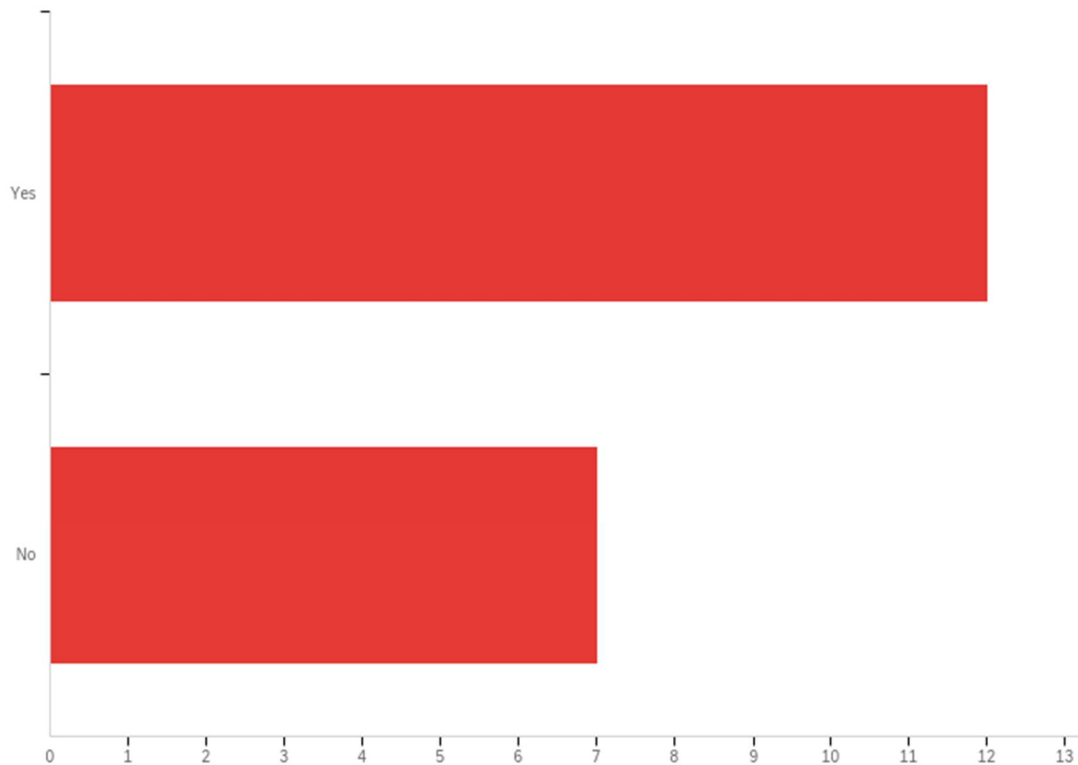


Figure 4.9: Survey Question-7

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	63.16%	12
2	No	36.84%	7
	Total	100%	19

Table 4.7: Question-7 Stats

Question-7 was an extra question that asked the participants to share their former work experiences. The purpose of this question was only to include participants who have some remote work experience to continue to the next question. Participants who answered no were exited from the survey based on this question. The chart above (Figure 4.9 and Table 4.7) represents the data.

Q8 - Before COVID-19, how often did you work remotely?

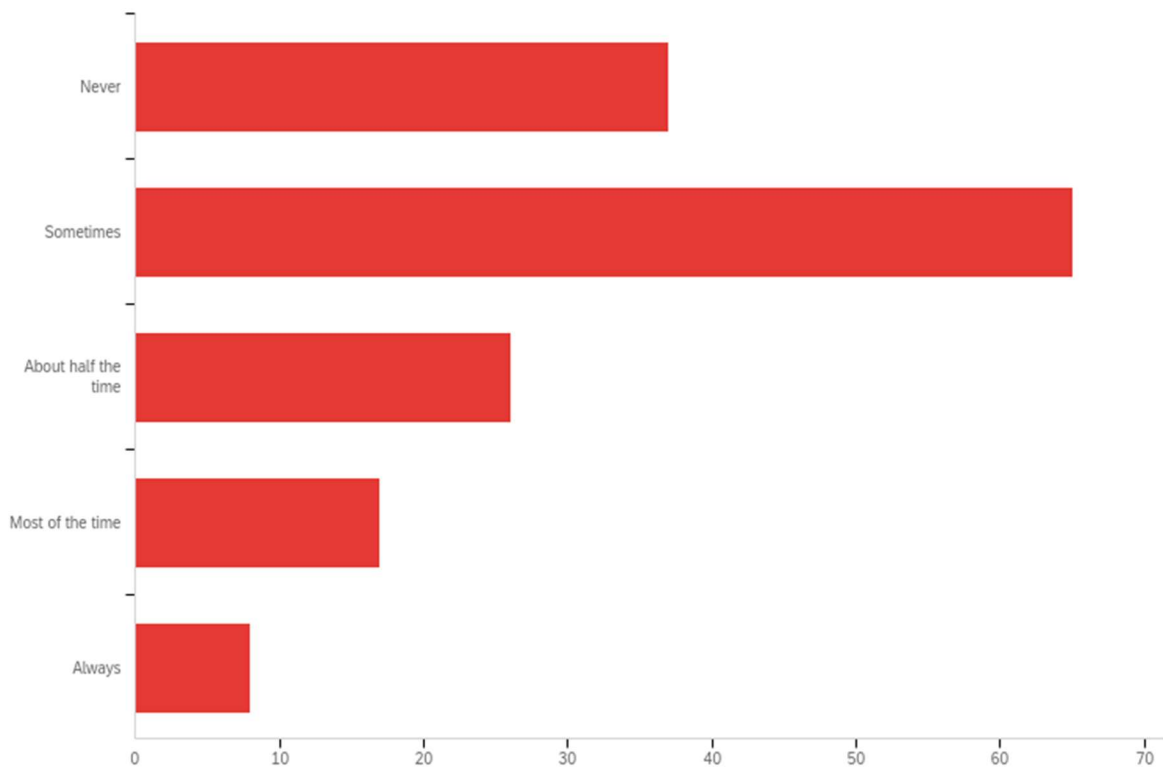


Figure 4.10: Survey Question-8

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Never	24.18%	37
2	Sometimes	42.48%	65
3	About half the time	16.99%	26
4	Most of the time	11.11%	17
5	Always	5.23%	8
	Total	100%	153

Table 4.8: Question-8 Stats

Question-8 was an essential question for the researcher to understand whether the participants worked remotely before COVID-19. The participants who had no remote work experience before COVID-19 can share valuable information about the remote work experience. The participants with remote work experience knew how to manage their work duties as they had prior experience. Out of 153 participants, 37 never worked remotely, 65 worked sometimes, 26 worked about half of the time, 17 worked most of the time, and 8 always worked remotely. The chart above (Figure 4.10 and Table 4.8) represents the data.

As mentioned previously, COVID-19 forced millions of employees to adapt rapidly to working remotely, usually alone. Once the pandemic was in full swing, the efficacy of having their entire workforce working from home became a top priority for many organizations. Prior remote work experience or not, there will always be new benefits and challenges when working in a remote and multicultural work environment. Many researchers claimed that employees working from home during COVID worried most about job security, the challenges of working in a home environment, and internet connectivity, but that much of this anxiety can be alleviated when companies utilize appropriate technologies (Narayanamurthy & Tortorella, 2021). Lenka (2021), a WFH model can significantly benefit companies as it “contributes towards employee engagement, motivation, innovation, better work-life balance, increased performance, and mental well-being” (p. 2678).

Q9 - Are you currently working in a multicultural work environment?

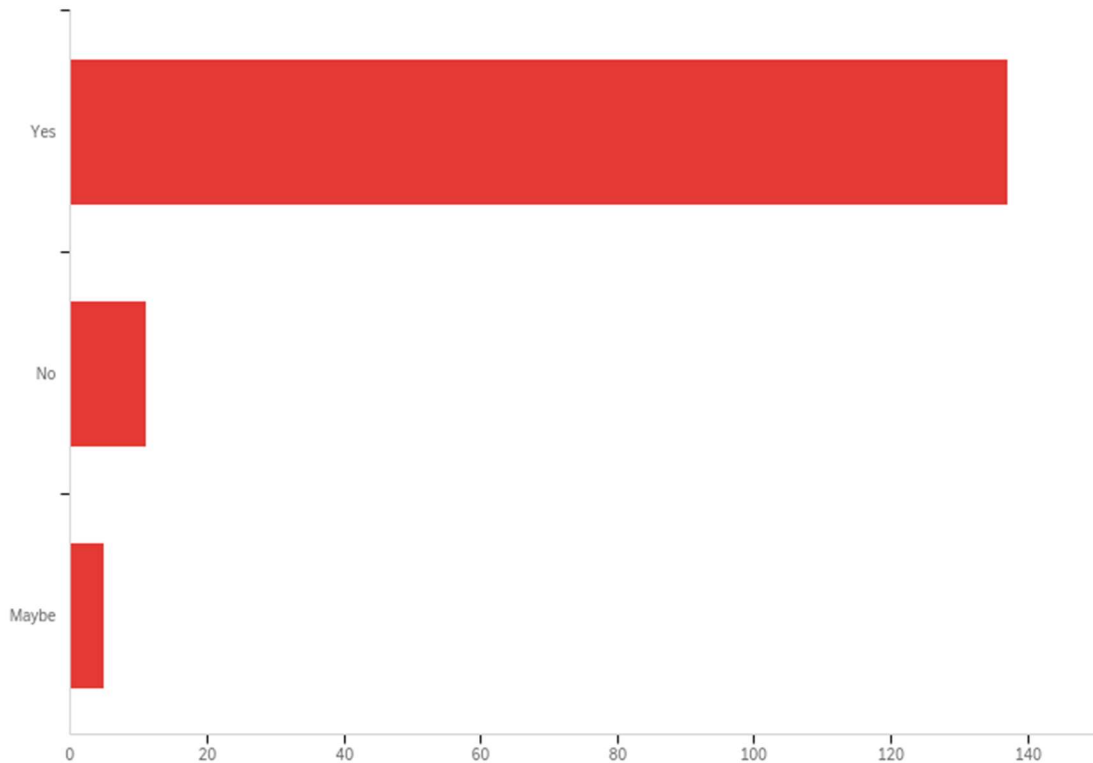


Figure 4.11: Survey Question-9

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	89.54%	137
2	No	7.19%	11
3	Maybe	3.27%	5
	Total	100%	153

Table 4.9: Question-9 Stats

Question-9 asked about the second aspect of the study, multicultural work environment experience. Most of the participants said they had multicultural work experience. A total of 16 participants said no or maybe. The 11 participants who answered no were asked an additional question to see if they had any former work experience in a multicultural work environment. The chart above (Figure 4.11 and Table 4.9) represents the data.

Q10 - Do you have any former experience working in a multicultural work environment?

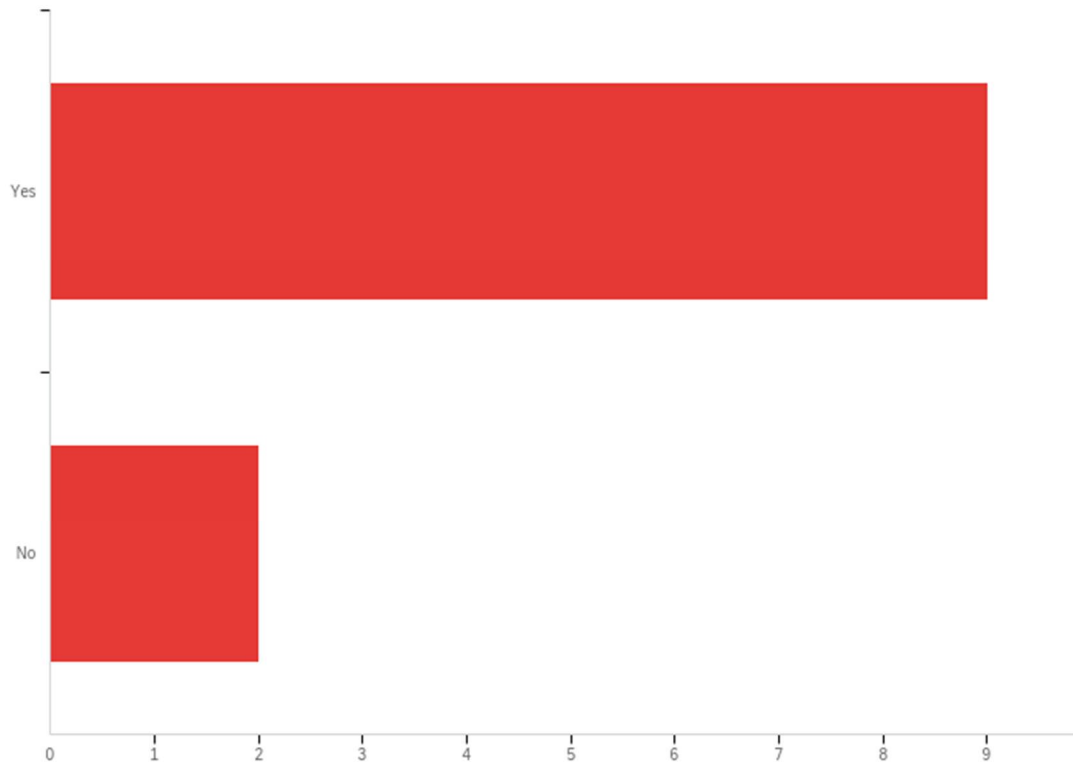


Figure 4.12: Survey Question-10

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	81.82%	9
2	No	18.18%	2
	Total	100%	11

Table 4.10: Question-10 Stats

The question-10 helped clarify the relevance of the survey as the following question requires remote and multicultural work environment experience. The 9 participants said they had former multicultural work experience. The 2 participants from question-10 and 5 participants from question-9 were kept in the survey to proceed further. The chart above (Figure 4.12 and Table 4.10) represents the data.

Q11 - In your opinion, what challenges impact your remote work environment?

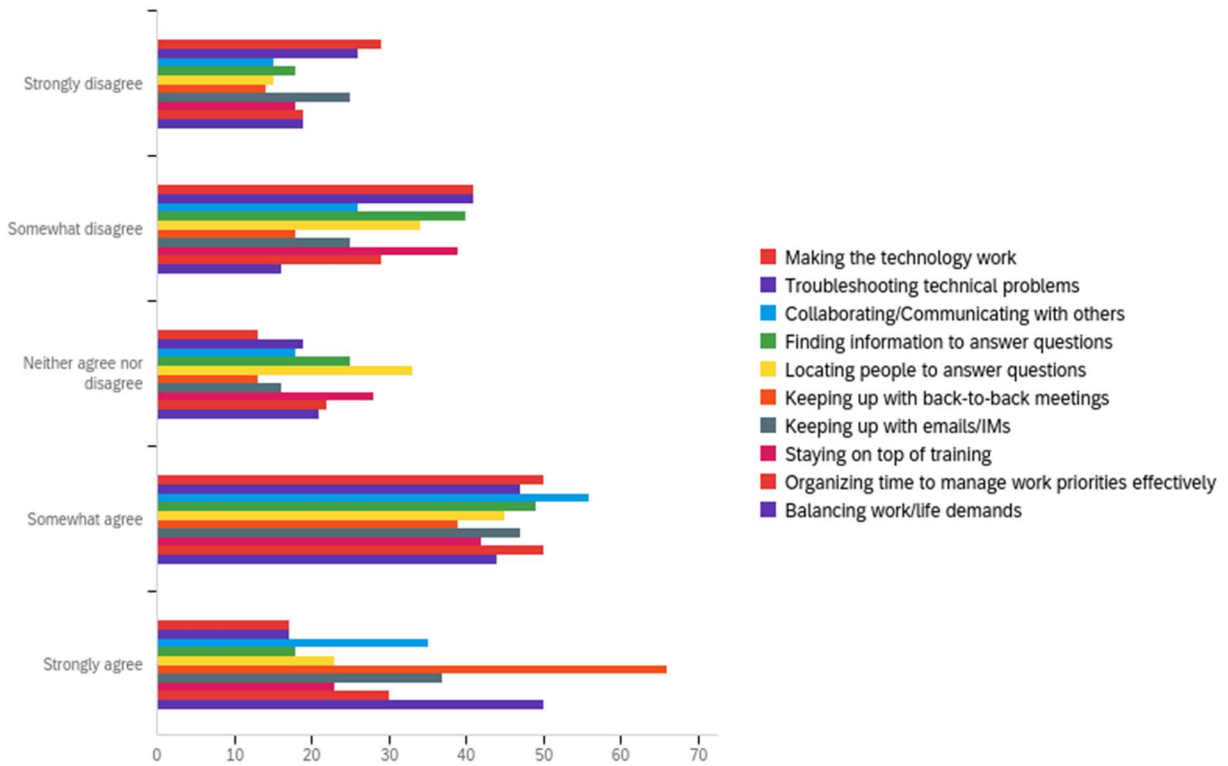


Figure 4.13: Survey Question-11

Question	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Total
1 Making the technology work	19.33% 29	27.33% 41	8.67% 13	33.33% 50	11.33% 17	150
2 Troubleshooting technical problems	17.33% 26	27.33% 41	12.67% 19	31.33% 47	11.33% 17	150

10	Balancing work/life demands	12.67%	19	10.67%	16	14.00%	21	29.33%	44	33.33%	50	150
9	Organizing time to manage work priorities	12.67%	19	19.33%	29	14.67%	22	33.33%	50	20.00%	30	150
8	Staying on top of training	12.00%	18	26.00%	39	18.67%	28	28.00%	42	15.33%	23	150
7	Keeping up with emails/IMs	16.67%	25	16.67%	25	10.67%	16	31.33%	47	24.67%	37	150
6	Keeping up with back-to-back meetings	9.33%	14	12.00%	18	8.67%	13	26.00%	39	44.00%	66	150
5	Locating people to answer questions	10.00%	15	22.67%	34	22.00%	33	30.00%	45	15.33%	23	150
4	Finding information to answer questions	12.00%	18	26.67%	40	16.67%	25	32.67%	49	12.00%	18	150
3	Collaborating/Communicating with others	10.00%	15	17.33%	26	12.00%	18	37.33%	56	23.33%	35	150

Table 4.11: Question-11 Stats

Question-11 was an essential question for the researcher to gather data on consultants' challenges in a remote work environment. A wide variety of challenges were listed, and participants had to share their opinions on whether they agreed or disagreed with them. Most

participants either selected somewhat or strongly agreed with all the challenges listed. The researcher highlighted each challenge's highest (orange text) number of counts. The top critical challenges highlighted were “keeping up with back-to-back meetings” and “collaborating/communication with others.” The chart above (Figure 4.13 and Table 4.11) represents the data.

Working in a remote and multicultural work environment always poses these challenges where consultants are in long back-to-back meetings and often required tasks and responsibilities are missed. Consultants have to stay longer at work to fulfill their required tasks, impacting most employees' work/life balance. As you can see, “balancing work/life demands” scored 50 votes, and the majority of the participants said they strongly agreed with this challenge. Similarly, “organizing time to manage work priorities effectively” received a higher vote count, and participants selected a somewhat agreed category.

All of the challenges listed in this question are common challenges where working remotely does add some benefits to the consultant's life. Still, it adds tons of challenges to complicate work responsibilities further. The researcher will evaluate this data in the next chapter to conclude the hypothesis and the research questions.

Q12 - In your opinion, what core competencies for a consultant can help succeed in a remote work environment?

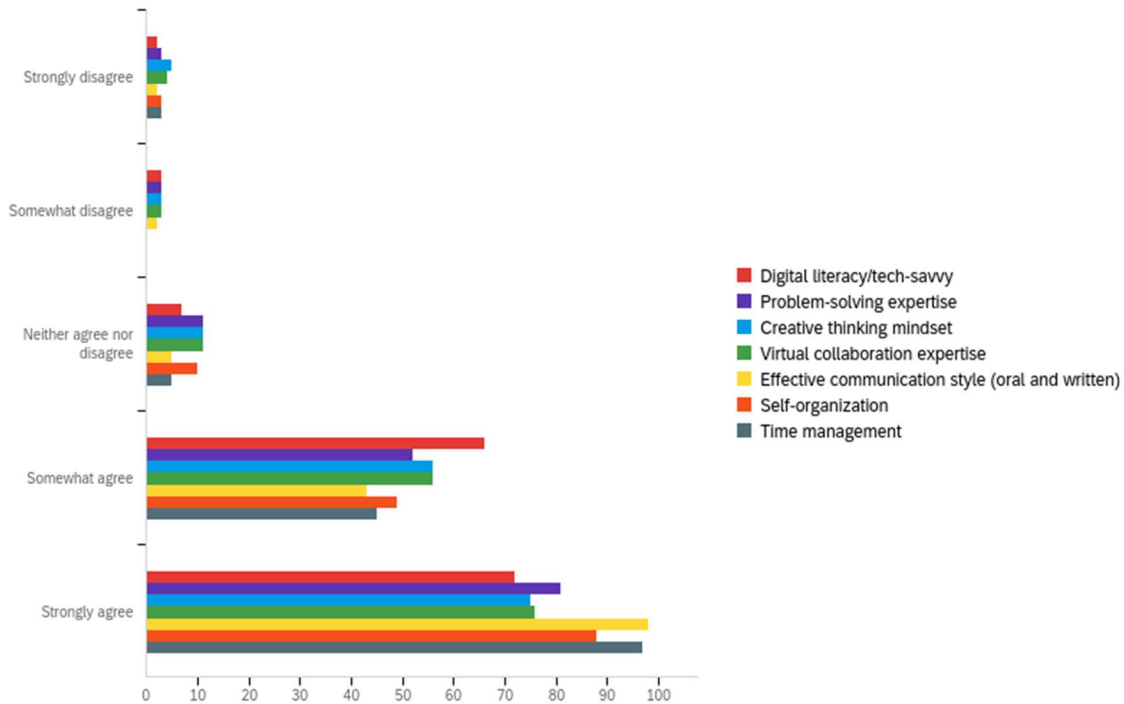


Figure 4.14: Survey Question-12

#	Question	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Total
1	Digital literacy/tec h-savvy	1.33%	2.00%	4.67%	44.00%	48.00%	150
2	Problem-solving expertise	2.00%	2.00%	7.33%	34.67%	54.00%	150
3	Creative thinking mindset	3.33%	2.00%	7.33%	37.33%	50.00%	150

4	Virtual collaboration expertise	2.67%	4	2.00%	3	7.33%	11	37.33%	56	50.67%	76	150
5	Effective communication style (oral and written)	1.33%	2	1.33%	2	3.33%	5	28.67%	43	65.33%	98	150
6	Self-organization	2.00%	3	0.00%	0	6.67%	10	32.67%	49	58.67%	88	150
7	Time management	2.00%	3	0.00%	0	3.33%	5	30.00%	45	64.67%	97	150

Table 4.12: Question-12 Stats

Question-12 asked what core competencies can help consultants succeed in a remote work environment. Most of the participants said they strongly agreed with all of the options listed in the question. The researcher highlighted the highest (orange text) number of counts in each core competency. The top competencies were “effective communication style (oral and written)” and “time management.” The chart above (Figure 4.14 and Table 4.12) represents the data.

The key to success in any work environment is effective communication and time management core competencies. To be productive and effective, one has to show strong communication skills, self-organization, and time management strengths. The majority of the participants said all of the core competencies are strongly required to succeed in a remote work environment.

Q13 - In your opinion, what challenges impact your multicultural work environment?

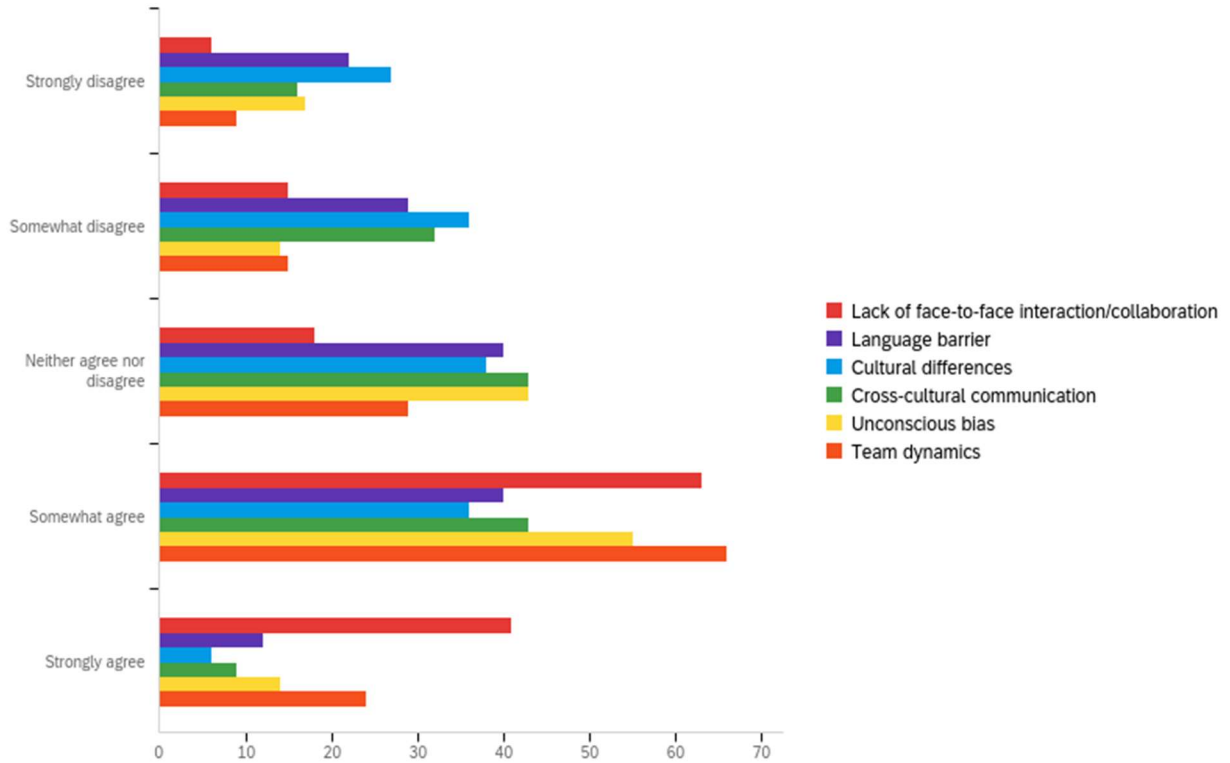


Figure 4.15: Survey Question-13

Question	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Total
1 Lack of face-to-face interaction/collaboration	4.20% 6	10.49% 15	12.59% 18	44.06% 63	28.67% 41	143
2 Language barrier	15.38% 22	20.28% 29	27.97% 40	27.97% 40	8.39% 12	143
3 Cultural differences	18.88% 27	25.17% 36	26.57% 38	25.17% 36	4.20% 6	143

4	Cross-cultural communication	11.19%	16	22.38%	32	30.07%	43	30.07%	43	6.29%	9	143
5	Unconscious bias	11.89%	17	9.79%	14	30.07%	43	38.46%	55	9.79%	14	143
6	Team dynamics	6.29%	9	10.49%	15	20.28%	29	46.15%	66	16.78%	24	143

Table 4.13: Question-13 Stats

Similarly, question-13 asked consultants about their challenges in a multicultural work environment. Most participants said they somewhat agreed or felt neutral about the challenges listed in the options. The researcher highlighted each challenge's highest (orange text) number of counts. The top challenges were “lack of face-to-face interaction/collaboration” and “team dynamics.” The other challenges had neutral results where participants selected that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the list of challenges. The chart above (Figure 4.15 and Table 4.13) represents the data.

Lack of face-to-face collaboration is a critical challenge faced in the remote and multicultural work environment. Teamwork without strong collaboration can impact productivity and employee growth. Collaboration in the virtual space must be encouraged and adequately facilitated to keep employees engaged and active. Remote and multicultural work environments can significantly benefit from employee collaboration, increasing the performance and mental well-being of the employees.

As remote work has become the norm, it is increasingly evident that remote employees need to be self-starters aside from conventional workplace skillsets. Those who work remotely must be capable of adapting to their new workplace realities. Virtual teams need to reinforce the

importance of communication and collaboration, and organizations need to emphasize virtual collaboration to be successful in a remote and multicultural work environment.

Q14 - In your opinion, what core competencies for a consultant can help succeed in a multicultural work environment?

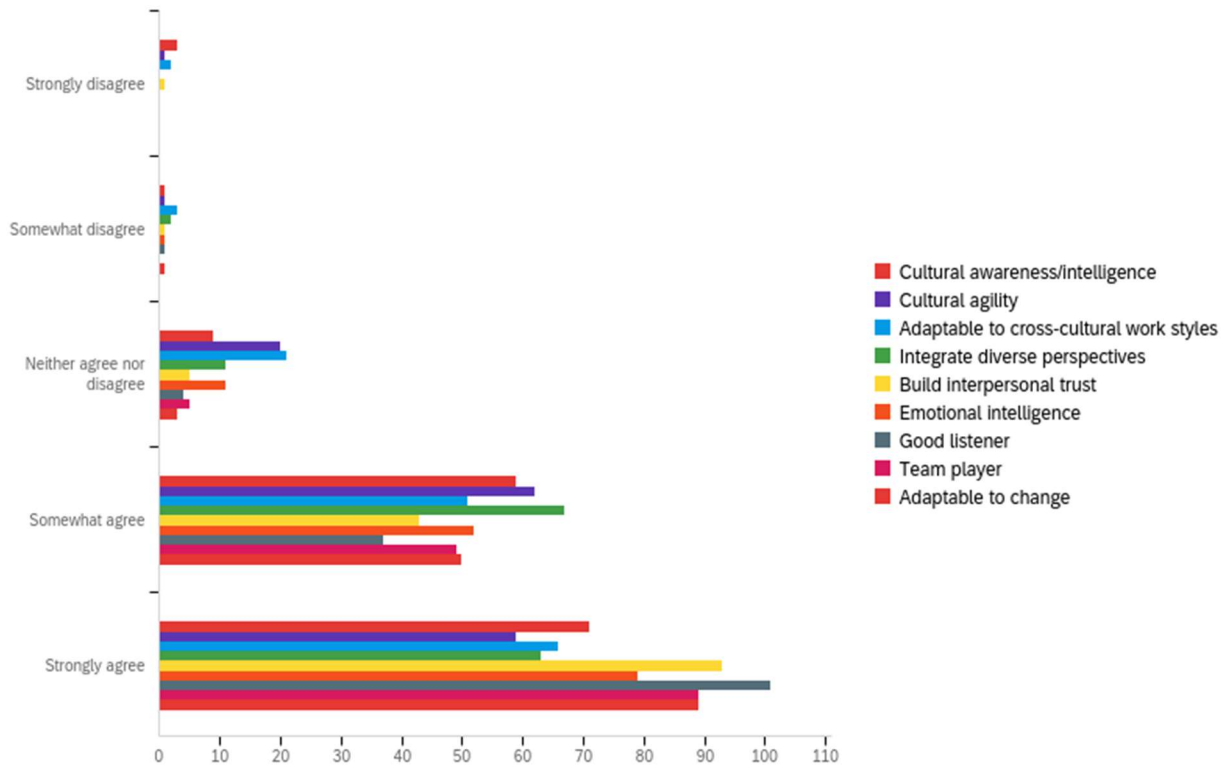


Figure 4.16: Survey Question-14

#	Question	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	Total					
1	Cultural awareness /intelligence	2.10%	3	0.70%	1	6.29%	9	41.26%	59	49.65%	71	143

9	Adaptable to change	0.00%	0	0.70%	1	2.10%	3	34.97%	50	62.24%	89	143
8	Team player	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	3.50%	5	34.27%	49	62.24%	89	143
7	Good listener	0.00%	0	0.70%	1	2.80%	4	25.87%	37	70.63%	101	143
6	Emotional intelligence	0.00%	0	0.70%	1	7.69%	11	36.36%	52	55.24%	79	143
5	Build interpersonal trust	0.70%	1	0.70%	1	3.50%	5	30.07%	43	65.03%	93	143
4	Integrate diverse perspectives	0.00%	0	1.40%	2	7.69%	11	46.85%	67	44.06%	63	143
3	Adaptable to cross-cultural work styles	1.40%	2	2.10%	3	14.69%	21	35.66%	51	46.15%	66	143
2	Cultural agility	0.70%	1	0.70%	1	13.99%	20	43.36%	62	41.26%	59	143

Table 4.14: Question-14 Stats

Similarly, question-14 asked consultants about the core competencies to help them succeed in a multicultural work environment. Most of the participants said they strongly agreed with the list of core competencies shared with them. The top core competencies were “good listener” and “build interpersonal trust.” The researcher highlighted the highest (orange text)

number of counts in each core competency. The chart above (Figure 4.16 and Table 4.14) represents the data.

Additional core competencies that participants highlighted were team player and adaptability to change. It is essential to be a strong team player and willing to change as the team and organization structures evolve in a remote and multicultural work environment. Most current organizations are fast-paced organizations where having dynamic teams and a change management mindset can benefit the employee's growth.

Q15 - Based on your experience, to what degree the following challenges can become more complicated in a remote and multicultural work environment?

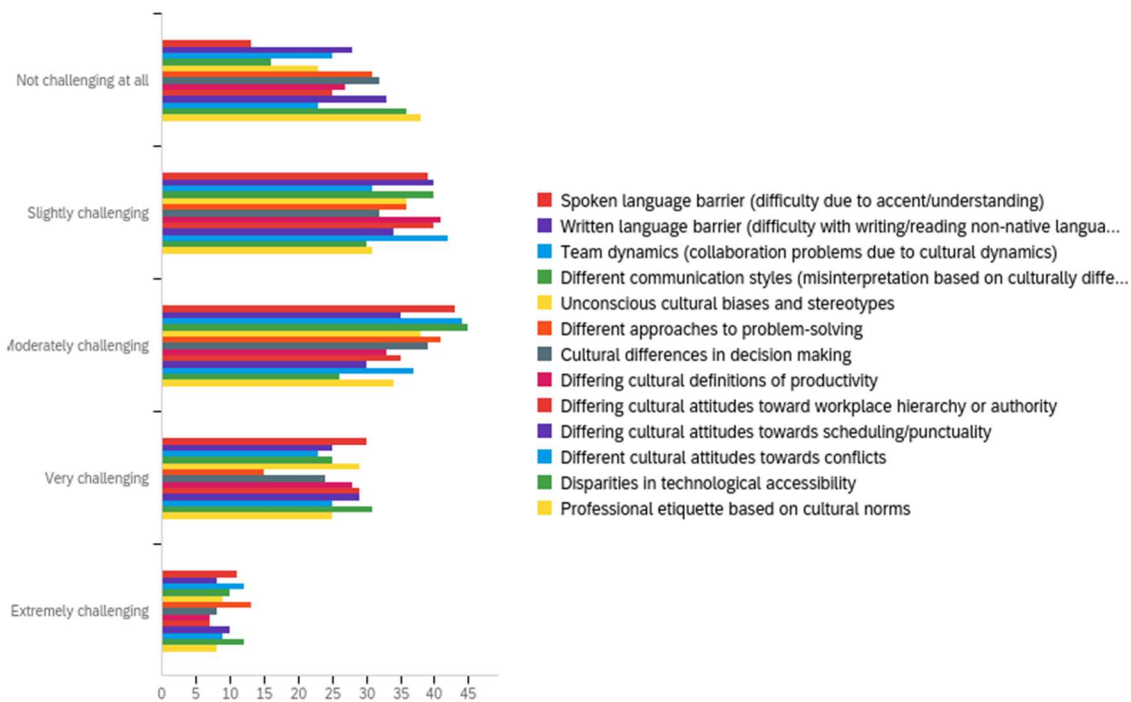


Figure 4.17: Survey Question-15

#	Question	Not challenging at all	Slightly challenging	Moderately challenging	Very challenging	Extremely challenging	Total
1	Spoken language barrier (difficulty due to accent/unders tanding)	9.56%	28.68%	31.62%	22.06%	8.09%	136
2	Written language barrier (difficulty with writing/readin g non-native language)	20.59%	29.41%	25.74%	18.38%	5.88%	136
3	Team dynamics (collaboration problems due to cultural dynamics)	18.52%	22.96%	32.59%	17.04%	8.89%	135
4	Different communicatio n styles (misinterpretat ion based on culturally different speech)	11.76%	29.41%	33.09%	18.38%	7.35%	136
5	Unconscious cultural biases and stereotypes	17.04%	26.67%	28.15%	21.48%	6.67%	135
6	Different approaches to problem-solving	22.79%	26.47%	30.15%	11.03%	9.56%	136
7	Cultural differences in decision making	23.70%	23.70%	28.89%	17.78%	5.93%	135
8	Differing cultural definitions of productivity	19.85%	30.15%	24.26%	20.59%	5.15%	136
9	Differing cultural attitudes toward workplace hierarchy or authority	18.38%	29.41%	25.74%	21.32%	5.15%	136

10	Differing cultural attitudes towards scheduling/punctuality	24.26%	33	25.00%	34	22.06%	30	21.32%	29	7.35%	10	136
11	Different cultural attitudes towards conflicts	16.91%	23	30.88%	42	27.21%	37	18.38%	25	6.62%	9	136
12	Disparities in technological accessibility	26.67%	36	22.22%	30	19.26%	26	22.96%	31	8.89%	12	135
13	Professional etiquette based on cultural norms	27.94%	38	22.79%	31	25.00%	34	18.38%	25	5.88%	8	136

Table 4.15: Question-15 Stats

Question-15 combined both aspects of the research question, remote and multicultural work environment, and asked consultants to what degree the following challenges can become more complicated. The purpose was to see if any significance could be analyzed when combining both aspects of the research question. The previous questions asked the challenges and core competencies separately about both types of work environments. Most of the participants said they felt that the listed options were moderately or slightly challenging. These results raise concerns as some of the terms are similar to the previous questions, and participants didn't mention them as extremely challenging. The researcher highlighted the highest (orange text) number of counts in each core competency. The chart above (Figure 4.17 and Table 4.15) represents the data.

With Question-15, the first section of the mandatory question ended. All participants were asked to see if they were willing to participate in the remaining optional sections. At the beginning of each section, a simple yes or no question was asked to see if participants were willing to

participate in additional optional questions. Some chose yes to share more insights, and others opted out and completed the survey. In section two, 33 participants selected yes for optional open-ended questions. In section three, 97 participants selected yes to optional demographic questions. Lastly, in section four, 23 participants selected yes to share their feedback about the survey.

In the second section, the researcher posed an optional question to capture participants' feedback about best practices and challenges faced in the remote and multicultural work environment. This question aimed to see if anything was missed in multi-choice questions and let participants share their thoughts around their experiences. This question was kept optional because often, open-ended questions fatigue the participants when they try to share their responses. The researcher gave the participants the option to see if they were interested in providing their best practice or challenges related to a remote and multicultural work environment. Out of 136 participants, 33 said yes and shared their best practices and challenges that they have experienced or faced in a remote and multicultural work environment.

Q16 - Would you like to share your best practices or challenges (if any) in a remote and multicultural work environment? (optional)

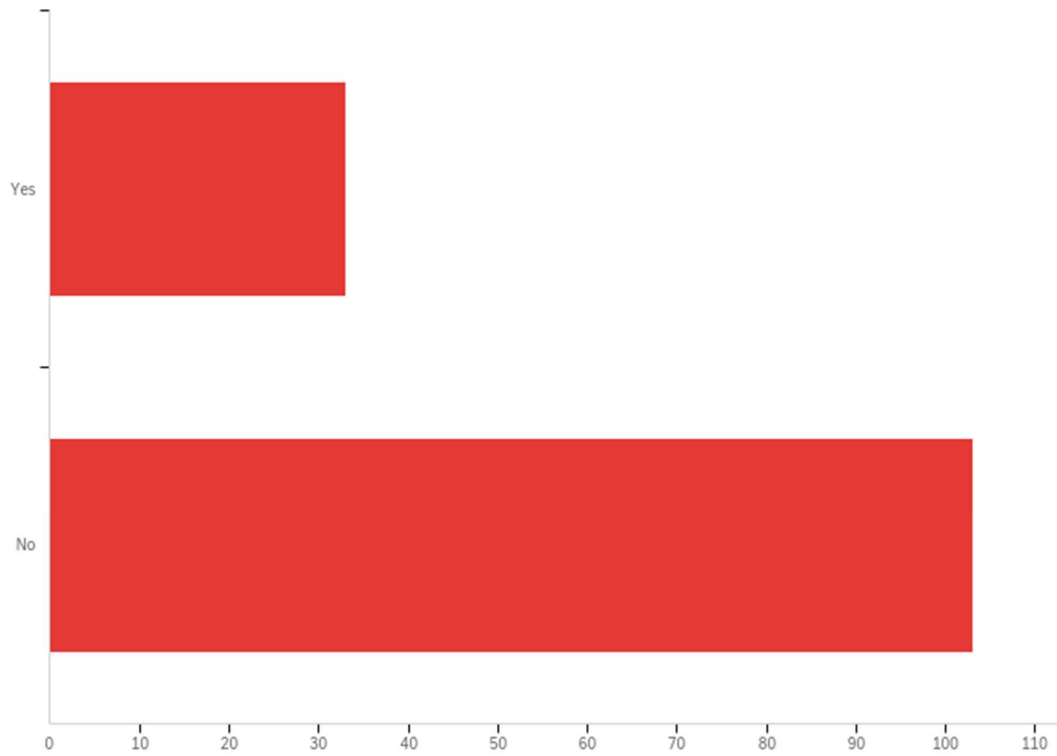


Figure 4.18: Survey Question-16

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	24.26%	33
2	No	75.74%	103
	Total	100%	136

Table 4.16: Question-16 Stats

Question-16 asked participants to see if they would like to share their best practices and challenges faced in a remote and multicultural work environment. However, out of the 136 participants, only 33 said yes. The chart above (Figure 4.18 and Table 4.16) represents the data.

Various best practices and challenges were shared, and the researcher has picked a few responses to shed some light on them. The researcher took participants' feedback and created a

word cloud to summarize their experiences. Figures 4.19 and 4.20 show the top words mentioned in the participant's responses.

For best practices, some of the supporting responses were as follows:

Respondent-2 said, "working in a remote and multicultural environment takes time and constant practice to overcome the learning curve. I found that it was very important for me to develop and grow individual relationships between my colleagues, in addition to the operational group meetings that we had on a regular basis. By focusing on individual relationships outside of the group/work environment formal meetings, I was able to improve my productivity in the group meetings. I also found that infrequent face-to-face interactions with individual employee further increased my productivity and team dynamic within the group."

Respondent-3 said, "independent consulting and research-oriented tasks are the most ideal for remote work. Time management and staying focused and motivated are also part of a successful remote work environment, including knowing your communication line."

Respondent-8 said, "I have found that remote meetings and environments are highly distracting. Patience, empathy, and focused communication are required, with both internal and external constituents, to effectively collaborate."

For challenges, some of the supporting responses were as follows:

Respondent-4 said, "lack of face-to-face interaction with the team creates endless chat sessions and meetings for minor issues that are time-consuming while you are waiting for a response that creates a barrier when you have a tight deadline."

Respondent-9, “not having face time with teammates, lack of social interactions makes me feel lonely sometimes.”

Respondent-13 said, “ensuring all parties have sufficient technology, bandwidth, and "office space" to work from home.”

Respondent-17 said, “The challenge in a remote and multicultural work environment is that it is hard for everyone to be on one page. There are many different values and opinions that come into play at work, and sometimes disagreements happen due to these, and work gets delayed. Being remote makes it harder because you can’t chase people down in person to make sure the work gets done. Everyone must be accountable in order to succeed.”

Respondent-18 said, “not everyone has access to good internet and workspaces at home.”



Figure 4.19: Question-16 Best Practices Word Cloud

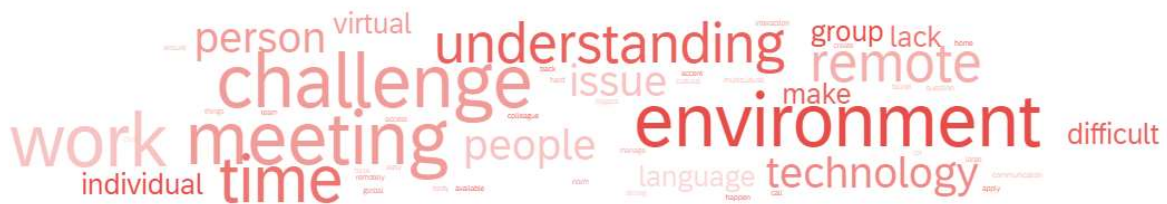


Figure 4.20: Question-16 Challenges Word Cloud

In the third section, the researcher asked additional questions to capture participants' demographics to see if there is any correlation with their responses to the remote and multicultural work environment. Three optional questions were asked based on the participant's ethnicity, country of origin, and sexual orientation. Out of the 142 participants who progressed through the questions-17, 97 participants said yes to the optional demographic questions. The charts (Figure 4.21 and Table 4.17) below represent the data.

Q17 - Would you like to answer a few optional demographic questions?

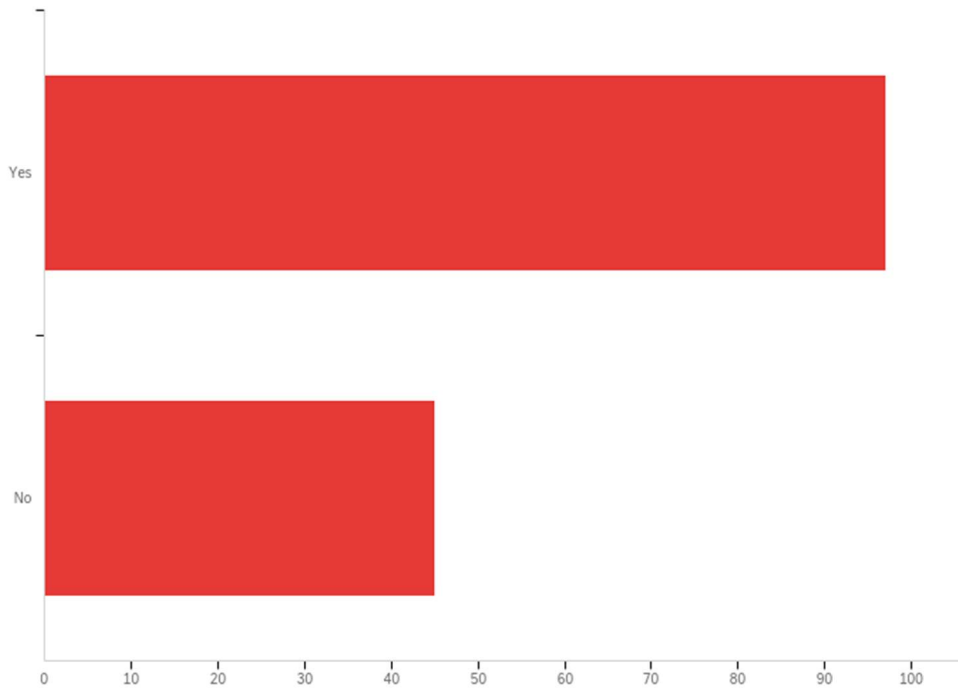


Figure 4.21: Survey Question-17

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	68.31%	97
2	No	31.69%	45
	Total	100%	142

Table 4.17: Question-17 Stats

Q18 - Share your ethnicity? (optional)

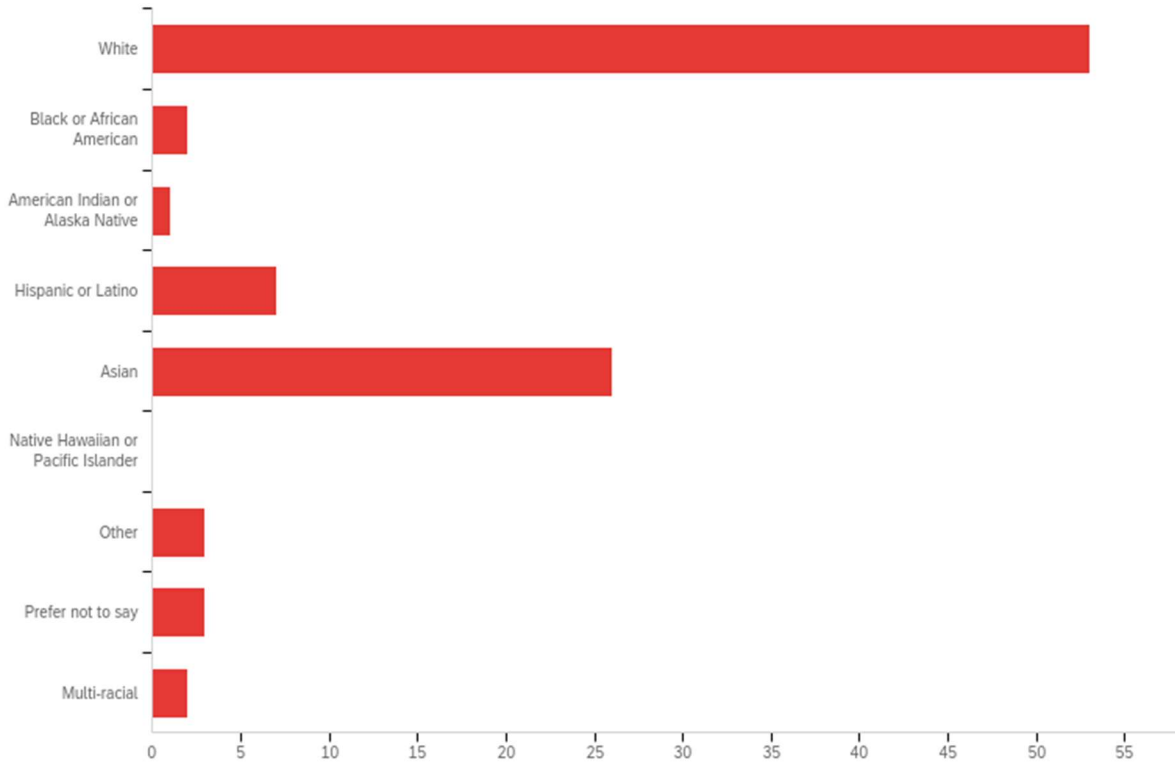


Figure 4.22: Survey Question-18

#	Answer	%	Count
1	White	54.64%	53
2	Black or African American	2.06%	2
3	American Indian or Alaska Native	1.03%	1
4	Hispanic or Latino	7.22%	7
5	Asian	26.80%	26
6	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.00%	0
7	Other	3.09%	3
8	Prefer not to say	3.09%	3
9	Multi-racial	2.06%	2
	Total	100%	97

Table 4.18: Question-18 Stats

Question-18 asked participants about their ethnicity, and 97 participants responded to this question. Out of which 53 participants were White, 26 were Asian, 7 were Hispanic or Latino, 2 were African American, and 1 was American Indian or Alaskan Native. The remaining 3 participants said they prefer not to say, 2 participants said they are multi-racial, and 3 participants selected other. Given that the survey was distributed in the United States, most participants were White American and American Indians. The charts (Figure 4.22 and Table 4.18) above represent the data.

Q19 - Share your country of origin? (optional)

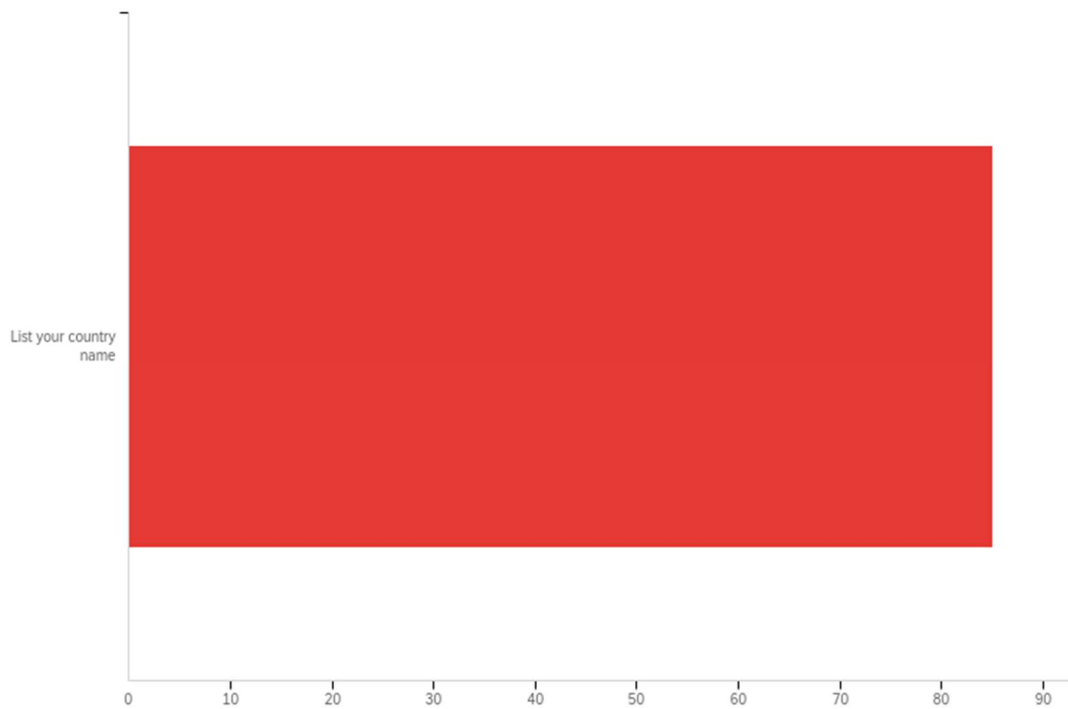


Figure 4.23: Survey Question-19

#	Answer	%	Count
1	List your country name	100.00%	85
	Total	100%	85

Table 4.19: Question-19 Stats

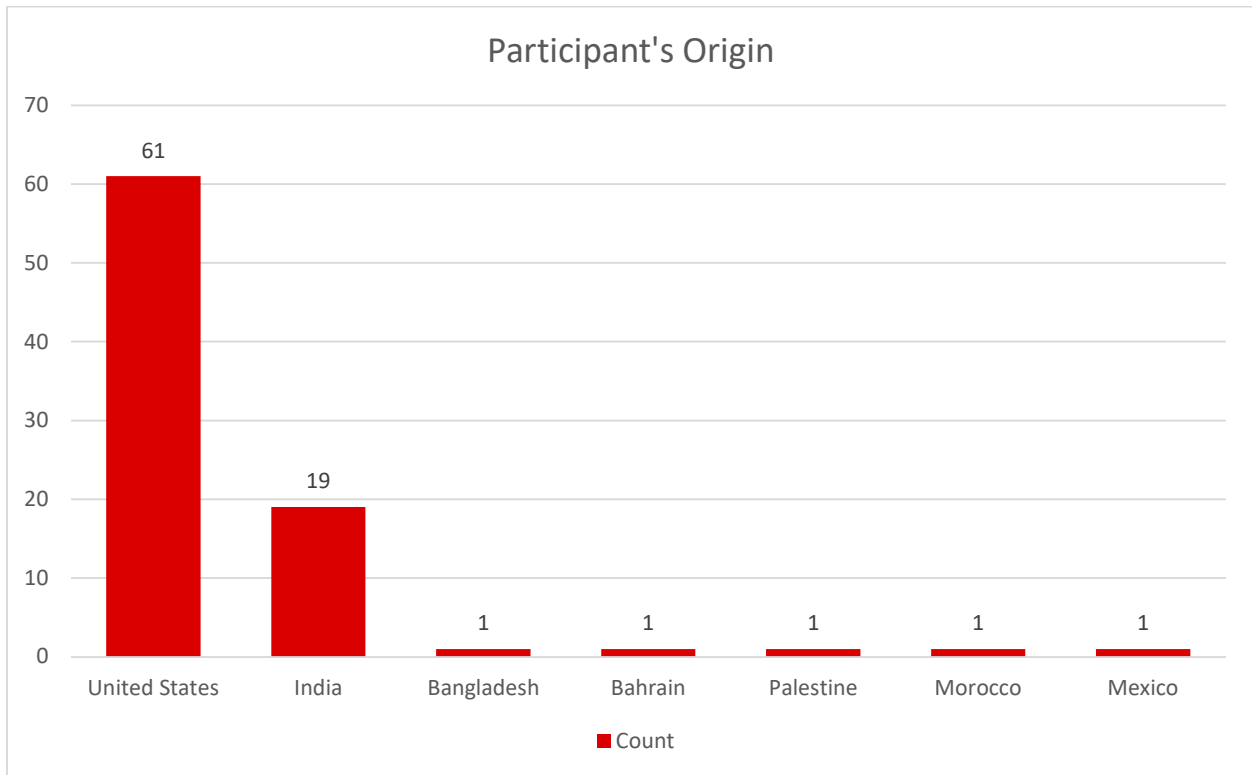


Figure 4.24: Question-19 Stats

Question-19 asked participants about their country of origin, and 85 participants out of 97 responded to this question. Out of which 61 participants were from the United States, 19 were from India, and one each from Bangladesh, Bahrain, Palestine, Morocco, and Mexico. The charts (Figure 4.23 and 4.24 and Table 4.18) above represent the data. The first and second demographic questions correlate as the survey was launched and distributed in the United States. The majority of the participants were the native population.

Q20 - Share your sexual orientation? (optional)

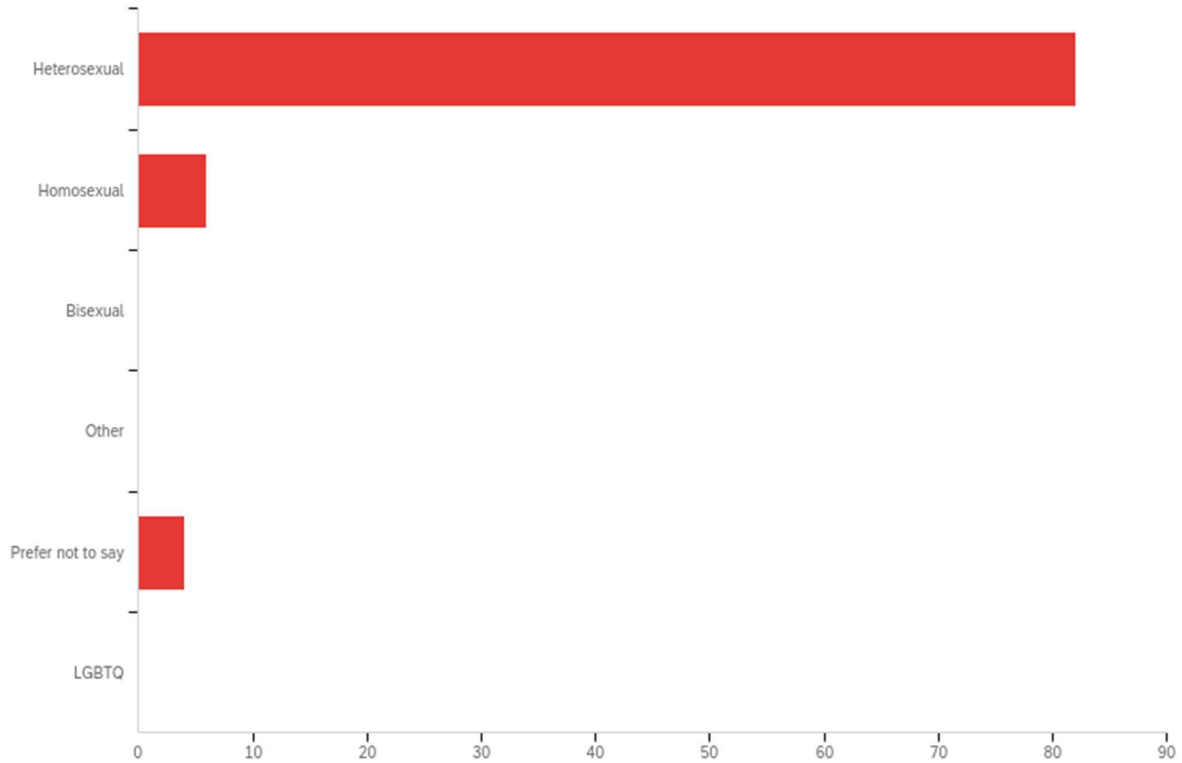


Figure 4.25: Survey Question-20

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Heterosexual	89.13%	82
2	Homosexual	6.52%	6
3	Bisexual	0.00%	0
4	Other	0.00%	0
5	Prefer not to say	4.35%	4
8	LGBTQ	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	92

Table 4.20: Question-20 Stats

Question-20 asked participants about their sexual orientation, and 92 participants responded to this question. Out of which 82 participants were heterosexual, 6 were homosexual, and 4 preferred not to say. The charts (Figure 4.25 and Table 4.20) above represent the data.

Q21 - Would you like to share your feedback about this survey? (optional)

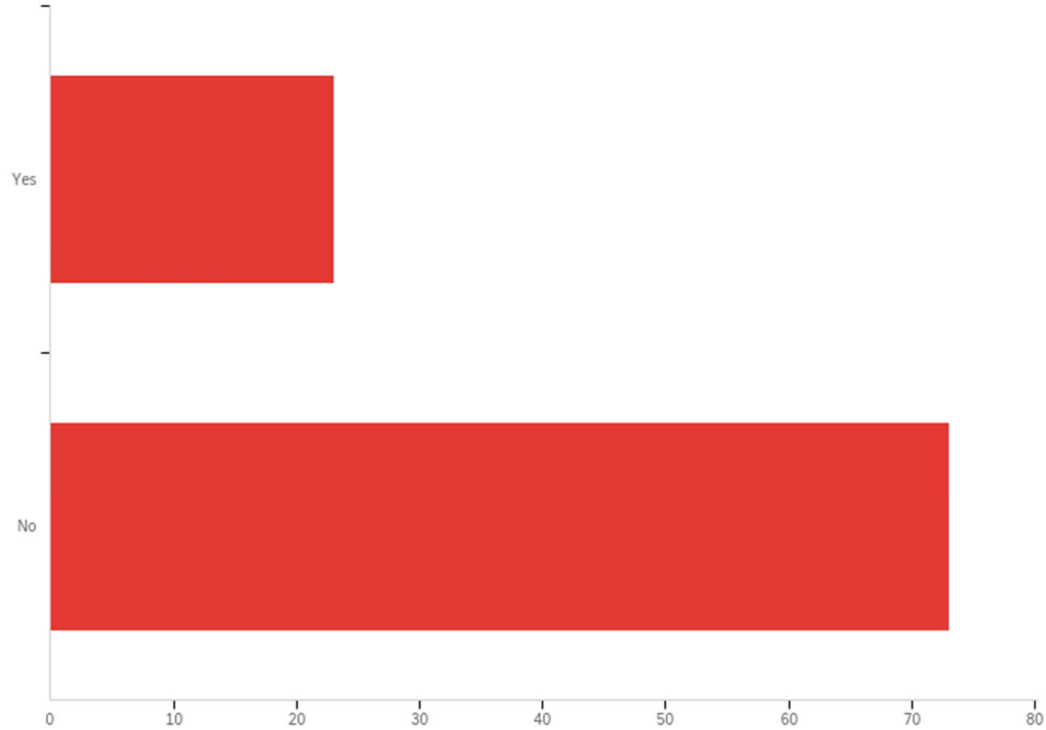


Figure 4.26: Survey Question-21

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	23.96%	23
2	No	76.04%	73
	Total	100%	96

Table 4.21: Question-21 Stats

The last optional section of the survey asked participants to see if they would like to share any feedback on the survey. Out of 96 participants, 23 mentioned yes and proceeded further to share their feedback. The charts (Figure 4.26 and Table 4.21) above represent the data.

Nine participants left the feedback section empty and ended the survey, and 14 shared their comments. For the survey’s feedback, some of the supporting responses were as follows:

Respondent-2 said, “easy to answer, short and clear questions.”

Respondent-3 said, “excellent survey and also a great job on the structure and format of the questions.”

Respondent-10 said, “very good survey, touching on points that are essential to a successful multicultural coaching engagement.”

Respondent-10 said, “well-structured questions. It felt like some questions were a stretch to connect virtual/remote working and multicultural challenges.”

The researcher took the participant’s feedback and generated a word cloud to share their feedback. The word cloud shows good, excellent, question, survey, and structure, pointing to the participant’s positive sentiments about the survey. Figure 4.27 below represents the data.



Figure 4.27: Question-21 Survey Feedback Word Cloud

Data Analysis

The researcher used the Qualtrics software to analyze the survey results. The tool provided several options to export the survey results in the generic reporting option. The researcher selected the MS Excel and PowerPoint export options to analyze the gathered data. The PowerPoint export contained several histograms and data tables which were helpful to analyze the data. The figures and tables listed in the earlier section were exported from the Qualtrics reports. The researcher evaluated the survey responses, analyzed how many participants responded to each question, and shared the breakdown of the responses in the earlier section.

Conclusion

Chapter-4 discussed the data results and analysis of the participant's responses to the research survey. A wide variety of consulting audiences was targeted for the research to conclude the hypothesis and research questions. Given the limited time of the study, the survey was live for approximately 18 days, and 185 participants volunteered to share their feedback. This study utilized the descriptive method of inquiry to explore the views of the industry leaders into whether or not they agree with the proposed core competencies and challenges faced in the industry. Chapter 5 concludes the study, presents the proposed framework, discusses its limitations and makes recommendations for practice and further research.

CHAPTER: 5

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Introduction

Conventional thinking might suggest that establishing a remote work environment requires nothing more than ensuring that employees have the necessary technology at their disposal to work off-site. However, in Gurchiek's (2020) view, giving employees the tools to work from home was merely the first step. As remote work has become the norm, it is increasingly evident that remote employees need to be self-starters and have a robust skill set to succeed. Workers must possess specific critical skills and learn how to mitigate particular challenges.

The initial phase of the remote work in COVID-19 made most employees excited as they gained extra time by not commuting to work anymore. The time gain did not last very long as the leader and team members started working around the clock as all the work was easy to access at home. Some employees struggled to maintain a work-life balance, which impacted everyone around them. For example, when one team member sends an email during off-hours, it creates a new norm for the teams to follow the same pattern. In a remote work environment, separation from work routine became harder and unavoidable as everyone felt restricted in maintaining their job security.

In a traditional work environment, it was easy to avoid unnecessary meetings, emails, and messaging because it was easy for employees to walk over and discuss the matter in their hands. Or, because they did not have access to their work tools, most employees had no expectations of working during the off-hours. Now every tiny communication creates a long, endless email or messaging chain. This creates unnecessary time-consuming activities for the employees to look after. These unimportant or time-consuming activities take time away from the important and urgent matters that need attention to be completed promptly. To learn how to protect work time and schedule, consultants must understand the simple concept of prioritizing urgent and important

tasks. They must learn how effectively communicate and negotiate work responsibilities so all team members align their tasks. They must also learn how to leverage SMEs to help execute tasks that can save time and effort.

Another underlying problem is that it is easy to procrastinate when important and urgent tasks are in the queue. Often, distractions cause disruption and delays in dealing with important and urgent matters. Having a to-do list seems equally urgent and important, but it becomes harder to complete due to the distractions. Back-to-back meetings, endless communication chains, or extraneous administration tasks can prevent a consultant from focusing on important and urgent tasks. Protecting the work schedule from unnecessary meetings and admin tasks can help consultants work on top priority items that add value to the organization. In the end, it is all about the revenue that the consultant generates for the organization.

The initial core competencies proposed in the proposal were problem-solving, creative thinking, virtual team collaboration, and self-organization and time management. The survey concluded that a consultant needs problem-solving, self-organization, time management skills, and virtual team collaboration to succeed in a remote and multicultural work environment. These skills can strengthen their core competencies and help mitigate challenges such as lack of face-to-face collaboration, back-to-back meetings, building interpersonal trust, and enhancing team dynamics. Additionally, the researcher proposes adding diversity management into the core competencies and changing the virtual team collaboration to social-technical collaboration. The proposed core competencies framework can help consultants succeed in a remote and multicultural work environment.

The proposed core competencies are problem-solving, social-technical collaboration, self-organization and time management, and diversity management are vital attributes for working in a remote and multicultural work environment. These core competencies are not new; they already exist in the traditional work environment. The proposed framework introduces new definitions of some existing competencies that embed the needs of the remote and multicultural work

environment. Data revealed that these essential core competencies need an enhanced set of lenses and perspectives to use them differently. Working from home impacts work-life balance as back-to-back meetings, long video conferencing, endless asynchronous training, and back and forth email communication distracts consultants from working on important and urgent matters. Lacking face-to-face interactions further complicates these matters as everyone needs to work in a team setting and communicate, due to which email and messaging have become the new communication medium. From a holistic point of view, this has shaped into a vicious cycle where endless communication chains of emails, meetings, and messaging have interrupted productivity.

Summary of Findings

The researcher utilized survey research to conduct this study and targeted 275 potential participants via email and a personal message over the LinkedIn platform. A total of 185 responses were collected, out of which 153 participants fully completed the required portion of the survey. The survey was divided into four sections. In the first section, five main questions collected data on challenges and best practices in a remote and multicultural work environment. The researcher separated both work environments and asked participants about their experience with core competencies and challenges separately. To conclude, the researcher combined both work environments and asked participants to share their challenges collectively to see if there were any similarities or differences when the work environments were combined.

In questions 11 and 13, the researcher asked the participants about the challenges faced in a remote and multicultural work environment. Question 11 indicated that the top five critical challenges in a remote work environment were “keeping up with back-to-back meetings,” “collaborating/ communication with others,” “balancing work/life demands,” “organizing time to manage work priorities effectively,” and “making technology work.” The participants ranked the challenges as strongly or somewhat agreed on the Likert scale. Question 13 indicated that the top five critical challenges in a multicultural work environment were “team dynamics,” “lack of face-to-face interaction,” “unconscious bias,” “cross-cultural communication,” and “language

barrier.” The participants ranked the challenges as somewhat agreed on the Likert scale (see Figure 5.1).

Survey’s Outcome - Top Challenges

List of challenges based on participant’s count

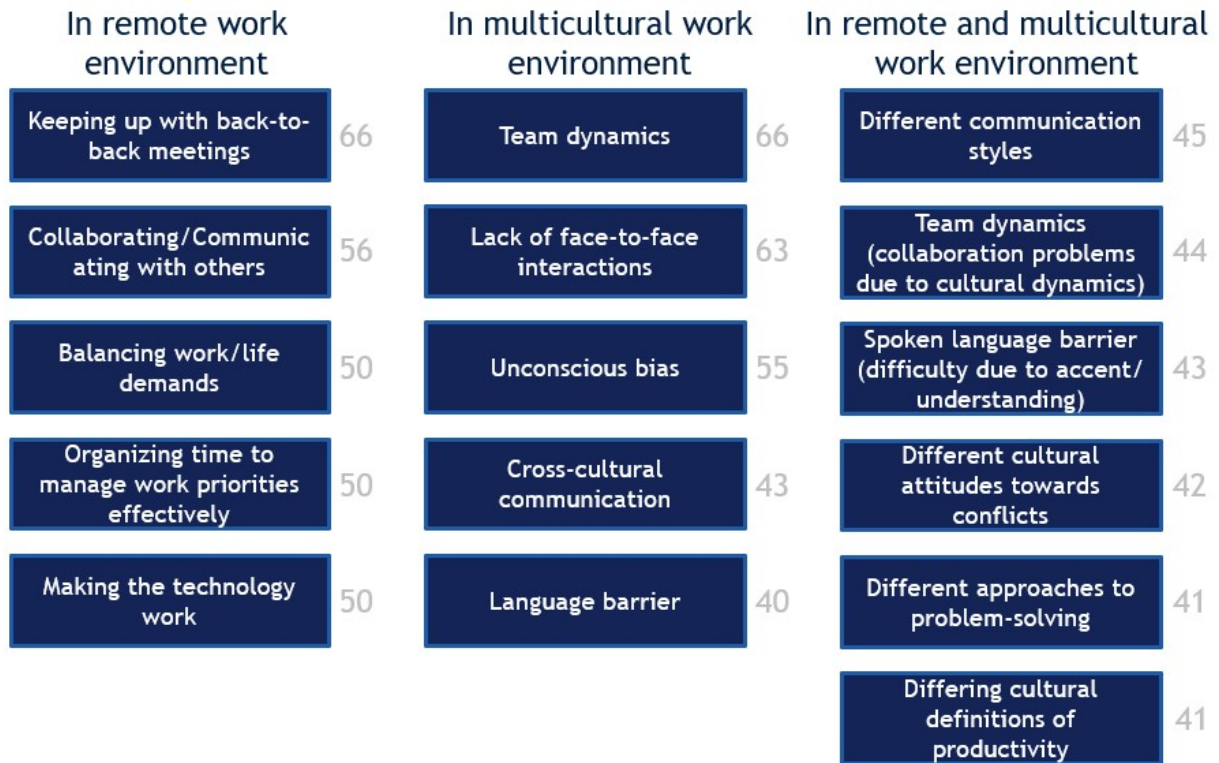


Figure 5.1: Survey Results – Top Challenges

Following questions 11 and 13, the researcher combined both work environments and asked participants about the challenges that can become more complicated in a remote and multicultural work environment. Combining both work environments was to see if the researcher could test the study’s hypothesis and answer the research questions. Question 15 indicated that the top six challenges in a remote and multicultural work environment were “different communication styles (misinterpretation based on culturally different speech patterns),” “team dynamics (collaboration problems due to cultural dynamics),” “spoken language barrier (difficulty due to accent/ understanding),” “different cultural attitudes towards conflicts,” “different

approaches to problem-solving,” and “differing cultural definitions of productivity.” The participants ranked these challenges as moderately or slightly challenging on the Likert scale (see Figure 5.1).

Similarly, in questions 12 and 14, the researcher asked participants about the core competencies in a remote and multicultural work environment. Question 12 indicated that the top five competencies in a remote work environment were “effective communication style (oral and written),” “time management,” “self-organization,” “problem-solving expertise,” and “virtual collaboration expertise.” The participants ranked the core competencies as strongly agreed on the Likert scale. Question 14 indicated that the top five competencies in a multicultural work environment were “good listener,” “build interpersonal trust,” “adaptable to change,” “team player,” and “emotional intelligence.” The participants ranked the core competencies as strongly agreed on the Likert scale (see Figure 5.2).

Survey’s Outcome - Top Core Competencies

List of core competencies based on participant’s count

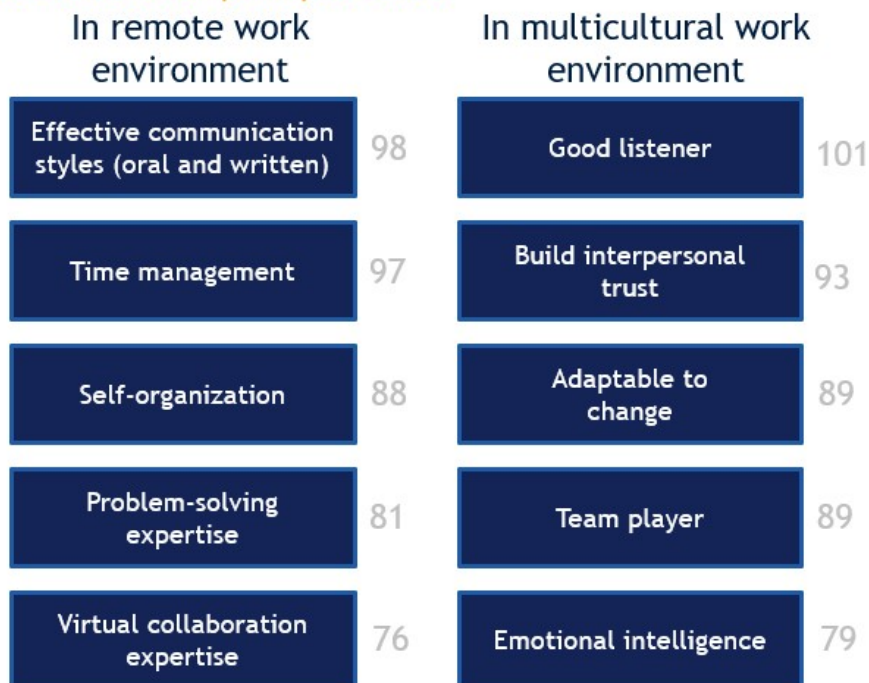


Figure 5.2: Survey Results – Top Core Competencies

Furthermore, the researcher tried to identify some of the missing components in the research. The demographic result indicated that survey participation lacked diverse participants. The majority of the participants were White Americans, Indian Asians, and Heterosexuals. Most of the participants lacked multicultural backgrounds. Moreover, the study did not collect data on participants' gender, age, and religion. The study findings will need to be evaluated based on the missed data with these limitations to propose the core competencies. It is crucial to keep the diversity perspective in the proposal to sustain multicultural team environments.

After analyzing the data, the researcher took the initial set of core competencies proposed in the proposal and reorganized the findings to align them with the core competencies. To limit the scope of the study, the researcher picked four core competencies – problem-solving, creative thinking, virtual team collaboration, and self-organization and time management (see Figure 5.3).

Restructuring Findings in Proposed Competencies

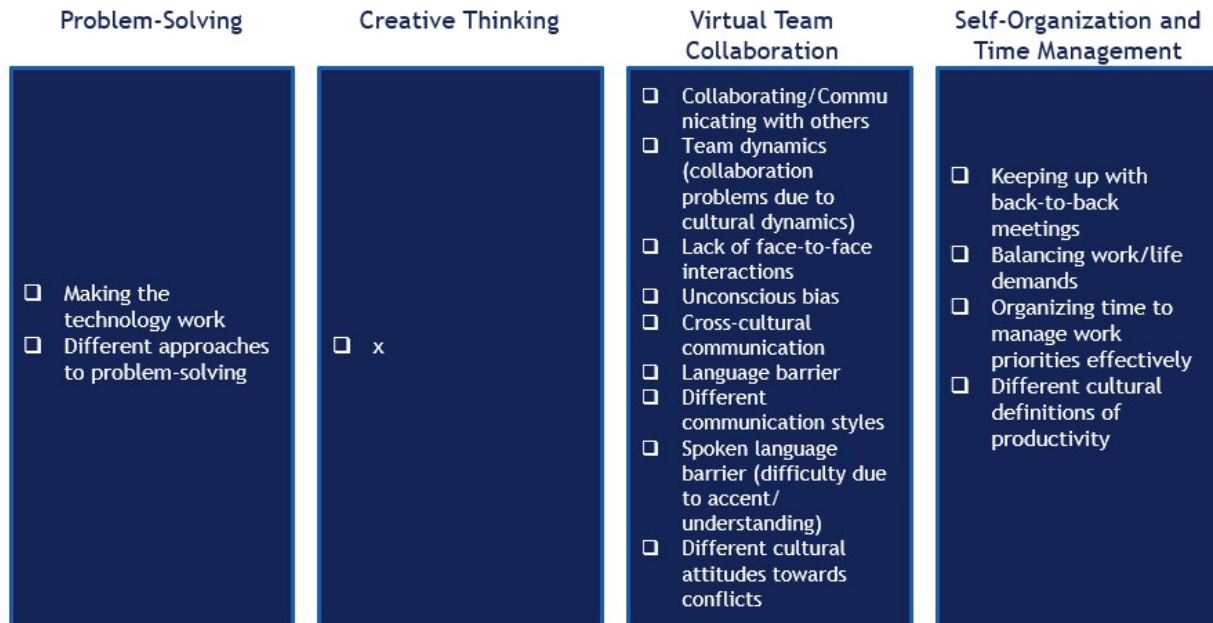


Figure 5.3: Connecting Survey Results with Proposed Core Competencies

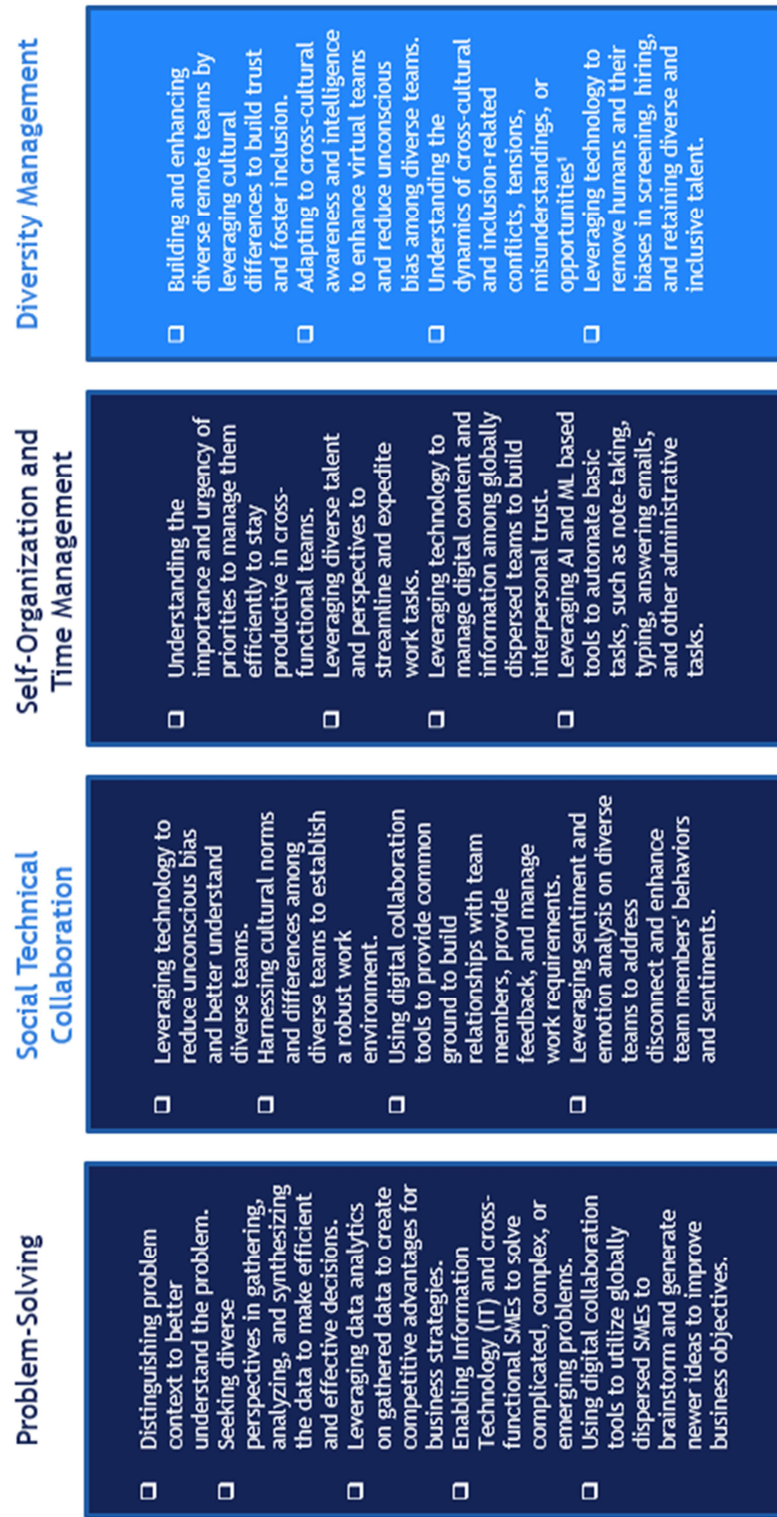
Problem-solving had two challenges, “making the technology work” and “different approaches to problem-solving.” There were no challenges associated with creative thinking.

Virtual team collaboration had several challenges, “collaborating/communicating with others,” “team dynamics (collaboration problems due to cultural dynamics),” “lack of face-to-face interactions,” “unconscious bias,” “cross-cultural communication,” “language barrier,” “different communication styles,” “spoken language barrier (difficulty due to accent/ understanding),” and “different cultural attitudes towards conflicts.” Self-organization and time management had some challenges, “keeping up with back-to-back meetings,” “balancing work/life demands,” “organizing time to manage work priorities effectively,” and “different cultural definitions of productivity.”

Core Competency Framework

The proposed framework will consist of problem-solving, social-technical collaboration, self-organization and time management, and diversity management. Each core competency will leverage the remote and multicultural context to help consultants succeed (see Figure 5.4). Additionally, as a reflection, this framework can be applied to any leader working in a remote and multicultural work environment. The leadership team can leverage the proposed competencies to enhance their remote and multicultural work environments.

Proposed Core Competency Framework



Adding feedback loop to each competency to keep evolving to fit the needs of remote & multicultural work environment

Figure 5.4: Proposed Core Competency Framework

The core competencies need to rely heavily on technology and diverse team cultures. As they evolve, core competencies must be enhanced to help consultants succeed in a remote and multicultural work environment. Adding a feedback loop to each competency can help sustain the needs of remote and multicultural work environments.

Problem-solving

Organizations need to understand the problem and problem-solvers (consultants) to distinguish between them accordingly. Not all problems and problem-solvers are the same. The problem-solving core competency needs to focus on distinguishing between problem contexts to understand the problem better. Often, organizations fail to categorize the problem they face in their routine. Solving various types of problems requires a different set of tools and experts. The Cynefin framework (Snowdon & Boone, 2007) helps distinguish between various types of problems and based on experience, experts can address those problems with the appropriate methods and tools. Cynefin classifies contexts that include environmental, cultural, and other situations in which problems and opportunities are presented as simple, complicated, complex, and chaotic. Trottier (2012) described four basic consultative models: expert model, medical (doctor-patient) model, process model, and emergent model, which provides a different level of approach and expertise in solving different types of problems.

Additionally, problem-solvers (consultants) need data and information when solving problems. Most organizations are full of data sources and have more data than they know. Still, the problem is analyzing and synthesizing the data to make information from it is causing many limitations to advance further. Organizations need to seek diverse perspectives in gathering, analyzing, and synthesizing the data to make efficient and effective decisions to solve such problems. Ackoff's (1989) DIKW pyramid can help consultants gain wisdom and understanding to make strategic decisions. In the content of the learning model, data is a vital input for decision making because it helps create information that provides info on know-what, where, when, and

who elements. The set of information provides know-who elements to formalize the knowledge. Further, structured knowledge generates know-why elements to formulate an understanding that articulates wisdom in problem-solving.

Gathering data is one thing, but making sense of the data is another. It is essential to leverage data analytics on gathered data to create competitive advantages for business strategies. Data can help establish a healthy baseline to enhance business operations and develop appropriate tools and resources to mitigate such problems. Enabling Information Technology (IT) and cross-functional SMEs can help solve complicated, complex, or emerging problems. Organizations need to employ digital collaboration tools to utilize globally dispersed SMEs to brainstorm and generate newer ideas to solve critical problems of the business.

Social-Technical Collaboration

As remote and multicultural teams increase, organizations will have to pay more attention to the multicultural characteristics of the workspace (Tarazona, 2022). With globally dispersed teams, organizations benefit from shared global knowledge and expertise, but they need to invest in the right tools and strategies to take full advantage of multicultural teams (Tarazona, 2022). Globally dispersed teams need to communicate and collaborate efficiently to be effective.

Effective communication and collaboration are vital to being successful in a virtual workplace. Often, communication is a crucial aspect of productive collaboration, and lack of communication can impact team dynamics and collaboration. Crafting a robust remote team environment begins with free, open, and frequent communication. The social-technical collaboration competency needs to focus on leveraging technology to reduce unconscious bias and better understand diverse teams (Alidina, 2020). Remote and multicultural organizations must actively promote communication, collaboration, and virtual connectivity among their teams (Tarazona, 2022). It is essential to harness cultural norms and differences among diverse teams to establish a robust work environment.

Digital collaboration tools can help provide a common ground for consultants to build relationships with team members, provide feedback, and manage work requirements (Tarazona, 2022). Virtual communication tools like Zoom, GoTo Meeting, Skype, Slack, and WebEx can be leveraged to share information and communicate. Collaboration Tools like Microsoft Teams, SharePoint, DropBob, Jira, and Trello can help manage work responsibilities and team collaboration. The right tools and collaborative approach will make life easier for multicultural teams (Tarazona, 2022). Leveraging analytical tools and personality assessments to gain insights into team members' work styles for better collaboration. Using multi-lingual close caption or embedded AI to translate while people speak to better understand team members' thought processes and help with multi-lingual collaboration. Using grammar checker and translation applications with digital technology tools when collaborating with multi-lingual teams.

Additionally, using sentiment and emotion analysis on diverse teams' collaboration can help address disconnects in remote and multicultural teams and enhance team members' behaviors and sentiments. Yam (2020) describes sentiment analysis as detecting positive, neutral, or negative feelings and emotion analysis as detecting feelings such as anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise on text shared between team members. Gathering sentiment and emotional analysis data can help consulting organizations guide consultants' minds and behaviors to fit business goals and objectives. This type of data is often used on consumers' behavior, but leveraging the same approach can help organizations improve their collaboration and multicultural team environments.

Self-Organization and Time Management

For self-organization and time management, consultants must understand the importance and urgency of priorities to manage them efficiently and stay productive in cross-functional teams. There are conflicting and overlapping commitments in a fast-paced work environment, which complicates the execution of high-priority and urgent tasks. The Eisenhower Matrix, also known

as the Time Management Matrix, helps prioritize tasks based on urgency and importance and identify tasks that should delegate or leave undone (Scott, 2022). The consultants need to leverage diverse talent and perspectives to streamline and expedite work tasks. All team members have a diverse skill set, and they should be leveraged accordingly to manage work priorities effectively. Work responsibilities should be shared and executed based on team members' strengths.

To be productive, effective, and efficient, consultants need to learn how to save and protect their time when executing their responsibilities. In day-to-day activities, there are way too many tedious and time-consuming activities. Often, regular business hours are wasted attending irrelevant meetings, answering emails, and team chats, which impacts the execution of high-priority activities. Leveraging AI and ML based tools to automate basic tasks, such as note-taking, typing, answering emails, and other administrative tasks can help save time (Chriss, 2017). Automating such tasks can help consultants become productive and focus their valuable time on high-priority activities. Additionally, leveraging technology to manage digital content and information among globally dispersed teams can help build interpersonal trust and make remote teams more productive.

Diversity Management

Diversity in the workplace is crucial for growth in today's competitive global marketplace. Organizations and consultants need to invest in diversity management heavily to be competitive. As global teams are growing and multicultural teams are interacting, diversity management needs to become a high priority for the leadership teams. Organizations need to have diverse ideas and skillsets to innovate and be different in the competitive marketplace. Diversity management consists of having diverse workforce representation, workforce relationships, diverse talent, and strategic diversity mixture (Thomas, 2010).

Building a diverse workforce starts with HR and recruiting channels. The HR team's unconscious bias often affects diverse talents' hiring and retaining process. Technology can help remove human biases in screening, hiring, and retaining diverse and inclusive talent (Alidina, 2020). The technology used correctly can help organizations harness diverse talent and strengthen their skill set to build a diverse and inclusive future. Organizations need to encourage team members to look for team members' strengths and weaknesses and then add additional members accordingly to fulfill the gaps to help build robust teams.

To strengthen diverse team relationships, organizations need to adapt to cross-cultural awareness and intelligence to enhance virtual teams and reduce unconscious bias among diverse teams. To be a productive and high-performing team, all team members need to learn about each other's strengths and weaknesses. Cross-cultural awareness and intelligence can help understand diverse teams and their core skill set and strengths. Organizations can build teams with various team members based on their skillsets.

Diversity in the workplace requires diverse talent, skillset, and personalities to help organizations grow and be more profitable. Adding diverse talent and skillset to a high-performing team is essential to diversity management. Maintaining and sustaining those teams is a more complex task involving various challenges. Remote and multicultural work environments can be challenging for such team members as they feel less inclusive in the team culture. Organizations need to build trust and transparency among diverse team members to feel more inclusive of the work culture. Building and enhancing diverse remote teams by leveraging cultural differences can help build trust and foster inclusion.

Furthermore, a strategic diversity mixture is crucial for every organization as it encompasses every team member's talents to become a robust team in a remote and multicultural work environment. Organizations need to understand the dynamics of cross-cultural teams and their complexity related to work conflicts, tensions, disagreements, or opportunities that can benefit the diverse team and their growth (Lahiri, 2008).

Limitations of the Research

The survey research was conducted for approximately three weeks, and 185 participants could participate in the research. Keeping the survey open for longer durations might have contributed to more responses to gain further insights. Given the limited duration, limited participation was captured in the study. Future research can benefit from existing research, conduct further research on a similar topic, and target diverse organizations and multicultural background consultants. The research was targeted based on the researcher's network and social media. Most of the survey questions contained multiple-choice questions, and given the researcher's dedicated focus on the four core competencies, other competencies were excluded from the research.

Recommendations for Future Research

The research study proposed core competencies and shared various challenges faced in a remote and multicultural work environment. The researcher came across various suggestions to help with future research in gathering and analyzing data. Here is the list of suggestions that can enhance the core competencies of consultants in a remote and multicultural work environment.

1. Partner with DEI practitioners to validate findings and gather additional data from more diverse participants
2. Leverage DEI consulting competencies to redesign consulting core competencies in a remote and multicultural work environment
3. Apply Change Leadership to reimagine consulting core competencies and enable a diverse work environment
4. Partner with academia to address the core competencies gap and make changes to curriculum for consultants and leaders

Conclusion

Core competencies are deep proficiencies that enable a consultant to deliver unique values to its organization and clients. It represents a consultant's level of specialization, expertise, and proficiency in their skillsets. Such core competencies help create a sustainable competitive advantage for a consultant and help their organizations establish a brand in the market. Core competencies allow consultants and organizations to invest in the strengths that differentiate them. To develop or enhance core competencies, a consultant must follow specific steps to master the desired level of proficiency. It is crucial to understand what core competencies are essential and valued by the organization and its clients. The consultants must invest accordingly to develop and sustain valued strengths. It is crucial to create a robust plan and roadmap that sets goals for competence development or enhancement.

The proposed core competencies are not new, they already exist in the traditional work environment. The proposed framework introduces new definitions of some existing competencies that embed the needs of the remote and multicultural work environment. Data revealed that these essential core competencies need an enhanced set of lenses and perspectives to use them differently in a remote and multicultural work environment.

Furthermore, the proposed core competencies also apply to leaders today managing a diverse and remote workforce. Data revealed that proposed core competencies apply to leadership that operates in a remote and multicultural work environment. The challenges faced in any remote and multicultural environment are similar. Therefore, these core competencies can add value to any organization and leadership that operates in a remote and multicultural work environment. These core competencies can enhance leadership's approach to managing and sustaining remote and multicultural work environments.

The consulting organizations and leadership teams need to pay close attention to their remote and multicultural organizations and learn how to support them better. The remote and multicultural work environment brings a diverse workforce together to collaborate and innovate to

advance in the industry. Organizations and leadership teams need to harness the diverse skillset and become better equipped to sustain the remote and multicultural workforce.

Lastly, undertaking this research study has been an invaluable learning experience, especially in understanding the nature of research and its process. This research study has provided significant insights which have helped inform the researcher's professional values for possible changes to future practice. As a next step, the intent is to explore this research further and enhance the core competency framework to better support leadership and consulting organizations in the future.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval Documents



Office of Human Research
Institutional Review Board

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March 9, 2022

Rosa Colon-Kolacko, PhD
School of Continuing and Professional Studies (SCPS)

Dear Dr. Colon-Kolacko:

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has evaluated the involvement of human subjects in the proposed research study entitled:

“A systemic model to augment consultants competencies for success in a remote and multicultural work environment” (Departmental) 45 CFR 46.101 (2-survey) Control #22E.111

In accordance with Federal-Wide Assurance #00002109 to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, I am pleased to inform you that your study was determined to be **EXEMPT** from IRB review on 2/3/2022 pursuant to Title 45 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 46.101(b) governing exempted protocol declarations. Board #152 was notified of this exemption status at its 2/3/2022 meeting.

No further review and approval by the Board will be required if the study is to be conducted as proposed. Any proposed revision in this protocol will necessitate submission of an OHR-12 to the IRB for further consideration prior to final implementation.

Please notify the IRB by letter when the study has been completed.

This approval verifies that the IRB operates in accordance with applicable federal, local and institutional regulations that govern IRB operations.

Thank you for your cooperation in the institutional review process.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Walter Kraft'.

Walter Kraft, MD
Director
Office of Human Research
/sm



APPENDIX B

Letter to Participants to Partake in Research Survey

Dear Participant:

I am reaching out to you with a request to help gather data on consulting competencies in a remote and multicultural work environment for my doctoral degree. As you know, I am working on completing my dissertation from Thomas Jefferson University's Doctor of Management (DMgmt) in Strategic Leadership program. I am working with Dr. Rosa Colon-Kolacko, dissertation advisor, to conduct my dissertation research.

The purpose of the research (dissertation) study is to focus on consulting organizations and their consultants to evaluate their consulting competencies in a remote and multicultural work environment. The goal is to identify gaps in conducting or executing remote projects. Your participation in this study will contribute to advancing our understanding of consulting competencies in a remote and multicultural work environment. This research study is only applicable to those consultants who could perform their roles and responsibilities remotely (aka work from home (WFH)) and in a multicultural work environment. This research will benefit the consulting organizations, consultants, and clients operating in a remote and multicultural work environment. Additionally, future consultants can capitalize on this research entering the consulting industry in the forthcoming years.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you can end your participation, if you wish, at any time. Also, your participation and feedback are anonymous. Your name will not be identified or associated with any specific responses, and it will not appear in any published materials which result from this research. Any information you provide will remain strictly confidential.

Our study consists of a survey containing ten-twelve MC questions and some optional open-ended questions. We estimate that this will take about 3-5 minutes of your time to complete. If any question makes you feel uncomfortable, you don't have to answer it. If you decide to participate in this study, please use this letter as verbal consent to participate in this study.

Please click on the enclosed survey link and fill out the survey –
https://jefferson.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_2I9d6jYcxPP3rlq

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Sagar Sharma

*Adjunct Faculty & Doctoral Student
SCPS, Jefferson University
East Falls – PA
Email: sagar.sharma@jefferson.edu*

APPENDIX C

Survey Questionnaire and Question Mapping

Consulting Competencies in Remote and Multicultural Work Environment

Survey Flow

Standard Block: Default Question Block (15 Questions)

Optional Block: Open-ended Feedback (1 Question)

Optional Block: Demographic Questions (4 Questions)

Optional Block: Survey Feedback (1 Question)

EndSurvey: Advanced

Page Break

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Welcome and thank you for participating in this survey. This survey research aims to gather input from the industry's experts and use it towards the dissertation study to understand the remote and multicultural work environments. Based on the analysis, a potential consulting model/framework will be proposed to share the best practices and potential enhancements for the remote and multicultural work environments.

Please note your participation and feedback are anonymous. Also, when answering the open-ended questions, avoid any names and details that might be confidential to your current or former experience.

Key definitions for the survey

Consultant – a person who gives professional or expert advice in a particular area of expertise. Various consultants offer advice in organizational management, program/project management, process improvement, change management, finance, economics, accountancy, human resources, marketing, engineering, technology, or law. Consultant roles can be either internal (direct full/part-time employee) or external (works for a consultancy firm or self-employed) team members in an organization.

Remote Work Environment (RWE) – the term delineates employees who work from home (WFH) and are not required to go into their employer's office (onsite facilities) to conduct job responsibilities.

Multicultural Work Environment – the term characterizes employees who come from diverse cultural backgrounds, which comprise different ethnicities and speaking various languages aside from English.

Click next below (1)

Page Break

Q2 Identify your consulting experience?

- Currently working as an internal consultant (1)
- Currently working for a consulting organization (2)
- Former consultant (3)
- No consulting experience (4)

Skip To: End of Survey If Identify your consulting experience? = No consulting experience

Page Break

Q3 What best describes your role?

- C-Level Executive (1)
 - VP / Director (2)
 - Manager / Engineer / Specialist (3)
 - Associate / Entry-level (4)
 - Program / Project Manager (5)
 - Change Manager (6)
 - Diversity Consultant (7)
 - Other (8) _____
-

Q4 Number of years spent in consulting roles

0-2 years (1)

2-5 years (2)

>5 years (3)

Q5 Describe your consulting experience?

Working for a small organization (1)

Working for a medium organization (2)

Working for a large organization (3)

Working for a global organization (4)

Page Break

Q6 Are you currently working in a remote work environment?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Page Break

Display This Question:

If Are you currently working in a remote work environment? = No

Q7 Do you have any former experience working in a remote work environment?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Do you have any former experience working in a remote work environment? = No

Page Break

Q8 Before COVID-19, how often did you work remotely?

Never (1)

Sometimes (2)

About half the time (3)

Most of the time (4)

Always (5)

Page Break

Q9 Are you currently working in a multicultural work environment?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Maybe (3)

Display This Question:

If Are you currently working in a multicultural work environment? = No

Q10 Do you have any former experience working in a multicultural work environment?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Page Break

Q11 In your opinion, what challenges impact your remote work environment?

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Making the technology work (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Troubleshooting technical problems (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collaborating/Communicating with others (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Finding information to answer questions (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Locating people to answer questions (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Keeping up with back-to-back meetings (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Keeping up with emails/IMs (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Staying on top of training (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Organizing time to manage work priorities effectively (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Balancing work/life demands (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Q12 In your opinion, what core competencies for a consultant can help succeed in a remote work environment?

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Digital literacy/tech-savvy (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Problem-solving expertise (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Creative thinking mindset (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Virtual collaboration expertise (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Effective communication style (oral and written) (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Self-organization (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Time management (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Page Break

Q13 In your opinion, what challenges impact your multicultural work environment?

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Lack of face-to-face interaction/collaboration (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Language barrier (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cultural differences (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cross-cultural communication (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Unconscious bias (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Team dynamics (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Q14 In your opinion, what core competencies for a consultant can help succeed in a multicultural work environment?

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Cultural awareness/intelligence (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cultural agility (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adaptable to cross-cultural work styles (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Integrate diverse perspectives (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Build interpersonal trust (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Emotional intelligence (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good listener (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Team player (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adaptable to change (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Page Break

Q15 Based on your experience, to what degree the following challenges can become more complicated in a remote and multicultural work environment?

	Not challenging at all (15)	Slightly challenging (16)	Moderately challenging (17)	Very challenging (18)	Extremely challenging (19)
Spoken language barrier (difficulty due to accent/understanding) (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Written language barrier (difficulty with writing/reading non-native language) (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Team dynamics (collaboration problems due to cultural dynamics) (14)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Different communication styles (misinterpretation based on culturally different speech patterns) (15)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Unconscious cultural biases and stereotypes (16)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Different approaches to problem-solving (17)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cultural differences in decision making (18)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Differing cultural definitions of productivity (19)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Differing cultural attitudes toward workplace hierarchy or authority (20)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Differing cultural attitudes towards scheduling/punctuality (21)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Different cultural attitudes towards conflicts (22)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Disparities in technological accessibility (23)

Professional etiquette based on cultural norms (24)

End of Block: Default Question Block

Start of Block: Open-ended Feedback

Q16 Would you like to share your best practices or challenges (if any) in a remote and multicultural work environment? (optional)

Yes (1)

No (2)

Skip To: End of Block If Would you like to share your best practices or challenges (if any) in a remote and multicultural... = No

Do you want to share your best practices in a remote and multicultural work environment? (optional)

Do you want to share your challenges (if any) in a remote and multicultural work environment?
(optional)

End of Block: Open-ended Feedback

Start of Block: Demographic Questions

Q17 Would you like to answer a few optional demographic questions?

Yes (1)

No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Would you like to answer a few optional demographic questions? = No

Q18 Share your ethnicity? (optional)

- White (1)
 - Black or African American (2)
 - American Indian or Alaska Native (3)
 - Hispanic or Latino (4)
 - Asian (5)
 - Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (6)
 - Multi-racial (9)
 - Other (7)
 - Prefer not to say (8)
-

Q19 Share your country of origin? (optional)

- List your country name (1) _____
-

Q20 Share your sexual orientation? (optional)

- Heterosexual (1)
- Homosexual (2)
- Bisexual (3)
- LGBTQ (8)
- Other (4)
- Prefer not to say (5)

End of Block: Demographic Questions

Start of Block: Survey Feedback

Q21 Would you like to share your feedback about this survey? (optional)

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If you would like to share your feedback about this survey? (optional) = No

Please share your feedback. Thank you!

End of Block: Survey Feedback