

Teamwork Across Cultures: Local Employees' Perceptions of Foreign Operational Co-workers in Malaysian Hotels

Abu Dzar Ahmad Khamal¹, Nurliyana Athirah Zainal¹, Asmahani Nayan², Mohd Faez Saiful Bakhtiar¹,
Nor Adila Kedin^{2*}

¹Faculty of Hotel and Tourism, Universiti Teknologi MARA Selangor, Malaysia

²Faculty of Computer and Mathematical Sciences, Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100800112>

Received: 14 August 2026; Accepted: 20 August 2026; Published: 27 August 2026

ABSTRACT

Malaysian hotels increasingly depend on foreign employees to support their daily operations, demanding local employees to work into multicultural environment. Despite this normal multicultural hotel settings, research on how local employees perceive working together with foreign co-workers and whether these perceptions shape teamwork performance is currently very limited. Thus, this study utilized Social Identity Theory (SIT) aims to examines the four aspects of foreign co-workers' work behaviour namely professionalism, teamwork orientation, communication effectiveness, and work attitude; as well as their influence on teamwork performance among local operational hotel employees. A quantitative, cross-sectional design was employed, with data collected through a self-administered questionnaire from 142 Malaysian employees who work directly with foreign operational co-workers in operational departments for at least three months in their current hotel across the Klang Valley. The data were collected using judgemental sampling and analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and diagnostic checking prior to multiple linear regression analysis. Overall, respondents viewed their foreign co-workers positively across all four behavioural dimensions, with both teamwork orientation and work attitude recorded the highest mean score ($M=4.02$). All four behavioural predictors have moderate to strong correlation ($r=.622$ to $.677$) with team work performance. However, when taken together, only teamwork orientation ($\beta = .295$, $t = 3.098$, $p = .002$), and communication effectiveness ($\beta = .279$, $t = 2.989$, $p = .003$) were statistically significant; where teamwork orientation reported as the strongest significant predictor, followed by communication effectiveness. In contrast, professionalism and work attitude did not significantly predicts the teamwork performance. These findings suggest that effective multicultural teamwork in hotel operations depends less on general positive impressions of foreign employees and more on behaviours that directly support cooperation and communication. The study extends understanding of local-foreign employee relations in hospitality and offers practical guidance for hotels seeking to strengthen teamwork through targeted communication, integration, and team-based training practices.

Keywords: Foreign operational employees, teamwork performance, teamwork orientation, communication effectiveness, multicultural teams, hotel industry, Social Identity Theory

INTRODUCTION

Hotel operations depend on closely coordinated human effort. Departments such as housekeeping, food and beverage, kitchen, stewarding, and front office perform interdependent tasks, often under considerable time and service pressures. Consequently, effective service delivery depends not only on individual competence but also on employees' ability to communicate, coordinate responsibilities, and support one another (Jung et al., 2023; Salas et al., 2018). These collaborative demands become more complex when operational teams comprise employees from different national and cultural backgrounds.

This issue is particularly relevant in Malaysia, where persistent labour shortages have increased hotels' reliance on foreign workers, especially in operational positions characterised by shift work and physically demanding tasks (Malaysian Association of Hotels [MAH], 2023). Malaysia recorded more than 2.4 million registered foreign workers in 2024 (The Star, 2024), while the hotel sector has continued to identify foreign labour as important for sustaining operations amid difficulties in recruiting local workers (MAH, 2023; TTG Asia, 2023). Local and foreign employees consequently work alongside one another in operational teams where service outcomes depend on their ability to coordinate effectively.

Yet cultural diversity does not inherently translate into effective teamwork. Although heterogeneous teams can benefit from diverse knowledge and perspectives, cultural and linguistic differences may also increase misunderstanding, conflict, and difficulties in developing cohesion (Harrison & Klein, 2007; Stahl et al., 2010). Such tensions are particularly consequential in hotels, where service tasks are highly interdependent and coordination failures can quickly disrupt operations. Conversely, strong interpersonal relationships can enhance team performance in hospitality settings (Jung et al., 2023), reinforcing the importance of examining how employees experience and evaluate one another within multicultural teams, rather than treating workforce diversity merely as a demographic characteristic.

Despite this importance, existing knowledge remains fragmented. Hospitality research has examined professionalism as an important employee attribute (Liasidou et al., 2023), while teamwork scholarship emphasises cooperation and shared commitment as foundations of effective team functioning (Salas et al., 2018). Research on multinational teams further demonstrates that language barriers can undermine communication and trust (Tenzer et al., 2014), with recent Malaysian evidence indicating that communication difficulties remain relevant when local organisations employ foreign workers (Jaafar et al., 2025). However, these behavioural dimensions have largely been investigated separately. Limited evidence explains how local employees simultaneously evaluate foreign co-workers' professionalism, teamwork orientation, communication effectiveness, and work attitude, or whether these perceptions differ in their influence on teamwork performance. This gap is particularly evident within Malaysian hotel operations, where local and foreign employees increasingly depend on one another in everyday service work.

Addressing this gap has both empirical and managerial importance. Without knowing which behaviours are most consequential for teamwork, hotels may rely on broad diversity or integration initiatives rather than addressing specific aspects of local–foreign workplace interaction. Accordingly, this study examines local operational employees' perceptions of foreign co-workers across four behavioural dimensions namely professionalism, teamwork orientation, communication effectiveness, and work attitude; as well as assessing their relative influence on teamwork performance. The study contributes by shifting attention from workforce diversity as a structural characteristic to how foreign co-workers are perceived through everyday work behaviours. In doing so, it provides a more differentiated understanding of multicultural teamwork and identifies behavioural priorities that can inform employee integration, communication, and team development in Malaysian hotels.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Multicultural Teams and Teamwork Performance in Hotel Operations

Multicultural teams bring together employees with different national, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds to accomplish shared work objectives (Stahl et al., 2010). Such diversity can enrich teams through broader knowledge, perspectives, and problem-solving approaches, but its effects are not uniformly positive. Cultural differences can simultaneously increase creativity and adaptability while introducing interpersonal conflict, communication difficulties, and weaker social integration (Harrison & Klein, 2007; Stahl et al., 2010). A later review by Stahl and Maznevski (2021) reinforces this dual perspective, suggesting that the consequences of cultural diversity depend substantially on the processes through which team members interact and integrate their differences. This makes interpersonal behaviour particularly important in-service environments where employees work interdependently.

Hotel operations represent such an environment. Teamwork performance reflects the extent to which members coordinate tasks, communicate effectively, provide mutual support, manage problems, and collectively achieve operational goals (Hoegl & Gemuenden, 2001; Salas et al., 2018). In hospitality settings, these processes occur

continuously because service delivery often crosses functional boundaries. Jung et al. (2023) demonstrated that stronger interpersonal relationships contribute to better team performance among hospitality employees, highlighting that effective teamwork depends not simply on having competent individuals but on how employees relate to and support one another.

For multicultural hotel teams, this distinction is particularly important. Local employees repeatedly observe how foreign colleagues behave during shared work and form judgements about their reliability and contribution to the team. The present study focuses on four such behavioural evaluations namely professionalism, teamwork orientation, communication effectiveness, and work attitude; as well as considers how each relates to teamwork performance. These constructs reflect observable behaviours through which local employees experience working with foreign colleagues, rather than cultural diversity as an abstract workforce characteristic.

Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory (SIT) provides the theoretical foundation for explaining these relationships. Tajfel and Turner (1979) propose that individuals classify themselves and others into social categories, producing distinctions between those perceived as belonging to the in-group and those viewed as members of an out-group. Nationality, language, and cultural background can make such categorisation particularly salient in multicultural workplaces. Social identification consequently influences interpersonal evaluations, trust, cooperation, and behaviour towards other group members (Hogg et al., 2004).

Applied to Malaysian hotel operations, nationality may initially distinguish local employees from foreign co-workers. However, SIT does not imply that these boundaries are fixed. Workplace interactions provide employees with repeated information about whether colleagues share expected norms and contribute to collective objectives. This is consistent with multicultural-team research showing that diversity outcomes depend substantially on team processes rather than demographic differences alone (Stahl et al., 2010; Stahl & Maznevski, 2021).

Accordingly, the present study treats the four behavioural perceptions as workplace cues through which local employees evaluate foreign co-workers. Professionalism may signal reliability and adherence to shared standards; teamwork orientation demonstrates commitment to collective goals; effective communication facilitates mutual understanding; and positive work attitude indicates willingness to contribute to the group. This study extends SIT by demonstrating that social boundaries are not reduced equally by all positive traits, but through individual level attributes specifically through active, interaction orientation behaviour. These behaviours may reduce the salience of local–foreign distinctions and encourage employees to perceive one another increasingly through a shared team identity. The four proposed relationships are developed in the subsequent section.

Perceived Professionalism and Teamwork Performance

Professionalism encompasses behaviours through which employees demonstrate responsibility, reliability, ethical conduct, and adherence to organisational standards. Within hotels, these behaviours include punctuality, compliance with standard operating procedures, appropriate grooming, responsible conduct, and the ability to maintain professional standards under pressure. Liasidou et al. (2023) show that hotel employee professionalism extends beyond technical competence and incorporates behavioural qualities that shape how employees are evaluated within the workplace.

Professionalism is particularly relevant to teamwork because operational employees depend on colleagues to perform interconnected tasks reliably. Inconsistent work practices can interrupt workflow and reduce confidence between team members, whereas dependable professional conduct provides greater certainty during coordination (Jung et al., 2023). From an SIT perspective, these behaviours may also influence how local employees categorise foreign colleagues. When foreign co-workers consistently conform to shared professional standards, nationality may become less salient than their demonstrated membership of the work group. Professionalism can therefore function as a cue of dependability and compatibility with team norms, strengthening willingness to cooperate. Having said that, the first proposed hypothesis was:

H₁: Perceived professionalism of foreign operational co-workers has a positive relationship with teamwork performance.

Perceived Teamwork Orientation and Teamwork Performance

To minimize conceptual overlap, a clear distinction is drawn between teamwork orientation and teamwork performance. Teamwork orientation reflects an individual's willingness to cooperate, assist colleagues, share responsibilities, and prioritise collective objectives. These behaviours are central to effective teamwork because successful teams require coordination, mutual support, shared understanding, and commitment to common goals (Salas et al., 2018). In hotel operations, where employees frequently respond to peak workloads and unexpected service demands, willingness to support colleagues can directly affect whether the team completes its work effectively. Conversely, teamwork performance refers to the extent to which team members effectively coordinate, communicate, and support one another to achieve shared objectives (Salas et al., 2018). In hotel operations, high teamwork performance is essential for maintaining service quality, operational efficiency, and guest satisfaction (Baum et al., 2022).

Hospitality evidence reinforces this relationship. Jung et al. (2023) found that positive interpersonal relationships strengthen team performance, suggesting that cooperative interaction is central to collective functioning. Teamwork orientation may be even more consequential in culturally diverse teams because cooperative behaviour provides visible evidence that a colleague is committed to the group rather than solely to individual responsibilities.

This proposition aligns closely with SIT. Social categorisation based on nationality can distinguish foreign employees from local colleagues, but commitment to shared goals provides an alternative basis for identification (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hogg et al., 2004). When foreign co-workers willingly assist others, share workloads, and support collective decisions, they demonstrate behavioural alignment with the team. Such behaviour may weaken perceived out-group boundaries and encourage reciprocal cooperation. Therefore, the second proposed hypothesis was:

H₂: Perceived teamwork orientation of foreign operational co-workers has a significant positive relationship on teamwork performance.

Perceived Communication Effectiveness and Teamwork Performance

Communication is fundamental to teamwork because coordination depends on the accurate and timely exchange of information. In hotel operations, employees communicate continuously about guest requests, task completion, service problems, shift handovers, and changing priorities. Communication effectiveness therefore extends beyond language proficiency to include clarity, responsiveness, confirmation of understanding, and the ability to adjust communication appropriately.

These requirements can become more challenging in multicultural teams. Tenzer et al. (2014) found that language barriers influence trust formation in multinational teams, demonstrating that linguistic differences can shape relationships as well as information exchange. In the Malaysian context, Jaafar et al. (2025) similarly identify language differences and difficulties understanding instructions as important communication barriers involving foreign workers. Cultural intelligence may further facilitate employees' willingness to communicate and express work-related ideas in hospitality environments (Yuan et al., 2023).

Communication also provides an important mechanism within SIT. Repeated and successful interaction can reduce uncertainty between socially distinct employees and create opportunities for mutual understanding. When foreign co-workers communicate clearly, respond appropriately, and ensure shared understanding, local employees receive evidence of their ability and willingness to participate effectively in collective work. Effective communication may consequently reduce interpersonal distance while facilitating the coordination required for team performance. Thus, the third proposed hypothesis was:

H₃: Perceived communication effectiveness with foreign operational co-workers has a significant positive relationship on teamwork performance.

Perceived Work Attitude and Teamwork Performance

Work attitude captures employees' orientation towards their responsibilities and workplace, including motivation,

commitment, adaptability, willingness to learn, and constructive behaviour under pressure (Robbins & Judge, 2022). These attributes are particularly relevant in hotel operations, where employees routinely face fluctuating workloads, extended shifts, changing guest demands, and the need to adapt quickly to operational problems.

Positive work attitudes can support team functioning because employees who remain committed and adaptable are more likely to contribute constructively when collective effort is required. Paredes-Saavedra et al. (2024) similarly show that positive organisational and interpersonal conditions, including collaborative relationships and employee involvement, are associated with work-team effectiveness. In multicultural teams, work attitude also provides colleagues with observable information about an employee's commitment to the group.

From an SIT perspective, foreign co-workers who demonstrate motivation, adaptability, willingness to learn, and constructive behaviour may challenge perceptions based primarily on out-group membership. Such behaviours signal investment in shared work and organisational objectives, potentially strengthening respect and acceptance among local colleagues (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Hogg et al., 2004). Positive work attitude is therefore expected to facilitate collaboration and ultimately strengthen teamwork performance. For that matter, the final proposed hypothesis was:

H₄: Perceived work attitude of foreign operational co-workers has a significant positive relationship on teamwork performance.

Research Framework

The proposed framework positions perceived professionalism, teamwork orientation, communication effectiveness, and work attitude as predictors of teamwork performance. Rather than treating cultural diversity itself as the explanatory factor, the model focuses on the behaviours through which local employees experience working with foreign colleagues. This distinction responds to multicultural-team research showing that diversity can produce both positive and negative outcomes depending on the interpersonal processes through which differences are managed (Stahl et al., 2010; Stahl & Maznevski, 2021).

SIT provides the theoretical mechanism connecting these perceptions to teamwork performance. Foreign co-workers may initially be socially differentiated through nationality or cultural background, yet their everyday behaviours provide alternative cues through which local employees evaluate their membership and contribution to the team. Professionalism signals adherence to shared standards, teamwork orientation demonstrates commitment to collective goals, communication effectiveness enables mutual understanding, and work attitude reflects willingness to contribute. The framework therefore proposes that favourable perceptions across these four behavioural dimensions strengthen teamwork performance by supporting more effective local–foreign working relationships.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Sampling

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships between local employees' perceptions of foreign operational co-workers and teamwork performance. Data were collected in a non-contrived setting from Malaysian employees working in 3-star to 5-star hotel's operational departments in Klang Valley; including front office, housekeeping, food and beverage, kitchen, and stewarding. The individual employee served as the unit of analysis.

As no complete sampling frame of eligible employees was available, non-probability judgemental sampling method was employed. This method allowed for the cautious selection of respondent who met the specific inclusion criteria; Malaysian citizens aged 18 years or above who had worked directly with foreign operational co-workers in their current hotel for at least three months. To facilitate data collection, eligible respondents were identified with the assistants of hotel HR departments and operational supervisors who then shared the online questionnaire personally to the employees. The minimum sample requirement was determined using G*Power, following statistical power principles established by Cohen (1992) and Faul et al. (2009). With four predictors, a medium effect size ($f^2 = .15$), $\alpha = .05$, and power = .80, at least 85 respondents were required. The three-week

data collection yielded 142 usable responses, exceeding this requirement.

Measurement Instrument and Adaptation

Data were collected through a bilingual (English and Bahasa Melayu) self-administered online questionnaire. Each construct comprised six items rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1(‘Strongly Disagree’) to 5(‘Strongly Agree’). Measurement items were adapted from established scales; Perceived Professionalism by Liasidou et al. (2023); Perceived Teamwork Orientation by Salas et al. (2018) and Jung et al. (2023); Perceived Communication Effectiveness by Tenzer et al. (2014) and Jaafar et al. (2025); Perceived Work Attitude by Robbins and Judge (2022) and Paredes-Saavedra et al. (2024); and Teamwork Performance by Hoegl and Gemuenden (2001) and Salas et al. (2018).

Instrument Validity, Reliability and Common Method Bias

Instrument validity were initially verified by an academic expert before data collection, and ethical approval was obtained from the relevant UiTM research ethics committee. Construct validity was evaluated via Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using Principal Axis Factoring and Direct Oblimin rotation across the 30 predictor items. Sampling adequacy was supported by Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of 0.815 and a statistically significant Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity ($\chi^2 = 1198.313, df = 276, p < .001$). While minor cross-loadings were observed due to higher inter-construct correlation, all items were retained in accordance with their established theoretical frameworks. Construct validity was then confirmed using Cronbach’s alpha Cronbach’s alpha coefficients ranged from .792 to .857, exceeding the recommended .70 threshold (Hair et al., 2022). Specifically, reliability was .812 for professionalism, .834 for teamwork orientation, .857 for communication effectiveness, .792 for work attitude, and .834 for teamwork performance. These results support the use of the composite measures in subsequent analyses. Since data were gathered from a single cross-sectional, and procedural, Common Method Bias (CMB) were addressed using Harman’s Single-factor test was executed by entering all 30 measurement items into an unrotated factor accounted for 32.349% of the total variance (below the 50% threshold), this conforms that a single domain factor does not account for the majority of the variance, indicating that CMB does not give a threat to the study’s validity.

Data Analysis and Assumptions Checking

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 30. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize data, followed by Pearson correlations. A multiple linear regression was also conducted to test the hypothesised relationship as well as to predict the influence of professionalism, teamwork orientation, communication effectiveness and work attitude on teamwork performance. Prior to multiple linear regression, diagnostics checking was conducted to test the regression assumptions including normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, independence of errors and multicollinearity in accordance with established multivariate analysis procedures (Field, 2024; Hair et al., 2022). The assumption of normality residual was successfully satisfied, as a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated that the distribution of residuals did not significantly deviate from a normal distribution, (D (126) = .05, $p = .200$). The linearity and homoscedasticity assumptions were also met as the scatterplot of the standardized residuals against standardized predicted values showing errors randomly distributed around zero. Homoscedasticity assumptions then further evaluated using Breusch–Pagan test indicated that the variance of the residuals was constant across the values of the predictor’s variables ($\chi^2(1) = 0.007, p = .933$). The assumption of independence of residuals (Durbin–Watson = 1.73) and multicollinearity (Tolerance values ranged from .345 to .393 and VIF values from 2.545 to 2.902) was also met. the overall diagnostics supported proceeding with multiple regression.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile and Descriptive Statistics

A total of 142 usable responses were obtained from Malaysian hotel employees with direct experience working together with foreign operational co-workers. The sample was predominantly female (56.3%) and relatively young, with 78.2% of respondents aged between 21 and 30 years. Food and beverage employees formed the

largest departmental group (48.6%), followed by housekeeping (41.5%) and front office (9.2%). More than half of the respondents (57.0%) had worked in their current hotel for between three and twelve months. This profile is relevant because food and beverage and housekeeping are highly dependent operational functions in which employees routinely coordinate tasks under time pressure and where local–foreign workforce interaction is particularly visible.

The descriptive results presented in Table 1 indicate broadly favourable perceptions of foreign operational co-workers. Work attitude and teamwork orientation received the highest mean score ($M = 4.02$), followed by teamwork professionalism ($M = 3.94$), and communication effectiveness ($M = 3.90$). Teamwork performance was also rated highly ($M = 4.05$). Thus, these results suggest that local employees generally perceived foreign colleagues as positive contributors to hotel operations rather than as a source of workplace difficulty.

The particularly favourable assessment of work attitude indicates that foreign co-workers were perceived as motivated, committed, adaptable, and willing to learn. This pattern is consistent with the broader view that positive employee involvement and constructive interpersonal conditions support team effectiveness (Paredes-Saavedra et al., 2024). Importantly, however, a high descriptive evaluation does not necessarily imply that work attitude is the strongest determinant of teamwork performance. Its explanatory contribution is therefore examined subsequently through multivariate analysis.

By contrast, communication effectiveness recorded the lowest mean among the four behavioural dimensions, although the overall evaluation remained positive. At item level, the lowest-rated statement concerned the use of language that local employees could easily understand ($M = 3.79$, $SD = .90$). This finding is meaningful in multicultural teams because language differences can affect both information exchange and interpersonal trust (Tenzer et al., 2014). Recent Malaysian evidence similarly identifies difficulties in understanding instructions and language differences as recurring communication barriers when organisations employ foreign workers (Jaafar et al., 2025).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	Item	Mean	SD
	Perceived Professionalism	3.94	
1.	Foreign co-workers arrive punctually for scheduled shifts.	3.87	0.91
2.	Foreign co-workers comply with hotel SOPs during operations.	3.95	0.84
3.	Foreign co-workers maintain proper grooming and uniform standards.	3.96	0.81
4.	Foreign co-workers demonstrate ethical conduct in guest interactions.	3.92	0.86
5.	Foreign co-workers handle tasks professionally under pressure.	3.93	0.88
6.	Foreign co-workers respect hotel policies and procedures.	3.98	0.83
	Perceived Teamwork Orientation	4.02	
1.	Foreign co-workers willingly assist local staff during peak hours.	4.02	0.78
2.	Foreign co-workers share responsibilities fairly within the team.	3.96	0.82
3.	Foreign co-workers prioritize team goals over personal preferences.	3.89	0.84
4.	Foreign co-workers cooperate effectively in resolving service issues.	3.93	0.81
5.	Foreign co-workers encourage collaboration and mutual support.	3.95	0.79
6.	Foreign co-workers adapt to team decisions without resistance.	3.92	0.87
	Perceived Communication Effectiveness	3.90	
1.	Foreign co-workers provide clear instructions during tasks.	3.88	0.83
2.	Foreign co-workers use language that is easy for local staff to understand.	3.79	0.90
3.	Foreign co-workers confirm understanding before task execution.	3.87	0.82
4.	Foreign co-workers adapt communication style to suit team needs.	3.92	0.79
5.	Foreign co-workers respond promptly to questions or clarifications.	3.94	0.80
6.	Foreign co-workers use appropriate non-verbal cues during interactions.	4.00	0.78
	Perceived Work Attitude	4.02	
1.	Foreign co-workers show strong motivation to complete tasks accurately.	4.05	0.76
2.	Foreign co-workers remain committed even during long shifts.	4.04	0.78

3.	Foreign co-workers adapt well to changes in schedules or priorities.	4.01	0.79
4.	Foreign co-workers maintain a positive attitude under pressure.	4.03	0.77
5.	Foreign co-workers demonstrate willingness to learn new tasks.	4.07	0.75
6.	Foreign co-workers avoid conflicts and maintain harmony in the team.	3.93	0.86
	Teamwork Performance	4.05	
1.	Our team coordinates tasks efficiently across local and foreign workers.	4.02	0.75
2.	Team members support each other to meet service deadlines.	4.07	0.73
3.	Shift handovers are smooth and organised.	4.00	0.77
4.	Team members communicate effectively during peak operations.	4.08	0.71
5.	The team resolves conflicts quickly without affecting service quality.	4.03	0.76
6.	Overall, the team works well together to achieve operational goals.	4.12	0.69
Note: N = 142, SD (Standard Deviation)			

Overall, the descriptive evidence presents an important distinction. Local employees generally evaluated foreign co-workers positively across all four dimensions, yet communication remained comparatively less favourable than other workplace behaviours. The high teamwork-performance score further suggests that multicultural operational teams were perceived as functioning effectively overall. These descriptive patterns provide the basis for the subsequent analyses, which determine whether favourable perceptions of the four behavioural dimensions translate into significant differences in teamwork performance.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to identify initial relationship between variables. Table 2 showed that all four behavioural perceptions indicated moderate to strong positive and significantly correlated with teamwork performance ($r = .622$ to $r = .667$). Among the predictor variables, teamwork orientation recorded the strongest correlation with teamwork performance ($r = .667$, $p < .01$), followed by communication effectiveness ($r = .658$, $p < .01$), professionalism ($r = .634$, $p < .01$), and work attitude ($r = .622$, $p < .01$). These results indicate that more favourable perceptions of foreign co-workers were consistently associated with higher perceived teamwork performance. The pattern is theoretically meaningful because the two strongest correlations; teamwork orientation and communication effectiveness reflect behaviours that directly structure day-to-day interaction. Cooperation, shared responsibility, and clear communication are central to effective team functioning (Salas et al., 2018), while interpersonal relationships have been shown to enhance team performance in hospitality settings (Jung et al., 2023). Communication is particularly salient in multicultural teams, where language differences can affect both information exchange and interpersonal trust (Tenzer et al., 2014).

Table 2: Correlation Analysis

Variable	Professionalism	Teamwork Orientation	Communication Effectiveness	Work Attitude	Teamwork Performance
Professionalism	1				
Teamwork Orientation	.722**	1			
Communication Effectiveness	.743**	.729**	1		
Work Attitude	.683**	.719**	.704**	1	
Teamwork Performance	.634**	.667**	.658**	.622**	1

Note: N = 142. $p < .01$ (two-tailed)

The correlation between predictors were also considered moderate to strong ($r = .683$ to $.743$), with the strongest relations observed between professionalism and communication effectiveness ($r = .743$). Even if this suggests multicollinearity might exist, the earlier tolerance and VIF diagnostics confirmed that multicollinearity was not problematic. Thus, the variables remained suitable for inclusion in the regression model.

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(4, 137) = 40.471$, $p < .001$, explaining 54.2% of the

variance in teamwork performance is explained by the four behavioural perceptions ($R^2 = .542$; adjusted $R^2 = .528$). As presented in Table 4, among the four behavioural predictors, only teamwork performance ($\beta = .295$, $t = 3.098$, $p = .002$), and communication effectiveness ($\beta = .279$, $t = 2.989$, $p = .003$) are significant predictors of teamwork performance; where teamwork orientation found to be slightly more important significant predictor (Beta = .286) as compared to communication effectiveness (Beta = .274) in predicting teamwork performance. Professionalism and work attitude was found not significantly predict the teamwork performance ($p > .05$). Thus, these results suggested to support H_2 and H_3 , and rejected H_1 and H_4 . Refer Table 5 for the summary of hypothesis testing results.

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.736	.542	.528	.40317

Table 4: Coefficients

Variable	β	SE	Beta	t	p
Constant	1.225	.289		4.234	.001
Professionalism	.122	.094	.115	1.103	.271
Teamwork Orientation	.295	.093	.286	3.098	.002
Communication Effectiveness	.279	.087	.274	2.989	.003
Work Attitude	.112	.098	.112	1.141	.256

Dependent variable: teamwork performance

The support for H_2 highlights teamwork orientation as the most consequential behavioural perception. Local employees appear to place particular value on foreign co-workers who cooperate, share responsibilities, assist colleagues, and contribute to common goals. This finding aligns with Salas et al. (2018), who position cooperation and coordination as central mechanisms of effective teamwork, and with Jung et al. (2023), who demonstrate the contribution of positive interpersonal relationships to hospitality team performance. From an SIT perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), cooperative behaviour may also provide a basis for shifting perceptions from nationality-based distinctions towards a shared team identity. Foreign co-workers who visibly prioritise collective goals may therefore be more readily regarded as part of the work group, facilitating reciprocal support and stronger team functioning.

H_3 was also supported, confirming communication effectiveness as a significant predictor of teamwork performance. This result is particularly relevant to multicultural hotel operations, where employees must continuously exchange information despite potential linguistic and cultural differences. Tenzer et al. (2014) demonstrated that language barriers can disrupt trust formation in multinational teams, while Jaafar et al. (2025) identified language differences and difficulties in understanding instructions as workplace barriers involving foreign employees in Malaysia. Effective communication may therefore contribute to teamwork not only by improving task coordination but also by reducing uncertainty between local and foreign colleagues. Viewed through SIT, repeated successful communication can lessen perceived social distance and strengthen interpersonal trust across group boundaries.

In contrast, H_1 was not supported. Although professionalism had a strong positive bivariate correlation with teamwork performance ($r = .634$, $p < .001$), it did not remain significant after the other behavioural dimensions were controlled. This finding does not reduce the importance of professionalism identified by Liasidou et al. (2023); rather, it suggests that professionalism may function as an expected baseline behaviour in hotel operations. Reliability, procedural compliance, and appropriate conduct may establish confidence in a co-worker, but these qualities alone may not translate into stronger teamwork unless accompanied by behaviours involving direct cooperation and communication.

A similar pattern emerged for H_4 . Work attitude was positively correlated with teamwork performance ($r = .622$, $p < .001$) but did not contribute significantly once the other predictors were considered. Positive attitudes such as

motivation, adaptability, and willingness to learn may therefore benefit the workplace without independently driving collective performance. This finding qualifies the broader association between positive interpersonal conditions and team effectiveness reported by Paredes-Saavedra et al. (2024). In the present context, positive individual dispositions appear to become more consequential for teamwork when expressed through interaction-oriented behaviours, particularly cooperation and effective communication.

Taken together, the findings reveal an important distinction between [being positively evaluated as a worker and contributing uniquely to teamwork performance](#). All four perceptions were positively related to teamwork at the bivariate level, yet only teamwork orientation and communication effectiveness remained significant in the multivariate model. This suggests that, within multicultural hotel teams, behaviours that directly connect employees to one another may be more influential than broader evaluations of individual professionalism or attitude. The findings therefore refine the application of SIT by indicating that shared team functioning may develop particularly through [active cooperation and effective communication across local foreign boundaries](#), rather than through favourable perceptions of co-workers alone.

Table 5: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship	Decision
H_1	Professionalism $\rightarrow$ Teamwork Performance	Not Supported
H_2	Teamwork Orientation $\rightarrow$ Teamwork Performance	Supported
H_3	Communication Effectiveness $\rightarrow$ Teamwork Performance	Supported
H_4	Work Attitude $\rightarrow$ Teamwork Performance	Not Supported

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends Social Identity Theory (SIT) to multicultural hotel operations by demonstrating that local employees' perceptions of foreign co-workers do not contribute equally to teamwork performance. Although all four behavioural dimensions were positively associated with teamwork, only teamwork orientation and communication effectiveness produced significant unique effects. This finding refines the application of SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) by suggesting that social boundaries between local and foreign employees may be weakened particularly through interaction-oriented behaviours. Cooperation signals commitment to shared goals, while effective communication facilitates mutual understanding and trust across cultural boundaries. In contrast, professionalism and positive work attitude, although valued, may represent individual attributes that are less influential in shaping collective performance. The study therefore shifts attention from workforce diversity itself towards the behavioural processes through which multicultural team integration occurs.

Practically, the findings suggest that multicultural workforce integration should prioritise cooperation and communication rather than relying solely on general diversity initiatives. Teamwork orientation was the strongest predictor of teamwork performance ($\beta = .295$), followed by communication effectiveness ($\beta = .279$). Hotels should therefore strengthen team-based training, shared problem-solving, cross-cultural communication, and work practices that encourage mutual assistance between local and foreign employees. Regular operational briefings, clear terminology, confirmation of instructions, and mixed local–foreign team activities may further reduce communication barriers. Such targeted practices can help transform workforce diversity into more effective operational teamwork.

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Several limitations provide opportunities for further research. First, the use of convenience sampling within the Klang Valley limits the generalisability of the findings to the broader Malaysian hotel workforce. Future studies should employ probability-based sampling and extend data collection across major hotel destinations in Malaysia. Second, the cross-sectional design captures perceptions at a single point in time; longitudinal research could determine whether local–foreign working relationships evolve through continued interaction, training, and workplace integration.

Third, the study reflects only local employees' perceptions of foreign co-workers. Future research could adopt dyadic or multi-source designs incorporating foreign employees and supervisors to provide a more balanced assessment of multicultural teamwork. Finally, while the model explained 54.2% of teamwork-performance variance, substantial variance remains unexplained. Future models could examine additional mechanisms, such as trust, cultural intelligence, team identification, leadership, and psychological safety, to further explain how multicultural workforce dynamics shape teamwork performance.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study advances understanding of multicultural teamwork by showing that favourable perceptions of foreign co-workers do not contribute equally to teamwork performance. Although all four behavioural dimensions were positively correlated with teamwork, however when taken together, only teamwork orientation and communication effectiveness employed significant predictors to the teamwork performance, with teamwork orientation emerging as the strongest predictor. These findings suggest that effective multicultural teamwork depends particularly on behaviours that facilitate direct interaction, cooperation, and mutual understanding.

Malaysian hotels should therefore move beyond general workforce integration practices and prioritise team-based cooperation and cross-cultural communication. Structured joint training, shared problem-solving, clear operational communication, and regular local-foreign team interactions are recommended. By strengthening these interaction-oriented practices, hotels can better integrate culturally diverse employees, improve coordination, and translate workforce diversity into stronger teamwork performance.

REFERENCES

1. Cohen, J. (1992). A power primer. *Psychological Bulletin*, 112(1), 155–159. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.112.1.155>
2. Faul, F., Erdfelder, E., Buchner, A., & Lang, A.-G. (2009). Statistical power analyses using G*Power 3.1: Tests for correlation and regression analyses. *Behavior Research Methods*, 41(4), 1149–1160. <https://doi.org/10.3758/BRM.41.4.1149>
3. Field, A. (2024). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.
4. Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., & Anderson, R. E. (2022). *Multivariate data analysis* (8th ed.). Cengage.
5. Harrison, D. A., & Klein, K. J. (2007). What's the difference? Diversity constructs as separation, variety, or disparity in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 32(4), 1199–1228. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2007.26586096>
6. Hoegl, M., & Gemuenden, H. G. (2001). Teamwork quality and the success of innovative projects: A theoretical concept and empirical evidence. *Organization Science*, 12(4), 435–449. <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.12.4.435.10635>
7. Hogg, M. A., Abrams, D., Otten, S., & Hinkle, S. (2004). The social identity perspective: Intergroup relations, self-conception, and small groups. *Small Group Research*, 35(3), 246–276. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1046496404263424>
8. Jaafar, M. F., Ahmad Daud, A. N., Selamat, M. N., Mis, M. A., & Zahid, I. (2025). Communication barriers in the workplace from the employers' perspective. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 9(8), 7101–7113. <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.908000588>
9. Jung, H. J., Lee, S. H., & Lim, S. G. (2023). Enhancing teamwork in the hospitality industry: The importance of empathy. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 114, Article 103557. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2023.103557>
10. Liasidou, S., Afxentiou, G., Malkawi, E., & Antoniadou, G. (2023). Attesting to hotel employees' professionalism: Views and perceptions of managers. *EuroMed Journal of Business*, 19(4), 720–735. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EMJB-04-2022-0075>
11. Malaysian Association of Hotels. (2023, January 19). Hotel associations submitted joint statement on expedite plan for employment of foreign workers. Malaysian Association of Hotels article
12. Paredes-Saavedra, M., Vallejos, M., Huancahuire-Vega, S., Morales-García, W. C., & Geraldo-Campos, L. A. (2024). Work team effectiveness: Importance of organizational culture, work climate, leadership,

- creative synergy, and emotional intelligence in university employees. *Administrative Sciences*, 14(11), Article 280. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci14110280>
13. Robbins, S. P., & Judge, T. A. (2022). *Organizational behavior* (19th ed.). Pearson.
 14. Salas, E., Reyes, D. L., & McDaniel, S. H. (2018). The science of teamwork: Progress, reflections, and the road ahead. *American Psychologist*, 73(4), 593–600. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000334>
 15. Stahl, G. K., Maznevski, M. L., Voigt, A., & Jonsen, K. (2010). Unraveling the effects of cultural diversity in teams: A meta-analysis of research on multicultural work groups. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 41(4), 690–709. <https://doi.org/10.1057/jibs.2009.85>
 16. Stahl, G. K., & Maznevski, M. L. (2021). Unraveling the effects of cultural diversity in teams: A retrospective of research on multicultural work groups and an agenda for future research. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 52(1), 4–22. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-020-00389-9>
 17. Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole.
 18. Tenzer, H., Pudenko, M., & Harzing, A.-W. (2014). The impact of language barriers on trust formation in multinational teams. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 45(5), 508–535. <https://doi.org/10.1057/jibs.2013.64>
 19. The Star. (2024, December 5). Over 2.4 million foreign workers in the country as of Sept, Parliament hears. The Star article
 20. TTG Asia. (2023, January 24). Hotel industry overlooked by Malaysia ministry's work to ease foreign worker hire. TTG Asia article
 21. Yuan, L., Kim, H. J., & Min, H. (2023). How cultural intelligence facilitates employee voice in the hospitality industry. *Sustainability*, 15(11), Article 8851. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su15118851>