




Onboarding Challenges of Female Employees in Remote International Teams

Natasha Kvitka

BMO GATE MBA Student Fellow

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Onboarding Challenges of Female Employees in Remote International Teams

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Introduction

Importance: The adaptation of female employees in remote international teams is challenging because of the absence of non-verbal cues that are essential for understanding corporate culture and accepted practices. International employees in such settings often lack developed knowledge of the unwritten rules of the corporate environment they are entering. According to the reviewed sources, the adaptation process for female-identifying employees is further hindered by a reluctance to voice their challenges, driven by fear of compromising their authority or appearing inadequate for their roles—often linked to experiences of impostor syndrome.

Analysis: Review of 13 publications available on related topics such as adaptation in remote teams, adaptation of recent immigrants, challenges female employees are facing in remote and international teams, and data gathered from interviewing 15 managers and members of international remote teams.

Key Observations and Takeaways

1. Challenges in Onboarding and Organizational Support

- Many participants noted that their onboarding process was **not structured** or tailored to recent immigrants or female employees.
- Lack of direct observation of workplace culture made it difficult for new employees to understand informal team dynamics.
- Some companies provided structured onboarding, but adaptation still depended on **the manager's approach** rather than an official process.

2. Remote Work Adaptation for Employees with No Prior Experience

- Several interviewees **struggled initially** with remote work, especially in self-management and understanding expectations.
- Companies varied in their approach, with some offering **no adjustments** for employees new to remote work.
- Peer support, trial and error, and self-initiative were common adaptation strategies.

3. Language and Communication Barriers

- While some employees experienced **no language difficulties**, others struggled, particularly with **regional accents, informal communication styles, or business jargon**.
- In multicultural teams, some participants noted that different team members used **English inconsistently**, leading to misunderstandings.
- Companies rarely provided formal language support, leaving employees to **self-adjust**.

4. Social Connection and Isolation

- Isolation and a **lack of informal networking opportunities** were widely cited as issues.
- Some companies had **formal social initiatives**, such as virtual coffee chats or team-building activities, which helped new employees integrate.
- Others relied on **self-initiative**, expecting employees to engage in casual interactions without structured support.
- Participants who actively sought out **mentorship or informal networking** adapted better.

5. Building Trust in Remote Teams

- Trust-building was largely dependent on **individual and managerial efforts**, rather than structured corporate initiatives.
- Employees who had frequent **1:1 meetings** with their managers felt they built trust faster.
- Some participants mentioned that trust was linked to **visibility in meetings and responsiveness** rather than personal interactions.
- Those who struggled to integrate noted that **a lack of in-person connection made it harder to build deep professional relationships**.

6. Emotional and Psychological Support

- Very few participants reported receiving **formal emotional or psychological support** from their employers.
- Some employees experienced **high stress levels**, especially in fast-paced or highly demanding roles.
- Companies that provided structured **mental health support or employee assistance programs** were seen as more supportive.
- Several women noted that **they hesitated to bring up challenges** they faced, aligning with literature findings on **impostor syndrome**.

7. Feedback and Performance Evaluation

- Some participants found remote feedback mechanisms **ineffective**, especially in organizations where feedback was informal or infrequent.
- In teams with **structured feedback processes**, employees felt they had clearer expectations.
- A few participants mentioned a **lack of recognition** for their contributions compared to in-office peers.

8. Work-Life Balance and Flexibility

- Remote work was perceived as **flexible but potentially overwhelming**.
- Some employees worked longer hours because of **lack of boundaries between work and personal life**.
- Those who established **clear work routines and boundaries** felt they managed work-life balance better.
- Companies that encouraged **asynchronous communication** helped employees manage workloads better.

9. Meeting Schedules and Interaction

- Most employees had **regular 1:1 meetings** with their managers, but the **frequency varied** across companies.
- Some participants expressed that **formal meetings alone were insufficient** to understand office culture or team expectations.
- The most successful adaptation experiences included **informal interactions, networking, and mentorship** in addition to structured meetings.

Key Takeaways and Alignment with Initial Assumptions

- **Limited onboarding structure:** Many companies do not formally tailor onboarding for female employees, recent immigrants, or those new to remote work, making adaptation challenging.
- **Importance of informal interactions:** Formal meetings alone are not enough to integrate into remote teams—social and informal interactions play a crucial role.
- **Gender-specific challenges:** Female employees often hesitate to raise concerns or seek help, supporting the idea that **impostor syndrome and self-doubt** may hinder their adaptation.
- **Trust-building and socialization gaps:** Without in-person interactions, trust-building is harder, and employees must proactively engage in networking.
- **Work-life balance struggles:** While remote work offers flexibility, it also brings challenges, such as blurred work-life boundaries and extended working hours.

Onboarding Roadmap for Female Employees in International Remote Teams

This roadmap ensures **structured adaptation** by addressing cultural, social, and work-related challenges over a **three-month period**.

Pre-Onboarding (Before Start Date)

At this stage, the manager receives information and guidance needed to address *Challenges in Onboarding and Organizational Support, Language and Communication Barriers, and Social Connection and Isolation Challenges*.

Preparation by HR and Hiring Manager

- Assign a **buddy or mentor** from a similar background (e.g., fellow female remote worker or immigrant employee).
- Share a **Welcome Package**, including:
 - Team introductions and organizational structure.
 - A guide on **company culture, unspoken norms, and remote work expectations**.
 - FAQ on **remote communication tools, meeting etiquette, and escalation processes**.
- Schedule a **pre-boarding check-in** with the manager to discuss:
 - Work expectations.
 - Personalized support needs (language assistance, flexible hours, etc.).
 - Preferred communication style.

🕒 Week 1: Structured Introduction and Social Integration

At this stage, the manager with the help from HR, if needed, has a chance to address common struggles with *Onboarding and Organizational Support, Social Connection and Isolation, Trust and Feedback, and Meeting Scheduling and Interactions*.

☑ Day 1-2: Warm Welcome

- **Virtual coffee chat** with the team.
Suggested agenda: Introductions of all team members, their roles, main projects, and one fun fact about oneself.
- **First 1:1 with the manager**.
Suggested agenda: Introduction to **company mission, values, and communication norms**, personal connection (sharing personal stories not shared in a group meeting).
- A 30-minute **1:1 with the mentor or buddy** to discuss experiences as a female employee or recent immigrant.
Suggested agenda: Introduction, sharing personal stories, buddy shares their experience as a newcomer to the team.

☑ Day 3-5: Role-Specific Learning

- **Interactive onboarding training**, covering:
 - Task workflows and software tools.
 - Best practices for remote collaboration.

Depending on technical aspects, this can be organized and held by HR and manager.

- **Shadowing sessions**:
 - Observe a peer in meetings or workflows.

- Participate in a structured **role-playing exercise** on company communication norms.

Depending on the mentor or buddy's role, they can lead these sessions, or the manager needs to assign an experienced peer.

Agenda for communication training may include: connection requests, escalation, feedback.

🌀 Weeks 2-4: Deepening Social and Work Integration

At this stage, issues of *Social Connection and Isolation, Trust and Feedback, and Work-Life Balance and Flexibility* are being addressed.

☑ Formal Learning

- **Manager check in (weekly 1:1s):** Discuss work expectations, feedback, and any challenges.
- **Peer-led training** on essential company tools and workflows.
Depending on the mentor or buddy's role, they can lead these sessions, or the manager needs to assign an experienced peer.

☑ Social Connection

- **Join Employee Resource Groups (ERGs):** E.g., Women in Tech, Remote Work Club.
Manager needs to add sharing these resources to the 1:1 meeting agenda. If groups are not available in the company, external resources may be shared, and the manager may need to work with HR to create space for such connections.
- **Virtual networking event:** Meet cross-functional team members.
If such gatherings are not held in the company, the manager needs to work with the HR to suggest them.
- **Slack/Teams introduction:** Add them to informal chat channels.
Manager needs to add sharing these resources to the 1:1 meeting agenda. If groups are not available in the company, the manager may need to work with the HR to create space for such connections.

☑ Psychological Safety & Support

- **Confidence-building workshop:** Overcoming impostor syndrome.
- **Anonymous feedback channel:** Encourage sharing of onboarding struggles.
Such initiatives are best maintained on the cross-team level and may require HR collaboration with team managers.

Month 2-3: Building Trust and Autonomy

At this stage, issues of *Social Connection and Isolation*, *Trust and Feedback*, and *Work-Life Balance and Flexibility* are being addressed.

☒ Structured Feedback and Performance Development

- Biweekly 1:1s with manager to track progress. Agenda may include more subtle challenges after initial onboarding frictions were addressed, and discussions listed in the next section.
- First **360-degree feedback session** for self and peer evaluations.

☒ Mentorship and Leadership Development (to add to 1:1 agenda)

- **Career growth discussion:** Identify opportunities for leadership training.
- **Visibility support:** Encourage speaking up in meetings with manager guidance.

☒ Long-Term Connection and Retention

- **Company-wide “New Hire” social event.**
- **Refresher cultural session:** Revisit company norms after full integration.

Such initiatives are best maintained on the cross-team level and may require HR collaboration with team managers.

Sample Team-Building Calendar for Remote Teams

This **quarterly calendar** fosters social connection, psychological safety, and inclusivity for female employees in remote teams.

Week	Activity	Purpose
Week 1	Virtual Coffee Chat ☕	Casual meet-and-greet with new team members.
Week 2	"Meet the Leaders" AMA Session 💡	Open Q&A with female leaders in the company.
Week 3	Peer Mentorship Matching 🤝	Pair employees for career guidance.

Week 4	Work-Life Balance Workshop 🌿	Strategies for managing stress remotely.
Week 5	International Cultural Exchange 🌐	Employees share stories from their home countries.
Week 6	Team Trivia and Fun Icebreaker 🎉	Foster engagement and informal bonding.
Week 7	Feedback and Recognition Session ★	Celebrate contributions and recognize efforts.
Week 8	Virtual Wellness Session 🧘	Guided meditation or stretching break.
Week 9	Career Growth Roundtable 🚀	Female employees discuss leadership paths.
Week 10	Small Group Project 🤖	Cross-team collaboration to build trust.
Week 11	Themed Networking Event 🍸	Casual, themed social hour.
Week 12	Company Town Hall & Retrospective 🏆	Reflect on team progress and set future goals.

Conclusion

✓ **A structured onboarding plan ensures smooth adaptation** for female employees, recent immigrants, and new remote hires.

✓ **A well-designed team-building calendar fosters trust, inclusion, and engagement** beyond work-related meetings.

✓ **Encouraging informal interactions, mentorship, and leadership development enhances retention and job satisfaction.**