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Employment Experience of Remote Workers

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Abstract. This study examined the employment experience of remote workers through a phenomenological approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with ten participants aged 23–50; with at least one year of remote work experience and had workloads equivalent to full-time employment, working for clients based outside the Philippines. A thematic analysis following Creswell’s approach revealed five major themes: (1) A Leap of Faith Into an Unfamiliar Landscape, (2) A Self-Defined, Blended, Multi-Role Identity, (3) A Non-Traditional and Multicultural Remote Work Ecosystem, (4) Unique Benefits, Burdens, and Adaptations in Remote Work, and (5) Future Directions and the Evolving World of Remote Work. The themes explored how many participants began their remote careers through invitations or risk-taking, viewing remote work as an uncertain yet promising alternative to traditional career paths. Over time, they developed flexible, multi-role professional identities shaped by continuous learning and experiences. Their work experiences were influenced by organizational structures, company culture, and professional relationships. While remote work offered benefits of comfort, autonomy, and greater opportunities for family-centered living, it also entailed tradeoffs relating to personal, ethical and systemic challenges. Looking towards the future, many viewed remote work as a platform for growth rather than a permanent destination. The findings suggest that remote work can be meaningfully situated within work psychology frameworks emphasizing motivation, self-efficacy, identity development, job crafting, and well-being. Filipino psychology also provided valuable insight into how cultural values shape remote workers’ attitudes toward relationships, responsibility, and resilience in a global work setting. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the employment experience of Filipino remote workers and offers implications for support programs, public education, and policy development.

Keywords. Remote Work, Filipino Psychology, Employment Experience

1. Introduction

Background of the Study

Remote work is perceived as an efficient way to perform tasks traditionally done in an office from the comfort of one's home. Although remote work may seem like a modern innovation due to its rising popularity, it has existed for decades. "Work-from-home," as we know it today, began in the 1970s from a policy that arose when oil prices made physical

commutes more expensive (Choudhury, 2020). In the 2000s, the advent of advanced technology allowed remote work to evolve further. Nonetheless, it was the COVID-19 pandemic that truly thrust it into the mainstream. It became necessary for individuals to perform their roles online, as it emerged as the only viable and safest option benefiting both companies and employees. However, despite the gradual return to on-site work in 2023 as the pandemic subsided, remote work continues to persist.

Remote work has also been gaining traction in Asia, with the Philippines emerging as a leading global hub. It currently ranks seventh among the fastest-growing remote work destinations (Presidential Communications Office, 2023). In addition to this, the BPO industry has primed Filipinos to work remotely for overseas clients for several years already. Given these trends, it is understandable that many Filipinos are drawn to remote work, with more individuals exploring opportunities in this growing market.

Likewise, remote work, while alluring as a modern shift in the workplace, carries its unique challenges. Working remotely entails being alone at home, leading to negative effects such as isolation, boredom and sadness. While technology enables remote work, connectivity issues and technology related issues may arise (Champolous, 2024). The nature of remote work places greater emphasis on intellectual, cognitive, and analytical skills. As a result, maintaining mental health becomes even more crucial, as it directly affects one's ability to perform at their best.

With this in mind, the study aimed to address gaps in existing research by exploring the employment experience of remote workers. It examines key aspects of remote work, including perceived benefits, challenges, quality of life, and work sustainability. Ultimately, the study sought to offer insights on how remote work can be applied to existing theories of work psychology and enhance our understanding of employee well-being and behavior in remote work settings.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to explore the employment experience of remote workers.

Research Paradigm

This study is rooted in interpretivism, a paradigm that focuses on how individuals make sense of their world by emphasizing the meanings, experiences, and perspectives they hold, rather than seeking to establish universal laws (Creswell & Poth, 2014). In this study, interpretivism provides a framework for understanding the unique and subjective experiences of remote workers. Aligned with interpretivism, the study also adopts a phenomenological approach. In this, phenomenology seeks to describe common meanings of lived experiences of several individuals who experience a particular phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2014).

Using data collection methods such as in-depth interviews, this approach emphasizes exploring the meanings, attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and emotions tied to individuals' experiences. This is particularly valuable in this study, as it enables participants to articulate the subjective and unique meanings they associate with remote work, offering insights that extend beyond the technical aspects of their roles.

Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study encompassed the employment experience of fully remote workers in Bacolod City, Negros Occidental. The study was conducted over a period of six months, from July 12, 2025 to October 21, 2025. The inclusion criteria are individuals who conduct all their work remotely without a physical office location, including those working directly under a company, through agencies, or as freelancers (this includes those engaged in project-based, contractual or seasonal work). The geographical focus was specifically those residing in Bacolod City to provide insights into the employment dynamics within this locality. Participants must be of legal age (18 years or older) and have at least one year of experience working in a fully remote setting. Participants may have a single employer or multiple employers, as long as their remote work is for an employer based overseas or outside the Philippines. Participants must either work on a full-time basis (at least 35-40 hours per week) or maintain a workload equivalent to full-time employment (e.g. multiple part-time roles totaling at least 35-40 hours per week), whether following a fixed or flexible work schedule.

Individuals that are excluded from the study include those that are residing outside Bacolod City and are under the legal age of 18 years. Those who are employed under hybrid setups that entail partial on-site attendance with offices located within Bacolod City are also excluded (e.g. BPOs, Agencies with a local office). Individuals who are only working a single part-time role (less than 35-40 hours per week), and those who use remote work as a supplementary source of income alongside non-remote roles are not eligible. Individuals whose employers are primarily based in the Philippines or are local entities are also excluded from the study.

Several limitations were encountered during the study. In the absence of an official registry of remote workers in the city, referral-based recruitment may have introduced selection bias and limited transferability; this was addressed through maximum variation sampling and data saturation. The sample consisted of eight female and two male participants, which may influence the range of perspectives represented. Overall, efforts were made to adhere strictly to ethical guidelines throughout the research process to maintain the integrity and reliability of the study. These limitations may influence the transferability of findings, as they reflect the specific context, participant composition, and practical conditions of this study.

Review of Related Literature

This section examines the conceptual and research literature related to the study which are presented thematically.

Remote Work Models and Occupational Entry Points. In studies on remote work, several distinct classifications of employees and employment terms are frequently observed. These often revolve around key terms such as "fully remote," "hybrid," and "onsite," among others. To understand these, it would be beneficial to examine the broader context of work arrangements and employment types set by employers and organizations. Remote work arrangements, such as on-site, fully remote or hybrid setups, can be seen as defining the location and flexibility of work, while employment types—such as permanent, agency, or direct contracts—outline the legal and organizational structure of the worker's engagement.

Remote work, according to Marcus (2022), refers to a type of work performed by knowledge workers in locations other than their employer's premises. Knowledge workers are individuals whose jobs involve handling information, analysis, and other digital or intellectual tasks that can be carried out using a computer. In contrast, hybrid work models involve delegating a portion of the work week to reporting at the office, with the rest allocated to working from home. Nonetheless, not all jobs are suitable to be translated into remote work however due to recent technological advances, much more are feasible than before the pandemic.

Cultural Values and the Meaning of Remote Work. Remote work often involves collaboration with teams from different parts of the world, exposing individuals to work values and practices that may differ from local norms. In this context, we can examine how specific Filipino values resonate with or conflict with the dynamics of remote work, using the lens of Filipino psychology. By utilizing concepts from Sikolohiyang Pilipino, as discussed by Enriquez, Pe-Pua, and Protacio-Marcelino (2000), alongside existing studies on competencies of remote work we can identify those that either align or present challenges.

A qualitative study by Henke, Jones & O'Neill (2022) of remote work adaptation explored factors that contributed to success or challenges in remote work, key skills and behaviors that supported its adaptation and organizational support elements related to remote work success. Through interviews among employees across different roles, these skills are technological literacy, communication skills, work ethic and self management, time management and routine and leadership skills for virtual teams were listed as competencies that supported successful remote work transitions.

Some of these competencies and skills can be linked to Filipino cultural traits. We can relate this to the concept of *Kapwa* (shared identity), which emphasizes the interconnectedness and relational aspect of individuals within a community. *Kapwa* has two categories: the *Ibang-Tao* (outsider) and the *Hindi-Ibang-Tao* ("one-of-us"). Depending on how one views their colleagues or clients, both categories provide avenues for positive interactions and rapport-building. By viewing colleagues and clients as part of *Kapwa*, Filipino remote workers can cultivate richer relationships in the workplace. It can also extend into the skill of communication, fostering good communication for strong relationships. However, it can also translate into using communication to express an idea, request, or concern in a way that maintains harmony. The Filipino tendency for indirect communication, though, can sometimes hinder these efforts. In this, Filipinos are described as more attuned to non-verbal cues and *pakikiramdam* (shared inner perception). Filipinos are said to have "concern for the feelings of others, being truthful but not at the expense of hurting others' feelings" (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). Given that remote communication doesn't allow for the same non-verbal cues as face-to-face interactions, it may be difficult for Filipinos to effectively communicate.

Hiya, another Filipino value that refers to shame or a sense of propriety, can also hinder relationships and communication (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). This is similar to the indirect communication style and can be misinterpreted when working with individuals who may not be familiar with Filipino values. However *hiya* can also serve as a motivator for maintaining high personal standards in work ethic and self-management, as individuals may strive to avoid embarrassment or appearing incompetent in front of others. While Filipino

workers can be competent and assume leadership roles in the workplace, the Filipino value of *hiya* (shame) can also be a hindrance. However, leadership can be positively influenced by the Filipino value of *pakikisama*, which refers to smooth interpersonal relations or conformity. This value, in conjunction with *kapwa* (shared identity), can foster collaborative efforts and strengthen team dynamics.

While these Filipino values were not explicitly developed for Filipino-to-Filipino relationships (especially those referring to communities), they are still significant as Filipino remote workers relate to their coworkers, supervisors, and employers. Understanding these values can help navigate cultural nuances in remote work settings and foster more effective collaboration, communication, and overall work performance.

Human Resource Management in Remote Work Contexts. Human resources apply psychological principles across all fields of work. Given the unique nature of remote work, traditional HR functions may require adaptation. This section explores the challenges HR professionals face in managing remote work.

Haque (2023), in a study on the impact of remote work on HR practices, reveals that HR professionals face multiple challenges in managing remote employees. These challenges include difficulties in engaging employees, effectively managing performance, and fostering collaboration within teams.

Popovici and Popovici (2020, as cited in Haque, 2023) highlight that one of the key challenges in managing remote workers is that they may experience personal and professional difficulties, which can negatively impact organizations. For example, remote employees may struggle with gaining exposure and accessing job opportunities or training programs. Haque also identifies specific HR challenges, stating that “monitoring employee engagement and performance, maintaining team cohesion, and addressing isolation” are critical concerns in remote work environments.

Furthermore, a study by Charalampous et al. (2024) examined the negative effects in remote work such as feelings of isolation, boredom, anger, frustration and stress. With these negative effects often stemming from limited social interaction from the nature of remote work.

For challenges such as these, Haque (2023) suggests remote work demands “innovative approaches” including “asynchronous communication, transparent documentation, and results oriented evaluation in human resource management.” These include well-being initiatives, and policies that focus on fostering inclusivity. He does note however that those with global talent pools need “robust technological infrastructure and security”. With this, HR practitioners can embrace the advantages of remote work while mitigating its negative effects.

Legal and Policy Frameworks for Remote Work. As of 2024, there has been one notable law related to remote work in the Philippines: Republic Act No. 11165, also known as the Telecommuting Act. Enacted on December 20, 2018, this law institutionalizes telecommuting or remote work, defined as working from an alternative location utilizing telecommunications and computer technology (Republic of the Philippines, 2018). It recognizes remote work as an alternative work arrangement for employees in the private sector. According to the law, employers may voluntarily offer remote work programs, provided they comply with minimum labor standards, such as compensable work hours, rest days, leave entitlements, and fair

treatment. This ensures that employees working remotely are granted the same privileges as on-site workers, covering equal pay, benefits, workload, training opportunities, and performance evaluations. Considering the remote work setup, employers are required to prevent employee isolation through regular interaction and ensure that employees have adequate access to company information. Additionally, the Telecommuting Act mandates the protection of data in line with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. The National Privacy Commission (NPC) states that the Data Privacy Act seeks to: “(1) protect the privacy of individuals while ensuring the free flow of information to promote innovation and growth; (2) regulate the collection, recording, organization, storage, updating or modification, retrieval, consultation, use, consolidation, blocking, erasure, or destruction of personal data; and (3) ensure that the Philippines complies with international standards set for data protection through the National Privacy Commission (NPC)”.

The Telecommuting law includes provisions for grievance resolution, implementation guidelines and compliance monitoring as well. The law had introduced a three-year pilot program to assess telecommuting practices as overseen by the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) to guide future policies. As of 2022, the law has been revised after consultations with labor and employer representatives, clarifying telecommuting policies and ensuring WFH employees receive the same rights and benefits as on-site workers. The order adds that remote work hours count as regular work hours and that telecommuting arrangements must meet minimum labor standards. DOLE encourages employers and employees to mutually adopt telecommuting programs to support economic recovery while maintaining fair labor practices.

There are, however, limitations to this law, as it only applies to employees in the Philippine private sector and does not extend to those employed by foreign companies. Remote workers employed through an agency registered in the Philippines may be covered under its provisions. On the other hand, remote workers engaged on a freelance, seasonal or contractual basis with a foreign employer may need to manage their own bureaucratic requirements and taxes, which excludes them from the standard employee benefits provided by local entities. These benefits might include government-mandated benefits such as Service Incentive Leaves (SIL), special leaves (e.g., maternity, paternity, solo parent, women's, Violence Against Women and Children [VAWC] leaves), subsidized payments for government-run benefits programs like Social Security System (SSS), PhilHealth, Pag-IBIG (for health insurance benefits, personal loans, or retirement income), and other compensation such as 13th Month Pay, night shift or differential pay, and holiday pay (DOLE, 2023).

Benefits and Opportunities of Remote Work. This section delves deeper into the personal benefits for remote workers themselves, supported by studies and insights. Although most research focuses on the pandemic period, the insights gained are still applicable to understanding remote work in its current and future contexts.

Sharma (2024) conducted a mixed-methods study exploring the theme of remote work and psychological well-being, with a focus on employee well-being, job satisfaction, and work-life balance. The study utilized a sample of remote workers from various industries and employed both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. The survey assessed aspects such as perceived stress levels, job satisfaction, work-life balance, and overall psychological

well-being. The interviews further explored participants' experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms. The results revealed positive outcomes, such as increased job satisfaction, improved work-life balance, and enhanced employee well-being.

Charalampous et al. (2022) explored the impact of remote work on employees' well-being. The study found that remote working appeared to have a positive effect on emotions with participants reported feeling satisfied with achieving a better balance between work and non-working life. Additionally, they valued the reduced need for commuting, which was often seen as stressful. To add variation to their work routine, individuals sometimes worked in different locations. Participants also believed that remote work could alleviate emotional exhaustion, as their workspaces provided greater control over task completion and reduced distractions typically found in an office environment. Recovery and recuperation from work were facilitated by the ability to manage personal life commitments more easily, and the flexibility of remote work helped release tension and decrease emotional exhaustion.

The study also highlighted the positive physical outcomes of remote work, with participants reporting a healthier lifestyle due to the increased availability of opportunities for exercise during breaks. Additionally, being at home allowed access to better-quality food, contributing to a healthier overall diet. Regarding employee weariness, individuals believed that working from home could improve concentration levels. Additionally, individuals working remotely reported experiencing greater autonomy in areas such as work location, task execution, and prioritization, with the added benefit of flexible working hours. The study also found it beneficial for individuals to possess self-discipline, self-motivation, and a strong focus on task completion. Good communication skills and awareness of the most efficient channels (especially through electronic communication) were also crucial, as was confidence in resolving work-related issues and a strong sense of self-awareness and understanding.

Challenges and Risks in Remote Work. While remote work offers numerous benefits, it also presents unique challenges that can impact workers personally and professionally. This section explores these challenges in depth, supported by studies and observations from various contexts. Challenges are also inevitable in the remote work environment.

In the same study by Sharma (2024), remote workers typically experienced negative outcomes such as social isolation, communication barriers, and difficulties in maintaining work-life boundaries. In the study by Champolous (2024), it was revealed that individuals working remotely were not exempt from experiencing negative emotions. These included feelings of isolation, boredom, and sadness due to limited social interaction. Additionally, feelings of anger, frustration, and stress were encountered, especially when dealing with technology-related issues. Some participants also reported experiencing guilt, fearing that higher-ups or coworkers might perceive them as "slacking" at times. Aside from the psychological negative effects experienced by remote workers, the study also highlighted negative psychosomatic issues, such as musculoskeletal complaints and slouching. The sedentary lifestyle and absence of breaks, such as being too focused on work to take breaks or mealtimes, or lacking social cues from coworkers to "take a break", also negatively impacted their psychosomatic well-being. Another physical factor that had negative effects related to employee workstations and ergonomics, as there was a need for appropriate equipment or setup, such as desks and chairs.

Individuals explained that they also experienced new forms of e-distractions. These included emails, phone calls, and instant messages, requiring them to consciously log off and disconnect to minimize distractions. Findings also reveal that some aspects of remote work make it more challenging for individuals to detach from work. Although communication was easily facilitated online in the remote work setting, individuals believed that face-to-face interactions were difficult to replace, and that these experiences were richer than communicating electronically. Another theme explored in the study related to individuals' attitudes toward career progression. In this context, they felt that career opportunities and training were not as easily accessible in a remote setting compared to an in-office environment.

Support Systems and Communities in Remote Work. With isolation being one of the challenges of remote work, it is important to explore the social support, communities, and relational aspects of remote workers. Investigating the importance, structure, and sources of such support, as well as its impact on other aspects of remote work, is vital.

A study by Prasad & Satyaprasad (2024) examined the relationship between remote working and work-life balance with mediating and moderating effects of social support on work-life balance. The results of the study highlight that work-life balance improves significantly when social support is strong. Remote workers often experience feelings of isolation and disconnection from colleagues, supervisors, and lacking support from family and friends outside of work. Support from both colleagues and family plays a crucial role in mitigating these challenges and enhancing the positive effects of remote work on achieving a better balance between personal and professional life.

Remote Work in the Philippine Economic Context. Remote work should also be considered within the context of the Philippine local economy. A study by Hanbal and Palaoag (2025) reveals that many Filipinos, in particular, choose to enter the remote work market due to its comparatively higher compensation, relative to what local roles in the Philippines offer.

However, it is worth noting that no official government records or updated statistics on individuals currently employed in remote work, particularly distinguishing those employed locally but remotely versus those employed by foreign employers. A closest available record, however, is the labor survey by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) titled *2021/2022 Integrated Survey on Labor and Employment*. The survey, which covers formal establishments employing at least 20 workers in the Philippines, reported that approximately 6 out of every 100 workers were in an alternative work arrangement (AWA), with a total of 300,088 individuals recorded for that year. However, AWAs do not only encompass work-from-home or telecommuting, but also other types of arrangements. The PSA noted that the top three most adopted types of AWA among workers were telecommuting or work-from-home (70.7%), hybrid setup (10.0%), and reduction of workdays (6.5%). While this is useful information and provides some insight, it may not fully capture the scope of remote work, as it is limited to establishments or companies within the Philippines.

In addition, the Philippines was ranked the 7th fastest-growing remote work hub worldwide according to Nomad List, a work-and-travel platform that tracks global cities based on remote worker activity (Presidential Communications Office, 2023). Over a five-year period (2018–2022), the Philippines experienced a +78% increase, reinforcing its appeal as a remote

work destination. Nomad List tracks the best global cities for remote work, analyzing data on cost of living, safety, infrastructure, and overall workability. It gathers numbers based on “check-ins” made by its members, remote workers logging in their locations while working in different cities worldwide. While these numbers do not distinguish between Filipino and non-Filipino remote workers, they indicate that the Philippines is becoming an increasingly attractive destination for remote professionals and digital nomads.

Emerging Trends in Remote Work. As remote work continues to evolve, research on the subject remains ongoing, with many concepts yet to be fully established in academic literature. However, emerging trends offer valuable insights into the future of remote work, highlighting shifts in workplace dynamics, technological advancements, and evolving HR strategies.

Outsourcing, while not exclusive to remote work, is becoming an increasingly prominent trend in the field. Marketed as a way to hire workers at lower labor costs without sacrificing productivity, Liutak et al. (2024) refer to this as “offshore outsourcing.” The authors note that countries such as the Philippines, alongside India, China, Eastern Europe, and Latin America, are key destinations for outsourcing in areas like IT, data processing, and financial services. Given this context, offshore outsourcing often takes the form of remote work for employees in countries like the Philippines.

Another emerging trend is the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into remote work. AI represents a transformative technological development, raising concerns about potential job displacement as its capabilities advance. Research highlights both the risks and opportunities associated with AI. Lilly (2023) suggests that AI could revolutionize remote work management by automating tasks, enhancing communication, and providing data-driven insights. However, it also presents challenges such as ethical concerns, data privacy and reducing human interaction.

Given the challenges HR faces in managing remote work, there are future trends likely to focus on addressing these issues more effectively as well. Haque (2023) explores the evolving role of HR in remote work. He emphasizes that as workplaces become increasingly decentralized, HR will play a pivotal role in shaping this dynamic landscape. With the unique challenges of remote work, HR professionals must refine their policies to strike a balance between flexibility and accountability while accommodating diverse work arrangements. Traditional HR responsibilities, such as onboarding, training, and talent acquisition, will undergo digital transformation, necessitating greater technological proficiency among HR professionals. Additionally, HR must take the lead in combating the negative effects of remote work, such as isolation and burnout, by implementing initiatives that foster employee well-being and engagement. Haque also highlights the importance of mental health support and strengthening workplace connections in a remote setting. Furthermore, he also acknowledges the role of AI in enhancing HR functions, suggesting that AI can provide deeper insights into remote work dynamics, optimize resource allocation, and improve employee engagement. He also underscores the critical need for robust cybersecurity measures to protect remote employees and organizational data. Lastly, Haque stresses that HR should focus on fostering an inclusive remote work culture, ensuring that employees have equitable access to growth opportunities, career advancement, and a strong sense of belonging within the company.

Synthesis. While existing literature extensively discusses the impact of remote work

during the pandemic, it largely focuses on Western contexts, leaving significant gaps in understanding the experiences of non-Western populations, particularly in the Philippines. Most studies emphasize quantitative measures of job satisfaction, productivity, and work-life balance, often neglecting qualitative insights that could provide a deeper understanding of the unique challenges and coping strategies employed by Filipino remote workers. This highlights the need for research that encompasses the cultural, economic, and social factors influencing remote work experiences in the Philippines. By employing a qualitative approach, this study aims to fill these gaps by exploring the employment experience of Filipino remote workers, exploring aspects such as work sustainability, psychological well-being, and social support systems.

II. Methods

This section outlines the components of the study related to the methodologies employed, including research design, participants, research instruments, data gathering procedures, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically utilizing a phenomenological approach. Creswell (as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018) defines phenomenology as a study that reports the “common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon.” In this study, the experience of remote work employment served as the central phenomenon to be explored and understood within its broader social and professional context. Using in-depth interviews with individuals who have directly experienced the phenomenon, the study was able to elicit rich, detailed responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, an interview guide was developed and reviewed by experts in the field prior to data collection.

Participants

Participants of this study consisted of remote workers residing in Bacolod City. Purposive sampling and referral sampling was utilized to recruit participants. The inclusion criteria for participants required that they are residents of Bacolod City, of legal age (18 years or older) and have at least one year of experience of remote work. They conduct all their work remotely without a physical office location, including those working directly under a company, through agencies, or as freelancers. Participants have a single employer or multiple employers, given their remote work is for an employer based overseas or outside the Philippines. Additionally, they either work on a full-time basis or maintain a workload equivalent to full-time employment, whether following a standard 8-hour shift or a flexible work schedule.

The study employed data saturation to ensure exhaustive themes are derived from the findings. Selection of participants was varied based on certain key characteristics that may allow comparison of responses. These characteristics include employment type (agency and/or direct employment), employment status (number of part-time roles and/or number of full-time roles), sex (2 males and 8 females), and family status (single, partnered and partnered with children). This variation allows for a richer understanding of the phenomenon through variations in remote work experience. A final sample of 10 participants was determined as data saturation was reached and no new themes emerged in data collection.

Table 1. Participant Summary Table

Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Family Status	Employment Type	Employment Status	Industry Role	Years of Experience
Bebe	29	Female	Partnered, with Children	Direct Employment & Agency	2 Part time	Executive Assistant & Social Media Manager	4
Jackie	50	Female	Partnered, with Children	Agency	1 Full time	Account Manager	4
Blossom	31	Female	Married, with Children	Direct Employment	2 Full time	Travel Advisor & Housing Specialist	2
Cuddy	24	Female	Single	Direct Employment	1 Full time	Recruitment Specialist & Data Engineer	2
MajessticVA	31	Female	Married, with Children	Direct Employment	1 Full time, 1 part time	Admin Assistant, Customer Service Representative	4
Kale	30	Male	Married, with Children	Agency	1 Full time	Inside Sales Agent	6
Jose	48	Male	Single	Direct Employment	1 Full time	Customer Experience Manager & Relationship Coach	12
Three	23	Female	Single	Agency	1 Full time	Executive Assistant	5
Minky	26	Female	Single	Direct Employment	1 Full time	Real Estate Property Administrator Assistant	4
Dan	37	Male	Single	Agency	1 Full time	LNT Specialist	5

Participants were excluded if they do not reside in Bacolod City and are under the legal age of 18 years. Those who are employed under hybrid setups that entail partial on-site

attendance with offices located within Bacolod City are also excluded (e.g. BPOs, Agencies with a local office). Individuals who are only working part-time for a single employer, and those who use remote work as a supplementary source of income alongside non-remote roles are not eligible. Individuals with employers in the Philippines or a local entity are also excluded from the study.

Instrument

The primary instrument for data collection in this study is an in-depth interview guide, designed to explore the employment experience of remote workers. The guide consists of open-ended questions that align with the study's research objectives, encouraging participants to provide detailed narratives about their motivations, work sustainability, work-life balance, quality of life, and challenges.

Three invited experts reviewed and validated the guide for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured, conversational format, allowing participants to freely express their thoughts while ensuring consistency across responses. The overarching question guiding the discussion was: "*How would you describe your experience as a remote worker?*". Probing questions were also included such as "*What value or benefits do you gain from remote work?*", "*How has remote work influenced your quality of life?*" and "*What challenges do you encounter in your work, and how do you deal with them?*". Follow-up questions served as flexible guides, with wording and timing adjusted as needed during the interviews.

Data-Gathering Procedures

The data-gathering process involved several steps to ensure a structured and ethical approach to collecting participants' experiences. Participants were recruited through purposive and referral or snowball sampling. A few initial participants were recruited from the researcher's professional and academic networks (e.g., former colleagues or remote work communities), provided they met the study's inclusion criteria and participated voluntarily. This was also done through the use of a digital poster containing a QR code to the screening form that was circulated through social media platforms (Facebook and LinkedIn). Additionally, snowball sampling was employed, wherein initial contacts and participants referred other potential participants who met the study's inclusion criteria. In some cases, individuals who did not qualify for participation also referred eligible remote workers from their networks.

The final sample consisted of 10 participants. Two participants responded directly to an online call for participants posted by the researcher. Four participants were recruited through referrals—two from a participant who met the study's criteria and two from an individual who expressed interest but did not qualify. The remaining four participants were recruited through word-of-mouth connections within the researcher's professional and personal networks. A total of 10 participants were recruited, which was sufficient to achieve data saturation.

Participants were first invited to complete a Google Form that serves as an initial screening tool. Consequently those who qualified were contacted. Individuals who did not meet the inclusion criteria were thanked for their interest, informed of their ineligibility, and therefore excluded from the study. Once participants were confirmed to meet the inclusion criteria, they had received a formal invitation to participate outlining the study's purpose, procedures, and

ethical considerations. The invitation was sent via email and included an informed consent form. Afterwards, the researcher had communicated with the participants regarding the preferred schedules for and their venue preferences for the interview.

Interviews were primarily conducted in person. Participants were given an option to select their preferred location that ensured privacy, confidentiality, and comfort. Each participant was scheduled for 1 to 2 interviews, with each interview expected to last between 45 minutes to one hour. With the participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate transcription and analysis. A total of 9 participants necessitated a single interview while 1 participant had necessitated 2 interview sessions.

In the first interview, the researcher oriented the participant and, as a brief recall of what was outlined in the informed consent, explained the study's objectives, confidentiality measures, and participants' rights. Afterward, the formal interview will commence, focusing on the main questions outlined in the interview guide.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated into English manually by the researcher. Hiligaynon, Tagalog and English were the languages used by the participants and these were translated into conversational English. Manual transcription and translation were employed to ensure that the nuances, contextual meaning, and culturally specific expressions in participants' responses were accurately captured, which might not have been fully preserved by automated transcription or translation tools.

After the completion of transcription and translation, participants were given the opportunity to review their responses through the completed transcript. This was sent alongside the transcript validation form. A follow-up meeting was scheduled for the signing of the form in person and the provision of the tokens. To express gratitude for their participation, the researcher provided participants with a token of appreciation during the last meeting.

To ensure confidentiality and ethical handling of data, all recorded interviews, transcripts, and related documents were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. Data will be retained for a period of 6 months following the publication of the study, as recommended by ethical research guidelines, to allow for verification if needed. After this period, all electronic files will be permanently deleted, and any physical documents will be securely shredded to protect participants' privacy.

Data Analysis

This study utilized Creswell's (Creswell & Poth, 2018) qualitative data analysis approach, following the six steps for qualitative analysis. This involves "organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation of them". Interview recordings were first transcribed verbatim and observation notes were prepared for analysis. Following this, the researcher conducted multiple read-throughs of the transcripts alongside observation notes to assess depth, credibility as well as familiarity with the data. The data was then coded independently by the researcher and an independent coder using in-vivo coding, which facilitated comparison across coders and focused on significant statements related to participants' experiences of remote work. Codes were consolidated into a single coding sheet and reviewed through a consensus meeting, during which the final codebook was agreed upon. Codes were first organized and then gradually clustered into broader categories, from which the

final themes and subthemes were derived. Themes were presented narratively using rich, thick descriptions supported by verbatim excerpts, illustrating how individual experiences converged into shared meanings. And lastly, interpretation of the findings involved examining themes in relation to existing literature and studies, guided by career development theories and Filipino psychology concepts.

To establish trustworthiness, this study applied Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was ensured through prolonged engagement and persistent observation with the participants. Interviews averaged 59.24 minutes per session and continued until participants had fully responded to all researcher's questions and shared any additional experiences they wished to discuss. If participants provided additional information after the interview, this was recorded with their consent and further explored until no new information emerged. Additionally, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for accurate and detailed data collection. Verbal and non-verbal cues, observations, and documents that participants were willing to share during the interviews aided in cross-validation, through interview data, observation notes and others that may be of use.

Participants also had the opportunity to review a transcript of the interview and fill-out a transcript validation form to clarify any misunderstandings or to add additional information. Furthermore, the results with the research adviser through peer debriefing to ensure reflexivity and minimize researcher bias.

Dependability and confirmability were addressed through the maintenance of an audit trail, thorough documentation of the research process and a reflective journal. As part of this audit trail, an independent coder with a master's degree in psychology and training in qualitative phenomenological research was engaged to conduct first-cycle coding. Following the completion of first-cycle coding, both sets of codes were compiled by the researcher into a consolidated online spreadsheet accessible to both coders. The finalized code list was subsequently subjected to second-cycle coding, and the remaining stages of analysis were carried out by the researcher. The research process had been thoroughly documented, including the steps for data collection, analysis, and decision-making through an audit trail. Confirmability was upheld by maintaining awareness of the researcher's own biases or assumptions that may influence data collection and analysis through a reflective journal, which documented the researcher's thoughts, decisions, and reflections throughout the research process.

For transferability, the researcher provides a detailed description of the research context, participants, and findings (e.g. physical observations of the participant and his or her environment, social and cultural contexts etc., detailed participant profiles such as demographics, experiences, perspectives and beliefs). The findings are presented clearly to ensure they are consistent, stable, and replicable.

Ethical Considerations

This research proposal has been granted ethical clearance by the USLS Research Ethics Review Committee (RERC). Additionally, ethical principles had been strictly adhered to by the researcher throughout the process. This included obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Participants have

signed informed consent forms that outlined the purpose of the study, procedures involved, potential risks and benefits, and their rights as participants. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without facing any consequences.

To maintain confidentiality, all data collected was encrypted, securely stored and only accessible to the researcher. Data will be deleted after 6 months following the publication of the study. No identifying information is included in any reports or publications, and pseudonyms are used to protect participants' identities. Given that participants may not be permitted to disclose their current employers, the researcher ensures the anonymity of the companies mentioned during the discussions. Additionally, measures will be implemented to minimize potential harm or discomfort to participants during the data collection process. While no emotional distress arose during the data-gathering process, participants were still informed that psychological support was available should they need it. Referral pathways to licensed mental health professionals or counseling services were prepared, including coordination with university-based psychological services, independent mental health practitioners, or crisis helplines, depending on the participant's needs and preferences.

Regarding the benefits of participation, while no monetary remuneration was provided, participants received a small token of appreciation for their involvement. Psychological benefits also included the opportunity to share their experiences, which may help other remote workers and contribute to the overall welfare of this community. Participants may have gained personal insights through their involvement in the study, which can extend beyond tangible benefits.

III. Results and Discussions

This section presents the results and discussion of the study, guided by Creswell and Poth's (2018) qualitative data analysis approach. The analysis produced six themes that capture the experiences of participants as remote workers.

Theme 1. A Leap of Faith Into an Unfamiliar Landscape

This theme describes participants' transitions into remote work, framing their entry as an alluring yet uncertain landscape. Guided by support and encouragement from social connections or by genuine personal curiosity, participants weighed financial prospects, growth opportunities, and perceived local-remote pay gaps as they navigated this transition. This theme comprises three subthemes: (1) Transitioning to Remote Careers from BPO and Diverse Backgrounds, (2) Entering an Opaque Market Guided by Social Support, and (3) Pursuing Financial and Career Growth.

1.1. Transitioning to Remote Careers from BPO and Diverse Backgrounds. While coming from diverse academic backgrounds, shared experiences had emerged: pursuing courses they did not truly or initially desire, often pushed by practical considerations or family expectations, and several were not able to complete their college education. These experiences shaped their personal values, work ethic, and future goals, many of which continue to influence their work today. Some participants were able to leverage their educational background in the industries they entered within remote work, aligning their studies with relevant fields such as nursing, business, or psychology.

However, a common background for many is previous work in local BPO or call-center agencies. Participants spent several years in this industry with some even advancing to higher-

level roles such as trainer or manager. However, participants often described their BPO experience in a negative light, citing high work pressure, strict supervisory protocols, long hours, late-night shifts, and frequent interactions with irate customers. Despite these, some participants were still hesitant to leave the BPO industry for the career security it offered. Experiences in the BPO sector served as a reference point during their transition to remote work, highlighting both the risks of the industry and the benefits of leaving a stressful, rigid environment. Conversely, participants carried over key takeaways from their BPO experience into their current remote roles, including relevant skills, competencies, industry tools, and practical adaptations such as handling graveyard shifts, engaging in self-training, and managing difficult clients. While previous academic and employment experiences can support entry into remote work, many participants noted that personality, drive, attitude, and practical experience are often prioritized over formal qualifications, certifications, or awards, except in specialized industries.

1.2. Entering an Opaque Market Guided by Social Support. The transition to remote work was not met with absolute certainty or immediate acceptance. For some participants, entering this unfamiliar and intimidating landscape was supported by influences outside themselves. Participants drew inspiration and support from peers and family members, particularly those already in remote work or coming from similar backgrounds. Some received direct assistance, such as help writing applications or referrals to their first remote jobs. Family and peers became a key source of encouragement, often highlighting the opportunities for higher earnings and motivating participants to pursue remote work. This illustrates that remote work roles and companies are often opaque to newcomers, making personal networks and referrals essential for accessing reliable information about online opportunities.

1.3. Pursuing Potential Financial and Career Growth. Compensation, particularly the significantly higher pay compared to local employment, emerges as one of the current, most salient advantages of remote work for participants. In the previous subtheme, peers and family members often encouraged participants to try remote work for this reason, making higher earnings a key driving force in their decision to pursue opportunities.

The perception of higher compensation was often contrasted with previous local salaries. Participants highlighted the clear disparity between local jobs and remote roles from personal experiences. They noted, for example, that similar tasks in BPO industries were compensated less, despite requiring comparable or greater effort to be physically present in an office. Remote work offered opportunities not only for financial growth but also for personal and career development. Some participants were motivated by genuine curiosity and a desire to experience the industry and test their abilities, while others saw it as a chance to grow professionally, noting that their previous workplaces would not have allowed such development. Some participants characterized this experience as “taking risks.”

Theme 2. A Self-Defined, Blended, Multi-Role Identity

This theme illustrates how years of remote work, combined with diverse experiences across companies and clients and a commitment to self-learning and training, have shaped a self-defined identity among remote workers. This theme comprises of five subthemes: (1) Wearing Many Hats in a Dynamic Profession, (2) Defining One’s Own Core Competencies, (3)

Maximizing & Optimizing Roles Across Work and Life, (4) Curating the Social Self Through Intentional Relationships and (5) Aligning a Remote Career with the Self and Sustainability.

2.1. *Wearing Many Hats in a Boundless Profession.* A very distinct pattern emerged among participants: they no longer viewed themselves through a single title, career, or profession. For some, titles were simply absent; others shared that their clients chose not to assign formal titles at all. This shift in perspective was further supported by the shared experience that remote workers “wear many hats. They routinely handle multiple, unrelated tasks with some describing themselves as “all-around”. Some participants moved between bookkeeping, sales, customer service, social media management, content creation, administrative work, and more. Several also experienced their roles evolving over time, as clients recognized their potential and reassigned them to new areas where their skills could be applied. With supportive bosses or clients, participants felt encouraged to try new tasks, explore additional projects, and expand their competencies. Some even transitioned into or were promoted to supervisory or higher-level roles: managing others, training colleagues, or acting as consultants, despite not carrying formal managerial titles. This multi-role nature did not only apply to participants themselves; they observed that even their supervisors or HR personnel also handled multiple functions in remote workplaces.

2.2. *Defining One’s Own Core Competencies.* Participants share core competencies they have learned that define what makes a remote worker successful—a set of self-defined standards or ‘shoulds’ that reflect both personal and professional work ethic. For many participants, successful remote work is built primarily on strong soft skills, which form the foundation of a professional work ethic. These include integrity, assurance, transparency, organization, consistency, accountability, self-discipline, time management, autonomy, agency, and attention to detail. Participants also highlighted soft skills especially important in remote work, such as adaptability, flexibility, continuous upskilling, speaking out, contributing ideas, effective communication, and proactivity. Hard or technical skills, such as being knowledgeable in specific areas, demonstrating efficiency, and completing tasks accurately and quickly, complement these soft skills. Participants emphasized that technical competence alone is insufficient and must be paired with strong soft skills to succeed and provide value in a remote work setting.

Being valuable to a client also entails speaking up and contributing ideas to the business. Some noted that a tendency among Filipino workers to remain quiet or show deference to foreign clients can undermine their ability to provide value and meaningful contributions. Participants also emphasized the importance of communication that is professional, effective, and dynamic. This includes resolving issues with clients, negotiating or compromising on deals, and ensuring that interactions are intentional and necessary, particularly in digital spaces, where teams can become disconnected without clear communication, and clients may not sense one’s presence.

Being a remote worker also requires autonomy and agency. Clients view participants as professionals in their trade and generally do not question their abilities. Given this, self-discipline, organization, and attentiveness are critical, as remote workers often operate without traditional supervision or structured oversight. For some, managing home responsibilities

alongside work makes organization essential, while for others, handling multiple clients simultaneously demands careful scheduling and prioritization.

Even with understanding and lenient clients, participants take personal responsibility through accountability, transparency, and frequent assurances. Participants entrusted with sensitive or confidential information take extra measures to ensure security and transparency, such as using time trackers, reporting tasks, or sending outputs to clients even when not required. Participants emphasized that being trusted and reliable is central to maintaining strong client relationships. Integrity, in this sense, includes ensuring clients never regret choosing them, knowing their worth, and sometimes embodying the client's broader values for the business. This professionalism also extends to respecting client needs, such as maintaining a reliable internet connection and having a dedicated workspace.

Participants also emphasize the need to be adaptable and flexible, reflecting the ever-evolving nature of remote work, market demands, competition, and technological changes. They stress constant upskilling, exploring new niches, staying ahead of emerging trends, and using online courses to expand their skills. Over time, participants acquire skills through hands-on experience and exploration, build a reputation that reflects their reliability and expertise, and become more adept at navigating challenges and setbacks. Being experienced in their role or settled in the VA world cannot be easily distinguished by tenure. Even participants with shorter tenures of around two years reported feeling experienced and already adapted to their roles, similar to participants with longer tenures.

2.3. Maximizing Roles Across Work and Life. Across the participants' narratives, a theme consistently emerges: remote workers rarely confine themselves to a single role. Their identity is not limited to "remote worker" alone: many simultaneously manage businesses, maintain side hustles, pursue other professional opportunities, and fulfill family roles such as parenting or supporting household responsibilities.

Many participants noted that their setups extend beyond a single full-time client or position. Some with full-time online jobs take on additional part-time work, while others engage with two full-time clients altogether. These arrangements reflect intentional planning and clear strategies that allow participants to sustain multiple roles. Participants describe carefully structuring their schedules and workflows, with some even using multiple computers at once to accommodate clients in overlapping time zones. Participants are also aware of the nuances surrounding moonlighting. While perspectives vary, several noted that taking on additional clients may not always be formally permitted, especially for those working under agencies or full-time contracts. Despite these complexities, participants consistently emphasized professionalism in managing multiple roles. They take deliberate steps to protect confidentiality and maintain quality across commitments.

Aside from those who already manage multiple clients, some participants expressed a desire to take on even more. For them, acquiring additional clients means expanding opportunities, broadening their professional horizons, and increasing financial stability. While many participants reported satisfaction in their current roles, they emphasized not wanting to limit themselves. This mindset is coupled with a more discerning approach in selecting potential clients based on job fit, time-zone compatibility, workload expectations, or alignment with their long-term goals. For others, however, the desire for more clients is not urgent, something 'nice

to have' but not essential, especially when weighed against job stability or the need to prioritize family time.

Participants also recognized that there is an optimal number of clients one can realistically manage. Several recounted experiences of overemployment—taking on more clients than they could reasonably handle. They described this period as financially lucrative, earning the highest income of their remote work career, yet accompanied by major drawbacks to their physical health, rest, and overall well-being. Participants view excessive multitasking as unhealthy and unsustainable, as some are not inclined to manage multiple clients or take on additional work, recognizing the limits of what is manageable over the long term.

Maximizing income streams and personal potential is not limited to remote work alone but extends to opportunities beyond it. Participants described engaging in various side hustles or additional income streams, including buying and selling products, selling pastries or coffee, operating mall-based ventures, marketing goods online, or assisting friends with their businesses. Many participants view entrepreneurship as a long-term pathway that could provide additional financial stability and growth alongside, or even beyond, their remote work roles. For others additional income streams come from skill-based pursuits, including part-time teaching, hosting events, vlogging, play-to-earn activities, and voice talent work. Participants shared maximizing downtime in their remote roles to complete these pursuits.

Financial obligations also motivate the pursuit of multiple clients and additional streams of income. Participants set specific income targets, strive for higher earnings, meet financial responsibilities, or build savings. For others, the motivation is personal, such as dissatisfaction with organizational changes or a desire for career growth through exploring new roles. For participants whose current workload still leaves pockets of free time, acquiring additional clients or doing side hustles becomes a way to maximize productivity.

Beyond their roles as remote workers, business owners, and multitasking professionals, participants emphasized being active and engaged members of their families. Many juggle household responsibilities, such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for children, alongside their professional duties.

2.4. Curating the Social Self Through Intentional Relationships. For many participants, remote work has shaped their social self—the ways they relate to others and manage social interactions. Participants described choosing carefully whom they engage with, preferring connections that encourage growth, share similar aspirations, offer guidance, or have comparable experiences. Participants expressed that community matters deeply, with the presence of a physical community carrying a distinct sense of grounding and significance. Several noted that remote work had gradually made them more introverted—not in terms of disliking social interactions, but in becoming more selective with their energy and interactions.

Family was also included in participants' selected social circles, with some choosing to spend more time with family and partners, whether going out together or simply sharing time outside of work. Participants also described friendships formed specifically within remote work contexts. Some relationships emerged from referrals or shared entry points into remote work, while others carried over from previous on-site jobs or were intentionally developed within virtual workplaces. Some participants were also able to influence or recruit friends to become Virtual Assistants like themselves, sometimes even bringing them directly into their companies.

Remote workers engaged with micro-communities such as VA coaches, church groups, former classmates, and other remote professionals for guidance, encouragement, and knowledge sharing. These intentional networks often involved meeting up, grabbing coffee, or checking in digitally to maintain closeness.

Despite these intentional efforts, participants recognized social limitations. Some described missing out on social events, feeling isolated, or experiencing “*FOMO*” (Fear of Missing Out) when schedules or physical distance prevented them from seeing friends. A sense of community was deeply desired but harder to maintain offline. As a result, socializing often became strategic—such as choosing less crowded times to go out or balancing work needs with personal connection.

2.5. Aligning a Remote Career with the Self and Sustainability. For many participants, remote work was not simply another job but a deliberate and meaningful career choice. Several described it as a calling, often framed as being in the right place at the right time. Participants reflected that earlier career paths they did not pursue, along with missed opportunities and setbacks, ultimately served as redirections that led them to remote work. Some intentionally chose remote work over traditional office roles or returned to it after exploring other employment options.

Across these accounts, participants described feeling valued and experiencing a strong sense of personal and professional fit. Participants shared that their current line of work often stems from finding their niche, which lies at the intersection of their skills, interests, and sense of purpose. For some, this niche relates to prior job experiences, industries they are familiar with, or areas where they have recognized their strengths. Conversely, some participants described the consequences of misalignment, noting that forcing oneself into roles or skill sets that did not align with their interests or professional goals often led to dissatisfaction or a sense of failure.

While a previous theme highlighted how remote workers often wear many hats and must be adaptable, there is a core to their practice, a mindset of knowing one’s strengths, cultivating self-awareness, and maintaining a goal-directed mindset. A clear sense of purpose drives their approach, guiding how they prioritize responsibilities, make decisions, and sustain their commitment over time. This self-awareness also extended to a realistic appraisal of remote work itself. Participants were not idealistic and recognized that remote work has its drawbacks. They noted that remote work is not always suitable as a long-term arrangement and involves more than simply working at a computer, as its viability depends on one’s setup, environment, and personal circumstances. Given these realities, remote work was viewed as a temporary opportunity to be used strategically. Participants shared taking advantage of higher earnings to invest for long-term financial goals, or using it as a stepping stone for future career paths. Despite viewing it as non-permanent, many expressed strong loyalty to their clients and a desire to remain in their roles in the meantime, intending to continue remote work for as long as they are needed or until personal milestones are reached. Some participants also planned to sustain remote work alongside other professional or business pursuits.

In addition to these, participants shared several sustaining factors that would allow them to continue remote work for the time being. These include appreciating additional company-provided benefits, retaining a predictable schedule to maintain current lifestyles and routines,

having a continued flexible work arrangement, minimal micromanagement, engaging and suitable types of work, and ensuring consistent financial stability.

In retrospect, participants generally report a positive experience with remote work, emphasizing its benefits across both their professional and personal lives. Many describe enjoying their work and expressing a strong intrinsic motivation to perform well—often working without excuses, maintaining minimal absences, and showing greater eagerness to work compared to previous jobs. Beyond workplace conditions, participants highlight that remote work has significantly improved their overall quality of life. Participants however, share that remote work is not suited to everyone. They share that one's experience with remote work can often depend on the choices they make. Some noted the importance of carefully selecting the right client, company, or agency. Finding a good fit involves aligning one's skills and line of business with the tasks at hand, thoroughly evaluating the company culture, and avoiding mindless applications. Participants also stressed the need to educate oneself on legitimate remote work opportunities, remain vigilant against scams, and proactively assess whether a position will support both professional growth and personal well-being.

Theme 3. A Non-Traditional and Multicultural Remote Work Ecosystem

Participants revealed a richer and more layered world working behind a screen: complex and unique work arrangements, interconnected relationships with clients, and coworkers each embedded in distinct structures, expectations, and ways of working. This theme comprises of four subthemes: (1) Adapting to Flexible and Unstructured Remote Work Arrangements, (2) Forming Personal & Reciprocal Relationships with Clients, (3) Experiencing Coworker Relationships as Supportive or Straining, and (4) Adjusting to a Global Remote Work Culture.

3.1. Adapting to Flexible and Unstructured Remote Work Arrangements. Remote work organizational and human resource systems were not standardized across participants, varying in structure and adaptability depending on the company or client. Participants also discussed their experiences with internal HR systems in comparison to more traditional HR structures.

One type of remote work arrangement experienced by participants was agency-mediated employment. An agency was described to act as a middleman between them and clients: securing roles, handling communication, and providing compensation and benefits, if available. For some, being in an agency also provides additional support from receiving formal training and resources, such as scripts and onboarding materials. Agency coaches or team leaders (TLs) provided regular check-ins and acted as mediators between coworkers and clients to address issues. Working through an agency typically involves a standard deduction from workers' pay. However, negative experiences involved issues with pay transparency, being treated unfairly, or when agencies prioritize client requests over employee well-being.

Participants also described experiences of going "*direct*" with a client. While there was no formal terminology among participants for this arrangement, going direct was a mutual decision between the client and the worker. Beginning with an agency, it often occurred when clients discovered the percentage an agency deducted from the worker's pay and encouraged them to transition to a direct working agreement. Participants acknowledged that going direct is generally prohibited under agency contracts, yet some described navigating around it. The

main advantage going direct was receiving one's full salary without agency cuts, while the primary drawback was reduced security.

When it comes to written or other forms of agreements, participants described theirs in diverse ways: some identified as offshore workers, contractual workers, independent contractors, freelancers, or service providers, while others referred to their setup as a form of partnership. While some described having formal contracts, such as yearly renewable agreements or performance-based contracts, others reported having none at all, resulting in a less stable work arrangement. For those connected with agencies, participants typically experienced changes in clients whenever a client decided to discontinue, offboard, or no longer retain their services.

Participants also commonly spoke about Human Resource systems in relation to hiring processes, employee engagement, and, most notably, employee benefits. Established HR departments were typically found in larger companies or agencies. In smaller organizations, HR responsibilities were often handled by a single person—sometimes someone not formally qualified—or, in some cases, there was no designated HR role at all. The hiring processes experienced also varied widely across companies. Some participants went through several interview rounds and longer waiting periods, while others encountered exercises that allowed them to showcase their skills. HR departments were generally open to providing various forms of support, ranging from technical assistance to responding to queries. Some participants highlighted structured engagement initiatives offered by the company, such as monthly surveys, coaching systems, or check-ins, which complemented their relational and non-technical support. Some observed changes within their company, including structural transitions, formalized performance expectations, and occasional onsite work required for certain roles.

One of the most commonly shared experiences among participants is that HR-provided employee benefits tend to be limited in remote work settings. Most participants—especially those classified as contractual workers—do not receive standard local benefits such as SSS, PhilHealth, Pag-IBIG, paid holidays, or HMO coverage unless they have been with the company for several years or receive specific allowances. Participants reported that they often pay for their own government benefits, taxes, and healthcare. However, some companies provide allowances for these expenses or include them in the compensation. Many noted this as a downside of remote work, particularly since certain benefits—especially those supporting family needs—would have been useful. For others, the extra allowances made this less of a concern.

3.2. Personal and Reciprocal Relationships with Clients. For participants, relationships and dynamics with employers or bosses, typically called 'clients', were generally viewed as distinct from their relationship with the company or agency, often understood beyond the usual lens of organizational structures or mandated forms of support. Working directly with clients allowed participants to develop *particular* interpersonal dynamics, sometimes described as *closer* or more *personal* relationships.

Reciprocity in these relationships were marked by clients showing generosity and respect, and by participants responding through reliability, honesty, and trustworthiness. Participants often felt valued and trusted by their clients, as evidenced by the recognition of their competence, contributions, and even potential. In concrete terms, several participants

reported being commended for their work, receiving promotions, salary increases, or support for professional growth, such as sponsorship for online courses.

Participants further described experiencing a deep level of trust from clients. They were frequently entrusted with major responsibilities, including managing entire operations or departments, training other staff, and performing tasks without their expertise being questioned. A commonly shared example involved clients entrusting them with highly sensitive information, such as credit card details. Relationships and dynamics were also characterized by mutual respect and open communication. Participants felt that bosses were consistently receptive to feedback, concerns, and even personal requests. Many described feeling genuinely involved in decision-making, noting that their suggestions were actually considered—an experience some contrasted with their previous non-remote or local work settings. Beyond formal interactions, they experienced casual and friendly exchanges with their clients. For some, this contrast was striking, especially compared to local workplace norms where superiors are often addressed with honorifics. Several shared that they initially had to adjust to the more informal and relaxed manner of addressing clients and supervisors in remote, often international, work environments.

Beyond these, some participants described developing a deep personal connection with their clients, who were often experienced as generous and supportive. These relationships occasionally extended beyond typical professional boundaries. Participants felt comfortable sharing personal challenges without fear of judgment, and many recounted instances where bosses or clients checked in on their well-being, health, or significant life events.

In many instances, participants experienced multiple positive qualities from their clients, such as generosity, understanding, and consideration. While others described more direct and substantial forms of generosity, clients would readily grant requests, including financial or material support such as salary advances during emergencies, as well as bonuses, gifts, or personal tokens offered on their own initiative.

In response to these positive experiences from clients and bosses, participants felt compelled to reciprocate by providing assurance, security, and transparency. They did this by reporting updates even when not strictly required, maintaining honesty, and avoiding any abuse of the rights and trust granted to them. While some participants described having a personal or closer relationship with their clients, they still viewed their bosses as bosses and remained aware of the power dynamics and authority involved. Participants also, in turn, expressed a strong sense of concern and regard for their bosses and clients. They wanted to help them, grow with them, and contribute to their long-term plans. Many felt aligned with the success of the client or company, deriving satisfaction from helping the business grow. For some participants, a common experience was feeling as though the client's company was "*theirs*," even if they were not formally part of the organization. In this way, participants' identification with the organization was not self-imposed alone but actively encouraged through relational leadership and mutual care.

Participants also clarified that these experiences were not uniformly shared with every superior, boss, or client. Nevertheless, the overarching pattern across accounts highlights that for many remote workers, relationships tended to be positive and reciprocal, characterized by mutual respect, trust, and a sense of shared commitment.

3.3. *Experiencing Coworker Relationships as Supportive or Straining.* Participants shared a range of narratives about interacting with, relating to, and forming relationships with their coworkers, as well as their preferences for how they engage with them. Many participants described positive experiences with their coworkers, emphasizing support, collaboration, and encouragement in their daily work. Some characterized the overall workplace dynamic as healthy, while others expressed that they genuinely enjoyed working with their colleagues.

Interactions with coworkers, however, can sometimes depend on the size of the company. A few participants from larger companies reported limited interactions with colleagues, citing busy workloads or the nature of their roles—such as in agencies where communication primarily revolves around client assignments. In these situations, factors like differences in age groups or having only a small circle of colleagues to interact with further constrained relationship-building. Closer relationships and meaningful dynamics are not automatically guaranteed in smaller companies, but often result from intentional efforts or facilitated opportunities.

Nonetheless, negative interactions and dynamics were also reported by some participants and reported taking away important lessons from these experiences such as maintaining a neutral stance in workplace relationships. Some recognized that such toxic behaviors are not unique to remote work, noting that there will always be individuals who harbor resentment or create conflict, similar to dynamics in a physical office setting.

There are still limits to such interactions and dynamics in a virtual environment. Some participants, however, noted that they preferred this arrangement, as it meant that others would only reach out to them when truly necessary

3.4. *Adjusting from Filipino Norms to a Global Remote Work Culture.* Participants highlighted several differences between remote work and traditional onsite work in the Philippines, particularly in terms of organizational culture and interpersonal dynamics. In comparison to onsite work, some participants recognized the value of having coworkers to bond with and the sense of “normalcy” that comes with structured hours and in-person interactions. Nonetheless, onsite work also presents notable drawbacks, including rigid schedules, long hours, and the demands of commuting.

Many participants also reflected on their experiences with Filipino workplace culture, whether from previous local offices or from interactions with Filipino coworkers and managers in remote work settings. For them, this often involved a comparison between Filipino and foreign work cultures, each presenting both advantages and challenges. Participants observed that Filipino workplaces are typically close-knit but also have a stronger hold on employees, which can translate into strictness, high demands, and rigid expectations. In some cases, participants remarked that local Filipino workplaces place significant value on educational background or degrees in hiring, and can prioritize clients over employees. Some participants described negative interpersonal experiences with coworkers as those who are Filipino coworkers. Other participants reflected on broader traits of Filipino workplace culture, such as noting how experiences working at local offices showcase a laid-back, social environment with multiple activities beyond actual work.

Despite some challenges, participants acknowledged that Filipino employees are generally hardworking, creative, and capable of generating ideas. However, they also noted a

tendency to hesitate in sharing ideas openly, and identified traits such as stubbornness or playfulness as characteristic of local work culture. These observations illustrate nuanced interpersonal dynamics, cultural expectations, and work practices in Filipino organizations or general Filipino workplace culture compared to foreign or remote work settings.

On the other hand, participants' remote work experiences also made them increasingly cognizant of the distinct characteristics of foreign work cultures present in global virtual workplaces. In contrast to Filipino work norms, foreign or Western work cultures were perceived to adopt a clear "work is work" approach—valuing output, efficiency, and individual responsibility. Participants observed that foreign bosses and clients tend to be well-structured and respectful of time and personal boundaries, often scheduling meetings weeks in advance and accommodating employees' personal commitments, while still maintaining a "time is gold" orientation. These environments were also described as more individualistic, emphasizing independence and personal accountability. Exposure to such multicultural work settings allowed participants to interact with various foreign colleagues and clients, which broadened their perspective and encouraged them to adopt and integrate some of these practices into their own work.

Theme 4: Unique Benefits, Burdens, and Adaptations of Remote Work

Every career has its advantages and drawbacks. For participants, remote work offers highly appealing benefits: convenience, comfort, autonomy, and the privilege of a simpler life centered on family, while also entailing personal, practical, ethical and systemic challenges. Some tradeoffs are minor, others more significant, but all require adaptations, making them an essential part of the remote work experience. This theme covers five subthemes, namely (1) Working on One's Own Terms and Environment, (2) Recognizing Physical and Mental Health Risks in Remote Settings, (3) Providing for and Keeping One's Family at Center, (4) Managing Higher Income and Lifestyle Inflation and (5) Confronting Systemic and Ethical Challenges.

4.1. Working on One's Own Terms and Environment. Participants experienced remote work as a convenient and low-stress lifestyle that supports autonomy and agency. One key convenience is the ability to work directly with minimal or no preparations, eliminating the burden of commuting and travel. They share saving time previously spent waking up early, navigating traffic, paying fares, or arranging for partners to drive them, as well as avoiding potential security concerns when traveling during night shifts. Some even noted that, unless required for meetings, there is no need to take a bath or dress up formally. Convenience also reflects how participants comfortably spent most of their time at home, sometimes hardly leaving their quarters, and followed simplified routines centered on sleeping, eating, and working—or even simplified overall priorities, such as family, work, and rest. Participants reported rarely leaving their homes to visit places such as malls, unless necessary, describing home as their primary comfort zone.

Participants also experienced remote work as a low-pressure and low-stress environment. Some report that their workloads are generally relaxed and manageable. Despite having full-time shifts, many share that they can complete their tasks in a shorter amount of time. Busier periods tend to come in seasons, followed by more idle, relaxed periods, sometimes leaving participants with "nothing to do", resorting to resting or even sleeping. For more tenured

and experienced participants, work feels casual and effortless, contributing to the perception that the job is no longer challenging. Such environments are also supported by experiences with understanding, lenient and not overly strict superiors. Participants share work cultures accommodating and understanding of breaks, absences, multitasking and making mistakes. They share that breaks and absences are flexible, easily granted, and in some cases, even paid. They are often encouraged to take leaves during emergencies or sickness; however, many feel little need to do so, as their work is generally manageable. Doing other tasks alongside work is not an uncommon experience, with participants sharing positive reactions from clients or superiors regarding their multitasking. In addition to a lenient environment, some describe experiences in which they felt safe making mistakes, with clients, superiors and even coworkers responding supportively rather than with anger or discouragement.

Participants report work is autonomous and done with agency, in ways one performs their tasks but also in managing their work hours. For those with a flexible schedule, this grants them a sense of freedom, being able to decide when to complete their tasks during the day and to organize their workload according to when they feel most productive. Clients and companies often value the completion of tasks over the manner in which they are performed or the exact number of hours logged. Some mention finishing their work ahead of time, while others describe routines they stick to. This autonomy also allows individuals to work from anywhere. Participants highlight the advantage of being able to work while traveling without worrying about missing tasks.

Nonetheless, convenience, comfort, autonomy and agency may also have its downsides. Such as simplified lifestyles leading to losing track of time or days and neglecting self-care routines, such as regular bathing. Empty hours from finishing tasks early may leave workers feeling unproductive and bored. It's also worth noting that not all industries afford the same flexibility in terms of downtime, leaves, and absences. Some working under hourly or "no work, no pay" arrangements experienced direct income loss when taking time off. In addition, certain industries operate year-round, including during holidays and peak vacation periods. On the other hand, work autonomy and agency can also lead to reduced support and guidance. Many shared that there were no trainers, with most tasks still needing to be self-learned. Some participants worked entirely alone as being the sole VAs of their clients, while others could not easily reach teammates or coworkers, leaving them with no one to ask questions or talk to. Alongside this, the ability to work anywhere is made possible by portable equipment such as laptops, yet this flexibility is limited in areas with poor internet connectivity or during travel, where fatigue and logistical demands can spill over into their work performance. To manage these differing conditions, remote workers employed various adaptive strategies. Many used slower periods to engage in personal or productive activities, such as exercising, self-care, self-directed learning, or working on personal or business-related projects. To work around the lack of support, participants went about training themselves and independently studying the tools and processes required for the job. Over time, participants shared that it became a matter of getting used to—and for others, even learning to appreciate working by themselves or working alone.

4.2. Recognizing Physical & Mental Health Risks in Remote Settings. For many participants, remote work presents both benefits and tradeoffs in terms of physical and mental

health. Participants describe experiences in which remote work felt “*unhealthy*.” This was often due to common arrangements such as graveyard shifts, or in some cases, periods of overemployment where juggling multiple clients simultaneously, while financially rewarding, took a significant toll on their health. While several report positive improvements in mental health when transitioning to remote work, new risks emerge unique to its environment.

Having to work graveyard or non-traditional shifts is reported to affect one's sleeping patterns. Several participants experience fragmented, insufficient, or irregular sleep, often due to their work schedules. As a result, they report feeling weak, sleepy during work hours or daytime, or even oversleeping during breaks. Many describe this pattern of staying up as ‘*unhealthy*’, with potential negative effects on long-term health. Other physical concerns include the risks associated with a sedentary lifestyle, snacking out of boredom or reliance on food deliveries, and sensitivity to daylight due to nighttime work. Weight gain was noted by some participants, though not directly attributed to remote work; contributing factors included stress, medications, and irregular routines. Additionally, participants mentioned general health challenges such as occasional illness, flus, or hereditary conditions like high blood pressure and uric acid issues. These concerns were reported across age groups, from participants in their 20s to those in their 50s.

Remote work was also reported to impose emotional burdens and affect mental health for some participants. Participants described the negative emotional tolls of remote work, including feelings of loneliness, difficulty reaching out to workmates, and missing the sense of community that physical workplaces provide. These experiences were reported by some participants in their 20s, regardless of their differing tenures in remote work. Others reported stressful experiences stemming from challenging clients, demanding workloads, or managing multiple clients simultaneously. For a few, these factors aggravated pre-existing mental health conditions, triggering depression, anxiety, and self-doubt. Long, empty hours in work were also linked to rumination and overthinking. Some participants also shared moments of self-doubt when lacking guidance or encouragement.

Nonetheless, participants reported positive health changes after recognizing the negative physical tolls associated with their work. Those who experienced mental health risks described learning to manage these challenges, while for some, remote work itself was perceived as healthier compared to their previous onsite work environments. Increased health consciousness is evident, with some participants making deliberate changes such as adjusting medications for better management, regular monitoring of laboratory results, following diets or fasting, or maintaining generally healthy eating habits. Participants with preexisting health conditions (e.g., high blood pressure), as well as those in their late 30s to 40s, placed greater emphasis on these healthier habits in response to their age and existing conditions. Physical activity is another common strategy, with participants engaging in exercise such as gardening, running, or other activities that allow them to break a sweat. Those who previously experienced weight gain shared that these habits helped them lose weight and improve overall health. Some report being accustomed to staying up late, previously working graveyard shifts in BPO settings. They cite that it's favorable being able to stay up at home rather than in an office. However, participants still emphasize prioritizing rest. Those in their late 40s to 50s describe proper sleep as especially vital due to age-related changes or conditions such as menopause. Others combat irregular sleep with short naps or by sleeping whenever they have the opportunity. Improvement to one's

mental health was in comparison to previous, high-stress work environments. Participants also set aside personal time for stress relief, bonding with friends, self-development, self-care, and reflection to improve mental health. Some participants learned not to dwell on negative or toxic workplace cultures or adopt neutral stances and others are planning larger changes, such as taking longer breaks from remote work or exploring alternative work setups.

4.3. *Providing for and Keeping One's Family at Center.* One of the biggest benefits reported by participants is the increased time they can spend with their families as remote workers as well as being able to provide them support through their presence and financial contributions. Participants who are parents emphasized that remote work allows them to be more present in their children's daily lives, including playing, cooking, tutoring, and accompanying them to school or other activities. Remote work also allows participants to compensate for moments they previously missed with parents or other family members due to demanding office-based jobs, where they often worried about their family while away at work.

Many participants explicitly value family over career, appreciating the flexibility and presence that remote work affords in fostering strong family relationships. Despite the increased family time, participants reported that they can still manage their tasks effectively, balancing work and personal obligations. They highlight that remote work allows them to always be "present," whether it's witnessing children's milestones, attending family events, or simply sharing daily moments. Some participants compared this to the experience of OFWs, observing that remote work provides similar financial benefits while enabling them to remain close to home.

Placing one's family at center also meant being able to support family members financially. For a few participants, compensation from remote work directly funded independent living and personal needs. However, many were not only earning for themselves but for multiple dependents—children, parents, partners, and siblings. With many identifying as breadwinners, supporting others also was a motivator in working remotely. For some, earning through remote work also represented a way of giving back, particularly to parents, or ensuring that family members did not experience financial hardship. Having sufficient financial capacity allowed participants to give freely, treat loved ones, and enjoy the act of supporting family members.

Nonetheless, working near family members also presented minor challenges. Participants who are mothers described a challenge when their children ask for or require attention during work hours. For those without childcare support, such disruptions become unavoidable. Additionally, some participants noted that having family members near their workstation affects their focus. Addressing these challenges, participants described the need to strike a balance between work demands and family obligations. Across these accounts, a common thread is that family responsibilities are never entirely set aside; but are balanced alongside work responsibilities without compromising one another.

4.4. *Managing Higher Income and Lifestyle Inflation.* Higher compensation in remote work brought both advantages and added responsibility. This new financial capacity allowed participants to achieve varying degrees of improvement, with some attaining financial independence, freedom, and stability. Several noted feeling less anxious about their financial

obligations. For others, this translated into affording additional conveniences and comforts, including paid travel, the ability to fund celebrations, and other lifestyle upgrades that were previously difficult to attain.

With higher compensation, participants described noticeable shifts in their spending habits. A common experience was a period where their expenses had also increased significantly. Coming from lower previous salaries or financial hardships in the past, many participants were surprised by the sudden increase in income, which sometimes led to impulsive or overwhelming spending, including items they had not been able to afford before. Without deliberate planning or expense tracking, spending became spontaneous and unregulated. Several participants reflected that earning more, particularly for the first time in their lives, triggered a sense of freedom that contributed to overspending. Some participants described their spending as linked to their hard work, with stress and exhaustion sometimes driving purchases or overcompensation for their efforts. Some also shared instances where spending extended to others, such as family members or partners.

For some, this period led to new debts, while for others, it compounded existing ones, becoming a source of financial stress for many. Lifestyle inflation, impulsive purchases, and reduced financial control often linked to first-time access to significantly higher income, led some participants to accumulate credit card debt. For some, it also served as a primary driver to continue earning and sustaining their income in remote work. Despite these challenges, participants framed their future financial goals around becoming debt-free and affording continued financial stability with this phase of overspending becoming a learning opportunity. Several participants described consciously adopting practices such as living below one's means, evaluating purchases more carefully, and prioritizing saving. For some, the experience still carried positive takeaways. They appreciated having been able to enjoy that period of financial freedom—buying things for themselves and their families, and experiencing comforts they had previously been unable to afford. Continued earnings would then be channeled into paying off home mortgages, personal loans, building emergency funds, and preparing for major life milestones such as weddings or children's education. Savings and investments were viewed as the next step toward long-term financial security once debts were resolved.

4.5. Confronting Systemic and Ethical Challenges. For participants, remote work involves challenges that are often beyond individual control—some of which are inherent to the remote work landscape itself. These challenges span systemic and even ethical dimensions.

Participants recognize that one of the biggest drawbacks of remote work is its lack of permanence, marked by its inherent insecurity and instability. For participants initially experiencing work instability, it can provoke trauma, anxiety, and stress, as they must quickly seek new work to sustain their income. Even some participants under contracts note that these agreements are limited in duration. Unlike local employment, government labor protections are often not applicable, leaving participants vulnerable if contracts end abruptly or payments are withheld. Additionally, remote work is experienced as a fast-paced environment, requiring constant adaptability and vigilance to maintain stability. By nature, remote work for overseas clients also entails working across different time zones. For some, this becomes a challenge, affecting sleep and overall physical well-being. Others described this affecting their social lives: being on a schedule that differs from their family and friends. This leads to missing out on social activities or having to work while family members are asleep.

Participants also encounter ethical challenges, including misconceptions and sensationalized ideas about remote work in the media, unethical practices by other workers, as well as challenges posed by clients or companies. Many noted that remote work is often sensationalized on social media, by promoters and remote workers with self-serving agendas such as those selling online courses. However, they emphasized that there is much more involved that is not addressed: identifying one's niche, acquiring proper equipment, providing real value to clients, and preparing for the unique demands of remote work compared to traditional office settings. Some also highlighted the misconceptions about virtual assistants (VAs), who are often generalized as the only type of remote worker. In reality, freelancers with specialized skills, such as video editors, graphic designers, and IT professionals, are also remote workers by nature of their industry but are not entirely considered VAs.

Participants also shared ethical issues caused by other remote workers, which can negatively affect the reputation of the profession. These issues often involve a lack of integrity and professional ethics. One example are remote workers faking their expertise or job titles and misleading clients, a practice observed both from a distance and within closer networks. Participants shared that some workers simply "*make up their profession*" to secure clients. For example, some remote workers exploit result-oriented systems by doing minimal effort while claiming more, or inflating logged hours. Another issue raised was workers themselves accepting low rates and doing the bare minimum simply to maintain a remote setup. Participants noted that these practices can have broader consequences: clients may compare rates or effort across workers, potentially undervaluing more experienced and diligent remote workers despite their higher skills and contributions.

This issue is closely linked to another ethical challenge, this time posed by clients. Participants use the term "lowballing" to describe situations where clients or companies pay remote workers extremely low rates creating an exploitative environment. Some participants expressed pity for other workers who are lowballed, noting that some are unaware of their market value or are scammed by illegitimate clients, unable to identify reliable work opportunities. Some participants have experienced lowballing firsthand. For instance, one had no choice but to accept a low-paying offer early in her remote work career, prioritizing experience over compensation. Another challenge associated with clients themselves are ghosting or giving incorrect or incomplete payments. Others also described being completely ignored by clients, either during ongoing work arrangements or after sudden termination of contracts. Another challenge posed by clients is micromanagement, being overly strict or exhibiting unfavorable traits. Micromanaging was described as situations where participants felt excessively monitored, often resulting from new management, agency structures, or clients who did not understand the workflow. Participants shared that this added stress, created pressure to "*perfect*" every task, and negatively affected their confidence and focus. Some clients and supervisors were also described as being very strict about results and quotas; even when participants met targets, clients sometimes remained unsatisfied.

To navigate these, participants adopt strategies to mitigate systemic and ethical challenges they encounter. Aware of the temporary nature of remote or freelance work, participants "*strike while the iron is hot*," taking advantage of high short-term earnings to build savings or invest in other income streams for the future. Some also plan future careers outside of remote work for similar reasons. To mitigate time-related challenges, participants shared that

it often involves getting used to or finding ways to balance both work and social life. Ethical challenges posed by other workers were countered by personally maintaining integrity, such as refusing to trick clients or misrepresent their work. For ethical challenges brought about by clients, participants sought and valued workplaces without micromanagement. Should micromanagement exist in one's workplace, participants reminded themselves to not be intimidated especially if they are performing their tasks correctly. When facing negative experiences with clients, participants often seek support from their agencies if applicable. Some participants also drew on past experiences to adapt.

Theme 5. Future Directions and the Evolving World of Remote Work

For many, remote work has become a place to grow and thrive, though not necessarily a permanent destination. Participants are building futures beyond remote work, seeking security and stability for themselves and their families, and confronting the fact that the remote work landscape will not be the same as when they first entered. This theme includes three subthemes: (1) Foreseeing a Future Beyond Remote Work, (2) Anticipating Market Saturation and the Rise of AI and (3) Equipping Stakeholder and New Remote Workers.

5.1. Foreseeing a Future Beyond Remote Work. Beyond remote work, and beyond continuing with their current clients, participants envision a future for themselves that could be markedly different from their present circumstances. A few participants described a possibility of migrating for their clients and working directly with them abroad. For some, this is seen as a hopeful and viable goal, with remote work serving as a stepping stone to overseas employment. For others, however, migration was seen as a possibility rather than a guaranteed outcome of remote work. For many other participants, pursuing further education features prominently in their future plans. They expressed interest in fields such as law, agriculture, or psychology. Other participants, however, envision a more distinct career trajectory, aiming to transition toward entrepreneurship or develop additional income streams through business ventures. This may involve expanding existing ventures or launching new ones, with some planning to channel earnings from remote work into these endeavors. In contrast, other participants continue to consider more stable roles, such as government positions or hybrid corporate jobs.

Beyond career and financial goals, participants also shared personal and lifestyle aspirations. For younger participants, these included plans to get married and start a family, as well as desires to travel to other countries or move to different cities. For participants who already have a family, their plans often focus on long-term security, such as saving for a retirement fund.

5.2. Anticipating Market Saturation and the Rise of AI. In the current landscape and looking ahead, participants shared several key observations about the state and trajectory of remote work. Participants noted that remote work is currently thriving, with growing popularity and wider acceptance, often aided by social media platforms. Alongside this, shifts in required skill sets and the types of businesses engaging in remote work have created new opportunities for many. Given the global nature of remote work, participants share that it provides access to a broader range of clients and opportunities than what a purely local market could offer. With more individuals entering remote work and its growing appeal, also noted a rising concern: saturation and increased competition. This was evident not only for newcomers but also for

participants seeking additional work or clients. As the number of experienced and tenured remote workers in the field grew, participants reported higher barriers to entry for newcomers, emphasizing the need for strong or specialized skills to remain competitive. Even participants with shorter tenure felt this pressure. Participants shared that before the pandemic or at the time they first entered remote work, clients actively sought employees. Today, however, remote workers often must compete to secure clients, reflecting an oversupply of virtual assistants. While opportunities remain, participants noted that they are increasingly limited or more challenging to obtain due to market saturation. Some also expressed concern that because of such, demand for remote work itself could decline, as not all companies may fully adopt outsourcing or continue expanding remote work arrangements.

Another emerging concern is AI, which participants described as a highly valuable tool for boosting productivity and improving outputs. At the same time, they noted that some jobs—particularly those involving simple or repetitive tasks, such as administrative assistants, executive assistants, and transcription roles—may become obsolete. Participants expressed concerns about the potential misuse of AI, while also emphasizing the importance of adapting to and integrating these tools into their work.

5.3. Equipping Stakeholders and New Remote Workers. During discussions, participants shared insights on the implications of remote work for newcomers, local companies, schools, and even government agencies. Some participants shared broader observations about how remote work can be utilized, noting that tasks requiring only a computer do not necessarily need to be performed in person and can be done remotely. While not widely expressed, these perspectives offer insight into how participants drew from their remote work experiences to reflect on potential organizational applications. Some suggested utilizing remote work practices such as instead of physically passing documents, employees could print or send them digitally, reducing unnecessary trips and making workflows more efficient.

Regarding education, participants expressed appreciation for local universities that offer courses related to remote work or virtual assistance, as well as for the integration of digital skills into existing programs. While these offerings were not viewed as sufficiently comprehensive, participants nonetheless acknowledged them as positive steps toward preparing individuals for remote work. Some also noted changes in college curricula compared to earlier years, emphasizing the need for continued updates that reflect current industry trends and expanding digital work landscapes. A small number of participants raised tentative reflections on the role of government in remote work. While there was uncertainty about what forms of support the government could realistically provide. These views echo on earlier accounts in which participants described the absence of formal protections and employment benefits in remote work that typically could be addressed or supported by local government laws.

Synthesis

Entry into remote work was characterized by a mix of curiosity, uncertainty, and social support, with guidance from family, friends, and peers in the industry. Participants leveraged prior academic and employment backgrounds but emphasized that their skills, attitude, and drive were valued more than formal education or certifications, a finding consistent with Baitenizov, Dubina, Rakhmetulina, et al. (2025). Many were drawn by the promise of financial

and career opportunities, highlighting the perceived potential for personal and professional growth in remote work.

Being a remote worker involves cultivating a fluid, multi-role, and self-defined professional identity. Participants described intentionally expanding their roles, diversifying clients, and maximizing their capacity, reflecting the principles of boundaryless careers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996, cited in Karakus, 2021), which emphasize mobility, flexibility, and self-directed career management. Remote workers learn to balance short-term gains with long-term sustainability, strategically “striking while the iron is hot” to capitalize on opportunities while maintaining alignment with personal and professional goals. Participants’ experiences of gauging sustainability and personal alignment in remote work can be understood through Self-Regulation Theory (Carver & Scheier, 1998), which frames mindset, self-awareness, and alignment as key forms of self-regulation in sustaining a career.

Organizational dynamics in remote work range from agency-mediated arrangements to direct client interactions, revealing that remote work operates outside traditional organizational frameworks. Participants reported building close, trusting relationships with generous and supportive clients, often reciprocating through reliability and honesty—a manifestation of *utang na loob*. Coworker relationships varied, shaped positively by Filipino traits such as *kapwa* and *pakikisama*, but also negatively influenced by *hiya*, *crab mentality*, or *mañana habit*, highlighting the social complexities of remote work. These traits are well-documented within Filipino Psychology (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000).

Remote work offers autonomy, flexibility, and a low-pressure environment, allowing participants to structure their schedules and work comfortably. Yet, this autonomy also brings challenges, including boredom, sedentary lifestyles, loneliness, lack of community, demanding clients, self-doubt, and mental rumination, alongside physical issues like disrupted sleep or preexisting conditions. Participants reported adapting through self-care, health-conscious routines, and boundary-setting strategies to manage these risks. Charalampous et al. (2022), which found that feelings of isolation, boredom, anger, frustration, and stress in remote work often stem from limited social interaction, a pattern echoed in the experiences of participants in the current study. At the same time, consistent with Charalampous et al. (2022), remote work can also foster positive health behavior changes.

Higher compensation enabled lifestyle improvements and provision for family needs for participants. Participants valued spending quality time with family while supporting them financially, reflecting how the sense of family and community is valued by Filipinos (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). However, family distractions can be observed working at home and the risk of lifestyle inflation or new debts required careful financial management, emphasizing the importance of planning for long-term stability. A study by Hanbal and Palaoag (2025) also supported the experience of participants that involved relying on higher online salaries to support dependents, with the study sample similarly identified as breadwinners.

Remote work also entails systemic and ethical challenges, such as micromanaging, lowballing, ghosting, or dishonest practices by clients or other remote workers. Many participants looked beyond remote work, considering further education, entrepreneurship, or alternative professions. This tendency to pursue careers beyond current remote work can also be understood through the Boundaryless Career Theory (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), which

suggests that individuals can move across jobs, roles, and industries guided by personal goals and relationships.

They acknowledge the evolving landscape marked by market saturation and emerging technologies such as AI may pose new challenges for new remote workers. They emphasized the value of education, guidance, and potential support from local institutions and companies to prepare current and future remote workers.

Simulacrum

To visualize the essence of participants' employment experience in remote work, a simulacrum was created. This visual representation integrates the core themes identified in the study, using symbolic objects and spatial arrangements to convey meaning. The chair signifies comfort and security prior to transitioning into remote work, with its position symbolizing the ability to move from a distance toward engagement with work tasks (Theme 1). The desk represents the self-defined, blended identity of the remote worker, encompassing competencies, role fluidity, and personal-professional alignment, symbolizing how the self supports and holds multiple responsibilities while not being limited solely to work-related tasks (Theme 2). The laptop embodies organizational processes, structures, and communication tools central to remote work, representing not only technology for completing tasks but also a hub for connection, organization, and collaboration (Theme 3). Desk clutter and other objects illustrate the tradeoffs, adaptations, and everyday burdens and benefits experienced by remote workers, reflecting items that aid productivity but may also contribute to cognitive or physical burden (Theme 4). Finally, the window looking outside reflects aspirations, future directions, and evolving career possibilities in the remote work landscape, encompassing both individual goals and a broader, shared vision for the future (Theme 5). Together, these elements form a cohesive visual interpretation of the participants' remote work experiences. The themes and elements chosen for each theme were reviewed with participants to confirm that they reflected their experiences. The figure was created in collaboration with a professional illustrator with all design decisions guided by the researcher to ensure an accurate representation of the qualitative findings.

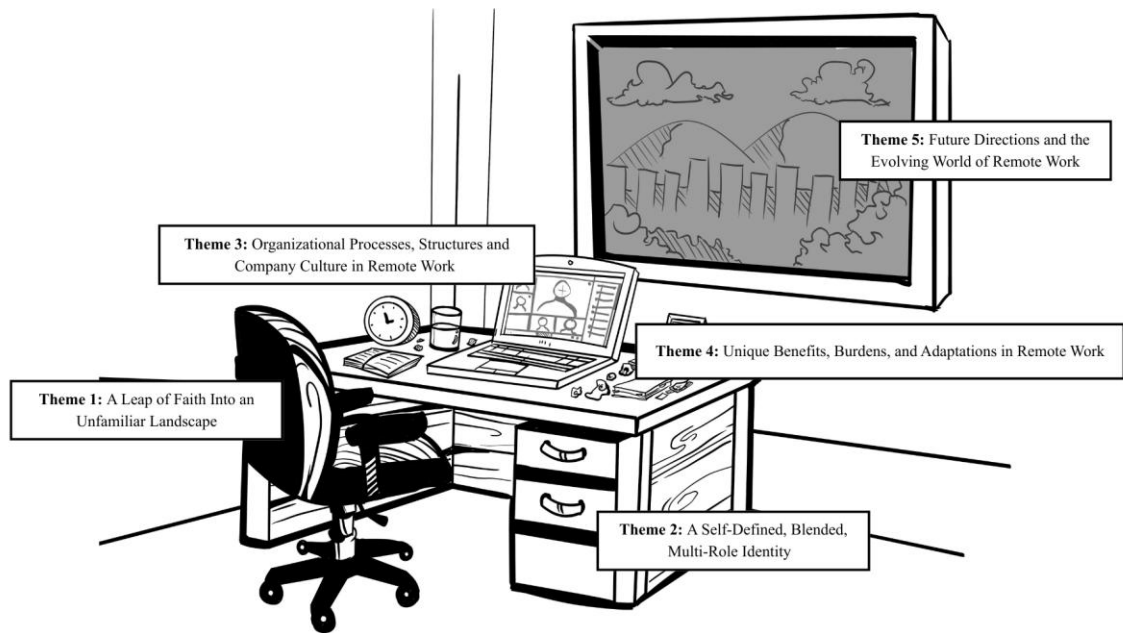


Figure 1. Simulacrum of employment experience of Remote Workers

IV. Conclusion

This study explored the employment experience of remote workers in Bacolod City. Ultimately, the study sought to illuminate how remote work can be meaningfully linked to existing theories in work psychology and to expand our understanding of employee well-being, motivation, and behavior in virtual work environments.

This study uncovered five themes that illustrate how Filipino remote workers enter, experience, and make sense of remote work. Participants often began their remote work journeys through uncertainty and curiosity, describing their entry as a leap of faith into an unfamiliar landscape, often guided by others, prior career experiences, and limited information. Over time, they developed a fluid and multi-layered remote worker identity, shaped by continuous upskilling, niche specialization, and the negotiation of professional roles alongside family responsibilities. Remote work was experienced as a space of both opportunity and adjustment, offering financial stability, autonomy, comfort, and work-life integration, while simultaneously presenting challenges such as physical, mental challenges as well as systemic and ethical challenges. To navigate these trade-offs, participants developed personal coping strategies and adaptations aligned with the demands of virtual work while still allowing themselves to reap its benefits. Organizational structures and company culture further shaped participants' experiences, with varying levels of support, personal connections that dictate work culture and work satisfaction and sustainability. Finally, participants expressed a forward-looking orientation, viewing remote work not always as a permanent destination but often as a stepping stone toward future goals, including entrepreneurship, career shifts, or long-term stability. Taken together, these themes highlight remote work as a complex, evolving experience—one that enables Filipino remote workers to envision futures characterized by

security, fulfillment, and flexibility, while navigating personal, professional, and structural challenges within a rapidly changing work landscape.

Overall, the findings suggest that remote work can be meaningfully situated within work psychology frameworks emphasizing motivation, self-efficacy, identity development, job crafting, and well-being, particularly highlighting the roles of autonomy, competence, relatedness, and person–environment fit, as well as the relevance of Filipino psychology in understanding the experiences of Filipino remote workers operating within a global remote work market.

These findings underscore the need for coordinated responses across professional, organizational, educational, and governmental areas. Mental health professionals may use the findings of the study to address the challenges faced by remote workers, recognizing and mitigating negative effects while supporting personal growth and long-term sustainability within a unique and evolving career path. IO psychologists and HR practitioners may utilize the study’s findings to design structures and programs that cater specifically to remote workers, particularly in addressing instability, mental health concerns, and access to wellness initiatives. At the same time, they may strengthen systems that support autonomy, output-based performance, and participation in global workplaces, while remaining mindful of Filipino traits, motivations, and relational tendencies that shape work engagement. Academic institutions that train remote workers may continue to do so, but with curricula that more accurately reflect lived remote work experiences. This includes buffering against potential negatives through education that extends beyond technical skills, integrating financial literacy, ethical awareness, self-management and other autonomy-related competencies necessary for sustainable remote careers. Government agencies such as the Department of Labor and Employment and the Department of Information and Communications Technology may draw from the study in recognizing remote work as a legitimate and widely relied-upon work arrangement among Filipinos. This recognition may inform stronger labor laws and structural supports that afford remote workers protections comparable to regular employees, while still addressing their unique conditions. Existing legislation such as the Philippine Telecommuting Act may be revisited to provide clearer guidance on remote employment practices. Strengthening local employment through fair wages and career growth remains crucial in reducing the financial push toward remote work, allowing it to be a deliberate and sustainable choice rather than an economic necessity.

Future research may examine how specific Filipino cultural values (e.g., *hiya*, *kapwa*, *utang na loob*) operate within remote work contexts, particularly in shaping client and coworker relationships, personal ethics and work motivations. Quantitative or mixed-methods studies may test how these cultural factors relate to well-being, burnout, and career sustainability among Filipino remote workers. Studies may also investigate the effects of market saturation and AI adoption on perceived job security, and role adaptations in remote work. More focused inquiry into ethical challenges such as “lowballing”, micromanagement, ghosting, and misrepresentation may clarify their prevalence and psychological impact. Longitudinal research may further track how motivations, financial outcomes, and well-being shift over time, while industry-specific analyses (e.g., administrative, IT, creative sectors) may identify patterns unique to particular remote work domains.

Grounded in the findings of the study, a Remote Work Starter Kit for Filipino workers was developed to translate key insights into practical guidance to support sustainable and informed entry into or continued engagement with remote work. Ultimately, this study affirms that remote work is more than a work arrangement; it has the potential to shape professional identity and serve as a life-altering experience through which individuals navigate opportunity, uncertainty, and adaptation, enabling pathways toward autonomy, well-being, and personal growth.

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