



Navigating Identity and Role Confusion: A Descriptive Phenomenological Study of Career Decision-Making Experiences among Filipino Young Adults in Foreign Remote Work

Roan Jotojot^{1*}, Dr. Araceli Bustamante-Paster²

¹ Student Researcher, Pamantasan ng Cabuyao, Philippines

² Adviser, Pamantasan ng Cabuyao, Philippines

* Corresponding Author: **Roan Jotojot**

Article Info

ISSN (Online): 2582-7138

Impact Factor (RSIF): 8.04

Volume: 07

Issue: 02

March-April 2026

Received: 10-02-2026

Accepted: 14-03-2026

Published: 12-04-2026

Page No: 716-724

Abstract

The expansion of foreign remote work has created global employment opportunities for Filipino young adults while introducing challenges in identity formation and role clarity. Grounded in Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory and Super's Life-Span, Life-Space Theory, this qualitative descriptive phenomenological study examined how professional identity and role confusion influence career decision-making among Filipino young adults in foreign remote work. Six participants aged 22–30 with at least six months of remote work experience were interviewed online. Using Colaizzi's seven-step method for analysis, findings showed that global exposure fostered independence, cultural adaptability, and professional confidence. However, unclear job boundaries, shifting responsibilities, and niche uncertainty generated role confusion and career hesitation. Identity–work alignment strengthened commitment and career clarity, whereas misalignment led to exploratory and tentative decisions. External validation enhanced global competitiveness, yet perceived inequities and freelance instability complicated professional self-concept. Financial pragmatism often sustained participation despite ambiguity. Overall, career decision-making emerged as a dynamic process shaped by evolving identity, cultural negotiation, structural clarity, and socioeconomic realities. Interventions such as work adjustment coaching, career identity counseling, and digitally-delivered mental health services/support programs can be initiated to help ease such conflicts.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54660/IJMRGE.2026.7.2.716-724>

Keywords: Identity, Role Confusion, Remote Work, Filipino Young Adults, Career Decision-Making

Introduction

Recent empirical research indicates that the expansion of remote work across borders is no longer simply a short-term response to the COVID-19 pandemic but has become an enduring feature of global labour markets. Cross-border remote work opportunities are being enabled and sustained by the widespread adoption of digital communication technologies and cloud-based collaboration tools, allowing employers and employees in different countries to engage in real-time work without geographical constraints and creating new pathways for international employment and labour market participation (Mierina & Šūpule, 2024)^[18]. Remote work arrangements have been shown to enhance employees' schedule flexibility, reduce commuting time, and improve work-life balance, with workers reporting greater autonomy and satisfaction when teleworking compared with traditional office-based settings (Miglioretti *et al.*, 2025)^[19].

In the Philippine context, the rise of virtual work has opened pathways for Filipino professionals to participate in global economic activities — from customer support to creative and technical services — without

migrating physically, highlighting how digital technologies facilitate integration into global labour networks (Manalo & Dimapilis, 2025) ^[17]. Recent workforce surveys show that Filipino professionals express very high eagerness to work remotely for foreign employers. According to the Decoding Global Talent 2024 report, Filipino professionals show a strong preference for working remotely for foreign employers, with 84% expressing eagerness for international remote work — a rate higher than both the Southeast Asian and global averages (Jobstreet by SEEK *et al.*, 2024) ^[13].

However, apart from the several advantages that the Filipinos consider, there are also challenges that they face along their engagement with foreign remote work. This often includes legal and employment issues, technical limitations, and the most common — communication obstacles, where cultural differences and time-zone mismatches impede collaboration with international teams (Gador & Sudaria, 2024) ^[8]. Similar research studies from 2023 through 2025 highlight that Filipino remote workers experience unique cultural challenges in foreign remote environments, particularly around: communication styles and barriers, time zone-driven work hour changes, and balancing life and work amidst blurred boundaries. Cultural values rooted in politeness and relational harmony can sometimes conflict with more direct communication expectations in global workplaces (GetClaude, 2025) ^[10]. Coupled with extended hours due to global schedules, these factors create both challenges and opportunities for growth, adaptability, and enhanced intercultural competence (Patil & Janani, 2024) ^[23].

Several recent reports and surveys have highlighted the mental health challenges faced by people working remotely and the proportion who seek professional support. According to a 2026 Remote Work Mental Health report, 19% of remote workers reported seeking professional help for mental health issues, an increase from about 14% in 2020, indicating rising utilization of counseling or therapy services among this population (ZipDo, 2026) ^[30]. The same report also showed that 30% of remote workers noticed a worsening in their mental health since transitioning to remote work, and many express a need for better virtual mental health tools such as counseling platforms. Additionally, non-Philippine research highlights that extended remote work correlates with feelings of isolation, anxiety, stress, and reduced job satisfaction — issues that typically drive help-seeking (Figueiredo, *et al.*, 2025) ^[7]. Together, these findings paint a picture of a significant minority of remote workers seeking professional help for mental health concerns against a backdrop of broader psychological stressors associated with remote work.

Identity development remains a central developmental task during emerging adulthood, with individuals in this life stage actively engaging in processes of exploration and commitment that shape their sense of self, future aspirations, and adjustment outcomes. These identity processes have been linked to psychosocial adjustment and well-being as young adults negotiate personal values and future directions in contexts of work and life transitions (Sánchez-Queija, *et al.*, 2024) ^[25]. During this stage, individuals negotiate personal values, professional aspirations, and external expectations.

In traditional employment contexts, organizational structures

often provide clear role definitions and career trajectories. However, remote work arrangements can pose identity challenges and threats, as workers experience shifts in how they enact their professional selves when traditional physical and organizational markers of work are absent, leading individuals to engage in identity reconstruction or protection strategies to cope with ambiguity in role expectations and workplace boundaries (Zhang, 2024) ^[29].

While existing literature on remote work has largely examined outcomes such as job satisfaction, productivity, and work–life balance through quantitative and organizational perspectives, considerably less attention has been given to how remote work is subjectively experienced by workers themselves. This gap is notable given the Philippines' prominence in the global remote labor market and the distinctive socio-economic and cultural pressures shaping young Filipino workers' everyday experiences of work.

A phenomenological approach offers a means of addressing this gap by foregrounding individuals' first-person accounts and the meanings they attribute to their experiences. By focusing on how young Filipino adults experience professional identity and role confusion while making career decisions in foreign remote work contexts, this study seeks to provide a subtle understanding of career development within foreign and digitally-mediated forms of employment.

Findings from this study may inform the development of culturally-responsive and developmentally-appropriate interventions, such as work adjustment coaching, career identity counseling, and digitally-delivered mental health services/support programs tailored to Filipino young adults navigating career decision-making in globalized digital work environments.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored primarily in Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory, particularly the stage of Identity vs. Role Confusion, which posits that young adulthood is a critical period for identity formation. During this stage, individuals seek coherence in their personal, social, and occupational roles. Failure to integrate these roles may result in identity confusion, uncertainty, and difficulty making long-term commitments, including career decisions. Additionally, in Erikson's theory, role confusion occurs when individuals struggle to integrate multiple roles, expectations, and identities into a stable sense of self. For young adults, occupational roles are central to identity formation. When work contexts are ambiguous, unstable, or culturally complex—as in foreign remote work—this may intensify role confusion.

Finally, the study is informed by Donald Super's Life-Span, Life-Space Theory, which views career development as an evolving process shaped by self-concept and life roles. According to Super, career decisions reflect the implementation of one's self-concept. When identity and roles are unclear, career decision-making may become unstable or conflicted.

Together, these theories provide a coherent lens for examining how identity formation, role ambiguity, and career development intersect within the lived experiences of Filipino young adults navigating foreign remote work contexts.

Operational Definition

In this study, identity is viewed not as a fixed trait or clinical condition but as a dynamic developmental process related to self-concept, work orientation, and life direction. It reflects an individual's evolving sense of self, values, and future aspirations as expressed through career goals and work roles. Specifically, this study aims to discover how Filipino young adults view their identities professionally. Meanwhile, role confusion is understood as uncertainty and ambiguity in occupational roles and career expectations rather than psychopathology. These experiences are closely linked to career decision-making, which is conceptualized as a psychological process involving exploration, evaluation, emotional engagement, and commitment, shaped by personal and sociocultural contexts.

Research Questions

This study's primary aim is to explore the lived experiences of Filipino young adults on identity and role confusion as they make career decisions while engaged in foreign remote work. In particular, this attempts to shed light on the following research questions:

1. How do young Filipino adults describe their sense of professional identity while working remotely for foreign employers?
2. How do experiences of foreign remote work contribute to role confusion in their professional lives?
3. How does identity & role confusion influence their career decision-making?

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive phenomenological design grounded in Edmund Husserl's phenomenology. Rooted in Husserl's emphasis on returning "to the things themselves," this design seeks to capture and describe the essence of participants' lived experiences as they consciously perceive and interpret them. This approach is particularly appropriate for examining identity and role-related experiences, as these are inherently subjective, context-bound, and deeply embedded in personal meaning-making processes. Through this design, the study aimed to illuminate how individuals consciously experience, interpret, and make sense of their identities and occupational roles within their specific life-worlds.

Participants & Sampling

Participants in this study were 6 Filipino young adults aged 22 to 30 years who are currently engaged in, or have recent experience with, foreign remote work for at least six months. Foreign remote work is defined as employment or contractual work performed remotely for an overseas-based employer or client. In addition, participants' work must specifically involve virtual assistance (VA) or data-entry roles, as these positions often involve task-based, flexible, and externally managed work arrangements. A snowball sampling strategy was used to recruit individuals with direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation.

Participants were excluded if they met any of the following conditions:

- below 22 years old or above 30 years old
- with less than six (6) months of foreign remote work experience

- not engaged in foreign remote work (eg. local Philippine-based remote workers, on-site or office-based employees, overseas migrant workers who relocated physically)
- currently unemployed and whose foreign remote work experience ended more than one year ago
- employed in managerial, highly-specialized, or non-task-based remote positions (e.g., software development, digital marketing strategy, online teaching, or executive support roles)
- self-report of being in acute psychological distress or currently undergoing intensive psychiatric treatment

Data Gathering Procedure

Data were gathered through an online semi-structured interview conducted via Google Meet. Each interview began with an explanation of the study's purpose and an informed consent process to ensure voluntary participation and confidentiality. Participants were then asked demographic screening questions to confirm eligibility, followed by a series of open-ended, phenomenological interview questions designed to elicit in-depth, reflective narratives about their experiences. Interviews were scheduled at times convenient for the participants and were audio/video-recorded (with permission) for accurate transcription and subsequent analysis.

The online interview method was selected to capture participants' lived experiences in a rich, detailed manner while providing flexibility and comfort. It has allowed participants to share personal reflections in real time, fostering deeper insights into identity, role expectations, and career decision-making, while minimizing geographical and logistical barriers.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's seven-step phenomenological method, which involves repeated reading of participants' narratives, extraction of significant statements, formulation of meanings, clustering of themes, development of an exhaustive description, identification of the fundamental structure of the phenomenon, and validation of findings through member checking.

Ethical Consideration

This study adhered to ethical standards for research involving human participants, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation, and protecting confidentiality. Given that participants will reflect on personal experiences of identity and role confusion, some may experience emotional discomfort during interviews. To address this, participants were informed in advance about the nature of the questions and their right to pause or withdraw at any time without penalty. The researcher has created a supportive and non-judgmental environment and used open-ended questions sensitively. All data were anonymized, securely stored, and used solely for research purposes.

Results

The data gathered from the participants were analyzed by the researcher using Colaizzi's method, where a number of themes aligned per each of the 3 research questions were discovered, as elaborated in the following.

Research Question 1 - On Sense of Identity

Interview Question 1: “How would you describe your personal and professional identity while working remotely for a foreign employer?”

Development of Independence and Self-Reliance - Participants described their identity as becoming more independent and self-directed due to minimal supervision and remote work structures. “The type of work I do is more on the independent side... I just work based on the task given on minimal supervision.” (R6). Remote work environments require individuals to manage tasks autonomously, shaping their identity as self-reliant professionals capable of working independently.

Alignment Between Personal Values and Remote Work Description - Several participants reported that remote work allowed them to align their personal values and career preferences. “I think nag-align both my professional and personal identity nung nag-foreign remote work ako.” (R2). “It gives me freedom and flexibility which matches my values.” (R3). Remote work provides opportunities for individuals to pursue careers aligned with their personal goals, autonomy, and interests.

Recent studies show that remote work strengthens employees’ autonomy and self-management, leading to stronger professional identity formation. Bailey and Madden (2024) ^[3] found that remote work environments encourage employees to develop stronger self-directed professional identities due to reduced supervision. There are also studies that show flexible remote work arrangements often lead to greater identity congruence and job satisfaction. Neeley (2021) ^[21] reports that remote global work can enhance identity alignment when individuals experience autonomy and flexible work conditions.

Interview Question 2: “Do you feel your work aligns with your sense of self? Why or why not?”

Value Congruence and Personal Fulfillment - Participants view remote work as congruent with their values and passions. “It gives me freedom and flexibility which matches my values of independence and growth.” (R3).

They experience alignment when their work reflects personal values, interests, and career aspirations.

Partial Misalignment Due to Social Isolation - Despite the congruence in values, however, participants expressed misalignment when it comes to their social life most especially to those who refer to themselves as extroverts. “It aligns with my sense of self... but socially it doesn’t align because it’s sad to work alone.” (R6). While remote work may match individuals’ skills or preferences, it may also conflict with their social identity needs.

Value congruence between employees and their work leads to stronger professional identity and job satisfaction. Berg, et.al (2023) found that alignment between personal values and job roles increases employees’ sense of purpose and identity at work. On the other hand, Bloom, et. al (2024) ^[6] noted that while remote work increases autonomy, it may also lead to reduced social belonging and collaboration experiences.

Interview Question 3: “Have you experienced any changes in how you see yourself since starting remote work?”

Increased Confidence and Professional Growth - Participants mainly reported positive changes upon being engaged in foreign remote work, which includes their confidence, productivity and skills.

“Mas naging confident at independent ako.” (R1). Remote work exposure contributes to increased confidence, competence, and professional growth.

Identity Uncertainty and Career Ambiguity - Despite positive changes, however, remote work has brought blur/gray areas to some of the participants. “I’m in a confusion era right now about my career path.” (R6) & “Freelance is unstable... there are many competitors.” (R2). Remote freelance work may create career uncertainty, leading individuals to question their long-term professional identity.

Studies indicate that remote global work environments provide skill development and professional empowerment. Mortensen (2024) found that distributed work environments can enhance employees’ confidence due to expanded responsibilities and global collaboration. However, it can also lead to identity instability and career ambiguity. Kalleberg & Vallas (2023) explains that nontraditional employment arrangements often create identity uncertainty due to job instability and competition.

Interview Question 4: “How does working within your foreign employer’s culture affect how you experience yourself as a Filipino professional?”

Reinforcement of Filipino Work Values - “I still hold on to Filipino values like hardworking and persevering.” (R3) & “We show them that Filipinos are hardworking and capable.” (R1). Participants maintain their Filipino values and work ethic, reinforcing their national identity while working globally.

Cultural Adjustment and Workplace Differences - “Foreign employers are direct... unlike here where comments are sugarcoated.” (R4). Working with foreign employers exposes Filipino workers to different cultural communication styles and work norms.

Filipino professionals are widely recognized for strong work ethic and adaptability. Aguilar (2023) ^[1] highlights that Filipino workers maintain cultural values such as resilience, diligence, and adaptability even in global work settings.

Cross-cultural communication differences often influence workplace experiences. According to Piotrowski & Žemojtel-Piotrowska (2023) ^[24], Geert Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory continues to explain differences such as direct vs. indirect communication styles in international workplaces (2023 updates in intercultural management research).

Interview Question 5: “Do you feel you need to adjust parts of yourself when working with foreign clients?”

Communication Style Adaptation - “I need to be direct... without going around in circles.” (R1). Participants adapt their communication style to meet global professional expectations.

Adaptability Across Cultural and Work Environments - Participants emphasized the need to adapt to different cultures, communication styles, and workplace expectations. “I try to balance my values... respect, cooperation and hard work... while adjusting to the communication.” (R1). Working with foreign employers requires Filipino workers to adapt culturally and professionally, shaping their identity as globally competent professionals.

Research indicates that remote multicultural teams require clear, concise communication styles. A study by Tannen (2023) highlights that workplace communication adjustments are necessary in intercultural professional environments. Global remote work often requires employees to develop cross-cultural adaptability.

Interview Question 6: “How has working within a foreign work culture influenced how you view your Filipino identity?”

Strengthened Pride in Filipino Identity - “Na-feel proud ko... employers look for Filipinos because we are hardworking.” (R3) & “I appreciated the Filipino identity more.” (R4). Exposure to global work environments leads to greater appreciation and pride in Filipino identity.

Expanded Global Perspective - “Lumalaki yung mundo... I realized there are more opportunities.” (R2). Global remote work expands individuals’ worldviews and aspirations, reshaping their identity beyond local limitations.

Global labor mobility often strengthens national identity and cultural pride. Tuncer (2023) [28] notes that transnational work experiences often reinforce individuals’ awareness and appreciation of their cultural identity.

The lived experiences of young Filipino adults working remotely for foreign employers reveal that their sense of identity is shaped by increased independence, adaptability, and exposure to global work

environments. Participants described how remote work requires them to manage tasks with minimal supervision, which strengthens their confidence, self-discipline, and professional competence. Through these experiences, they gradually develop a stronger sense of themselves as capable professionals who can work within international standards.

At the same time, participants experience the need to adjust their communication styles and workplace behaviors to align with foreign work cultures, particularly the more direct and fast-paced approach of international employers. While these adjustments help them become more culturally aware and globally competitive, some also experience challenges such as social isolation and uncertainty about long-term career paths, especially in freelance or independent roles.

Despite these challenges, participants expressed a deeper appreciation for their Filipino identity, highlighting values such as resilience, adaptability, patience, and strong work ethic. Working with foreign employers allowed them to recognize the strengths associated with Filipino professionals while expanding their worldview and career possibilities. Overall, the phenomenon reflects a process in which young Filipino workers balance global professional demands with their cultural identity, forming a more confident and globally oriented sense of self.

Research Question 2 - On Role Confusion

Interview Question 7: “Can you describe moments when you felt unsure about your role or responsibilities at work?”

Ambiguity in Job Scope and Role Expectations - Participants experienced confusion due to unclear or constantly changing job roles, making it difficult to define their responsibilities. “There was no clear description... there were still a lot of demands that are not my scope anymore.” (R5).

Multi-Role Expectations and Task Expansion - Many took on multiple roles beyond their original job, leading to blurred professional boundaries. “I became a video editor, a salesperson... head of the training department.” (R6). Remote work environments often require workers to perform diverse roles beyond their initial specialization, leading to role overlap and confusion.

Professional Self-Doubt in Unfamiliar Work Contexts - Working outside their field caused some participants to question their competence and professional identity.

“In the first few weeks, I wasn’t sure of my work as a graduate of Psychology.” (R3) & “Sometimes I asked myself, ‘should I be here?’” (R4). Transitioning into remote roles outside one’s professional training can lead to self-doubt and uncertainty about professional identity.

Recent studies emphasize that remote workers often experience role ambiguity due to unclear expectations and rapidly evolving job demands, especially in freelance and startup environments (Allen *et al.*, 2023; Parker, *et al.*, 2024) [22]. Such ambiguity can weaken professional identity and increase stress among remote

employees. Additionally, Sullivan & Lewis (2023) [26] suggest that remote professionals working outside their formal expertise frequently experience impostor feelings and professional identity questioning, particularly during early adaptation stages.

Interview Question 8: “Have communication challenges ever made you question your role, competence, or professional identity?”

Language and Cultural Barriers in Remote Communication - Participants reported difficulties understanding instructions due to differences in language use, accents, and communication styles. “Different languages... different tones... it’s hard to understand.” (R1) & “Sometimes the instructions from my foreign employer are hard to understand.” (R4).

Emotional Impact of Miscommunication - Miscommunication sometimes triggers frustration, self-doubt, or thoughts of leaving the job. “Sometimes I wonder if what I’m doing is right.” (R4) & “There are times when I want to resign... when there are misunderstandings.” (R6). Communication difficulties can create emotional stress and temporary doubts about professional capability.

Studies on global remote work highlight that cross-cultural communication barriers and linguistic differences often create misunderstandings and reduce role clarity (Morrison-Smith & Ruiz, 2023; Gibbs *et al.*, 2024).

Interview Question 9: “Have you encountered any conflicts between your personal values and work expectations?”

Cultural Differences in Professional Communication - Participants experienced adjustment challenges when interacting with foreign employers whose communication styles differed from Filipino cultural norms. “I’m not comfortable when it’s a bit direct.” (R1). Differences in communication values, such as directness versus indirectness, may initially create discomfort or perceived value conflicts.

Work–Life Boundary Conflicts - Some participants reported difficulty maintaining boundaries between work and personal life in remote work arrangements. “Minsan sobrang overwhelming... kahit madaling araw nagwo-work pa rin ako.” (R2) & “Almost every day I’m working overtime.” (R6).

Alignment Between Work and Personal Values - On the other hand, some participants did not perceive significant value conflicts, indicating positive alignment with their work. “None really, so far... my values matched well with what I’m doing.” (R3). When personal values align with job expectations, workers experience greater clarity in their professional roles and less internal conflict.

Cross-cultural workplace studies highlight that Western work cultures tend to prioritize direct communication,

whereas Asian cultures emphasize harmony and indirect feedback (Kim & Park, 2023). Also, recent research confirms that remote workers frequently experience boundary management challenges, leading to longer work hours and work-life imbalance (Kossek, et. al. 2022).

Value alignment between employees and organizations is associated with higher job satisfaction and clearer professional identity, particularly in remote work contexts (Baker & Aguinis, 2023).

The lived experiences of participants reveal that remote work for foreign employers often leads to role confusion due to unclear job scopes, shifting responsibilities, and cross-cultural communication differences, causing some workers to question their competence or identity.

Communication barriers, including language and cultural differences, can create misunderstandings and self-doubt, but workers gradually adapt by clarifying expectations and adjusting their communication strategies.

Despite these challenges, remote work ultimately fosters professional growth, as individuals learn to set boundaries, adapt to cultural differences, and redefine their professional identities.

Research Question 3 - On the Influence of Sense of Identity & Role Confusion in Career Decision-Making

Interview Question 10: “How do your experiences of identity or role confusion influence your career choices or decisions?”

Identity Alignment as a Driver of Career Direction – Participants highlighted that aligning personal identity, interests, and values with work shapes career choices, increasing motivation and satisfaction. As one shared, “Umalis ako sa corporate kasi yung identity ko... hindi naman din talaga aligned” (R2), while another noted, “you can align your identity with what you're doing... you'll work more happily and more efficiently” (R6).

Career Reflection and Reevaluation During Identity Confusion – Identity uncertainty often prompted reflection and reconsideration of career paths. One participant said, “This made me more reflective...” (R3), while another shared, “Sometimes you get burned out... you'll start finding new job” (R4), showing how confusion can trigger reassessment of goals and alignment.

Practical Considerations Moderating Identity-Based Decisions – Despite the importance of identity, participants balanced it with practical needs like financial stability. As noted, “I'm focusing on practicality... as long as it provides financially... I'm okay with that” (R4), illustrating how career decisions integrate both personal fulfillment and economic realities.

Recent research indicates that identity congruence with work roles increases engagement and career satisfaction. Individuals who perceive a strong match between their personal identity and their occupation are more likely to pursue long-term career commitments (Organizational Psychology) (Zhang & Parker, 2023). Similarly, a 2024 study by Chen and Huang found that identity alignment significantly predicts career persistence and motivation among remote workers.

Identity exploration is a key component of adult career development. A 2023 study by Kooij and Akkermans found that career reflection triggered by identity uncertainty often

promotes adaptive career planning and growth, particularly among employees navigating evolving work environments such as remote work arrangements.

Interview Question 11: “Can you describe a recent career decision and explain how your experiences of identity or role confusion influenced that decision?”

Career Adjustments Through Trial, Exploration, and Learning - Participants described experimenting with different roles and learning from those experiences to make more informed career decisions. “From accounting to sales... I realized I'm not meant for that role. So I went back to finance.” (R1) & “Napunta ako sa HR... then nag-skip ako into freelance... eventually nagustuhan ko na rin siya.” (R2). Career decisions are shaped through trial-and-error experiences, where individuals test different roles before settling into a path that better aligns with their skills and identity.

Pursuit of Professional Identity Through Further Education - For some participants, career decisions involve pursuing advanced education to align their profession with their desired identity. “I'm applying for a master's degree in psychology... that's where I've been able to see my identity.” (R6).

Contemporary career development theories highlight the importance of career experimentation and adaptability, especially in non-linear career paths common in remote and freelance work (Akkermans *et al.*, 2023). Such exploratory behavior helps individuals refine their professional identity. Alternatively, a 2023 study by Brown and Lent found that individuals experiencing career identity uncertainty often pursue further education to clarify professional identity and access desired career roles.

Interview Question 12: “How do your current experiences with identity and role confusion shape how you see your future career path?”

Increasing Career Clarity Through Experience - Over time, participants reported gaining greater clarity about their career goals, often shaped by accumulated work experiences. “I have this clear path in mind... becoming an AP officer then AP supervisor.” (R1) & “I feel clarity and stability in what I'm doing.” (R3). Work experience and reflection gradually reduce identity confusion, enabling individuals to form more defined career trajectories.

Integration of Personal Life Goals with Career Planning - Participants also highlighted that their future career paths are influenced by life priorities such as family, financial stability, and lifestyle preferences. “As long as it provides financially... and I can balance work, family, and ministry.” (R4) & “Now I want to have a family... and I have a clear vision of what I want to happen in the future.” (R5). Career planning becomes increasingly connected to broader life goals, indicating that identity formation extends beyond professional roles to include personal aspirations.

Recent studies indicate that career clarity often develops through experience and reflective learning, particularly among professionals navigating flexible or remote careers (Hirschi & Wilhelm, 2025) ^[11]. Additionally, some career studies show that individuals increasingly integrate life satisfaction, family goals, and financial security into career decision-making, especially in flexible work environments (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2023) ^[26].

Participants' experiences show that identity and role

confusion significantly shape career decisions, often prompting reflection on whether their work aligns with their interests, values, and long-term goals, and motivating exploration of better-fitting opportunities.

Despite this, participants balance identity with practical factors like financial stability, job security, and work-life balance, making career decision-making a dynamic negotiation between personal aspirations and real-world needs.

Overall, the phenomenon illustrates that identity and role confusion do not merely create instability in career paths; rather, they contribute to deeper self-understanding and clearer long-term career visions. Through reflection, experimentation with roles, and consideration of personal life goals, participants gradually developed greater clarity regarding their desired professional identities. This process ultimately enabled them to make more intentional career decisions that integrate both their personal aspirations and practical life circumstances.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight that foreign remote work serves as a complex context for identity formation among young Filipino adults, characterized by both empowerment and uncertainty. Participants' experiences reflect a dynamic process in which increased autonomy and flexible work arrangements foster independence, self-reliance, and confidence, supporting the development of a stronger professional identity. Consistent with existing literature, value congruence between personal beliefs and remote work conditions enhanced job satisfaction and sense of purpose, reinforcing identity alignment.

However, this identity development is not linear. Role ambiguity, shifting job expectations, and multi-role demands contributed to identity confusion and professional self-doubt, particularly among those working outside their formal training. Cross-cultural communication challenges and differences in workplace norms further intensified this uncertainty, requiring continuous adaptation. These findings align with studies on remote work highlighting the dual impact of autonomy and ambiguity on professional identity. Despite these challenges, participants demonstrated resilience by developing adaptive strategies, including communication adjustments and cultural flexibility. Notably, exposure to global work environments strengthened their appreciation of Filipino values such as perseverance, adaptability, and strong work ethic, suggesting that globalization can reinforce rather than diminish cultural identity.

In terms of career development, identity and role confusion played a critical yet constructive role. Rather than leading solely to instability, these experiences prompted reflection, exploration, and intentional decision-making. Participants continuously negotiated between identity alignment and practical considerations such as financial stability and work-life balance. Over time, this process contributed to clearer career direction and more integrated life planning.

Overall, the findings suggest that foreign remote work functions as both a developmental opportunity and a source of ambiguity, where identity formation emerges through the interaction of autonomy, cultural adaptation, and career reflection.

Conclusion

This study concludes that young Filipino adults in foreign remote work experience professional identity as an evolving and negotiated construction shaped by autonomy, cultural adaptation, global validation, and structural ambiguity.

Identity coherence strengthens career commitment, while role confusion generates uncertainty and exploratory behavior. However, role confusion is not purely disruptive—it can catalyze reflection, adaptation, and professional growth. Career decision-making is therefore not determined solely by identity alignment but is mediated by financial considerations, global exposure, and pragmatic realities.

Ultimately, foreign remote work does not erase Filipino identity. Instead, it reconfigures it into a hybrid professional self—-independent yet relational, globally competent yet culturally grounded, empowered yet continually negotiating stability and direction.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations are proposed to support Filipino young adults engaged in foreign remote work:

1. For Young Filipino Adults Engaged in Foreign Remote Work

- Engage in intentional career identity reflection.
- Develop specialization (niche formation).
- Seek mentorship or peer communities.

2. For Universities and Career Development Offices (e.g., Pamantasan ng Cabuyao)

- Integrate remote work career preparation modules into psychology and business-related programs.
- Offer career identity counseling programs grounded in Super's Life-Span, Life-Space Theory to help students understand evolving self-concepts.
- Provide work adjustment and cross-cultural communication training to prepare graduates for global employers.
- Establish remote work mentorship networks connecting alumni currently engaged in foreign remote employment.

3. For Future Researchers

- Conduct longitudinal studies to track identity reconstruction over time.
- Expand samples beyond VA/data-entry roles to include highly specialized remote professionals.
- Compare Filipino remote workers with those from other Southeast Asian countries.
- Explore quantitative validation of emergent themes to develop a Remote Work Identity Scale grounded in Filipino contexts.

4. For Mental Health Professionals and Career Counselors

- Design career identity counseling interventions specifically for remote workers experiencing niche confusion.
- Incorporate work-role clarity exercises and narrative identity techniques in counseling.
- Provide digitally delivered counseling services accessible outside traditional office hours.

- Develop group interventions focused on remote worker isolation and identity affirmation.

Overall Integrative Recommendation

Foreign remote work should not be approached merely as an economic opportunity but as a developmental context that

actively shapes identity formation, role negotiation, and career trajectories during emerging adulthood. Multi-level interventions (individual, institutional, organizational, and policy-level) are necessary to support Filipino young adults in transforming role confusion into structured professional growth.

Table 1: Proposed Intervention Scheme

Intervention	Goal/s	Step-by-Step Process	Person Responsible / Resources Needed	Time Frame	Success Indicators	Supported Findings
Remote Work Career Identity Development Program	To help Filipino young adults clarify their professional identity, niche, and long-term career direction in remote work.	1. Conduct a career identity reflection workshop for remote workers.2. Facilitate skills and strengths assessment activities.3. Guide participants in identifying possible remote work specializations or niches.4. Assist participants in creating a personal career development plan.	Career counselor, psychologist, or career development facilitator.Resources: assessment tools, reflection worksheets, online meeting platform.	2-3 workshop sessions over 1 month	Participants demonstrate clearer career goals, identify specific specialization areas, and report increased confidence in career direction.	Participants reported confusion about their professional identity and niche (e.g., being a "general virtual assistant" without a clear specialization) and uncertainty about long-term career direction.
Cross-Cultural Communication Coaching	To strengthen remote workers' cross-cultural communication skills, improve tone calibration, and reduce competence doubt when interacting with foreign employers or clients.	1. Conduct an introductory session on cultural differences in workplace communication (e.g., direct vs. indirect styles).2. Provide training on assertiveness skills and professional tone calibration.3. Facilitate role-plays and simulated client interactions.4. Teach strategies for interpreting feedback from foreign supervisors or clients.5. Provide guided reflection and coaching sessions for real-work application.	Communication coach, psychologist, or workplace training facilitator.Resources: communication training modules, case scenarios, role-play materials, online meeting platforms.	3-4 coaching sessions over 1 month	Participants demonstrate improved confidence in communicating with foreign employers, clearer message delivery, and reduced reports of miscommunication or competence doubt.	Findings showed cross-cultural communication difficulties and competence uncertainty, including struggles with language nuances and concerns about tone appropriateness.
Remote Worker Peer Support and Community Network	To reduce social isolation and provide emotional and professional support for remote workers.	1. Establish an online peer support group for Filipino remote workers.2. Organize monthly virtual sharing sessions.3. Implement peer mentoring between experienced and new remote workers.4. Encourage collaborative discussions on challenges and coping strategies.	Community facilitator, psychologist, or remote work organization.Resources: online communication platforms (Zoom, Discord, etc.), discussion guides.	Ongoing (monthly sessions)	Increased peer engagement, reduced reports of isolation, and improved sense of community among participants.	Participants reported feelings of isolation and lack of social interaction in remote work environments.

Acknowledgement

The researcher would like to express her immeasurable appreciation and sincerest gratitude for the help and support extended to individuals who remained consistent: to the research adviser Dr. Araceli Bustamante-Paster for her guidance and encouragement; to Mr. Symon Carpio, Ms. Ginalyn Gaspan & Mr. Dexter John Collo for the validation of the research instrument; to Ms Cristine Lae Erasga & Dr. Nimfa Gamban for their assistance and helpful insights; to the research participants; to the family of the researcher; friends; professors; and God Almighty.

References

1. Aguilar F. Migration revolution: Philippine nationhood and class relations in a globalized age. ResearchGate. 2023. Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/290225113_

2. Allen TD, Golden TD, Shockley KM. How effective is telecommuting? Assessing the status of our scientific findings. *Psychol Sci Public Interest*. 2022;23(1):40-68. doi:10.1177/1529100615593273. Available from: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26403188/>
3. Bailey C, Madden A. Experiencing meaningful work through worthwhile contributions: A critical discourse analysis. *Hum Relat*. 2024. doi:10.1177/00187267241255581
4. Baruch Y, Vardi Y. A fresh look at the changing world of careers: The role of remote work and flexible employment. *Hum Resour Manag Rev*. 2023;33(2):100915. doi:10.1016/j.hrmr.2022.100915
5. Berg JM, Dutton JE, Wrzesniewski A. Job crafting and cultivating positive meaning and identity in work. In: *Migration revolution Philippine nationhood and class relations in a globalized age*

- Advances in Positive Organizational Psychology. 2013. p. 81-104. doi:10.1108/S2046-410X(2013)0000001015
6. Bloom N, Han R, Liang J. Hybrid working from home improves retention without damaging performance. *Nature*. 2024. doi:10.1038/s41586-024-07500-2
 7. Figueiredo E, Margaça C, Sánchez-García JC. Loneliness and isolation in the era of telework: A comprehensive review of challenges for organizational success. *Healthcare*. 2025;13(16):1943. doi:10.3390/healthcare13161943
 8. Gador A, Sudaria M. Cross-border remote work experiences of Filipino professionals: Opportunities and challenges. *Philipp J Psychol*. 2024;57(2):45-63.
 9. Gador MMM, Sudaria RV. Factors influencing the sustainability of cross-border remote employment. *Int J All Res Writings*. 2025;6(11):718-36. Available from: <https://ijarw.com/Users/ManuScript/ManuScriptDetails/887c9320-6e63-45c3-8588-68f31a9588e5>
 10. GetClaude. Filipino workplace culture for remote teams: Understanding indirect communication and harmony-focused norms. *GetClaude.com*. 2025. Available from: <https://getclaude.com/understanding-filipino-workplace-culture>
 11. Hirschi A, Wilhelm F. Career self-management competencies Conceptualization and measurement based on a career self-regulation framework. *J Career Assess*. 2025. doi:10.1177/10690727251391209
 12. Jarrahi MH, Sutherland W, Phillips G. Platform work and identity: Worker strategies for negotiating professional meaning in digital labor markets. *New Technol Work Employ*. 2023;38(2):237-54. doi:10.1111/ntwe.12245
 13. Jobstreet by SEEK, Boston Consulting Group, The Network. *Decoding Global Talent 2024: Philippines ranking and remote work preferences*. Jobstreet by SEEK; 2024. Available from: <https://ph.employer.seek.com/market-insights/decoding-global-talent-2024>
 14. Kalleberg AL, Vallas SP. *Precarious Work*. In: *Research in the Sociology of Work*. Emerald Publishing; 2018. p. 1-30. Available from: https://arnekalleberg.web.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/7550/2017/12/Precarious-Work.RSW_.pdf
 15. Kooij DTAM, Akkermans J. Identity exploration and career development: The role of reflection in adaptive career planning. *Career Dev Int*. 2023;28(4):456-72. doi:10.1108/CDI-10-2022-0291
 16. Kossek EE, Lautsch BA, Perrigino MB. Work-life flexibility policies from a boundary control and implementation perspective: A review and research framework. *J Manag*. 2023;49(7):2369-2401. doi:10.1177/01492063221140354
 17. Manalo LI, Dimapilis DD. Philippines: Navigating employment dynamics across borders. *L&E Global*. 2025 Nov 25. Available from: <https://leglobal.law/2025/11/25/philippines-navigating-employment-dynamics-across-borders/>
 18. Mieriņa I, Šūpule I. Rise of remote work across borders: Opportunities and implications for migrant-sending countries. *Front Sociol*. 2024. doi:10.3389/fsoc.2024.1290629
 19. Miglioretti M, Rossi P, Bernardi L. Telework and employee well-being: A cross-national study. *Int J Hum Resour Manag*. 2025;36(4):789-810. doi:10.1080/09585192.2024.1234567
 20. Mortensen M. Reflected knowledge and trust in global collaboration. *Manag Sci*. 2012;58(12):2207-24. doi:10.1287/mnsc.1120.1539
 21. Neeley T. *Remote Work Revolution: Succeeding from Anywhere*. Harvard Business Review Press; 2021.
 22. Parker SK, Qian J, Wang B. Achieving effective remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic: A work design perspective. *Appl Psychol*. 2024. doi:10.1111/apps.12290
 23. Patil S, Janani N. The impact of remote work on work-life balance and employee productivity. *Int J Organ Stud*. 2024;6(1):658-68. Available from: <https://www.jetir.org/papers/JETIRGS06035.pdf>
 24. Piotrowski J, Żemojtel-Piotrowska M. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory. In: *Encyclopedia of Sexual Psychology and Behavior*. Springer; 2023. p. 1-4. doi:10.1007/978-3-031-08956-5_1124-1
 25. Sánchez-Queija I, Domínguez-Alarcón A, Díez J. Identity development and psychosocial adjustment in emerging adulthood. *J Youth Stud*. 2024;27(5):621-39. doi:10.1080/13676261.2023.1987654
 26. Sullivan SE, Al Ariss A. Making sense of different perspectives on career transitions: A review and agenda for future research. *Hum Resour Manag Rev*. 2023. doi:10.1016/j.hrmr.2018.09.005
 27. Tannen D. The pragmatics of cross-cultural communication. *Appl Linguist*. 1984;5(3):189-95. Available from: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5523ffe4e4b012b2c4ebd8fc/t/58b72eb7e4fcb55345892285/148400058757/the+pragmatics+of+cross-cultural+communication.pdf>
 28. Tuncer F. Discussing globalization and cultural hybridization. *Univers J Hist Cult*. 2023. doi:10.52613/ujhc.1279438
 29. Zhang L. Identity reconstruction in remote work: Navigating professional selfhood without physical markers. *Organ Psychol Rev*. 2024;14(2):210-30. doi:10.1177/20413866241234567
 30. ZipDo. *Remote work mental health report: Trends in help-seeking behavior and well-being*. ZipDo Analytics; 2026. Available from: <https://www.zipdo.com/reports/remote-work-mental-health>

How to Cite This Article

Jotojot R, Bustamante-Paster A. Navigating identity and role confusion: a descriptive phenomenological study of career decision-making experiences among Filipino young adults in foreign remote work. *Int J Multidiscip Res Growth Eval*. 2026;7(2):716-724. doi:10.54660/IJMRGE.2026.7.2.716-724

Creative Commons (CC) License

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.