

# Agile Human Resource Management Adaptation and Local Culture in Multinational Companies

Agile HRM  
Adaptation and Local  
Culture

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## ABSTRACT

Globalization and increasing workforce diversity have prompted multinational companies to adopt agile Human Resource Management (HRM) practices tailored to local cultural contexts. This study aims to examine how PT SASL and Sons Indonesia, with its multicultural workforce of expatriates and local employees, integrates agile HRM principles into the Indonesian work environment. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were gathered through in-depth interviews with 19 expatriates, analysis of internal documents, and thematic analysis using specialized software. Findings reveal that successful adaptation depends on aligning agile values of flexibility, collaboration, and adaptability with Indonesian cultural values of cooperation, harmony, and respect for hierarchy. Cross-cultural communication emerged as a crucial factor in bridging differences in values and work styles. Managerial support, mentoring, and cross-cultural training facilitated smoother organizational acculturation. Challenges identified include gender disparities in leadership and tensions between agile work principles and existing bureaucratic structures. The study concludes that agile HRM can be effectively implemented in multinational settings when adapted to local cultural norms. It offers theoretical contributions to adaptive HRM frameworks and provides practical insights for building inclusive, responsive organizations that can navigate cultural diversity while maintaining operational agility.

**Keywords:** Agile HRM, Local Culture, Multinational Companies, HR Adaptation.

## ABSTRAK

Globalisasi dan meningkatnya keragaman tenaga kerja telah mendorong perusahaan multinasional untuk mengadaptasi praktik manajemen Sumber Daya Manusia (SDM) yang gesit ke dalam konteks budaya lokal. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana PT SASL and Sons Indonesia, dengan tenaga kerja multikulturalnya yang terdiri dari ekspatriat dan karyawan lokal, mengintegrasikan prinsip-prinsip SDM yang gesit ke dalam lingkungan kerja Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan 19 ekspatriat, analisis dokumen internal, dan analisis tematik menggunakan perangkat lunak khusus. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa keberhasilan adaptasi bergantung pada penyelarasan nilai-nilai agile, yaitu fleksibilitas, kolaborasi, dan adaptabilitas, dengan nilai-nilai budaya Indonesia, yaitu kerja sama timbal balik, harmoni, dan penghormatan terhadap hierarki. Komunikasi lintas budaya muncul sebagai faktor krusial dalam menjembatani perbedaan nilai dan gaya kerja. Dukungan manajerial, pendampingan, dan pelatihan lintas budaya memfasilitasi akulturasi organisasi yang lebih lancar. Tantangan yang diidentifikasi meliputi disparitas gender dalam kepemimpinan dan ketegangan antara prinsip kerja agile dan struktur birokrasi yang ada. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa SDM yang gesit dapat diimplementasikan secara efektif di lingkungan multinasional jika diadaptasi dengan norma-norma budaya lokal. Buku ini

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## INTRODUCTION

Globalization has transformed organizational structures and dynamics, particularly in multinational companies operating across countries with diverse cultural contexts. In such settings, Human Resource Management (HRM) faces heightened complexity, requiring adaptation to multicultural environments, flexibility in response to global market shifts, and responsiveness to cross-regional performance expectations. Maryadi et al. (2024) impacts employee performance. For multinational corporations, comprehensive HR planning is essential to align global strategies with local execution. This is especially critical in areas such as talent recruitment, cross-cultural competency training, and the development of global leadership capabilities, ensuring that workforce management supports both organizational competitiveness and the demands of diverse cultural and operational landscapes (Baillon & Winarsih, 2025).

The importance of HR quality is also emphasized as a key factor in business success, including technology, human resource quality, market access, capital access, and networking (Gendalasari, 2020). This indicates that in the era of globalization, companies must invest in enhancing HR quality to compete in international markets and possess intercultural competence (Alabdullah & Kanaan-Jebna, 2023). Cultural diversity in multinational organizations indeed creates opportunities for innovation and creativity, but presents challenges in communication, decision-making, and harmonizing work values (Putrapandowo & Meilani, 2025).

Several studies emphasize the importance of intercultural competence in addressing organizational complexity. Nosratabadi et al. (2020) advocate shifting from passive multiculturalism to dialogical, collaborative interculturalism. Lakshman and Gonzalez (2023) argue that managerial team diversity can be a competitive advantage when paired with cultural intelligence, enabling the effective navigation of cultural differences and the adjustment of contextual strategies. This research also affirms that strategic agility is shaped by sensitivity to local culture. Similarly, Suhardi (2025) finds that unique administrative and cultural dynamics, as in Bangka Belitung, influence governance outcomes. However, cultural diversity may also pose risks, including miscommunication, value conflicts, and identity fragmentation.

Research by Perdhana et al. (2022)' indicates that a company's cultural origins influence its approach to managing diversity, necessitating adjustments in cross-cultural management strategies to accommodate local dynamics. Furthermore, a study by Murphy (2023) reveals that multinational companies operating in Indonesia frequently struggle to align their global HR models with local regulations, social structures, and cultural values, as well as profitability through intensive training, due to a lack of local technical skills and strong hierarchical thinking patterns.

Various previous studies have demonstrated the importance of Human Resource Management (HRM) in addressing cultural diversity and the dynamics of global organizations. Ambarwati et al. (2024) highlighted diversity management in the public sector, while Fodor et al. (2023) explored the relationship between company attributes and attitudes toward diversity. Pidduck et al. (2022) emphasized the role of individual cultural intelligence in a cross-cultural context, and Crocco and Tkachenko (2022) examined regional HRM development in Southeast Asia. Wahyuni and Waskito's (2024) study examined GHRM and organizational culture in promoting methodology adoption of agile methodologies, and continuous change. However, these studies have not specifically integrated the Agile Human Resource Management (Agile HRM) approach, which is an adaptive, collaborative, and responsive approach to HR management in the

context of multinational corporations operating in complex local cultural environments. This study aims to fill this gap by in-depth exploring the process of adapting Agile HRM to the local cultural context of multinational corporations.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Agile Human Resource Management (Agile HRM)**

Agile Human Resource Management (Agile HRM) has emerged as in addressing the dynamics of a rapidly changing business environment. This concept is rooted in Agile principles developed in the world of information but has now been widely adopted in human resource management practices to increase organizational flexibility. One of the key characteristics of Agile HRM is the importance of aligning organizational culture, particularly in building a work environment that supports employees' autonomy and self-reliance, while also providing space for continuous skill development (Mollet & Kaudela-Baum, 2023). This approach is also considered highly relevant to the preferences of Generation Y, who tend to prefer flexible and informal work environments that provide opportunities for continuous learning (Revutska & Maršíková, 2021). In this context, human resource management is expected to support overall organizational agility by embedding an Agile mindset in the company culture, thereby making the organization more responsive and resilient to external changes (Schellinger & Bänziger, 2022). Key dimensions of HR agility include proactivity, resilience, and adaptability, all of which can be developed through effective internal communication and strong team collaboration (Athamneh & Jais, 2023). While Agile HRM promises numerous benefits, its implementation is not without challenges, including the need to shift away from traditional HR practices and resistance from some employees to changes in managerial style.

### **Local Culture Theory: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions**

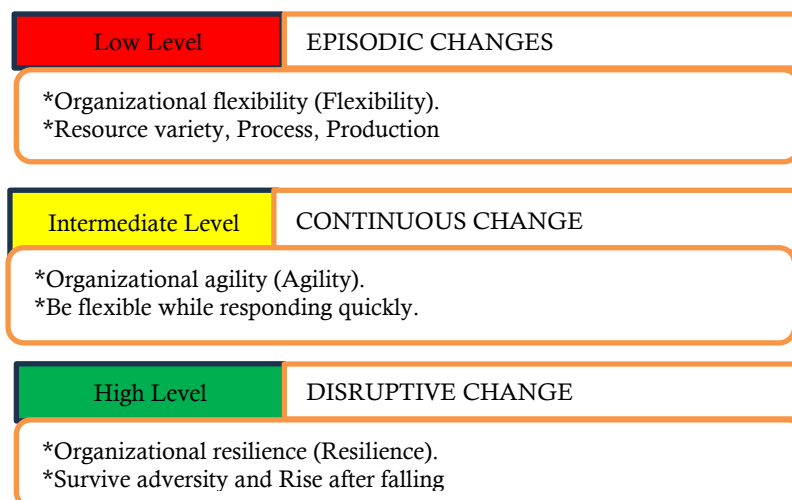
Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory provides an important conceptual framework for understanding how differences in cultural values and norms influence individual and organizational behavior across countries. In societies with a high-power distance index, such as Indonesia, hierarchical structures are socially accepted and tend to go unquestioned, making a top-down leadership approach more effective. In terms of individualism vs. collectivism, collectivist countries emphasize values of togetherness, harmony, and group loyalty, which have direct implications for HRM strategies and organizational communication. The dimensions of masculinity and femininity also influence how gender roles, work values, and indicators of success are defined within a society; masculine societies tend to value competitiveness and individual achievement, while feminine societies often emphasize work-life balance and social solidarity. Meanwhile, uncertainty avoidance is closely related to the level of tolerance for ambiguity: societies with high scores tend to avoid risk and rely heavily on formal rules and structures. In contrast, societies with low scores tend to be more flexible and open to change.

The time orientation dimension indicates the extent to which a culture has a long-term or short-term perspective in facing life's challenges and planning for the future. Finally, the control vs. Indulgence reflects the extent to which a society controls or allows the fulfillment of personal desires and drives, which influences lifestyles, consumption behavior, and social policies. In practice, Hofstede's theory has been widely applied in various contexts such as cross-cultural communication, international management, global marketing, and education. In cross-cultural communication, understanding these dimensions can reduce miscommunication and increase the effectiveness of interactions between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. In international management, multinational companies utilize this theory to design leadership strategies, work policies, and human resource development that align with local cultural characteristics. Similarly, in marketing, understanding consumer cultural preferences is crucial effective promotional messages and product distribution strategies.

### McCann and Selsky Theory

The change theory proposed by McCann and Selsky classifies social and organizational transformation dynamics into three main categories: incremental, transformative, and regressive change. Incremental change is characterized by its gradual and adaptive nature, focusing on minor improvements that accumulate over time. This type of change is often more acceptable to individuals or groups who feel vulnerable to uncertainty, as explained in social prospect theory, showing that individuals from disadvantaged groups prefer gradual progress to avoid loss risks (Cropley & Jost, 2024).

Conversely, transformative change describes more radical and fundamental shifts in existing structures or systems. This change often involves significant disruption to the status quo and triggers resistance, especially when the outcomes of change cannot be fully predicted. McCann and Selsky’s framework overall emphasizes that change dynamics are not always linear or progressive. Some social systems even show tendencies to actively reject change, resulting in stagnation or regression as responses to external challenges (O’Connell et al., 2023). Thus, understanding these three forms of change becomes crucial in designing more contextually sensitive intervention strategies, which are sensitive to power dynamics, risk perception, and the adaptive capacity of an organization or society. McCann and Selsky’s theory explains three types of Changing Nature of Change as shown in Figure 1:



Source: Saputra (2021)

Figure 1. Change and Dynamic Capabilities McCann and Selsky Theory

### Development of Agility Concept

The development of the agile concept in Figure 2 did not emerge suddenly, but rather is the result of an evolution from iterative approaches that have been applied in various fields since the mid-20th century. In the 1950s, the iterative approach was first introduced by Walter Shewhart through the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle, which W. Edwards Deming later refined into the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle. This model is not just a quality management tool but also reflects adaptive sociotechnical approaches oriented toward continuous improvement in social and organizational systems, including education.

In the 1970s, these iterative principles began to penetrate the world of education, particularly in the form of reflective and collaborative learning methods. Although the term agile pedagogy was not yet widely known at the time, this approach was already evident in constructivist and participatory learning theories. Concepts such as Pedagogy 3.0 and Web 3.0-based education, which emphasize dynamic interactions between teachers and students, demonstrate that agile principles and adaptability were already being applied in education even before the term agile was coined. Then, in the 1990s, the

idea of agile entered the manufacturing realm through the term agile manufacturing. Lehigh University began popularizing this concept in 1991 in response to the rapidly changing business environment. Agile manufacturing combines lean production principles with high flexibility in the supply chain and production process, allowing companies to respond quickly to market demands without sacrificing efficiency and quality.

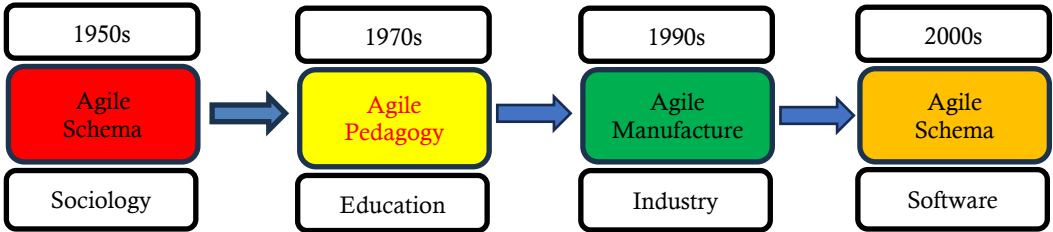


Figure 2. Development of Agility Concept

Finally, in the early 2000s, the evolution of agile reached a significant milestone in the world of information technology, particularly software development. This manifesto establishes agile principles as a new paradigm in software development, emphasizing rapid iteration, intensive collaboration, and high flexibility in responding to changing user needs. The development of agile concepts represents a multidisciplinary trajectory that demonstrates consistency in the spirit of adaptation, iteration, and responsiveness to change, originating in the social and educational realms, then extending to the manufacturing industry, and ultimately being formally codified in the software world.

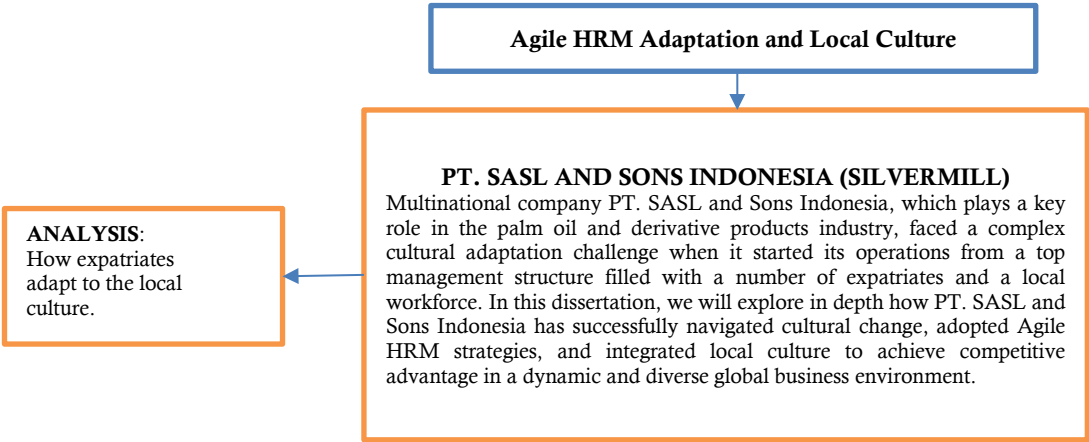


Figure 3. Research Conceptual Framework

Figure 3 illustrates the conceptual framework of the study, emphasizing the relationship between Agile HRM Adaptation and Local Culture within the case of PT. SASL and Sons Indonesia (Silvermill). As a multinational company in the palm oil and derivative products industry, PT. SASL encountered cultural adaptation challenges when it began its operations with a workforce composed of both expatriates and local employees. Through the implementation of agile and responsive HRM strategies, the company seeks to address cultural differences, integrate local values, and build competitive advantage in an increasingly dynamic global business environment. The focus of the analysis is directed toward how expatriates adapt to the local culture, which plays a crucial role in ensuring successful cultural change management and the effectiveness of adaptive HRM strategies. Thus, the conceptual framework demonstrates

the interconnection between theory, the case context, and the specific analytical focus that supports the objectives of the research.

**RESEARCH METHOD**

This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design, aiming to provide an in-depth understanding of the adaptation strategies, cultural barriers, and integration of local values in Human Resource Management (HRM) practices within multicultural work environments. The study focuses on PT. SASL and Sons Indonesia, with research subjects consisting of 19 expatriates selected purposively based on criteria of minimum six months work experience in the company and direct involvement in cross-cultural interactions in the workplace.

Data collection techniques include semi-structured in-depth interviews, as well as documentation in the form of internal policies and company reports. All data were analyzed using NVivo software through thematic coding processes including open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to identify patterns and build thematic narratives. Data validity was maintained by applying source triangulation, comparing interview results, observations, and documentation, as well as through data confirmation to participants (member checking).

The main focus of the analysis was on the adaptation strategies used by expatriates, the cultural barriers they faced in carrying out their work roles, and the extent to which local values are integrated into company HRM policies and practices. This approach enables contextual and holistic understanding of cross-cultural work relationship dynamics within a specific organization.

**RESULTS**

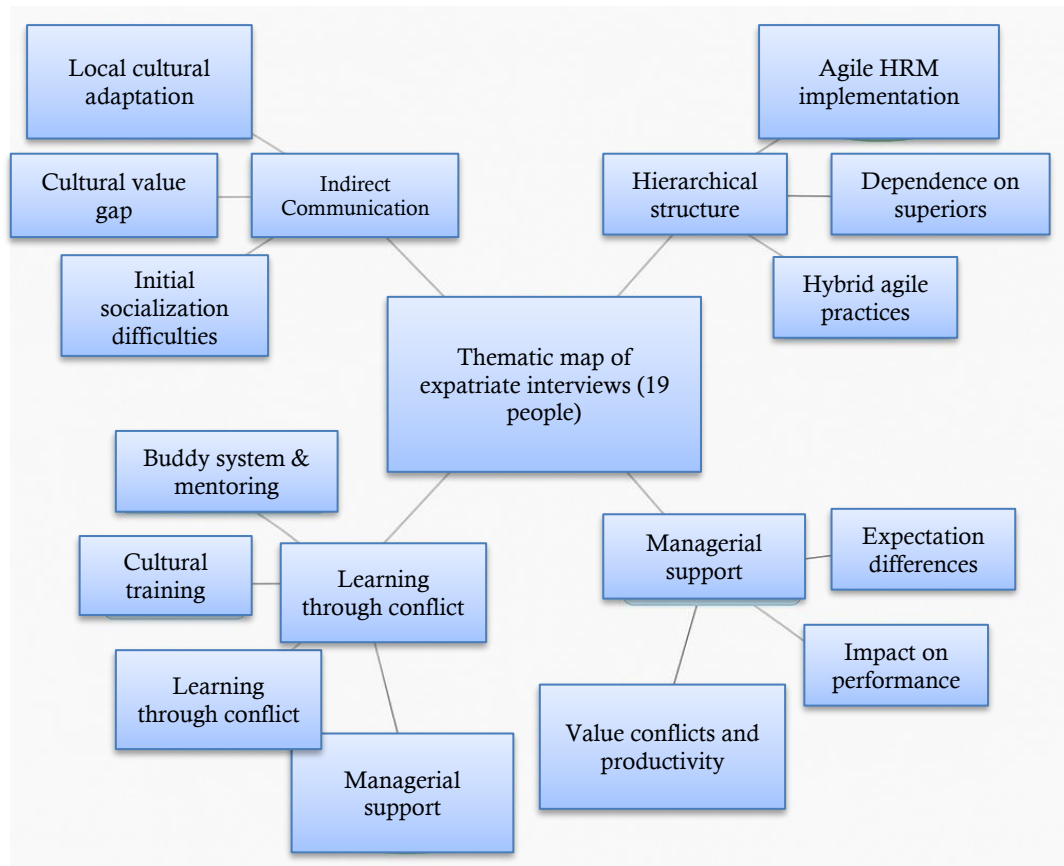
Three main strategies in adapting Agile HRM with local culture: (1) cross-cultural mentoring that brings together expatriates and local employees to understand work values, (2) cross-cultural training to build mutual understanding, and (3) informal approaches through social activities such as communal dining that strengthen work relationships. The gotong royong value strengthens teamwork, while hierarchy and collectivism become challenges in rapid decision-making. Discussion shows that the success of Agile HRM adaptation heavily depends on communication openness and managerial flexibility.

Table 1. Number of Employees at PT. SASL and Sons Indonesia

No	Provider	Total Headcount	Gender		Remarks
			Male	Female	
1	Head of Operations	1	1	0	1 Expatriates
2	Director	1	1	0	1 Expatriates
3	Manager	5	5	0	5 Expatriates
4	Advisor	12	12	0	12 Expatriates
5	Assistant Manager	1	1	0	
6	Executive	2	2	0	
7	Staff	113	94	19	
8	Worker	276	143	133	
	Total Headcount	393	241	152	
	Total Expatriates	19			

Based on Table 1, the staffing structure at PT. SASL and Sons Indonesia demonstrates the dominance of local workforce at operational levels, with a total of 393 employees, comprising 241 males and 152 females. Among them, 19 are expatriates, such as Head of Operations, Director, Manager, and Advisor. All expatriate positions are typically filled by males, reflecting the dominance of males in the foreign workforce. Expatriate roles appear focused on managerial levels and decision-making, while staff and worker positions are filled mainly by the local workforce, with more balanced gender distribution especially at worker level, where female numbers reach almost half of the total. This





**Figure 5.** Thematic Map of Adaptation and Work Dynamics of Expatriates at PT. SASL and Sons Indonesia

Figure 5, the thematic map from interviews with 19 expatriates at PT. SASL and Sons Indonesia reveals that local cultural adaptation, Agile HRM implementation, managerial support, and value conflicts become central themes in their cross-cultural work experiences. Expatriates face challenges such as cultural value gaps, indirect communication, and initial socialization difficulties, which are overcome through cultural training, buddy systems, and learning through conflict. Meanwhile, the implementation of Agile HRM still encounters hierarchical structures and dependence on superiors, creating different expectations and impacting performance. Managerial support plays a crucial role in minimizing value conflicts and enhancing productivity, indicating that successful expatriate adaptation is not solely determined by individual factors, but also by organizational structure and cultural sensitivity in company HRM policies.

## DISCUSSION

The absence of women in expatriate positions is worth examining as an indication of a glass ceiling, an invisible barrier that limits women's access to leadership positions. Prihadyanti et al. (2022) and Khodijah et al. (2024) demonstrate that women in the accounting profession in Indonesia perceive themselves as being treated unequally in promotions and job evaluations, which is attributed to a lack of mentoring support, structural organizational bias, and patriarchal social norms. Communication plays a central role in the cultural adaptation process of expatriates in multicultural work environments such as PT. SASL and Sons Indonesia. Liao et al.'s (2021) findings highlight the importance of cultural adaptation and effective communication as key mediators of successful expatriate cultural adaptation. Han et al. (2022) concluded that cultural intelligence and four personality dimensions contribute significantly to expatriate cross-cultural adaptation, surpassing the Five Personality Traits. Research by Lo and Nguyen (2023) on expatriate adjustment and training confirms that while training alone

is insufficient, personality traits and cross-cultural adaptation directly improve expatriate work performance.

An agile human resource management approach adaptation ability to rapidly adapt to change. In this regard, PT SASL and Sons Indonesia needs to implement adaptive human resource management that integrates global practices while remaining sensitive to the local cultural context. This aligns with the findings of Van der Laken et al. (2019), Tariana (2024), and Sitorus et al. (2025), which show that formal and informal social support and mentoring programs can accelerate the adaptation process for expatriates while improving their psychological well-being.

Talent and retention strategies in the context of agile HRM must address cultural challenges and local needs. Based on the results of thematic mapping, four main themes were identified in the adaptation process: local cultural adaptation, Agile HRM implementation, managerial support, and value conflicts and productivity. The theme of local cultural adaptation reflects the challenges faced by expatriates in adjusting to indirect communication styles, collectivist values, and deep-rooted organizational cultural differences (Azizah & Perkasa, 2025). Ansah and Louw (2019) and Rohman et al. (2023) highlighted the challenges of expatriates' cross-cultural adaptation. This cultural adaptation is heavily influenced by initial approaches such as cultural training, the buddy system, and learning from conflict processes, as outlined by Backmann et al. (2020) in their framework for bridging cultural gaps in multinational teams.

The implementation of Agile HRM in this company demonstrates the tension between the agile work spirit and the still-dominant hierarchical structure. According to Agdaviswan et al. (2021), the implementation of Agile in large Indonesian organizations is often partial and faces obstacles due to a bureaucratic culture. This is reinforced by Dumalang (2021), who stated that successful Agile requires adaptive and innovative human resources. However, differing expectations between expatriates and local employees regarding Agile work methods create new dynamics that influence perceptions of the management system. Furthermore, organizational attitudes toward diversity, including the presence of expatriate workers, also significantly influence the acceptance of cross-cultural leadership styles, as discussed by Fodor et al. (2023). In this context, Yildiz and Esmer (2021) emphasize the importance of adaptive global talent management in emerging market contexts.

When superior support is available and acts as a cross-cultural facilitator, the adaptation process is more effective (Fehér et al., 2022). Conversely, when such support is lacking, value conflicts arise, which in turn impact work productivity. Within the framework of cross-generational employee management, Ongkowijoyo (2021) states that leadership that adapts to modern work styles and technology will strengthen cross-cultural employee engagement. Furthermore, Erfan (2024) emphasizes the importance of cross-cultural management in fostering effective collaborative performance in an increasingly complex global environment.

## **CONCLUSION**

Agile Human Resource Management (Agile HRM) in multinational companies, such as PT SASL and Sons Indonesia, can be effective when adapted through a hybrid approach. This approach combines core Agile values such as comfort, collaboration, and continuous learning with Indonesia's local work structure and culture, which tend to be collectivistic and hierarchical. Cultural values such as mutual cooperation (gotong royong) and deliberation have been shown to strengthen teamwork within an Agile framework. However, hierarchical values remain a major challenge, particularly in implementing the principles of autonomy and rapid decision-making. Strategies such as cross-cultural mentoring, internal training, and intensive cross-cultural communication are crucial to reducing resistance and accelerating organizational adoption of Agile principles. A gap in the literature identified is the limited number of studies that in-depth examine the adaptation of Agile HRM within the local cultural context of developing countries, such as Indonesia, particularly through qualitative approaches. Most previous

studies are conceptual, quantitative, or focus on specific industries without a thorough exploration of the cultural adaptation process and the role of intercultural communication. Limitations of this research include the use of a single case study in a single company, thus limiting the generalizability of the results. Furthermore, the study participants were exclusively male expatriates, which does not reflect the perspectives of cross-gender individuals or local employees. Future research is recommended to expand the analysis to include several multinational companies across various sectors and regions in Indonesia. Quantitative research measuring local employees' perceptions of Agile HRM could also enrich the results. Further studies should also explore the role of gender, generation, and digital technology approaches in strengthening the cross-cultural culture of Agile HRM in a global workplace.

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