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**FILIPINO VIRTUAL ASSISTANTS AS GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS
PRACTITIONERS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**

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Acceptance Page

This paper prepared by **MARIANNE REMO CABRAL** with the title: “**FILIPINO VIRTUAL ASSISTANTS AS GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS PRACTITIONERS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**” is hereby accepted by the Faculty of Information and Communication Studies, U.P. Open University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Communication.

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Biographical Sketch

Marianne R. Cabral is a communication professional, educator, researcher, and sales leader whose career spans the fields of corporate communication, customer service, language education, marketing, and business development. Born and raised in Batangas, Philippines, she is currently a resident of Rome, Italy, bringing an international and cross-cultural perspective to her professional and academic work.

Marianne holds a Master of Arts in English Language Studies and a Bachelor of Arts in Communication Arts, both from Lyceum of the Philippines University Batangas. She graduated *cum laude* and received several distinctions. She has also completed diplomas in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and Teaching English to Children (TEC) from Concordia International University, Canada.

She has been working as a Virtual Assistant for six years and currently serves as an Virtual Account Executive, and Sales and Marketing Manager at a California-based residential and commercial moving company. In this role, she contributes to sales leadership, client relationship management, marketing communication, team development, and the improvement of organizational processes. She is also equipped with Bookkeeping and AI integration skills.

Her professional background also includes teaching English in the Philippines and Italy. She served as a faculty member in Languages and Literature and Mass Communication at the Lyceum of the Philippines University Batangas, where she also held the role of Features Editor for The Patriot Publications. Her passion for language

education later led her to Rome, where she worked as English as a Second Language instructor at Innova Education Europe's Cambridge Exam Preparation Centre.

As a researcher, Marianne's interests focus on communication, remote work, globalization, and the experiences of Filipino professionals in international workplaces. Her academic and professional journey reflects her commitment to lifelong learning, effective communication, and meaningful collaboration across cultures.

Acknowledgment

This dissertation is more than an academic requirement. It represents years of learning, sacrifice, uncertainty, persistence, and personal growth. Reaching this point would not have been possible without the people who supported me, believed in me, and reminded me to keep going whenever the journey became overwhelming.

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Moreover, I am sincerely grateful to the Filipino virtual assistants who participated in this research. I am indebted to them for entrusting me with their stories, experiences, struggles, and successes. Their voices gave life and purpose to this dissertation. I hope this study honors their contributions as global communication practitioners and helps create a deeper understanding of the important work they do.

To my family, most especially to my **Tatay Bonjing, Inay Mayeth**, and my husband **Jervyn**, I thank them for their endless patience, love, and understanding. Thank you for allowing me the time and space to write, read, revise, and sometimes begin again. They listened to my worries, celebrated my progress, and encouraged me when I felt tired. This accomplishment is not mine alone; it belongs to all of us. Every page of this dissertation carries the love, patience, and sacrifices they so generously gave. I could not have reached this milestone without them, and I will always be deeply grateful to have them beside me.

To my children, **Yohann Vyn and Hailey Yumi**, they have been among my greatest inspirations. Every late night, every moment of exhaustion, and every challenge became easier because I knew I was working toward something that would make them proud. I hope this achievement serves as a reminder that dreams are possible when pursued with commitment, courage, and perseverance. May they always believe in their abilities, remain steadfast in the face of challenges, and never be afraid to work for the life they envision.

Above all, I thank God for providing me with strength, wisdom, protection, and grace. There were moments when I did not know how I would move forward, but He continually opened doors, sent the right people, and reminded me that I was never alone.

This dissertation may carry my name, but it also carries the love, support, knowledge, and generosity of everyone who became part of this journey. To all of you, I offer my sincerest gratitude.

Dedication

To Tatay Bonjing and Inay Mayeth, *whose love and sacrifices gave my dreams a place to grow.*

To Jervyn, *whose quiet acts of love carried me forward.*

To Yohann Vyn and Hailey Yumi, *dream boldly, strive faithfully, and never stop believing in what you can become.*

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ABSTRACT

The study explored how Filipino Virtual Assistants (VAs) view themselves as global communication practitioners in the digital world. Anchored in Heideggerian phenomenology, the lived experiences of 10 VAs working in fully remote, transnational environments were analyzed from December 2023 to April 2024.

Becoming a VA is often shaped by life transitions, economic necessity, and the pursuit of flexibility; sustained participation in virtual work then transforms how participants perceive professionalism, identity, and communication. They described their work as deeply communicative, relational, and emotionally labor-intensive, extending beyond task execution to include trust-building, cultural adaptation, and identity negotiation.

Filipino Virtual Assistants occupy a distinct and critical position within the global digital economy as fully remote communication workers whose labor is fundamentally relational, interpretive, and identity-forming. They do not simply adapt to global communication norms; rather, they actively negotiate professional identity through culturally informed communication practices characterized by adaptability, emotional intelligence, relational sensitivity, and a strong sense of responsibility toward clients. These traits rooted in Filipino sociocultural values become strategic assets in transnational virtual environments. At the same time, the study reveals a paradox at the core of virtual work. While remote work offers autonomy, flexibility, and economic mobility, it also exposes Filipino VAs to structural vulnerabilities, including job insecurity, blurred work-life boundaries, limited legal protection, and emotional fatigue

arising from continuous digital presence. These conditions shape how participants experience selfhood, productivity, and belonging.

Viewed through a phenomenological lens, the experiences of Filipino VAs illustrate that virtual work is not a neutral technological arrangement but a lived, embodied condition that reshapes identity, communication, and meaning making. Filipino Virtual Assistants emerge not as invisible background workers, but as global communication practitioners whose voices and experiences deserve scholarly and institutional recognition.

KEYWORDS: online or digital workers, digitalization, work from home, job satisfaction, virtual environment or workplace, global digital labor economy, Filipino transnational worker, digital job hierarchies

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The rise of the digital era, alongside the COVID-19 pandemic, has had a major impact on how we work and utilize technology in our daily lives. Information and Communications Technology (ICT) made it possible to bridge geographic divides. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS, 2020) acknowledged that the pandemic has brought “*perhaps the greatest intellectual explosion*” and is reshaping the future of human history, the governments, businesses, institutions, and individuals. Workplaces have been reconstituted on virtual grounds and opened a multitude of opportunities for home-based and virtual employment.

Before 2020, remote work was considered a niche setup, mostly limited to select professional sectors, with only 4% of high-paying jobs being remote. However, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the widespread adoption of telework, and demand continued even after economies reopened. By the end of 2020, remote high-paying jobs increased to 9% and later exceeded 15% (Ladders, 2021). Similarly, Kassi et al. (2021), as cited by Braesemann et al. (2022), reported that the number of globally registered online workers reached 163 million by 2021. In addition, data from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics revealed that 35% of full-time employees worked remotely at least

part of the time in 2023, up from 34% in 2022, suggesting that remote work has become a sustained feature of modern employment (Hyatt, 2024).

An online worker whose role, competencies, and identity are fast evolving in the virtual workplace is the virtual assistants. The role of Virtual Assistants (VAs), one that is distinct from AI assistants, is predominantly significant in this economic shift. Human virtual assistants perform administrative, operational, and communicative tasks for clients remotely using digital communication tools. These roles encompass scheduling, correspondence, customer service, bookkeeping, research, and more, all conducted through computer-mediated communication platforms.

Compared to traditional labor arrangements, virtual assistants are generally more cost-effective, easier to hire through freelance platforms or outsourcing agencies, and offer greater flexibility in terms of working hours and task responsibilities (Westerman, 2023). These advantages position virtual assistance as a practical workforce solution during a period of economic disruption and uncertainty.

According to the “There Is Talent’s” study (cited in (Westerman, 2023)), a virtual assistant organization based in Colombia, the market for virtual assistants has doubled in size between 2021 and 2022 with about 40 million people. A sizable portion of this total is headquartered in the Philippines, which has a ready pool of competent customer care representatives who speak English (Westerman, 2023).

Peatman (2021) estimated that there are approximately 25 to 30 million virtual assistants worldwide, with the Philippines accounting for about 13% of this workforce. Notably, one in every eight virtual assistants working on Upwork, one of the largest global freelancing platforms, is Filipino. This highlights the country's prominent role in the global virtual labor market.

The Philippines ranks as the world's top outsourcing destination in the 2026 Ataraxis Global Outsourcing Talent Index, earning an overall score of 90.65 out of 100 and surpassing Malaysia (85.55) and India (85.40). The Filipinos scored high in labor cost (96), English proficiency (90), and talent availability (90), highlighting its strong competitive advantage in the global outsourcing industry. (Philstar Global, April 2026).

Because Filipino VAs are the easiest to work with, the most affordable, and have the highest national literacy rate of 96.2% (Truelist, 2022), the Philippines is said to be the best place to source for a VA (Philstar Global, 2026; Truelist, 2022). Filipinos have become some of the most in-demand online workers globally (Truelist, 2022; Peatman, 2021; PIDS, 2020), valued for their English proficiency, strong work ethic, adaptability, and flexibility in performing diverse tasks.

From the perspective of employers, hiring remote virtual assistants presents substantial cost savings. Employers are not required to provide benefits such as healthcare coverage or pensions and often pay only a fraction

of the cost associated with traditional employment. According to Glassdoor, the average annual cost of hiring an executive assistant in the United States is approximately USD 56,000, or roughly USD 4,700 per month (Westerman, 2023). In contrast, hiring virtual assistants from countries such as the Philippines allows employers to significantly reduce labor expenses while maintaining operational efficiency.

The Philippine National Wages and Productivity Commission (2017) classifies virtual assistants under the gig economy, defining such work as labor performed through digital platforms. This includes web-based platforms where tasks are outsourced to independent contractors through open calls and distributed across geographically dispersed workers, commonly referred to as “crowdwork.”

Remote work and virtual assistance are tied to larger structural shifts in labor markets. Hybrid and remote work persist globally as part of the post-pandemic equilibrium, with millions of workers adopting flexible work arrangements across sectors. The Philippines has emerged as a major global hub for virtual work, especially virtual assistance. These contextual trends underscore the need to understand not only the economic dimensions of virtual work but also its communicative and identity-related dimensions, especially among Filipino VAs who operate within global and culturally diverse digital environments.

The Research Problem

A preliminary search of the existing literature on Filipino virtual assistants reveals only a limited number of scholarly works. Only five (5) published works related to Filipino Virtual Assistants have been published by far. Filipino authors Simoy (2022), Sulasula (2024), Saldo (2025), Palo, et al. (2025), and Garcia (2025) have explored the field of Virtual Assistance in different facets including, but not limited to, VA hyping and online self-presentation, work-life balance, job satisfaction and productivity, and professional sustainability and viability.

Despite the substantial presence of Filipinos in virtual assistant roles, academic research remains limited on how Filipino VAs experience their work as communicative labor and how they construct professional identities within fully virtual environments. There appears to be a notable lack of empirical research examining how the Filipino workforce is adapting to emerging forms of employment shaped by digitalization, advanced communication technologies, and participation in the global online economy.

Moreover, most of these studies focus on technological, economic, or platform aspects of remote work while giving less attention to lived experience, identity, and communicative practice. This gap suggests an underrepresentation of Filipino virtual assistants' voices and lived realities within academic discourse.

Hence, this study addresses the literature gap by examining Filipino virtual assistants through phenomenological and communication-centered lenses as they navigate their professional identities, roles, and communication practices in transnational online workspaces. By foregrounding lived experience through a phenomenological lens, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of Filipino VAs as communicative agents in the global digital economy.

Research Questions

This study aims to explore “who” the Filipino Virtual Assistant is in the global online community. Specifically, how do Filipino virtual assistants make sense of themselves as virtual communication workers in a global workplace?

The following are the specific research questions:

1. How did the VAs enter the profession and when?
2. Why did they enter the VA workplace?
3. How do the VAs view themselves as Filipino virtual communication practitioners?
4. How do the VAs view themselves as global virtual communication practitioners?
5. How do they practice communication in their profession and work?
6. How do they face challenges as VAs in a dynamic virtual world?
7. How has their ‘becoming’ virtual assistants emerged?

The research questions revolve around the virtual identity of the Virtual Assistant in multiple levels – as Filipinos and as international workers in the global spheres. In so doing, the study analyzes their “becoming Virtual Assistants” – their competencies, identities, and communication roles and challenges - through their personal journey of “becoming” “global representations” of Filipino virtual communicators.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant to several key groups who are directly and indirectly engaged in the evolving landscape of virtual work and global communication.

Virtual assistants. This study is significant to Filipino Virtual Assistants as it recognizes and foregrounds their contributions within the professional communication field, particularly as agents navigating a rapidly changing digital work environment and global economic shifts. The study highlights how clear and effective communication reinforces professional relationships among coworkers, fosters teamwork, reduces workplace misunderstanding and dissent, and aligns individual efforts with organizational goals, ultimately contributing to increased productivity and professional legitimacy.

Virtual managers. The findings of this study will benefit virtual managers by providing deeper insight into the communication dynamics, challenges, and strengths of their virtual teams. Understanding how Filipino Virtual Assistants

construct meaning, manage cross-cultural interactions, and perform communicative labor will enable managers to revise existing management strategies or develop more responsive, culturally informed, and human-centered approaches suited to the ever-changing remote work environment.

Online working community. This study offers a grounded and realistic view of the virtual assistant profession for the broader online working community, including aspiring virtual assistants. It provides insight into the actual circumstances of online work on what virtual assistants do, how communication processes unfold, and how relational and professional challenges are navigated. The experiences may resonate with or inform others engaged in similar forms of remote or digital labor.

Transglobal companies. Transglobal companies may benefit from this study by gaining a deeper understanding of how organizational identity and performance can be enhanced through culturally diverse and inclusive virtual workforces. The findings can inform the development of improved policies, communication protocols, and support programs tailored to online workers, fostering stronger camaraderie, cultural sensitivity, and job-related performance across geographically dispersed teams.

Academic and research community. The knowledge generated by this study contributes to the growing body of literature in the fields of communication and Information and Communications Technology (ICT), both locally and globally. By offering an empirical and phenomenological perspective on Filipino Virtual

Assistants as Global Communication Practitioners, this research provides scholars with additional conceptual and contextual grounding for future comparative, interdisciplinary, and in-depth studies within virtual work, digital labor, and global communication research.

Contributions to the Body of Knowledge. Beyond the audiences identified above, this study explicitly contributes several original constructs and conceptual offerings to the scholarly conversation on virtual work, communication, and the Filipino diaspora of digital workers. These contributions are foregrounded here so that the depth and originality of the inquiry are recognized.

First, the dissertation offers a working typology of Virtual Assistants as they are practiced in the Philippine context, distinguishing fully remote VAs from hybrid and partially remote arrangements and grounding the distinctions in the lived experiences of practitioners themselves. Second, it advances original constructs for understanding how Filipino VAs enter, sustain, and reinterpret their work, including the framings of re(entering) the un(familiar) world of virtual assistant work and the come-on and the stay-on of VA work. Third, it extends Heideggerian phenomenology into the domain of fully remote, transnational labor, showing how being-in-the-world is re-articulated when one's workplace is an always-on, digitally mediated, culturally heterogeneous environment. Fourth, the study generates an insider-informed reading of Filipino cultural attributes (such as versatility, *pakikipagkapwa* in relation to politeness and

conflict avoidance traits, and adaptability) as deliberate communicative resources in global virtual work, rather than as incidental cultural traits.

Taken together, these contributions reposition Filipino Virtual Assistants from invisible background workers to global communication practitioners whose lived experience deserves both scholarly recognition and policy attention. The interpretive depth of the study is further strengthened by my own positionality as a practicing Filipino VA, which enabled a sustained, insider-led reading of the evolution of VA work in the Philippines.

Chapter II

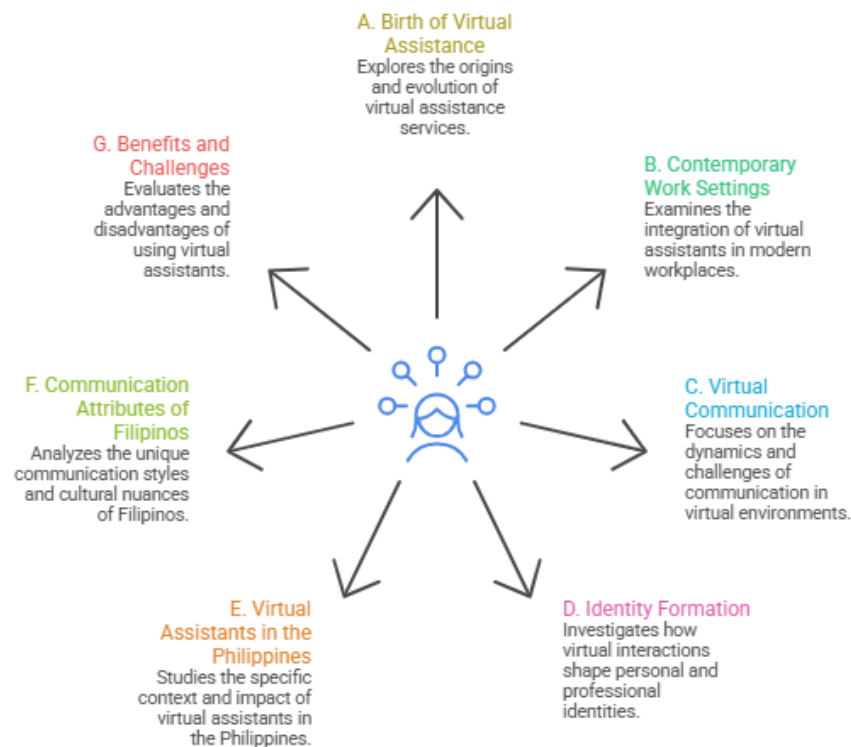
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Work that is done remotely and using technology has been given many names that attempt to characterize a phenomenon that is both a part of and a context for modern work (Michaud, 2018; Bélanger, Watson-Manheim, & Swan, 2013). Terms such as telework, remote work, distance work, or virtual work are frequently interchanged. This literature review will shed light on how virtual assistance progressed, its origin and affordances, to how we see it today.

The review of related literature is organized to discuss the following: (1) birth of virtual assistance, (2) contemporary work settings, (3) virtual communication, (4) identity formation, (5) studies of virtual assistants in the Philippines, (6) communication attributes of Filipino VAS, and (7) benefits and challenges of being a VAS.

Figure 1.

Outline of the review of related literature.



This body of literature supports the view that fully remote work is not simply a logistical arrangement but a distinct mode of organizing labor, characterized by technological immersion, spatial dislocation, and continuous communicative negotiation.

The Birth of “Virtual Assistance”

The origins of virtual work can be traced back to the history of telecommuting and the beginning of the secretarial profession.

Telework and Telecommuting

In 1973, Jack Nilles coined the terms telecommuting and teleworking, long before the widespread adoption of personal computers, as an alternative to daily commuting via transportation (Nilles, 1988; Bailey & Kurland, 2002; JALA International, 2018; Uy, 2021). These concepts emerged in response to the global oil crisis, which prompted organizations to explore ways of reducing travel-related costs. Both terms share the prefix *tele*, meaning “to or at a distance,” emphasizing work performed away from centralized offices.

At the time, Nilles himself was collaborating remotely on a sophisticated NASA communication system, and he introduced the term telecommuting to describe this emerging mode of work. Two primary forms of telecommuting were initially identified: (1) working from home and (2) working from regional centers or alternative physical job sites.

Teleworking refers broadly to the practice of “*moving the work to the workers rather than moving the workers to work*” and involves replacing traditional job-related travel with information and communication technologies such as telephones and computers (Nilles, 1988 pp. 301-317; Uy, 2021). In contrast, **telecommuting** refers to the occasional or partial use of remote work (typically one or more days per week) from home, a client site, or a telework facility. Its central emphasis lies in reducing or eliminating daily commuting through the use of information technology (Nilles, 1988).

More importantly, telecommuting is considered a subset of teleworking (Nilles, 1973). As such, all telecommuting arrangements fall under the broader umbrella of teleworking, but not all teleworking arrangements qualify as telecommuting.

From Secretarial Work to Virtual Assistance

Secretarial services have historically played a crucial role in organizational communication. In the 1800s, Sir Isaac Pitman established a school exclusively for men to study secretarial work, and he developed shorthand techniques that later became accessible to women in the 1880s following the invention of the typewriter. As technology modernized with the emergence of computers and the Internet, traditional secretarial services were made available virtually and became a popular medium for long-distance transactions (Acero, 2022).

While the exact origin of virtual assistance remains unclear, at least two historical accounts help trace its emergence.

The first and more widely accepted account credits Christine Durst with founding the virtual assistant industry in 1995. In her book “The 2 Second Commute”, Durst described **virtual assistance** as a “*revolutionary way of working from home,*” encouraging professionals to leverage the Internet to pursue independence and work–life balance while earning a living. During this

period, virtual assistants were commonly referred to as home-based administrative workers or work-at-home secretaries (Durst, C., & Haaren, M. 1995, 2005).

The rise of virtual assistance coincided with global economic shifts that led to the elimination of traditional jobs and prompted small businesses to adopt flexible hiring practices, allowing them to hire support staff by the hour without the financial burdens associated with full-time employment (Square Fish Inc., 2019).

The second historical account dates to 1996 and centers on a phone conversation between Stacy Brice and Thomas Leonard. Brice worked full-time from home as a secretary for an international client, Cheryl Richardson. Despite never meeting in person, Brice provided comprehensive administrative support, including personal assistance and travel planning, entirely through the Internet. She referred to herself as a “virtual assistant”, a term that later gained widespread recognition (Acero, 2022). Thomas Leonard, Brice’s mentor, further contributed to the development of remote professional collaboration through virtual coaching and support arrangements (Lazanov, 1998).

Virtual Assistance in Contemporary Work Settings

Virtual Assistant vs AI (Artificial Intelligent) Virtual Assistant

Cambridge dictionary (n.d.) defines the term “Virtual Assistant” as two (2) distinctive expressions.

First, “a computer program or device that is connected to the Internet and can understand spoken questions and instructions, designed to help make plans, find answers to questions, etc.”. This refers to AI Virtual Assistant – also known as intelligent conversational systems such as Google's Virtual Assistant, Alexa, Google Home, Google Mini and Apple's Siri, that interact with human-like responses to users' queries and finish specific tasks.

Second definition is, “someone who works as an assistant for several companies from their own home or office using the Internet”, which pertains to an actual person doing an online job. This is the focus of this study.

A virtual assistant is a self-employed worker, either a freelancer (Fiverr, 2020), an independent contractor (Indeed Editorial, 2021), or an outsourced contractor (Carmody, 2022), who works as an assistant for several companies (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.) focusing on providing administrative and technical support to clients from a distance, typically from a home office (Kenton, 2022; Duermyer, 2022; Indeed, 2021), or an office building (Carmody, 2022) using the Internet.

As information technology grows more prevalent, the traditional workplace's structure is altering; consenting work to be done remotely is becoming more common (Fritz et al., 1998). In the contemporary working world, many companies have learned to adapt safe work environments amidst the pandemic by transitioning to remote work setup, typically from a home office.

Virtual assistants have increased acceptance as more startups and small businesses use virtual offices to reduce expenditures and as businesses of all sizes consume the Internet recurrently for everyday operations (Kenton, 2022).

For employers, hiring remote virtual assistants offers a cost-effective staffing solution that helps reduce operational stress and allows them to focus on business growth, regardless of the type of assistance needed (Fiverr, 2020). Employers are generally not obligated to provide benefits such as healthcare coverage or pensions and often incur only a fraction of the costs associated with traditional employees (Westerman, 2023). Businesses also save on overhead costs, including office space, utilities, and workstations. Moreover, virtual assistants are generally expected to provide their own equipment, including computers, high-speed internet access, and essential software tools needed to perform their tasks effectively (Kenton, 2022).

Some of the top industries employing Virtual Assistants include Healthcare, Biotech; Real estate, Mortgage and Lending; Insurance; Law firms; Marketing agencies; Engineering firms; IT and Technology; HR; Retail,

Inside/Outside Sales; Project Management (Indeed, 2021; Ramsey, 2021); Telecommunications, E-commerce, and more.

Tasks and Categorization

There is no definite demarcation that can encapsulate the role of a Virtual Assistant. Each VA may require a different set of proficiencies reliant on what will best suit the client's needs and may change over time.

The specific tasks that a virtual assistant performs depend on the demands of the customer and the contract's requirements (Kenton, 2022). Clients can give the Virtual Assistant tasks that will save them time in their personal or professional lives (Carmody, 2022).

A virtual assistant may typically handle administrative and financial responsibilities including making phone calls, booking trips, managing email accounts, data entry, and arranging appointments. Some virtual assistants specialize in offering graphic design, blog writing, bookkeeping, social media, content management, research and market analysis, marketing, prospecting and lead generation, customer support, IT support, website creation, creating presentations, building and updating databases; among others (Fiverr, 2020; Peek, US Chambers of Commerce, 2022; Kenton, 2022). It is a multifaceted job that requires adaptability.

Tyler (2018) offered seven categories (but not limited to) of Virtual Assistants depending on the most common market niche. They have certain identities, responsibilities, and niche in the personal and professional lives of people or organizations.

- a. **Administrative VA.** They are Virtual office assistants manage and organize online business calendars, manage and schedule meetings and appointments, organize and reply to business emails, create and review documents, enter data, file and manage cloud storage, and perform other administrative tasks.
- b. **Marketing VA.** Frequently referred to as a "digital marketing manager," "social media manager," or a combination of the two terms. A virtual marketing assistant can handle a variety of duties, including creating profiles for you or your company on well-known social media sites, producing content for posting, planning posts, optimizing content for search engines, examining analytics, keeping an eye on and responding to comments, and much more.
- c. **Bookkeeping VA.** They are experts in managing the following: cash flow projections, bank and credit card reconciliation, budgeting, inventory management, payroll processing, record keeping/bookkeeping procedures, account reconciliation, and QuickBooks management or other online software management.
- d. **Data Entry VA.** Time-consuming jobs like gathering, organizing, and sorting data for entry, checking it for accuracy, updating and removing redundant files, tracking data, creating reports, entering it

into a CRM (**Customer Relationship Management**), and more are finished by a data entry virtual assistant (VA).

- e. **Research Assistant VA.** Usually assigned tasks include gathering research data, simplifying research, looking for significant statistics, assembling research data, and searching reliable websites for current information based on client needs.
- f. **Technical VA.** Helps with running a company's webpage or blog on the Internet. One of the most widely used platforms for business blogging nowadays is WordPress, and an experienced Technical VA can help companies with search engine optimization (SEO), general technical support, and blog upkeep.
- g. **Product Launch VA.** A Product Launch VA can handle tasks like creating webinars, Facebook ads and email marketing, press release writing, integrating and customizing e-commerce solutions on business websites, among others.

Since the virtual assistant market is still relatively young and evolving quickly, it can be challenging to stay on top of trends. A virtual assistant is not limited to the aforementioned categories; it may also be in between or a combination of two or more categories. Other terminologies are also used in specialized or certification-level classifications.

Telework Versus Remote Work

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the global adoption of alternative work arrangements, particularly telework and remote work. Despite their frequent interchangeable use, these terms are not synonymous and represent distinct work structures. Clarifying these differences is essential to understanding the work environment of Virtual Assistants.

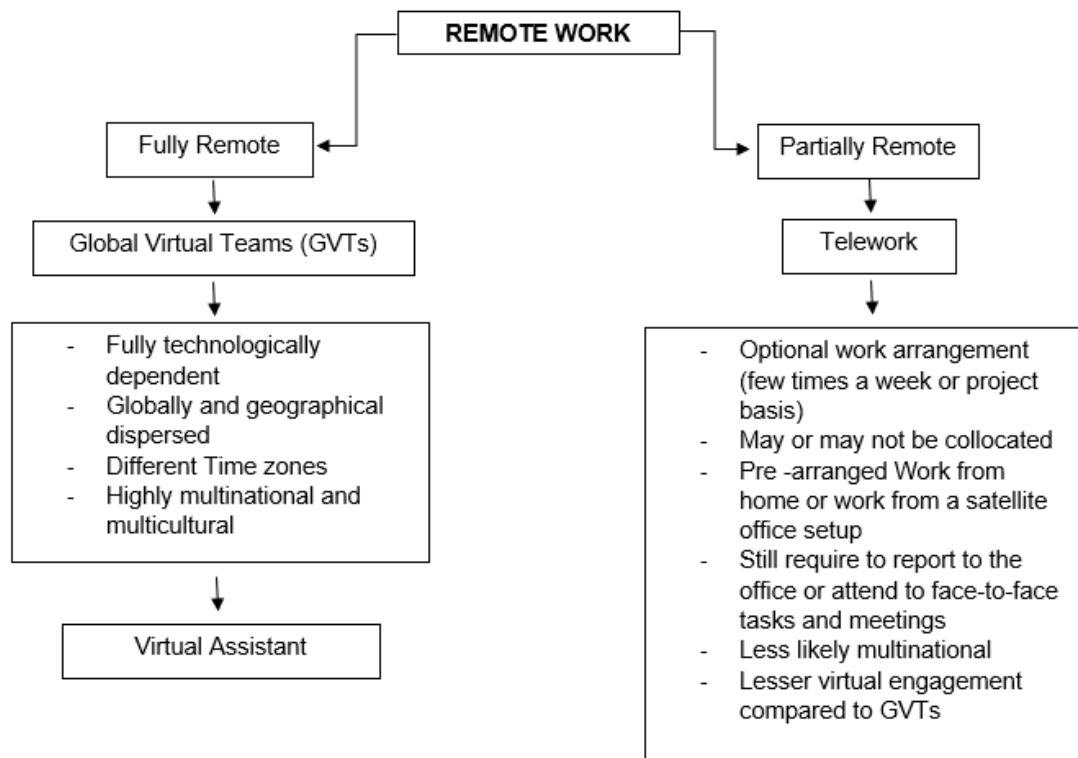
Remote-work models are generally categorized as temporary, hybrid, or fully remote. Temporary remote arrangements occur when organizations shift partially or fully online for a limited period, with expectations of returning to physical offices. Hybrid models combine in-office and remote work, while fully remote organizations operate entirely without physical offices and rely exclusively on digital infrastructures to manage distributed teams (Velocity Global, 2022; Sokolic, 2022).

Virtual Assistant work aligns most closely with the fully remote model, as tasks are performed entirely online, often across national borders.

To more precisely delineate the scope of this study, the research anchors its discussion on the following definitions and meaning categorizations of virtual assistant as a conceptual and professional role (*See Figure 2. Virtual Assistant Categorization*).

Figure 2.

Virtual Assistant Remote Work Model Categorization. These are the work categorization based on my knowledge from the literature and actual experiences



Key Distinctions: Telework, Partially Remote Work, and Fully Remote

Work

Early scholarship on alternative work arrangements conceptualized telework primarily as a workplace flexibility strategy rather than a fundamental restructuring of organizational space.

Bailey and Kurland (2002) describe telework as a hybrid arrangement that preserves organizational attachment while reducing physical commuting. Similarly, Allen, Golden, and Shockley (2015) frame telework as an

organizational accommodation designed to improve work–life balance and productivity yet still governed by traditional managerial oversight and temporal expectations.

In contrast, fully remote work represents a more radical departure from conventional employment structures. Messenger and Gschwind (2016) argue that remote work decouples labor from fixed spatial and temporal frameworks, allowing work to be organized around outcomes rather than presence. This distinction is especially pronounced in outsourced and offshore arrangements, where workers operate entirely outside the employer’s national, legal, and physical boundaries (Gereffi, Humphrey, & Sturgeon, 2005).

From a technological standpoint, Leonardi (2011) emphasizes that digital tools do not merely support work but actively shape organizational processes and social relations. In fully remote environments, technology becomes the primary medium through which authority, coordination, and identity are enacted. This aligns with Orlikowski’s (2007) sociomaterial perspective, which posits that technology and human agency are mutually constitutive in organizing practices. As such, fully remote workers experience work as fundamentally mediated, whereas teleworkers encounter technology as supplementary to face-to-face interaction.

Technological Consumption

Several scholars note that virtual work alters traditional mechanisms of managerial control. Kurland and Bailey (1999) argue that telework challenges

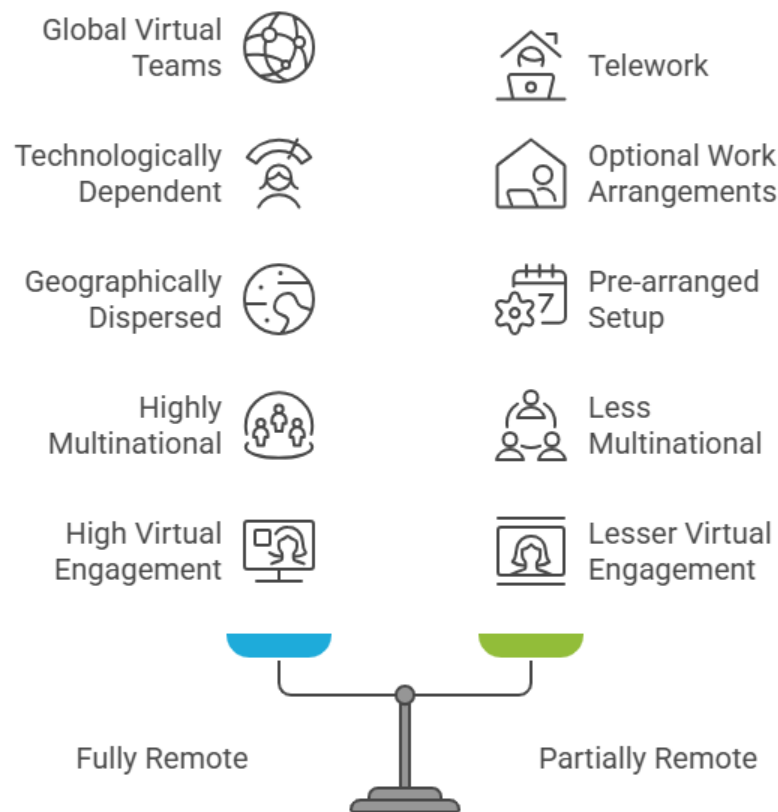
supervisory practices by reducing visibility, prompting organizations to rely more heavily on output-based performance metrics. However, in fully remote work arrangements, particularly in global outsourcing contexts, control is often reasserted through digital surveillance, performance dashboards, and communication monitoring tools (Mazmanian, Orlikowski, & Yates, 2013).

Virtual work is broadly defined as work mediated by online technologies that organize labor in ways that dislocate, redistribute, and relocate work across new workspaces such as virtual teams, distributed workplaces, offshore facilities, restructured global value chains, and outsourced functions (Webster & Randle, 2016). These digitally mediated arrangements are enabled by expanding digital communication networks, which encourage the emergence of innovative organizational structures based on evolving communication patterns rather than physical proximity (Trier, 2008).

Across telework, partially remote work, and fully remote work arrangements, employees rely on digital tools such as email, instant messaging applications, project management systems, and video conferencing platforms to coordinate tasks and sustain communication. However, the degree of technological consumption differs significantly across these models. Teleworkers may only partially rely on virtual platforms, as their work arrangement still presumes periodic physical presence in a designated office. In contrast, fully remote workers, such as Virtual Assistants (VAs), engage in 100% technological mediation, wherein all tasks, coordination, supervision, and performance evaluation occur entirely through digital systems.

Figure 3.

Fully Remote vs. Partially Remote work setup. These are data based on my knowledge from the literature and actual experiences



A virtual workplace, therefore, is not merely an extension of the physical office but a digitally constructed environment that represents organizational space without being anchored to a specific geographic location (Bailey et al., 2012; Junaid, 2020). It consists of an integrated network of technological infrastructure, human actors, institutional rules, and virtual procedures that collectively reproduce office-like functions in a non-physical environment (Junaid, 2020).

Geographic Location and Spatial Flexibility

Both telework and remote work allow employees to perform tasks outside traditional office settings; however, their spatial flexibility varies considerably. Fully remote workers operate under distant work conditions and may work for organizations located anywhere in the world without ever reporting to a physical office. For Virtual Assistants, geographic location does not constrain employment, collaboration, or task execution, as all responsibilities are completed online.

Telework, on the other hand, is typically an approved and regulated work arrangement within an organization. Employees are permitted to work from an alternate location—often their home—while maintaining a formal relationship with a specific office. This arrangement usually involves hybrid mobility, wherein employees alternate between remote work and on-site presence based on organizational requirements. As such, teleworkers may still be required to commute periodically to a main or satellite office for tasks that cannot be handled remotely (Vega, 2011; Gobes-Ryan, 2017; Junaid, 2020).

Consequently, telework offers less geographic flexibility than fully remote arrangements, as it remains anchored to organizational proximity and predefined work locations. In contrast, the working environment of Virtual Assistants exemplifies spatial independence and transnational labor integration.

The globalization of remote work has been extensively examined through the lens of global value chains and digital labor markets. Gereffi et al. (2005) highlight how outsourcing redistributes labor across national borders, enabling firms to access skilled workers in lower-cost regions while maintaining strategic control. In this context, fully remote workers function as nodes within transnational production networks, rather than as extensions of a centralized office.

The Virtual Office and Organizational Transformation

Virtual workplaces are sustained by technological and communication infrastructures that recreate organizational, social, and managerial functions traditionally associated with physical offices. As information technology becomes more pervasive, the organization of work increasingly shifts from physical constraints to digitally mediated structures (Fritz et al., 1998).

Virtuality emerges when digital representations partially or fully replace physical objects, actions, or interactions within organizational contexts (Bailey et al., 2012). This transformation alters how authority, coordination, collaboration, and identity are enacted within organizations. Unlike traditional workplaces whose structures are shaped by physical boundaries, virtual organizations rely on information and communication technologies to form adaptive, fluid, and task-oriented arrangements that promote flexibility and collaboration (Igbaria & Mahatanankoon, 2003).

D'Cruz and Noronha (2016) emphasize that offshore virtual workers often experience asymmetrical power relations, as clients retain decision-making authority while workers remain spatially and institutionally distant. Despite this, studies also show that global virtual work can foster professional growth, intercultural competence, and identity reconstruction (Nurmi & Hinds, 2016; Connaughton & Daly, 2004).

Home as Workplace

For fully remote workers, the home becomes the primary site of labor. Home-based workstations are the most common setup for Virtual Assistants, enabling them to integrate professional activities into domestic spaces. In virtual organizations, work structures are no longer dictated by office layouts but by access to digital tools, connectivity, and communication protocols. Virtual organizations leverage information and communication technology to build ad hoc organizational structures that encourage adaptability and collaboration (Igbaria and Mahatanankoon, 2003).

Fleming (2014) cautions that while remote work is frequently framed as empowering, it may also intensify labor through constant connectivity and blurred work–life boundaries. This phenomenon is further elaborated by Gregg (2011), who describes how digital communication technologies extend work into domestic spaces, transforming the home into a site of continuous professional engagement.

For Virtual Assistants, this blurring of boundaries is amplified by client-driven expectations, time-zone misalignment, and platform-based accountability systems (Wood et al., 2019). Unlike teleworkers, whose schedules and locations are often protected by organizational policies, fully remote workers must negotiate autonomy and precarity simultaneously.

Time Zones, Geographic Dispersion and Global Labor Integration

Traditional physical workplaces are typically bound by restrictions and standardized business hours and local time zones. Virtual offices, however, operate across multiple time zones, allowing collaboration to occur synchronously or asynchronously depending on contractual arrangements and client needs. This flexibility enables work to be organized around deliverables rather than fixed schedules.

As a result, collaboration in virtual environments may occur outside regular business hours, particularly when clients and teams are geographically dispersed. Certain tasks, such as graphic design or project-based work, may be performed asynchronously and evaluated based on output and deadlines rather than real-time supervision.

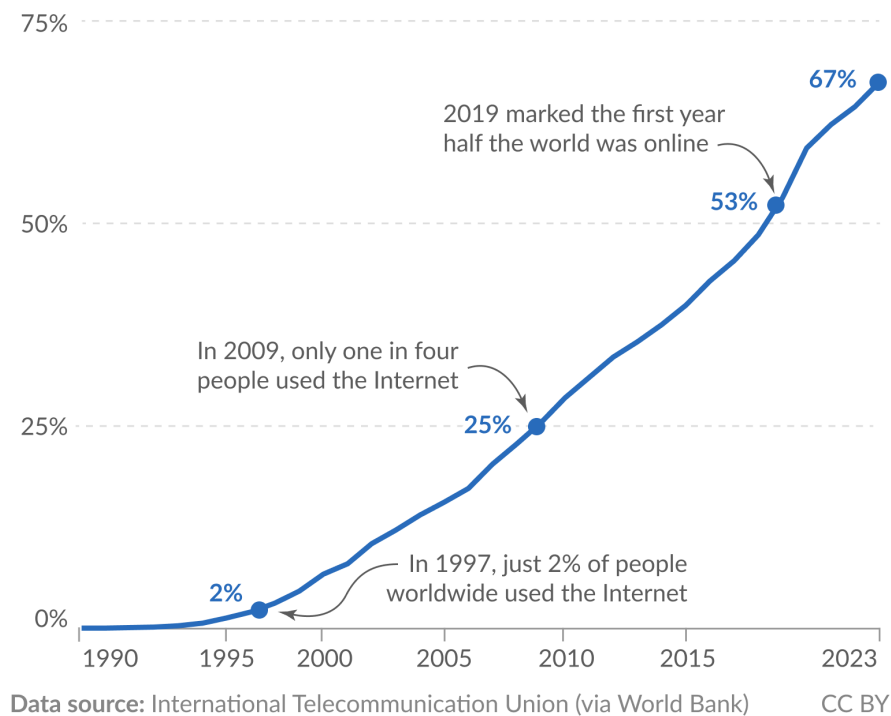
Virtual Communication: World of the VAs

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) has become the primary mode of interaction in modern workplaces. According to Teutum (2025), the United Nations has set a goal of connecting over 90% of the global population

to the Internet by 2030. However, significant disparities remain, as access is still limited in certain regions, with only about 43% of people in South Asia and 37% in Sub-Saharan Africa currently online.

Figure 4.

Global Population's Internet Usage from 1990 to 2023. Adapted from Teutum (2025)



The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the adoption of CMC platforms, not only in education but also across business and organizational contexts.

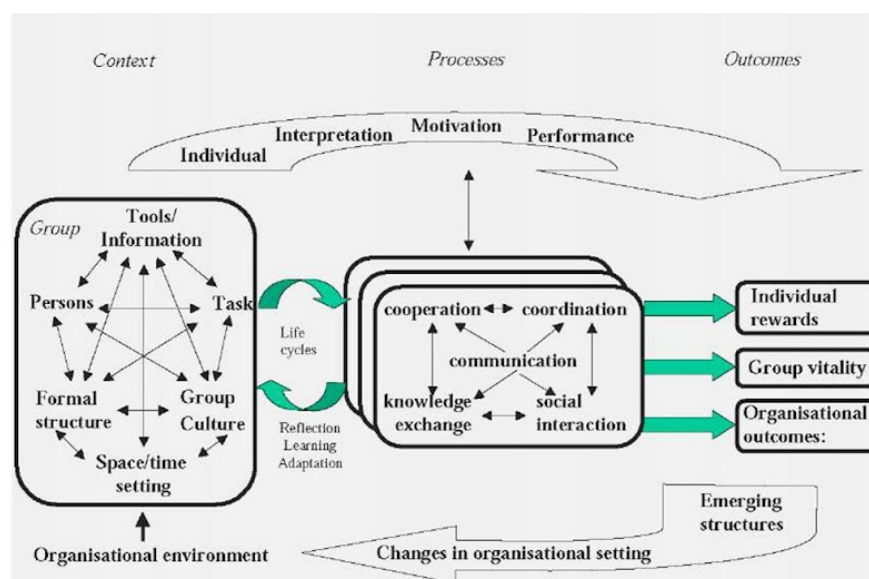
Electronic media are widely recognized as enablers of distributed work (Trier, 2008; Fallows, 2004; Sijtsema & Sivunen, 2013), facilitating real-time

collaboration among globally dispersed teams. Progressive organizations increasingly invest in cloud-based solutions to support remote workers, recognizing technological infrastructure as a strategic organizational asset (Blichok, 2022).

For Virtual Assistants, effective participation in virtual work requires adequate hardware, software, and reliable Internet connectivity. Beyond technical competence, communication through ICT platforms also demands strong social and interpersonal skills to navigate digital interactions effectively (Schonauer et al., 2013). However, the reliance on structured communication processes may also constrain individual creativity and innovation within virtual teams (Dube & Robey, 2008).

Figure 5.

Dynamic Group Interaction model (DGIn-model). Akar et al. (2003)



Akar et al. (2003) cited the Dynamic Group Interaction model's (DGIn-model) implication in designing and assessing collaborative environments in

which significant consideration should be given to communication, social interaction, and learning as well as the context in which the learners act.

The model incorporates group dynamics and four interrelated theories, such as media richness theory, activity theory, coordination theory and constructivist learning theory.

Media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986) remains foundational in understanding communication in virtual work. Richer media, such as video conferencing, are better suited for equivocal tasks requiring negotiation and relationship-building, while leaner media, such as email, are effective for routine coordination. In fully remote settings, workers must strategically navigate multiple communication channels to compensate for the absence of physical cues.

Walther's (1996) social information processing theory further suggests that relational depth can still develop in computer-mediated environments, albeit at a slower pace. Over time, virtual teams establish norms, trust, and shared meanings through sustained interaction. This is particularly relevant for Virtual Assistants who engage in long-term client relationships despite geographic separation.

However, Hinds and Bailey (2003) note that distributed teams face heightened risks of misalignment, delayed feedback, and coordination breakdowns. These challenges are exacerbated in global virtual teams due to

cultural differences, time-zone dispersion, and varying communication styles (Gibson & Gibbs, 2006).

Virtual Teams and Global Collaboration

Virtual teams form the foundational units of virtual organizations, serving as the fundamental building blocks of virtual enterprises. They combine the key capabilities of partnerships to produce knowledge-based goods and services (Igbaria and Mahatanankoon, 2003).

Global virtual teams (GVTs) emerged as a result of business globalization, the drive toward leaner, flatter organizations, and widespread access to information technology (Kelley, 2005; Jimenez, et al., 2007). While the term virtual team can apply to any geographically dispersed group, GVTs are separated by vast distances and have limited ability to communicate face-to-face (IGI Global, n.d.), are multinational, (Shaik et al., 2019; Connaughton and Shuffler, 2007) culturally diverse (Shaik et al., 2019; Stanko and Gibson, 2009; Zigurs, 2003; Jarvenpaa and Leidner, 1999), and *“rarely or never see each other in person”* (Kankanhalli, et al., 2007).

Nurmi and Hinds (2016) argue that global virtual work enhances skill variety, learning opportunities, and professional growth, despite challenges related to coordination across time zones and cultural differences. Through their study of globally professional engineers working remotely, they identified that global virtual work provided more skill variety, impact and learning

opportunities as a result of extensively working with talented and experienced engineers across the globe and across cultures.

Pros and Cons of Virtual Communicative Practices

Aside from the technological, emotional, cultural, and financial aspects, virtual communicative practices also have their pros and cons.

Virtual teams have several benefits for an organization, including greater organizational performance, increased information exchange, and employee dedication (Furst et al., 2004).

Virtual Teams can now regularly communicate and work together through web conferencing, instant messaging, email (Bailey et al., 2012), and most currently, cloud-based business communications (Blichok, 2022).

Communication in the workplace is heavily influenced by social or non-task related interactions between employees as social interactions allow for the emergence of shared interests amongst coworkers. Concepts like power, role definition, and interpersonal compatibility are constructed (Fritz et al., 1998).

Yet, scholars (Furst et al., 2004; Straus, 1996; Shaik et al., etc.) acknowledged key challenges in working with virtual teams, namely: (1) issues with logistics, like coordinating and transmitting tasks across time; (2) interpersonal issues, including building a strong working relationship with team

members without face-to-face interaction in aggregation with diversity, isolation, detachment and trust issues, and (3) difficulties with technology, such as selecting the appropriate tools for the task and learning how to manipulate them.

Employees that work in the same physical place establish relationships and coordinate tasks through casual conversations and chance meetings, which are limited in the remote environment (Fritz et al., 1998). Bartel et al. (2011) in conformity with McClosey and Igbaria (2013) posit that physical isolation is the focal ordeal faced by virtual workers.

Further, the fact that team members must collaborate across time zones and cultural barriers, as well as the possibility that the communication technology they employ may encourage unclear or conflicting signals, adds another layer of difficulty to coordination (Bailey et al., 2012; Maznevski and Chudoba, 2000; Hinds and Bailey, 2003; Sproull and Kiesler, 1991). Trust (Raghuram et al., 2001; Golden and Raghuram, 2010) is also viewed as a key predictor in establishing virtual relationships.

Studies have shown that the kind of work that requires little or no interaction with coworkers and can be accomplished in isolation are the ones that are most suited for remote jobs (Bartel et al., 2011; Milki et al., 2008).

This has given rise to concerns that the use of virtual work environments and the physical separation of employees from the company and its members

can endanger their sense of belonging, organizational identification, and standing within the organization. This can be seen through the works of Bartel et al. (2011), Thatcher and Zhu (2006), Wiesenfeld et al. (2001), Cooper and Kurland (2002), among others.

Overall, while telework, partially remote work, and fully remote work share reliance on digital technologies, they differ markedly in degree of technological consumption, spatial flexibility, organizational attachment, and communication intensity. Fully remote work, particularly in the context of Virtual Assistants, represents the most advanced form of virtual labor, characterized by total digital mediation, geographic independence, and integration into global virtual teams.

Taken together, existing literature demonstrates that while telework and partially remote work represent extensions of traditional employment models, fully remote work constitutes a qualitatively different labor paradigm. It involves total technological mediation, global spatial reach, altered power relations, and intensified reliance on computer-mediated communication. These distinctions are particularly salient in the context of Virtual Assistants, whose work exemplifies the most advanced form of virtual labor in contemporary organizations.

Virtual Identity Formation

Virtual Identity and becoming a productive member of the team in this era demands increasing technological sophistication and personal flexibility among workforces. The concerns of identity and identification are also challenges. It is via communication with others that we express our sense of belonging (or lack of belonging) to different associations, evaluate the reputation and image of those associations, become aware of other identities, and learn the social costs and benefits of sustaining diverse identities (Scott, 2017). More profoundly, virtual working spaces that are limited geographically, and culturally and have time boundaries may incur unknown discord.

The idea of identity is perhaps the most fundamental idea to every member of society (Davis, 2022; Gioia et al., 2013; Oliver and Vough, 2020). It is used to help make sense of and explain behavior, whether it is in reference to a person, an organization, or even a country (Gioia et al., 2013).

The complex theme of identity and identification is influenced by a person's location, gender, race, history, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, and ethnicity which hinge on sociocultural context (Mehta, 2017). We inquire about a person's name and position in the community when we want to know who they are. Although the concept of identity is clearly important at the individual level, its significance has also become more apparent at larger macro-levels of analysis.

The modern definition of identity is largely derived from the work of psychologist Erik Erikson in the 1950s. Erikson discusses the connection between libido development, ego development, and society, and proposed a mode-zone technique for diagramming individual personality development. Psychosocial theory states that throughout our lives, we go through eight stages of development from infancy to late adulthood, where he believed that the main psychological challenge of adolescence was developing a sense of self (Cherry, 2022).

When he discussed an inner identity, influential psychologist Sigmund Freud laid the social basis of identity. He claimed that the human personality is multifaceted and comprises multiple elements (Freud, 1923 as cited in Cherry, 2022), whereas the ability to live and think independently was a gift from the Jewish tradition.

In a similar perspective, Mehta (Freud, 1923 as cited in Mehta, 2017) elaborates on multiple interpretations of the idea of identity, as follows:

a) Self-concept and individuality

Within a given society, the idea of the individual is socially constructed. This is a very introspective, self-reflexive process that is typically developed by thoughtful, insightful people with a significant influence on comprehending the relationship between a person and his society. Universal concepts of selfhood are the foundation for gender identity, social identity, and national identity.

The tripartite id, ego, and superego, all of which develop at various phases of our lives, was the structure proposed by Freud in his personality theory (1923). Although every component of the personality has distinct qualities of its own, these components work together to form a whole and each contributes differently to a person's behavior.

Table 1.

Freud's personality theory

Id	Ego	Superego
Instincts	Reality	Morality
An innate and primal aspect of personality wherein wishful impulses should always be granted, no matter what the repercussions.	It is the conscious self-perception that an individual holds and the image that they typically attempt to project onto other people as it operates in both the conscious and unconscious mind.	A composition of conscience and ideal self. Depending on which part—the conscious or ego-deal—is activated, the superego is perceived as the supplier of rewards, such as feelings of pride and satisfaction, and punishments, such as feelings of shame and guilt.

b) National identity

Self-determination is a key concept that shapes national identity. The two concepts are intimately related to the freedoms of speech, religion, and political power. A nation's identity is primarily shaped by its people, not just by one person. National identity and cultural recognition have also emerged as a result of modern science and technology (Mehta, 2017).

c) Social identity

People are made to adopt the beliefs and behaviors necessary to function in a specific society through the process of socialization. Religious, familial, educational, and political institutions are being rebuilt in society, and within these institutions, the individual identity is being formed (Mehta, 2017).

Originating in a series of studies known as minimal-group investigations, social identity theory (SIT) was developed by British social psychologist Henri Tajfel and associates in the early 1970s. Social identity theory seeks to identify and predict the conditions under which individuals and/or group members perceive themselves. According to Harwood (2020), this framework is founded on people's intrinsic value placed on social group membership and their wish to be perceived favorably within their specific social groupings. It examines how social and personal eccentricities interact with one another.

d) Gender identity

Gender is determined by sociological and psychological factors rather than by biology. Just like there are likely as many variations and nuances in

sexual orientation and gender identity, there are also just as many methods to navigate these identities through the complexities of day-to-day existence. Men, women, and other gender identities in between, are fundamentally different.

Further, Gioia et al. (2013), in their study of organizational identity formation and change, examined the theoretical and empirical research on the three proposed "pillars" of identity—that is, what is supposedly central, persistent, and unique. They paid close attention to the most contentious of these pillars, which is the debate between the "enduring identity proposition," which holds that identity is stable over time, and the "dynamic identity proposition," which holds that identity is more flexible.

Key values, labels, goods, services, or practices, among other things, are examples of central features that are fundamental components of an organization's self-definition of "who we are". An organization can only determine whether it is acting "in character" if its past behavior has been consistent with its founding principles or embraced core values. This makes history a crucial component of identity. Correspondingly, Oliver and Vough (2020, pp. 76–77) through Davis (2022), assert that organizational identity is the "socially constructed perception of an organization's core characteristics broadly shared by organizational members." A person's feeling of identification or belonging to their organization is a crucial component of organizational identity (Ashforth and Mael, 1989).

The concept of "optimal distinctiveness" (Brewer, 1991; Gioia, 2013) is a crucial idea associated with the second pillar of identity. Organizations, as social entities, seek to perceive themselves and others as both like and different from pertinent members of a category or industry (Corley et al., 2006; Gioia, 2013).

The most contentious identity pillar is presumably the third one. A significant aspect of identity has been described as either "enduring" or having "continuity" over time. A growing body of research affirms that identity often changes over relatively short time horizons, albeit perhaps in subtle ways, has effectively settled that debate. The key finding is that insiders continue to describe themselves with the same labels even when those labels' meanings change unconsciously, leading them to believe that identity is stable even when it is changing. This leads them to believe that identity is stable even when it is changing (Gioia et al., 2000, 2023).

Virtual Identity and Professional Self-Construction

Recent literature increasingly examines virtual work as an identity-shaping process. Ashforth, Kreiner, and Fugate (2000) argue that work roles contribute significantly to professional self-concept, particularly when traditional organizational markers such as offices, uniforms, and face-to-face supervision are absent. In fully remote contexts, workers must actively construct legitimacy and professionalism through communication practices, responsiveness, and digital presence.

Barley, Meyerson, and Grodal (2011) suggest that remote professionals develop “interactional expertise” to navigate multiple organizational contexts simultaneously. For Virtual Assistants, this involves managing client expectations, adapting communication styles, and aligning with organizational cultures they may never physically encounter.

As a result of information technology's pervasiveness in daily life, human identities are reconfigured, leading to the rise of virtual identities, identities that people adopt for themselves online and in virtual environments (Brey and Søraker, 2009). Concerns concerning the nature of identity and the self, as well as their future realization, have been brought up by this development.

Two main processes determined the social being modernity - globalization and the emergence of the information society. The world of technology, the economic system, and the modes of social organization are all changing at a rate never seen before by humans, and this has a cumulative effect that leads to constant identity changes in society, culture, and the individual (Korotkevich, 2019).

Below are some studies on virtual identification and formation:

Table 2.

Studies on virtual identification.

Author and Year	Research Title	Key Findings	Method
Davis, D. J. (2022)	Understanding virtual organizational identity through the intersection of information technology and narratives	Resistance was encountered in attempts to foster a sense of identity and community using information technology while senior leaders promoted and formalized the development of organizational narratives. Social media and hyperlinks increased the benefits of organizational members' narrative production and sharing.	Qualitative; In-depth interview with 18 members of the organization
Korotkevich, E.R. (2019)	Problems of virtual identity in the digital age (social and philosophical analysis)	For the first time, the author established and articulated a historical-genetic succession of social identity types: "sacred-imputed", "communicative-spectral", and "corporate-transformative", which serve as the foundation for distinct human identity forms. Author proposed for the development of a common typology of identity: socio-natural (civilizational, ethnic, gender, geopolitical), social (cultural, subcultural, political, religious, professional, personal, virtual, digital), mental (fashion brand, scientific paradigm)	Socio-philosophical analysis of the communicative virtual identity structure

Michaud, D. C. (2018)	From A Distance: A Phenomenological Study of the Lived Experience of Telecommuters Working Remotely in Virtual Teams	This phenomenological investigation into participants' lived experiences explored the social and emotional experience of telecommuters working remotely in interdependent virtual teams. The study aimed to fill the knowledge gap regarding how people in virtual teams perceived working remotely in their own subjective ways. The two main themes of the participants' social and emotional experiences—as well as several subthemes that pinpointed the structural, personal, and contextual elements that influenced those experiences—were revealed by the data analysis.	Qualitative; interview with 10 participants
Holmlund and Lindqvist (2015)	Virtual Team Management & Organisational Identification	Levels of organizational identity and virtuality, member involvement, and prior experience all showed positive correlations. The degree of member involvement was the best predictor of organizational identity.	Mixed methods
Boum, A. (2014)	"The Virtual Genizah": Emerging North African Jewish and Muslim Identities Online	The majority of websites emphasized the largely good interactions between Jews and Muslims as well as their ties to their own ancestral cultures and gave a new generation of academics a platform to create a new, borderless historiographical paradigm that breaks free from nationalist histories and reintegrates North African Jewish relations into the global community.	Qualitative: Ethnography

Belk, R. (2013)	Extended Self in a Digital World	The extent to which virtual self-construction online transfers into nonvirtual self-construction offline is a major concern that underlies digital changes. The notion of a fundamental self is a myth. Understanding the connection between online and physical personas is essential to identifying the self in the digital age.	Article: update on the 1988 Extended Self research
Au, Yee Wei (2010)	Identification and Conflict in Virtual Teams: A Social Identity Approach	The workers' intrinsic wants are what motivate them. The team's contextual and situational characteristics have an impact on how well needs for identification with a specific virtual team are met. The identification procedures also affect how well the team members interact with one another and how they handle conflicts.	Qualitative; 7 virtual teams from 4 companies
Thatcher and Zhu (2006)	Changing Identities in a Changing Workplace: Identification, Identity Enactment, Self- Verification, and Telecommuting	Role conflict and subsequent bad results are common among people who have identities tied to both organizations and families. However, people who are able to juggle work and family responsibilities may really have a better life and job outcome.	Quantitative: Meta Analysis

Most of the studies relate virtual identity to their environment interaction. Although executed in different methodologies, all studies require a high level of participation and inclusion.

Davis (2022) in his study on understanding virtual organizational identity through the intersection of information technology and narratives, presupposes

that organizational narratives provide insight into various identity processes. According to Gabriel (2000), people can experiment with their identities when they tell stories. However, little is known about how information technology affects the way narratives are constructed, as technology affordances are a concept used by management scholars to describe how people use specific features of a technological artifact to achieve a specific objective (Fayard and Weeks, 2014).

Profound in remote work arrangements, the term virtual organizing describes the bridging of spatial and temporal boundaries through the use of information and digital technologies, including cloud computing, teleconferencing, virtual private networks, and collaborative software (Davis, 2022; Wiesenfeld et al., 2001). Davis' (2022) study on DiverseCS – a nonprofit, virtual organization - through grounded theory methodology, revealed stories of technology failure, stories of a common narrative, stories of technology affordances. Attempts for information technology adoption to foster a sense of community and identity were greeted with resistance. Instead, organizational narratives were fostered and formalized by senior leaders. Innovative information technology applications, such as social media and hyperlinks, were used to enhance the benefits of organizational members creating and sharing stories.

Upon initiating DiverseCS's activities, the leaders endeavored to establish a shared objective and identity for every member throughout the Southeast United States. But the leadership team's attempts to forge an

organizational identity were severely hampered by the absence of physical colocation and in-person interactions. Several DiverseCS members opposed the use of IT, frequently claiming that the asynchronous nature of interacting with coworkers did not feel natural. In addition to challenges with technology adoption among DiverseCS members, technical issues prevented students and leaders from DiverseCS from utilizing a variety of technologies to create deep, meaningful social connections (Davis, 2022).

In an effort to create an identity-based framework for comprehending organizational issues, Zhu (2006), examined the literature on three crucial facets of identity: identification, identity enactment, and self-verification. The implications of telecommuting within the identity-based framework were scrutinized in three main ways that telecommuting modifies the social context of work and interaction: the location of the work, the amount of time spent telecommuting, and the voluntary nature of the work.

First, she focused on cognitive self-categorization by drawing on social identity theory. Social identity is an identity that is classified according to different criteria wherein as a person integrates into social units, "I" transforms into "we," and their self-concept incorporates the traits of the social unit (Zhu, 2006; Brewer, 1991; Hogg & Terry, 2001).

Her second crucial consideration is self-verification which contends that people actively work to align other people's evaluations with their own and that people have a basic need for others to see them as they see themselves. There

are two main reasons why self-verification matters - it supports people's sense of psychological coherence by giving them confidence that they are seen as the people they think they are, and self-confirming feedback indicates that other people have formed realistic expectations regarding the focal person (Zhu, 2006).

Third, the method used is based on studies that highlight identity as “habitual routines”. According to this perspective, identity is a continuous process of habitual activities that give one's everyday life a sense of structure and coherence rather than merely an abstract perception of the person one thinks oneself to be (Zhu, 2022; Brocklehurst, 2001; Burke, 1991; Giddens, 1991). Hence, changes to routines can bring in fresh aspects that broaden, deepen, or transform an identity. Thus, these deviations from regular patterns are also threats to the integrity and security of an identity.

Numerous outcomes, including job satisfaction, performance, motivation, compliance, and intragroup conflict, have been empirically and theoretically linked to organization-related identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton et al., 1994; Elsbach, 2003; Mael & Ashforth, 1995).

Figure 6.

Reproduction of telecommuting and identity processes (Zhu, 2006).

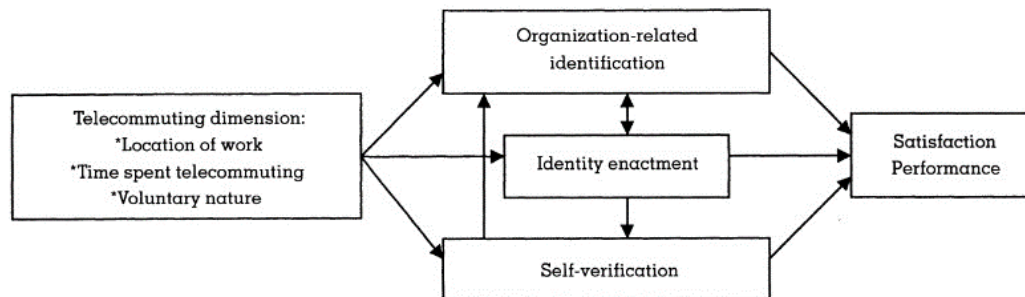


Figure 6 shows that when identity enactment is successful, it creates habits and routines that support the sense of coherence and certainty in one's identities related to the organization, which boosts high levels of satisfaction, creativity, and self-esteem linked to self-verification (Zhu, 2006; Polzer et al., 2002; Swann, 1985, 1996; Thatcher, 2004). Individuals may change their identities and seek the verification of new ones because of a lack of verification, which could potentially impair the functioning of people and their organizations (Zhu, 2006; Bartel, 2004; Swann, 1996). Therefore, when telecommuters can achieve or maintain high levels of identity verification related to their organizations, they are likely to be more productive and content with their jobs.

Similarly, Au (2010) employed a critical perspective on Social Identity Theory (SIT) along with a qualitative case study approach to gain an understanding of the cognitive processes involved in identification, as well as the sources of motivation behind them and the relationships between employees in virtual teams. The results show that employees identify with a specific virtual team based on their intrinsic needs and that the contextual and

situational factors of the team have an impact on how those needs are met. The team members' intergroup and conflict-handling behaviors are influenced by the identification processes.

Belk (2013), in his study of Extended Self in a Digital World, outlined five shifts resulting from the current digital era: (1) dematerialization, (2) re-embodiment, (3) sharing, (4) co-construction of self, and (5) distributed memory. Our understanding of the self, the nature of possessions, and our relationships with objects in a digital world are all considered when evaluating the implications of these changes.

According to Belk's 1988 original definition of the extended self, we can observe that while the concept of the core self is eroding due to the emergence of numerous online personas, the illusion of a core self is still a powerful and relevant one. It is a belief rather than an absolute truth that there is a core self. That self is now expanded into broadly defined avatars in the digital world (Belk, 2013), with which we strongly identify and which have the power to influence our offline behavior and sense of self. The degree to which we now self-disclose and confess online, changing the once semiprivate to a more public presentation of self, is another way that the predigital era differs from the present. Along with changes in how one presents and constructs oneself, there have also been significant changes in the other half of self-extension, which consists of one's possessions and people.

More recently, Michaud (2018) placed an emphasis on the social and emotional aspects of the lived experiences of telecommuters who collaborate virtually in virtual teams to broaden our knowledge and comprehension of their social, economic, and personal practices. The significance of working remotely in virtual teams was examined in connection to the members' sense of presence in the virtual setting. Important findings present a nuanced picture of the daily work lives of telecommuters, suggesting that telecommuting is both a context and an aspect of work, with the main focus being on how people complete their tasks rather than on where and when they work.

Five conclusions regarding their experiences working in virtual teams and telecommuting were revealed (Michaud, 2018):

1. Time is seen by telecommuters as an elastic and limitless aspect of their working environment.
2. Due to their work arrangements, telecommuters believe they are more productive.
3. The difficulties associated with the social and emotional aspects of telecommuting are mitigated by individual initiative.
4. How other people perceive you affect the social and emotional aspects of working remotely in virtual teams.
5. Informal contacts enrich the emotional experience of presence.

Michaud (2018) concluded that we need to consider more aspects of the social and emotional experience of working in virtual teams and telecommuting,

in the context of today's knowledge-based, and technologically advanced workplace. Michaud explained that their emotional experiences had to do with how people interpreted their work as telecommuters and processed their feelings and ideas on an individual basis. It was closely related to their individual identities, experiences, backgrounds, and motivations for looking for remote employment, he said.

Korotkevich's (2019) socio-philosophical analysis of virtual identity offers a parallel framework for understanding how digital immersion reshapes personal and social development. He argues that unrestricted internet access has fundamentally altered daily routines, moral frameworks, and interpersonal dynamics, giving rise to new forms of relational deficits, particularly among youth, while simultaneously diminishing the depth of networked communication.

Central to Korotkevich's model is the relationship between virtual reality and virtual identity. He defines virtual reality as a form of "near-reality", a replication of lived experience (Korotkevich, 2019; Virtual Reality Society, 2017), within which virtual identity functions as a representation of conditional parameters including behavior, social status, and perceived social standing. Analogous to real-world group identity, virtual identity is distinguished by its multiplicity: internet anonymity and the construction of a "virtual body" enable individuals to maintain several virtual personas simultaneously.

Korotkevich further contends that computer-generated imagery increasingly supplants real objects and processes, allowing social reality to be modeled and curated on-screen in ways that cultivate feelings of creativity and

competence. He describes what he terms the "media meshing lifestyle", a condition in which simultaneous engagement across social networks, email, video platforms, and online gaming normalizes communication noise as ambient experience (Korotkevich, 2019). For digitally immersed individuals, the virtual image becomes more vivid and credible than lived reality, and the boundary between virtual and real identity narrows in direct proportion to one's withdrawal from offline social life.

Social networks are a fundamentally new form of social space because they lack spatial localization and calendar-temporal determinants, exist under their own laws, and are not subject to unification processes or globalizing trends in social beings. As a result, they act as a hub for designing, reproducing, and preserving new forms, a variety of forms, of an individual's personal and cultural identity, and consequently forms of sociality and social relations (Castells, 2010; Giddens, 1990).

Due to its lack of enduring substantive structural forms, it can only be understood and described in terms of the methodological potential of the category "identity," specifically in terms of the identities that social actors in virtual spaces (such as bloggers, posters, moderators, and providers) or virtual technologies (such as chat rooms, forums, flash mobs, and social networks) practice (Korotkevich, 2019).

Studies on Virtual Assistants in the Philippines

In the 2026 Ataraxis Global Outsourcing Talent Index, the Philippines ranked first worldwide, highlighting its strong workforce, competitive labor costs, and high English proficiency (Philstar Global, 2026). The article pointed out that the Philippines had an overall score of 90.65 out of 100, surpassing Malaysia (85.55) and India (85.40). The index evaluated 193 countries based on labor cost, English proficiency, talent availability, digital infrastructure, and business stability. The Philippines received high scores in labor cost (96), English proficiency (90), and talent availability (90), highlighting its strong competitive advantage in the global outsourcing industry. Other top outsourcing countries, in order, included Chile, South Africa, Peru, Indonesia, Argentina, and Romania.

Another article penned that the Philippines has consistently been recognized as a top destination for sourcing virtual assistants because Filipino VAs are often described as easy to work with, cost-efficient, and highly literate, with a national literacy rate of 96.2% (Truelist, 2022). As a result, Filipinos have become some of the most in-demand online workers globally (Truelist, 2022; Peatman, 2021; PIDS, 2020), valued for their English proficiency, strong work ethic, adaptability, and flexibility in performing diverse tasks.

As previously discussed, the demand for virtual assistants (VAs) significantly increased alongside the rapid growth of solo entrepreneurs and small enterprises during the COVID-19 pandemic (Westerman, 2023).

The Philippines ranked as the sixth fastest-growing digital work market internationally in 2019 prior to the epidemic, according to Payoneer data (2022). Fifty- five percent (55%) are independent contractors between the ages of 21 and 35. A sizable (28%) percentage of independent contractors are between the ages of 36 and 45, suggesting that a significant number of Gen Xers (Born from 1965 – 1980) and Boomers (born from 1946 – 1964) are joining the gig economy.

A report from the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) in 2020 pinpointed that the Philippines recorded the highest growth in freelance revenue in Asia between 2019 and 2020, reaching an increase of 208%. This marked a substantial rise compared to the 35% growth recorded between 2018 and 2019, during which the country ranked sixth in the region. The sharp increase was largely attributed to the country's young workforce and the growing availability and acceptance of flexible work arrangements, particularly in digital labor platforms.

Statistics from a 2022 analysis by payment companies Payoneer and GCash indicate that over 1.3 million Filipinos operate as freelancers online. The survey by Payoneer (2022) also revealed that freelancers looking for opportunities abroad are capitalizing on this digital work trend and growing their businesses in important markets like the US, UK, Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, and the UAE. Facebook is the most popular medium for freelancers to

find work, followed by Instagram and other job sites or platforms for the gig economy (Payoneer, 2022).

Despite the rapid growth of the virtual assistant industry in the Philippines, only a small number of academic works have directly examined the experiences and professional dynamics of Filipino VAs. To date, only five (5) identified scholarly studies have specifically focused on this sector. These include works by Filipino researchers such as Simoy (2022), Sulasula (2024), Saldo (2025), Palo et al. (2025), and Garcia (2025). These seem to be the only existing available resources to date (as of research time March, 2026), as crossed check through various platforms (OpenAI, Research Gate, Academia.edu, IJFMR, 2026).

Simoy's (2022) autoethnographic study examines "VA hyping" as a form of impression management among Filipino virtual assistants, drawing on Goffman's dramaturgical framework. As a practitioner with extensive experience in international business development, global talent acquisition, and remote team management, Simoy analyzes how VAs curate their online personas to enhance marketability, approaching the phenomenon from three dramaturgical positions: the VA as actor, the manager as director, and the prospective client as audience.

Grounded in sociocultural communication theory (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019), the study finds that VA hyping intensified during the pandemic as professional life migrated online, heightening awareness of digital self-presentation among both VAs and potential clients. The practice is primarily

driven by two motivations: maintaining a positive online reputation and securing opportunities within the gig economy.

Simoy further finds that VA hyping succeeds when performers demonstrate command of performance elements, employ defensive techniques effectively, and maintain clear boundaries between front- and back-stage regions. Broadly, the motivations map onto three self-preservation strategies: protecting personal data online, sustaining professional reputation, and securing employment. This study is relevant here for its attention to how online self-presentation shapes individual identity particularly how VAs construct and manage their digital personas for target audiences.

On the other hand, Sulasula (2024) conducted a phenomenological study titled *“Lived Experiences of Virtual Assistants in Achieving Work-Life Balance”*. The research explored the lived experiences of virtual assistants in Iligan City, focusing on how they manage and achieve work–life balance within the context of remote work. She found that virtual assistants face several challenges, including blurred boundaries between work and personal life, difficulties in time management, social isolation, fluctuating workloads, and financial instability. To cope with these challenges, participants employed strategies such as setting clear work boundaries, utilizing time-management tools, strengthening communication and technical skills, building support networks, and practicing financial planning. Despite these coping mechanisms, Sulasula found that there is a need for stronger support systems, improved organizational structures, and better work management tools to help virtual assistants maintain sustainable work–life balance and overall well-being.

Similarly, Saldo (2025) examined the relationship between job satisfaction and productivity among fifty (50) virtual assistants in Bukidnon, Philippines in his paper *“Virtual Assistants’ Job Satisfaction and Productivity: A Correlational Study”*. The multiple dimensions of job satisfaction included pay, promotion opportunities, supervision, benefits, working conditions, coworker relationships, nature of work, and communication. Saldo found generally high levels of job satisfaction (mean score of 3.25) and productivity (mean score of 3.31). Statistical analysis revealed a strong positive correlation between job satisfaction and productivity, indicating that improvements in job satisfaction are associated with higher levels of productivity.

The findings emphasize that supportive supervision, effective communication, and positive working relationships contribute strongly to the productivity of remote workers, while compensation and promotion opportunities remain areas needing improvement. This study reinforces the importance of workplace satisfaction in sustaining productivity within the virtual workforce and highlights how remote professionals navigate organizational relationships and communication structures in digitally mediated work environments (Saldo, 2025).

Palo, Sebastian, and Rosete (2025) wrote a paper titled *“Insights from Professionals on Sustainability and Viability”* which examined the sustainability and viability of the virtual assistant profession in the Philippines through a survey of 400 respondents. The study focused on key factors influencing the

long-term stability of the profession, including financial sustainability, career longevity before retirement, job satisfaction, technological advancements, and workplace constraints. The research aimed to understand whether virtual assistant work provides financial stability, whether professionals envision remaining in the field until retirement, and how emerging technologies may influence the future of the industry.

Their findings suggest that working as a virtual assistant can provide opportunities for financial stability, particularly because professionals may acquire multiple clients, extend contracts, and develop a sense of job security through continuous engagements. However, the study also raised concerns regarding the ability of virtual assistants to build sufficient emergency savings, which is essential for coping with unexpected personal or financial circumstances. While remote work provides flexibility, the authors noted that self-employed remote workers may sometimes receive lower compensation compared to permanent employees. In addition, flexible work arrangements may blur the boundaries between work and personal life, which can result in work–family conflicts and challenges in maintaining personal priorities.

Palo et al. (2025) further emphasized that with the average retirement age in the Philippines being around 60 years old, the sustainability of the virtual assistant profession must be considered in terms of long-term financial security and career longevity. They identified several factors influencing job satisfaction among virtual assistants, including financial rewards and recognition, which were found to positively affect motivation and work attitudes. However, the

study also pointed out that remote workers may face challenges in career advancement because their contributions are less visible to employers compared to those working in traditional office settings. In addition, the perception of job security was found to influence employee attitudes and satisfaction depending on the nature of their employment arrangements.

Moreover, Palo et al. (2025) observed that remote work may contribute to improved well-being by providing workers with more leisure time and flexibility in managing their schedules. At the same time, flexible working arrangements may disrupt regular social interactions that commonly occur in traditional workplaces. The study also highlighted the importance of communication technologies in enabling remote work, particularly through online platforms that facilitate meetings and collaboration. However, concerns regarding security risks associated with digital communication platforms were also identified. The authors further discussed the role of emerging technologies, such as blockchain, in transforming recruitment processes by enabling algorithm-based job matching, secure verification systems, and digital agreements. Despite these advancements, the study noted several challenges faced by virtual assistants, including differences in educational backgrounds, difficulties in establishing interpersonal relationships, and communication barriers caused by the lack of nonverbal cues, technical issues, and challenges related to accountability and monitoring.

Finally, Garcia (2025) in her study *“Professionals’ career-oriented factors contribution to the success of online freelancing: Evidence from the*

Philippines”, examined the career-oriented factors that contribute to the success of online freelancing professionals in the Philippines, particularly among virtual assistants in the CALABARZON region. The study employed a descriptive quantitative design and surveyed 324 freelancers using online questionnaires distributed through digital platforms. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and ANOVA to determine the relative influence of different career-related variables.

The findings revealed that several factors influence the success of online freelancers. These include individual factors such as self-awareness and adaptability, organizational factors such as career opportunities and organizational support, and job-related factors such as job design and job characteristics. Among these, adaptability emerged as the most significant contributor to freelancing success, followed by job design, self-awareness, and job characteristics. Organizational support and career opportunities were also relevant but ranked lower in influence.

Garcia’s study highlights that success in online freelancing is shaped not only by technical skills but also by the ability of freelancers to adapt to changing work conditions, manage their careers independently, and effectively navigate digital work environments. Based on these findings, Garcia recommended the development of career management programs for freelancers to help strengthen professional competencies and improve long-term sustainability in the gig economy.

Taken together, these studies provide initial insights into the emerging field of virtual assistance in the Philippines. However, the limited number of scholarly works suggests that the field remains underexplored, particularly in relation to the broader communication practices, professional identities, and global roles of Filipino virtual assistants in the digital labor economy.

Communication Attributes of Filipinos

The Filipino struggle against colonial rulers, rooted from the lack of nationalistic sense of unity, gave rise to the national ideology in 1896 known as Filipino nationalism or more currently known as Filipinism (Almonte, 2003).

Camilo Osias, one of the most prominent supporters of Filipinism, sought to “*define what it meant to be Filipino*” and created an internationalist, outward-looking nationalism that resulted in a country with a distinct identity, the ability to govern itself, and an understanding of its responsibilities as a member of the global community – recognized as Dynamic Filipinism (Zialcita, 2017).

Even in this technological modern era, Dynamic Filipinism can be taken in various contexts that encourage a sense of global citizenship while retaining both knowledge of national character and a sense of national consciousness to evoke a sense of national identity. For instance, the term “Filipino English” in linguistics can be traced back to our Filipinism (Filipino nationalism) rooted in our direct or loose linguistic translation from the local languages such as

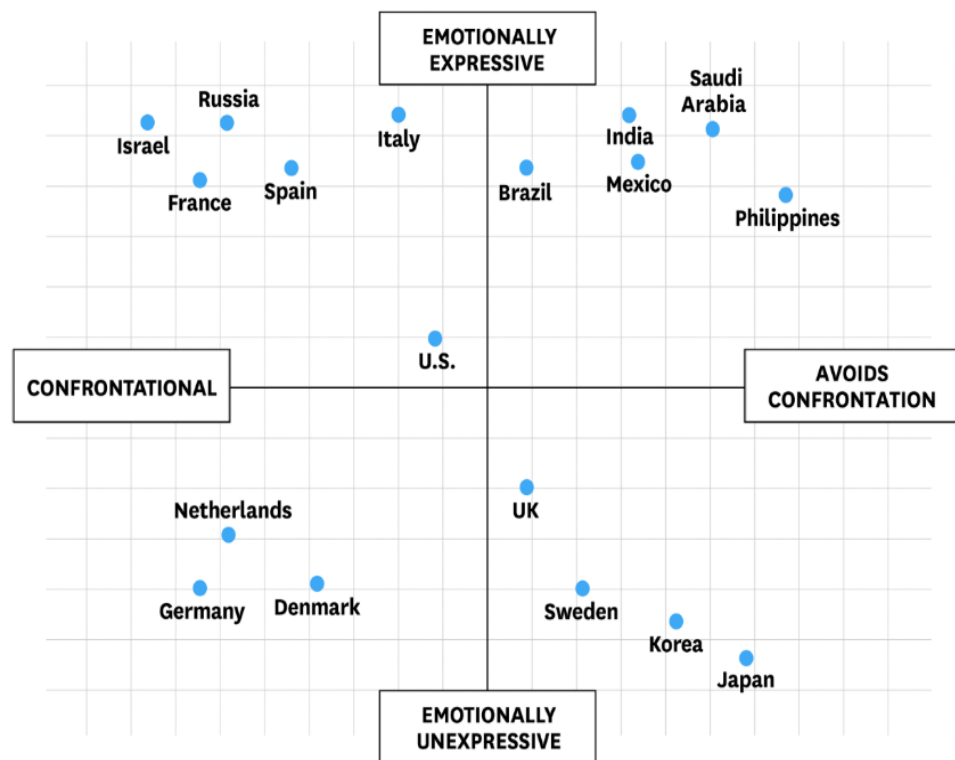
Tagalog to the English language (Dagalea, n.d.; Bautista, 2000). Filipino Virtual Assistants may be well-versed in many Western references, but they remain firmly enmeshed in their own workplace culture in terms of their distinctive values, habits, and beliefs.

Most Americans typically appreciate a direct and plain approach to communication to make sure that their objective and meaning are conveyed completely and correctly (Evason, 2022), which some Filipinos may find uncomfortable, offensive, or even impolite.

Meyer (2015) of Harvard International Business, published a map (Figure 6) showing how confrontational and emotionally expressive are various nationalities. This was in relation to how they communicate, their culture, and how they build trust with core focus on the different norms of communication while dealing with negotiations.

Figure 7.

Confrontational and Emotional Expressions of different nationalities. Erin Meyer, Harvard Business Review (2015).



SOURCE ERIN MEYER
FROM "GETTING TO SÍ, JA, OUI, HAI, AND DA," DECEMBER 2015

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The map suggests that Filipinos are most likely to avoid confrontations or disagreements but are intuitive and would likely go the extra mile to build genuine connections with their counterparts.

Shaik et al.'s (2019) study of work and non-work identities revealed that the relationship between cultural intelligence and employee engagement in Global Virtual Teams (GVTs) was the dynamic interplay of members of GVTs negotiating their work and non-work identities. It broadly categorizes individual

identity based on the way it is either being defined by work (occupational) or is non-work related (persona, religious, national, gender, family, etc.).

Benefits and Challenges of Virtual Assistants

In her study of the lived experiences of Filipino mothers as online freelancers and outsourced workers, Potestades (2023) found that online freelancing offers Filipino women flexible employment opportunities that help them balance income generation and family responsibilities. Many entered the gig economy due to financial needs, motherhood, or dissatisfaction with traditional work arrangements. While freelancing provided autonomy, convenience, and opportunities for skill development, it also exposed workers to unstable income, lack of social protection, blurred work-life boundaries, and emotional and physical exhaustion. The findings further revealed that women freelancers continue to carry the majority of caregiving and domestic responsibilities despite participating in paid labor. Overall, the study highlights both the empowering and precarious nature of online freelance work within the Philippine gig economy.

In the high-tech economy of today, a remote workforce helps to increase revenue, expand clients, boost business capacity, and frequently outperform rival businesses with fewer remote employees (Ramsey, 2021). One benefit of using a virtual assistant for an employer is the freedom to just pay for the services they require. A firm does not require a client to offer a virtual assistant the same benefits or make the same tax payments as it would for a full-time

employee since the virtual assistant is an independent contractor (Kenton, 2022). The “client” refers to the individual, business, or organization that hires the VA and receives their services.

Although they regularly work from home, virtual assistants have access to the digital tools they need to conduct their jobs. A virtual assistant should be computer literate, possess a broad variety of computer skills, be highly proficient with widely used business applications and programs (Kenton, 2022; Nurmi and Hinds, 2016; Schonauer et al., 2013); and an overall online presence is an advantage (Simoy, 2022).

Most remarkably, Virtual Assistants can earn several times the average salary in the Philippines, with monthly wages in the thousands of dollars.

There is no fixed salary for virtual assistants because the industry operates largely on a freelance or contract-based setup, where both the virtual assistant and the client negotiate compensation terms and rates. Compensation is largely influenced by factors such as experience level, specialization, employment arrangement, and client market. Some virtual assistants work for local Philippine companies or under VA agencies, while others work directly with international clients or through online platforms direct international client arrangements. The following consolidated salary benchmarks summarize compensation trends across multiple hiring platforms, recruitment agencies, salary aggregators, and outsourcing reports to provide a clearer overview of the current VA salary landscape in the Philippines.

Table 3.

Overview of the current VA salary landscape in the Philippines.

Category	Experience Level	Common Roles / Skill Level	Agency-Based VA Rate	Direct Client VA Rate	Salary Benchmarks by Platform	Key Differences	Sources
Beginner	Entry-Level / No Direct VA Experience	General Admin VA, Data Entry, Appointment Setter, Customer Service	₱15,000 – ₱30,000/ month (\$3–\$4/hr)	₱25,000 – ₱45,000/ month (\$4–\$6/hr)	₱15,000 – ₱35,000/ month	Agencies typically provide training, onboarding, and client sourcing, but compensation is lower because agencies retain part of the client billing rate.	Indeed Philippines, 2026; Talent.com, 2026; Cyberbacker, 2026; VirtualStaff.ph, 2026
Intermediate	1–3 Years Experience / Specialized Support	Executive Assistant, Social Media Manager, CRM Support, Bookkeeper, Real Estate VA	₱35,000 – ₱60,000/ month (\$5–\$7/hr)	₱50,000 – ₱90,000/ month (\$7–\$12/hr)	₱25,000 – ₱90,000/ month	Direct clients increasingly pay premium rates for experienced VAs with CRM, social media, bookkeeping, executive support, and industry-specific expertise.	Remote Staff, 2026; VirtualStaff.ph, 2026; The VA Hub, 2025; OnlineJobs.ph, 2026
Expert / Specialized	Advanced / Highly Specialized / Technical	PPC Specialist, SEO Specialist, GoHighLevel Automation, Web Developer, Operations Manager, Project Manager	₱60,000 – ₱100,000/ month (\$8–\$12/hr)	₱100,000 – ₱200,000+/ month (\$12–\$25+/hr)	₱80,000 - ₱150,000/ month	Specialized VAs handling automation, SEO, PPC, development, operations, and project management command the highest compensation when working directly with international clients.	Upwork, 2026; HuruPay, 2026; OnlineJobs.ph, 2026; VirtualStaff.ph, 2026

Table 3 highlights a substantial difference between agency-based and direct-client employment models. Virtual assistants working under Philippine agencies generally receive lower compensation because agencies retain a portion of the client billing rate in exchange for training, onboarding, administrative support, and client acquisition. In contrast, virtual assistants who work directly with overseas employers through platforms such as

OnlineJobs.ph, Upwork, VirtualStaff.ph, among others, consistently earn higher rates due to the absence of middlemen and increased negotiation flexibility.

Another significant finding is that technical specialization strongly correlates with salary growth in the Philippine VA industry. Skills involving automation systems, CRM management, digital marketing, SEO, paid advertising, web development, and project management are among the highest-paying competencies across all salary sources reviewed. Overall, the evidence suggests that the Philippine virtual assistant industry remains highly competitive and continues to experience salary growth due to increasing global demand for remote work, outsourcing services, and specialized digital support roles.

Holmlund and Lindqvist (2015) concluded that the main benefits of virtual work were the cost savings and the accessibility to expertise. Virtual team success was found to be significantly influenced by both technological know-how and user-friendly technologies. High-frequency, high-quality communication, and user-friendliness is a prerequisite for the technology to operate well.

On the other hand, the same study (Holmlund and Lindqvist, 2015) revealed that the problem with technology is one of the main arguments that emerged in their mixed method analysis. Lack of interpersonal relationships at work was found to be the biggest drawback of virtual labor. Other drawbacks were disorganized meetings, work that wasn't given top priority, and technological problems. Furthermore, "trust" was found to be the most crucial

success factor in Virtual Team Management, whereas both the qualitative and quantitative samples showed cultural differences to be a problem in a virtual environment. All of the managers stressed the value of a strong sense of group identity within their organizations when speaking about organizational identity.

Consistently, Bartel et al. (2011) found out that higher levels of physical isolation are linked to weaker organizational identity and perceived respect. Golden and Raghuram (2010) suggest that relational factors such as trust, interpersonal bond, and commitment promote interpersonal affective-based connections which empower organizational commitment and job-related identity. Whereas, virtual organization leaders frequently face difficulties that jeopardize the efficacy of their organizations, it's common for remote workers to report feeling invisible (Davis, 2022; Au and Marks, 2012, p. 280) or alone (Schinoff et al., 2020). These factors make it difficult for leaders to foster a sense of unity within virtual teams (Fiol and O'Connor, 2005; Wiesenfeld et al., 2001). Likewise, because of the limitations of virtual organizing, leaders should work hard to foster a culture of story sharing so members can connect with these stories, which promotes diversity.

Moreover, Potestades (2023) revealed that women carried multiple burdens as mothers, workers, and community members, often resulting in time poverty, emotional stress, and exhaustion. Their daily routines revolved around childcare, household labor, online work deadlines, and volunteer or community activities. Although freelancing offered flexibility, it also blurred the boundaries between work and personal life, making it difficult for women to separate

caregiving from productive labor. Many participants relied on parents, spouses, or extended family members for support, yet childcare and domestic work remained largely feminized responsibilities.

Equally significant, in terms of career pathways and sustainability, online freelancers performed diverse tasks such as content writing, customer service, scheduling, social media management, research, administrative support, graphic design, and other forms of microwork. Many workers continuously developed new technical and digital skills to remain competitive in the gig economy. However, sustaining a long-term freelancing career remained challenging because of unstable income, lack of contracts, absence of healthcare and social benefits, irregular workloads, and unclear career progression. Despite these insecurities, freelancing was still perceived as more sustainable than traditional office work because it reduced commuting costs, allowed flexible schedules, and enabled workers to simultaneously fulfill family responsibilities while maintaining employment (Potestades, 2023).

While Internet labor presents financial benefits, it also raises concerns about securing respectable employment in online freelancers in the Philippines. They worry that their jobs are insecure due to the nation's inherently unregulated freelance and gig economy labor market. As a result, the government is becoming more concerned with the difficulties faced by online employees and their wellbeing (Serafica and Oven, 2022). Further, there is currently no platform work policy in the Philippines because this platform work is not covered by the Labor Code (Tacadao, 2020).

Chapter III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

This research takes the phenomenological lens as mentioned in Craig's tradition of communication theories (1999). This framework pivots on the experience of self and others through discourse. There is the purposeful scrutiny of daily life by the one doing the experiencing which emphasizes that each person has unique experiences. These are subjective experiences on how people perceive phenomena, events and conditions. Additionally, phenomenology is concerned with learning why it is so strenuous to start and maintain genuine human interactions as well as solutions to this issue.

"Phenomenology is a philosophy of experience", Armstrong (2005).

Phenomenology offers a broad understanding that illustrates the connection between the mind and the outside environment (Erciyes, 2015).

The three pillars of phenomenology can be traced through the philosophical works of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology; Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology; and Merleau-Ponty's idea of perception.

The German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), the principal and modern founder of phenomenology of the 20th century (Beyer, 2022), avers that those who aim to transform philosophy into "a rigorous science" by directing philosophy's focus back "to the objects themselves," is viewed as the

contemporary author of phenomenology (*zu den Sachen selbst*). He does not intend for philosophy to become empirical, as if "facts" could be established in an absolute and objective manner but instead suggests that reflection puts out of play all implausible assumptions, and describes what is given in experience (Armstrong, 2005), thus making an objective study of the subjective. Husserl's transcendental phenomenology is focused on determining the essence of consciousness that is anchored in the concept of "intentionality" (Moustakas, 1994). He established the method of phenomenological reduction and transcendental reflection through "bracketing or epoch" and Eidetic reduction.

Martin Heidegger, on the other hand, rejected the transcendental reduction as it was too subjective and abstract. Hermeneutical Phenomenology commences with a basic question "What is being?" which focuses on the interpretation and meaning of being (Erciyes, 2015; Giorgi, 2012). Instead of the concept of "intentionality", he adopted the ideas of "hermeneutics". The hermeneutic methodology offers a technique to more deeply comprehend and interpret the whole person. This methodological approach directs an inquiry-based approach to finding the truth (James and Komnenich, 2021) which puts emphasis on the necessity of interpretation when studying social beings, implying the concept of *Dasein* as we question the meaning of being (Heidegger, 1962).

Heidegger expanded the phenomenological tradition originally established by Edmund Husserl by shifting the focus from describing pure consciousness to interpreting the meaning of human existence within the world.

Heidegger emphasized that individuals are always situated within a social, historical, and cultural context, and therefore their experiences cannot be separated from the environments in which they occur. Central to Heidegger's philosophy is the concept of *Dasein*, or "being-there," which refers to the human condition of existing within and interacting with the world. Through this perspective, understanding lived experiences requires interpreting how individuals make sense of their everyday realities (Heidegger, 1962).

Merleau-Ponty's works significantly deviated from the aforementioned concepts although he was greatly influenced by Husserl, Heidegger, and Gestalt psychology. Carman (2009) posits *"Neither a psychological nor an epistemological theory, Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception is instead an attempt to describe perceptual experience as we experience it"*.

This study is grounded on Heideggerian phenomenology as this tradition's fundamental conception is the conscious experience of self and others by means of communication. It is an interpretive phenomenology approach which is frequently employed as a technique to examine and characterize people's lived experiences.

Hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to uncover the meanings embedded in lived experiences by recognizing that interpretation is an inherent part of understanding human phenomena. Rather than bracketing prior knowledge completely, as proposed in Husserlian phenomenology, Heidegger argued that researchers inevitably bring their own background, understanding,

and context into the interpretive process. Thus, the researcher engages reflexively with participants' narratives to interpret how experiences are constructed and understood within particular social contexts (Laverty, 2003). In the context of this study, Heideggerian phenomenology enables a deeper exploration of how Filipino virtual assistants interpret their roles, communication practices, and lived experiences as global communication practitioners in digitally mediated work environments.

Chapter IV

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This dissertation used a qualitative approach. Greater knowledge and comprehension of the social world are the goals of qualitative research. It employs scientific inquiry to address questions about the sample population using data that are observed or measured (Burrell & Gross, 2017). The tasks of gathering and evaluating data, creating, and revising theories, and extending or refocusing the research questions typically occur simultaneously in the qualitative approach, with each activity having an impact on the others (Maxwell, 2008).

Specifically, I was guided by the premise of Heideggerian phenomenology, to analyze and depict people's lived experiences. Identity explores the depths of our sensemaking and comprehension and is about us, both as individuals and as members of an organization. Studying identity means exploring the depths of both your own being and the topic you are studying (Gioia, 2008).

Time and Location

This study was conducted over an extended period, from December 2023 to 2025. The initial phase of data collection commenced in December

2023, during which the first round of in-depth interviews was carried out. This was followed by a second interview phase conducted in the first half of 2024, allowing for deeper reflection, clarification, and validation of participants' experiences.

Subsequent to the completion of the first and second interview rounds, all recorded video interviews were systematically transcribed and organized throughout the latter part of 2025. During this stage, qualitative analysis was undertaken, leading to the development of the Results and Discussion sections.

Selection of Participants

This study involved 10 full-time virtual assistants (VAs) who work with clients from foreign countries where English is the primary language, particularly the United States of America (USA) and Australia. Participants were purposively selected based on their direct engagement in virtual work environments that required sustained professional communication in English.

The criteria set for the participants were as follows:

- a. Must be a full-time virtual assistant
- b. Must be fully working from home (WFH), with no current or prior onshore or office-based work arrangement for the client
- c. Must have been working as a virtual assistant for at least three (3) months
- d. Must be employed by or contracted to an overseas or foreign company or individual client

- e. Must be working for an English-speaking client
- f. Must be engaged in direct virtual communication with an overseas team, manager, or client
- g. Has not engaged in face-to-face or traditional office-based work arrangements with their clients and whose professional communication has been conducted exclusively through virtual means from the commencement of their employment.

Consistent with the phenomenological research approach, the emphasis is placed on depth rather than breadth of lived experience (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014); within phenomenological inquiry, even a single participant may be considered methodologically acceptable. However, given the aim of this study to capture a rich and nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of virtual assistants, the inclusion of multiple participants was deemed necessary to allow for comparative reflection and thematic depth.

The number of participants was not predetermined. Instead, participant recruitment and data collection went through an iterative and uninterrupted process until the researcher attained empirical confidence and determined that theoretical saturation has been reached, that is, when additional data no longer yielded new themes or insights relevant to the phenomenon under investigation.

Based on the identified inclusion criteria, the researcher utilized personal and professional networks in selecting participants who appropriately fit the

scope of the study and can meaningfully represent the target population. The selection process emphasized participant relevance and experiential alignment rather than statistical representativeness, consistent with qualitative and phenomenological research principles. The primary objective was to focus on a specific and information-rich demographic capable of providing reliable and reflective responses to the research questions.

As I am also a virtual assistant, I drew the initial participants from personal contacts established during virtual assistant training, my current organization's pool of virtual employees, and current colleagues engaged in similar work arrangements. This positionality facilitated access while maintaining ethical transparency and reflexivity.

Data Collection

This study employed virtual, in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method to generate rich, focused, and contextually grounded data in relation to the research questions. Virtual interviews are particularly suitable for this inquiry, as they align with the participants' work environments and communication practices as virtual assistants.

The study leverages the convenience and flexibility afforded by Internet-based technologies, allowing participants to engage regardless of geographic location or work schedule. Given that virtual assistants operate across different time zones and predominantly through digital platforms, conducting interviews

online ensures accessibility while maintaining methodological coherence with the phenomenon under investigation.

Data Gathering Tool

In line with Stone (1978), the data collection process underwent several crucial stages to ensure the validity and reliability of the study. Consistent with qualitative research traditions, I served as the primary data collection tool, assuming responsibility for gathering, recording, and organizing all documentary evidence, research materials, and data throughout the duration of the study.

I used two primary approaches to data collection.

First, I distributed a Google Form questionnaire to participants prior to the scheduled interviews to collect demographic information relevant to the study. This preliminary step facilitated participant profiling and contextual grounding before the in-depth interview phase.

Second, I collected the principal data through scheduled semi-structured interviews conducted via Zoom. Zoom was selected as the primary platform due to its accessibility and built-in recording functionality, which is available across its plans and supports accurate data documentation. In instances where technical difficulties arose during the interview process, Google Meet was

utilized as an auxiliary video conferencing platform to ensure continuity of data collection.

An Informed Consent Form was distributed to participants through the DocuSign application and was duly signed with an appropriate date stamp prior to participation. All interviews were screen-recorded with the explicit consent of the participants for documentation and transcription purposes.

Interview questions were designed within the context of the participants' organizational environments, focusing on the nature of their work, the tasks they perform, and the ways in which virtual communication processes influence their sense of belonging, professional identity, and integration within their teams or organizations. The interview guide followed a semi-structured format, allowing flexibility for probing questions and follow-up inquiries to capture the authentic and lived experiences of the virtual assistants.

The interview process was conducted in two parts to allow deeper exploration and reflection on participants' experiences. The first interview session focused on understanding the participants' backgrounds, entry into virtual assistant work, daily tasks, communication tools, and general work experiences. The second interview session explored the participants' reflections more deeply, allowing them to elaborate on emerging themes such as communication challenges, professional identity formation, collaboration with global clients, and the meaning they attach to their roles as virtual assistants. This two-stage interview approach enabled the researcher to obtain

richer descriptions and more reflective insights into the participants lived experiences.

Finally, all recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, most segments translated into English and prepared for qualitative analysis.

Data Analysis

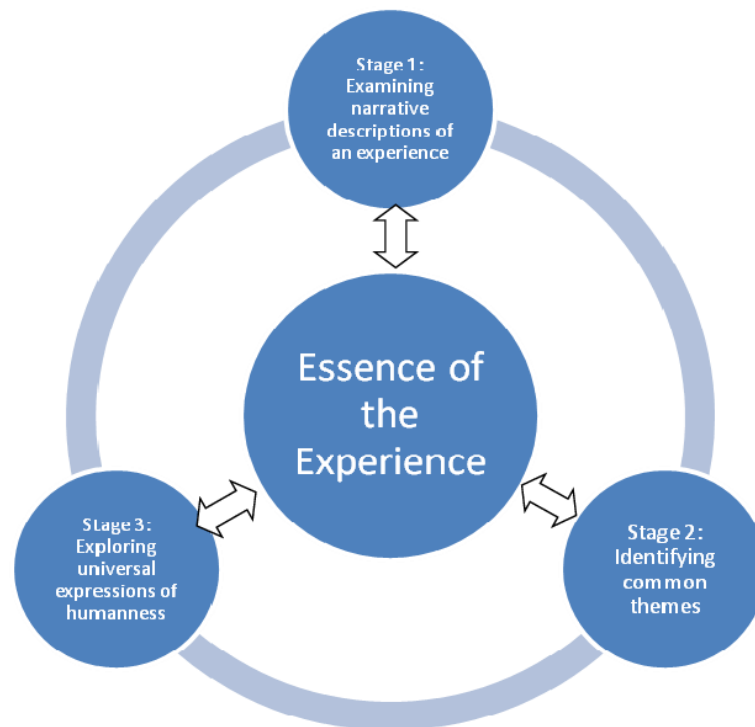
The data analysis followed Heideggerian phenomenological methodology.

The NVivo qualitative analysis software, on the other hand, was used to facilitate systematic data organization, coding, theme development, and synthesis of findings.

Heideggerian phenomenology typically involves in-depth interviews, reflective interpretation, and thematic analysis to uncover meanings embedded in participants lived experiences. The analysis follows a hermeneutic circle, where the researcher moves back and forth between parts of the text (individual statements) and the whole narrative to develop deeper understanding. The goal is to reveal how individuals make sense of their experiences and existence in the world, rather than merely describing the experience itself.

Figure 8.

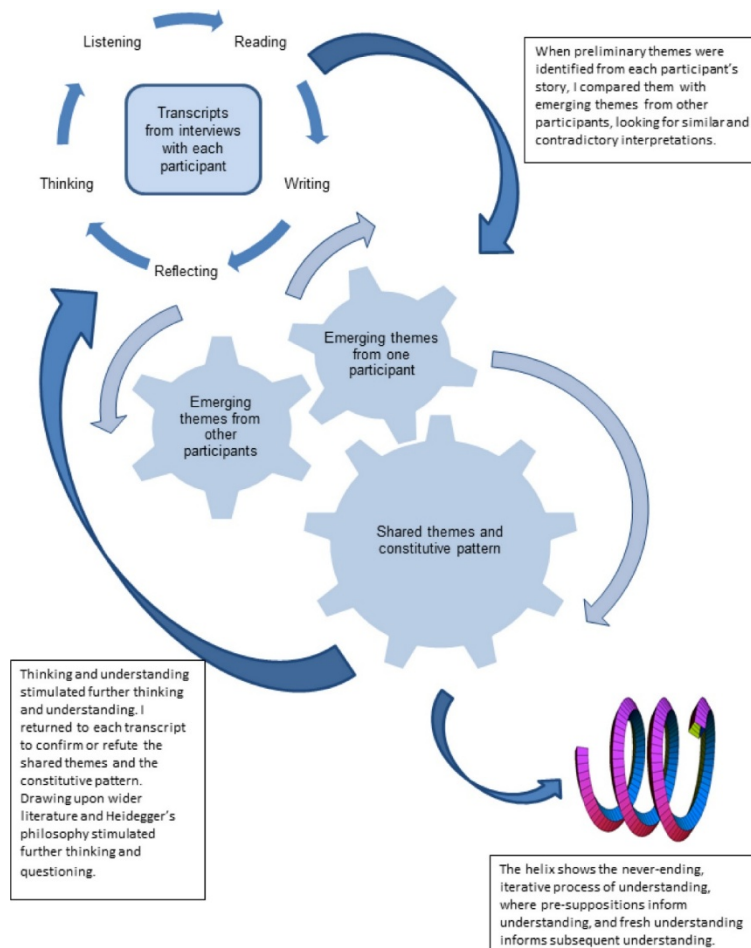
Heidegger's Hermeneutic Circle. Adapted from Monaro S, Stewart G, Gullick J. (2014).



Moreover, the Heideggerian phenomenological interview analysis is an interpretive process aimed at understanding the meaning of participants lived experiences within their everyday world. Unlike descriptive phenomenology, which focuses on describing experiences as they appear, Heideggerian analysis emphasizes interpretation (hermeneutics) and the researcher's engagement with the meaning of those experiences. This approach is rooted in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, particularly on his concept of being-in-the-world, which suggests that individuals interpret their experiences based on their social, cultural, and historical contexts.

Figure 9.

Heideggerian Data Analysis Process adapted from Taylor (2017)



The Heideggerian interview analysis involved the following:

1. Data Immersion and Familiarization

The researcher begins by repeatedly reading the interview transcripts to gain a deep understanding of participants' narratives. At this stage, the goal is to become familiar with the context and tone of the lived experiences shared by

participants. The researcher reflects on initial impressions and meanings emerging from the text.

2. Identification of Significant Statements

Key statements or passages that relate directly to the research phenomenon are identified. These statements often reflect how participants describe their experiences, perceptions, or interpretations of a particular situation.

3. Interpretive Reflection

The researcher interprets the meaning behind the participants' statements. Rather than simply describing what participants said, the researcher seeks to understand how participants make sense of their experiences within their everyday life contexts.

4. Hermeneutic Circle Analysis

Analysis proceeds through the hermeneutic circle, where the researcher moves back and forth between individual statements and the entire interview narrative. This iterative process helps refine interpretations and uncover deeper meanings embedded in participants' experiences.

5. Development of Themes

Patterns and shared meanings across interviews are identified and organized into themes. These themes represent common interpretations of the lived experience among participants.

6. Synthesis and Interpretation of Meaning

The final step involves synthesizing the themes to construct a rich interpretation of the phenomenon. The researcher explains how participants understand and experience the phenomenon in their everyday lives.

To help code the transcripts, the NVivo software, created by QSR International, was used. NVivo is specifically used to analyze unstructured text, audio, video, and image data from sources such (but not restricted to) interviews, focus groups, surveys, social media, and journal articles (Lumivero, n.d.).

The NVivo 15.3.2 software was utilized to enhance analytic rigor by enabling structured coding, efficient data management, and transparent theme construction, thereby supporting the reliability and coherence of the study's interpretations.

The transcribed interviews were uploaded to the application and to interpret the data. After understanding the context of the interviews, the researcher performed initial or open coding followed by axial coding to identify and highlight striking themes (Saldaña, 2013) where dominant themes and sub-themes were categorized.

My Positionality and Philosophical Assumptions

Ontology

Ontology refers to the philosophical stance concerning the nature of social reality, what exists and how it can be known (Crotty, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

From this standpoint, reality is viewed as multiple, subjective, and context-dependent, emerging from how individuals experience and interpret their everyday lives. Rather than seeking one universal truth, interpretive phenomenology aims to explore the different meanings individuals attribute to a particular phenomenon. These meanings are revealed through participants' narratives and the researcher's interpretive engagement with those narratives.

In the context of this study, the ontological assumption recognizes that the experiences of Filipino virtual assistants are shaped by their interactions with global clients, digital communication technologies, and their socio-cultural backgrounds. Their realities are therefore understood as dynamic and socially constructed, reflecting how they interpret their roles and experiences as communication practitioners in a virtual work environment.

Epistemology

Epistemology concerns what is considered acceptable knowledge within a field of inquiry and how such knowledge is generated (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Holmlund & Lindqvist, 2015). In qualitative research, the researcher is

responsible for gathering, documenting, and making sense of evidence throughout the research process. As the sole researcher, I therefore participate in the co-construction of knowledge within the context of this study.

Interpretivism holds that social reality is not fixed but is constructed through the meanings individuals assign to their experiences (Walsham, 1995). Unlike the natural sciences, which seek objective explanation, interpretivist inquiry recognizes that human behavior and social institutions require methods sensitive to context, intention, and lived meaning (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

Virtual Assistants operate within diverse and individualized virtual environments, shaping their understanding of work, communication, and identity through ongoing interactions with global teams and clients. Knowledge in this study is therefore understood as situated, experiential, and meaning-laden, constructed through the perspectives of the social actors involved.

Axiology

Axiology addresses the role of values, ethics, and moral judgment in shaping research decisions and interpretations (Finnis, 1980; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). In qualitative inquiry, the researcher's values, experiences, and ethical considerations inevitably influence the research process, from topic selection to data interpretation.

My professional experience as a Virtual Assistant for about six years, has informed the choice of this research topic. While this positionality provides

valuable contextual understanding of the field, it also necessitates heightened reflexivity to ensure methodological rigor. Recognizing this dual role, a deliberate process of self-evaluation was undertaken throughout the study.

Guided by Heideggerian phenomenological and ethical considerations, interview protocols, and phenomenological analytic procedures were consistently monitored to uphold research reliability, transparency, and integrity.

Praxeology

Praxeology concerns the relationship between theory and practice, particularly how knowledge informs action (Mouton & Marais, 1990; Schwandt, 2007). Within this study, praxeological assumptions guide the examination of how Virtual Assistants' lived experiences may inform emerging practices, training approaches, and work culture immersion within virtual communities.

The interpretive lenses and analytical constructs applied in this research allow for the identification of themes that may contribute to practical interventions and communicative strategies in virtual work settings. As articulated by Quéré and Motlow (2018), *“objectivity and subjectivity, individuality and sociality define themselves reciprocally and simultaneously through the practices by which members of a community give form and meaning to their interactions with the world and with others”* (pp.33-46). In this sense, meaning emerges through practice, and practice, in turn, reshapes understanding.

Teleology

Teleology refers to the orientation of human actions toward purpose and intention. Social practices may be understood as goal-directed, shaped by individuals' internal motivations and aspirations (Aristotle, trans. 1999; Schwandt, 2007). In exploring the lived experiences of Virtual Assistants, this study seeks not only to describe actions but to rationalize and understand their underlying intentions.

The ultimate aim of this phenomenological inquiry is to arrive at a deep and authentic understanding of Virtual Assistants' experiences in global virtual work environments. This understanding is pursued for the greater good of the Filipino Virtual Assistant community, contributing insights that may inform advocacy, policy development, professional support structures, and future research.

Research Ethics

The ethical considerations guiding this study are informed by the principles outlined by Fleming (2018), particularly in relation to ethical dilemmas commonly encountered by insider researchers. As the researcher occupies a professional role within the same field being studied, heightened ethical awareness and reflexivity were maintained throughout the research process.

As the primary investigator, I assumed full responsibility for adhering to established ethical standards. Data collection was conducted only after securing the appropriate ethical approval. Participation was strictly voluntary, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. In addition to verbal agreement, a written informed consent form was provided to participants for review and authorization. Any questions, concerns, or disagreements raised by participants were addressed promptly and professionally, with respect for their autonomy and perspectives.

During the interview process, careful attention was given to maintaining ethical conduct, neutrality, and professional boundaries, particularly in tone, delivery, and interaction. Consistent with ethical guidance in qualitative research, personal affiliations and relational familiarity were consciously managed to prevent undue influence or coercion (Haggerty, 2004; Held, 2006; Zegwaard, Campbell, & Pretti, 2017).

Informed Consent

Participants were fully informed about the nature and scope of the study through a written letter of consent. This document clearly outlined the study's purpose, participation requirements, intended use of the data, and any potential risks or discomforts associated with participation. The consent form was written in clear and accessible language to ensure participant comprehension.

By signing the consent form, participants acknowledged their voluntary agreement to participate in the study, their understanding of the research procedures, and their awareness of their rights, including the right to access their data and the right to withdraw from the study at any point without penalty (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018).

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The confidentiality and anonymity of all participants were treated as paramount ethical priorities. Participants' real names and identifiable information were not used in any research outputs; instead, pseudonyms were assigned to protect their identities. Any potentially self-identifying details disclosed during interviews were excluded, masked, or paraphrased to prevent indirect identification and minimize the risk of harm.

All recorded interviews, transcripts, and research materials were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. These materials were not shared with third parties and were handled in accordance with ethical standards for data protection and safe storage.

Conflict of Interest

Given the researcher's professional involvement in the virtual assistant field, any existing relationships, beliefs, or activities that could present a potential conflict of interest were openly acknowledged and critically examined. Transparency regarding positionality and reflexive monitoring were

maintained throughout the study, as unmanaged conflicts of interest could compromise both the ethical integrity and credibility of the research.

Chapter V

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of the study and discusses them in relation to existing literature and the research objectives. Using thematic analysis, the data revealed key patterns in how Filipino Virtual Assistants (VAs) understand their roles, construct professional identities, navigate global communication spaces, and experience remote work. The discussion contextualizes these findings within global labor, communication, and remote-work scholarship.

This section is divided into five parts. The first section shows the entry to virtual assistant work, specifically the pathways (how they entered) and when they entered the work. The second section discusses the initial motivations of the participants in engaging in virtual assistance work and the benefits they have experienced after more than a year at work. The third section discusses the way the VAs viewed themselves as Filipino virtual communicators, highlighting their characteristics and Filipino culture. The fourth section discusses how the VAs viewed themselves as global virtual communication practitioners in relation to other nationalities. The fifth section explains their communicative work and practices as VAs. The sixth section discusses the challenges that VAs face in their work. And the final section synthesizes the VAs realizations on their lived experiences, especially their ‘becoming’ as Filipino virtual communicators, which is the major research question of the study.

Re(entering) the (un)familiar World of Virtual Assistant Work

Work-related Pathways

At the outset, economic pressures and financial instability were significant push factors influencing participants' entry into virtual assistance. Many participants cited low wages, limited opportunities, rising living costs, and job insecurity in local employment as primary motivations for seeking remote work.

Mark Julian shared: "I started my journey as an entrepreneur at home where I managed our sand & gravel business. I drove a mini dump truck for couple of years so I was a one-man team basically. I had a couple of employees helping me out, helpers for concrete hollow block production and all that for the last two years. What happened was the business was going down a bit, and I don't have a steady stream of income. So I said why not try going back maybe on the same industry but working from home? I tried to apply for jobs for at least a year. That was how long it took basically. I have a gap in my resume for like 8 years, so that's a big question mark for the employers".

Many of the respondents mentioned that, with COVID-19 restrictions in place, and they could not go to work and had to find a new source of income while staying at home.

“Yeah, I think this is related to the pandemic cause I told you that it was slowing down”, Randy.

“I decided to work as a VA because of the pandemic. I felt comfortable in the work-from-home set-up and because of that I didn't feel like going back to the office. I have four kids, so it makes sense to be practical because there are a lot of expenses when you go to the office, like fare, gasoline, and food”, Drew.

“..that was when the pandemic came, and we were not allowed to go onsite. I was a former Interior designer,” Julius Angelo.

“Then the pandemic came, and I went back to freelancing”, Leslie.

“Since it was a pandemic, I looked for work from home”, Che, Aubrey, and Mark Julian.

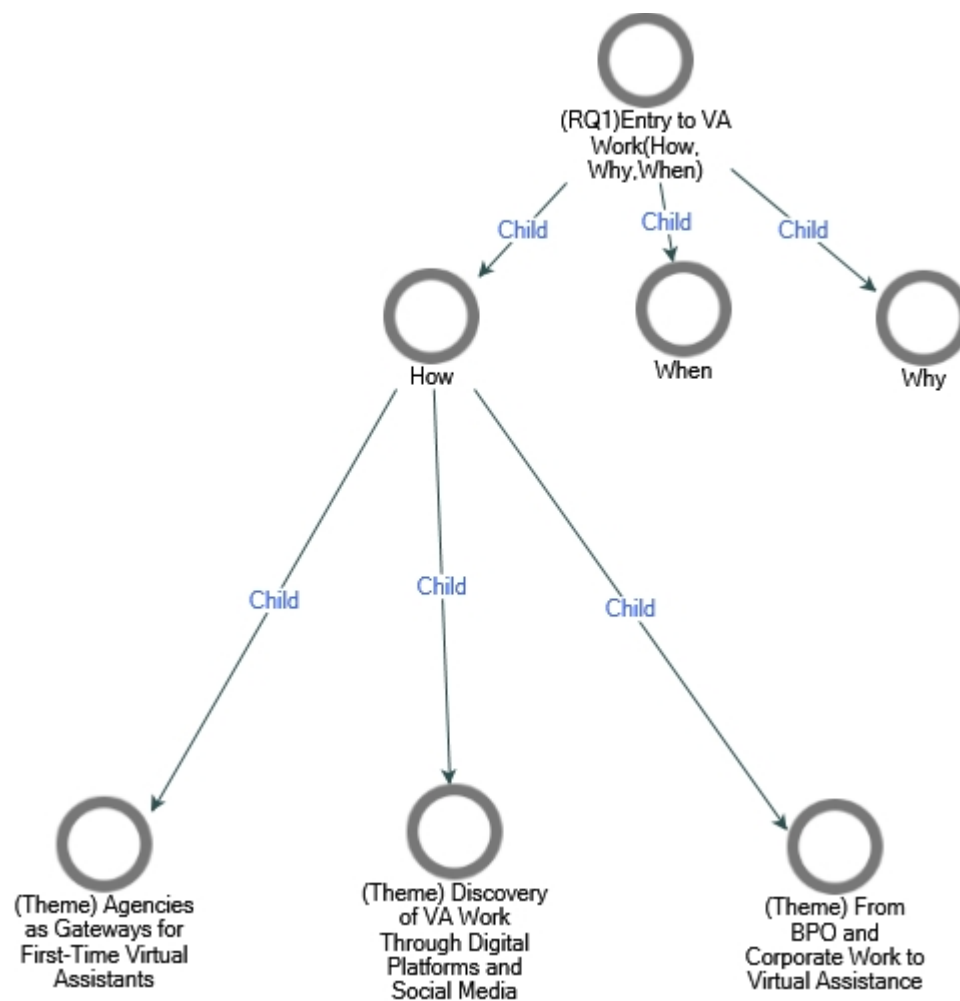
Virtual assistance was often framed not as an idealized career choice but as a practical response to economic constraints. This positioning underscores how broader structural inequalities and financial precarity shape participation in global remote labor, with virtual assistance offering a pathway

to improved income and financial stability, notably during the crisis brought by the pandemic.

With economic factors as a common factor among all the participants, the question next is how they entered VA work.

Figure 10.

Participants' entry into virtual assistant work, work related reasons (Generated using NVivo).



The findings reveal that Filipino Virtual Assistants enter the virtual assistance field through multiple, interconnected pathways shaped by the workplace such as agency gateways, digital exposure, and professional BPO (Business Process Outsourcing) background, and social networks.

The findings on Filipino Virtual Assistants' (VAs) entry into remote work align with and extend existing literature on telework, remote labor, and virtual work trajectories. Prior research conceptualizes telework and remote work as outcomes of technological mediation, economic restructuring, and shifting organizational models (Nilles, 1988; Bélanger et al., 2013; Michaud, 2018).

1. Agencies as Gateways for First-Time Virtual Assistants

For many first-time virtual assistants, agencies served as one of the primary gateways into remote work. Participants described agencies as providing structure, legitimacy, and a sense of security, particularly for those with no prior freelancing experience.

The VA agencies provided structure, training, and opportunities they could not access independently. Through training, onboarding, and client matching, agencies reduced the uncertainty associated with remote work and functioned as institutional mediators that enabled participants to take their first steps into the global digital labor market.

“I’m going to be a first-time mom, so I want to make sure that I will be the one taking care of her. The first platform I looked for was online jobs on Upwork because that was the trend back then. But then, it turned out to be so difficult to find opportunities there if you don’t have experience. So, I looked for a VA agency, and apparently, my friend works at The VA Hub. She told me to apply there, and that’s how I got into this business. I applied through the agency and also got hired through the agency” (Jeally, 28 years old).

Cherilyn, 33, also shared a similar experience:

“It’s through Indeed (a VA agency?). Since it was a pandemic, I looked for work from home. I tried to send my resume through Indeed, and then I saw TVH (The VA Hub Agency). I really didn’t have any idea about being a VA until I was interviewed, and that was the only time I learned what a virtual assistant is, that it’s a work-from-home job. That’s how it all started”.

“I went to the VA Hub Facebook page... tried my luck and got into the initial interview” (Julius).

Agencies served as intermediaries that helped workers bridge skill gaps and connect with international clients.

Participants' reliance on VA agencies as entry points corroborates earlier research describing how intermediary institutions reduce uncertainty in virtual labor markets (Kenton, 2022; Carmody, 2022).

Similar to Michaud's (2018) findings on telecommuters' need for structural support, agencies in this study functioned as stabilizing structures that mediated access to global work. However, findings of this study extend the literature by showing that agencies also play a symbolic role, legitimizing VA work for first-time entrants who initially doubted the reality or sustainability of remote employment.

This reinforces DeSanctis and Monge's (2006) characterization of virtual organizations as contractual, edgeless, and reconfigurable, where entry is rarely direct and often mediated by institutional actors.

2. Discovery of VA Work Through Digital Platforms

In addition to agencies, digital platforms and social media played a critical role in the discovery of virtual assistance as a viable form of work. Participants frequently encountered information about VA opportunities through online job platforms like Upwork and Indeed, LinkedIn, Facebook groups, YouTube content, and peer-shared posts.

Exposure to tutorials, success stories, and step-by-step guides contributed to shaping participants' awareness and perceptions of virtual assistance. These platforms did not merely serve as job-search tools but

operated as awareness ecosystems that normalized VA work and presented it as accessible and achievable, especially for individuals seeking alternatives to traditional employment.

“The first platform I looked for was online jobs on Upwork because that was the trend back then”, Jeally.

“It's through Indeed. Since it was a pandemic, I looked for work from home. I tried to send my resume through Indeed”, Cherilyn.

Erika, 28 also said: *“The role of virtual assistants was starting to emerge... being marketed on TikTok and social media.”*

“I started searching for LinkedIn and one of these clients requested to do some stuff. That was when I started it”, Randy.

Consistent with Trier's (2008) assertion that digital communication networks shape new work structures, participants' exposure to VA work through platforms such as Upwork, Indeed, LinkedIn, Facebook, and TikTok demonstrates how platform visibility normalizes remote labor. Rather than merely facilitating job matching, these platforms functioned as cultural and informational spaces where VA identities were first imagined.

This finding aligns with Webster and Randle's (2016) notion of technological consumption, where work is reorganized and redistributed

through digital mediation, but adds an experiential layer by showing how seeing others succeed online influenced participants' willingness to attempt VA work.

3. Transition from BPO and Corporate Work to Virtual Assistance

For several participants, entry into virtual assistance represented a transition from Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) or corporate employment. These individuals described leaving traditional office-based roles due to burnout, inflexible schedules, night shifts, and limited work-life balance.

As per Leslie: "I was a single parent that time. So, I think it was 2016 or 2017, when freelancing became trending. I got curious, but that time, I was really half hearted if I was going to give up my BPO or corporate world career or not. But ended up resigning, and then I used my last pay to buy all the stuff in a Virtual World without any plan and not knowing where to start."

Randy shared: "Before, I was based in the office way back 2010 I believe... I started working under a BPO company as a dialer assistant, as an IT, so I worked there for 7 years."

"I did come from a BPO background for like six years way back in 2009 until 2016", Julian.

Erika confirmed: "I was previously employed as a customer service representative in a BPO here in Dasmariñas."

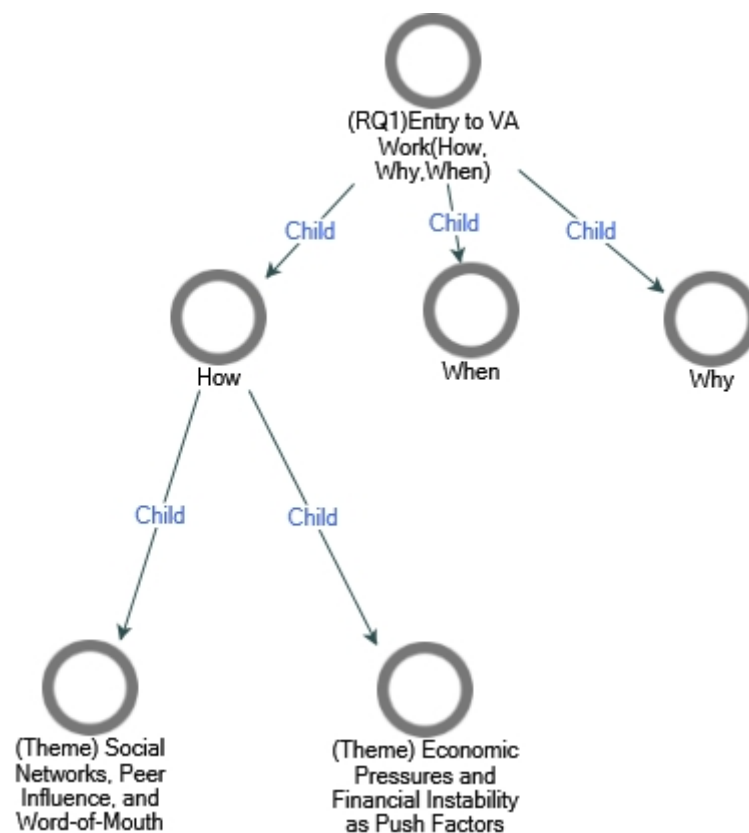
Nine out of 10 participants have BPO experience, while one had online teaching experience. Most of them had long background in BPO, like 6-7 years being the longest. Others were on managerial positions already.

Virtual assistance was perceived as offering greater autonomy, flexibility, and control over one's time and labor. Rather than viewing this shift as a step down, participants reframed virtual assistance as a strategic career move that aligned better with personal well-being and long-term sustainability.

Personal-related Pathways

Figure 11.

Participants' entry into virtual assistant work on a personal level (Generated using NVivo)



1 Social Networks as Influence

Social networks and peer influence facilitated participants' entry into virtual assistance. Friends, relatives, and acquaintances already working as

virtual assistants often served as sources of information, encouragement, and informal mentoring.

“My friend works at The VA Hub... she told me to apply”, Jeally.

“A lot of my friends were doing work from home”, Randy

“My friend referred me to a direct client”, Aubrey.

Jean recounted, *“Referral ng friends... I landed my first e-commerce VA work from a Hong Kong client.”*

Word-of-mouth referrals and shared experiences reduced uncertainty and fear associated with remote work, reinforcing trust in virtual assistance as a legitimate career option. These social connections functioned as forms of social capital, complementing formal agencies and digital platforms by providing personalized guidance and validation.

2 Economic Pressures and Instability as Push Factors

Economic pressures and financial instability also emerged as significant push factors influencing participants' entry into virtual assistance. Many participants cited low wages, limited opportunities, rising living costs, and job insecurity in local employment as primary motivations for seeking remote work.

Mark Julian shared, “I started my journey as an entrepreneur at home where I managed our sand & Gravel business. I drove a mini dump truck for couple years so I was a one-man team basically. I had a couple of employees helping me out, helpers concrete hollow block production

and all that and it's just like for the last two years what happened was the business was going down a bit and I don't have a steady stream of income so I said oh why not try going back either on the same industry but working from home ...I tried to apply for jobs for at least a year that's how long it took basically. I have a gap in my resume for like 8 years so that's a big question mark for the employers and gladly the VA hub (agency) initially”.

Many of the respondents mentioned that since COVID-19 pandemic, restrictions are set in place, and they cannot go to work so they found a new source of income while staying at home.

“Yeah one thing is I think it relates to the pandemic coz I told you that it was slowing down”, Randy.

“I decided to work as a VA because of the pandemic. I felt comfortable in the work-from-home set-up and because of that I don't feel like going back to the office. I have four kids, so it makes sense to be practical because there are a lot of expenses when you go to the office, like fare, gasoline, and food”, Drew.

“..that was when pandemic came, that we are not allowed to go onsite. It was before going onsite I was a former Interior designer Before I work from home then when pandemic came, we're not allowed to go outside”, Julius Angelo.

“Then the pandemic came, and I went back to freelancing”, Leslie.

“Since it’s a pandemic, I looked for work from home”, Che, Aubrey, and Mark Julian.

Virtual assistance was often framed not as an idealized career choice but as a practical response to economic constraints. This positioning underscores how broader structural inequalities and financial precarity shape participation in global remote labor, with virtual assistance offering a pathway to improved income and financial stability.

Taken together, Filipino Virtual Assistants navigate multiple entry routes shaped by necessity and agency, reflecting broader patterns in global remote labor where access to digital work is mediated by agencies, digital platforms, and personal social networks. This multifaceted entry process highlights how virtual assistance functions as both an economic strategy and a reconfiguration of professional identity in the context of fully remote work.

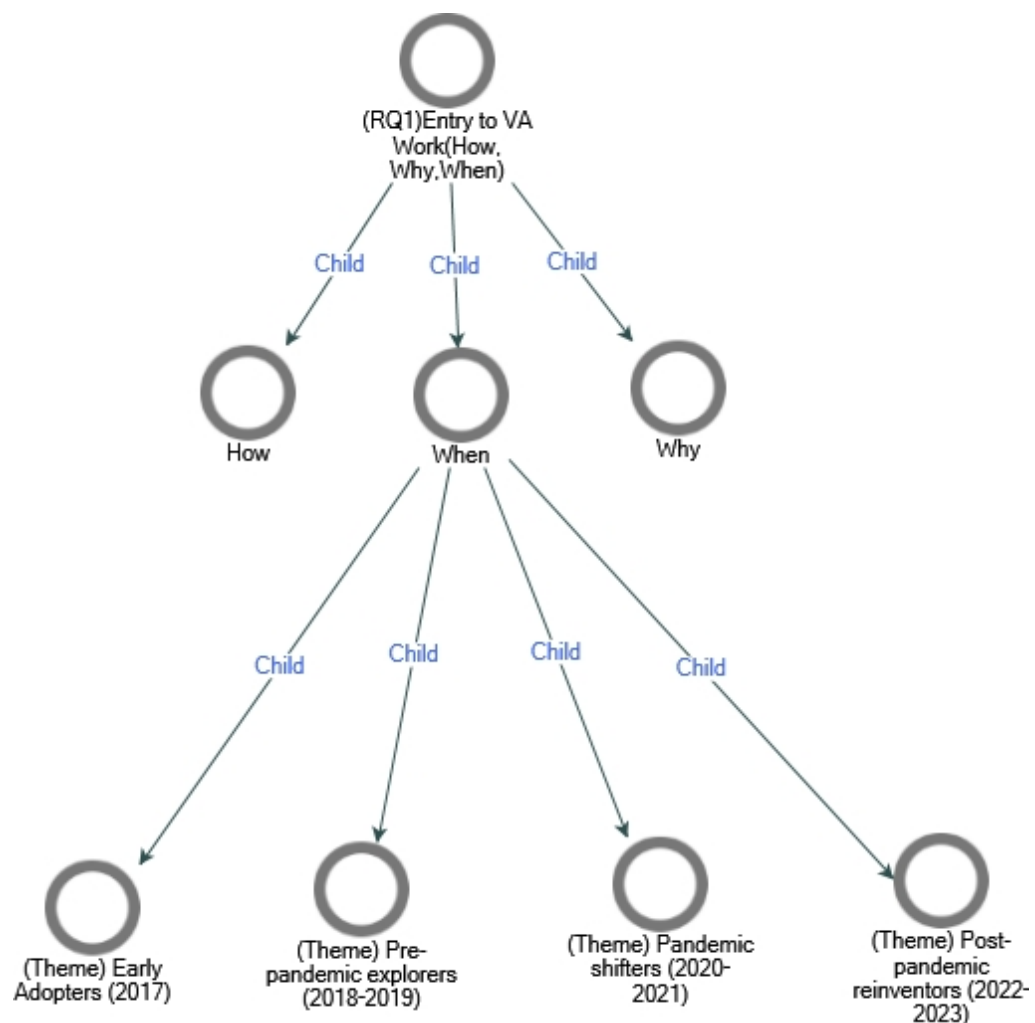
Temporal Pathways

Analysis of participant narratives revealed that entry into virtual assistant (VA) and work-from-home careers occurred across distinct time periods, resulting in four temporal cohorts: Early Adopters (2017), Pre-pandemic

Explorers (2018–2019), Pandemic Shifters (2020–2021), and Post-pandemic Reinventors (2022–2023).

Figure 12.

Temporal Pathways into Virtual Assistant Work (Generated using NVivo)



1. Early Adopters (2017)

Participants categorized as Early Adopters began working from home as early as 2017, well before the COVID-19 pandemic. Their accounts emphasize longevity and stability in remote work, suggesting that VA or home-based work

was already a viable career path prior to global disruption. These participants often framed their experience in terms of accumulated years in the industry, highlighting sustained engagement rather than temporary adjustment.

Although remote work became widespread during the COVID-19 pandemic, a participant reported entering the WFH landscape much earlier. She described herself as an early adopter who transitioned to remote setups as early as 2017.

Leslie shared: *“I started working from home since 2017”*. This account indicates stable and long-term engagement in WFH roles even before external pressures such as the pandemic or economic disruptions emerged.

Early Adopters challenge the dominant narrative that remote work among Filipino VAs is primarily a pandemic-driven phenomenon. Their experiences indicate that digital labor infrastructures and competencies were already in place prior to COVID-19, supporting the view that Filipino workers were early participants in global remote labor markets.

2. Pre-Pandemic Explorers (2018–2019)

Pre-Pandemic Explorers reported initial exposure to virtual work opportunities between 2018 and 2019. While not all formally entered VA roles during this period, participants described actively seeking clients, applying for virtual jobs, or being influenced by peers already working from home. The shift was not sudden but gradual, influenced by curiosity, peer examples, or side-

hustle opportunities. This group represents an exploratory phase, where interest in remote work was present but not yet urgent or fully realized.

For instance, one noted that *“between 2018–2019 that was when I decided to look for a client, which a lot of my friends were doing work from home”* (Randy).

Others revealed that, *“It actually started nung ... 2019.”* (Jeally). Also,

“Okay so, started applying for virtual jobs way back 2019.” (Jean)

The combination of peer influence, rising online opportunities, and increased visibility of freelancing platforms contributed to early adoption.

Pre-Pandemic Explorers illustrate how social influence and peer modeling played a critical role in normalizing work-from-home arrangements even before global disruption. Their delayed entry suggests that awareness alone does not guarantee transition; structural or personal factors may be required to convert exploration into action.

3. Pandemic Shifters (2020–2021)

Pandemic Shifters entered virtual work during the height of COVID-19 restrictions. Their narratives explicitly link career transition to lockdowns, reduced on-site work, and economic slowdown. For these participants, working from home was a response to external constraints rather than a long-term

premeditated plan. The pandemic served as a decisive catalyst that accelerated their shift into VA roles. For majority, the pandemic acted as the triggering factor that forced or accelerated their transition into remote work. Restrictions on movement and job disruptions pushed them toward virtual assistance.

One participant described the sudden shift: *“Then the pandemic came, and I went back to freelancing”* (Leslie).

Another recalled: *“Since it was a pandemic, I looked for work from home. I tried to send my resume through Indeed, and then I saw TVH”* (Cherilyn).

These accounts reflect the economic precarity and job instability brought about by lockdowns.

A participant who previously worked onsite as an interior designer articulated how restrictions made office-based work impossible:

“The pandemic came, and we were not allowed to go onsite... I was a former interior designer before I worked from home” (Julius).

Others reported that their industries were *“slowing down”*, prompting them to seek alternative employment, such as freelance or remote work. As one explained:

“I think it relates to the pandemic cause I told you that it was slowing down” (Randy).

Others echoed similar experiences of unplanned transitions:

“I started working from home as a virtual assistant in 2021.” (Aubrey)

“I started in 2021, if I recall correctly.” (Erika)

Pandemic Shifters reinforce existing literature that frames COVID-19 as a turning point in global labor practices. The pandemic emerges as one of the strongest external forces influencing career shifts into VA work. However, participant accounts suggest that this shift was not purely opportunistic but often reactive, driven by necessity, restricted mobility, and industry instability. This positions VA work as both a survival strategy and a pathway to continued employment during crisis.

4. Post-Pandemic Reinventors (2022–2023)

Post-Pandemic Reinventors began VA work after the most disruptive phase of the pandemic. Unlike Pandemic Shifters, their entry was not driven by immediate crisis but by intentional reinvention. Participants in this cohort often cited encouragement from partners or peers and framed their transition as an opportunity to redefine their professional trajectory rather than merely adapt to external conditions.

One participant described her entry as completely accidental:

“I started as a virtual assistant in 2023 and that was an accident... a coincidence... when my partner told me, ‘why don’t you try working from home doing virtual assistance?’” (Julius)

Post-Pandemic Reinventors complicate crisis-based explanations by showing that virtual work remains attractive even after emergency conditions subside. Their narratives emphasize agency, choice, and career reinvention, indicating that VA work has transitioned from a temporary solution into a normalized and desirable professional option.

The findings under these temporal pathways theme demonstrate that Filipino virtual assistants do not share a single, homogeneous entry point into remote work. Instead, entry into VA careers is shaped by temporal context, which influences motivation, decision-making, and professional identity formation.

The strong influence of economic instability and the COVID-19 pandemic confirm global findings that crises accelerate transitions to remote work (Aswani, 2022; Sokolic, 2022). Participants' narratives also echo Michaud's (2018) phenomenological findings that telework often emerges not from preference alone but from contextual necessity.

However, this study's temporal cohort analysis (Early Adopters, Pre-Pandemic Explorers, Pandemic Shifters, Post-Pandemic Reinventors) significantly extends existing literature by demonstrating that Filipino VAs' entry into remote work is historically differentiated, challenging pandemic-centric explanations and showing that digital labor participation pre-dated COVID-19 for some participants.

Collectively, these temporal pathways highlight how global events, local labor conditions, and interpersonal networks intersect to shape Filipino VAs' entry into digital work. Understanding these distinctions is crucial for interpreting how Filipino virtual assistants construct their professional identities and negotiate their roles as global communication practitioners.

The Come-on and Stay-on of Virtual Assistant Work

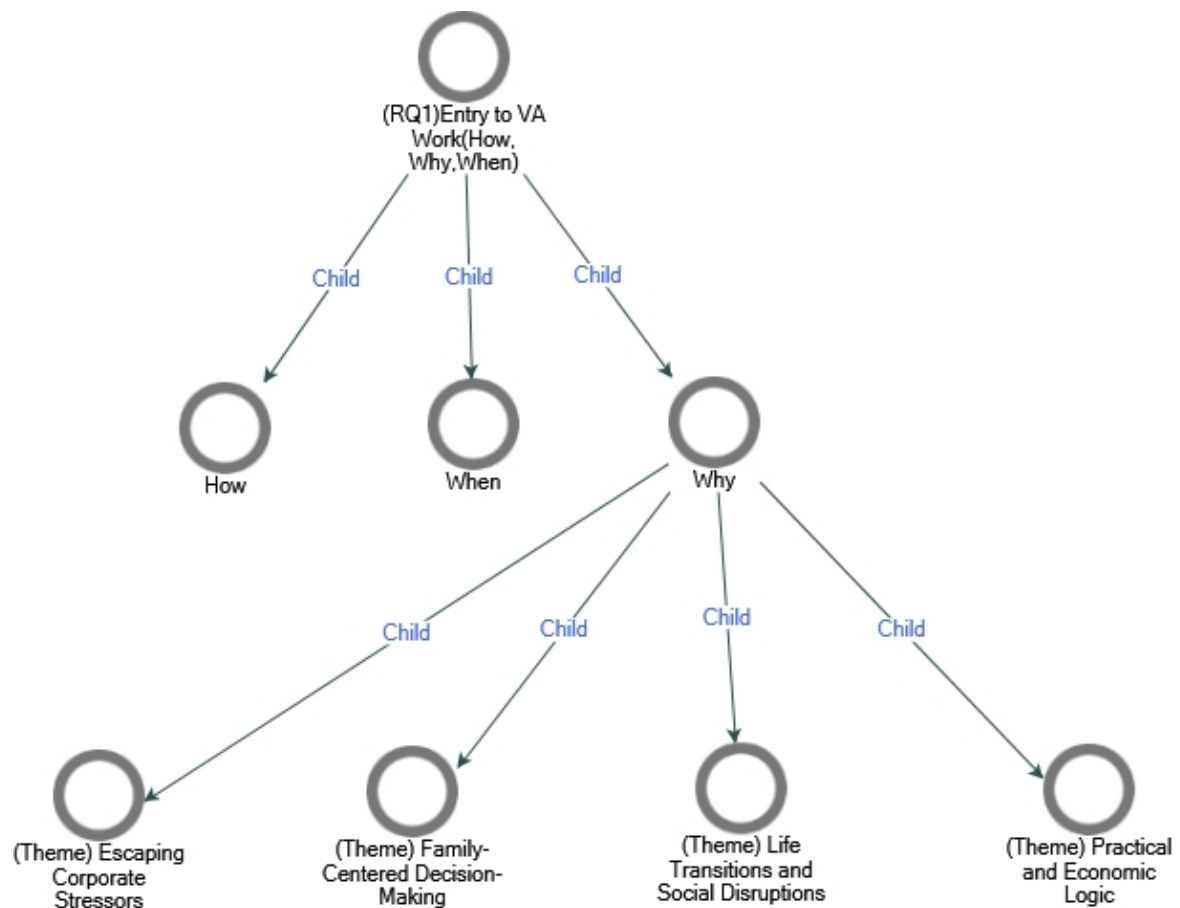
This section presents why the Filipino Virtual Assistants initially entered being a VA in the first place. Their answers will be matched with their answers on the advantages or benefits they have seen from being a VA after a year or more.

The Come-on

Analysis of interview data revealed that participants' decisions were shaped by a convergence of personal, familial, social, and economic factors. Four major themes emerged: (1) escaping corporate stressors, (2) family-centered decision-making, (3) life transitions and social disruptions, and (4) practical and economic logic. These themes often overlapped, illustrating that participants' career transitions were rarely driven by a single factor but rather by layered lived experiences.

Figure 13.

Motivations for Entering / Shifting to Virtual Work. (Generated using Nvivo).



1. Escape from corporate stressors

Participants described traditional corporate employment, particularly in the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry, as emotionally exhausting, unhealthy, and unsustainable. Many recounted experiences of toxic workplace cultures, excessive workloads, rigid performance expectations, and constant pressure that led to burnout and demotivation.

One participant explicitly stated that: *“the BPO industry... is no longer healthy,”* while another shared feeling deeply demotivated, explaining, *“I felt demotivated and it’s no longer healthy to work in a BPO industry”* (Leslie).

The language used to describe these environments was strongly affective, with participants associating corporate work with negativity and emotional exhaustion.

As one participant emphasized: *“It’s already toxic for me... I hate toxic people, I hate toxic world”* (Leslie)

Another expressed a similar sentiment in Filipino, stating, *“Corporate environment stress... hindi ko na kaya”* (Jean).

These accounts highlight how prolonged exposure to corporate cultures has eroded the participants’ emotional well-being and motivation to remain in traditional office-based roles.

Several participants explicitly framed their exit from corporate work as an act of self-preservation, citing stress-related health issues, emotional fatigue, and loss of personal time. Long working hours and constant monitoring limited opportunities for rest, reflection, and meaningful relationships. For some, the stress extended beyond work performance and affected their physical health and family relationships.

In addition to emotional strain, participants repeatedly identified daily commuting as a major source of stress and fatigue. Long travel times, heavy traffic, and crowded environments intensified exhaustion and contributed to burnout. One participant described the commute as consuming a significant portion of the day, noting, *“It takes me two hours to get there and two hours to go home... the traffic is OA”* (Jean).

Others echoed similar experience, with one stating that *the “afternoon commute... sometimes takes up to 2 hours”* (Erika).

The physical and mental toll of commuting was further emphasized by participants who admitted, *“I got tired of commuting outside”* (Jeally, Drew).

Crowded spaces amplified this stress, particularly for introverted individuals, as one participant explained, *“I hate crowded places”* (Leslie).

Even short distances were described as overwhelming due to traffic, with one noting, *“Stressful... even if malapit lang, the traffic is too much”* (Jean). She also mentioned, frequent site transfers intensified exhaustion, leading them to admit, *“I had to take a break from commuting... transferring sites a lot.”*

Leslie directly linked excessive workload to serious illness, stating, *“Due to overworked I got kidney problem. Others described how commuting and office demands became especially challenging during critical life stages, such as pregnancy. As one participant shared, “I was pregnant... commuting...”*

challenging Talaga.... It didn't turn out well... I decided to take a break" (Jean).

She suffered a miscarriage.

These findings suggest that the decision to transition into VA work was not merely a career preference but a response to prolonged exposure to high-stress environments that participants perceived as detrimental to their overall well-being.

The migration from BPO and corporate environments to VA work resonates with Thatcher and Zhu's (2006) findings on identity conflict in telecommuting, particularly the tension between organizational demands and personal well-being. Participants' accounts of burnout, rigid schedules, and emotional exhaustion reflect what prior studies describe as role strain in traditional employment.

2. Compatibility with family responsibilities

Family considerations emerged as a central motivation in participants' decision to pursue virtual work. Motherhood, pregnancy, and caregiving responsibilities, particularly for young children and children with special needs, played a decisive role in shaping employment choices.

For many, becoming a mother intensified the need to be physically and emotionally present, prompting a re-evaluation of traditional work arrangements. Jeally shared, *"I'm going to be a first-time mom... I want to be*

the one taking care of her,” emphasizing a desire to personally fulfill caregiving roles rather than delegate them to others.

Similarly, she explained, *“My goal was to provide and work and be a mom at the same time,”* reflecting the aspiration to balance economic contribution with maternal presence.

This sentiment was echoed by others who prioritized family time over career demands, with one stating, *“I’d rather spend time with my kids... especially now that I have two kids”* (Leslie).

Another noted that *“Working from home is convenient for me as a mother”* and *“It is really an advantage that you have more time for the family”* (Aubrey).

Practical considerations also influenced these decisions, particularly for larger families. As Drew remarked: *“I have four kids so it makes sense to be practical”*.

Across accounts, participants repeatedly emphasized the emotional difficulty of physical separation, with one explaining, *“I want to be with my kids... being separated from your family is hard,”* while another affirmed, *“It is better for me to work from home to be with my kids”* (Cherilyn).

Beyond general parenting needs, remote work also enabled participants to fulfill intensive caregiving responsibilities, particularly for children with special needs. Randy described how remote work allowed him to be closely involved in her child's development, stating, *"I have an autistic son... I want to witness his journey"*. He further explained that his role required consistent engagement, noting, *"It requires me to follow up and assist his progress,"* and elaborated that *"All throughout these years, he is receiving therapy... we're doing follow-ups here at home"*.

These accounts highlight how virtual work arrangements created the flexibility necessary to support ongoing therapeutic and developmental needs that would have been difficult to manage within rigid corporate schedules.

In addition to parenting and caregiving, participants framed their shift to remote work as a way to protect personal relationships that had been strained by corporate overwork.

Emotional distance and neglect were recurring themes, as one participant admitted, *"I don't have time anymore... I ignore his calls"* (Leslie).

Reflecting on the consequences of this imbalance, she expressed regret, saying, *"I regret it... I don't want it to happen again"* and candidly revealed, *"My partner and I separated for one year."*

Others similarly emphasized the emotional cost of separation, reinforcing that it was *"hard to be separated from your family"* (Cherilyn).

Collectively, these narratives illustrate how the decision to pursue VA work was not solely economic but deeply relational, rooted in participants' efforts to sustain family bonds, fulfill caregiving roles, and reclaim time for meaningful personal connections. Participants emphasized the importance of being physically present for their children, especially during early childhood as they expressed a strong desire to personally care for their children rather than delegate caregiving to others. For those with children requiring special attention, such as children with autism, working from home allowed them to actively participate in therapy, monitoring, and developmental milestones.

In general, this theme highlights how the participants' decision on their employment were deeply embedded in gendered caregiving roles, where work arrangements were evaluated based on their compatibility with family responsibilities rather than solely on career advancement.

3. Life transitions and social disruptions

Beyond workplace dissatisfaction and family needs, participants' narratives revealed that major life transitions and external disruptions significantly influenced their move toward VA work. These included the COVID-19 pandemic, relationship breakdowns, pregnancy complications, relocation, and perceived age-related barriers in the labor market.

The pandemic, in particular, disrupted traditional employment pathways and intensified uncertainty, prompting participants to seek more stable and

flexible forms of income. Older participants expressed concerns about employability in corporate settings that favored younger workers, leading them to view remote work as a more inclusive and accessible alternative.

3.1 The COVID-19 pandemic as a turning point

The COVID-19 pandemic functioned as a critical turning point that normalized remote work and destabilized conventional employment structures. Several participants explicitly identified the pandemic as the moment that redirected them toward freelancing and VA work. One participant shared, *“Then the pandemic came, and I went back to freelancing”* (Leslie), reflecting how crisis conditions revived previously abandoned remote work pathways.

Others echoed similar motivations, stating, *“I decided to work as a VA because of the pandemic”* (Drew) and *“Since it was a pandemic, I looked for work from home”* (Cherilyn).

Beyond immediate job loss or lockdown restrictions, the pandemic also triggered deeper reflections on career sustainability. One participant noted, *“is I think it relates to the pandemic coz I told you that it (his consultancy business) was slowing down. That’s one thing and I’m already 40 so no one will take an older guy in a company.”* (Randy), indicating how economic uncertainty and reduced opportunities in traditional sectors pushed individuals to explore alternative livelihoods.

In this context, remote work was not merely a temporary adjustment but a structural shift that redefined what viable employment could look like.

3.2 Age factor as ending point

Age emerged as a perceived barrier within traditional employment systems, particularly among participants approaching their late 30s and early 40s. One participant candidly expressed anxiety over age discrimination, stating, *“At my age... almost 40... no one will take an older guy... they want fresh graduates”* (Randy).

This perception of being disadvantaged by age was reinforced by the difficulty of re-entering corporate employment, as the same participant added, *“It’s kinda difficult to find another job at my age”*.

These experiences highlight how ageism within conventional labor markets intersected with pandemic-era instability, intensifying feelings of exclusion and job stability. VA work, by contrast, was perceived as more inclusive and skills-based, allowing participants to bypass age-based hiring norms and reposition themselves as globally competitive professionals.

3.3 Career redirection triggered by life events

Personal life events, predominantly pregnancy, repeated transitions, and physical and emotional exhaustion, played a decisive role in redirecting career paths. For several participants, pregnancy was not

only a biological transition but also a catalyst for rethinking work demands and priorities.

One participant shared: *“When I got pregnant... my goal was to provide and work”* (Jeally), emphasizing the need to balance financial responsibility with physical well-being.

Others described cumulative stress from workplace instability and repeated adjustments. One participant reflected: *“I was promoted... but after the pandemic... I felt comfortable in WFH setup”* (Drew), suggesting that remote work reshaped expectations about career progression.

Another narrated a cycle of disruption, stating: *“I decided to take a break... pregnant... site transfers... stressful”* (Jean), followed by, *“I took leave... then went back to work... then got pregnant again”*. These experiences ultimately led to intentional withdrawal from high-stress environments, as the same participant explained: *“I didn’t want all the stress factors during my second pregnancy”*.

For some, the transition into freelancing involved uncertainty and risk. One participant admitted, *“I used my last pay to buy all the stuff in a virtual world... without any plan”* (Leslie), underscoring the unwarranted nature of career shifts during crisis periods. Yet, her curiosity and social influence also played a role, as freelancing gained

visibility during the pandemic: *“Freelancing became trending... I became curious”*.

Life disruptions often served as turning points, where participants reassessed their priorities and recognized the limitations of conventional employment structures in accommodating changing personal circumstances. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that entry into VA work was not a linear or purely aspirational choice but a response to layered disruptions within the global, institutional, and personal sphere.

4. Practical and economic logic

Practical and economic reasoning strongly underpinned participants' decisions to work from home. Long and costly commutes, daily transportation expenses, food costs, and the physical toll of travel were frequently cited as factors that made office-based work impractical.

Participants described virtual work as financially efficient, allowing them to reduce expenses while maintaining income. The elimination of commuting time also translated into increased availability for household responsibilities and rest. For many, VA work provided a necessary or supplemental source of income during periods of economic instability, business downturns, or family financial needs.

Participants consistently emphasized the cost-saving advantages of working from home compared to traditional office-based employment. Daily expenses associated with commuting, such as transportation, fuel, and food, were viewed as significant financial burdens.

As one participant explained: *“There are a lot of expenses when you go to the office... fare, gasoline, food”* (Drew). Eliminating these costs allowed participants to redirect income toward essential household needs, especially in larger families. This was evident when Drew stated, *“It makes sense to be practical because I have four kids.”*

Beyond transportation costs, participants also highlighted reduced discretionary spending. Working from home limited opportunities for unnecessary social expenses, which further supported savings. As Drew also noted, *“I was able to save... because I didn’t have to go out with friends every break time.”*

For others, the motivation stemmed from sudden economic shift. Participants who previously relied on small businesses or unstable industries described income loss as a turning point. One participant shared, *“My business was going down... no steady stream of income”* (Mark Julian). In this context, VA work was perceived as a reliable alternative.

Another dominant result under this theme was the value participants placed on time efficiency and multitasking. Working from home enabled

individuals, specifically mothers, to perform paid labor while simultaneously attending to caregiving and household responsibilities. For working mothers, financial practicality was intertwined with caregiving responsibilities, as reflected in Jeally's statement: *"I want to earn money and still take care of my child."*

Participants repeatedly framed multitasking as a core advantage of remote work. As Drew explained, *"You can multitask; you can look after your kids... at the same time you are working."* This dual role was not viewed as a burden but as a practical solution to competing demands.

Jeally echoed this sentiment, stating: *"I want to provide and work, and be a mom at the same time."* Participants also extended the idea of multitasking beyond childcare, noting the ability to complete household chores during work hours.

These accounts suggest that time flexibility was not only about convenience but about optimizing productivity across multiple life domains. The repetition of similar phrasing by participants underscores how central this benefit was to their decision-making process.

The data further show that economic instability in traditional employment and small businesses pushed some participants toward VA work. Declining industries, unpredictable income, and lack of job security created anxiety and

prompted career redirection. As Mark Julian stated, *“The business was going down... I didn’t have a steady stream of income.”*

In such situations, VA work emerged as a practical and dependable option. Julius’s assertion, *“This is the only thing I know that will work for my family”*, reflects how participants framed virtual work not as an aspirational choice, but as a necessary response to economic uncertainty.

This theme reflects participants’ pragmatic evaluation of work arrangements, where flexibility, cost savings, and income continuity were prioritized over traditional markers of corporate employment.

Participants’ motivations, escaping corporate stressors, family-centered decision-making, life disruptions, and economic logic, mirror broader discussions of work-life integration in virtual environments (Holmlund & Lindqvist, 2015; Nurmi & Hinds, 2016).

However, the findings emphasize how care labor, motherhood, health, and relational maintenance are central to employment decisions. This aligns with Belk’s (2013) argument that identity is continuously extended and reconstructed across digital and physical domains. For Filipino VAs, choosing remote work was not merely occupational, it was identity-preserving, allowing them to remain present as parents, partners, and caregivers while participating in global labor markets.

Overall, the “Why” dimension reveals that Filipino Virtual Assistants enter remote work not simply to seek flexibility but to reclaim agency over their time, health, family roles, and economic survival. These motivations position VA work as a meaningful reconfiguration of professional identity, one that prioritizes sustainability, care, and practicality over traditional corporate norms.

The Stay-on of VA Work

While the initial motivations for entering the VA work centered on escaping from corporate stressors, and managing life transitions, economic needs, and family’s needs, they eventually added more benefits after experiencing VA work for a year or more. Across narratives, participants framed VA work not merely as an employment arrangement but as a lived transformation of work, family life, identity, and well-being.

Seven interrelated themes emerged: (1) better work–life balance for sustainable future; (2) comfort and convenience from restructured work style; (3) financial growth and stability with dignity; (4) freedom from traditional employment and institutionalized control; (5) alignment with family-centered values; (6) continuous learning and adaptability for boundary-less career; and (7) spatial and temporal flexibility for productivity.

1. Better work–life balance for sustainable future

Participants consistently described VA work as enabling a healthier balance between professional and personal life. Many contrasted the emotional exhaustion of corporate or BPO environments with the relative calm and autonomy of home-based work. Introverted participants emphasized how working remotely aligned with their personality and reduced social overstimulation while still allowing meaningful virtual interaction.

Several participants expressed a strong sense of belonging in VA work, noting that long-term remote employment helped them realize that traditional office environments were incompatible with their well-being. This realization marked a shift from seeing work as merely a source of income to viewing it as an integrated part of a sustainable life structure.

From a phenomenological perspective, work–life balance emerged as a felt experience rather than a policy benefit. Participants' narratives reflect a reconstitution of everyday life, where reduced stress was not only the absence of pressure but the presence of control, privacy, and alignment with one's personal rhythms.

2. Comfort and convenience from restructured work style

Comfort and convenience were repeatedly cited as foundational advantages of VA work. Participants highlighted the elimination of daily commuting, rigid dress codes, and time-consuming preparation routines. The

ability to “*just sit down and work*” transformed daily labor into a more accessible and less burdensome activity.

Working from home also enabled multitasking and practical household management, especially for parents. Participants framed convenience not as laziness, but as efficiency, a restructuring of daily life that maximized energy and minimized unnecessary effort.

This theme underscores how spatial flexibility reshapes the meaning of productivity. Comfort became a condition for sustained output rather than a distraction, challenging traditional assumptions that professionalism requires physical presence or formal appearance.

3. Financial growth and stability with dignity

Financial improvement emerged as one of the strongest motivators for entering and staying in VA work. Participants frequently compared their current earnings to significantly lower provincial or BPO wages, emphasizing that even part-time VA income could exceed previous full-time salaries.

Several participants reported being able to save, invest, and experience financial security for the first time. Receiving their initial VA paychecks was often described as a turning point that validated their decision to shift careers.

Drew, who previously worked in BPO in Ilocos, observed, “*And I think the best thing about being a VA is the salary because when I was in the BPO here in Ilocos, I’m getting provincial rate and which is too low. The salary that I*

am getting right now as a part time is my full time pay in the BPO Industry...".

Erika described the shift in similar terms: *"Yes, when I started as a VA, you could really feel it twice, like, 'Oh, I can earn this much, I can earn much more,' and it's almost the same work... So yes, you can really feel that your salary has increased".* For others, VA work approached the earning potential of overseas employment without the cost of family separation, as Che' put it, *"In comparison to working abroad, I'm getting almost the same salary that I am earning now. It's a good decision for me because, aside from earning dollars, I am also with my family" .*

Participants also described considerable variability in hourly rates, both across the industry and within individual career trajectories. Jean recalled her entry point, *"Okay good start sya parang \$3 per hour. Year 2019 hindi pa pandemic"* and explained how juggling clients across time zones expanded her income: *"kasi yung isang client is pang morning, HongKong time and tapos yung isa nman pang Night Shift It offers \$5 per hour"* . Leslie similarly recounted a modest start, noting, *"my starting salary that time was just around \$2.75 to \$3 per hour, imagine I stayed in that company for 2 years and a half..."*.

A clear financial gap also emerged between agency placements and direct-hire arrangements. Jeally noted plainly, *"Yeah, that's probably it. That's the only difference with direct hire, and if you get hired, of course, the salary is bigger"*, while Mark Julian offered a sharper critique of agency markups: *"Imagine Athena, (a VA agency), they're being paid \$3000 for executive servicesand the VA's pay is in Filipino peso 45,000 a month, imagine that, and VA hub (another VA agency) is actually cheaper than Athena and we do a*

lot more... So on my OT's I get paid \$8 an hour. I do OT's on end of month weekends...". Aubrey added that direct-client relationships sometimes yielded additional perks, recalling, "Actually, my last client partnered with a local company here in the Philippines, to avoid money laundering because they are sending a huge amount of money and months before they ended the contract, they gave us benefits".

Beyond immediate earnings, participants framed VA work as a foundation for long-term financial stability and entrepreneurship. Leslie offered the most expansive reflection: *"Definitely, VA gives me financial stability. I was able to invest because of freelancing. I am proud to say that this is my life now and if there is any reason why I will quit this job, it is probably because I already run my own business. Business that will provides all my needs. I can say that I have comfortable life because of freelancing"* (Leslie). Taken together, these accounts suggest that VA work meaningfully outperforms local BPO employment, rivals the earning potential of overseas labor without its familial costs, and for some enables capital accumulation sufficient to fund independent enterprise - though variability in starting rates and agency markups indicate that financial outcomes remain uneven across the workforce.

Financial stability functioned as both a material and psychological anchor. Beyond higher income, participants experienced a sense of dignity and fairness, particularly when earning in foreign currency while remaining with their families. This redefined economic success as adequate, stable, and family-sustaining, rather than upward corporate mobility.

4. Freedom from traditional employment and institutionalized control

Participants strongly contrasted VA work with corporate environments characterized by micromanagement, rigid hierarchies, toxic interactions, and physically draining routines such as long commutes. Some participants explicitly linked corporate stress to health issues, reinforcing their decision to leave traditional employment.

Being directly hired by clients rather than managed through layers of supervision allowed participants to feel trusted and valued as individuals rather than treated as replaceable labor.

This theme reflects a rejection of institutionalized control and surveillance. VA work was experienced as a reclaiming of agency, where freedom from toxicity enabled participants to redefine professionalism on their own terms.

5. Alignment with family-centered values

For parents, especially mothers and single parents, VA work was framed as a life-changing arrangement. Participants emphasized being physically present for their children while continuing to earn, describing the ability to attend to caregiving needs without sacrificing income.

Participants noted that even when workloads were heavy, they could intentionally create time for loved ones, reinforcing family as a central priority rather than an afterthought.

Family time emerged not only as a benefit but as a moral justification for VA work. This aligns with Filipino family-centered values, where employment decisions are deeply intertwined with caregiving, presence, and relational responsibility.

6. Continuous learning and adaptability for boundary-less career

Participants described VA work as intellectually and professionally expansive. Unlike narrowly defined corporate roles, VA work exposed them to diverse tasks such as lead generation, CRM management, data analysis, client communication, and team leadership.

Several participants highlighted continuous learning and adaptability as core aspects of their professional identity, expressing confidence in their ongoing relevance regardless of age.

Professional growth was experienced horizontally rather than hierarchically. Instead of promotions and titles, participants valued skill accumulation, versatility, and self-directed learning in the hallmarks of a modern, boundaryless career.

7. Spatial and temporal flexibility for productivity

The ability to work from any location with Internet access symbolized ultimate flexibility. Participants shared experiences of working while traveling, staying near beaches, or exploring new places without requesting formal leave.

Travel was often framed as productive rest, blending leisure, learning, and family bonding while maintaining work responsibilities.

Travel freedom represents the culmination of spatial and temporal autonomy in VA work. It reflects a reimagining of rest, mobility, and productivity as compatible rather than oppositional experiences.

Table 4.

Summary of initial motivations for entering VA and experienced benefits after a year or more.

Initial motivations	Experienced benefits
Escape from corporate stressors	Better work-life balance
	Comfort and convenience
Practical and economic logic	Financial growth and stability
	Freedom from traditional employment
Family-centered decision making	Alignment with family-centered values
Life transitions and social disruptions	Continuous learning and adaptability
	Spatial and temporal flexibility

The intersection between participants' initial motivations and their experienced outcomes after a year in virtual assistant work reveals both continuity and transformation in their perceptions of remote employment.

Many of the motivations that initially led them to pursue virtual work, such as escaping corporate stress, seeking flexibility, and prioritizing family needs,

remained consistent even after extended engagement in the field. Participants confirmed that these expectations were largely fulfilled, particularly in terms of achieving a healthier work-life balance, enjoying the comfort of working from home, and maintaining closer involvement in family life. These sustained benefits reinforced their decision to transition into virtual work and validated the practical motivations that initially drove their career shift.

At the same time, participants reported that their experiences in the field introduced additional benefits and upgraded expectations beyond their original motivations. While some initially entered virtual assistance primarily for convenience or supplemental income, many later discovered opportunities for financial growth, professional development, and greater autonomy in managing their work schedules and client relationships. Over time, the role also encouraged continuous learning and adaptability, as participants developed new digital, communication, and organizational skills necessary for global remote collaboration. As a result, what began as a practical or situational decision gradually evolved into a sustainable and rewarding career path, reinforcing why the shift to virtual work was ultimately perceived as worthwhile.

Filipino VAs as Virtual Communicators

This section presents how Filipino VAs construct and negotiate their professional identities.

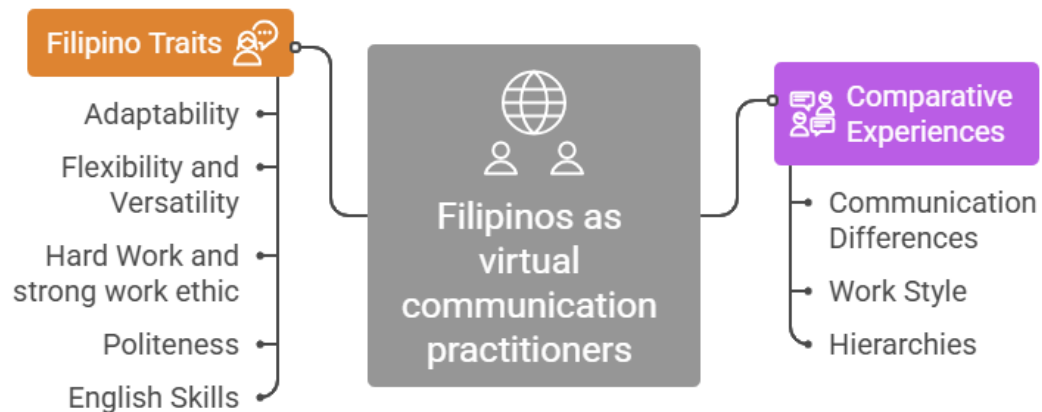
As Filipino VAs operate within transnational digital labor markets, communication becomes both a functional skill and an identity practice. Participants do not merely perform tasks; they actively manage language, tone, relational expectations, and cultural norms while interacting with international clients and teams.

Their narratives reveal that global communication in VA work is not culturally neutral but is deeply influenced by Filipino values, prior corporate or BPO experience, and continuous exposure to foreign work cultures. The findings are organized into two interrelated thematic categories: (1) Filipino traits as foundations and (2) what they see as their comparative strengths.

The discussion highlights how Filipino VAs leverage cultural strengths, such as adaptability, empathy, and relational orientation, to meet global communication standards, differentiate themselves from other nationalities, and construct a hybrid professional identity suited to virtual, cross-border work environments.

Figure 14.

Filipinos as virtual communication practitioners



By examining these themes, this section demonstrates that Filipino virtual assistants are not passive recipients of global work norms. Instead, they actively negotiate, adapt, and redefine what it means to be a global communication practitioner, situating their cultural identity as both a resource and a strategic advantage in virtual assistant work.

Filipino Traits as Foundations of Virtual Communication Practice

Analysis of participant narratives reveals five interrelated Filipino traits that shape how virtual assistants (VAs) enact global communication work: (1) adaptability, (2) flexibility and versatility, (3) hard work and strong work ethic, (4) polite and conflict-avoidant communication, and (5) English proficiency and accent adaptability. These traits are consistently articulated through

participants' lived experiences in cross-cultural, remote, and client-facing environments.

1. Adaptability to clients, workflows, and personalities

Participants consistently described adaptability as a core requirement of virtual work, particularly when dealing with diverse client personalities, unclear tasks, and evolving workflows. Filipino VAs emphasized their ability to absorb information quickly, adjust expectations, and align themselves with client needs.

As one participant explained, *"What we do is we just absorb everything, we just adjust and understand them...that's the good thing about it, about working with them."* (Drew). Adaptability was also reflected in his willingness to humble himself in professional interactions, *"We humble ourselves and apologize even if it is not our fault."*

These accounts show that adaptability operates as both a communicative and operational skill, allowing Filipino VAs to function effectively in ambiguous and fast-changing global work settings.

This adaptability extends beyond communication into task execution and role transitions with Filipino VAs adjusting tone, language, and interaction styles depending on the client's cultural background, reinforcing their role as flexible global communication practitioners.

Several participants recalled stepping into disorganized roles left by previous remote workers and reorganizing workflows without complaint or resistance. Such accounts suggest that adaptability operates both as a communicative competence and a professional survival strategy in remote work environments where clarity, continuity, and initiative are highly valued.

Participants emphasized their ability to “*absorb everything, adjust, and understand*” client expectations, even in environments with “*no support system.*” Adaptation was often achieved through observation, experiential learning, and trial-and-error, as one participant noted, “*I learn by observing... you have to adjust for them and work your way through it*” (Drew).

Importantly, adaptability was framed not as passivity, but as strategic flexibility. Filipino VAs positioned themselves as professionals who can align with client needs without losing accountability, reinforcing their role as reliable global collaborators rather than mere task executors.

2. Flexibility, versatility, and the “Jack-of-all-trades” identity

Closely linked to adaptability is the Filipino VA’s self-identification as flexible and versatile. Participants frequently described themselves as “jack-of-all-trades,” capable of handling administrative work, communication tasks, coordination, and problem-solving across multiple domains. This versatility was

often attributed to learning by doing through observation, trial, and real-time client engagement rather than formal training alone.

The data also show that Filipino VAs are expected and willing to extend effort beyond strict job descriptions, including checking emails during rest days or handling urgent matters without direct supervision. While this reflects dedication, it also highlights how flexibility can blur boundaries between availability and overwork, particularly in global remote arrangements.

Aubrey explicitly framed flexibility as a communicative strength rooted in the Filipino's ability to adjust to diverse clients and expectations, stating: *“As a Filipino, we use our communication skills to connect to the client. Filipinos are flexible and versatile. We can easily adapt to the language needed by the client and their nationalities. We adjust to the demands of the client.”*

This highlights how flexibility is enacted through language choice, tone adjustment, and cultural sensitivity, reinforcing the role of Filipino VAs as global communication practitioners rather than task-bound workers.

Language itself was also discussed as a strategic tool that supports this versatility. Jean explained how English allows Filipino VAs to convey information in a more neutral and professional manner, particularly in client-facing communication: *“It’s easier to express objective information in English kasi pag Tagalog is always gonna be subjective... But if it’s in English, this is just a message for you to know, not this is an emotion have to dissect.”* This suggests that English proficiency is not only a technical asset but also a means

of managing emotional distance, professionalism, and clarity which are key requirements in remote, cross-cultural work environments.

Beyond communication, participants emphasized trainability and reliability as core aspects of the Filipino VA identity. Erika noted that Filipino VAs are perceived as quick learners who are committed to their roles, explaining: *“We are trainable and... Filipino VAs can catch up quickly. Moreover, we are dedicated to our work and won’t just not show up even if we don’t feel like working.”* This reinforces the “jack-of-all-trades” identity, where versatility includes the willingness and ability to learn new tools, systems, and responsibilities while maintaining consistency and accountability.

Taken together, these findings illustrate that flexibility and versatility among Filipino VAs extend beyond multitasking. They are embedded in communicative adaptability, language strategy, emotional regulation, and professional discipline. This aligns with the broader framing of Filipino virtual assistants as global communication practitioners who actively negotiate cultural, linguistic, and relational boundaries in remote work settings.

Nonetheless, participants largely framed versatility as an advantage that increases employability and trust. Their ability to quickly acquire new skills, shift roles, and respond to changing demands reinforces their positioning as indispensable communication partners within distributed global teams.

3. Hard work, persistence, and strong work ethic

Another dominant theme emerging from the data is the strong work ethic attributed to Filipino VAs, characterized by diligence, persistence, integrity, and a deep sense of responsibility toward work.

Participants consistently framed hard work not merely as productivity, but as an attitudinal and cultural orientation rooted in Filipino values. Filipino VAs consistently described themselves as goal-oriented, self-motivated, and reliable even in the absence of monitoring. Participants highlighted working diligently regardless of whether supervision was present, emphasizing honesty and accountability as internalized values rather than externally enforced behaviors.

Leslie emphasized that this work ethic goes beyond technical skills such as English proficiency and is instead grounded in values and cultural upbringing. As she explained: *“It’s the attitude; our hospitality, we put our heart when we work... it’s not just we can speak English so well, but also because of our values and cultures. We are also persistent and goal oriented.”* This highlights how work is infused with emotional commitment, perseverance, and purpose, reinforcing the idea that Filipino VAs approach their roles with sincerity and long-term dedication.

Patience and integrity were also repeatedly cited as defining characteristics. Cheryl contrasted Filipino work behavior with that of other

nationalities, noting that Filipinos are willing to work steadily without constant supervision: *“We Filipinos have patience... Even if no one is looking at us, we do what we need to do, there is no need to monitor if we are working or not.”* This reflects a form of internalized discipline, where accountability is self-regulated rather than externally enforced.

The home-based nature of virtual work was described as intensifying, rather than diminishing, this sense of responsibility. Cherylyn further shared that Filipino VAs often continue working even beyond formal expectations: *“Even if sometimes we don’t get paid... it’s a weekend or rest day, we still do our tasks, even just simply checking our emails and updates.”* While this demonstrates dedication and persistence, it also suggests a tendency toward overwork and self-sacrifice, which carries implications for labor sustainability and worker well-being.

Organizational skills and reliability were highlighted through experiential comparisons. Randy recounted stepping into a role vacated abruptly by a previous worker of another nationality and described reorganizing the work to meet client expectations: *“When I saw his work, it’s like all over the place, and I just kinda fix it out... the client was happy.”* He concluded that Filipinos are not only hardworking but also *“more organized... professionally.”* This reinforces the perception of Filipino VAs as dependable problem-solvers who stabilize workflows in disrupted or poorly managed situations.

However, the theme of hard work was also intertwined with cultural tendencies toward endurance and silence. Jean discussed how Filipinos rarely complain, even under heavy workloads, explaining that teams often absorb pressure without voicing concerns: *“You’re just accepting everything and just bearing all the pain and just putting in hours but you never complain.”* This reluctance to speak up was linked to job insecurity and cultural norms of endurance, even when such silence hinders operational improvement and scalability.

Finally, dedication and trainability were reinforced by external validation from clients and supervisors. Erika noted that Filipino VAs are perceived as quick learners who consistently show up for work, stating: *“Filipino VAs can catch up quickly... we are dedicated to our work and won’t just not show up if we don’t feel like working.”* The participant further observed that clients explicitly compare Filipino work ethics favorably against those of other nationalities, particularly American counterparts.

Overall, this theme illustrates that the hard work and persistence of Filipino virtual assistants are deeply embedded in cultural values of responsibility, patience, and commitment. While these traits enhance reliability and performance in global remote work settings, the findings also reveal tensions between dedication and self-advocacy, suggesting the need to critically examine how strong work ethic intersects with issues of workload, voice, and labor protection in the virtual economy.

While this resilience enhances client trust, it also reveals a structural vulnerability. The Filipino VA participants' willingness to continue performing tasks despite challenges such as unpaid overtime, weekend responsibilities, or role overload may normalize overextension as part of professional identity, particularly in precarious global labor markets.

From a global communication perspective, this strong work ethic contributes to the perception of Filipino VAs as dependable and professional, reinforcing their desirability in international outsourcing contexts but also raises the risk of exploitation for virtual workers.

4. Polite, warm, and conflict-avoidant communication

Participants repeatedly contrasted Filipino communication styles with those of other nationalities, particularly in terms of directness. Filipino VAs described themselves as careful, polite, and intentional in message delivery, often using positive scripting and softened language to avoid conflict. Rather than blunt refusals or confrontational corrections, they emphasized diplomacy, empathy, and emotional consideration.

Jeally articulated this distinction by highlighting how Filipinos consciously shape their language to minimize negative impact and avoid conflict: *"We're very careful when it comes to delivering our messages... We want to make sure we avoid conflict as much as possible. We use positive scripting... we avoid negative phrases so that the impact of the message isn't too strong."*

This approach was frequently contrasted with the blunt and highly direct communication style of other nationalities when she added, *“Other nationalities... they’re very straight to the point... ‘No, this is incorrect.’... We’re a bit more careful; they’re blunt.”*

Beyond linguistic politeness, participants also emphasized emotional regulation and composure as part of Filipino communication identity. Randy described a tendency to remain calm and emotionally light even under pressure, *“Whatever problems that come across... they just smile and kinda laugh about it... you’re not pressuring yourself... you gave it your best so that’s it.”*

Similarly, Drew highlighted empathy, adjustment, and humility as central communication values. He said, *“We just absorb everything, we adjust and understand them... we humble ourselves and apologize even if it is not our fault.”*

Participants also emphasized the Filipino tendency to add a personal and relational touch to professional interactions. Aubrey noted that Filipino VAs prioritize making clients feel cared for and understood. She said: *“We want to make sure that our clients feel that we care and understand them... we put personal touch to it, as compared to other nationalities... more on the professional and transactional side.”*

However, participants acknowledged that this communication style can also have unintended drawbacks, including potential misunderstandings. Aubrey also explained, *“Our delivery of words sometimes leads to misunderstanding with the client... there are positive and negative effects.”*

Meanwhile Jean further described the Filipino tendency to “sugarcoat” messages, particularly in contrast to task-oriented, direct communication norms in global teams, *“We are never straight forward... we’re always trying to translate what we wanna say in a nice way that won’t offend anyone.”*

Yet, she also noted that Filipino VAs can strategically shift communication styles when urgency or seriousness is required: *“When there are urgent or red flags... I’m straight English... ‘I’m serious.’... But pag Filipino... chill tayo... magbiruan tayo.”*

This conflict-avoidant style was not framed as weakness but as cultural competence. Filipino VAs consciously shaped messages to preserve relationships and maintain workplace harmony, even when delivering corrective feedback. However, several participants acknowledged the downside of this approach, particularly the tendency to “sugarcoat” issues or avoid complaints, sometimes to the detriment of organizational efficiency.

The findings suggest that Filipino VAs enact a relational model of communication, prioritizing emotional intelligence and rapport over

transactional efficiency. This orientation significantly shapes their global communication practice, especially in client-facing roles.

5. Strong English communication skills and accent neutrality

English proficiency emerged as a critical factor distinguishing Filipino VAs from other nationalities in the global outsourcing market. Participants expressed confidence in their English skills, emphasizing clarity, comprehension, and the ability to convey meaning even when grammar or word order is imperfect. Mutual understanding rather than linguistic perfection, was consistently prioritized.

Also, English proficiency was not described merely as technical fluency, but as a communicative competence rooted in adaptability, openness, and cultural sensitivity. Many participants emphasized that Filipino VAs are confident using English in professional contexts, including interactions with supervisors and international clients.

Leslie highlighted this communicative confidence and clarity, noting that Filipino VAs are *“very good specially in English language”* and are *“open in sharing ideas, and we communicate them even with our higher bosses, plus we can convey messages clearly.”*

This ability to speak up and communicate across hierarchical boundaries positions Filipino VAs as effective collaborators rather than passive support

workers. Importantly, she framed English proficiency as inseparable from Filipino values, explaining that *“it’s not just we can speak English so well, but also because of our values and cultures,”* such as *hospitality, openness, and putting “our heart when we work.”*

Other participants echoed the perception that English comprehension comes naturally to Filipinos. Randy shared, *“I don’t have any trouble so far... Filipinos are good in understanding English,”* suggesting that language barriers rarely hinder performance. This ease of comprehension contributes to confidence and reduces feelings of inferiority when working with foreign clients or teams.

Accent neutrality emerged as a particularly salient advantage in global communication. Drew contrasted Filipino accents with those of other nationalities, explaining that accents from *“Indians, Thai or Vietnamese... are easy to be recognized from the very beginning,”* whereas Filipino accents tend to become more neutral over time. According to him, *“the longer you are working, the longer you are speaking the language, the more fluent you are with their accent.”* This adaptability makes Filipino VAs more linguistically flexible and client-friendly, especially in customer-facing or voice-based roles.

Participants also perceived that clients prefer Filipino English accents. Drew stated that *“client prefer us compared to other nationalities,”* particularly in industries such as BPO and virtual assistance where clarity and ease of

understanding are critical. This preference reinforces the employability of Filipino VAs in global labor markets.

Beyond accent and fluency, participants emphasized pragmatic communication strategies. Julius noted that even when Filipino VAs *“chop words and speak it literally,”* communication remains effective *“as long as... our client understands what we are telling them.”* This reflects a results-oriented view of communication, where meaning and understanding take precedence over grammatical perfection. He added *that “even if it's not the right order of words as long as they understand... it's fine,”* underscoring functional competence rather than linguistic elitism.

Confidence was another recurring theme. Jean asserted, *“I am competent, I never feel inferior communication wise... I'm proud of the Filipinos working in general because we are not afraid of communicating to other nationalities.”* This confidence is reinforced by strategic communication practices such as organizing ideas clearly: *“we break down our point by bullets... as long as we know how to organize the thoughts in our minds, it's easy to communicate and to adjust.”*

She also emphasized the ability to adjust language styles depending on the client's background, using *“straight forward English”* for U.S. clients while adapting to the comprehension styles of Brazilian, Colombian, or Spanish clients.

Finally, external validation from clients further reinforced participants' perceptions. Erika shared feedback from a current client who preferred hiring Filipino workers, stating that *"we have good English, although I have a slight accent, but still, it's good English."* This acknowledgment from employers underscores how Filipino VAs' English proficiency and accent neutrality translate into trust and hiring preference, even in fully remote, cross-border work arrangements.

Accent neutrality was repeatedly cited as a competitive advantage. Participants noted that Filipino accents are often less immediately identifiable compared to other non-native English speakers, allowing smoother integration into international teams. Many also highlighted bilingualism and the ability to learn additional languages through exposure, media, and immersion rather than formal instruction.

The findings under this theme suggest that strong English communication skills and accent neutrality function not only as technical competencies but as strategic assets that enable Filipino VAs to operate effectively as global communication practitioners. These skills support confidence, adaptability, and employability, reinforcing the Philippines' position as a key hub in the global virtual labor market.

Most importantly, participants rejected narratives of inferiority in communication. They asserted competence, confidence, and pride in their ability to engage with clients across cultures. English, in this context, functions

not merely as a language skill but as a symbolic resource that enables Filipino VAs to perform legitimacy, professionalism, and global belonging.

However, the findings also reveal tensions. Traits such as flexibility, politeness, and non-complaint, while valued, can lead to invisible labor, boundary erosion, and under-assertion in organizational contexts. Thus, Filipino communication strengths operate within both empowering and constraining dynamics.

Comparative Traits as Filipino VAs

Rather than framing differences purely along national or racial lines, participants articulated nuanced, experience-based observations that emphasized communication style, work organization, directness, and perceived power dynamics. Importantly, several participants resisted racialized generalizations, offering counter-narratives that framed differences as individual rather than national.

1. Communication differences as individual, not nationality (counter-narrative)

Participants emphasized that communication challenges were not always rooted in nationality but were often shaped by interpretation, personality, and delivery. One participant reflected on a misunderstanding with a client,

relating: *“I don't know if it is because of nationality but based on my experience... He [client] thought that I was instructing him, but that was not what I meant”* (Leslie). This participant explained that grammatical accuracy and formal phrasing could sometimes be misinterpreted as authoritative, noting that *“they thought that it is a command. So, better do it in a way that you use slang or deliver the word on how they say it, it would sound more friendly to them”*.

Other participants resisted racial explanations entirely. One strongly argued that work behavior should not be racialized, pointing out that *“It doesn't really make a difference... it depends on the personality... not every race, every person has their own work ethics”* (Mark Julian).

Similarly, another participant described nationality as largely irrelevant to their experience, sharing that *“the only difference is that all communication is done virtually”* (Cherilyn).

2. Differences in work style — organization, priority, and urgency

Differences in work style emerged strongly in participants' accounts, particularly regarding organization and task prioritization.

One participant observed that colleagues from other nationalities often treated all tasks as urgent, explaining, *“Everything is a priority, even if it is not that important... They don't know the difference between priority and urgency;*

for them, everything is urgent” (Cherilyn). In contrast, Filipino VAs were described as more systematic and structured in their approach to work.

Erika shared how Filipino colleagues demonstrated flexibility and commitment during scheduling disruptions, recounting, *“My Filipino colleague and I were okay with working extra hours or double shifts... She said that the work ethics of Filipino VAs are very different compared to the Americans she worked with before”* (Erika). These narratives reinforced the perception of Filipino VAs as dependable, organized, and willing to exert additional effort to ensure continuity of operations.

3.Directness vs. Filipino politeness in communication

A consistent contrast emerged between the direct communication style of other nationalities and the more polite, indirect approach commonly associated with Filipino communication. Several participants described Western clients as blunt and straightforward.

Randy explained, *“They don't just beat around the bush... they get straight to the point, what's the problem, what's the issue, here's the fix”*.

Jullius similarly noted, *“With other nationalities they are very direct to the point... it's literal”*. In comparison, Filipino VAs emphasized conflict avoidance and careful message construction.

Jeally explained: *"We want to make sure we avoid conflict as much as possible. We use positive scripting... We're careful; they're very blunt"*. However, this difference sometimes resulted in misinterpretation, with politeness or grammatical precision being perceived as commanding or overly formal by some clients.

4. Perceived hierarchies and racialized power dynamics

Some participants openly discussed the presence of perceived hierarchies and racialized dynamics within global work arrangements.

Leslie shared: *"Not to be racist but other nationalities look at us as inferior... they consider us as servants"*.

Another participant, Jean, highlighted how economic vulnerability had shaped Filipino communication behavior, stating, *"Takot tayong mga Filipino... baka sabihin reklamador tapos mawalan ng work"*. These reflections illustrate how power imbalances and job insecurity influence communication practices, often leading Filipino VAs to prioritize compliance, politeness, and emotional restraint despite their professional competence and experience.

Overall, participants' narratives demonstrate that experiences with other nationalities are complex and multifaceted. While differences in directness, organization, and hierarchy were commonly observed, many participants resisted simplistic national stereotypes. Instead, they positioned themselves as

adaptive global communication practitioners, capable of navigating cultural differences through politeness, flexibility, and professionalism—sometimes at the cost of emotional labor and self-silencing.

Filipino VAs as Global Communications Practitioners

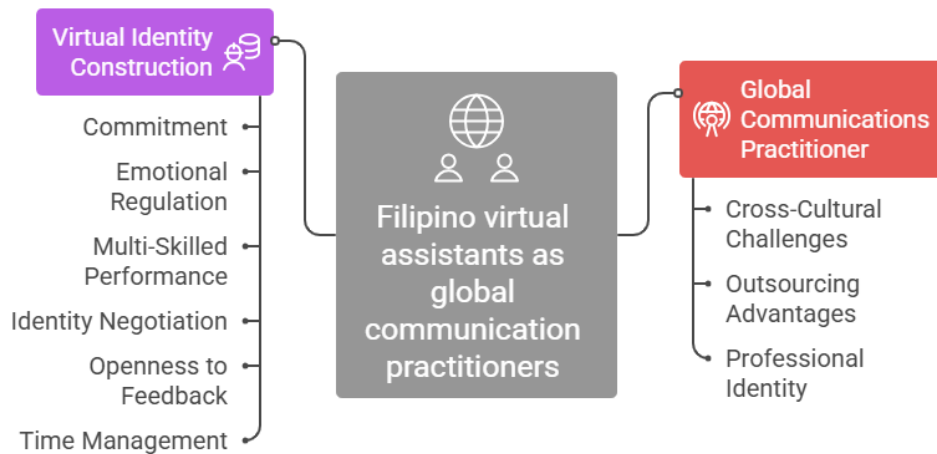
This section presents findings on how Filipino Virtual Assistants construct their identity as global communications practitioners. They shared that being a global VA, 1) they face challenges in cross-cultural communication, 2) they believe that Filipinos have advantages in global outsourcing, and 3) they have professional identity and global communication competence (Figure 14).

They also continuously shape their virtual identities as global VAs by having 1) commitment and self-discipline, 2) emotional regulation, 3) flexibility and multi-skills, 4) openness to feedback, and 5) good time management.

The findings reveal that participants navigate linguistic nuance, cultural perception, and professional self-positioning while demonstrating strong communicative adaptability and reflexivity in global work environments.

Figure 15.

Filipino virtual assistants as global communication practitioners



Becoming Global Communications Practitioners

1. Meeting cross-cultural challenges.

Although participants consistently rejected the notion that language itself was a barrier, they identified communication style, tone, and perceived assertiveness as key cross-cultural challenges. Rather than vocabulary or grammar, misunderstandings arose from differences in pragmatics and interpretation.

Leslie explained that miscommunication was rooted in how messages were framed rather than in English proficiency:

"I can't say it is language barrier because we can speak the language, but it is more on the way we say it... There was this one time... the same client thought I'm commanding him. I think it's the way we say it, or choice of words."

Similarly, Erika acknowledged discomfort tied to accent perception and racialized preferences in communication, which affected confidence in self-presentation:

“Some people don't want to talk when there's an accent and stuff like that... especially those who have kind of a racial preference for the people they want to talk to.”

Accent and racialized perceptions further complicated cross-cultural communication. Erika expressed that discomfort was not necessarily internal but shaped by anticipated judgment from others, stating, *“some people don't want to talk when there's an accent and stuff like that.”* This hesitation was intensified by awareness of discriminatory preferences, as she noted feeling less confident *“especially [with] those who have kind of a racial preference for the people they want to talk to.”*

These narratives suggest that global communication work involves emotional labor and self-monitoring, where Filipino VAs must manage not only message clarity but also how their identity is received. For introverted participants like Drew, this challenge was compounded by personality, as they shared, *“I'm not really into talking to a lot of people unless I really need to.”* Despite this, introversion did not equate to incompetence; rather, it highlighted the adaptive strategies VAs employ to engage selectively and professionally when communication is required.

Participants' articulation of Filipino traits, as previously discussed such as adaptability, politeness, flexibility, English proficiency, and conflict avoidance resonates with studies on global virtual teams (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1999; Shaik et al., 2019). These traits enabled Filipino VAs to navigate cross-cultural communication demands while maintaining relational harmony.

2. Capitalizing on Filipinos' advantages in global outsourcing.

Alongside the challenges, participants strongly articulated perceived Filipino advantages within the global outsourcing industry, positioning these traits as both marketable strengths and sources of collective pride.

Leslie openly acknowledged global preference for Filipino workers, stating: *"out of all nationalities, clients and companies prefer Filipinos when they are outsourcing."* This advantage was attributed not only to English proficiency but also to cultural values such as humility and perseverance: *"Filipinos are humble and low profile. We are also persistent and goal oriented."*

Participants consistently identified being Filipino as a significant advantage within the global outsourcing industry, particularly in terms of employer preference, work ethic, humility, and adaptability. Several participants openly acknowledged that nationality itself plays a role in hiring decisions, with one stating, *"Let's admit it, that out of all nationalities, clients and companies prefer Filipinos when they are outsourcing. And I think that's an edge that being a Filipino is a factor"* (Leslie).

This perceived preference was attributed not only to English proficiency but also to cultural values such as humility and perseverance. Drawing from overseas work experience, she explained that Filipinos often accept roles below their formal qualifications without resistance, noting that *“there are a lot of Filipinos who are teachers here, but in Italy, they are domestic helpers (DH), but they don’t mind.”* This willingness was framed as a reflection of being *“humble and low profile,”* as well as *“persistent and goal oriented.”* However, this advantage juxtaposed preference with marginalization.

The same participant acknowledged, *“Not to be racist but other nationalities look at us as inferior... they consider us as servants, especially here in Asia,”* revealing a critical consciousness of how Filipino labor is simultaneously valued and marginalized in international contexts.

This dual awareness reflects a nuanced understanding of global labor hierarchies, where Filipino VAs are both highly sought after and structurally undervalued.

Despite the inequalities, participants reframed their role in empowering terms. Julius emphasized national representation and pride, explaining, *“being a virtual assistant is an opportunity... it will at least give me some pride being a Filipino on the international set up.”*

This sense of recognition was reinforced by external validation from clients. Randy shared experiences of positive comparison, recalling feedback

such as *“you're doing great so far... you're the best person that I had as VA,”* particularly when clients contrasted Filipino VAs with other nationalities. This validation has fostered a sense of responsibility, as he expressed pride in *“representing us,”* signaling that individual performance was seen as reflective of Filipino workers more broadly.

Overall, the data demonstrate that Filipino VAs do not merely participate in global communication, they actively shape it through culturally grounded practices that balance efficiency, empathy, and adaptability.

3. Living up to the virtual identity of Filipino workers. While Filipino traits were identified in earlier sections, this research further examined virtual assistants' lived experiences and self-described characteristics to understand how they actively construct, perform, and sustain a virtual professional identity in remote and globally mediated work environments. Rather than treating identity as a fixed national attribute, the findings show that virtual identity is continuously shaped through everyday work practices, communication choices, emotional regulation, and adaptation to client expectations across cultures.

Constructing Identity as Global VAs

The VAs continuously shape their virtual identities as global VAs by having (1) commitment and self-discipline, (2) emotional regulation, (3) flexibility and multi-skills, (4) dynamic cultural values, (5) adjustments to cross

cultural communication, (6) openness to feedback, and (7) good time management.

1. Grounded in commitment and self-discipline.

Participants consistently described their virtual identity as grounded in strong internal discipline and self-directed commitment. In the absence of physical supervision, identity was constructed through reliability, consistency, and personal accountability. Leslie framed this identity as intrinsic rather than externally enforced, stating that even without monitoring, they continue to perform their duties because *“that’s who I am.”* This highlights how virtual identity is not merely about task completion but about being seen by oneself and by clients as dependable and professional.

Moments of fatigue, demotivation, or “lazy days” were openly acknowledged; however, these were framed as temporary disruptions rather than defining features. Participants emphasized returning to work by recalling personal motivations, suggesting that virtual identity is actively reaffirmed through self-regulation and purpose-driven behavior, rather than passive compliance.

2. Professional and emotional maturity

Virtual identity building also involved emotional labor and careful self-presentation. Several participants described managing personal emotions to maintain a professional demeanor in client interactions. Drew noted that

regardless of personal struggles, interaction with clients requires emotional adjustment, reinforcing the idea that virtual professionalism involves emotional containment and role performance.

Leslie's experience of misinterpretation during a client interaction further illustrates how virtual identity is negotiated in communication. Formal language intended to signal respect was perceived as confrontational, prompting the participant to re-evaluate their messaging. This reflective process, back-reading messages, clarifying intent, and adjusting tone demonstrates how virtual identity is co-constructed through interaction and feedback, particularly in cross-cultural contexts.

3. Role flexibility and adaptability

A defining feature of virtual identity across participants was adaptability. Rather than identifying with a single professional role, participants described themselves as "all-around" or "jack-of-all-trades." Cherilyn explicitly stated that being a virtual assistant means doing tasks beyond formal scope, indicating that virtual identity is task-fluid rather than role-bound.

Randy and Jean extended this further by narrating how they accumulated diverse competencies, ranging from IT and graphic design to accounting and customer support, often through self-learning and trial-and-error. This suggests that virtual identity is built through continuous skill expansion and improvisation, shaped by client needs rather than organizational

hierarchies. Identity, in this sense, becomes modular and adaptive, responding to situational demands.

4. Dynamic Filipino cultural values

While participants referenced Filipino identity, predominantly values such as hard work, patience, and humility, these were not positioned as static cultural traits. Instead, they functioned as resources mobilized in virtual identity performance. Cherilyn's emphasis on working even without pay during rest days illustrates how Filipino values intersect with virtual labor expectations, reinforcing an identity of reliability and dedication.

At the same time, participants like Randy acknowledged perceived gaps in communication confidence, expressing aspiration rather than deficit. This reflects a forward-looking identity orientation, where being a Filipino VA involves continuous self-improvement and alignment with global professional standards rather than simple cultural replication.

5. Adjustments in cross-cultural communication

Virtual identity was particularly visible in moments of intercultural interaction. Participants described adjusting communication styles based on client preferences, especially when working with foreign clients who favored directness over "flowery" language. Erika explained learning to be more

straightforward because their client preferred clarity and honesty, indicating that virtual identity is shaped through alignment with dominant workplace norms.

Mark Julian's experience of being perceived as "*sounding like a white guy*" further illustrates identity negotiation. Accent neutrality and calm speech became tools for credibility and trust, particularly in environments where clients were wary of scams. In this context, virtual identity was strategically performed to meet expectations of legitimacy, professionalism, and safety.

6. Openness to feedback for resilience and growth

Participants repeatedly framed their virtual identity as evolving rather than fixed. Openness to feedback was not merely a skill but a core identity orientation. Jeally emphasized receptiveness to correction as essential, particularly when entering unfamiliar industries. Similarly, Jean framed resilience as more important than having complete skills, positioning identity as anchored in learning capacity rather than expertise.

This growth-oriented identity allowed participants to view mistakes as part of becoming professional, reinforcing the idea that virtual identity is iterative and developmental, shaped over time through experience and reflection.

7. Autonomy and self-management

Finally, virtual identity was strongly linked to autonomy and self-management. Participants described deliberate strategies for prioritization, focus, and boundary-setting. Jean's use of "head's down" status and selective responsiveness illustrate how control over attention and time becomes a key marker of professional identity in virtual work.

Aubrey similarly described increased focus and productivity at home compared to office settings, suggesting that virtual identity is reinforced through perceived efficiency and control. In this sense, being a "good VA" is equated with being self-regulating, organized, and strategically responsive rather than constantly available.

Virtual Identity as Ongoing Construction

Overall, the findings indicate that Filipino virtual assistants construct their virtual identity not simply through nationality or predefined traits, but through ongoing performance, adaptation, and sensemaking in digitally mediated work. Their identity emerges at the intersection of commitment, emotional regulation, flexibility, cross-cultural communication, and self-discipline.

Rather than positioning themselves in opposition to other nationalities, participants emphasized fit, adjustment, and credibility within global work

environments. Virtual identity, therefore, is not a static label but a continuously negotiated professional self, shaped by client interactions, cultural expectations, and the demands of remote labor.

Participants articulated their professional identity as global communications practitioners through lived experience, reflexivity, and continuous learning rather than through formal titles or credentials. Several participants emphasized that their achievements were often invisible to outsiders, particularly because virtual assistance is commonly perceived as “easy” work. One participant reflected, *“They think that being a VA is easy. We cannot just brag to everyone... I know that for myself.”*

Instead of public recognition, professional identity was grounded in accumulated communicative encounters, as the participant explained that *“everyday, in every experiences that I have, I was able to deal with different people, different clients and business so I consider myself as... a global communication practitioner”, Leslie.*

This sense of competence was paired with humility, with the same participant emphasizing continuous growth, stating, *“success is a continues learning. Every day is an opportunity to learn... but still low profile.”* Such narratives suggest that professional identity among Filipino VAs is internally validated and process-oriented rather than status-driven.

Professional identity as a global communications practitioner was further constructed through functional fluency, adaptability, and continuous learning. Participants often hesitated to label themselves as “experts,” yet their narratives demonstrated advanced communicative competence across contexts.

Jeally described their ability to adjust communication registers seamlessly, noting, *“I can communicate effectively not just at the customer face level... but also business to business... even if I'm talking to a CEO, a business owner, or even the President.”*

Consistent with the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Harwood, 2020), participants defined themselves in relation to other nationalities, constructing a distinct but globally competent professional identity. However, rather than reinforcing national stereotypes, participants emphasized individual adaptability, echoing Au’s (2010) findings that identification in virtual teams is situational and negotiated.

Rather than credentials, long-term client relationships were repeatedly cited as concrete evidence of communication effectiveness. Cheryl cited long-term client relationships as evidence, stating: *“I have a client for almost three years now. That shows that communication is effective, even virtually.”* For her, prior international exposure further strengthened this confidence: *“communication... is no longer new to me since I've worked abroad.”*

Learning and upskilling emerged as defining features as well of professional identity. Cherilyn recalled moments of uncertainty that became learning opportunities, sharing, *“my client asked me to do a QR code, I was like how will I do it?”* Instead of viewing this as a limitation, she framed it as empowerment: *“you get to learn on your own... you get to experience the things that you never thought you can do.”* This autonomy contrasted sharply with corporate environments, where *“they will spoon feed you with all the things that you need.”*

Similarly, Aubrey viewed exposure to diverse clients as a competitive advantage, stating: *“I've learned a lot from different clients which not all people will know, and I consider it as my edge to others.”* Experience across borders reinforced confidence while normalizing intercultural interaction. Participants also emphasized self-directed upskilling as central to their professional growth.

Participants also linked professional competence to broader economic and social contribution. Professional identity was tied to versatility and perceived uniqueness. One participant expressed pride in accumulated skills, stating: *“I don't see enough persons who have the same skills that I have accumulated so far” (Randy)*. He also described being adaptable across roles: *“you can just throw me at any positions... in a company”*.

Randy also framed virtual work as both personal growth and national service, explaining, *“you're helping the country as well... they're gonna be sending dollars here.”* This economic framing positioned Filipino VAs as active

contributors to the national economy, reinforcing their identity as global practitioners rather than as passive outsourced labor. Yet, humility remained central. Despite extensive experience, they still positioned themselves cautiously, stating, *“if I’m gonna be comparing myself to them, I’m just gonna be in the beginner”* (Randy). This self-effacing stance also echoed Leslie’s reflection on achievement without overt self-promotion: *“I consider myself... a global communication practitioner... but still low profile.”*

Participants further highlighted professionalism as a defining requirement of virtual global work. One participant emphasized that working remotely demands greater self-regulation, explaining, *“if you want to be a virtual assistant... you need to be first professional... you need to stand on your ground and provide the specific needs of your client.”* Unlike office environments where *“there are many cameras all over the office,”* virtual work places responsibility directly on the individual, as *“it is only your client who needs to be pleased every now and then”* (Julius).

Finally, communication competence was framed not only in terms of fluency but also in strategic language choice and professionalism. One participant emphasized willingness and trainability over static expertise, stating: *“I go for someone who is not skilled enough but trainable and willing to render hours without pay”* (Cherilyn).

At the same time, the importance of English as a professional and objective medium was underscored, particularly in global contexts: *“when the*

time comes... it's gonna be in English and they cannot reply in Filipino" (Cherilyn).

English was described as enabling clarity and objectivity, as *"it's easier to express objective information in English... not this is an emotion for you to dissect"* (Jean). These reflections demonstrate that Filipino VAs view global communication competence as a combination of linguistic strategy, adaptability, professionalism, and emotional discipline shaped through sustained intercultural engagement.

Their narratives reveal a hybrid professional identity, one that balances global confidence with cultural modesty, technical competence with relational awareness, and individual success with national representation. In doing so, Filipino VAs position themselves not merely as outsourced labor but as intentional global communication practitioners operating within complex transnational spaces.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that Filipino VAs construct their identity as global communications practitioners through a combination of linguistic fluency, cultural sensitivity, adaptability, continuous learning, and moral professionalism. Their narratives reveal an ongoing negotiation between confidence and humility, visibility and restraint, expertise and learning. They do so while navigating global communication spaces marked by power asymmetries, accent bias, and cultural misinterpretation.

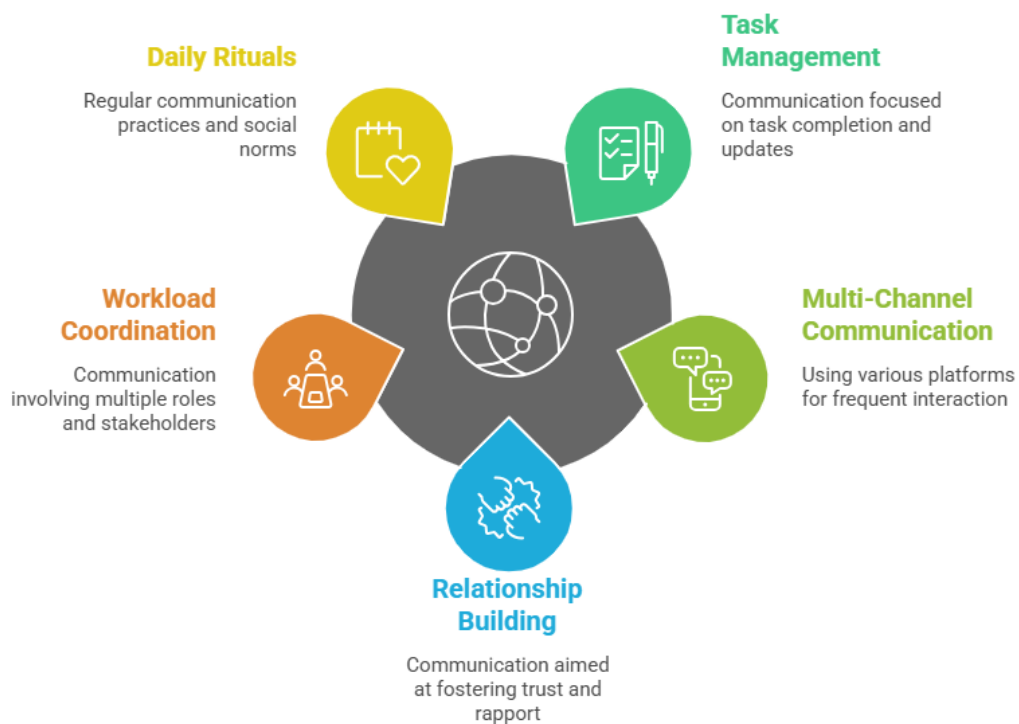
These findings reflect Davis's (2022) argument that virtual organizational identity is narratively constructed. Filipino VAs actively assert competence while remaining reflexive and grounded, positioning themselves as skilled, ethical, and globally attuned communication practitioners. They actively narrated themselves as global communication practitioners, not merely assistants, positioning communication competence as both labor and identity.

Multi-role and Multi-tasks of Virtual Assistants in a Changing Communication Ecology

Filipino Virtual Assistants (VAs) operate within a highly structured yet flexible communication ecology, where tools, practices, and tasks are deeply intertwined. Rather than using communication platforms merely as utilities, participants described communication as the core mechanism through which work, trust, accountability, and professional identity are enacted in virtual labor.

Figure 16.

Dimensions of virtual communication work and practice as experienced by the participants.



Filipino Virtual Assistants perform a wide range of tasks that extend far beyond narrowly defined job descriptions, reflecting the highly flexible and multi-role nature of virtual work. Participants described being entrusted with operationally critical responsibilities that span facing customers and handling technical, administrative, and strategic functions. Rather than occupying single, specialized roles, most VAs functioned as generalists who adapted continuously to business needs, often absorbing additional duties as trust and reliance increased.

Several participants were involved in claims handling, particularly in service-oriented industries such as moving and logistics. These tasks required managing post-service concerns, responding to client complaints, and coordinating resolutions after transactions were completed. As one participant explained, after each move, some clients inevitably filed claims, and the responsibility of handling these cases fell directly on the VA. This role demanded emotional labor, attention to detail, and accountability, highlighting the level of trust placed in VAs to manage sensitive customer issues.

CRM (Customer Relationship Management) tools management and data systems setup emerged as a core responsibility for many participants. VAs were not only tasked with updating records but also with configuring entire systems, including setting up integrations, notifications, and workflow automations.

One participant described managing MLS (Multiple Listing Service, a private data base for realtors) and CRM platforms while simultaneously acting as informal IT support, even though such tasks were not officially part of the job description. This demonstrates how Filipino VAs are often expected to possess technical adaptability and to take initiative in building systems that support organizational efficiency.

Lead generation, cold calling, and appointment setting constituted the most labor-intensive and prominent task clusters. Participants described conducting high-volume outbound calls, following up with prospects, qualifying

leads, and scheduling appointments that directly contributed to sales outcomes. In some cases, VAs have become the primary point of contact for clients, to the extent that prospects are requesting them by name. This indicates that Filipino VAs play a direct role in revenue generation and relationship management, rather than serving merely as back-office support.

Operational tasks further illustrated the central role VAs play in daily business functions. Participants working in logistics and dispatch described handling inbound and outbound calls, verifying customer information, coordinating drivers, and assigning resources in real time. These responsibilities required constant communication, quick decision-making, and coordination across teams using platforms such as Slack. Such tasks resemble operational management roles and underscore the extent to which VAs are embedded in core business processes.

Some participants held specialized administrative roles in payroll, contracts, and human resource support. These responsibilities included managing contractor payments, interpreting contracts, communicating with clients and team leads across different regions, and ensuring compliance within global employment platforms. One participant described serving as a contracts specialist for an international HR provider, handling concerns across time zones and regions. This level of responsibility reflects institutional trust and highlights the professional competence required of VAs in administrative and compliance-related work.

Real estate and property management support was another recurring area of responsibility. Participants assisted with MLS updates, collections, client coordination, and property-related communications. These tasks often overlapped with marketing and administrative functions, demonstrating how real estate support roles required both financial accuracy and sustained client engagement. Similarly, social media and marketing tasks were widely performed, including managing social media accounts, creating digital content, designing flyers and infographics using platforms such as Canva, and offering strategic recommendations to improve audience reach and engagement.

Overall, the participants' accounts reveal that Filipino Virtual Assistants routinely manage complex, overlapping tasks that position them as integral contributors to organizational operations. Their work is characterized by flexibility, adaptability, and a high degree of responsibility, often encompassing communication, technical setup, operations, sales support, and creative labor simultaneously. These findings support the characterization of Filipino VAs not as peripheral workers, but as embedded global communication practitioners whose roles are essential to the continuity and growth of the organizations they support.

1. Communication for task management, updates, and accountability

Participants consistently described communication as a mechanism for tracking work progress, clarifying responsibilities, and ensuring accountability, particularly in remote settings where visibility of labor is limited.

Several VAs emphasized the need to demonstrate productivity through updates, not only for managerial oversight but also to align expectations within teams.

Jean explained that communication is used strategically to signal work ethic and set standards among colleagues, noting that by consistently updating others, *“the expectation among them is you also get things done because I’m working with you.”* This practice fostered mutual accountability without direct supervision.

Similarly, Randy, described structured communication routines tied to accountability measures such as invoices, detailed hour tracking, and end-of-shift confirmations, where finance executives would request breakdowns of how time was spent.

These communicative exchanges functioned as both performance validation and labor documentation, reinforcing the importance of transparency in remote work environments.

2. Communication tools as the backbone of virtual work

Communication tools were embedded in the daily rituals and workflow routines of Filipino Virtual Assistants, forming part of their habitual work practices. Participants consistently reported using multiple, overlapping communication platforms, including email, Slack, RingCentral, Google Meet, Google Voice/SMS, and project-specific systems, to manage daily

responsibilities. This multi-platform setup reflects the fragmented but continuous nature of VA work, where no single tool is sufficient to meet all communication demands.

Leslie explained that proactivity was necessary because communication was not always system-driven, noting *that “you need to be pro-active in checking because not all can be notified, and usually when it’s marketing, it will be sent either through email or chat”*.

Another participant described starting the workday with routine system checks, emphasizing that communication-related tasks were part of everyday discipline: *“The first thing I always do is check for duplicates because sometimes customer requests get duplicated... Those are the usual rituals. And of course, coffee is a must”* (Erika). These accounts highlight how communication monitoring becomes routinized and normalized within the VA’s daily workflow.

Email emerged as the formal and documentary channel, especially for business clients, contracts, claims, payroll, and official instructions. As Cherilyn explained, *“When it comes to our clients from business, we use email... especially when it comes to sending documents.”* Email functioned as a record-keeping and accountability mechanism, particularly in high-risk or emotionally charged interactions such as claims handling.

This distinction positions email as a professional and institutional medium, separating formal client interactions from more informal or operational exchanges conducted through chat-based platforms.

Real-time platforms such as Slack and RingCentral served as daily operational hubs, enabling rapid task updates, coordination across departments, and continuous visibility of work. Several participants emphasized that being “present” on Slack through greetings, status updates, or quick confirmations was itself a form of professional accountability (Leslie, Erika).

Erika highlighted its ritualized use, explaining, *“Every time, we have a channel where we’re all present. You just say ‘here’ and ‘Good morning,’ and then that’s the usual”* (Erika).

Another participant also described Slack as the primary channel for updates, stating, *“Slack is our main channel for any changes or updates”* (Jeally). Beyond task coordination, these platforms facilitated social presence and collective accountability in a fully remote work environment.

The need for proactive monitoring was emphasized across accounts, reinforcing the responsibility placed on VAs to anticipate missed notifications. As Leslie reiterated, *“You need to be pro-active in checking because not all can be notified.”* This proactive stance highlights an underlying accountability structure in remote work, where effective communication depends on the worker’s vigilance rather than automated systems alone.

Also, Cherilyn elaborated on the functional advantages of these platforms, explaining, *“We use different platforms, mostly. If you’re familiar with RingCentral, that’s how we communicate... it has a chatroom, so we have group chat, and then our client likes to send tasks and other updates from RingCentral”* (Cherilyn). This reflects the expectation for VAs to maintain fluency across multiple systems rather than rely on a single communication channel.

Meanwhile, synchronous communication through Google Meet was described as highly structured and reserved for verification, clarification, and conflict resolution. One participant explained that video calls were initiated only when necessary, stating, *“We really only use Google Meet to schedule them in case there are any issues... if he doesn’t understand the contract, if there’s a disagreement with the contractor’s payment schedule, or if he can’t access his account... that’s why we need a live call”* (Jeally).

The same participant added that Google Meet was also used for regular check-ins, noting, *“We use G-meet for touch base every two weeks, and then Slack is our main channel for any changes or updates”*. This illustrates how video communication functions as a tool for trust-building and verification rather than routine interaction.

Finally, for customer-facing communication, RingCentral, Google Voice and SMS were used selectively and strategically. One participant clarified, *“It’s*

a text message and using Google Voice, that's how we communicate with our clients before" (Leslie).

Another added that voice communication was limited to scheduled interactions, explaining, *"It'll only have a voice during scheduled phone calls or video calls"* (Jeally). These practices indicate deliberate boundary-setting to manage availability while maintaining professionalism.

3. Communication practices from task updates to trust-building

Beyond tools, participants described distinct communication practices that structured their workdays. These included daily check-ins, end-of-day (EOD) reports, morning huddles, weekly or bi-weekly touch bases, and real-time updates, depending on the client and organizational culture.

Communication functioned not only to transmit information but to signal reliability, professionalism, and emotional presence. Leslie highlighted the importance of daily greetings and positive messaging, explaining *that "the morning huddle sets the mood... it gives us positive vibes and helps a lot."* These rituals fostered a sense of belonging despite physical distance.

Participants also demonstrated adaptive communication strategies when managing upset clients, multiple stakeholders, or cross-cultural interactions. For example, Cheryllyn deliberately shifted from calls to email when dealing with angry customers, stating that written communication allowed for greater control and professionalism. This reflects a high level of communication

reflexivity, where VAs actively choose channels based on emotional, cultural, and situational factors. She also recalled receiving feedback that their voice could “calm people,” particularly in conflict situations, reinforcing how interpersonal communication skills contribute to service effectiveness.

Meanwhile, Mark Julian described relational closeness with clients, stating that they were treated *“like family or friends,”* with conversations occasionally shifting into Filipino or Tagalog, creating comfort and mutual trust. This relational dynamic also enabled VAs to contribute ideas and strategic input, as clients actively sought their opinions. These findings indicate that communication in VA work extends beyond transactional exchanges and becomes a site where professional trust, emotional labor, and relational belonging are continuously negotiated.

Importantly, communication was also used to manage boundaries. Some participants avoided messaging clients through personal platforms, emphasizing professionalism and respect for private life (Jean). This highlights the negotiation between accessibility and boundary-setting in remote work.

4. Communication-intensive and multi-role coordination

The data further show that VA tasks are communication-intensive by nature, spanning claims handling, CRM and data management, lead generation, cold calling, operations, payroll, HR support, real estate coordination, and social media management.

Participants frequently described themselves as “all-around” or multi-role workers, often handling responsibilities beyond their formal job descriptions. Drew, for instance, managed CRM systems, lead follow-ups, social media approvals, and even IT-related tasks, while simultaneously explaining processes to clients in live meetings. Communication enabled this role expansion by allowing VAs to translate technical systems into understandable workflows for clients.

In lead generation, which is the process of generating prospects list on different platforms, and appointment setting, communication was continuous and strategic, involving timing, follow-ups, tone adjustment, and relationship maintenance. Julius described how rapport-building, being treated “like family”, enhanced trust and allowed him to offer strategic input, reinforcing the VA’s role as a communication partner rather than a passive assistant.

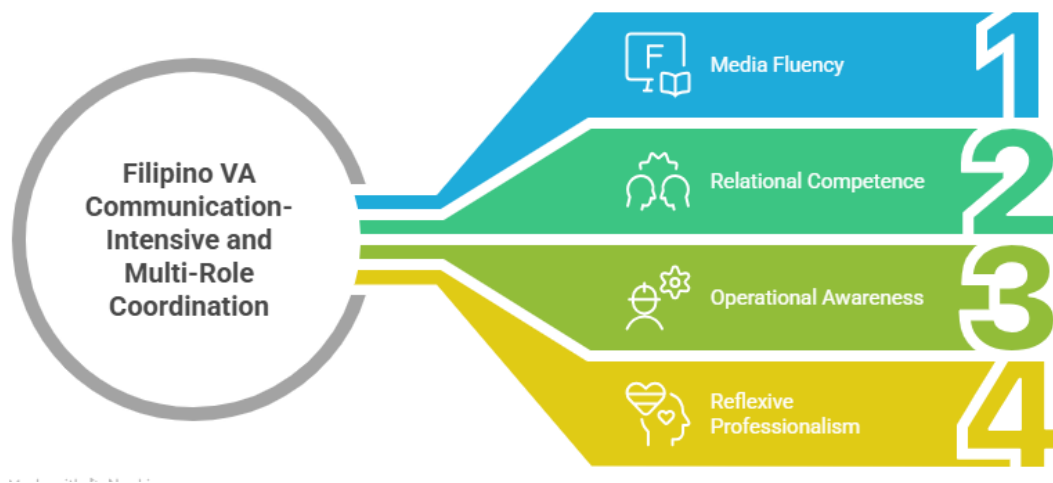
Taken together, these findings identify and position Filipino VAs as global communication practitioners who actively design, manage, and negotiate communication systems across time zones, cultures, and organizational hierarchies. Their work demonstrates:

- Media fluency (knowing which platform fits which task)
- Relational competence (building trust through tone, consistency, and presence)
- Operational awareness (coordinating multiple stakeholders and workflows)

- Reflexive professionalism (adapting communication to emotional and cultural contexts)

Figure 17.

Filipino VA as global communication practitioners' key communication competencies.



Rather than being peripheral support workers, Filipino VAs emerge as central communication nodes within global digital labor systems while maintaining continuity, accountability, and relational stability in distributed organizations.

5. Daily communication rituals and positive social norms

Daily communication rituals, such as morning huddles, greetings, and routine check-ins, emerged as powerful mechanisms for emotional regulation, team cohesion, and morale building. Leslie described intentionally spreading “positive vibes” every morning, noting that daily greetings and huddles helped release stress from previous workdays and set the emotional tone for the team.

Similarly, Randy and Aubrey reported regular huddles where team members shared daily plans, updates, and reflections, often led by management or the CEO. These rituals normalized openness and created a shared rhythm despite physical distance.

However, not all participants experienced or preferred such practices. Erika described an environment with no huddles, memos, or hourly updates, where autonomy was prioritized and silence was normalized unless updates were necessary. Together, these contrasting experiences suggest that while daily communication rituals can foster solidarity and psychological safety, their effectiveness depends on alignment with organizational culture and individual work preferences.

Overall, the findings under this theme of Communication Work and Practices demonstrate that communication practices in VA work are multifunctional, serving operational, relational, and emotional purposes. Communication enables task coordination and accountability, supports trust and relationship-building, manages complex multi-role workloads, and sustains positive social norms in distributed teams. Rather than being merely instrumental, communication emerges as a central organizing force in virtual labor shaping how work is done, how relationships are maintained, and how professional identity is enacted in remote environments.

Challenges and Coping by Filipino Virtual Assistants

This section presents the challenges experienced by Filipino Virtual Assistants (VAs) in remote work, organized into three interrelated domains: communication challenges, structural, and contextual challenges of virtual labor. Adaptive resolutions and coping strategies are also discussed.

Findings reveal that challenges are not isolated technical issues but are deeply embedded in power relations, emotional labor, cultural positioning, and the precarious nature of remote work.

Figure 18.

Challenges experienced by Filipino virtual assistants.



Communication Challenges

1. Delays, emotional strain, and power asymmetries

A dominant challenge across participants was delayed responses and disrupted information flow, particularly when VAs depended on clients or onshore teams for task-critical information. Participants described situations where urgent tasks could not be completed due to unavailable managers or incomplete instructions, intensifying stress and uncertainty.

As Cheryl explained, working virtually meant *that “the information needed to complete a task [is] not available right away,”* creating delays beyond the VA’s control and reinforcing feelings of powerlessness.

These communication gaps were closely tied to emotional strain, particularly anxiety, overthinking, and self-monitoring.

Several participants also described heightened emotional labor when interpreting client tone, emojis, or sudden shifts in communication style. Jean articulated this vividly, noting that a client’s abrupt change in messaging could trigger anxiety because *“you know the job is not stable.”* This emotional uncertainty led some participants to excessively proofread emails or second-guess their language, reflecting how communication became a site of psychological vulnerability rather than clarity.

Power dynamics further complicated communication experiences. Participants recounted encounters with harsh feedback, intimidation, and power-tripping, especially during meetings or coaching sessions. Leslie described being made to feel *“like a foolish person”* by mentors, while another incident involved being publicly silenced during a discussion, resulting in withdrawal from future interactions. These experiences illustrate how hierarchical communication structures can suppress participation and erode confidence, particularly in virtual environments where tone is difficult to regulate.

2. Virtual communication limits in language and culture

Although most participants rejected the idea that English proficiency itself was a major barrier, cross-cultural miscommunication emerged as a persistent challenge. Differences in pragmatics, terminology, and conversational norms often resulted in misunderstandings. Leslie recalled being advised that an incident was considered a “language barrier,” despite her intention being misunderstood rather than poorly expressed. This labeling led to self-censorship, where she eventually stopped asking questions during meetings.

The limits of virtual communication amplified these issues. Participants emphasized that chat-based platforms restricted emotional nuance and made it harder to clarify intent. As Leslie noted, *“it’s not easy to deal with people or to express something, especially if we just talk through chat.”* Without visual cues

or immediate feedback, misunderstandings escalated more easily, reinforcing the emotional toll of virtual work.

In some cases, participants explicitly identified racism, bias, and nationality-based stereotyping as part of their communication challenges. Jean shared that despite good performance, being Filipino meant that acceptance was *“never gonna be completely okay.”* These experiences highlight how communication difficulties are not merely linguistic but are shaped by racialized and geopolitical power relations within global outsourcing arrangements.

Contextual Challenges

Contextual challenges refer to pressures that arise from the lived conditions of working remotely, including emotional, social, and routine disruptions. Participants described reduced social interaction and growing introversion, where remote routines narrowed social exposure and contributed to isolation.

Randy framed social life as minimal and described missing *“meeting new people,”* while others noted that long-term remote work can reduce face-to-face engagement and increase withdrawal. He described grocery shopping as his only remaining form of social engagement. Several participants observed increased introversion over time.

Participants also described irregular schedules and sleep disruptions, particularly due to time zone coordination, shifting schedules, and lifestyle misalignment. Erika explained that schedule changes (including daylight savings and frequent weekly shifts) disrupted sleep and eating patterns, making it difficult to plan rest, travel, or outings, sometimes requiring them to bring laptops and work while outside the home.

In addition, VAs named personal challenges (e.g., stress management, limited outlets to de-stress) as disadvantages of home-based work. Jeally described difficulty finding an “*outlet to de-stress*,” suggesting that remote work can compress life into the same space and reduce psychological separation between work and rest.

Structural Challenges

Beyond communication, participants identified job instability as a central challenge. Many emphasized the precarious nature of freelance VA work, where contracts offer little protection and termination can occur without warning.

Cherilyn explained that unlike traditional employment, “*the client can let go of you anytime*,” creating persistent insecurity that shaped how VAs interacted with clients and managed their performance, producing a background fear that shapes performance, compliance, and communication behavior.

This insecurity also appeared in Jean's account, where instability amplified anxiety and made shifts in client communication feel threatening.

Another structural issue involved unrealistic expectations, poor training, and blame culture. Some participants reported being assigned complex tasks without clear onboarding, then being blamed when outcomes failed. Drew described situations where expectations were overwhelming and unclear, saying clients "*have high expectations,*" and that role scope was not fully explained during hiring. This created pressure to self-train continuously while managing fear of disappointing clients.

Related to this, participants cited difficulty adjusting to new roles and learning curves, particularly when work involved specialized systems, multi-country processes, or unfamiliar professional domains (e.g., HR/payroll contracts). Jeally described struggling to work independently due to the complexity and variability of global workflows.

Finally, participants identified material and infrastructure constraints such as Internet instability, power outages, and technology/equipment limitations. Randy described how power outages and connectivity are perceived as "*main concerns*" for clients working with Filipinos, often pushing responsibility onto the VA to maintain uninterrupted delivery through backups (extra laptops, data, or future generators). This structural burden reflects how

global work standards assume stable infrastructure, even when local conditions are uneven.

Adaptive Strategies to Address Challenges

Learning. Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated strong adaptive agency. Many emphasized the importance of continuous learning and self-improvement, particularly in communication and technical skills. Participants described actively researching cultural norms, studying client-specific terminology, and using online resources such as Google and YouTube to compensate for limited training.

Improving communication emerged as a key resolution strategy. Participants learned to be more direct, ask clarifying questions, and set boundaries around availability. Leslie reflected that avoiding questions only led to mistakes and emphasized *that “there’s nothing wrong with asking questions.”*

Boundary setting. Others described asserting work schedules and requesting paid overtime to manage unrealistic deadlines, reframing communication as a professional negotiation rather than passive compliance.

Self-regulation. Time management, discipline, and initiative were also central coping mechanisms. Participants described structuring their work environments, investing in equipment, and proactively solving problems to meet client expectations. These strategies reflect how Filipino VAs actively

reconstructed themselves as competent, resilient professionals navigating uncertain and unequal work conditions.

Overall, these findings reveal that the challenges faced by Filipino VAs are relational, emotional, and structural, rather than purely technical. Communication difficulties are intertwined with power asymmetries, cultural interpretation, and job insecurity, while structural constraints such as infrastructure limitations and irregular schedules further intensify emotional labor. Importantly, participants did not position themselves as passive victims but as adaptive global workers, continuously learning, negotiating boundaries, and developing strategies to sustain their professional identities in a precarious virtual economy.

Becoming a VA: A Heideggerian Phenomenological Interpretation

The participants arrive at a deeper realization of their career direction, professional identity, and long-term goals as Virtual Assistants. Rather than viewing VA work as a temporary or purely transactional role, participants described an evolving understanding of their professional self shaped through lived work experiences, autonomy, and ongoing engagement with remote work environments. Their narratives reveal how meaning develops gradually through everyday practices such as problem-solving, interacting with clients, learning new systems, and managing responsibilities independently.

From a Heideggerian phenomenological perspective, realization is not merely a cognitive reflection but emerges through being engaged in the world of work. Martin Heidegger's phenomenology emphasizes *Dasein*, or the human being as a "being-in-the-world," whose understanding of self and reality unfolds through practical involvement in everyday activities. Meaning therefore arises not through detached reflection but through participation in lived situations where individuals interpret their experiences while navigating responsibilities, relationships, and possibilities. Within this framework, the participants' understanding of VA work developed through their active involvement in the remote work environment, where professional identity and career direction emerged through ongoing interpretation of their lived experiences.

Rather than describing career trajectories as objective paths, participants narrated how their understanding of work evolved through experience. VA work became meaningful as they interpreted their role within the broader context of their lives, responsibilities, and future aspirations. This aligns with Heidegger's view that understanding is always situated and interpretive, grounded in the practical world in which individuals live and act.

1. Career aspirations and 'leadership' goals as projection of possibilities

In Heideggerian phenomenology, human beings are understood as entities that constantly project themselves toward future possibilities.

For some participants, VA work is understood not as a permanent destination but as a pathway toward future goals, such as financial independence or business ownership. When a participant describes VA work as the “last thing” they will do before retiring early, the work itself is interpreted within a broader horizon of possibilities. The meaning of VA work therefore lies not only in the tasks performed but in how it is integrated into participants’ projected futures

Heidegger’s concept of temporality further explains this experience. Present work experiences are interpreted in relation to past struggles and anticipated futures. Participants’ previous experiences in traditional employment shaped how they valued the flexibility and autonomy of VA work, while their future aspirations are giving meaning to their current efforts. In this sense, VA work is experienced as part of a temporal continuum in which past, present, and future are interconnected.

‘Leadership’, within the framework of the study, is also interpreted differently. Rather than formal authority, ‘leadership’ emerges through participants’ sense of being relied upon, consulted, or trusted by others. Through everyday interactions with clients and colleagues, participants began to interpret themselves as capable contributors within their work environment, gradually redefining their professional identity.

Rather than being defined by formal managerial titles or hierarchical authority, ‘leadership’ appears through everyday relational experiences.

Participants described moments in which clients entrusted them with important tasks, sought their advice, or relied on them to manage communication and workflows. These interactions gradually shaped how the participants understood their own professional capabilities.

Through repeated experiences of trust, responsibility, and collaboration, participants began to reinterpret themselves as reliable contributors within their work environment. As participants navigated their roles, responded to client needs, and solved problems independently, they gradually developed a stronger sense of competence and agency. 'Leadership' therefore emerges not as a formal position but as an experienced recognition of one's ability to contribute meaningfully to others' work and success.

In this way, the participants' narratives revealed how professional identity evolved through everyday practice. Leadership becomes embedded in the ordinary routines of communication, decision-making, and problem-solving that characterize VA work. Over time, these experiences reshaped how participants understood themselves, not merely as assistants performing tasks, but as trusted professionals capable of guiding processes, supporting clients, and influencing outcomes within the virtual workspace.

2. Growing confidence through practical engagement in the work world

Heidegger emphasizes that understanding emerges through practical engagement with the world. Knowledge is not primarily theoretical but develops

through involvement in activities and situations that require decision-making, problem-solving, and responsiveness.

Participants described gaining confidence as they navigated independent work environments, managed multiple clients, and resolved challenges without direct supervision. These experiences illustrate Heidegger's concept of ready-to-hand engagement, where individuals learn through interacting with tools, tasks, and situations within their everyday work environment.

Initially, participants experienced uncertainty when entering the VA profession. However, as they continued performing tasks, researching solutions, and communicating with clients, their understanding of their own capabilities evolved. Confidence developed gradually through repeated engagement with work responsibilities rather than through formal validation or structured training.

Statements such as being "70% confident" illustrate this evolving process. Confidence is not a fixed state but emerges through ongoing engagement with real work situations. In Heideggerian terms, participants come to understand themselves as capable through the recognition that they can effectively navigate the practical demands of their work environment.

3. Learning curve and self-initiated growth within the world of work

The participants' descriptions of continuous self-learning reflected Heidegger's view that understanding develops through situated involvement in everyday life. Without formal structures such as trainers or supervisors, participants relied on their ability to interpret situations, search for information, and adapt to emerging challenges.

Learning therefore occurred through direct engagement with the demands of remote work. Participants frequently described researching solutions, experimenting with unfamiliar tools, and learning from mistakes. These experiences illustrate Heidegger's concept of interpretive understanding, where individuals make sense of their environment through active involvement rather than through abstract instruction.

In this context, learning was experienced as a necessary response to the practical requirements of the work environment. Participants learned not simply to acquire technical skills but to navigate the responsibilities and expectations associated with professional communication, client relationships, and remote collaboration.

Through this ongoing process, participants gradually developed a deeper understanding of how to function effectively within the virtual work environment, reinforcing their sense of professional competence and autonomy.

4. Realization as interpretive understanding of one's work and self

Across the participants' narratives, realization emerges as a process of interpretive understanding, where individuals reassess their assumptions about work, career stability, and professional identity. Many participants entered the VA profession with expectations shaped by traditional employment structures, including supervision, organizational hierarchy, and predictable career paths.

However, their lived experiences in remote work environments led them to reinterpret these assumptions. Participants gradually came to understand that VA work involves a different set of responsibilities, expectations, and opportunities for autonomy.

Through this interpretive process, participants recognized that VA work can function as a strategic career pathway rather than merely temporary employment. Professional confidence developed through practical experience and independence, and continuous learning became a personal responsibility rather than an externally imposed requirement.

These realizations illustrate Heidegger's emphasis on self-understanding emerging through lived engagement with the world. Participants did not simply adapt to remote work; they reinterpreted their professional identity in relation to the realities and possibilities that the work environment presented.

5. Professional identity formation through being-in-the-world

From a Heideggerian perspective, professional identity is not imposed by organizational structures but emerges through individuals' ongoing engagement with their work environment. The participants' narratives demonstrated how Filipino Virtual Assistants gradually came to understand themselves as professionals through their everyday interactions, responsibilities, and experiences within the virtual workspace.

Their accounts show that VA work becomes meaningful as it is integrated into their broader life context, including family responsibilities, financial goals, and personal aspirations. Through these experiences, the participants interpreted themselves as active agents shaping their own professional trajectories.

In this sense, becoming a VA was not simply a career shift but an evolving process of being-in-the-world, where individuals continuously interpreted and redefined their place within their work environment.

6. Virtual work relationships as being-with-others (*mitsein*)

Heidegger emphasizes that human existence is inherently being-with-others (*Mitsein*). Individuals do not exist in isolation but always encounter others within the shared world in which they live and work. Within the context of virtual work, the participants' narratives demonstrated how relationships with clients and coworkers became meaningful through sustained interaction, shared responsibilities, and mutual support.

Participants described how virtual work relationships often evolved beyond transactional interactions into deeper bonds characterized by trust, emotional support, and shared life experiences. These relationships developed gradually through long-term collaboration, consistent communication, and shared professional challenges.

One participant described how virtual coworkers became deeply involved in her personal life, even serving as godparents to her child and providing voluntary financial support during a medically difficult pregnancy. Such experiences illustrate how relationships formed within virtual work environments can extend beyond professional obligations into meaningful personal connections.

Other participants compared virtual friendships to online romantic relationships, suggesting that genuine emotional bonds can emerge even without physical proximity. However, the participants also acknowledged the need for discernment in online environments, recognizing that trust must be built gradually through consistent behavior and shared experiences.

Smaller teams were often described as fostering stronger relational bonds because collaboration required mutual reliance and collective accountability. Participants noted that maintaining harmony within these teams required emotional intelligence and an understanding of when to address conflicts and when to prioritize group cohesion.

At the same time, not all participants found it easy to develop deep relationships online. Some described challenges in achieving full comfort and openness with colleagues due to the absence of physical interaction or cultural differences. This indicates that the depth of virtual relationships varies depending on factors such as communication frequency, shared experiences, and opportunities for in-person interaction.

Trust, in many cases, was grounded not in physical familiarity but in observed work ethic, reliability, and shared values. Participants expressed confidence in collaborating again with individuals they had never met in person when previous interactions demonstrated mutual trust and competence.

Contrary to assumptions that virtual work produces impersonal relationships, participants described connections characterized by empathy, mutual care, and shared life events. From a Heideggerian perspective, these coworkers are experienced not as distant digital entities but as others who share the same world of work, whose presence and influence shape the participants' lived experiences.

Through this lens, virtual work environments become social spaces where individuals encounter others, build trust, and construct meaningful relationships, demonstrating that even within technologically mediated contexts, human existence remains fundamentally relational.

Chapter VI

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study aims to explore “who” the Filipino Virtual Assistant is in the global online community. How do Filipino virtual assistants make sense of themselves as virtual communication workers in a global workplace?

Specifically, it explored the lived experiences of VAs working in fully remote, transnational environments.

The following are the specific questions:

1. How did the VAs enter the profession and when?
2. Why did they enter the VA profession?
3. How do the VAs view themselves as Filipino virtual communication practitioners?
4. How do the VAs view themselves as global virtual communication practitioners
5. How do they practice their communication profession and work?
6. What challenges do they see in their jobs as VAs and how do they resolve these issues?
7. How has their ‘becoming’ virtual assistants emerged?

Anchored in Heideggerian phenomenology, the research sought to understand 10 Filipino VAs experience, interpret, and construct meaning around their professional identities, communicative practices, and challenges within digitally mediated global workplaces.

The highlights of the findings are the following:

Entry to the VA World

Why they entered the VA world

Virtual assistance was often framed not as an idealized career choice but as a practical response to economic constraints. This positioning underscores how broader structural inequalities and financial precarity shape participation in global remote labor, with virtual assistance offering a pathway to improved income and financial stability, notably during the crisis brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Filipino virtual assistants then transitioned into being VAs through multiple, interconnected pathways shaped by the workplace such as agency gateways, digital exposure, and professional BPO (Business Process Outsourcing) background, and social networks

First, VA agencies served as important gateways, particularly for first-time virtual assistants. Agencies provided structured onboarding, training, and

client matching, which helped participants gain access to international clients while reducing uncertainty associated with freelance work.

Second, digital platforms and social media played a crucial role in participants' discovery of virtual assistance as a viable career. Job platforms such as Upwork, Indeed, and LinkedIn, as well as social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok, exposed participants to tutorials, success stories, and employment opportunities that increased awareness of the VA industry.

Third, many participants transitioned into virtual assistance from Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) and corporate employment. Nine out of the ten participants had previous experience in the BPO sector, with several having worked in the industry for many years. For these individuals, virtual assistance offered greater flexibility, autonomy, and improved work–life balance compared to traditional office-based roles.

Aside from work-related linear pathways, social networks also influenced participants' entry into VA work. Friends, relatives, and acquaintances already working as virtual assistants often provided encouragement, referrals, and informal mentoring. Word-of-mouth referrals and shared experiences reduced uncertainty and fear associated with remote work, reinforcing trust in virtual assistance as a legitimate career option. These personal networks helped reduce uncertainty and strengthened participants' confidence in pursuing remote work.

When they entered the VA world

Distinct temporal patterns indicate when participants began their virtual work careers. Four temporal cohorts were identified: Early Adopters (2017), Pre-Pandemic Explorers (2018–2019), Pandemic Shifters (2020–2021), and Post-Pandemic Reinventors (2022–2023).

Early Adopters began working remotely before the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrating that virtual assistance was already an emerging career pathway prior to global disruption.

Pre-Pandemic Explorers became aware of remote opportunities between 2018 and 2019 and gradually explored freelancing or remote employment before fully transitioning. This indicates that Filipino workers were early participants in global remote labor markets.

Pandemic Shifters entered virtual work during the height of COVID-19 restrictions. For many participants, lockdowns and workplace disruptions acted as catalysts that accelerated their transition into remote work. Participant accounts reveal that the shift to virtual assistant (VA) work was not purely opportunistic but largely reactive. It was driven by necessity, mobility restrictions, and instability across industries. Consequently, VA work functioned both as a survival strategy and as a pathway for maintaining employment during the crisis.

Post-Pandemic Reinventors began their VA careers after the most disruptive phase of the pandemic. Unlike earlier cohorts, their transition was often driven by intentional career reinvention rather than immediate economic crisis. Participants' narratives highlight agency, personal choice, and career reinvention, suggesting that virtual assistant (VA) work has evolved from a temporary coping strategy into a normalized and increasingly desirable professional option. Participants framed their transition as an opportunity to redefine their professional trajectory rather than merely adapt to external conditions.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Filipino virtual assistants do not share a single entry point into remote work. Instead, entry into the VA industry is shaped by multiple pathways (how individuals entered) and temporal contexts (when they entered), reflecting the dynamic nature of global digital labor and the evolving opportunities available in remote work environments. Furthermore, the narratives also reveal that digital labor participation pre-dated COVID-19 for some individuals, indicating that the pandemic did not initiate involvement in VA work but instead accelerated and expanded existing engagement in digital labor markets.

Motivations and Benefits of Being a Virtual Assistant

Aside from economic and social pathways, other motivations led Filipino professionals to enter Virtual Assistant (VA) work and supported by the benefits they experienced after remaining in the field for at least one year.

The findings reveal that participants' decisions to transition into VA work were shaped by interconnected personal, social, and economic factors rather than a single motivating condition. Over time, their experiences confirmed many of their initial expectations while also introducing additional advantages that strengthened their commitment to remote work.

Initial motivations

Four primary motivations initially drove participants to pursue VA work: escaping corporate stressors, family-centered decision-making, life transitions and social disruptions, and practical and economic considerations.

Many participants previously worked in corporate or BPO environments that they described as emotionally exhausting, unhealthy, and unsustainable. Experiences of workplace toxicity, rigid schedules, heavy workloads, and long commuting hours contributed to burnout and declining well-being. These conditions prompted participants to seek alternative employment arrangements that would provide greater autonomy, reduced stress, and improved quality of life.

Family considerations also played a central role in shaping participants' employment decisions. Many participants, particularly mothers, sought work arrangements that allowed them to remain physically present for their children while continuing to contribute financially. Remote work enabled them to balance caregiving responsibilities with income generation, especially for those raising young children or supporting children with special needs. Maintaining family relationships and preventing emotional distance caused by demanding corporate schedules were also strong motivating factors.

Life transitions and social disruptions further influenced participants' career shifts. Events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, ageism, pregnancy, relationship challenges, and job relocation disrupted traditional employment paths and encouraged participants to reconsider their career trajectories. The pandemic, in particular, normalized remote work and revealed the feasibility of digital labor opportunities. Some participants also perceived age-related barriers as intensified exclusion and threat to job stability within traditional employment systems, leading them to view VA work as a more inclusive and skills-based career path. These are some illustrations of the participants' recognition of the limitations of the conventional employment structures.

Economic and practical considerations also contributed to the decision to pursue virtual work. Participants identified the high costs associated with commuting, transportation, and daily office expenses as financially burdensome. Working from home reduced these costs while allowing participants to allocate their income toward family needs and savings. For some

individuals experiencing unstable income from businesses or traditional employment, VA work provided a more reliable and practical source of livelihood. Moreover, another key finding of the study under this theme is the importance participants placed on time efficiency and multitasking. The findings indicate that working from home enabled individuals, particularly mothers, to perform paid work while simultaneously attending to caregiving and household responsibilities. For many working mothers, financial practicality was closely intertwined with their caregiving roles.

These findings suggest that participants viewed virtual work not as an aspirational career path but as a practical response to economic uncertainty.

Experienced benefits after a year

After spending a year or more in VA work, participants reported a range of benefits that reinforced and expanded their initial motivations. Seven key benefits emerged from their experiences: better work-life balance for sustainable future, comfort and convenience from spatial flexibility, financial growth and stability with dignity, freedom from traditional employment and institutionalized control, stronger alignment with family-centered values, continuous learning and adaptability for boundary-less career, and spatial and temporal autonomy for rest, mobility, and productivity.

Participants consistently emphasized improved work-life balance as one of the most meaningful outcomes of VA work. Remote work reduced emotional exhaustion and allowed them to manage their time according to personal and

family priorities. The convenience of working from home eliminated daily commuting, rigid dress codes, and time-consuming preparations, creating a more comfortable and efficient working environment.

Financial improvement also emerged as a significant benefit. Many participants reported earning higher incomes compared to previous corporate or provincial employment. This financial stability enabled them to save money, invest in personal needs, and support their families while maintaining a flexible work arrangement. Accounts suggest that participants viewed economic success not in terms of corporate advancement but in terms of securing stable, sufficient income that could sustain their families and daily needs.

Participants also described experiencing greater autonomy and freedom compared to traditional employment structures. Working directly with clients rather than under hierarchical corporate management allowed them to avoid micromanagement and workplace toxicity. This sense of independence contributed to higher job satisfaction and a stronger sense of professional dignity.

Family-centered values continued to play a crucial role in shaping participants' perceptions of VA work. The ability to remain physically present for their children while maintaining financial stability was frequently described as life changing. Participants viewed this arrangement as enabling them to fulfill both their economic and caregiving responsibilities without sacrificing one for the other.

In addition, VA work facilitated continuous professional learning. Participants reported developing new digital, communication, and organizational skills while working with international clients. This exposure broadened their professional competencies and allowed them to remain competitive in a global digital workforce.

Finally, spatial and temporal flexibility allowed participants to experience a level of mobility rarely possible in traditional employment. Some participants reported working while traveling or relocating temporarily without interrupting their professional responsibilities, illustrating how VA work redefined the boundaries between work, mobility, and lifestyle.

Overall, the “why” dimension reveals that Filipino Virtual Assistants pursue remote work not merely for flexibility but to regain control over their time, health, family responsibilities, and economic stability. These motivations position VA work as a meaningful reconfiguration of professional identity, where individuals prioritize sustainable work arrangements, caregiving roles, and practical livelihood strategies over traditional corporate employment norms. While many of their initial motivations were confirmed through their experiences, participants also discovered additional opportunities for professional growth, autonomy, and lifestyle flexibility. These outcomes suggest that VA work represents more than a temporary alternative to traditional employment; rather, it functions as a sustainable career path that

supports both personal well-being and economic participation in the global digital labor market.

Filipino VAs as Virtual Communicators

Within this study, Filipino virtual assistants (VAs) emerged as active virtual communication practitioners who mediated interactions between clients, teams, and digital workflows in transnational remote work environments. Rather than functioning merely as task executors, participants demonstrated that their roles involved continuous negotiation of language, tone, relational expectations, and cultural norms while working with international clients.

Their experiences reveal that communication in virtual assistant work was not culturally neutral; instead, it is shaped by Filipino cultural values, previous professional experiences such as BPO or corporate work, and ongoing exposure to global communication practices.

Filipino traits for communication

Participants consistently described how Filipino cultural traits influence the way they perform communication tasks in global virtual workspaces. These Filipino traits include adaptability, flexibility and versatility, hard work and strong work ethic, politeness and strong English skills.

Adaptability emerged as a central competency, allowing Filipino VAs to adjust communication styles, expectations, and workflows depending on the client's personality, cultural background, and work processes. This adaptability extends beyond technical task execution and becomes a communicative strategy that enables Filipino workers to function effectively in ambiguous and rapidly changing remote work environments, reinforcing their role as flexible global communication practitioners. Rather than being interpreted as passivity, adaptability was framed by participants as strategic flexibility, allowing Filipino VAs to navigate diverse client expectations while sustaining effective professional relationships.

Closely connected to adaptability is the Filipino VA's identity as flexible and versatile professionals. Many participants described themselves as "jack-of-all-trades," capable of handling administrative tasks, communication management, coordination, and problem-solving across multiple areas. This versatility reflects a communicative capacity to shift between roles, languages, and interaction styles depending on the situation. Such flexibility reinforces their positioning as valuable collaborators within distributed global teams rather than narrowly defined support workers.

The data also indicate that Filipino VAs are often both expected and willing to extend their efforts beyond formal job descriptions, such as checking emails during rest days or responding to urgent matters without direct supervision. While these practices reflect dedication and professional responsibility, they also illustrate how flexibility can blur the boundaries between

availability and overwork. In global remote work arrangements, where organizational structures and working hours are less clearly defined, this dynamic reflects what scholars describe as boundaryless work, in which the distinction between professional and personal time becomes increasingly fluid. Constant responsiveness within digital work environments contributes to forms of invisible labor that are not always formally recognized or compensated. Filipino VAs' willingness to remain accessible and responsive to client needs may therefore function as both a communicative strength and a structural vulnerability within the global digital labor market.

The theme also highlights the importance of strong work ethic, persistence, and reliability in shaping Filipino virtual communication practices. Participants framed hard work not simply as productivity but as a cultural orientation rooted in values such as responsibility, patience, and commitment. These values influence how Filipino VAs communicate with clients, often emphasizing professionalism, accountability, and responsiveness even without direct supervision.

However, the findings also reveal that this strong work ethic can sometimes lead to blurred boundaries between work and personal time, particularly in remote environments where expectations for availability are less clearly defined. Rather than reducing professional accountability, the home-based nature of virtual work was described as intensifying participants' sense of responsibility, as Filipino VAs often felt compelled to demonstrate reliability and responsiveness in the absence of direct workplace oversight.

From a global communication perspective, this strong work ethic contributes to the perception of Filipino VAs as dependable and professional, reinforcing their desirability in international outsourcing contexts. However, it also raises concerns about potential vulnerabilities to exploitation, as the normalization of dedication and constant responsiveness may lead to excessive workloads and unequal power dynamics within global virtual labor arrangements.

Another defining characteristic of Filipino virtual communication practice is a relational communication style marked by politeness, empathy, and conflict avoidance. Participants frequently described carefully constructing messages to avoid misunderstanding and maintain positive client relationships. Instead of using blunt or confrontational language, Filipino VAs often rely on softened expressions, positive scripting, and emotional sensitivity to ensure that communication remains respectful and constructive. This approach reflects broader Filipino cultural norms that prioritize harmony and interpersonal respect in social interaction. This relational approach often involves expressing empathy, warmth, and attentiveness in communication, which participants believed helps strengthen client relationships and foster a more collaborative working environment. However, participants also acknowledged that this communication style may sometimes lead to unintended drawbacks, including potential misunderstandings. The Filipino tendency to “sugarcoat” messages, particularly in contrast to the more task-oriented and direct communication

norms commonly found in global teams, can occasionally obscure the urgency or seriousness of certain issues.

Despite these challenges, participants did not view this conflict-avoidant communication style as a weakness. Instead, they framed it as a form of cultural competence that prioritizes relationship management and workplace harmony. Filipino VAs consciously shape their messages to maintain positive professional relationships, even when delivering corrective feedback or addressing problems, prioritizing emotional intelligence over transactional efficiency. Nevertheless, several participants recognized that excessive politeness or reluctance to express complaints may sometimes hinder organizational efficiency, as important concerns or issues may not be communicated as directly or promptly as required in fast-paced global work environments.

In addition, English proficiency and accent neutrality were widely recognized by participants as key assets in global communication. Filipino VAs expressed confidence in their ability to communicate clearly with international clients and colleagues, emphasizing comprehension and mutual understanding rather than grammatical perfection or technical fluency. Many participants noted that their relatively neutral English accents facilitate smoother communication in global teams and contribute to employer preference, a salient advantage, for Filipino workers in outsourcing and remote work arrangements.

Most importantly, participants challenged narratives that portray Filipino workers as inferior communicators. They expressed confidence and pride in their ability to communicate effectively with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. In this context, English serves not only as a communication tool but also as a symbolic resource that allows Filipino VAs to demonstrate professionalism, credibility, and a sense of belonging in global work environments.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that Filipino virtual assistants function as skilled communication mediators and active participants in global digital workplaces. They strategically combine cultural values, linguistic competence, and professional adaptability to navigate cross-cultural interactions and maintain effective collaboration with international clients. Their communication practices reflect a hybrid professional identity that integrates Filipino relational values with the expectations of global virtual work.

However, the study also suggests that these strengths exist within broader structural dynamics of the global digital economy. Traits such as politeness, flexibility, and willingness to adapt can sometimes lead to emotional labor, self-silencing, or acceptance of excessive workloads. Despite these challenges, Filipino VAs actively position themselves as competent global professionals who contribute significantly to the functioning of remote teams and transnational digital labor networks.

Comparative traits as Filipino VAs

Drawing from their experiences working with international clients and colleagues, Filipino VAs reflected on their comparative traits from other nationalities in global remote work environments. Participants highlighted their perceived differences in communication styles, work style organization, directness vs. Filipino politeness, and perceived hierarchies and racial workplace power dynamics.

While some participants identified patterns in how different nationalities communicate and approach work, many also emphasized that these differences should not be interpreted solely through national or racial categories. Instead, participants offered nuanced, experience-based observations that considered individual personalities, professional expectations, and situational factors.

One key finding shows that participants often interpreted communication misunderstandings as situational rather than purely cultural or national. Several participants explained that misinterpretations sometimes occurred because of differences in tone, phrasing, or communication style. For example, formal or grammatically structured messages from Filipino VAs were occasionally perceived by clients as authoritative or commanding. In response, participants described adjusting their language to align more closely with the conversational style used by their clients. These adjustments illustrate how Filipino VAs actively adapt their communication practices to reduce misunderstandings in intercultural interactions.

Participants also emphasized that work behavior should not be generalized according to nationality. Some participants rejected racialized interpretations of workplace behavior and instead argued that communication style and work ethic are shaped by individual personality and professional experience. For some participants, the most significant difference in global remote work was not nationality but the fact that communication occurs virtually rather than face-to-face.

Another finding relates to perceived differences in work style, particularly in terms of organization and task prioritization. Participants observed that colleagues from other nationalities sometimes treated multiple tasks as equally urgent, whereas Filipino VAs were described as more systematic in distinguishing between priority and urgency. Filipino workers were often perceived as organized and structured in managing tasks, particularly when coordinating multiple responsibilities in remote work settings. Participants also highlighted the willingness of Filipino VAs to extend additional effort, such as covering extra shifts or maintaining workflow continuity during scheduling disruptions.

Communication style differences were also commonly discussed in participants' comparisons. Participants frequently described Western communication as more direct and straightforward, often focusing on identifying problems and immediately proposing solutions. In contrast, Filipino VAs emphasized a more relational and polite communication style that prioritizes

diplomacy, empathy, and positive message framing. While this approach helps maintain professional relationships and avoid conflict, participants acknowledged that it may sometimes lead to misunderstandings, especially when politeness or careful phrasing is interpreted as overly formal or indirect.

Furthermore, findings also reveal participants' awareness of perceived hierarchies and power dynamics within global outsourcing arrangements. Some participants described situations in which Filipino workers felt they were perceived as subordinate within international work relationships. Concerns about job security and economic vulnerability were also identified as factors that influence communication behavior. As a result, Filipino VAs may prioritize politeness, compliance, and emotional restraint in their interactions with clients, even when they possess the professional competence to assert their perspectives more directly.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that participants' comparisons between Filipino VAs and other nationalities are complex and multifaceted. While differences in communication style, work organization, and perceived hierarchy were frequently observed, many participants resisted simplistic national stereotypes. Instead, they positioned themselves as adaptable global communication practitioners who are capable of adjusting their communication practices to diverse cultural contexts. However, these adaptive strategies may also require emotional labor and self-regulation, particularly in situations where power imbalances and job insecurity shape workplace interactions.

Filipinos as Global Virtual Communication Practitioners

Filipinos have become highly visible in the global virtual workplace because they combine strong English proficiency, cultural adaptability, and a service-oriented communication style. Findings reveal that Filipino virtual assistants (VAs) construct their professional identity as global communication practitioners through continuous interaction, adaptation, and learning within digitally mediated work environments.

Rather than perceiving language as the primary barrier in cross-cultural communication, participants identified differences in communication style, tone, and pragmatic interpretation as the more significant challenges. Misunderstandings often arose from how messages were framed or interpreted rather than from limitations in English proficiency. Participants also described how accent perceptions and racialized preferences sometimes affected confidence during interactions, highlighting the emotional labor involved in managing both message clarity and identity presentation in global communication contexts.

Despite these challenges, participants emphasized several advantages associated with Filipino VAs in the global outsourcing industry. These advantages were attributed to cultural values such as humility, persistence, adaptability, and strong work ethic, as well as to English proficiency and effective communication skills.

Participants observed that Filipino workers are often preferred by international clients due to these qualities framing them as both valuable market strengths and sources of collective pride. External validation from clients further strengthened this sense of recognition. The participant articulated pride in “representing us,” indicating that his individual performance carried a broader sense of responsibility, symbolizing the collective reputation of Filipino workers.

However, this perceived advantage exists alongside an awareness of structural inequalities, as some participants reported experiences in which Filipino workers were simultaneously valued for their work yet positioned within unequal global labor hierarchies. This dual awareness demonstrates participants’ recognition of the contradictions embedded within global labor hierarchies, where Filipino VAs occupy a paradoxical position of being both highly sought after and structurally undervalued within the global outsourcing economy.

Virtual Identity of VA

Filipino virtual assistants’ professional identity as global communication practitioners is shaped through a dynamic interplay of personal discipline, professional self-presentation, adaptability, cultural values, intercultural communication, openness to growth, and autonomous work practices. Across participants’ narratives, virtual identity emerged not as a fixed role but as an

evolving professional orientation continuously negotiated through daily work experiences in digitally mediated work environments.

They continuously shape their virtual identities as global VAs by having 1) commitment and self-discipline, 2) emotional regulation, 3) flexibility and multi-skilled performance, 4) openness to feedback, and 5) good time management.

First, participants grounded their professional identity in strong internal discipline and self-directed **commitment**. In the absence of physical supervision, reliability and accountability became central markers of professionalism. Participants emphasized that motivation and productivity were sustained through personal values and purpose rather than external monitoring.

Second, virtual identity required careful management of professional self-presentation and **emotional regulation**. Participants described the need to adjust their emotional responses and communication styles in order to maintain professionalism during client interactions. These experiences highlight the role of emotional labor and communicative awareness in sustaining professional relationships in virtual work settings.

Third, **adaptability or flexibility** emerged as a defining characteristic of participants' professional identity. Rather than adhering to a single occupational role, many participants described themselves as flexible and multi-skilled, all-

around” or “jack-of-all-trades”, performing a wide range of tasks depending on client needs. This role fluidity reflects the evolving nature of virtual work, where competence is often demonstrated through continuous learning and skill diversification.

Identity negotiation is a continuous process for the VAs. Filipino cultural values such as diligence, patience, and humility were frequently referenced as guiding principles in participants’ work practices. However, these values were not portrayed as static cultural attributes. Instead, they were actively mobilized as resources that supported reliability, dedication, and professionalism in virtual labor contexts.

Intercultural communication played a critical role in shaping virtual identity. Participants described adjusting their communication styles to align with the expectations of international clients, particularly in terms of clarity, tone, and directness. These adjustments illustrate how virtual identity is negotiated through cross-cultural interaction and the need to build trust in global digital workplaces.

Fifth, participants emphasized **openness to feedback** and resilience as essential elements of professional growth. Mistakes and challenges were viewed as opportunities for improvement rather than failures. This growth-oriented mindset reflects an identity orientation grounded in continuous learning and adaptability.

Finally, autonomy and strategic control emerged as central features of participants' professional identity. Participants described developing strategies to **manage time**, prioritize tasks, and maintain productivity within remote work environments. In this context, being a "good VA" is equated with being self-regulating, organized, and strategically responsive rather than constantly available.

Overall, the findings suggest that the virtual identity of Filipino virtual assistants is constructed through ongoing negotiation between personal values, professional expectations, and the demands of global digital labor. Rather than being defined solely by technical skills, virtual identity is shaped through disciplined work practices, adaptive communication, cultural grounding, and continuous professional development. The narratives reveal a hybrid identity that balances global competence with cultural modesty, adaptability with professionalism, and individual growth with collective representation. Filipino virtual assistants therefore position themselves not merely as outsourced workers but as intentional and capable global communication practitioners operating within complex transnational digital workspaces.

Virtual Communication Work and Practices

Rather than occupying single, specialized roles, most VAs functioned as generalists who adapted continuously to business needs, often absorbing additional duties as trust and reliance increased.

Five dimensions of virtual communication work and practice as experienced by the participants have been specified: Communication for task management, multi-channel communication, relationship building, workload coordination, and daily rituals.

The findings show that Filipino Virtual Assistants operate within a communication-intensive virtual work environment where communication functions as the primary mechanism for coordinating tasks, maintaining accountability, building trust, and sustaining professional identity. Rather than serving as passive support workers, participants described themselves as multi-role practitioners responsible for a wide range of operational, technical, administrative, and customer-facing tasks.

Participants reported performing diverse responsibilities including claims handling, CRM system management, lead generation, cold calling, appointment setting, dispatch coordination, payroll administration, contract management, real estate support, and digital marketing. These responsibilities often extend beyond formal job descriptions, reflecting the flexible and adaptive nature of virtual work where VAs function as generalists responding to evolving organizational needs.

Communication tools and technologies formed the backbone of these work practices. Participants routinely used multiple platforms such as email, Slack, RingCentral, Google Meet, and SMS systems to manage workflows,

coordinate with teams, and communicate with clients. Each platform served distinct communicative functions: email for formal documentation and record-keeping, chat platforms for operational coordination, and video conferencing for conflict resolution, clarification, and trust-building.

Beyond tools, communication was embedded in daily practices and rituals that structured remote work. Participants described routines such as morning greetings, huddles, end-of-day reports, and regular updates that reinforced accountability, social presence, and team cohesion. These communicative practices helped compensate for the reduced visibility of labor in remote work environments and enabled workers to demonstrate productivity and reliability.

Participants also demonstrated reflexive communication strategies when managing client relationships and emotionally charged situations. For example, some deliberately shifted from voice communication to written channels when addressing customer complaints in order to maintain professionalism and emotional control. Such practices highlight the emotional labor and interpersonal competence required in VA work.

Taken together, these findings position Filipino Virtual Assistants (VAs) as global communication practitioners who actively design, manage, and negotiate communication systems across time zones, cultures, and organizational hierarchies. Rather than merely transmitting information, participants described communication as a strategic practice through which

work coordination, relational trust, and professional accountability are sustained in distributed work environments. Their experiences demonstrate several key communication competencies: media fluency, reflected in the ability to select appropriate platforms for specific tasks; relational competence, manifested through tone management, consistency, and trust-building interactions with clients and colleagues; operational awareness, which involves coordinating multiple stakeholders, workflows, and organizational processes; and reflexive professionalism, where communication strategies are deliberately adapted to emotional, cultural, and situational contexts. Together, these competencies illustrate how Filipino VAs function as central communication nodes within global digital labor system.

Challenges Experienced by Filipino Virtual Assistants

Despite the opportunities offered by remote work, participants identified several persistent challenges. These challenges can be categorized into communication challenges, contextual challenges, and structural challenges.

Communication challenges were among the most frequently reported issues. Participants experienced delays in receiving necessary information from clients or managers, which sometimes prevented them from completing tasks on time. These communication gaps created uncertainty and heightened stress, especially when responsibilities depended on external responses beyond the VA's control.

Emotional strain also emerged as a significant dimension of communication work. Participants described feeling anxious when interpreting ambiguous messages, changes in tone, or delayed replies from clients. Because job security in freelance arrangements is often uncertain, communication interactions became emotionally charged moments where participants carefully monitored their language and responses.

Cross-cultural communication differences further complicated interactions. Although participants generally possessed strong English proficiency, differences in cultural communication styles, idiomatic expressions, and conversational norms sometimes resulted in misunderstandings. In some cases, participants reported being labeled as having language barriers even when the issue stemmed from cultural interpretation rather than linguistic competence.

Participants also described experiences of hierarchical communication dynamics, including harsh feedback, intimidation, or public criticism during meetings. These interactions sometimes discouraged participation and reduced confidence, illustrating how power asymmetries can shape communication practices in virtual workplaces.

Contextual challenges related to the lived realities of working remotely. Many participants reported reduced social interaction and increasing introversion as a result of long-term home-based work. The absence of

workplace social environments limited opportunities for casual interaction and professional networking.

Irregular work schedules were another major contextual issue. Because many clients operate in different time zones, participants often worked night shifts or adjusted schedules to align with international business hours. These arrangements sometimes disrupted sleep patterns, daily routines, and work-life balance.

Structural challenges were also evident in the organization of virtual labor. Participants emphasized the precarious nature of freelance work, where contracts often lack stability and clients may terminate engagements without warning. This insecurity created persistent pressure to maintain high performance and avoid mistakes.

Participants also reported unrealistic expectations, limited onboarding processes, and insufficient training. In several cases, complex tasks were assigned without clear guidance, requiring VAs to independently learn new systems or procedures. This expectation to self-train added to the cognitive and emotional demands of remote work.

Finally, technological and infrastructure constraints presented additional challenges. Issues such as unstable Internet connections, power interruptions, and equipment limitations occasionally affected productivity. Participants noted that clients often expected uninterrupted service despite local infrastructure

conditions, prompting VAs to invest in backup solutions such as mobile data connections or additional devices.

Adaptive strategies to address challenges

Despite these challenges, Filipino VAs demonstrated strong adaptive capabilities and professional resilience. Participants described actively developing strategies to manage communication demands, maintain productivity, and navigate uncertain working conditions.

Continuous learning emerged as a central strategy. Participants frequently engaged in self-directed learning through online tutorials, digital resources, and independent research in order to improve both technical and communication skills. This commitment to ongoing development allowed them to adapt to new tools, workflows, and client expectations.

Participants also emphasized the importance of improving communication practices. Over time, they learned to ask clarifying questions, confirm instructions, and communicate more directly with clients to prevent misunderstandings. This proactive approach helped reduce errors and improve collaboration.

Boundary-setting was another important adaptive strategy. Some participants described establishing clearer limits around work schedules, negotiating deadlines, or requesting compensation for overtime work. These

actions reflect an increasing sense of professional agency within remote work relationships.

Self-regulation also played a critical role in sustaining performance. Participants described organizing their workspaces, maintaining structured routines, and investing in equipment to ensure reliability and productivity. These practices demonstrate how Filipino VAs actively manage both the technical and psychological demands of remote work.

The challenges experienced by Filipino VAs are not merely technical obstacles but are embedded within broader social and structural dynamics, including power asymmetries, job insecurity, cross-cultural communication, and infrastructural inequalities. At the same time, participants demonstrated significant adaptability, continuously learning and developing strategies to sustain their professional identities within complex transnational work environments.

Becoming a Virtual Assistant: A Heideggerian Phenomenological Interpretation

Becoming a Virtual Assistant (VA) is an evolving process of professional identity formation shaped through lived experiences in remote work environments. Participants gradually developed a deeper understanding of their career direction, professional capabilities, and long-term aspirations as

they navigated everyday work responsibilities, interacted with clients, and adapted to the demands of virtual labor. The findings revealed that becoming a VA is often shaped by life transitions, economic necessity, and the pursuit of flexibility, while sustained participation in virtual work transforms how participants perceive professionalism, identity, and communication.

From a Heideggerian phenomenological perspective, this process reflects the concept of being-in-the-world, where individuals come to understand themselves through practical engagement with their work environment. Rather than viewing VA work as temporary employment, participants increasingly interpreted their roles as meaningful professional engagements connected to broader life goals such as financial independence, career growth, and entrepreneurship.

Participants also described how confidence developed through practical engagement with work tasks. As they managed clients, solved problems independently, and learned to use new systems, they gradually recognized their ability to navigate the complexities of remote work. This experiential learning reflects Heidegger's notion that understanding emerges through involvement in everyday activities rather than through formal instruction.

Another key finding highlights the importance of self-directed learning. Without structured supervision or training, participants relied on research, experimentation, and continuous adaptation to develop new skills and respond

to evolving client expectations. This process strengthened their sense of professional autonomy and competence.

The study further shows that professional identity as a VA emerges through lived practice rather than formal organizational structures. Participants began to view themselves as trusted professionals as clients relied on them for decision-making, communication management, and operational support. Leadership therefore appeared not through formal authority but through everyday experiences of trust, responsibility, and collaboration.

Finally, participants' narratives reveal that virtual work relationships can become meaningful social connections. Consistent with Heidegger's concept of being-with-others (*Mitsein*), relationships with clients and coworkers often developed into bonds characterized by trust, empathy, and mutual support despite the absence of physical interaction. In several cases, these bonds deepened into personal connections, becoming real friends and godmothers or godfathers to their children.

Overall, the findings suggest that becoming a VA is not merely a career shift but an ongoing process of interpreting one's role, capabilities, and possibilities within the world of remote work. The study foregrounds Filipino Virtual Assistants not merely as outsourced labor but as active communicators who perform complex, identity-laden work within global digital systems. Through continuous engagement with their work environment, Filipino Virtual

Assistants construct professional meaning, develop confidence, and redefine their place within the global digital workforce.

Conclusion

Filipino Virtual Assistants are seen as competent global communication practitioners who contribute significantly to transnational digital work systems. Their work demonstrates how communication, cultural adaptability, and professional resilience enable Filipino workers to navigate and sustain complex virtual workplaces.

Filipino Virtual Assistants function as skilled communication practitioners in global digital workplaces. Participants described communication as the central mechanism through which tasks are coordinated, relationships are maintained, and professional accountability is demonstrated. Filipino cultural values such as adaptability, politeness, diligence, and relational sensitivity shape how participants manage communication with international clients. These traits enable Filipino VAs to navigate cross-cultural interactions and maintain collaborative relationships within distributed teams.

At the same time, the Filipino VAs construct their professional identity through continuous interaction, learning, and adaptation. Their identities as virtual communication practitioners are not fixed but evolve through everyday engagement with digital tools, client expectations, and global work

environments. Participants demonstrated strong media fluency, relational competence, operational awareness, and reflexive professionalism, positioning them as central communicators who sustain the functioning of remote organizational systems.

Despite these strengths, the study also identified persistent challenges associated with virtual labor. Their experiences highlight the structural inequalities and emotional demands embedded within the global digital labor industry. The study reveals a paradox at the core of virtual work. While remote work offers autonomy, flexibility, and economic mobility, it also exposes Filipino VAs to structural vulnerabilities, including job insecurity, blurred work-life boundaries, limited legal protection, and emotional fatigue arising from continuous digital presence. These vulnerabilities reveal the broader structural conditions of the global digital economy, where Filipino workers often navigate unequal power relations and limited institutional protections. These conditions also shape how participants experience selfhood, productivity, and belonging.

Nevertheless, the Filipino VAs demonstrate remarkable adaptability and resilience in managing these challenges. They continuously develop strategies such as self-directed learning, proactive communication, boundary setting, and work organization to maintain productivity and professional growth. They also do not simply adapt to global communication norms; rather, they actively shape their own professional trajectories within complex digital labor systems and actively negotiate their professional identity through culturally informed communication practices characterized by adaptability, emotional intelligence,

relational sensitivity, and a strong sense of responsibility toward clients. These traits rooted in Filipino sociocultural values become strategic assets in transnational virtual environments.

Finally, the study shows that becoming a Virtual Assistant is an ongoing process of professional identity formation. Through everyday engagement with clients, technologies, and work responsibilities, participants gradually develop confidence, autonomy, and a deeper understanding of their roles in global digital workspaces. Consistent with Heidegger's concept of being-in-the-world, their professional identity emerges through lived experience and practical involvement rather than formal organizational structures.

Viewed through a phenomenological lens, the experiences of Filipino VAs illustrate that virtual work is not a neutral technological arrangement but a lived, embodied condition that reshapes identity, communication, and meaning-making. Filipino Virtual Assistants emerge not as invisible background workers, but as global communication practitioners whose voices and experiences deserve scholarly and institutional recognition.

Implications and Recommendations of the Study

Theoretical Implications

This study extends communication scholarship by positioning virtual assistance as a form of communicative labor, rather than purely administrative

or technical work. By applying Heideggerian's phenomenology, the research demonstrates how identity and meaning are constituted through digital interaction, thereby enriching phenomenological applications within communication studies.

The findings also contribute to virtual identity and organizational communication literature by showing how professional identity is constructed and sustained in the absence of physical organizational markers. This underscores the relevance of phenomenology in studying digitally mediated work and global communication practices.

Practical Implications

For Virtual Assistants, the study affirms the legitimacy of their communicative expertise and highlights the importance of boundary-setting, self-advocacy, and emotional labor management in sustaining long-term virtual careers.

Filipino Virtual Assistants are encouraged to consciously develop sustainable communication practices that balance professionalism with personal well-being. Given the emotionally intensive and relational nature of virtual work, VAs may benefit from setting clearer boundaries around availability, workload, and time-zone expectations, while continuing to strengthen intercultural communication skills that enable effective engagement with diverse global clients.

For virtual managers and employers, the findings emphasize the need for culturally sensitive communication practices, clearer expectations, and relational leadership approaches that recognize the emotional and communicative dimensions of remote work.

For transglobal companies, the study suggests that productivity and retention in virtual teams can be enhanced by acknowledging identity, trust, and communication as central organizational resources rather than secondary concerns.

Policy Implications

Despite its growth, virtual work in the Philippines remains fraught with regulatory and labor challenges. Tacadao (2020) identified ambiguous employment status as one of the critical grey areas in platform-based work, resulting in limited access to social security benefits, weak labor representation, and downward pressure on wages due to global competition. Because platform work falls outside the scope of the Philippine Labor Code, there is currently no comprehensive national policy governing virtual or platform-based labor.

At the national level, the study underscores the urgent need for clearer labor protections for platform-based and remote workers in the Philippines. As Filipino VAs continue to comprise a significant portion of the global virtual

workforce, policies addressing job security, benefits access, and fair labor standards become increasingly necessary.

Professionalizing Filipino Virtual Assistant Work the Microcredentials Pathway

Based on the findings of this phenomenological study and building on the policy implications above, this study proposes a concrete pathway for the professionalization of Filipino Virtual Assistant work. Filipino VAs sit at the fulcrum of a fast-growing global industry, yet most practitioners have entered the field by self-learning, supplemented by short, irregular, industry-led seminars. The current ecosystem of training is, in effect, a hodgepodge of webinars, bootcamps, and influencer-led courses that has not yet coalesced into a recognized credentialing system. Without a credentialing infrastructure that legitimizes their expertise, Filipino VAs remain easily substitutable in the eyes of global clients and largely invisible to Philippine labor and education policy.

Continuous upskilling in digital tools, communication platforms, and self-management strategies is essential in sustaining long-term career growth in the virtual economy

I therefore recommend that institutions of higher education, with the University of the Philippines Open University (UPOU) as a natural anchor given

its mandate for open and distance e-learning, design and offer a structured set of microcredentials for VA work.

Microcredentials are short, stackable, competency-based programs that allow learners to demonstrate mastery of specific skills and accumulate them toward a recognized qualification.

For Filipino VAs, an initial set of microcredentials could include: (a) Foundations of Virtual Assistance and Remote Professional Communication, (b) Cross-cultural and Transnational Client Engagement, (c) Digital Tools and AI-augmented Workflows, (d) Ethics, Data Privacy, and Information Security in Remote Work, and (e) Career Progression and Entrepreneurial Pathways for VAs.

Such a microcredential pathway would do three things at once. First, it would give Filipino VAs a portable, internationally legible signal of competence that they currently lack. Second, it would create a basis for legislative and industrial-policy action, including potential recognition by the Department of Labor and Employment and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, so that VA work is no longer treated as a residual gig category. Third, it would put the Philippines first in defining the global standard for VA professionalism, much as Filipinos have been positioned in the maritime, nursing, and BPO industries. As the panel rightly observed, the country that produces a disproportionate share of the world's virtual assistants should also be the country that names, professionalizes, and credentials the work.

Beyond UPOU, related actors are encouraged to take up complementary roles: industry associations to validate the competency frameworks, established VA agencies to pilot recognition of microcredentials in hiring and promotion, and Philippine policymakers to incorporate VA work into formal labor classifications with corresponding protections. This is also an area in which related future research can directly inform curriculum design.

More human-centered and culturally responsive management

Aside from the microcredentials pathway, virtual managers and organizations employing Filipino VAs are encouraged to adopt more human-centered and culturally responsive management approaches. The findings suggest that productivity and trust in virtual teams are closely tied to clear communication structures, realistic performance expectations, and recognition of emotional labor.

Managers may improve virtual collaboration by implementing transparent onboarding processes, regular feedback mechanisms, and communication norms that acknowledge cultural differences and relational dynamics inherent in fully remote work. Such practices can foster stronger professional identification, reduce miscommunication, and enhance both job satisfaction and performance.

At the institutional and policy level, this study recommends greater recognition of virtual assistants as legitimate contributors to the digital economy.

Policymakers and labor institutions in the Philippines are encouraged to explore regulatory frameworks that address the precarity of platform-based and freelance work, including access to social protection, clearer employment classifications, and basic labor safeguards.

As the Philippines continues to be a top global hub for virtual assistance, policies that support the welfare and sustainability of remote workers are increasingly necessary.

Suggestions for Future Studies

Finally, future research is encouraged to build on the findings of this study by examining Filipino Virtual Assistants in comparative, longitudinal, and interdisciplinary contexts.

Comparative studies across nationalities may further illuminate how culture shapes communication practices in virtual work, while longitudinal research can explore how identity, resilience, and professional meaning evolve over time. Such inquiries will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of virtual labor as lived experience and as global communication practice.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEW RESEARCH



UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES OPEN UNIVERSITY
DOCTOR OF COMMUNICATION PROGRAM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEW RESEARCH

Informed Consent Form for Communication Research

Principal Researcher: Marianne Remo Cabral
Organization/ Institution: University of the Philippines Open University
Research Title: Filipino Virtual Assistants as Global Communication Practitioners
Contact Information: (+63)917 931 8435
mrcabral@upou.edu.ph

Dissertation Adviser: Dr. Serlie Barroja – Jamias
sbjamias@up.edu.ph

PART I: INFORMATION SHEET

INTRODUCTION:

Participant's Name:
Address:

Dear (Participant's Name),

I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Marianne, and I am a Doctor of Communication student, conducting research on Virtual Assistants' lived experiences as global communication professionals. I am reaching out to request your participation in an interview as part of my research study.

Your involvement will contribute valuable insights to my study, and I greatly appreciate your willingness to participate. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important that you understand the nature of the study and what will be expected of you during the interview.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore who is a Filipino Virtual Assistant in the global online community, and how Filipino virtual assistants make sense of themselves (identity) and work (role) as virtual communication workers in a global workplace.

Interview Details:

The questions will revolve around the virtual identity of the Virtual Assistant on various levels - individual, group, and global sphere. Interview questions will be taken within the context of the organization you work for, what and how you perform the tasks, and how the virtual communicative processes impact how you feel about being part of the team or company you work for.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty or consequence.

Procedures: Two primary approaches to data collection will be employed.

First, a Google form will be sent to the participants to obtain their demographic information prior to the scheduled interview. Second, as the primary data collection tool, a scheduled semi-structured interview will be performed via Zoom or Google Meet.

Duration: The interview will take approximately 30 – 45 minutes each session and will be conducted via video call. It will be done in 2-3 separate sessions to fully extract meaningful in-depth conversations granting significant pieces of evidence to fully encapsulate your lived experience as a virtual assistant.

Benefits and Risks:

There are no direct benefits to participating in this study, but your insights will contribute valuable information to the research. The only potential risk is the possibility of discomfort in discussing certain topics as they might be private and based on personal reality.

Reimbursements: You will not be rewarded or receive any type of benefit.

Confidentiality:

All information collected during the interview will be kept confidential. Your responses will be kept confidential, and your identity will be protected throughout the research process. Your name will not be associated with any quotes or information shared in the research report.

Recording:

With your permission, the interview may be audio-recorded for accuracy in transcribing. If you prefer not to be recorded, alternative arrangements can be made.

PART II: CERTIFICATE OF CONSENT

Consent:

By agreeing to participate in this interview, you acknowledge that you have read and understood the information provided in this letter. You are aware of your rights as a

participant, and you consent to the use of the information gathered for the purposes of this research study.

Thank you for considering this request. I appreciate your time and contribution to advancing knowledge in this field.

By signing below, you indicate that you have read and understood the information provided above, and you voluntarily agree to participate in the interview.

This section is mandatory

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked to have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Print Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: [MM/DD/YYYY]: _____

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability.

I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

Print Name of Researcher or person taking the consent: Marianne R Cabral

Signature of Researcher or person taking the consent _____

Date: [MM/DD/YYYY]: _____

Make sure to include any additional details specific to your study and adhere to ethical guidelines and regulations governing research in your field.

APPENDIX B

ACTUAL SAMPLE SIGNED CONSENT VIA DOCUSIGN



UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES OPEN UNIVERSITY
DOCTOR OF COMMUNICATION PROGRAM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEW RESEARCH

Informed Consent Form for Communication Research

Principal Researcher: Marianne Remo Cabral
Organization/ Institution: University of the Philippines Open University
Research Title: Fully Remote: Filipino Virtual Assistants as Global Communication Practitioners
Contact Information: (+63)917 931 8435
mrcabral@upou.edu.ph
Dissertation Adviser: Dr. Serlie Barroja – Jamias
sbjamias@up.edu.ph

PART I: INFORMATION SHEET

INTRODUCTION:

Cherilyn De Claro
Quezon City

Dear Cherilyn,

I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Marianne, and I am a Doctor of Communication student, conducting research on Virtual Assistants' lived experiences as global communication professionals. I am reaching out to request your participation in an interview as part of my research study.

Your involvement will contribute valuable insights to my study, and I greatly appreciate your willingness to participate. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important that you understand the nature of the study and what will be expected of you during the interview.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore who is a Filipino Virtual Assistant in the global online community, and how Filipino virtual assistants make sense of themselves (identity) and work (role) as virtual communication workers in a global workplace.

Interview Details:

The questions will revolve around the virtual identity of the Virtual Assistant on various levels - individual, group, and global sphere. Interview questions will be taken within the context of the organization you work for, what and how you perform the tasks, and how the virtual communicative processes impact how you feel about being part of the team or company you work for.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty or consequence.

Procedures: Two primary approaches to data collection will be employed.

First, a Google form will be sent to the participants to obtain their demographic information prior to the scheduled interview. Second, as the primary data collection tool, a scheduled semi-structured interview will be performed via Zoom or Google Meet.

Duration: The interview will take approximately 30 – 45 minutes each session and will be conducted via video call. It will be done in 2-3 separate sessions to fully extract meaningful in-depth conversations granting significant pieces of evidence to fully encapsulate your lived experience as a virtual assistant.

Benefits and Risks:

There are no direct benefits to participating in this study, but your insights will contribute valuable information to the research. The only potential risk is the possibility of discomfort in discussing certain topics as they might be private and based on personal reality.

Reimbursements: You will not be rewarded or receive any type of benefit.

Confidentiality:

All information collected during the interview will be kept confidential. Your responses will be kept confidential, and your identity will be protected throughout the research process. Your name will not be associated with any quotes or information shared in the research report.

Recording:

With your permission, the interview may be audio-recorded for accuracy in transcribing. If you prefer not to be recorded, alternative arrangements can be made.

PART II: CERTIFICATE OF CONSENT

Consent:

By agreeing to participate in this interview, you acknowledge that you have read and understood the information provided in this letter. You are aware of your rights as a participant, and you consent to the use of the information gathered for the purposes of this research study.

Thank you for considering this request. I appreciate your time and contribution to advancing knowledge in this field.

By signing below, you indicate that you have read and understood the information provided above, and you voluntarily agree to participate in the interview.

This section is mandatory

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked to have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Print Name of Participant: CHERYLYN DE CLARO

Signature of Participant: 

Date: [MM/DD/YYYY]: 12/19/2023

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability.

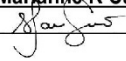
I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been provided to the participant.

Print Name of Researcher or person taking the consent: Marianne R Cabral

Signature of Researcher or person taking the consent

Date: [MM/DD/YYYY]: 12/18/2023



Make sure to include any additional details specific to your study and adhere to ethical guidelines and regulations governing research in your field.

APPENDIX C

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A COMMUNICATION DISSERTATION

INTERVIEW EMAIL

Invitation to Participate in a Communication Dissertation Interview



Marianne Cabral <mrcabral@up.edu.ph>
to markjulianespino9.tvh ▾

Tue, Mar 26, 2024, 10:08 AM



Hi Mark,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Marianne, and I am currently pursuing my Doctorate Degree in Communication at the University of the Philippines Open University (UPOU). As part of my academic research, I am conducting a dissertation on Virtual Assistants, and I am reaching out to you because of your expertise and valuable insights in the field.

I am particularly interested in your experiences and perspectives on being a representation of a Filipino Global Communication Practitioner, and I believe that your input would greatly contribute to the depth and gravitas of my research. Your expertise in the field of online communication and professional experience aligns perfectly with the focus of my dissertation.

The interview process will involve a 30-45-minute conversation, via a video call, depending on your availability and preference. The questions will revolve around who is a Filipino Virtual Assistant in the global online community and how Filipino virtual assistants make sense of themselves (identity) and work (role) as virtual communication workers in a global workplace. Rest assured that any information shared during the interview will be kept confidential, and your anonymity will be preserved in the final dissertation.

Please let me know your best date and time availability, and we can coordinate a time that suits you best.

Please complete the following link to begin the initial data collection process:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScipiV4__5BMCgifaqeLhzb8uWTxM9_tooh18Lx8qRXBOa4Q/viewform

The Consent Form will be sent on a separate email.

If you have any questions or concerns about the interview process or the research itself, please feel free to reach out to me at mrcabral@up.edu.ph.

I sincerely appreciate your consideration of this request, and I am looking forward to the possibility of discussing your valuable insights in the context of my research.

Thank you for your time, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Warm regards,
Marianne R. Cabral

APPENDIX D

DATA COLLECTION FORM VIA GOOGLE FORM

3/12/26, 9:06 PM

Fully Remote: Filipino Virtual Assistants as Global Communication Practitioners

← Preview mode

✓ Published

🔗 Copy responder link

Fully Remote: Filipino Virtual Assistants as Global Communication Practitioners

UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES OPEN UNIVERSITY
DOCTOR OF COMMUNICATION PROGRAM
Principal Researcher: Marianne Cabral

* Indicates required question

Email *

Your email

Name:

Your answer

Age:

Your answer

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1E3d-Kax96kaUO8C-k-REEx4eCNVz7iMEEnSpm-QNH8o4/preview>

1/5

[←](#) Preview mode Published[↗](#) Copy responder link

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other:

Marital Status:

- ☐ Single
- ☐ Married
- ☐ Other:

Highest Educational Attainment:

Your answer

Location:

Your answer

How many months or years have you been working remotely / working from home?

Your answer

 Preview mode Published [Copy responder link](#)

Your answer

Are you a full-time Virtual Assistant? (No other face to face office job)

☐ Yes☐ No

Are you working for an overseas/foreign company or individual client?

☐ Yes☐ No

Are you working for an English-speaking client?

☐ Yes☐ No

Do you have direct virtual communication with the counterpart team or manager overseas?

☐ Yes☐ No☐ Other:

[←](#) Preview mode

✔ Published

[↗](#) Copy responder link

- ☐ Desktop telephones
- ☐ Email
- ☐ Instant messaging
- ☐ Cloud-based software for group call and chat
- ☐ Smart phone
- ☐ Video conferencing (Zoom, MS teams, Google Meet, etc)
- ☐ Others (Please mention other platforms or tools you use to communicate):
- ☐ Other:

A copy of your responses will be emailed to the address you provided.

[Submit](#)[Clear form](#)

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

reCAPTCHA
[Privacy](#) [Terms](#)

This form was created inside of University of the Philippines. - [Contact form owner](#)

Does this form look suspicious? [Report](#)

Google Forms

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANTS DEMOGRAPHICS

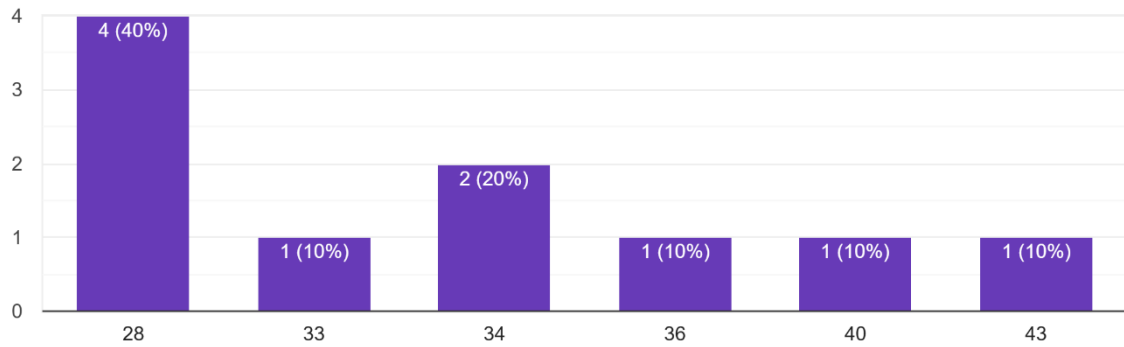
Timestamp	Name:	Age:	Gender:	Marital Status:
12/19/2023 10:21:32	Cherilyn	33	Female	Married
12/20/2023 16:35:04	Leslie Anne	40	Female	Single
12/20/2023 21:51:32	Jeally Ann	28	Male	Single
1/6/2024 4:03:44	Erika	28	Female	Single
2/8/2024 16:19:52	Randy	43	Male	Co-Hab
3/4/2024 7:59:20	Drew	28	Male	Married
3/13/2024 15:26:47	Julius	28	Male	Single
3/26/2024 10:32:56	Aubrey	34	Female	Single
3/26/2024 10:37:40	Mark	36	Male	Single

APPENDIX F

GOOGLE FORM RESPONSE SUMMARY

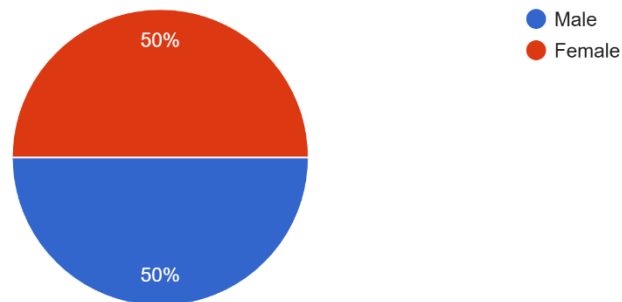
Age:

10 responses



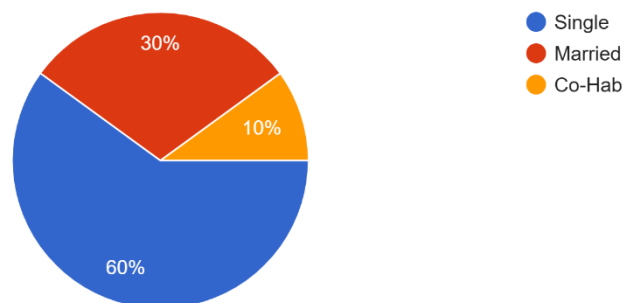
Gender:

10 responses



Marital Status:

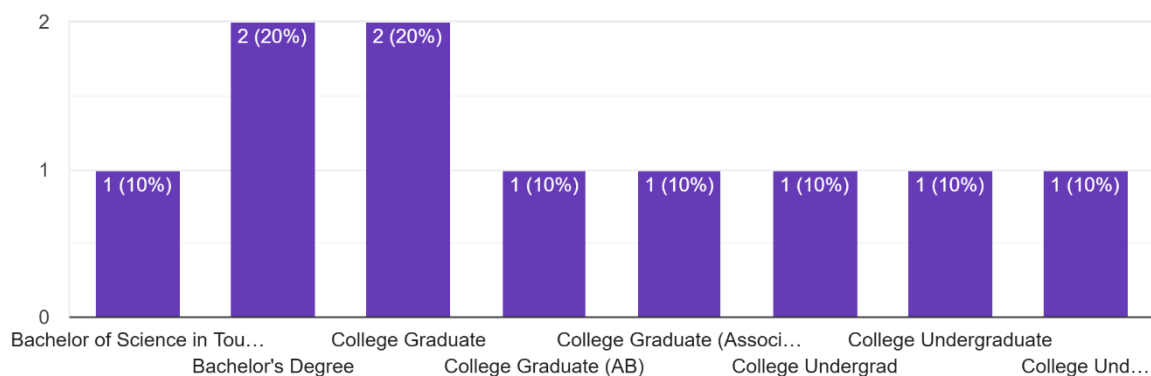
10 responses



Location:	Months or years of working remotely / working from home
10 responses	10 responses
Dasmariñas City, Cavite	4 years
Proper 1 Alag Baco Oriental Mindoro	5 years
Ilocos Norte	3 Years
Naguilian, La Union	3 months
Subic Zambales Philippines	7 years
Philippines	3 years
Bulacan, PH	4 years
Philippines	2019
Metro Manila	6 years
Lipa City, Batangas	8 months

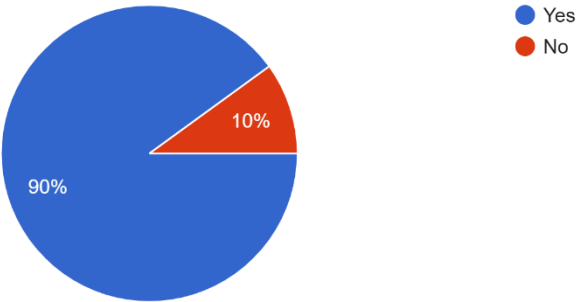
Highest Educational Attainment:

10 responses



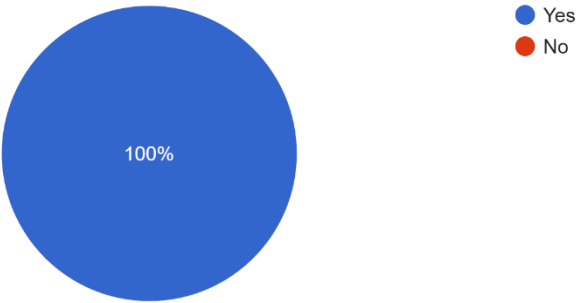
Are you a full-time Virtual Assistant? (No other face to face office job)

10 responses



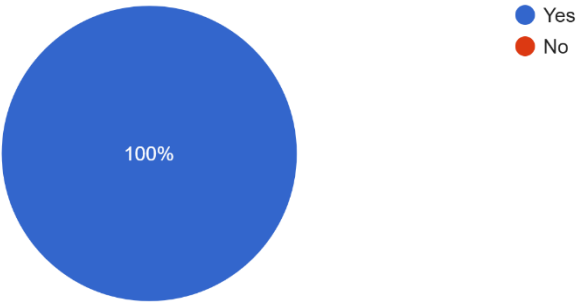
Are you working for an overseas/foreign company or individual client?

10 responses



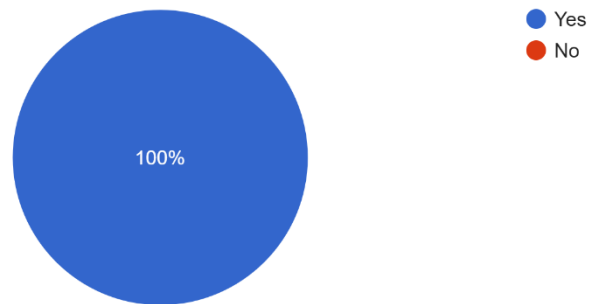
Are you working for an English-speaking client?

10 responses



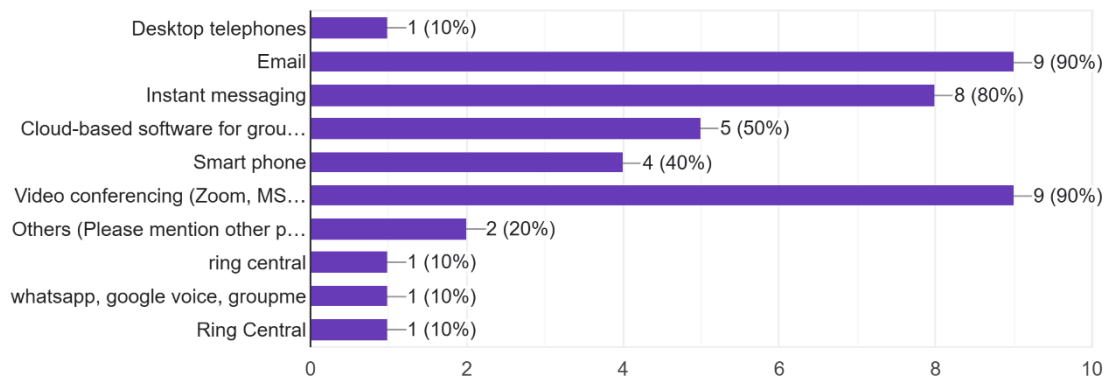
Do you have direct virtual communication with the counterpart team or manager overseas?

10 responses



What types of communication do you use in your workplace? Choose all that apply.

10 responses



APPENDIX G

SAMPLE OF NVIVO CODING

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface. On the left is a purple sidebar with navigation options: Quick Access, IMPORT, Data (Files, File Classifications, Externals), ORGANIZE, Coding (Codes, Autocoded The..., Sentiment, Relationships, Relationship Types), Cases, Notes, Sets, EXPLORE, Queries (Query Criteria, Query Results, Coding Matrices), Visualizations (Maps), and Reports.

The main window shows a 'Codes' tree on the left and a table on the right. The table has columns for 'Name', 'Files', and 'References'. The codes are organized into a hierarchical tree structure.

Name	Files	References
(RQ1) Entry to VA Work(How, Why, When)	10	44
How	9	12
When	9	14
Why	10	18
(RQ2) Self vs. other Nationalities	10	138
Filipino Traits	9	36
Global Communications Practitioner	9	25
Other Nationalities	10	25
Own characteristic and Virtual Identity as a VA	10	52
(RQ3) Communication work and Communicative practices	10	62
Comms Tools	4	10
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Benefits, Advantages	10	47
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(Theme) Comfort, Convenience & Work-From-Home Lifestyle	5	9
(Theme) Financial Growth, Higher Salary & Stability	9	14
(Theme) Freedom From Corporate Toxicity, Traffic, Dress Codes	4	5

Codes

⊕ Name	Files	References
⊖ (RQ1)Entry to VA Work(How, Why,When)	10	44
⊖ How	9	12
○ (Theme) Agencies as Gateways for First-Time Virtual Assistants	5	5
○ (Theme) Discovery of VA Work Through Digital Platforms and Social Media	4	5
○ (Theme) Economic Pressures and Financial Instability as Push Factors	1	1
○ (Theme) From BPO and Corporate Work to Virtual Assistance	4	4
○ (Theme) Social Networks, Peer Influence, and Word-of-Mouth	3	3
⊖ When	9	14
○ (Theme) Early Adopters (2017)	2	4
○ (Theme) Pandemic shifters (2020–2021)	7	7
○ (Theme) Post-pandemic reinventors (2022–2023)	1	1
○ (Theme) Pre-pandemic explorers (2018–2019)	3	3
⊖ Why	10	18
○ (Theme) Escaping Corporate Stressors	3	8
○ (Theme) Family-Centered Decision-Making	4	6
○ (Theme) Life Transitions and Social Disruptions	2	2
○ (Theme) Practical and Economic Logic	4	4

○ (RQ2) Self vs.other Nationalities	10	138
○ Filipino Traits	9	36
○ (Theme) Adaptability to Clients, Workflows & Personalities	2	5
○ (Theme) Flexibility, Versatility & Jack-of-All-Trades Identity	3	3
○ (Theme) Hard Work, Persistence, and Strong Work Ethic	5	10
○ (Theme) Polite, Warm, and Conflict-Avoidant Communication	5	8
○ (Theme) Strong English Communication Skills and Accent Neutrality	6	16
○ Global Communications Practitioner	9	25
○ (Theme) Challenges in Cross-Cultural Communication	4	5
○ (Theme) Filipino Advantages in Global Outsourcing	4	5
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○ (Theme) Communication Differences as Individual, Not Nationality (Counte	6	9
○ (Theme) Differences in Work Style - Organization, Priority & Urgency	5	5
○ (Theme) Directness vs. Filipino Politeness	6	6
○ (Theme) Perceived Hierarchies & Racialized Power Dynamics	4	6
○ Own characteristic and Virtual Identity as a VA	10	52
○ (Theme) Commitment, Dedication & Work Ethic	7	18
○ (Theme) Emotional Resilience & Coping With Stress	2	3
○ (Theme) Flexibility & Jack-of-All-Trades Identity	6	13

Codes

⊕	Name	Files	References
⊖	○ (RQ3) Communication work and Communicative practices	10	62
⊖	○ Comms Tools	4	10
○	○ (Theme) Daily VA Rituals & Workflow Routines	1	1
○	○ (Theme) Email as Formal Channel (Documents, Business Clients)	2	2
○	○ (Theme) Multi-Platform Communication Setup	3	3
○	○ (Theme) Need for Proactive Monitoring	1	1
○	○ (Theme) Structured Use of Google Meet for Verification & Issues	1	2
○	○ (Theme) Use of Google Voice & SMS for Client Communication	2	2
○	○ (Themes) Slack, RingCentral as Daily Operations Hub	4	5
⊖	○ Communication Practices	10	33
○	○ (Theme) Communication for Task Management, Updates & Accountability	8	11
○	○ (Theme) Multi-Channel, High-Frequency Communication (Calls, Email, Chat	2	2
○	○ (Theme) Relationship-Building & Trust Through Communication	4	11
○	○ (Theme) Workload, Multi-Role Communication, and Coordination With Mu	5	6
○	○ (Themes) Daily Communication Rituals & Positive Social Norms	6	9
⊖	○ Tasks	8	19
○	○ (Theme) Claims Handling	1	1
○	○ (Theme) CRM, Data Management & Systems Setup	1	2
○	○ (Theme) Lead Generation, Cold Calling & Appointment Setting	4	8
○	○ (Theme) Operations	3	3
○	○ (Theme) Payroll, Contracts & HR or Administrative Support	2	3
○	○ (Theme) Real Estate & Property Management Support	3	3
○	○ (Theme) Social Media & Marketing Tasks	4	5

Codes

⊕ Name	Files	References
⊖ (RQ4) Challenges	10	93
⊖ Communication Challenges	8	25
○ (Theme) Delayed Responses & Lack of Information Flow	5	7
○ (Theme) Emotional Impact- Anxiety, Uncertainty, Overthinking Communica	2	4
○ (Theme) Harsh Feedback, Power Dynamics, and Intimidation	2	3
○ (Theme) Language Barriers & Cross-Cultural Miscommunication	5	6
○ (Theme) Limits of Virtual Communication (Tone, Clarity, Accessibility)	3	3
○ (Theme) Over-Extension, Overtime Requests & Deadline Pressure	1	2
○ (Theme) Racism, Bias & Nationality-Based Stereotyping	1	2
○ (Theme) Reduced Social Interaction & Increased Introversion from Remote	1	1
○ (Theme) Unrealistic Expectations, Poor Training & Blame Culture	1	1
○ Job Stability	5	8
⊖ Other Challenges	9	34
○ (Theme) Difficulty Adjusting to New Roles, Processes & Learning Curve	4	10
○ (Theme) Internet Issues	2	3
○ (Theme) Irregular Schedules, Sleep Disruptions & Time Zone Adjustments	2	6
○ (Theme) Personal Challenges	3	3
○ (Theme) Power Outages	3	4
○ (Theme) Social Isolation	3	5
○ (Theme) Technology and Equipment	2	3
⊖ Resolution	8	18
○ (Theme) Adapting to Culture & Work Patterns	1	1
○ (Theme) Continuous Learning & Self-Improvement	4	4

Codes			
	Name	Files	References
○	Benefits, Advantages	10	47
○	(Theme) Better Work–Life Balance & Reduced Stress	3	9
○	(Theme) Comfort, Convenience & Work-From-Home Lifestyle	5	9
○	(Theme) Financial Growth, Higher Salary & Stability	9	14
○	(Theme) Freedom From Corporate Toxicity, Traffic, Dress Codes	4	5
○	(Theme) More Time With Family (Especially for Parents)	4	7
○	(Theme) Professional Growth, Learning & Skill Expansion	4	4
○	(Theme) Travel Freedom (Work Anywhere)	5	8
○	Realization	7	13
○	(Theme) Career Aspirations & Leadership Goals	3	5
○	(Theme) Growing Confidence Through Experience	3	3
○	(Theme) Learning Curve & Self-Initiated Growth	4	5
○	Relationships	9	13