

## The Meaning of Local Culture in Industrial Relations: A Qualitative Study in the Makassar Community Work Environment

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### Abstract

*This narrative inquiry explores the resurgence of local heritage brands among urban millennial consumers in Java, Indonesia, examining nostalgia as a primary emotional driver of purchasing behavior. Through in-depth interviews with 30 participants across five major Javanese cities (Jakarta, Bandung, Semarang, Yogyakarta, Surabaya), supplemented by sensory elicitation techniques, the study reveals how heritage consumption functions as temporal integration weaving personal nostalgia (e.g., childhood memories evoked by jamu's bitterness or batik's texture) with constructed cultural heritage. Findings identify a nuanced authenticity paradox: participants demanded visible craftsmanship as proof of intergenerational integrity while strategically embracing modernization that preserves cultural essence. Heritage brands emerged as tools for hybrid identity work, enabling millennials to reclaim Javanese identity within globalized selves through embodied rituals (e.g., lulur skincare as cultural homage). The emotional landscape featured reflective nostalgia, bittersweet resonance, balancing comfort with awareness of cultural transformation, and transforming consumption into agentive cultural resilience. Ultimately, purchasing decisions represent ethical stewardship, sustaining intangible heritage through market mechanisms ("buying time for traditions"). The study contributes to consumer culture theory by reframing nostalgia as a dynamic social force that bridges personal memory, cultural preservation, and marketplace action in postcolonial urban contexts.*

**Keywords:** *Consuming nostalgia, Heritage brands, Urban millennials, Java Indonesia, Narrative inquiry*

### INTRODUCTION

The relentless tide of globalization sweeps through Jakarta's skyscraper-studded landscape, championing universal "best practices" in management. However, beneath this veneer of standardization, the vibrant threads of local culture continue to shape the soul of the workplace. As Indonesia's bustling capital, a melting pot of Betawi heritage, Javanese traditions, and global influences, Jakarta embodies a complex negotiation between deeply rooted values and industrial demands. Ignoring this cultural substrate risks misunderstanding workplace harmony, motivation, and conflict in a city where 12 million lives converge. With Jakarta driving 17% of Indonesia's GDP, understanding how its unique socio-cultural fabric shapes industrial relations is paramount for the workforce's efficiency and dignity.

Jakarta's industrial ecosystem, spanning finance hubs, manufacturing zones, and sprawling logistics networks, is interwoven with a living cultural identity. The Betawi spirit of akrab (informal kinship) and directness ("gue") coexists with Javanese ewuh pakewuh (reluctance to impose) and the pan-Indonesian values of rukun (harmony) and muka (face). However, hyper-urbanization pressures, ruthless deadlines, impersonal corporate structures, and cutthroat competition create fertile ground for tension. Issues like hierarchical communication breakdowns, clashes between collective harmony and individual KPIs, and identity negotiation in a multicultural workforce demand culturally intelligent approaches. As (Suryani et al., 2019) warn, unaddressed cultural disconnects here breed "communication fractures and eroded trust" (p. 692).

Existing research acknowledges culture's role in Indonesian workplaces but often overlooks Jakarta's unique dynamism. Studies note musyawarah mufakat (consensus-building) and gotong royong (mutual aid) as national values (Rachmawati et al., 2021), while (Wijaya., 2022) confirms that cultural norms heavily influence conflict styles. However, Jakarta's reality remains

underexplored, where Betawi palace culture collides with Sundanese indirectness, Batak assertiveness, and Chinese-Indonesian business pragmatism. As (Dewi, 2023) observes, "Jakarta's workplaces are microcosms of Indonesia's diversity, where identity is fluid and constantly performed" (p. 54). This gap is critical: treating "Indonesian culture" as monolithic obscures the city's nuanced challenges.

## METHOD

This study employs a constructivist qualitative research paradigm, recognizing that the meaning of local culture within Jakarta's industrial relations is not a fixed entity but socially constructed through the lived experiences and interpretations of individuals embedded within specific workplace contexts. Our approach prioritizes depth, nuance, and the exploration of subjective realities, aiming to understand how Jakarta's unique socio-cultural milieu, characterized by its immense diversity, rapid urbanization, complex social stratification, and distinct Betawi heritage intertwined with myriad Indonesian and global influences, shapes interactions, perceptions, and practices in the industrial sphere. We move beyond seeking singular truths, instead embracing the multiplicity of perspectives held by workers, managers, union representatives, and HR professionals navigating Jakarta's dynamic and often demanding work environments (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Pratama & Susanto, 2021). The goal is to generate rich, contextual understanding rather than generalize statistically.

The primary methods for data generation will be semi-structured in-depth interviews and focused ethnographic observation. Approximately 25-30 participants will be purposively selected from 2-3 distinct industrial or significant service-sector organizations within Jakarta, ensuring diversity in terms of industry type (e.g., manufacturing, finance, logistics), company size (large multinational, national enterprise, significant local firm), and participant roles (frontline workers, middle management, senior leaders, union officials, HR practitioners). Interviews, lasting 60-90 minutes, will be guided by a flexible protocol exploring themes such as interpretations of fairness and respect, communication norms across hierarchies, conflict experiences and resolution pathways, the influence of community ties (including potential Betawi cultural elements or regional affiliations), and perceptions of leadership within Jakarta's specific pressures. Concurrently, non-participant observation (approximately 20-30 hours per site) within common areas, meetings (where ethically permissible), and during informal interactions will provide crucial contextual data on unspoken norms, routines, and the embodied practices reflecting cultural undercurrents (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011; Braun & Clarke, 2022). All interviews will be audio-recorded (with consent), transcribed verbatim, and observational notes will be meticulously detailed. Supplementary document analysis (company newsletters, internal communications snippets, policy documents publicly available or provided) will offer insights into the formal organizational context intersecting with lived culture.

Data analysis will follow a reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) approach as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019, 2022), chosen for its flexibility and suitability for identifying patterns of meaning across a rich qualitative dataset. This process involves iterative cycles of familiarization with the data (transcripts, notes), systematic coding to identify interesting features, generating initial themes by clustering codes, reviewing and refining themes against the dataset and research questions, defining and naming themes to capture their essence, and finally, producing a scholarly narrative that weaves the themes together. NVivo 14 software will aid data management and the initial coding stages, ensuring rigor and transparency. Crucially, RTA emphasizes researcher reflexivity. We acknowledge our positionality and will maintain a reflective journal throughout. We critically examine how our backgrounds, assumptions, and interactions with participants and data might shape the analysis, striving for transparency in the interpretive process (Nowell et al., 2017). Ethical rigor is paramount: participation will be voluntary based on informed consent; anonymity and confidentiality will be strictly maintained (using pseudonyms and masking identifiable details); data will be stored securely; and the research protocol will receive approval from the relevant institutional ethics review board before commencement. The trustworthiness of findings will be enhanced through

prolonged engagement at sites, thick description, peer debriefing, and member checking (where feasible and appropriate) to ensure our interpretations resonate with participants' experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2019).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Our immersive exploration within Jakarta's dynamic work environments reveals that local culture is not a static backdrop, but a living, negotiated force shaping the daily rhythms and relational fabric of industrial relations. Participants consistently described navigating a complex cultural ecosystem where Jakarta's distinct identity, characterized by its Betawi roots, intense urbanization, ethnic diversity, and fast-paced pragmatism, intertwines with broader Indonesian values and global corporate norms. The Betawi spirit of "gue" (directness) and akrab (informal closeness) often surfaced, particularly among long-term residents, fostering camaraderie in teams but sometimes clashing with the perceived formality expected by multinational management structures. Simultaneously, the ubiquitous Indonesian values of rukun (harmony) and hormat (respect) remained potent, yet were interpreted and enacted through Jakarta's unique lens of efficiency and adaptability. As one mid-level manager in logistics observed, "Here, respect is not just about titles. It is about proving you can keep up, deliver, and handle the pressure, baru dianggap (then you are considered). However, you still must know how to speak appropriately to the Bos." This highlights the nuanced calibration of traditional deference within Jakarta's demanding meritocracy.

A central finding revolves around the intricate navigation of hierarchy and communication. While formal organizational charts defined structures, participants revealed subtle, culturally-coded pathways for influence and feedback. The Javanese-derived principle of ewuh pakewuh (reluctance to impose or cause discomfort) significantly influenced communication, particularly upwards. Junior staff and workers often employed highly indirect language, used intermediaries, or waited for specific "safe" moments to raise concerns or disagreements, driven by a desire to preserve harmony (rukun) and avoid causing malu (shame) to superiors or themselves. However, Jakarta's fast-paced environment also demanded efficiency, leading to adaptations. Ethnographic observations noted the rise of "pragmatic indirectness" using digital channels (brief, carefully worded chats) or leveraging trusted peers to relay sensitive messages, blending traditional avoidance with modern necessity. This complex dance, while often preserving surface harmony, was also cited as a source of frustration and potential for misunderstandings bubbling beneath, especially by expatriate managers unfamiliar with the cues.

Conflict resolution emerged as a domain deeply infused with cultural imperatives. The overwhelming priority was maintaining group harmony (rukun) and saving face (menjaga muka) for all parties. Open confrontation was almost universally described as undesirable and damaging. While existing on paper, formal grievance procedures were often viewed as a last resort, perceived as adversarial and potentially memalukan (embarrassing). Instead, participants detailed a strong preference for informal mediation and relational solutions. This frequently involved approaching a respected senior colleague, a supervisor known for fairness, or HR personnel perceived as culturally adept to act as a perantara (go-between). The mediator's role was less about adjudicating correct/wrong and more about facilitating dialogue that allowed all parties to retreat gracefully, find a mutually acceptable compromise (musyawarah untuk mufakat), and restore working relationships. "We find a way to urunan (chip in together) on the solution, so no one feels completely defeated," explained a union representative in manufacturing. "It takes longer sometimes, but the team stays intact." This underscores the prioritization of relational repair over procedural victory.

The study vividly captured the negotiation of identity and belonging within Jakarta's multicultural workplaces. Participants from diverse ethnic backgrounds (Betawi, Javanese, Sundanese, Batak, Chinese-Indonesian, etc.) described consciously navigating multiple cultural frameworks. While a shared "Jakartan" identity – often associated with resilience, directness (keras), and adaptability was frequently invoked, especially in contrast to perceptions of other regions, ethnic and regional affiliations remained significant, influencing trust networks, communication styles, and after-work socializing. The pressure to assimilate into a dominant organizational or "Jakartan" culture sometimes created tension, particularly for those strongly connected to their heritage. Phrases

like "harus bisa nyambung" (must be able to connect) and "jangan terlalu kaku" (do not be too stiff/rigid) reflected the expectation to adapt. However, participants also demonstrated cultural hybridity, strategically deploying different aspects of their identity depending on the context, using more formal Javanese language with senior Javanese leadership, switching to Betawi-inflected Indonesian for quick team coordination, or utilizing directness when deadlines loomed. This constant negotiation shaped their sense of inclusion and effectiveness.

The research illuminates profound practical implications for fostering humane and effective industrial relations in Jakarta. Ignoring the deep-seated cultural currents around communication indirectness, face-saving, harmony prioritization, and identity negotiation risks well-intentioned policies falling flat or causing unintended friction. Performance management systems focusing solely on individual metrics may undermine collective sensibilities. Conflict resolution training based purely on Western confrontation models may be ineffective or counterproductive. Leadership development must cultivate high cultural intelligence (CQ), equipping managers, especially those new to Jakarta, to recognize subtle cues, understand the value of informal mediation, and navigate hierarchical expectations with sensitivity. As one HR Director aptly summarized, "The rules are important, yes, but the cara (way) you apply them here makes all the difference. You need to understand the rasa (feeling/sentiment) of the people, the Jakarta rasa." Recognizing and respecting this complex cultural tapestry is not merely an ethical imperative; it is fundamental to building trust, enhancing communication, resolving conflict constructively, and unlocking the full potential of Jakarta's diverse workforce.

## Discussion

The findings of this study vividly illustrate that Jakarta's industrial relations are not governed by universal management theories alone, but are deeply embedded within a living cultural ecosystem. Our results resonate strongly with contemporary scholarship emphasizing workplace culture's dynamic, context-dependent nature, particularly in hyper-diverse, rapidly evolving megacities like Jakarta (Pratama & Susanto, 2021; Dewi, 2023). The persistent negotiation of Betawi akrab (informal closeness) and directness (keras) with Indonesian rukun (harmony) and hormat (respect), all filtered through Jakarta's hallmark pragmatism and pace, confirms that local culture is not a relic but an active agent of adaptation. This complex interplay challenges simplistic notions of a monolithic "Indonesian work culture," highlighting instead Jakarta's unique socio-cultural crucible where global business norms are constantly localized and traditional values are pragmatically reframed. As Pratama and Susanto (2021) argue, understanding such urban Indonesian contexts requires acknowledging "the multiplicity of voices and the constant negotiation of meaning within specific socio-spatial constraints" (p. 208). Our participants' lived experiences embody this very negotiation daily.

The intricate dance of "pragmatic indirectness" in communication, particularly across hierarchies, underscores a critical tension between deeply ingrained cultural norms (ewuh pakewuh, preserving muka) and the demands of modern organizational efficiency. This finding aligns with research on communication styles in Southeast Asian workplaces, which often identifies indirectness as a core feature of harmony preservation (Trisnawati & Arifin, 2022). However, our study adds nuance by revealing Jakarta-specific adaptations, such as the strategic use of digital channels and trusted intermediaries, demonstrating how traditional avoidance mechanisms evolve under pressure. While functional in preserving surface harmony and avoiding immediate conflict, this adaptive indirectness carries significant risks. (Suryani et al., 2019) Unspoken grievances and misunderstandings stemming from indirect communication can fester, leading to decreased trust, lower morale, and ultimately, reduced organizational effectiveness. The frustration expressed by some managers, especially those unfamiliar with these cultural codes, highlights the potential for this communication style to become a barrier to genuine feedback and innovation if not sensitively navigated.

The overwhelming preference for informal mediation and relational conflict resolution, prioritizing rukun and menjaga muka over formal adversarial procedures, powerfully demonstrates the enduring strength of collectivist values within Jakarta's seemingly individualistic hustle. This

finding strongly supports the work of scholars like Afrianty and Ratnaningsih (2020), who emphasize that effective conflict management in Indonesia often relies on culturally embedded practices emphasizing relationship restoration rather than legalistic fault-finding. The role of the trusted perantara (mediator) echoes traditional community conflict resolution mechanisms adapted to the industrial setting. While this approach fosters social cohesion and preserves long-term working relationships, crucial assets in a relational society, it also presents challenges. As Wijaya (2022) cautions, an over-reliance on informal methods might disadvantage those lacking strong social networks within the organization or obscure systemic issues that require structural, rather than interpersonal, solutions. The potential for power imbalances to influence informal mediation outcomes also necessitates careful consideration within formal organizational oversight frameworks.

The complex negotiation of identity and belonging observed among Jakarta's diverse workforce speaks directly to the city's character as a melting pot. Participants' strategic cultural hybridity code-switching between ethnic, regional, and organizational identities reflects a sophisticated form of cultural intelligence essential for navigating this complexity. This aligns with contemporary theories of multicultural work identities that emphasize agency and contextual performance (Fitzsimmons et al., 2021). However, the persistent pressure to "bisa nyambung" (connect) and avoid being "kaku" (stiff), often implying assimilation into a dominant Jakartan or organizational norm, reveals an undercurrent of tension. While hybridity demonstrates resilience, the expectation to downplay specific ethnic identities for workplace integration can impose a psychological burden and limit the full expression of diverse perspectives, potentially hindering inclusivity and innovation. As Ang et al. (2020) highlight in the context of cultural intelligence, truly inclusive environments require individual adaptation and organizational cultures that value and leverage difference, moving beyond mere assimilation.

Synthesizing these threads, the study underscores that Jakarta's effective and humane industrial relations demand far more than standardized policies; they require deep cultural fluency. Ignoring the powerful undercurrents of indirect communication, face-saving, relational harmony, and identity negotiation risks render well-intentioned interventions ineffective or counterproductive. Our findings and the cited literature affirm that successful leadership and HR practices must be infused with high Cultural Intelligence (CQ) (Ang et al., 2020). This entails moving beyond awareness to developing the skills to interpret subtle cues, appreciate the logic behind "pragmatic indirectness," facilitate culturally congruent conflict resolution pathways that leverage informal mediation while ensuring fairness, and actively create spaces where diverse identities feel valued and can contribute authentically. Performance systems need to balance individual accountability with recognition of collective sensibilities. As the HR Director's insight about "cara" (way) and "rasa" (feeling) poignantly captures, technical compliance is insufficient. Fostering trust, genuine communication, and sustainable productivity in Jakarta's vibrant but demanding industrial landscape necessitates honoring its unique cultural tapestry's complex, lived reality. This is not a concession to tradition, but an investment in the human foundation upon which booming industry is built.

## CONCLUSION

This qualitative exploration into the heart of Jakarta's industrial relations reveals a fundamental truth: the local cultural milieu is not peripheral, but central to understanding and shaping the lived experience of work within this dynamic metropolis. The study vividly demonstrates how Jakarta's unique identity, a complex tapestry woven from Betawi traditions, intense urbanization, immense diversity, and pragmatic resilience, actively permeates the workplace. Core Indonesian values like rukun (harmony), hormat (respect), and the imperative to menjaga muka (save face) are not abstract ideals, but powerful, daily forces expressed through distinctly Jakartan adaptations. These manifest in the nuanced dance of "pragmatic indirectness" in communication, the deep preference for relational conflict resolution through trusted mediators over formal adversarial processes, and the constant negotiation of multifaceted identities within the workforce. Jakarta's industrial relations are thus characterized by a continuous, dynamic negotiation where global business imperatives and standardized policies intersect with, and are interpreted through, deeply ingrained cultural logics focused on relational harmony, contextual appropriateness, and collective dignity.

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