From Surviving to Thriving: The Dynamics of Regaining Work Meaningfulness in Career Transition of International Skilled Migrants

by

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We acknowledge and respect the Lək̓ʷəŋən (Songhees and Xʷsepsəm/Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Lək̓ʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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ABSTRACT

Work meaningfulness—the sense that one's work holds significance, serves a purpose and aligns with deeper values—is a cornerstone of personal and professional fulfillment (e.g., Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). However, this sense of meaningfulness has become increasingly fragile in an era characterized by economic shifts, rapid technological advancements, globalization, and evolving job roles. External challenges and unforeseen transitions often disrupt the alignment between individuals and their work. For International Skilled Migrants (ISMs), these disruptions are particularly acute as they navigate professional downgrading, cultural transitions, and systemic barriers in their new countries. This dissertation explores how ISMs navigate these disruptions and regain work meaningfulness, offering insights into global challenges, such as epidemic work disengagement and skilled labour shortages.

I used an exploratory research design and employed ideal-type analysis to examine 31 narrative interviews with ISMs in Canada. The findings reveal the dynamic and evolving journey of ISMs through three interconnected phases. In the **survival jobs phase**, driven by the immediate need for survival, participants adopted reactive strategies, including *embracing a transitional purpose*, *affirming self-worth*, and *diluting misalignments* to cope with the misalignment between their pre-migration expectations and the harsh realities of underemployment. As tensions escalated, the need to alleviate mounting pressures triggered the **reorientation phase**, where participants began recognizing their volition through trial and reflection cycles. Small, exploratory actions—such as seeking credentials, pursuing alternative career paths, or leveraging professional networks—demonstrated their capacity to influence their

circumstances, enabling a gradual reclamation of agency and reinforcing their confidence to act. Finally, in the **regaining work meaningfulness phase**, the driving force became the need for coherence and purpose. Participants sought to integrate their past professional identities, skills, and values with their present realities and future aspirations through five integrating strategies: *broadening, expanding, evolving, narrowing and rechanneling*. This process encompassed both personal fulfillment and a growing desire to contribute, reflecting participants' development through hardship and resilience. These findings highlight that regaining work meaningfulness is not about returning to what was lost but embracing a fluid, context-sensitive process of transformation and realignment, challenging the literature's static conceptualizations of work meaningfulness.

This research contributes to the emerging dynamic view of work meaningfulness within organizational behaviour, which addresses its tensional and temporal dimensions and examines how it arises, persists, is challenged, and regained (e.g., Bailey & Madden, 2019; Jiang, 2021; Mercurio, 2019; Mitra & Buzzanell, 2017). By highlighting adaptive approaches, this study provides empirical insights into navigating disruptions and regaining a sense of meaning in work. It advances the theoretical understanding of work meaningfulness and offers practical implications for fostering resilience and adaptability in an uncertain global labour market.

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DEDICATION

To my parents and sister, whose sacrifices and encouragement made this journey possible, and to all immigrants in Canada who inspire hope and resilience through their unwavering courage.

This work is a tribute to you all.

1. INTRODUCTION

In an era marked by uncertainty and rapid change, work has become more than a means of livelihood—it is often the bedrock of identity, purpose, and life meaning (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017; Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2017; Van Tongeren & Showalter Van Tongeren, 2021); For many, work is expected to provide coherence, significance, and direction amidst the turbulence of modern life (Schnell & Hoffmann, 2020). However, the notion of work as a stable source of meaning is increasingly under scrutiny (e.g., Bailey et al., 2019). Movements like "quiet quitting" and "slow living" highlight growing resistance to the centrality of work to meaning in life, even within North America, reflecting a societal shift towards prioritizing work-life balance and challenging the sustainability of work as a core source of meaning in life (Klotz, 2022; Williams, 2024).

When work meaning erodes—whether through a shift in personal aspirations, systemic barriers, or unexpected life transitions—the consequences are profound. Feelings of alienation (Mottaz, 1981), burnout (Schabram & Maitlis, 2016), and emotional emptiness (Bendassolli, 2017) take root, disrupting both personal well-being and organizational productivity. The World Health Organization (2022) estimates that depression and anxiety among working adults cost the global economy over one trillion dollars annually in lost productivity (Mental Health at Work, 2022). These staggering figures underscore the urgent need to understand how individuals navigate the erosion of work meaning and the pathways they take to rebuild it.

Ella, a skilled teacher from Turkey, experienced this erosion firsthand. Before migrating to Canada, she found profound meaning in teaching English, a role imbued with societal respect and personal fulfillment. Yet, upon arriving in Canada, she faced the stark reality of

underemployment, working in a daycare where she felt reduced to "teaching children how to pee and poo." Over time, she reframed her experience, finding value in teaching life skills instead of language. Ella's journey reflects broader questions: When work meaning erodes, how do individuals adapt and regain it? What enables some to transform their circumstances and reestablish a sense of meaningfulness?

This dissertation addresses these questions by exploring the dynamics of regaining work meaningfulness after it has eroded. By examining the experiences of International Skilled Migrants[1] (ISMs) in Canada—individuals who often face barriers such as credential recognition and underemployment (Cornelissen & Turcotte, 2020)— this research explores the dynamics of eroded work meaning and its recovery. By shedding light on how ISMs reconstruct meaning in work, this study offers insights into resilience and the human capacity for renewal in the face of profound challenges.

1.1 Personal Motivation

I am a wounded healer. In Iran, I was an educated architect and project coordinator in the oil and gas and construction industries. Successfully working in such masculine-dominated industries was my source of pride as a woman. Following increasing social pressures, I decided to come to Canada and return to school to change my career to academia. Although my career change was self-initiated, I experienced an erosion of meaning in my work. The ambiguity surrounding my professional identity and sense of purpose during this transition was the darkest

[1] See Appendix A for definitions.

and most painful period of my work life. This experience was substantially different from my prior career shocks, including my transition from university to the labour market and also from being a specialized architect to a general project manager.

During the first term of my Ph.D. program, I encountered the concept of work meaningfulness in organizational behaviour. I remember being pleasantly surprised to learn that "meaningfulness" was no longer confined to philosophy and art. This discovery gave me the language I needed to articulate and understand my experiences as a professional navigating my career journey. It sparked an enduring obsession with the concept of meaning in work and life, providing both intellectual and emotional clarity.

However, as I delved into contemporary studies in organizational behaviour, human resource management, and sociology, I found them insufficiently developed to explain how to regain work meaningfulness after it erodes. This gap reflected my own lived experience, as it took me four years of struggle to make peace with transitioning from engineer to researcher and teacher. Ultimately, I found new meaning in teaching and research, experiencing moments of profound connection and fulfillment that reshaped my understanding of meaningful work.

Since then, I have been deeply curious about how individuals navigate similar journeys, particularly how they maintain and regain work meaningfulness after experiencing erosion. I have observed others undergoing comparable transitions, and these encounters have reinforced my desire to explore this subject not only for myself but for the many others seeking to bring meaningfulness back into their professional lives. My research is, at its core, a personal and academic quest to illuminate this process and contribute to the well-being of those who, like me, have faced the loss and rediscovery of meaning in work.

As a wounded healer, I draw on my own journey of pain and recovery to illuminate the path for others. My research reflects the belief that regaining work meaningfulness begins with small, deliberate steps within one's control and requires an open mind to embrace new meanings rather than restoring the old. This new purpose has become a source of pride and fulfillment in my own life as I now strive to help others navigate their own journeys of loss and rediscovery.

1.2 Research Gap and Problem Statement

The pursuit of meaningful work has garnered increasing attention in both scholarly and practical domains, with numerous studies highlighting its positive effects on job satisfaction, engagement, and well-being (Allan et al., 2019; Duffy, Autin, & Bott, 2015; Fairlie, 2011). However, much of the existing literature conceptualizes meaningful work as a relatively static construct, focusing on its antecedents and outcomes or treating it as a property of the job (Hackman & Oldham, 1976) or solely the individual (Rosso, Dekas and Wrzesniewski, 2010). A perspective that assumes that meaningful work is a sustained, pervasive experience limits our understanding of how individuals navigate situations where work meaning is disrupted or eroded. Recent phenomenological studies have begun challenging this notion, emphasizing the dynamic and context-dependent nature of work meaningfulness (Bailey & Madden, 2017; Mercurio, 2019). However, there remains a significant gap in understanding the processes through which individuals recover or reconstruct work meaningfulness after erosion, particularly in the context of challenges such as prolonged underemployment.

This gap is especially critical in the case of International Skilled Migrants (ISMs), who often face systemic barriers such as unrecognized credentials, limited access to their pre-migration professions, and cultural dissonance upon relocation (Cerdin, Diné, & Brewster, 2014;

Hajro et al., 2019). These challenges frequently result in prolonged underemployment, diminishing the role of work as a source of meaning in their lives (Kim & Allan, 2020). While existing research has explored issues of labour market integration and skill utilization among migrants (e.g., Avni, 2012; Hajro et al., 2019; Valenzuela & Schwartz, 2022), few studies — except for Matejicek (2010) — have examined how ISMs experience and regain work meaningfulness following its erosion. Addressing this gap is essential, as the erosion of work meaningfulness has been linked to significant individual and organizational consequences, including alienation, burnout, and diminished productivity (Schabram & Maitlis, 2016; Bendassolli, 2017). Additionally, the erosion of work meaningfulness poses broader societal and economic challenges. Countries like Canada, which rely on skilled immigrants to address labour shortages, face difficulties when ISMs experience prolonged underemployment, limiting their potential contributions to the economy (Cappelli, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2022). Understanding how ISMs regain work meaningfulness is critical not only for empowering these individuals but also for supporting their integration into the workforce and ensuring their well-being and societal contributions.

This study seeks to address this gap by investigating how ISMs in Canada navigate the complex process of regaining work meaningfulness after its erosion. By examining their experiences, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the adaptive processes and strategies individuals employ to reconstruct meaning in their work, offering both theoretical insights and practical implications for supporting migrant workers in achieving meaningful employment.

1.3 Research Questions

To fulfill the purpose of my dissertation, I framed the following research questions with an exploratory approach to guide this inquiry. These questions are built on the identified research gap and aim to uncover the nuanced processes that International Skilled Migrants (ISMs) employ to navigate and regain work meaningfulness after its erosion:

1) How does immigration, as a change in social context, impact ISMs' perceptions and experiences of work meaningfulness?
2) How does underemployment affect ISMs' perceptions of work meaningfulness?
3) In what ways does meaning in work erode following these experiences?
4) What factors contribute to or buffer against the erosion of work meaning?
5) What adaptive strategies do ISMs use to respond to the erosion of work meaningfulness, and how do contextual factors influence these responses?
6) What processes do ISMs follow to regain a sense of meaningfulness in work?
7) In what ways do ISMs' pre-migration work experiences influence their pathways to regain meaningfulness in work?

Although these specific questions helped structure my initial focus, as the study progressed, I found them overly directive. Initially, drawing on Vough's (2008) suggested directions for future research and Lepisto and Pratt's (2017) conceptual paper, I assumed that the types of erosion would directly correspond to distinct pathways for regaining work meaningfulness. However, as the study evolved, I discovered that their regaining pathway depends on ISMs' belief about why their work is meaningful and their opportunities to overcome challenges rather than the type of erosion itself. In response, I adopted a broader research question to allow for a more flexible and exploratory approach: ***How do International Skilled Migrants navigate the erosion and regain***

work meaningfulness, for those who do, in the context of migration? This broader framing enabled me to uncover deeper, emergent patterns in participants' experiences while remaining open to the complexity and fluidity of the processes they described.

1.4 Key Assumptions

My dissertation rests on several important premises regarding work meaningfulness, which underpin the framing of my research questions, designing this inquiry and delineating contributions. These assumptions are as follows:

1) *Human beings aspire to have meaningful work regardless of whether they actively seek meaning from work (Chalofsky, 2003; Elangovan, Kar, & Steinke, 2018; Frankl, 1959).* In other words, individuals prefer meaningful work to meaningless work, regardless of their definition of the role of work in their lives as a job, career or calling (Lips-Wiersma, Wright, & Dik, 2016; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). For example, Matejicek (2010) interviewed female physicians migrants to Canada who had lost their jobs due to lack of recognition of their credentials and found that women with different work orientations in the same profession can similarly experience their work as meaningful and grieve for their loss as it fulfilled their different needs for meaning through work. In her study, physicians with a calling orientation used to see their work as meaningful as it satisfied their need for purpose, whereas the work was also meaningful for those with a career orientation as it used to satisfy their need for self-efficacy and worth. Therefore, I expect to observe that individuals with different work orientations will experience and react to the erosion of meaning in work. However, their pathways to regain it may vary based on how their work orientation and needs for meaning. Thus, unlike most studies on work meaningfulness disruptions that have exclusively studied

individuals with a calling orientation (e.g., Schabram & Maitlis, 2016; Florian, Costas, Kärreman, 2019), I will include individuals with all types of work orientations in my study (similar to Bailey & Madden, 2019).

2) *Meaningfulness of work is a subjectively and socially constructed phenomenon (Rosso et al., 2010).* Work does not inherently possess meaning, but individuals assign meaning to it (Elangovan et al., 2018; Wrzesniewski, Dutton, & Debebe, 2003). Therefore, in this study, following contemporary studies of work meaningfulness, I assumed that meaning is constructed both subjectively by the individual and socially through dynamic interactions of the individuals with their environment (Bailey & Madden, 2019; Rosso et al., 2010; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). It is the individual who ultimately decides whether work is perceived as meaningful (Rosso et al., 2010; Bailey et al., 2019). Therefore, my role as a researcher is to draw insights from my participants to describe their experiences.
3) *The judgment about the meaningfulness or meaninglessness of work and its environment can be made over the course of work on a daily basis (episodic) and about one's overall job (global).* In other words, individuals have many episodic experiences at work that are meaningful or meaningless, and they integrate them into a global belief about the significance and purpose of their work, which explains why their work is worth doing (Allan et al., 2019). While episodic experiences of work as meaningful or meaningless are related to specific isolatable events (incidents) or aspects of work (e.g., tasks), global perception of work as meaningful or meaningless is an overall judgment as to whether one's work accomplishes significant, valuable or worthwhile purposes that are congruent with one's existential values (e.g., Allan et al., 2019; Baily and Madden, 2019; Elangovan et al., 2018). In this study, I focus on the global experience of work meaningfulness and meaninglessness.

4) *The perception of work as meaningful is tensional and temporal (e.g., Baily & Madden, 2017; Mitra and Buzzanell, 2017).* Recent phenomenological studies suggest that experiencing work meaningfulness is not a sustained, pervasive positive attitude towards one's work (e.g., Allan et al., 2020; Bailey et al., 2019; Both-Nwabuwe, Dijkstra, Beersma, 2017; Scroggins, 2008). Instead, such meaningfulness emerges from a fluid, tension-based and contextual meaning-making process in which the individual actively negotiates their preferences against professional, organizational, political, cultural and economic forces at different levels (everyday work, career) to arrive at an experience of meaningfulness or meaninglessness (e.g., Baily & Madden, 2017; Mitra and Buzzanell, 2017; Mercurio, 2019).

The temporal aspect of work meaningfulness reflects a dynamic interplay between episodic moments of meaningfulness and a broader, enduring sense of meaning tied to one's job or occupation (e.g., Bailey & Madden, 2017). While episodic moments are tied to temporally transient experiences—connecting past efforts, present contributions, and future impacts—these moments contribute to the cumulative and reflective sense of global work meaningfulness (Allan et al., 2019). This global perception involves a long-term process of negotiating and reconciling individual preferences, values, and aspirations with professional, organizational, and socio-cultural influences (e.g., Mitra and Buzzanell, 2017). Therefore, work meaningfulness is not static but evolves over time as individuals interpret their episodic experiences within their broader career and life context.

5) *Responses to work meaningfulness disruptions include deliberate actions.* While meanings are made in an ongoing manner, the process needs to be triggered. Trigger(s) are " *jarring*" enough to start a cycle of sensemaking and appraisal, which shift individuals' automatic processing of stimuli to conscious attention (Driver, 2001; Elangovan et al., 2018; Jarvis,

1987). Therefore, the responses to work meaningfulness challenges/threats include deliberate actions (Park & Goerge, 2013). As such, scholars have found that people in interviews could readily recall the experiences of work meaninglessness and their intentions, thoughts, feelings and actions in response to them (e.g., Baily & Madden, 2019; Mercurio, 2019).

1.5 Research Design Overview

This dissertation adopts an exploratory research design influenced by grounded theory approach to investigate how International Skilled Migrants (ISMs) in Canada navigate the erosion and regain work meaningfulness in the context of migration. This research incorporates grounded theory principles, such as memoing, constant comparison, and iterative data collection and analysis, to ensure a flexible and reflective approach to understanding participants' experiences (Charmaz, 2000;2006). These principles allowed emergent themes and processes to guide the inquiry without imposing rigid frameworks.

Ideal-type analysis (Weber, 1904; Stapley, O'Keeffe, & Midgley, 2022) was employed as the central methodological approach to structure and interpret the data. This method involves constructing "ideal types"—conceptual groupings based on recurring patterns in participants' experiences—while accounting for individual variations and contextual influences. The ideal-type analysis provided a systematic framework for comparing participants' journeys, identifying distinct strategies for coping with migration-related challenges and reconstructing work meaningfulness.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with a diverse sample of ISMs, purposefully selected to reflect variations in gender, occupation, country of origin, and career stage. The semi-structured interviews allowed for a consistent exploration of changes in work

meaningfulness while capturing participants' unique experiences, enabling the identification of shared patterns and individual adaptations.

The epistemological foundation of this research is rooted in pragmatism and constructivism, which together prioritize understanding the practical and subjective aspects of human experiences. By combining grounded theory principles with ideal-type analysis, the study ensures methodological coherence and rigour while capturing the dynamic interplay between subjective experiences and objective contextual factors. Together, these approaches provide a robust framework for exploring the complex processes through which ISMs adapt to migration-related challenges and regain meaningfulness in their work.

1.6 Contributions to Research and Practice

This dissertation contributes to both research and practice by providing new insights into the dynamic and adaptive nature of work meaningfulness, particularly in the context of International Skilled Migrants (ISMs) in Canada. Unlike traditional perspectives that present work meaningfulness as a stable or fixed construct, this study highlights its evolving, context-sensitive, and relational nature. ISMs, faced with shifts in professional roles, cultural contexts, and personal goals, reconstruct meaning in work through adaptive approaches that progress from reactive coping mechanisms (e.g., embracing transitional purpose) to proactive explorations (e.g., skill development, networking) and ultimately, to integrative reconceptualizations (e.g., expanding or evolving purpose). These approaches reflect ISMs' capacity to navigate challenges and realign their work with evolving values, identities, and broader life aspirations.

The findings further emphasize that work meaningfulness is not simply restored but reimagined through evolving relationships between work and life priorities. This study identifies

adaptive approaches across multiple phases of transition, demonstrating how ISMs creatively redefine the role of work to regain coherence and purpose. These insights expand the theoretical understanding of work meaningfulness, contributing to literature that frames it as a dynamic and adaptive process rather than a static state.

This study addresses the need for a deeper understanding of global experiences of work disruptions and meaningfulness reconstruction, responding to Bailey and Madden's (2019) and Mitra and Buzzanell (2017) call for research that examines the dynamic and context-sensitive nature of meaning-making processes over time. By focusing on ISMs in Canada, the research provides a detailed account of how individuals navigate systemic challenges and reconstruct meaningful work through adaptive approaches tied to distinct phases. The identification of adaptive approaches tied to distinct phases offers a nuanced perspective on the interplay between immediate coping strategies and longer-term efforts to realign purpose and identity. This phase-specific framework expands existing theories, emphasizing the dynamic and temporal dimensions of work meaningfulness.

The research also foregrounds the relational and social dimensions of regaining work meaningfulness, shedding light on how ISMs draw on social interactions to validate their efforts, find a sense of belonging, and gain inspiration during transitional phases. These findings extend the literature on meaningful work by addressing Rosso et al.'s (2010) critique that the field has often underemphasized the influence of social contexts. This study highlights the contextual and interpersonal dynamics underpinning work meaningfulness by showcasing how relationships with peers, mentors, and communities play a crucial role in ISMs' ability to navigate systemic barriers and rebuild their sense of purpose.

Additionally, this study bridges differing perspectives on meaningful work by illustrating how ISMs integrate self-oriented and contribution-focused dimensions in their meaning-making processes. This aligns with recent calls by Bailey, Madden, and Lips-Wiersma (2024) to explore the interplay between self-actualization and societal contributions. The findings reveal how ISMs reconcile evolving personal aspirations with their desire to contribute to others, offering fresh insights into the dynamic relationship between individual growth and broader societal impact in the construction of meaningful work.

Finally, this study contributes to discussions on work orientations by illustrating their fluidity and adaptability. ISMs demonstrated shifts in how they viewed work—from instrumental to central or integrated with broader life meaning—depending on their evolving aspirations and circumstances. Additionally, the research complements the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) by showing how autonomy and relatedness are enacted even in constrained environments, revealing how ISMs maintain a sense of volition and connection despite systemic challenges. Together, these insights provide a more holistic understanding of how work meaningfulness is reconstructed in dynamic and complex contexts.

Empirically, this study also addresses pressing global challenges, such as the epidemic work disengagement and skilled labour shortages. With 78% of employees globally disengaged (Gallup, 2023) and disengagement costing $8.8 trillion annually, this research underscores the importance of regaining and enhancing work meaningfulness as a path to improving engagement (Kahn, 1990; Afrahi et al., 2022). Moreover, ISMs often face unanticipated underemployment, which limits their ability to contribute meaningfully to host economies that rely on skilled immigrants to address workforce gaps (Government of Canada, 2022; Statistics Canada, 2022).

This dissertation sheds light on factors that buffer the erosion of work meaningfulness and enable resilience, offering strategies for individual adaptation and environmental support.

The practical implications of this research are wide-ranging, offering actionable insights for ISMs, managers, immigrant service providers, HR professionals, and policymakers. For ISMs, the findings emphasize the importance of acknowledging the challenges of transitional roles while focusing on incremental steps to build networks, develop skills, and find opportunities that align with their long-term goals. Recognizing the critical role of family as a source of stability and meaning, organizations and service providers can address family-centered needs, such as childcare support and flexible work options, to enable ISMs to pursue meaningful work without compromising their personal priorities.

Managers and HR professionals can foster inclusive work environments by acknowledging ISMs' unique challenges and providing pathways for growth that align with their skills and aspirations. Mentorship programs, timely credential recognition, and clear feedback during the hiring process can help ISMs navigate systemic barriers and feel supported in their professional journeys. Immigrant service providers can enhance these efforts by creating bridging programs that connect ISMs with mentors, employers, and peer networks while also addressing immediate needs like housing and childcare through community-driven initiatives. Policymakers, in turn, can play a vital role by streamlining credential recognition processes, funding immigrant-focused programs, and providing realistic pre-arrival information to prepare ISMs for the realities of transitioning to the host country's labour market. These coordinated efforts can help ISMs regain work meaningfulness while fostering resilience and inclusion at individual, organizational, and systemic levels.

1.7 Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into five chapters: Chapter One introduces the study by outlining the research motivation, research gap, key assumptions, research questions, and the study's methodological approach. It also highlights the theoretical and practical contributions of the research, setting the stage for the subsequent chapters. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature on work meaningfulness, focusing on its definitions, mechanisms, and the challenges associated with sustaining work meaningfulness. This chapter contrasts static and dynamic perspectives and explores strategies for regaining work meaningfulness, situating the study within these broader discussions.

Chapter Three outlines the research design, including the data collection process and the analytical approaches used to explore ISMs' experiences. Chapter Four presents the findings in three sections: the survival jobs phase, the reorientation phase, and the regaining work meaningfulness phase. Each section explores the dominant features, driving forces, adaptive approaches, and the role of social interactions within these phases of participants' journeys. Chapter Five discusses the study's key findings, theoretical contributions, and practical implications. It also examines the study's limitations, suggests directions for future research, and concludes with a synthesis of its overall contributions to understanding work meaningfulness as a dynamic and adaptive process.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: WORK MEANINGFULNESS DYNAMICS

In this chapter, I review the literature as follows: Section One introduces the concept of meaningful work, defining its core components and exploring factors contributing to those components. Section Two contrasts static and dynamic perspectives on work meaningfulness, with the static view framing meaningfulness as a stable outcome shaped by job design or individual values, while the dynamic view recognizes it as an evolving experience influenced by changing personal and contextual factors. Section Three delves into the challenges of sustaining \ work meaningfulness over time, addressing factors that lead to meaning erosion, such as misalignment between job expectations and reality, constraints on personal agency, and value incongruence. In Section Four, I review existing literature on strategies to combat work meaninglessness and regain work meaningfulness, examining both organizational interventions and individual coping approaches. Finally, Section Five highlights the gaps in current research and presents the focus of my dissertation, which aims to provide a much more comprehensive, person-centred perspective on sustaining and reconstructing meaningfulness dynamically across career transitions and life changes.

2.1 Introduction to Meaningful Work

To explore the concept of meaningful work, it is essential first to clarify "work." While some scholars include unpaid activities like caregiving or volunteering as forms of work, this study focuses on paid employment, where individuals may have less autonomy and prosocial motives (Both-Nwabuwe et al., 2017). Work encompasses multiple facets: from discrete tasks (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) to a collection of tasks in the form of a job (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) or a role that encompasses not only formal job tasks but also the relational and

organizational expectations associated with one's position (Elangovan et al., 2018), as well as broader career trajectories that encompass a series of roles over time (Hall & Chandler, 2005).

In this study, the unit of analysis is the individual's *job role*, encompassing specific tasks and relational expectations within an organizational context. I examine participants' meaningfulness across multiple jobs during their careers, considering how each job—with its unique tasks, relationships, and organizational demands—contributes to or detracts from their sense of meaning in work.

2.1.1 Defining Meaningful Work

Meaningful work has been defined in numerous ways, reflecting its inherently complex and multidimensional nature. For instance, Bailey and Madden (2019), in their review, highlighted the diversity of approaches, noting that 28 different measurement scales were used across just 56 articles. Similarly, Both-Nwabuwe et al. (2017) identified four broad approaches for defining meaningful work: significance and purpose (the dominant approach), constituents of meaningful work (its key components), fit (the alignment between work and self), and fulfillment (meeting specific personal needs). This study adopts the significance and purpose approach, which is also the most widely cited and emphasizes the intrinsic essence of what makes work meaningful rather than focusing on the conditions under which it becomes meaningful.

Following Pratt and Ashforth (2003), this study defines meaningful work as "work and/or its context are perceived by its practitioners to be, at minimum, purposeful and significant." According to this definition, meaningful work encompasses both the intrinsic worth that individuals attribute to their work and the context of their work (or work environment).

To further understand these components, purposefulness and significance can be distinguished in how they establish work meaningfulness. Significance refers to the intrinsic value of work, reflecting how much work and its purpose matter personally to the individual, as Martela and Pessi (2018) describe. This component is subjective and relies on personal fit, identity alignment, or intrinsic value (Robertson, O'Reilly, & Hannah, 2019). In contrast, purposefulness often reflects a broader social dimension, where work's worthiness is perceived in terms of its contribution to society or alignment with societal norms and moral values (Allan, 2017; Bunderson & Thompson, 2009). As such, work becomes deeply meaningful when it is both significant to the individual and perceived as contributing to societal good. However, meaningfulness can also exist when work is personally valuable to the individual, even if it lacks societal recognition or approval (e.g., the immigrant service provider in Germany continued to find meaning in helping refugees integrate despite declining public support during the refugee crisis (Florian et al., 2019)). Understanding what constitutes meaningful work provides a foundation for exploring how individuals come to experience it. In the following section, I examine the underlying mechanisms that enable individuals to find meaningfulness in their work.

2.1.2 Mechanisms Underpinning Finding Work Meaningful

Rosso et al.'s (2010) framework for "pathways to meaningful work" integrates multiple mechanisms and pathways to explain how work becomes meaningful. Their framework is grounded in the dual motivations of agency[2] (the drive to assert and expand one's sense of self)

[2] For further definitions please see Appendix A

and communion (the drive to connect with others). These motivations serve as foundational forces that guide the meaning-making process. Building on these motivations, the framework identifies several mechanisms-such as self-efficacy, purpose, belongingness, and transcendence-that describe how individuals construct or sustain meaningfulness in work. These mechanisms represent the psychological and social processes that enable meaning-making.

The framework organizes these mechanisms along two dimensions: self versus others and agency versus communion. Actions oriented toward the self focus on personal development and self-expression, while actions directed toward others emphasize relationships and contributions. Combining these dimensions yields four pathways through which work can become meaningful:

- **Individuation (Agency-Self)**: Meaning arises when work enhances self-worth, self-efficacy, and personal achievement.
- **Self-Connection (Communion-Self)**: Meaning is found when work aligns with one's authentic self, reflecting personal values and fostering intrinsic motivation.
- **Contribution (Agency-Others)**: Work is considered meaningful when it serves a greater purpose, impacting others in society and fostering a sense of self-transcendence.
- **Unification (Communion-Others)**: Meaning emerges from harmony with others through shared values, belonging, and social connection.

By distinguishing between motivations, mechanisms, and pathways, Rosso et al.'s (2010) framework provides a comprehensive and layered understanding of how work becomes meaningful. Among existing models that explore the dimensions and pathways contributing to meaningful work—such as those by Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012), Steger, Dik, and Duffy

(2012), and Schnell & Hoffmann (2020)—I selected Rosso et al. (2010) as it best captures my participants' experiences and provides a strong foundation from which to build.

While Rosso et al.'s (2010) framework provides a valuable theoretical foundation for understanding work meaningfulness through static mechanisms and pathways, its primary focus is on explaining how meaning is created in relatively stable work contexts. The framework emphasizes broad psychological and social processes (e.g., self-efficacy, belongingness) and general pathways (e.g., individuation, contribution) as static categories. In contrast, this dissertation explores work meaningfulness as a dynamic and context-sensitive construct, particularly for International Skilled Migrants (ISMs). The driving force and adaptive processes examined in this study emphasize adaptability, capturing how individuals actively reconstruct work meaningfulness in response to disruptions, transitions, and evolving personal and contextual circumstances. This distinction in purpose, focus, and scope positions the forthcoming analysis to build on and extend the insights provided by Rosso et al.'s framework.

2.2 Static vs. Dynamic Perspectives on Work Meaningfulness

Traditionally, research on work meaningfulness has approached it from two primary angles: the objective and the subjective. The objective perspective, exemplified by models like Hackman and Oldham's Job Characteristics Model (1976), suggests that meaningful work can be fostered through specific job features such as autonomy, task significance, and skill variety. In this view, meaningfulness is seen as something that can be systematically designed and embedded within job tasks, organizational culture, and leadership styles, making it a stable characteristic of the job itself (Allan, 2017; Carton, 2018). This perspective assumes that by incorporating these features into work design, organizations can create conditions under which

individuals will experience their work as meaningful. While valuable, this view focuses heavily on structural factors, often overlooking how personal perceptions, life stages, and broader social environments contribute to shaping individual experiences of work meaningfulness.

In contrast, the subjective perspective emphasizes the individual's personal experience of meaning, shaped by alignment with values, aspirations, and life goals (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Steger et al., 2012). This perspective highlights that meaningful work arises when individuals experience a resonance between their work roles and core beliefs, viewing work as an extension of their personal values. Notably, Salancik and Pfeffer (1978) complement this view by arguing that job attitudes and meanings are not inherent in job characteristics but are instead socially constructed and influenced by informational social processing. They emphasize that individuals' perceptions of job characteristics, shaped by their social environments and personal contexts, play a critical role in determining attitudes and experiences. This approach acknowledges that the same job or task may be deeply meaningful to one person but lack significance for another, depending on their unique values and circumstances. Moreover, social contexts—such as family expectations, community values, and societal norms—can either reinforce or disrupt the individual's perception of meaningful work, suggesting that meaning is not isolated to personal alignment alone (Ashforth & Pratt, 2003). While this subjective approach provides valuable insights, it often treats meaningfulness as a stable outcome shaped by relatively static personal values without fully addressing how life transitions and external pressures can dynamically shift what individuals consider meaningful over time.

Emerging research indicates that meaningfulness is neither a fixed property of jobs nor an unchanging individual experience but a dynamic process shaped by both contextual and personal changes (Bailey & Madden, 2017; Mercurio, 2019). Vough's (2008) study is one of the earlier

contributions to the dynamic perspective on work meaningfulness, examining the pathways individuals use to manage threats to their self-involvement in work. She defines work meaningfulness as the degree of personal investment and connection individuals feel toward their job. In her framework, threats to self-involvement—such as a lack of challenge, inappropriate tasks, or distractions—prompt individuals to engage in either connecting processes (e.g., substituting one source of meaningfulness for another, expanding their focus) or disconnecting processes (e.g., suppressing interest in certain aspects of work, minimizing the importance of work, or treating tasks as mere obligations). These processes reflect different strategies individuals use to respond to threats: successful connecting processes help preserve self-involvement and foster meaningfulness, whereas reliance on disconnecting processes tends to erode self-involvement and lead to experiences of meaninglessness.

This study, however, adopts a broader and more multidimensional definition of work meaningfulness, conceptualizing it as the significance and purposefulness of work rather than solely self-involvement. Significance refers to the intrinsic value of work to the individual, while purposefulness reflects its perceived contribution to broader societal or moral goals. In this framework, self-involvement is not equated with meaningfulness but is instead considered a potential outcome when work is experienced as significant and purposeful. This distinction expands the conceptual lens of meaningfulness beyond the task-level, organizational-centred processes emphasized by Vough (2008).

While Vough's pathways offer valuable insights into episodic adjustments, they are limited to short-term, transitional responses to meaning threats. Her framework primarily addresses task-level mechanisms for maintaining or restoring self-involvement in relatively stable work environments. By contrast, this study explores how individuals navigate the

dynamic, long-term reconstruction of meaningfulness amidst significant life transitions, such as migration. It examines how evolving personal, relational, and societal contexts influence the ongoing negotiation of meaning, extending beyond the episodic focus of Vough's work.

By situating Vough's contributions within the broader literature, this study highlights the need for a more comprehensive understanding of work meaningfulness. Specifically, it emphasizes that meaningfulness is dynamically reconstructed through the interplay between objective job and organizational features and subjective, socially shaped perceptions, continuously adapting to changing contexts and personal transitions. This expanded perspective lays the foundation for exploring the complexities of meaning-making across career and life transitions, which will be elaborated in subsequent sections.

2.3 Challenges in Sustaining Meaningful Work and Its Erosion

The concept of work meaninglessness has emerged as a counterpoint to meaningful work, describing a subjective experience where work feels negative, purposeless or insignificant (e.g., May, Gilson, & Harter, 2004). While early literature tended to view meaninglessness as merely the absence of meaningfulness, more recent scholarship emphasizes that it constitutes a distinct, global state with unique antecedents and mechanisms (Bailey & Madden, 2016, 2019). Bailey and Madden (2019) identify relational processes such as powerlessness, disconnection, and devaluation as contributors to this experience, underscoring its dynamic and relational nature.

Complementary to this perspective, Elangovan et al. (2018) proposed that global meaninglessness arises through a dynamic process involving sensemaking, misalignment, and the recognition of discrepancies between one's current work reality and aspirational work narratives. Their Sensemaking-Misalignment-Discrepancy-Submission (SMaDS) model

illustrates how episodic meaninglessness can coexist with episodic meaningfulness across different dimensions of work, such as tasks, relationships, and organizational aspirations. For instance, an individual might find interactions with colleagues meaningful (people-related) while experiencing a lack of purpose in day-to-day tasks (task-related). This coexistence reflects the multifaceted nature of work aspirations and demonstrates that meaninglessness does not always pervade all aspects of work simultaneously.

However, when episodic misalignments accumulate and affect multiple dimensions of work, they can lead to a global erosion of meaning. This holistic and sustained dissonance arises from the realization of discrepancies between actual work experiences and aspirational narratives. Unlike episodic meaninglessness, which may be addressed through adjustments or reframing, global meaninglessness represents a deeper, more pervasive state characterized by frustration, alienation, and hopelessness. This framing challenges the notion that meaninglessness is simply low meaningfulness. Instead, it highlights that meaninglessness is an active, emergent state with profound emotional and cognitive consequences, inviting further exploration into the mechanisms that drive its coexistence or transition.

When the sense of work meaningfulness is disrupted, individuals may experience varying degrees of meaninglessness, ranging from minor dissatisfaction to profound alienation from their work. These degrees are shaped by structural and relational factors, such as restricted autonomy, repetitive or non-purposeful tasks, and incongruence between personal and organizational values (e.g., Bailey & Madden, 2016; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012). Experiences of disempowerment, isolation, and a lack of recognition from supervisors and peers further exacerbate the erosion of meaning, leading individuals to feel undervalued or disconnected from their work (e.g., Bailey & Madden, 2019; Vough, 2008).

Positive or negative experiences can act as triggers, prompting individuals to reassess the significance and value of their work (Elangovan et al., 2018; Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). When the cumulative impact of misalignment reaches a threshold, it leads to a more holistic evaluation where individuals assess their work-life narratives, comparing current realities with aspirational states. This broader self-evaluation moves beyond specific misalignments, serving as a periodic stock-taking exercise that vividly highlights discrepancies. Such realizations of discrepancy drive the erosion of meaning as the gap between actual and aspirational narratives becomes increasingly difficult to reconcile (Elangovan et al., 2018).

As individuals grapple with these challenges, maintaining a stable sense of meaningfulness becomes difficult, underscoring the need for adaptive strategies to counteract meaning erosion. Without effective strategies to reconcile these misalignments, individuals may experience long-term disengagement or develop negative attitudes toward their work. These insights underscore the importance of examining the interplay between personal aspirations and job realities in sustaining meaningful work, setting the foundation for exploring strategies to combat meaning erosion in the next section.

2.4 Combating Work Meaninglessness or/and Regaining Work Meaningfulness

The study of work meaninglessness has gained traction as an essential counterpart to the exploration of meaningful work, highlighting complex factors that lead individuals to experience their work as purposeless, undervalued, or misaligned with personal values (Bailey & Madden, 2016, 2019; Mercurio, 2019). Research indicates that combating meaninglessness requires more than simply enhancing positive job characteristics; it necessitates targeted strategies that

individuals and organizations can apply to restore and sustain a sense of purpose when it is at risk of erosion (Carton, 2018; Elangovan et al., 2018; Rosso et al., 2010).

A significant body of literature examines organization-centred approaches (i.e., studies focus on understanding how employees deal with work meaninglessness or enhance their perceived work meaningfulness during the course of a job in an organization), such as work design studies, which incorporate strategies such as job enlargement and enrichment. Job enlargement expands the range of tasks to utilize diverse skills, while job enrichment adds autonomy and responsibility, fostering a deeper sense of purpose and motivation (Chung & Ross, 1977; Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Parker, Morgeson, & Johns, 2017). Together, they support intrinsic motivation by aligning job structure with human needs for growth and engagement. These interventions elevate work meaningfulness by increasing autonomy, task significance, and employee involvement in decision-making (Hackman & Oldham, 1975; Martela & Riekki, 2018). Unfortunately, while these organizational-led strategies can support intrinsic motivation, they often overlook the subjective variations in how individuals interpret and experience meaning.

The Social Information Processing (SIP) approach offers an alternative perspective, which emphasizes the role of social context in shaping perceptions of work meaningfulness (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). According to this view, social cues and informational environments significantly influence individual attitudes and interpretations of job characteristics. Employees may reconstruct meaning through interactions with peers and leaders, who provide narratives that shape how tasks and roles are perceived. By fostering a supportive social environment and leveraging positive social cues, organizations can mitigate the effects of meaninglessness, even in roles with limited intrinsic rewards. This approach complements work design strategies by

focusing on the dynamic interplay between individual perceptions and social information, broadening the scope of interventions to combat work meaninglessness.

While these organizational approaches represent top-down strategies, employees themselves can actively reshape their experience of work meaningfulness. To address these gaps, job crafting emerged as a complementary approach that empowers employees to reshape their roles to better align with personal needs and values. Job crafting studies emphasize proactive behaviours such as task, relational, and cognitive adjustments, which help individuals find greater alignment with their work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Tims, Bakker,& Derks, 2013). Yet, job crafting can be of limited use when employees face constraints like heavy workloads or lack of support, leading them to rely on meaning-focused coping strategies instead (Gordon et al., 2015; Petrou et al., 2012; Solberg & Wong, 2016). These strategies, such as reframing, refocusing and recalibrating their work perspectives, allow employees to adapt to constraints but may fall short of fully restoring meaningfulness in restrictive contexts (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Bailey & Madden, 2019).

Another strategy discussed in recent research is the adoption of situational purpose, which involves constructing a temporary sense of purpose to sustain meaningfulness during times of disruption (Jiang, 2021). In her longitudinal study of employees at a refugee-resettlement agency during a crisis, Jiang demonstrated how individuals shifted from prioritizing long-term, quality-focused goals to adopting immediate, quantity-oriented objectives. This reframing allowed employees to align their work with the pressing demands of the environment, sustaining meaningfulness amidst emotional and organizational strain. However, situational purposes are not universally effective. As this study later explores, some individuals may require

alternative strategies to address their unique needs when situational purposes fail to restore meaningfulness effectively.

When meaninglessness becomes pervasive, studies show that employees may ultimately choose to leave the organization or profession in search of more aligned opportunities (Schabram & Maitlis, 2016; Kar et al., 2021). However, voluntary turnover alone may not be an adequate response, particularly for individuals seeking long-term career satisfaction rather than immediate role adjustments. These insights highlight the need for dynamic and adaptive strategies that address both short-term and long-term challenges to work meaningfulness.

2.5 Dissertation Focus

Building on the previous discussion, this dissertation shifts the lens from static approaches to a dynamic understanding of how individuals reconstruct work meaningfulness across time and contexts amidst disruptions. While much of the existing literature conceptualizes meaningfulness as a fixed property of jobs or individuals, emerging perspectives suggest it is better understood as an evolving process, continuously shaped by contextual challenges, personal growth, and shifting life circumstances (Bailey & Madden, 2017; Mercurio, 2019). This dissertation extends this dynamic perspective by focusing on how individuals, particularly immigrants, navigate disruptions in their sense of work meaningfulness and adapt their strategies to reconstruct meaningfulness over time.

Most studies emphasize organizational or job-specific solutions. While exceptions in the careers literature, such as career sustainability (e.g., de Vos et al., 2020) and subjective career success (e.g., Smale et al., 2019), these works adopt a more person-centred perspective, exploring how individuals sustain employability or achieve career satisfaction by aligning

personal and professional goals. Yet their focus remains on employability and achievement rather than the reconstruction of work meaningfulness, leaving a critical gap in understanding how individuals adapt meaning-making processes during significant life transitions. This dissertation adopts a person-centred approach to address this gap.

The existing literature frequently assumes that restoring alignment between one's job and personal aspirations automatically reinstates meaningfulness. This assumption overlooks the tensional and contextual nature of meaning-making, wherein individuals actively negotiate their values and preferences against professional, organizational, political, cultural, and economic forces across different levels—daily work, career trajectories, and beyond (e.g., Bailey & Madden, 2017; Mitra & Buzzanell, 2017; Mercurio, 2019).

Moreover, this research shifts the focus from an episodic understanding of meaningfulness tied to isolated events (e.g., Jiang, 2021; Bailey & Madden, 2019) to a global perspective that captures the enduring sense of work meaningfulness shaped by cumulative experiences over time (e.g., Allan et al., 2019). While episodic experiences of meaninglessness have been explored (e.g., Bailey & Madden, 2019; Mercurio, 2019), the broader global experience of work meaninglessness remains underexamined. This dissertation addresses this gap, recognizing that global work meaninglessness is not only more cognitively threatening—it challenges deeply held assumptions about identity and worldview—but also more consequential, with far-reaching impacts on individuals' lives (van Tongeren & van Tongeren, 2021). Responding to Bailey and Madden’s (2019) call for research on how individuals experience and respond to global work meaninglessness, this study advances understanding of how individuals navigate these profound challenges.

By focusing on the experiences of immigrants, this dissertation explores how contextual challenges, evolving aspirations, and personal growth converge to shape the reconstruction of work meaningfulness. It highlights the interplay between episodic and global dimensions of meaningfulness, emphasizing its fluid and context-dependent nature. Through a process-oriented lens, this study deepens our understanding of how individuals navigate disruptions and adapt their meaning-making strategies amidst dynamic and challenging transitions. In doing so, it contributes to broader conversations about the complexities of sustaining meaningful work across changing life circumstances, addressing critical gaps in existing research and offering fresh insights into the evolving nature of work meaningfulness.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter outlines the research design and methodology used to examine how International Skilled Migrants (ISMs) in Canada experience and navigate the erosion of work meaningfulness. By integrating a pragmatic philosophy of inquiry with constructivist assumptions, the study adopts an approach that values the complex and evolving nature of ISMs' experiences, allowing for both depth and flexibility in understanding how participants reconstruct work meaningfulness within a new cultural context.

The chapter includes an overview of the philosophy of inquiry and research approach, providing the rationale for focusing on ISMs and highlighting the unique challenges they face in aligning their skills with suitable employment, which impacts their sense of purpose and identity. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews using purposeful sampling, to ensure diversity in gender, occupation, country of origin, and career stage among ISMs. Finally, the analytical approach is explained, detailing the use of ideal-type analysis (Weber, 1904; Stapley et al., 2022) as a method to identify shared patterns and variations in participants' adaptive strategies while accounting for individual and contextual nuances.

3.1 Philosophy of Inquiry and Research Approach

3.1.1 Philosophy of Inquiry

This dissertation is grounded in a pragmatic philosophical stance, emphasizing practical relevance and the iterative exploration of problems (Patton, 1990; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Pragmatism prioritizes actionable insights and practical solutions, making it particularly suitable for studying complex phenomena like how ISMs reconstruct work meaningfulness after migration. Ontologically, pragmatism views reality as dynamic and shaped by the interaction

between subjective experiences and objective contexts, providing a practical foundation for addressing the interplay of personal and environmental factors.

In complement to this pragmatic foundation, I adopted constructivist epistemological assumptions to explore how participants subjectively construct meaning within their social and cultural contexts (Schwandt, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Constructivism focuses on the interpretive processes through which individuals make sense of their experiences, ensuring that participants' perspectives remain central to the inquiry while acknowledging the researcher's role in interpretation. This combination reflects an effort to address both the subjective meaning-making processes and the practical implications of participants' experiences.

While pragmatism and constructivism stem from distinct traditions, their integration is consistent with the pragmatic emphasis on adaptability and usefulness in addressing real-world questions. Pragmatism's pluralistic ontology supports the exploration of both subjective and contextual dimensions, while constructivist epistemology provides the tools to deeply understand how participants' meanings are formed. Together, they enable a more comprehensive understanding of how meaning in work is reconstructed after migration.

Methodologically, this philosophical alignment guided my effort to preserve participants' voices while engaging in systematic analysis to identify patterns and processes. Qualitative methods inspired by grounded theory principles (Charmaz, 2000, 2006) and ideal-type analysis (Stapley, O'Keeffe, & Midgley, 2021, 2022; Weber, 1904) were employed to connect participants' subjective experiences with broader contextual factors, ensuring that the findings are both grounded in the data and practically relevant.

By integrating pragmatic ontology with constructivist epistemology, this dissertation aims to balance the need for actionable insights with an in-depth exploration of participants'

lived experiences. This approach reflects a commitment to addressing the complexity of the research question through complementary philosophical perspectives rather than adherence to a single paradigm.

3.1.2 Research Approach

This dissertation adopts an exploratory research design influenced by grounded theory principles to investigate how ISMs in Canada navigate the erosion and regaining of work meaningfulness in the context of migration. Grounded theory methodological practices, such as memoing, constant comparison, and iterative data collection and analysis, provided a flexible and reflective framework for exploring participants' experiences (Charmaz, 2000, 2006). These practices, rooted in grounded theory's principle of generating insights directly from the data, ensured that emergent themes and processes guided the inquiry without imposing rigid preexisting frameworks.

In alignment with this exploratory design, ideal-type analysis (Stapley et al., 2021, 2022; Weber, 1904) was employed as the central methodological approach for structuring and interpreting the data. Ideal-type analysis is a qualitative research method designed to synthesize complex social phenomena into generalized conceptual constructs, or "ideal types," that highlight recurring patterns, themes, and structures observed across datasets (Stapley et al., 2022). Originally developed by Max Weber, ideal types are heuristic tools that abstract and accentuate key features. They do not represent "pure" forms of reality but serve as analytical frameworks to interpret and compare both typical and deviant cases. By systematically organizing insights, ideal-type analysis illuminates relationships and variations within the data, offering clarity without oversimplification.

The rationale for adopting ideal-type analysis in this research includes the following:

- **Illuminating Complex Phenomena**: Ideal-type analysis provides a structured approach to synthesizing the complexities of ISMs' experiences. It helps capture the nuanced processes through which participants reconstruct work meaningfulness, offering clarity without oversimplification.
- **Framework for Comparison**: Ideal types serve as tools for systematic comparison, enabling the identification of both shared patterns and unique adaptations in participants' experiences. This comparative lens is crucial for exploring how individual strategies for regaining work meaningfulness differ across contexts.
- **Integration of Context and Subjectivity**: Recognizing that the construction of ideal types is shaped by the researcher's perspective and context, this approach incorporates reflexivity and transparency. It ensures that the analysis is grounded in the data while acknowledging the interpretive nature of the constructs.

By combining grounded theory principles with ideal-type analysis, this study benefits from both emergent, data-driven insights and a structured framework for comparison. Together, these approaches enable a dynamic and context-sensitive exploration of how ISMs combat the erosion of work meaningfulness and develop pathways to regain purpose and fulfillment.

3.2 Justification of Research Context (ISMs)

3.2.1 Why Important?

International Skilled Migrants (ISMs) are migrants with at least an undergraduate degree or equivalent who have permanently moved to work and live abroad (Cerdin et al., 2014; Hajro et al., 2019). Studying ISMs in Canada is essential not only for economic reasons but also for

understanding how migration personally affects skilled individuals striving to build a fulfilling life in a new country. ISMs bring a wealth of cultural diversity, unique aspirations, and a wide range of skills and knowledge, contributing greatly to Canada's economy and social fabric. They embody hope, resilience, and a dedication to self-improvement, having left their home countries to create better futures for themselves and their families.

ISMs contribute significantly to the Canadian economy, addressing labour shortages in a country with an aging population and low birth rates, accounting for over 80% of workforce growth in recent years (Government of Canada, 2022; Statistics Canada, 2022). Yet, beyond the numbers, ISMs' integration into Canadian society is deeply intertwined with their personal identity and sense of purpose. Work is not merely a means to survive but a vital part of ISMs' self-worth and fulfillment. When skilled immigrants face barriers to fully utilizing their talents, the impact extends beyond economic loss—it affects their psychological well-being, sense of dignity, and connection to their new country and community (Cerdin et al., 2014; Aycan & Berry, 1996).

The erosion of work meaningfulness in ISMs' lives can lead to feelings of alienation and a diminished sense of belonging. Addressing this issue humanizes the broader societal goals of diversity and inclusivity, acknowledging that meaningful work is central to every person's life purpose and self-respect. Investigating ISMs' pathways to regaining meaningful work thus becomes a way to support not just ISM's economic integration but their holistic well-being, fostering a society where individuals are valued for their full potential. Insights gained from this study can guide policymakers, managers, HR professionals and community organizations to develop integration programs that prioritize dignity, psychological health, and social cohesion, enhancing both individual lives and the broader community fabric.

3.2.2 Why Appropriate?

Focusing on International Skilled Migrants (ISMs) is well-suited for addressing my research questions, which explore both the erosion of work meaningfulness and the process of regaining it. ISMs face unique experiences of underemployment and significant challenges in aligning their skills with suitable employment, making them a compelling group for examining these dynamics. ISMs often face prolonged underemployment due to institutional, social, and regulatory barriers, such as the demand for Canadian work experience and lack of credential recognition (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Government of Canada, 2022; Immigration.ca, 2024; Matejicek, 2010). These barriers frequently result in jobs that do not fully utilize their qualifications, leading to a high rate of overqualification, three times that of non-immigrants, with ISMs often relegated to survival jobs far below their skill level (Cornelissen & Turcotte, 2020).

Underemployment is a significant driver of meaning erosion in ISMs' work, as it creates a disillusioning gap between their career aspirations and the reality of their employment opportunities. This discrepancy can lead to a diminished sense of purpose and fulfillment, contributing to a loss of work meaningfulness (Elangovan et al., 2018). Additionally, migration introduces a shift in social context, which can alter ISMs' value systems and identities through acculturation, further impacting their perceptions of meaningful work (Berry, 1997; Park & George, 2013).

ISMs' strategies to cope with these challenges vary, ranging from adaptive flexibility and compromise to proactive resource-seeking and resilience-building (Ali, 2016; Daya, 2016). These diverse responses make the ISM context highly appropriate for exploring the process of regaining work meaningfulness, as ISMs are often navigating the intersection of professional

identity, cultural adjustment, and personal values within a new and challenging work environment.

3.3 Data Collection

This section outlines the data collection process, including the methods used, participant recruitment, and the design of semi-structured interviews. It provides an overview of how the research captured participants' experiences and ensured a diverse and proper sample to explore the dynamics of work meaningfulness among ISMs.

3.3.1 Interview Strategy and Operationalization of Work Meaningfulness Change

The primary data source in this dissertation is the semi-structured interview, chosen for its alignment with my research goals. This format allowed consistent exploration of core concepts, such as changes in work meaningfulness, while allowing participants to share their unique experiences in depth. Semi-structured interviews effectively balance structure and flexibility, which is essential for capturing the complex and evolving nature of work meaningfulness in the migration context.

This approach also facilitated reflective questioning, encouraging participants to think deeply about shifts in their perceptions of work meaningfulness over time. By including core questions across interviews, I could systematically compare responses on topics like professional identity, immigration motivation, and extent of work meaningfulness, while the flexible format enabled follow-up questions based on initial responses. This approach allowed for deeper insights and revealed individual variations. Overall, the semi-structured format ensured that key

themes were consistently covered while allowing the exploration of personal nuances, revealing how and why work meaningfulness evolved for each participant.

To encourage participants to compare their global perception of work meaningfulness before and after migration and across different jobs (operationalize work meaningfulness changes), I requested them to score their jobs in terms of work meaningfulness. I told them they had 0 to 7 and 0 to minus 7 to score the jobs. I asked this question once after they explained their career path back home and once after their responses to their career path in Canada (for an example of this question, please see Appendix C). My purpose was fourfold: (1) understanding their frame of reference regarding work meaningfulness comparisons; (2) pushing them to compare their different jobs in terms of their meaningfulness to extract what matters to them and how they define work meaningfulness; (3) understanding global work meaningfulness and how positive and negative experiences lead to a global evaluation of work worthiness; and (4) understanding their definition of work meaninglessness in terms of less meaningful, no meaning, or negative meaning of work. Then, I mapped these scores on a graph to understand the fluctuations experienced by each individual.

It is important to note that these graphs were designed to operationalize changes in global work meaningfulness. However, during data analysis, I focused on participants' language and narratives rather than relying on numerical representations. This decision was made because participants' reference points were not consistent across jobs. Moreover, when describing situations that were closer in time, they often perceived them as more extreme. Finally, while these graphs were helpful for assessing fluctuations within an individual experience, they were not valid for comparisons across individuals due to differing reference points, definitions, and personal frameworks.

3.3.2 Interview Procedure

Upon receiving emails or verbal expressions of interest from potential participants, I would send them an information letter explaining the study's purpose, potential risks and benefits, and how their anonymity and confidentiality would be protected (see Appendix B). I encouraged them to ask any questions or raise concerns. If they agreed to participate, they could either sign the consent form included with the information letter or reply to my email using the provided consent script. These signed forms and emails served as their informed consent. To protect their anonymity, I invited participants to choose a pseudonym from a list I provided or create their own. Participants enjoyed selecting a pseudonym, and this approach ensured each participant's data was labelled uniquely.

Initially, once they confirmed participation, I sent a follow-up email with a link to a short Qualtrics survey to gather demographic information (see Appendix D). I explained that their responses would help me tailor the interview questions to fit their background better, making our interview time more productive. One of the goals of this pre-interview survey was also to verify whether participants met the eligibility criteria. For those who did not meet the sample criteria, I expressed appreciation for their interest and encouraged them to stay in touch for future studies. Eligible participants received a confirmation email, and we scheduled a Zoom meeting.

However, as the recruitment progressed, I noticed that many potential participants preferred not to complete the online survey and, in some cases, declined to participate altogether due to the extra step. In response, I revised the procedure and began asking the same demographic and eligibility questions verbally at the beginning of the interview instead of through the survey. This adjustment reduced barriers to participation and helped me proceed

directly with the interview. As a result, I conducted interviews with 34 individuals, three of whom were later omitted from the study due to not meeting the eligibility criteria.

Before the interview, I reminded participants that they could skip questions if they felt uncomfortable and reiterated my commitment to creating a safe, supportive environment. To establish rapport, I sometimes shared my own experience with immigration challenges, helping to build trust and a deeper connection. I clarified that the study focused on their personal experiences with their careers, not on evaluating their performance, and reminded them that they could withdraw from the study at any time, with their data being promptly deleted. Finally, I asked for their consent to record the interview. Once granted (as all participants agreed), I began recording on Zoom.

3.3.3 Interview Structure

To develop interview questions (please see Appendix C for interview questions), I made a matrix to ensure that I can ask questions to elicit information addressing my research questions. However, following Kvale and Brinkmann's (2008) suggestion, I wanted the interview to go smoothly, like a conversation. To do so, I reordered the questions from the matrix to follow a chronological order to extract the story of immigrants from when they chose their field of study back home, all through their work experiences in their home country to their decision to immigrate and their work experience in Canada to their future vocational aspirations.

3.3.4 Sampling Strategy and Recruitment

I employed purposeful sampling (Morse, 1991) to recruit participants through my network, the Gustavson School community, and immigrant service providers (e.g., Business

Edge Professional Development at the University of Toronto). I also used snowball sampling to reach additional participants and quota sampling to ensure diversity across specific variables.

My aim was to capture a heterogeneous sample that reflected a wide range of experiences in coping mechanisms and pathways for regaining work meaningfulness. To achieve this, I diversified the sample based on the following key variables extracted from literature review:

- **Years of Residency in Canada**: This allowed me to capture varied stages of adjustment, as the time since migration influences individuals' adaptation to new professional and cultural contexts, impacting their work meaningfulness trajectories.
- **Occupation (Pre- and Post-Migration)**: I considered participants' occupations before and after migration, including changes in fields or roles, to examine how these shifts influenced their meaningful work experiences. Some ISMs moved into entirely different professions post-migration, while others sought to reconnect with their original fields.
- **Work Orientation**: I included individuals with different orientations toward work—calling, career, and job orientations—to reflect diverse attitudes about work's role in life. Migration can influence shifts in these orientations, with some individuals reorienting to prioritize financial stability or community contribution, affecting their pathways to regaining work meaningfulness (Schabram et al., 2022).
- **Country of Origin**: I diversified the sample by participants' countries of origin to capture cultural and institutional differences that influence career transitions. For instance, differences in professional standards in the home countries or potential stereotypes in the host country may shape their challenges and strategies for regaining work meaningfulness (Remennick, 2013; Konitzer et al., 2019).

- **Gender**: Recognizing that family roles and acculturation experiences can vary significantly between men and women, I aimed for gender diversity to explore potentially distinct pathways in regaining work meaningfulness (Creese & Wiebe, 2012).
- **Life and Career Stage**: Participants at different life stages (e.g., single or married, with or without children) and career stages (e.g., early career versus nearing retirement) were included to examine how life responsibilities and career stage advancement affect work meaningfulness. These factors often shape individuals' priorities and coping strategies when facing work-related challenges (Matejicek, 2010; Lopez & Ramos, 2017).

The target population included foreign-born adults who:

1) Immigrated to Canada to settle permanently,
2) Had been in Canada for over one year,
3) Held paid employment (full-time, part-time, or self-employed),
4) Had been employed prior to immigrating to Canada,
5) Had either a university degree with at least two years of work experience in their home country or a minimum of six years of work experience in a specific occupation (without a formal degree),
6) Had experienced underemployment in Canada.

Criterion 4 (prior employment before migrating) was added because underemployment presumes a reference point—without prior work experience, it would be difficult to assess whether participants experienced a drop in status, relevance, or utilization of their skills after migration. Criteria 1 and 5 align with definitions of ISMs (Cerdin et al., 2014; Hajro et al., 2019). A minimum of two years of work experience was required to ensure participants had

begun developing a career identity prior to migration. Criterion 2 (at least one year in Canada) was chosen to allow sufficient time for participants to experience the effects of social context change and underemployment and develop insights on their work meaningfulness. Finally, criteria 3 and 6 ensured that all participants had faced underemployment, either working outside their expertise or below the professional level held in their home country (see Appendix A for definitions).

3.3.5 Number of Participants in Sample and Conceptual Saturation

In total, I conducted 34 interviews. However, three participants were excluded after the interviews due to not meeting the eligibility criteria. As a result, the final sample included 31 participants. Following a grounded theory approach, I began analyzing data and familiarizing myself with emerging concepts from the first interview onward. Consistent with Charmaz (2006), I conducted initial memo writing to capture individual participant profiles, summarizing their responses and noting unexpected insights that diverged from my prior understanding based on existing literature. This approach allowed me to identify potential avenues for contribution and refine my interview questions over time. Initially, memos mirrored the order of my interview questions. However, as I progressed, they became more focused on themes relevant to my research questions, such as evolving definitions of meaningful work and participants' unique coping strategies in response to erosion, like "self-isolation from people back home."

To further organize insights, I developed a table to catalogue participants' explanations for why specific jobs felt meaningful or meaningless. This iterative process allowed me to capture a breadth of perspectives on meaningful work. As my understanding deepened, I

adjusted my follow-up interview questions based on participant responses and shifted my coding to focus more precisely on narratives of regaining meaningfulness in work.

Rather than aiming to reach a strict saturation point, where redundancy (or repetition of data) indicates that no new information is emerging, I prioritized what Nelson (2017) refers to as "conceptual depth." Conceptual depth involves reaching a richness and complexity in understanding key categories rather than simply achieving data repetition. This approach helped ensure that I captured the nuances within each participant's experience, providing a robust foundation for theoretical insights.

As I approached conceptual depth, my focus shifted from understanding how work meaningfulness changed within individuals to exploring the processes they used to regain a sense of meaning. This deeper focus, inspired by Nelson's emphasis on conceptual richness, allowed me to capture both unique narratives and broader patterns across participants in how they rebuilt meaningfulness in their work lives. After interviewing Miguel (33rd interview), whose responses provided extensive insight and marked a milestone in achieving conceptual depth, I observed that I had reached a sufficient saturation point for theory building. This point, as Corbin and Strauss (2015) suggest, is not merely about reaching redundancy but about ensuring that categories are fully developed and integrated with rich variations.

Following this milestone, I conducted one additional interview. However, by this stage, my analysis confirmed that I had achieved sufficient conceptual depth and breadth for my dissertation. This robust foundation ensured that the data collected was both comprehensive and aligned with the dissertation's purpose, providing a thorough understanding of participants' experiences without the need for further data collection solely for redundancy.

3.3.6 Participant Profile

This study includes 31 international skilled migrants who shared their experiences of navigating employment and finding meaning in work before and after immigration to Canada. The interviews ranged in length from 33 minutes to 1 hour and 32 minutes, with an average duration of 1 hour. Participants, 71% of whom were female, ranged in age from 29 to 73 and immigrated to Canada between the ages of 25 and 54 from 1998 to 2022. Approximately 65% were from Iran, with the remainder from India, the Philippines, Turkey, the Czech Republic, Nigeria, Ukraine, and Germany. As planned, they had diverse occupations as 19% of participants came from the medical field (including physicians and nurses), 31% from engineering, and the remainder represented various fields such as the arts, accounting, human resources, and librarianship.

Before immigration, participants held established careers in their home countries, with work experience ranging from 2 to 34 years. Approximately 23% had limited experience (2-5 years), 35% were in the early stages of their careers (6-10 years), 23% had mid-level experience (11-15 years), and 19% had advanced experience (16-34 years). For many, work played a central role in their identities and sense of purpose. Since moving to Canada, they have encountered diverse employment paths, including initial survival jobs, shifts to new fields, or roles that partially align with their previous expertise. Despite their qualifications, participants frequently face challenges finding jobs that fully utilize their skills, reflecting the common barriers skilled migrants encounter in the Canadian job market. Since moving to Canada, participants have encountered diverse employment paths. At the time of the study, 26% (eight participants) remained underemployed and were still struggling to re-engage with work that could provide a sense of meaningfulness. The rest had experienced varying forms of occupational re-

engagement, although not all had fully regained a sense of meaningful work. Specifically, 19% had returned to their pre-migration occupations, 16% had reconnected to their purpose through similar roles, 19% had reconstructed meaning through a mosaic of roles, 13% had found meaning in unrelated occupations, and 6% had shifted their focus beyond paid work to other fulfilling pursuits.

Demographically, the group includes both married participants (some with children) and single or separated individuals, each bringing unique motivations for immigration. Married participants often cited family-focused reasons, such as reuniting with spouses, creating a safer environment for their children, or ensuring better educational and social opportunities for their families. In contrast, single and separated individuals were frequently driven by personal aspirations, advancing their careers, pursuing educational opportunities, or achieving greater economic stability. These varied motivations illustrate the different personal and family dynamics that shaped participants' decisions to immigrate, ultimately influencing their expectations and approaches to work and life in Canada.

This section offers a background overview to set the stage for understanding the deeper, individualized journeys of work meaningfulness explored in the findings. Examining these profiles reveals the range of experiences that shape each participant's perspective on work, identity, and adaptation in a new country (for demographic tables and graphs, please refer to Appendix E and F).

3.4 Analytical Approach

In this section, I delineate the steps I took in ideal-type analysis as the central analytical method of this dissertation to explore how ISMs experience and respond to the erosion of work

meaningfulness in Canada. This approach, rooted in Max Weber's sociological framework, offers a systematic approach to organizing data by identifying "ideal types"—conceptual groupings that reflect recurring patterns across participants' experiences (Weber, 1904; Stapley et al., 2022). This method was later adapted into qualitative research by Gerhardt (1994) and has been applied in fields like psychology to study human behaviour and social phenomena (e.g., Ainsworth & Bell, 1970; Baumrind, 1991; Boonstra & Söderberg, 2024; McCare & Costa, 1987; McLeod, 2011; Thomas & Broussard, 2023).

Unlike thematic analysis, which identifies shared themes across datasets, ideal-type analysis groups participants based on similarities in their entire accounts, forming typologies that highlight both commonalities and variations. While it shares some similarities with narrative analysis in its attention to participants' stories, ideal-type analysis differs by focusing on comparing and grouping participants' accounts as part of broader patterns rather than examining individual narratives in isolation. This makes it particularly well-suited for my dataset of 31 interviews, allowing for a nuanced understanding of participants' experiences while enabling comparisons across diverse cases. Its emphasis on developing typologies bridges within-case and cross-case analyses, offering a structured yet flexible framework for exploring complex social phenomena. Following this overview, I will detail the steps taken to apply this method in my study.

1. **Familiarization with the Dataset**

The first step of ideal-type analysis focuses on immersing oneself in the dataset to comprehensively understand the participant's experiences and the phenomena under study. This step ensures the researcher is familiar with the content and ready to engage in deeper analysis. For this study, I began with reading the transcriptions, detailed memoing, documenting

participant profiles, initial observations, and early insights that emerged during data collection. These memos captured notable patterns, surprises, and potential contributions to the literature. I also employed open coding to carefully examine participants' descriptions of how their work meaningfulness evolved over time, paying close attention to contextual influences and key turning points. This process provided a nuanced understanding of individual experiences and prepared the groundwork for the subsequent steps.

2. Writing Case Reconstructions

The second step involves creating detailed summaries of individual participants' narratives, referred to as case reconstructions. These reconstructions ensure a holistic understanding of each participant's journey before comparisons are made across cases. In this study, I began by developing chronological summaries that capture the key stages of participants' experiences, such as their initial immigration challenges, erosion of work meaningfulness, and eventual recovery or transformation (see Appendix H for chronological case reconstruction). Visual tools, such as graphs mapping participants' work meaningfulness over time, were also employed to track significant transitions and turning points (see Appendix G for visuals).

By comparing these visuals and chronological narratives, I identified three overarching phases common to most participants: survival jobs, reorientation, and regaining work meaningfulness[3]. Based on these findings, I developed a second set of case reconstructions

[3] Almost universally, participants began with a phase where their work contributed the least to their meaning in life, reflecting the challenges of underemployment or survival jobs post-immigration. The middle phase, reorientation pahse, varied across participants, marked by significant events or realizations that prompted deliberate actions or mindset shifts. Finally, for those who progressed beyond erosion, the regaining work meaningfulness phase was characterized by their work contributing to their meaning in life again, though to varying degrees and in different forms.

structured around these three phases, treating them as key parts of each narrative. For each phase, I analyzed participants' concrete[4] and abstract[5] responses to challenges, adapted from Reiss et al. (2021) (see Appendix I for a phased case reconstruction example). This phased structure enabled an analysis of participants' personal and social reactions to initial disillusionment, coping mechanisms during underemployment, and responses to triggers identified as turning points in the reorientation phase and adaptive approaches in the regaining work meaningfulness phase.

By employing these two stages of case reconstruction, I was able to capture the richness of individual accounts while organizing the data in a way that facilitated later comparisons. This process provided a detailed exploration of participants' adaptive approaches, offering insights into both shared patterns and unique adaptations.

3. Constructing Ideal Types

Constructing ideal types involves identifying patterns and grouping participants based on shared characteristics to develop conceptual categories that capture the diversity and commonality within the dataset. After completing the phased case reconstructions, I analyzed participants' accounts across the three identified stages—survival jobs phase, reorientation phase, and regaining work meaningfulness phase. For each phase, I examined the dominant features of the participant's journey, the driving forces, and the adaptive approaches reflected in participants' responses, considering both social and personal concrete and abstract strategies they employed to navigate challenges, adapted from Reiss et al. (2021). These approaches included, for example,

[4] Concrete responses refer to observable, specific actions participants took in response to their challenges, such as seeking employment or reaching out for social support.

[5] Abstract responses involve reflective thoughts or beliefs, encompassing personal insights about identity or broader reflections on societal norms.

embracing transitional purposes during difficult phases or affirming self-worth in the face of underemployment. This allowed me to identify recurring patterns and categorize participants into distinct groups based on similarities in their experiences and adaptive approaches.

Through iterative comparison, I grouped participants who shared similar approaches within these phases, resulting in the construction of ideal types. Each ideal type reflects a distinct set of strategies and transitions participants used to navigate the erosion of and regaining of meaningfulness in their work. These ideal types do not represent "pure" or exhaustive forms of participants' experiences but rather serve as conceptual tools to illuminate patterns and variations across the dataset. This typology provides a structured framework for understanding how participants adapted to and overcame the challenges of work meaningfulness erosion in the context of migration.

By organizing the data in this way, I was able to develop a clear, systematic framework for cross-case comparisons, allowing for a deeper exploration of the relationships, tensions, and variations within participants' journeys. This process set the stage for identifying optimal cases and forming detailed ideal-type descriptions.

4. Identifying Optimal Cases

The fourth step involves selecting representative cases that best illustrate each ideal type, ensuring that the core characteristics of each type are clearly articulated. In this study, I identified participants whose experiences exemplified the defining features of each grouping. For instance, Grace, Glory, and Hannah were identified as those who successfully relied on transitional purpose, while Esther, Aurora, Emma, and Maha represented participants for whom self-worth affirmation played a central role. Outliers were also noted and analyzed to highlight

alternative strategies and exceptions, enriching the understanding of diversity within the dataset and providing a more nuanced view of participants' adaptive approaches.

5. Forming Ideal-Type Descriptions

This step focuses on developing detailed descriptions of each ideal type, emphasizing their defining features and how they relate to one another. These descriptions serve as conceptual tools, providing a structured framework to interpret participants' experiences and identify patterns within the dataset.

For this research, I constructed narratives for each typology by synthesizing data from case reconstructions, linking specific participant accounts to each ideal type, and highlighting both shared and unique pathways participants used to regain work meaningfulness. The process included analyzing participants' responses to challenges, contextual influences such as occupation, cultural background, family roles, and their approaches to regaining meaning.

These descriptions provided a comprehensive view of each ideal type, facilitating meaningful comparisons and deeper insights into participants' adaptive approaches. You will later read these descriptions in the findings chapter of this study, where they are presented with supporting evidence and contextual explanations to illustrate the diversity and complexity of participants' pathways to regaining work meaningfulness.

6. Checking Credibility

The sixth step ensures that the ideal types are firmly grounded in the data and meaningful for interpretation. In this study, I iteratively refined the typologies by employing constant comparison and memoing, revisiting themes and categories to verify their coherence and alignment with participants' accounts. Visual tools and graphs provided clear representations

of patterns and supported the validation of ideal types, ensuring they reflected the richness and complexity of participants' experiences.

To account for occupational influences, I compared narratives within broadly defined professional categories. For instance, I observed that different occupations inherently carried distinct work goals and orientations. Teachers often focused on contributing to students' growth, while engineers initially prioritized the prestige of their field before shifting attention to innovation, quality, and societal impact. Healthcare providers, on the other hand, commonly emphasize societal contribution and patient care. By grouping participants with similar occupational backgrounds, I was able to consider the role of occupational context in shaping their experiences. However, "controlling" for these influences in qualitative analysis differs from quantitative methods; rather than holding the impact constant, it involved being mindful of how occupational context shaped participants' narratives while allowing for individual variation within the same field.

Additionally, my Iranian background allowed me to remain attuned to certain cultural nuances among my primarily Iranian participants. This cultural understanding enabled me to recognize unwritten norms and societal expectations, such as face-saving practices and attitudes toward different occupations, which shaped participants' experiences. While I did not explicitly compare findings across countries, I acknowledged that much of the existing literature on work meaningfulness is rooted in North American contexts. Recognizing these cultural distinctions—such as differing views on agency as an individual versus collective force—helped identify contributions my findings could make to existing theories. This reflexive awareness further ensured that the typologies and insights derived from the data were both credible and contextually informed.

7. Making Comparisons

The final step involves comparing the ideal types to uncover relationships, tensions, and variations across the dataset. In this study, I explored how different adaptive approaches were shaped by the centrality of work to participants' meaning in life. Comparisons were conducted both within and across typologies to examine how participants' strategies evolved over time, highlighting both shared trajectories and distinctive pathways. Visual representations, such as circles depicting changes in the centrality of work meaningfulness, were employed to map participants' journeys and provide a clear, comparative framework that illuminated key patterns and dynamics within the data.

Although I have described these steps as sequential for clarity, in practice, many of them were conducted simultaneously, reflecting the inherently iterative nature of the analysis. For example, while constructing ideal types, I often revisited earlier case reconstructions or refined themes based on insights gained during comparisons. This iterative process allowed for constant reflection and adjustment, ensuring the analysis remained grounded in the data while accommodating emerging patterns and complexities. By following this dynamic approach, I was able to systematically analyze the data, construct meaningful typologies, and offer nuanced insights into how ISMs navigate the erosion and recovery of work meaningfulness. This process provided a structured yet flexible framework for capturing the richness and variability of participants' experiences.

The chapter outlined the research design and methodologies used to explore phases, dominant features, driving forces, adaptive approaches and role of social interactions participants employed to navigate the erosion and recovery of work meaningfulness. Chapter Four presents

the findings, detailing these phases and diverse approaches participants utilized across their journeys.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter explores the multifaceted journey of ISMs as they navigate three interconnected phases: *survival jobs phase, reorientation phase, and regaining work meaningfulness phase*. These phases capture the evolving dynamics of participants' experiences as they moved from navigating initial misalignment and focusing on survival to reaching critical turning points where escalating tensions urged them to address discrepancies and ultimately reconstruct work meaningfulness post-migration, as outlined in the framework in Table 1. The findings draw upon the identification of these three phases and their dominant features, the primary driving forces within each phase, the adaptive approaches participants employed, and the critical role of social interactions throughout their journeys.

To provide clarity, the terms used in this framework are defined as follows:

- **Phases**: The overarching stages most participants moved through—survival jobs phase, reorientation phase, and regaining work meaningfulness phase—each with distinct characteristics.
- **Dominant Features**: These refer to each phase's key characteristics and overall sentiments, such as misalignment, escalated tensions, and a renewed sense of purpose.
- **Primary Driver:** The fundamental need motivating participants' efforts in each phase, such as the need for survival, alleviating tensions or achieving coherence and purpose.
- **Adaptive Approaches:** The strategies participants used, whether intentional or unintentional, to navigate challenges and make progress, such as embracing

transitional purposes, strategically developing skills in the same field or industry, and broadening their sense of purpose.

- **Role of Social Interactions**: This refers to the functions of interpersonal interactions in each phase, spanning from offering emotional support to facilitating transformative relationships.

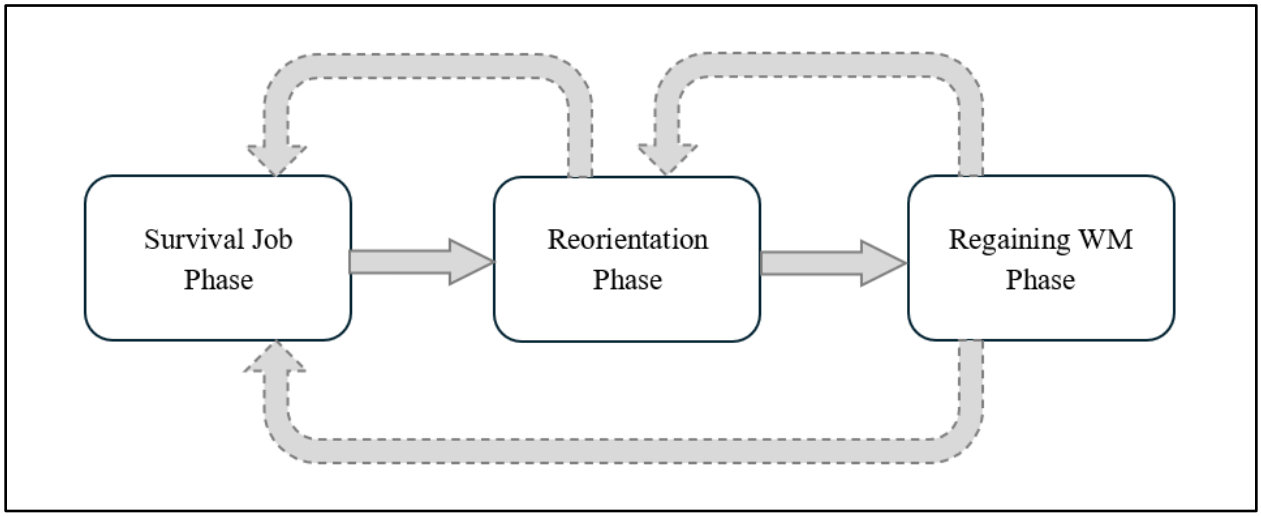

Figure 1-The Evolving Journey of ISMs to Regain Work Meaningfulness across Three Phases

Table 1-A Thematic Framework of ISMs' Journey to Regain Work Meaningfulness across Three Phases

Phases	Survival Jobs Phase	Reorientation Phase	Regaining Work Meaningfulness Phase
Dominant Features	**Disorientation and struggle** a) Striking sense of misalignment b) Disillusionment c) Feeling being lost d) Frustration	**Tension and reassessment** a) Triggers b) Escalated tensions c) Evolving perspective on opportunities d) Being empowered through taking actions	**Integration and renewal** a) Growing alignment between aspirations and realities b) Reconciliation of past and present c) Feeling more settled d) Renewed sense of purpose
Primary Driver Force	**Need for survival**	**Need for tension alleviation**	**Need for coherence and purpose**
Adaptive Approaches	**Reactive coping approaches** a) Embracing transitional purpose b) Affirming self-worth c) Diluting misalignment	**Proactive explorations** a) Strategically developing skills in the same field or industry b) Exploring alternative paths beyond the original field or industry c) Leveraging networks d) Redefining the role of work in their life	**Integrative reconceptualization** a) Broadening b) Expanding c) Evolving d) Narrowing e) Rechanneling
Role of Social Interaction	**Selective engagement and seeking validation** a) Self-isolation/selective engagement b) Maintaining connections with former networks c) Validating contribution	**Strategic networking and cultural bridging** a) Tapping into networks for knowledge sharing and referrals b) Reassessing priorities through social interactions c) Social interactions as a catalyst for growth d) Bridging cultural expectations and facilitating integration	**Recognition, belonging and contribution** a) Recognition of professional identities and impacts b) Fostering a sense of belonging c) Helping others and giving back

In the *survival jobs* phase, participants encountered a stark misalignment with their pre-migration professional identities and aspirations. This phase was characterized by disillusionment, the feeling of being lost, and the immediate need to address survival needs. Adaptive approaches such as embracing transitional purposes, affirming self-worth and diluting misalignment enabled participants to endure this challenging phase while maintaining hope for future opportunities. Social interactions during this phase were often marked by selective engagement, as participants focused on immediate survival needs and limited their social networks to cope with the underemployment.

The *reorientation* phase underscores pivotal moments when participants encountered jarring triggers, such as job loss, recurring rejections, burnouts, reaching breaking points due to misalignment, or facing workplace inequities. These moments often acted as catalysts for recognizing broader discrepancies and initiating responses to alleviate tensions. Participants began leveraging networks, reassessing priorities, and engaging in social interactions to foster growth and bridge cultural expectations, facilitating integration. This phase marked a transition from reactive coping to proactive decision-making. A notable shift toward building new connections and seeking support defined social interactions, as participants aimed to rebuild networks and establish relationships that offered both emotional reinforcement and practical opportunities.

Finally, the *regaining work meaningfulness* phase reflects participants' efforts to realign their work with broader aspirations and values. Adaptive approaches—including broadening, expanding, evolving, narrowing, and rechanneling—emerged as participants reconstructed their sense of purpose within the context of their new lives. Social interactions during this phase were

characterized by building a sense of belonging, recognition of professional identities and impacts, and giving back by contributing to others, reinforcing participants' sense of purpose and connectedness.

Although these three phases emerged as dominant patterns across participants' experiences, their progression was not always linear or uniform. Some participants moved back and forth between the survival and reorientation phases multiple times before making sustainable progress, while others who had reached the regaining work meaningfulness phase later encountered disruptions—such as layoffs or health issues—that led to renewed erosion and re-engagement with earlier strategies. A few participants, especially those with access to strong financial or social support systems, reported only a mild sense of erosion and transitioned quickly to the reorientation phase. Therefore, the model presented here is a conceptual framework that captures recurring patterns, not a rigid sequence that applies equally to all ISMs (see Figure 1).

This chapter is organized to reflect these phases and their specific characteristics. Each phase is analyzed using the framework elements: dominant features, primary driver force, adaptive approaches, and the role of social interactions. By integrating these elements, the findings offer a comprehensive understanding of how ISMs navigate the erosion and regaining of work meaningfulness, emphasizing the interplay between individual needs, existing and developing opportunities, adaptive approaches, and the evolving social contexts participants actively shaped and navigated.

4.1 Survival Jobs Phase

The survival jobs phase marked the initial and often most challenging stage of participants' journeys, defined by profound misalignment and uncertainty. This phase was characterized by the necessity of taking on survival jobs—roles that provided financial stability but often clashed with participants' professional identities and aspirations. Participants grappled with systemic barriers, such as credential recognition issues and the demand for Canadian work experience, which limited access to roles aligned with their qualifications. These challenges often led to feelings of disillusionment, frustration, and a sense of being lost. For some, survival jobs were temporary bridges to future opportunities, fostering growth and resilience over time. For others, they represented a painful disconnect from their pre-migration careers, highlighting the emotional and psychological toll of navigating this transitional stage. This phase was underscored by a dual focus on enduring misalignment while seeking ways to adapt and sustain hope for eventual professional realignment.

4.1.1 Dominant Features of the Survival Jobs Phase

The survival jobs phase was marked by *a striking sense of misalignment*, where many participants found themselves in roles that sharply diverged from their pre-migration professional identities and aspirations. For these individuals, survival jobs served as functional necessities, providing financial stability but failing to align with their qualifications, expertise, or long-term goals. This misalignment often led to emotional and psychological strain, although not all participants experienced this phase in the same way, underscoring the varied ways individuals navigated this period of adjustment.

Participants frequently encountered barriers such as credential recognition issues, the requirement for Canadian work experience, and systemic biases, which limited their

opportunities and pushed them into roles far removed from their professional backgrounds. The challenges were compounded by the sheer number of job applications participants submitted without receiving responses, further emphasizing the lack of recognition for their skills and professional backgrounds. **Howard**, a former award winner architect from Iran, reflected: "Believe it or not, I applied for about 200 jobs in about six months." Similarly, **Aurora**, an HR manager from India, applied for over 200 managerial and entry-level jobs but struggled to secure employment. "I didn't understand what was wrong with my resume. Maybe they didn't recognize the companies I worked for or were just interested in Canadian experience," she shared. These experiences of being overlooked illustrate how systemic obstacles deepened the sense of misalignment and undermined participants' sense of professional value.

For many, this phase brought profound *disillusionment*. **Maha**, an experienced physician from Iran, reflected on the painful reality of abandoning her medical career: "It was the most painful thing for me... erasing all of those years and achievements was hard." **Miguel**, who had worked as the CEO of a major coffee company in Mexico, spoke about the emotional impact of serving coffee at Tim Hortons (a Canadian fast-food chain known for coffee and donuts, where service work is often fast-paced and physically demanding): "This period deepened my feelings of failure and led me to question whether I had made the right decision by moving to Canada." These reflections underscore the emotional toll of survival jobs, particularly for those whose identities were deeply tied to their work.

However, not all participants experienced the same strong emotional strain from survival jobs. For some, survival jobs served as a bridge to future opportunities. **Khushi**, who had been a chartered accountant in India, worked as a housekeeper in Canada while pursuing his studies at a Canadian university. He viewed his survival job as a refreshing change from the high-pressure

finance world: "I didn't perceive it as underemployment," he explained, noting his enjoyment of the physical activity and the kindness of his colleagues. "I knew this was not forever; my studies would lead me back to a career aligned with my qualifications."

Similarly, **Glory**, an experienced nurse from Iran, took a temporary job in a chain store while preparing for her nursing licensure exam in Canada. She described the experience as "fun" and an opportunity to practice her English: "I knew this was just a step before I could start my career in nursing again." For these participants, the certainty that survival jobs were temporary, coupled with their ongoing efforts to transition toward more meaningful work, underscored a proactive approach to their circumstances.

For many others, survival jobs led to *feelings of being lost* and questioning their place in Canada. **Sophia**, an artist and art instructor from Iran, vividly described her disorientation: "When you come as a permanent resident, you're like a piece of a puzzle in the middle of nowhere. I was lost." **Roxana**, a teacher from Iran who took on retail work in Canada, shared a similar sentiment: "I was asking myself what I was doing here." These reflections reveal the broader psychological challenges participants faced as they struggled to make sense of their new environment and their position within it.

Frustration was another prevalent emotional response, particularly when participants perceived their roles as exploitative or excessively demanding. **Sun**, an environmental engineer from Iran who worked at Winners (a discount retail store) in Canada, described her experience: "They made us do hard labour for minimum wage. It felt like exploitation." Similarly, **Daniel**, a former financial manager at Iran's National Bank, described his survival job in Canada as a stark departure from his professional identity. Working as a general labourer and cleaning fish in a grocery store, he reflected on the repetitive and uninspiring nature of the tasks: "It was jarring

and degrading," he shared, highlighting the frustration of engaging in work so disconnected from his expertise and career aspirations.

While the survival jobs phase was not universally experienced as disillusioning or frustrating, it was often characterized by the recognition of misalignment and the range of negative emotional responses these roles evoked. For those who viewed it as a temporary bridge, their concurrent efforts to prepare for future opportunities and the certainty of eventual progress provided a buffer. These diverse narratives reveal the complexity of this phase, shaped by individual perspectives, systemic barriers, and external constraints.

4.1.2 Driving Force in the Survival Jobs Phase: Need for Survival

The survival jobs phase was fundamentally driven by the broader *need for survival*, encompassing both financial stability and the emotional toll of uprootedness from familiar environments and social ties. Participants frequently cited the necessity of meeting immediate responsibilities, such as supporting their families, paying for basic expenses, and navigating the high costs associated with resettlement in Canada. At the same time, they grappled with the disconnection from their previous networks and environments that had anchored their identities, adding an emotional layer to their struggles.

For many participants, this urgency left little room for choice or exploration of roles that aligned with their qualifications or career aspirations. **Daniel**, a former financial manager from Iran, reflected on the urgency to secure income, regardless of the nature of the job: "I didn't have the luxury to wait for something better. Bills don't stop." Similarly, **Glory**, a nurse from Iran, worked in a chain store while preparing for her nursing licensure exam. She noted, "I knew this wasn't forever, but I needed to support myself and stay on track." While these narratives

emphasize financial survival, they also reflect the need to establish a sense of stability amidst uncertainty and separation from their former lives.

The need for survival also intersected with broader systemic barriers, such as credential recognition issues and the Canadian work experience requirement. These challenges limited participants' ability to access professional roles, reinforcing the necessity of taking survival jobs as a financial and emotional safety net. For **Sam**, an experienced project manager with a PhD from Iran, navigating these barriers meant taking on entry-level work: "They don't look at your certificates here; they want Canadian work experience. So I volunteered at a construction site."

While the survival jobs phase was often accompanied by disillusionment or frustration, the broader need for survival—including financial security, emotional resilience, and adaptation to unfamiliar environments—drove participants' strategies for navigating this challenging period. For most, this phase was less about advancing their careers and more about establishing the foundational conditions needed to eventually pursue professional alignment and personal fulfillment.

4.1.3 Adaptive Approaches in Survival Jobs Phase

In the survival jobs phase, participants faced profound misalignment between their current roles and their professional aspirations, compounded by the emotional and psychological strain of adapting to an unfamiliar context. Despite these challenges, many demonstrated remarkable adaptability through strategies that helped them endure this phase while maintaining resilience and a sense of continuity. Rather than succumbing to disillusionment or frustration, participants employed various adaptive approaches to navigate the disconnect between their pre-migration professional identities and the demands of survival jobs. These strategies included

embracing transitional purposes, *affirming their self-worth*, and *diluting the misalignment* they experienced. Each approach reflects a distinct way of mitigating the strain of survival jobs, with participants drawing on both cognitive reframing and practical adjustments to sustain themselves during this challenging period. The following sections explore these approaches in detail, highlighting the diversity of strategies participants employed to cope with the misalignment and navigate this transitional phase.

4.1.3.1 Embracing Transitional Purpose

As participants entered survival jobs that did not align with their prior professional experiences or aspirations, I initially expected they would express an obsession with the discrepancy between their current roles and their original expectations or aspirations. Given that scholars often theorize that this incongruity leads to an erosion of work meaningfulness, I anticipated it would be a prominent theme in participants' stories. However, I did not hear this perspective consistently across participants. Instead, I observed that they adopted *transitional purposes*[6]—temporary, situation-specific purposes for their survival jobs that helped them endure this transitional phase without fundamentally altering their views on meaningful work.

To illustrate this dynamic, I selected five individuals from my sample who all had backgrounds in healthcare and identified deeply with their professional roles before migrating. This group includes participants who had worked as nurses, physiotherapists, and physicians—fields in which they found a sense of purpose and personal fulfillment. Despite their shared backgrounds in terms of strong identification with healthcare, each participant adopted a

[6] This concept aligns with Jiang's (2021) identification of situational purposes in organizational crises. While Jiang's study focused on sustaining meaningful work during workload surges, the findings here extend the concept to the migration context, highlighting its variability and context-dependent effectiveness for International Skilled Migrants.

transitional purpose as an adaptive approach to varying degrees, helping them to cope with the misalignment between their previous professional identity and the reality of survival jobs in Canada. Their experiences reveal how transitional purpose was more helpful for some than others, providing a glimpse into the challenges they faced in this transition.

Transitional purposes provided these participants with a way to tolerate and navigate their survival jobs by focusing on their works' immediate, functional benefits. This approach often involved framing their work as a means to support their families financially, fulfill obligations, or contribute in a way that, while not professionally fulfilling, still provides a sense of meaning to their lives. These transitional purposes helped fill the gap between their aspirations for meaningful work and the reality of their current experiences, allowing them to retain a sense of direction in jobs they otherwise found misaligned with their professional aspirations.

For instance, **Grace**, a former physiotherapist from the Philippines, approached her factory job with a practical mindset, finding purpose in her ability to support her family financially and contribute to her loved ones back home. She explained, "I was making more money here than as a physiotherapist in the Philippines. This job was meaningful to me because it allowed me to make money... to somehow contribute to my family, and I could send money back home, too... It gave meaning to my life." By focusing on the benefits to her loved ones, Grace found a transitional purpose in her work, bridging the gap between her professional aspirations and her current role.

Similarly, **Glory**, who had worked for several years as a nurse in Iran, found a transitional purpose in her early survival job at a chain store in Canada. In her nursing role, she was accustomed to providing direct, meaningful care and support to patients, which gave her a strong sense of professional fulfillment. In contrast, her temporary retail job did not match the

depth or significance of her healthcare experience. However, she framed this role as an opportunity to earn an income and improve her English, focusing on the practical benefits it provided. "I knew this wasn't my career, but it was a chance to meet people, learn, and earn," she reflected. By viewing the job as a temporary stepping stone, Glory was able to manage the disconnect from her prior career without feeling overwhelmed, seeing it instead as a transitional experience that would help her acclimate to life in Canada.

Hannah, a former professional nurse from Iran, found herself working as a healthcare assistant in Canada, a role she felt was profoundly misaligned with her professional skills and ambitions. Reflecting on this experience, she shared, "For me, it was like torturing. I was working as a supervisor in Iran, and here I was an assistant. It wasn't a job for me—it was torturing." Despite her initial frustration, Hannah embraced a transitional purpose in this position, driven by necessity rather than a belief in the inherent meaningfulness of the role. Facing financial pressures to support her family, she took on the job while simultaneously navigating the challenges of a foreign healthcare system, language barriers, and the process of obtaining certifications to resume her nursing career. Throughout this period, she remained optimistic and determined, saying, "I always say I'm going to be a winner; I would do it." While her commitment to nursing as a meaningful profession remained intact, her immediate focus shifted to financial survival and family support, enabling her to endure the difficulties of this transitional phase.

In contrast, **Maha**, a former emergency room physician from Iran, initially took on digital marketing roles as a temporary solution while balancing family responsibilities. Her transitional purpose began with financial stability, but over time, it grew into a deeper engagement with self-employment and digital marketing as she recognized its potential for flexibility and creativity.

Reflecting on this shift, Maha shared, "It wasn't what I trained for, but I tried to see it as an exploration. Maybe I could make something of it." Although she faced a difficult transition from medicine to entrepreneurship, Maha's transitional purpose eventually led her to redefine her career goals.

Esther provides an example where transitional purposes were insufficient to bridge the gap between her past identity as a physician and her survival job. Having worked as a physician in Czech Republic , Esther deeply valued the patient-centred approach and personal fulfillment her previous role provided. In Canada, she pursued licensing to work as a massage therapist, seeking a role that would allow her to continue in healthcare in some capacity. However, despite obtaining this license, Esther struggled to find meaning in massage therapy, as it lacked the depth and professional identity she associated with her work as a physician. She reflected, "It's not what I worked my life for. I feel like I've lost my true purpose." Esther's case illustrates how, even with the technical steps taken to remain in healthcare, transitional purposes fell short of providing the sense of purpose she needed, underscoring the limitations of this strategy for those who draw their sense of work meaningfulness more strongly through their professional identity.

Embracing transitional purposes in this phase as a distinct adaptive approach highlights the varying degrees to which participants could find temporary meaning in their survival jobs. For those with a stronger orientation toward seeing work as a central part of their identity—such as Esther— the immediate, practical benefits of transitional purpose provided limited relief from the misalignment they experienced. In contrast, participants who viewed work more as a means of contributing to others, even in temporary roles, found transitional purposes somewhat effective in bridging the gap. This variation in how participants related to their work revealed the limitations of transitional purpose as an adaptive approach. Those with a strong connection to

their professional identities often required strategies that went beyond practical benefits, leading to the emergence of self-worth affirmation approaches. These strategies, explored in the next section, allowed participants to maintain a sense of alignment with their core professional values, even during survival jobs.

4.1.3.2 Affirming Self-worth

While transitional purposes provided practical motivation for participants during the survival jobs phase, they often fell short of fulfilling the deeper needs related to their sense of self-worth that many associated with their sense of meaningful work. For participants like **Aurora**, **Emma**, **Esther**, and **Maha**, simply enduring survival jobs for financial stability or family contribution was insufficient for sustaining a sense of self-worth, which, for them, was deeply tied to feeling valuable and competent in their professional identities. Thus, meaningfulness for them was not just about contributions to others but was intrinsically connected to a sense of personal worth and identity within their work.

Self-worth affirmation emerged as a secondary coping mechanism (adaptive approach), filling the gaps left by transitional purpose. Participants adopted behaviours that reinforced their professional identities, often drawing on past accomplishments or current standards of excellence to maintain a sense of worth.

Aurora, for instance, found her survival job as an HR administrator in Canada drastically different from her former role as an International HR Manager in India, where she thrived on shaping company culture and mentoring others. Although the new position allowed her to support her daughter and work remotely, it lacked the depth and leadership she valued. To cope, she maintained ties with former colleagues and a mentor back home, who reassured her of her

potential and abilities. She also dedicated herself to high standards in her current work, sharing, "Even if it's a simple job, I make sure I do it well... I don't want anyone to say, 'Oh, she's not from here, so she doesn't know what she's doing'." Through these efforts, Aurora preserved her sense of professional pride.

Emma, a dedicated educator in Iran, viewed teaching as her calling and struggled with her bank job in Canada, which felt misaligned with her passion. However, to affirm her self-worth, she volunteered at local schools, carving out time in the mornings to stay connected to her field. "I really missed my job… I was so curious to know how schools work here," she explained, underscoring her need to stay engaged in teaching even when her primary job did not align. Volunteering reinforced her self-worth as an educator and provided continuity, sustaining her through years of underemployment.

Esther, the former physician from Czech Republic , took on roles in alternative healthcare-related occupations such as massage therapy and holistic health but found the titles and scope misaligned with her identity as a healthcare professional. Disliking being called a "masseuse" due to its connotations, she sought to maintain her professional dignity by connecting with rehabilitation experts and translating advanced techniques with a mentor from her home country. This self-worth affirming engagement with healthcare allowed her to maintain her self-respect and commitment to high professional standards, even though her current role did not reflect the status or scope of her previous career as a physician.

Maha, the former physician from Iran who faced challenges in re-entering medicine in Canada, shifted to survival jobs in digital marketing. Initially, these job roles served only as instrumental, income-driven choices, but Maha soon discovered a deeper form of fulfillment. Through building her own digital marketing business, she affirmed her adaptability and

creativity, sharing, "I started to see that I could do something that was mine, that could grow, even if it wasn't in medicine." Digital marketing allowed Maha to express new skills and regain a sense of self-worth, which somewhat filled the gap left by her inability to practice medicine.

For these individuals, meaningful work was not primarily about contributing to others; rather, it was closely tied to affirming their self-worth and maintaining their sense of professional identity. Within the constraints of survival jobs, participants who found meaning through their professional competence sought self-worth affirmation as a temporary strategy to sustain their identity and purpose. This strategy helped them bridge the gap left by misaligned roles, allowing them to stay connected to their professional skills and values when transitional purposes alone were insufficient.

Building self-worth amidst the challenges of survival jobs provided participants with a sense of stability and resilience, even as they navigated roles that often felt disconnected from their professional identities. However, not all participants relied solely on affirming their self-worth to cope with these misalignments. Many adopted another adaptive approach: reframing their experiences to dilute the sense of misalignment between their current roles and previous identities. This strategy allowed them to temper the emotional strain and find a degree of acceptance within their circumstances, as explored in the next section.

4.1.3.3 Diluting Misalignment

For many participants, survival jobs brought a profound sense of misalignment between their prior professional identities and the work they now performed. Unlike strategies that focused on imagining a transitional purpose or affirming self-worth, this adaptive approach involved reframing perceptions to reduce the emotional strain of misalignment, enabling participants to tolerate and accept their circumstances.

One example of this adaptive approach is **Daniel**, who held a managerial position at a major bank in Iran before migrating to Canada. Initially, he found it hard to accept his survival job, cleaning fish at IGA, a Canadian grocery store chain. The stark contrast between his former managerial responsibilities and his new role created feelings of diminished professional status. However, Daniel began to notice cultural differences in the Canadian workplace, where hierarchical distinctions were less pronounced. He observed that, unlike in Iran, managers and owners actively participated in tasks alongside employees. Reflecting on his experience, Daniel remarked, "I've seen the manager of the IGA come to the cashier and put the people's groceries in the bag." leading him to reflect, "Here, everyone works hard; even the owner works as an employee if needed." This observation led Daniel to reevaluate his initial perceptions, recognizing the egalitarian nature of his workplace. Through this reframing, Daniel found a way to reconcile his role within this new cultural context, which helped dilute the sense of misalignment and made his job more tolerable.

Similarly, **Ella**, who was an English teacher in Iran, struggled with her role as a childcare worker in Canada. Ella initially perceived her new position as reducing her professional contributions to that of a nanny. She described this misalignment poignantly, stating, "We are not teachers; we are nannies." This perception deeply conflicted with her self-concept and led her to question the value of her work. Over time, however, Ella reframed her perspective by focusing on the broader impact of her efforts. She realized that, despite the different job titles and responsibilities, she was still fostering children's growth. This recognition allowed her to affirm, "I am still nurturing young minds." By reinterpreting her role in a way that aligned more closely with her core values, Ella diluted the sense of misalignment and was able to persist in her job.

In both examples, participants did not shift their focus to a transitional purpose or seek to reaffirm their self-worth directly. Instead, they reinterpreted their experiences and adjusted their expectations to align more closely with their current realities. This process of diluting misalignment by reframing helped temper the emotional strain, enabling them to find acceptance and continue their survival jobs while maintaining a degree of psychological resilience.

The adaptive approach of diluting misalignment highlights the role of cognitive reframing in fostering resilience during challenging transitions. By adjusting their perceptions to align with new cultural and occupational realities, participants demonstrated an ability to tolerate and navigate the dissonance between their past professional identities and present circumstances. This approach enabled participants to endure the survival jobs phase without requiring immediate alignment with their broader aspirations or self-concept.

While embracing a transitional purpose, affirming self-worth and diluting misalignment helped participants navigate the survival jobs phase with a sense of professional continuity, these adaptive approaches did not occur in isolation. Social interactions played a critical role in reinforcing participants' resilience, offering emotional support and practical resources that supplemented their strategies. These interactions provided a relational context that both buffered against the strain of survival jobs and laid the groundwork for future opportunities to regain work meaningfulness.

4.1.4 The Role of Social Interactions in the Survival Jobs Phase

During the survival jobs phase, social interactions served as relational foundations that supported adaptive approaches like transitional purpose, self-worth affirmation, and diluting misalignment, facilitating their effectiveness as ISMs adapted to roles far removed from their previous careers and professional identities. Faced with underemployment and the psychological

strain of disconnection from their past achievements, participants naturally gravitated toward specific forms of social interaction to buffer against the erosion of work meaningfulness. By selectively engaging with supportive figures, maintaining connections with former networks, and validating their contributions, ISMs preserved a sense of self-worth and dignity. These interactions allowed participants to endure the challenges of survival jobs, sustaining them until pivotal moments when they could begin to reclaim a sense of agency and long-term purpose.

4.1.4.1 Self-isolation and Selective Engagement

In the survival jobs phase, participants like Grace, Hannah, and Daniel turned to self-isolation and selective social engagement as strategies to protect their sense of dignity.

Grace, a former physiotherapist from the Philippines, chose to self-isolate from friends back home, avoiding discussions about her job in a factory due to feelings of embarrassment. She created a "different persona" in Canada to cope with disconnecting from her former physiotherapist identity. Instead of sharing her struggles with her broader social circle, Grace sought emotional support from her husband, who became a crucial anchor during her difficult transition. She explained, "I tried to isolate myself from my friends back home... I felt embarrassed." Her selective engagement allowed her to maintain her self-worth, choosing to disclose her challenges only to those who could understand and support her.

Hannah, a former nursing supervisor, also distanced herself from her social circle in Iran. She found her underemployment as a healthcare assistant emotionally taxing and refrained from discussing her situation with friends and family back home. Hannah explained, "I never talked about it... because everybody was like, 'Why are you going to Canada? You have everything here, a good job, a good life.'" This choice to limit conversations about her job with

her immediate family allowed Hannah to avoid judgment and preserve her sense of professional identity in the eyes of those in her home country.

Daniel experienced a similar need for selective engagement. Having held a managerial position at a major bank in Iran, he struggled to come to terms with his survival job at IGA, a Canadian grocery store chain, where he initially worked cleaning fish. Instead of discussing his job openly, he avoided mentioning specifics to family members back home, revealing his work details only when his mother visited Canada.

This approach of temporary self-isolation and selective engagement allowed participants to protect their professional dignity in the eyes of those in their home country and affirm aspects of their identity in a phase where they felt displaced from their previous careers. By selectively choosing supportive figures, such as close family members or spouses, they were able to navigate the challenges of underemployment with a stronger sense of dignity.

4.1.4.2 Maintaining Connections with Former Networks:

During their survival jobs phase, participants like Ella and Aurora maintained connections with former professional networks to sustain their sense of identity and purpose, drawing strength from these connections as they navigated their new realities in Canada.

Ella, a former English teacher from Turkey who later worked as a childcare worker in Canada, found solace and affirmation in staying connected with former colleagues and students from her teaching career in Turkey. These relationships reminded her of her significant contributions as a teacher and reaffirmed her self-worth during challenging times in her new environment. Ella shared how seeing her former students grow up, use the skills she had taught them, and stay connected with her on social media provided her with a sense of enduring impact:

"I was really trying to do my best to be a memorable teacher... my students are all grown-ups now, and some of them even have their own families. It was really nice to see them use English in their lives and careers." These ongoing connections helped her stay rooted in her identity as an educator, even as her current role felt far removed from her previous responsibilities.

Aurora, who previously worked as an international HR manager in India and now holds a survival job as an HR administrator in Canada**,** also kept connections with her previous employer and colleagues in India, where she held a senior HR role in a rapidly expanding startup. She described the deep sense of fulfillment she felt from contributing to her former company's growth and how leaving that position had been a difficult decision. To this day, her former employer left the door open for her return, which provided her with a form of psychological security. Aurora explained, "I grew with the company, knew every employee… and I still have friends there; they keep telling me I can come back anytime." This connection gave her a supportive professional anchor that reinforced her self-worth as she adjusted to her survival job in Canada, which felt less aligned with her career aspirations.

Maintaining these professional ties served as a lifeline, reinforcing participants' identities and helping them stay connected to a past where they had experienced greater career fulfillment. By keeping these connections active, Ella and Aurora could draw on their former selves' strengths to navigate the present difficulties.

4.1.4.3 Validating Contributions through Social Interactions

For participants like Aidan and Ella, engaging in job roles that enabled them to witness their contributions firsthand played a significant role in validating their sense of purpose. These interactions, whether directly impacting the community or receiving appreciation from those they

served, allowed them to reconnect with the meaningful aspects of their current work, even when roles felt temporary or mismatched with their prior expertise.

Aidan, a former civil engineer from Iran and current construction coordinator, reconnected with a sense of contribution in Canada not only through visible outcomes in his work as a technician and coordinator but also through sharing these accomplishments with others. Passing by a completed project, like a hospital in Niagara, and sharing this with friends allowed him to express, "I was involved in that," giving him a sense of pride and validation. This acknowledgment of his work, even in a role below his former expertise, helped him foster a connection with others who could appreciate his contributions, reinforcing his sense of purpose. This social affirmation was crucial for Aidan, offering him some fulfillment and a sense of belonging despite the challenges he faced adapting to his new environment.

Ella, an experienced English teacher from Turkey, transitioned to working in childcare in Canada. Initially, she struggled to reconcile her identity as an educator, feeling her new role was closer to babysitting than teaching. However, through her interactions with the children and their parents, Ella gradually recognized the meaningful impact she had on the children's development and explained, "I'm finding myself useful… I am still trying to teach them how to learn while they are playing." Parents frequently expressed appreciation, sometimes through gifts or words of gratitude, which validated her sense of contribution. These interactions provided Ella with a renewed sense of purpose and connection, allowing her to feel valued and respected in her role in Canada.

In summary, the direct acknowledgment of their contributions through social interactions allowed Aidan and Ella to re-establish their sense of purpose in their roles, regardless of initial doubts or misalignments. These experiences underscore the importance of witnessing impact and

receiving appreciation, helping participants reconnect with a deeper sense of work meaningfulness in their new environments.

The survival jobs phase, defined by misalignment, financial necessity, reactive coping approaches, and selective social interactions, represented a pivotal period of adjustment for ISMs. During this time, participants relied on adaptive approaches to cope with roles that frequently clashed with their professional identities and aspirations. However, as these experiences unfolded, many began recognizing opportunities to influence their circumstances and gradually shifted from passive endurance to deliberate action. This progression signalled the start of a new phase—a reorientation—where participants began reclaiming agency and working toward reshaping their professional paths. In the next section, I explore the reorientation phase in greater detail, examining how participants moved beyond coping to actively pursuing realignment in their work and lives.

4.2 Reorientation Phase

The reorientation phase marked a significant shift in participants' journeys as they moved beyond the immediate survival strategies of the earlier phase and began actively reassessing their professional and personal paths. While survival jobs provided temporary stability, escalating tensions arose as participants confronted increasingly visible and intolerable discrepancies between their realities and aspirations. These tensions were amplified by triggers such as job loss, recurring rejections, recurring burnouts, reaching a breaking point in tolerating misalignment, and encountering workplace inequality. Each of these experiences made the misalignment between their work and personal or professional priorities more vividly apparent, prompting a need for deeper reflection and deliberate action.

This phase was characterized by a transition from reactive coping to intentional exploration, where participants began to reevaluate their circumstances and envision longer-term solutions. Unlike the survival jobs phase, where actions were primarily dictated by immediate necessity, participants in the reorientation phase started adopting more strategic approaches to decision-making. They balanced practical considerations with an emerging sense of possibility, exploring ways to navigate systemic barriers and reclaim agency over their professional trajectories.

Social interactions played a pivotal role during this phase, evolving from providing emotional support in the survival jobs phase to facilitating knowledge sharing, mentorship, and practical guidance. These interactions enabled participants to access resources, build networks, and explore opportunities, helping them develop the confidence and tools needed to take proactive steps toward their evolving goals. Through this process, participants began laying the groundwork for the next phase, where they moved toward regaining work meaningfulness by reshaping their professional identities and aligning their work with their broader aspirations.

The following sections explore the dominant features of the reorientation phase, followed by an analysis of the driving force behind participants' transitions and a detailed discussion of the adaptive approaches and the role of social interactions that facilitated their progression during this critical juncture.

4.2.1 Dominant Features of the Reorientation Phase

The reorientation phase was characterized by a shift in participants' approach to their professional and personal challenges, driven by triggers that prompted more holistic reflection and deliberate action. These triggers often brought about a re-evaluation of the misalignment

between their circumstances and aspirations, serving as turning points that shifted participants from coping with survival jobs to actively seeking opportunities for change.

One dominant feature of this phase was the role of *triggers*, such as job loss, recurring rejections, burnouts, breaking points in tolerating misalignment, and heightened perceptions of injustice due to encountering workplace inequities. These events acted as catalysts, forcing participants to confront the limitations of their current situations and consider broader, long-term solutions rather than continuing with temporary coping strategies. As participants became more aware of the broader discrepancy between their current roles and their professional aspirations, they experienced an escalation of tensions. For instance, **Grace**, a former physiotherapist from the Philippines, initially accepted her role as a physiotherapy assistant but became increasingly unsettled after facing inequities in pay and recognition. When she was suddenly let go due to licensing requirements, these tensions culminated in a pivotal realization, motivating her to pursue licensure and reclaim her professional identity. Similarly, other participants described how escalating tensions heightened their awareness of discrepancies and prompted them to reflect on their circumstances more critically.

Another defining characteristic was the participants' *evolving perspectives on opportunities*. Unlike the survival jobs phase, where actions were often dictated by immediate financial necessity or limited options, participants in the reorientation phase began to take more strategic approaches to decision-making. They shifted their focus toward long-term goals, balancing practical considerations with an emerging sense of possibility. These responses included exploring new networks, seeking alternative roles, and adopting strategic maneuvers to reclaim agency over their career trajectories.

Additionally, this phase was marked by a sense of *empowerment*. While external constraints, such as systemic barriers and misalignment, persisted, participants' deliberate responses reflected growing confidence and agency. By engaging in actions that aligned with their evolving priorities, participants gradually regained a sense of control, paving the way for a more proactive and empowered approach to shaping their futures.

I will elaborate on some of the jarring triggers in the next subsection, while the other two dominant features—participants' evolving perspectives on opportunities and their sense of empowerment—will be discussed in greater detail in the adaptive approaches section.

4.2.1.1 Triggers and Participants' Reflections in the Reorientation Phase

In my research, triggers emerged as pivotal internal responses that drew participants' attention to the need for change. Although often sparked by external events, these triggers are fundamentally internal processes. They arise when individuals encounter a jarring incident or reach a threshold of tolerance after repeated experiences, prompting a realization that the current unsatisfying situation will not change without action.

Triggers activate when individuals recognize a significant misalignment between their work-related aspirations and lived realities. This activation may be gradual, as recurring incidents accumulate and create mounting dissatisfaction, or sudden, sparked by a singular event that disrupts their equilibrium. In some cases, even a minor external incident—the proverbial "last straw"—can act as the tipping point, catalyzing an internal response that compels reflection and action.

For example, participants described the impact of both recurring challenges and singular events that brought their dissatisfaction to the surface. **Ali**, a former engineer, faced multiple

layoffs in the oil and gas sector, leading him to question his career path's long-term viability. Over time, the cumulative instability triggered him to explore alternative industries. Conversely, **Sam**'s layoff after major project completion in Canada was a sudden and jarring contrast to his experience in Iran, where layoffs were rare and tied to poor performance. This singular event forced him to reflect on the fragility of his professional future in a new context.

These triggers highlight the internal realization that emerges from these moments, whether gradual or sudden. They are less about the external events themselves and more about the internal process they activate. As will be explored in the following sections, these triggers set distinct pathways of reflection, reevaluation, and adaptation in motion, shaping the ways participants navigated their professional journeys in a new environment.

4.2.1.1.1 Job Loss

For some participants, job loss served as a catalyst for exploring new options in response to sudden shifts in their work environments. These events, while initially unsettling, prompted participants to reconsider their paths and explore new possibilities that broadened their perspectives and options.

When **Sam**, a seasoned project manager with extensive experience managing large-scale construction projects, faced a layoff after the completion of the major project he was managing. This unexpected termination was particularly unsettling for Sam, as it contrasted sharply with his experiences in Iran, where layoffs are rare and usually occur only for poor performance. Reflecting on the differences, Sam noted, "In Iran, they don't let you go easily. You stay even if the company struggles; it's like a partnership."

The unfamiliarity of this event forced Sam to confront the instability of his career in Canada, leaving him questioning the security of his professional future. The layoff became a

jarring moment of uncertainty that pushed him to pause and reflect more deeply on his circumstances. For the first time, Sam began to reevaluate his career path more holistically, considering how his skills might be applied beyond traditional project management roles. This reflective process marked a shift in his perspective as he started to explore broader possibilities for adapting to his new environment, signalling the beginning of a gradual transformation in how he approached his professional trajectory.

4.2.1.1.2 Recurring Rejections

For some participants, the experience of recurring rejections became a defining trigger that disrupted their professional progression and compelled them to reevaluate their circumstances. These repeated setbacks, particularly in response to applications for roles aligned with their pre-migration expertise, tested their resilience and prompted deeper reflection on their career paths.

As an engineer, **Ali** faced job losses during his early years in Canada, particularly in the oil and gas sector. Reflecting on this period, Ali explained, "I knew even if I went back to school, got more education, and found another job, there was no guarantee I wouldn't lose it again. I didn't want to waste my time." The instability of recurring layoffs led Ali to question the long-term viability of his field. This realization prompted him to consider how to adapt his skills to other industries that offered greater stability. For Ali, rejection was not just a source of frustration but also a turning point, leading him to reassess his professional future.

In contrast, **Emma**, a dedicated educator from Iran, approached recurring rejections with a different mindset. Despite years of unsuccessful applications for teaching positions, she remained deeply connected to her profession, which she viewed as stable and central to her

identity. Over seven years, Emma persistently applied for positions, volunteered, and attended workshops to stay engaged in her field. Recalling this period, Emma shared, "I couldn't give up. I knew I had to keep trying, even when it felt like no one cared about my experience." Unlike Ali, Emma saw rejection not as a reason to reconsider her profession but as a challenge to overcome, driven by her unwavering belief in the value and purpose of her work.

The contrasting responses of Ali and Emma highlight how similar triggers—recurring rejections—can prompt divergent evaluations. While Ali's reflections led him to question the sustainability of his field and seek alternative pathways, Emma's strong connection to her profession reinforced her persistence and commitment. These differences could stem from various factors, including the nature of their professions, personal values, work orientations, or even individual approaches to resilience. Though gender may play a role in shaping perspectives on work, such conclusions would require broader evidence beyond these examples.

4.2.1.1.3 Recurring Burnouts

For some participants, recurring burnouts emerged as a critical trigger, forcing them to confront the toll of their professional experiences and reassess their priorities. Burnout in the context of this study often stemmed from overwork, undervaluation, or environments that demanded excessive effort with little recognition or reward. These experiences highlighted the unsustainable nature of their current approaches, prompting deeper reflection on their boundaries and goals.

Miguel, a former CEO in Mexico, experienced recurring burnout while navigating his professional journey in Canada. During this period, Miguel held multiple survival jobs, including roles in the service industry, which were physically demanding and emotionally unfulfilling.

Reflecting on this time, Miguel shared, "I was working six days a week, sometimes double shifts, and there was no time to rest or even think. I felt like a robot, just following the routine." The constant cycle of overwork left him feeling depleted, both physically and mentally.

Miguel's transition to a professional role in Canada, initially seen as a step forward, also became a source of burnout. He described feeling micromanaged and undervalued in his new position in a Canadian bank, stating, "I was doing all the work, but there was no trust. They were always watching over my shoulder. It drained me completely." This recurring experience of burnout forced Miguel to pause and reflect on his career trajectory. He began to reassess the importance of work-life balance and the need for roles that aligned more closely with his values and boundaries.

The recurring burnouts Miguel experienced ultimately became a turning point, compelling him to shift his focus toward more sustainable opportunities. These moments of exhaustion served as a wake-up call, helping him recognize the need to prioritize his well-being alongside his professional aspirations. Miguel's journey highlights how recurring burnouts while challenging, can act as a catalyst for re-evaluating one's career path and redefining success.

4.2.1.1.4 Reaching Breaking Point in Tolerating Misalignment

For several participants, career misalignment became unavoidable as they engaged in jobs that no longer aligned with their professional backgrounds, aspirations, or evolving values. Unlike the misalignment experienced during survival jobs—characterized by temporary roles taken out of necessity—this phase of misalignment emerged in positions participants initially perceived as career progression or more stable alignments with their professional identities. However, the persistent disconnect between their work and personal or professional priorities

became untenable over time, eventually leading to a breaking point. Though often marked by frustration or dissatisfaction, these moments of realization served as catalysts for reflection and reevaluation of their paths.

Daniel, who returned to banking after several survival jobs, initially hoped to reestablish his career in a familiar and respected field. However, he quickly discovered that Canadian banking was far more stressful and less rewarding than his pre-migration experience in Iran. The role, which Daniel expected to restore his sense of professional stability, instead exacerbated his dissatisfaction. Reflecting on this misalignment, Daniel shared, "It was not what I had imagined. The stress, the long hours—it didn't feel worth it anymore." This realization marked a turning point, prompting Daniel to reflect critically on his goals and consider paths better suited to his evolving priorities.

Daniel's breaking point highlights the distinct nature of career misalignment participants faced in roles they initially saw as aligned with their aspirations compared to survival jobs. Unlike the temporary misalignment tolerated in survival roles, these positions offered no clear resolution or path forward, forcing participants to confront deeper questions about their professional identities and long-term goals. For Daniel, the realization of persistent misalignment was a powerful trigger for reevaluating his path and envisioning alternatives that aligned more closely with his evolving values and interests.

4.2.1.1.5 Encountering Workplace Inequities

For some participants, the experience of inequity in their workplaces—whether through unequal pay, lack of credential recognition, or systemic biases—served as a powerful catalyst for reflection and action. These inequities, which often stemmed from their international credentials

being undervalued, highlighted broader systemic barriers while prompting participants to take steps to address these disparities.

Grace, a physiotherapist from the Philippines, encountered barriers when her international credentials were not recognized. Working as a physiotherapy assistant, she performed many of the same tasks as licensed physiotherapists but was paid significantly less. Reflecting on her experience, Grace shared, "I was the most senior, but they let me go because I didn't have the license." This treatment made her experience a heightened feeling of injustice, leading her to realize the systemic barriers she faced and the need for action to align her professional identity with her contributions.

Similarly, **Ella**, an experienced English language educator from Turkey, initially worked as an early childhood assistant in a daycare in Canada, performing tasks identical to those of a certified early childhood educator but receiving considerably lower pay. Expressing her frustration, she said, "I was giving exactly the same effort... but at the end of the day, she [the certified colleague] was paid more than I was." This experience deepened her awareness of inequities in the workplace, prompting her to reflect on the value of her work and the steps necessary to address this misalignment.

These examples highlight how confronting workplace inequities pushed participants to reflect on their circumstances and consider taking steps to improve their professional standing. While these inequities initially created frustration, they also served as powerful motivators for participants to pursue Canadian credentials.

The triggers discussed during the reorientation phase revealed the profound tensions participants experienced between their aspirations and realities. These tensions served as a driving force, pushing individuals to confront misalignments and seek ways to alleviate the

internal discomfort and uncertainty they faced. In the next section, I delve deeper into this driving force and its impact on participants' sense of agency.

4.2.2 Driving Force in the Reorientation Phase: Need for Tension Alleviation

The transition from the survival jobs phase to the reorientation phase marked a critical turning point for participants. While survival jobs offered temporary stability, they often carried unresolved tensions—arising from ongoing misalignments with participants' professional goals, evolving values, and sense of identity. Over time, these tensions became increasingly intolerable, compelling participants to step back and deeply reflect on their circumstances. This pressing *need for tension alleviation* became the driving force of the reorientation phase.

Participants described this phase as a turning point, recognizing that their current path was no longer sustainable. This realization prompted a period of deep reflection, where they grappled with questions that blended immediate concerns with broader considerations about their identity and priorities. They asked themselves, "What can I do?" "Who do I know can help?" and "What's the best path considering my family and future?" These practical questions were often accompanied by more profound introspection, such as, "Who am I here?" and "What kind of work fits the aspirations of this new me in this new context?" While participants did not always find immediate answers, these reflections marked the beginning of a process of exploration and reevaluation, helping them clarify their priorities and identify steps toward change.

This turning point often began with small, deliberate steps. Participants gradually identified areas where they could exert influence, even within the constraints of their environment. External events, such as job loss, recurring rejections, or burnout, often acted as catalysts for this shift. In other instances, the realization was more introspective, emerging from

persistent dissatisfaction, reaching a breaking point, or drawing on encouragement and insights from others. These triggers illuminated participants' volition—their capacity to make choices and initiate change, even when faced with limited options.

The process of realizing volition was not instantaneous. Instead, it evolved through a cycle of trial and reflection. Participants began taking small, exploratory steps, such as seeking credentials, exploring alternative career paths, or connecting with professional networks. Each step—however incremental—demonstrated their ability to influence their circumstances, reinforcing their confidence and capacity to act more deliberately. This iterative process gradually shifted their focus from seeing only limitations to recognizing possibilities, creating a cycle where each success reinforced the belief that further progress was possible.

As participants engaged in this process, they began envisioning paths that aligned more closely with their current professional goals and personal values. These emerging possibilities reflected not just their premigration aspirations but also their evolving priorities in their current life stage and the context of their migration journeys. Their reflections extended to considerations like family needs, long-term security, and alignment with their developing sense of self. Even if their immediate circumstances remained constrained, participants' mindsets shifted toward envisioning greater opportunities.

Initially driven by the need to alleviate tension, this process ultimately led participants to reclaim a stronger sense of agency. Through a combination of reflection, small actions, and incremental successes, they discovered they had more capability than they initially believed. Every step built confidence, reinforcing their volition and enabling them to reclaim agency by the end of the reorientation phase. This empowerment marked a significant shift in their journeys as they transitioned from feeling constrained to actively shaping their paths.

In the next sections, I explore how participants navigated this phase, translating the need to alleviate tension into adaptive approaches that went beyond survival strategies. These approaches reflected deliberate efforts to address persistent challenges and move toward paths better aligned with their evolving values and aspirations, reshaping their professional and personal trajectories.

4.2.3 Adaptive Approaches in Reorientation Phase

When the tensions participants faced during the reorientation phase exceeded their threshold for toleration, they were compelled to move beyond survival-centered strategies. This shift forced them to transition from merely enduring to taking adaptive approaches that addressed these tensions more holistically, focusing on underlying challenges rather than temporary solutions. This phase marked a critical juncture where participants began to reflect more deeply on their circumstances and take intentional steps to align their professional and personal goals with their evolving priorities.

Participants grappled with the disparity between their aspirations and the realities they faced. These aspirations often evolved, reflecting a broader understanding of their values and goals beyond the confines of their pre-migration occupational identities. Adaptive approaches during this phase did not emerge as grand, deliberate plans but often began with subtle steps. Participants started by recognizing their volition—their capacity to influence their circumstances—and gradually moved toward reclaiming agency through incremental actions. Whether it involved developing new skills, exploring alternative career paths, or leveraging networks, each decision represented progress toward reconciling their realities with their aspirations.

This section delves into the four key adaptive approaches participants adopted during the reorientation phase: *strategic skill development in the same field or industry, exploring alternative paths beyond the original field or industry, leveraging networks, and redefining the role of work in their lives*. These narratives illustrate how participants navigated systemic barriers, explored new opportunities, and gradually reclaimed agency, charting paths that aligned more closely with their aspirations and realities.

4.2.3.1 Strategic Skill Development in the Same Field or Industry

For many participants, encountering workplace inequities—such as unrecognized credentials, inequitable pay, and systemic biases—served as a powerful catalyst for action. These experiences highlighted barriers that participants felt unable to change directly but motivated them to find ways to improve their standing within the system. Reflecting on these challenges, participants recognized skill development as a practical step to address these inequities, balancing their long-term aspirations with the realities of their environment.

Grace, a physiotherapist from the Philippines, responded to the inequities she faced by identifying certification as the pathway to regain her professional standing. Despite the frustration of performing equivalent tasks for lower pay and eventually losing her job, Grace took deliberate steps to address the disparity. She pursued Canadian certification while balancing her work and family responsibilities, a decision that ultimately improved her position and aligned her qualifications with systemic expectations.

Similarly, **Ella**, an experienced English language educator from Turkey, recognized that obtaining certification was essential for achieving equitable treatment in her workplace. Though disheartened by the unequal pay for identical work, she chose to focus on acquiring the necessary

credentials to legitimize her efforts within the system. By enrolling in courses and managing both her job and studies, Ella achieved her goal of gaining recognition and fair compensation.

While Grace and Ella adapted by accepting the system's constraints and working within them, not all participants approached workplace inequities in the same way. **Lydia**, for instance, responded to systemic barriers by pursuing a new career aligned with her values and aimed at addressing inequities she had witnessed. Her alternative path will be explored in the next section.

For most participants, workplace inequities underscored the limitations of systemic structures but also motivated them to take practical steps to improve their circumstances. Strategic skill development reflected a pragmatic response, where participants balanced acceptance of systemic constraints with proactive efforts to address misalignment in their careers.

4.2.3.2 Exploring Alternative Paths Beyond the Original Field or Industry

For many participants, barriers such as systemic constraints, reaching a breaking point in tolerating misalignment, or shifting personal priorities prompted them to explore entirely new fields or industries. Unlike those who adapted within their original professions, these participants reevaluated their circumstances and identified alternative paths that better aligned with their evolving goals, values, and life contexts. This process often involved small, incremental steps as participants tested new possibilities before making decisive transitions.

Daniel's journey exemplifies this adaptive approach. After returning to banking in Canada, a field he had worked in pre-migration, Daniel quickly discovered that the Canadian banking system was far more stressful and less rewarding than his experience in Iran. Reflecting on this, he realized, "I couldn't see myself continuing in banking—it wasn't what I wanted

anymore." During this period, Daniel became interested in real estate, inspired by his positive experience purchasing his own home. "I liked the autonomy, the variety, and the fact that there's no limit to how much money you can make," he shared.

Daniel gradually began exploring this interest while still working in banking. "And then, while working in the bank, I decided to study real estate," he explained. He attended evening courses after finishing his workday. For Daniel, real estate represented not just a career shift but also a fulfillment of a broader aspiration. "One of the reasons I immigrated to Canada was to work for myself. I had never had that chance in Iran," he reflected. Real estate also appealed to his personality, offering autonomy, mobility, and variety. "I don't like to work in a fixed place. I like to move around… When I bought my house and saw how real estate works here, I thought, 'This is cool. If I want, I can just go and study in this field." These small, deliberate steps allowed Daniel to transition into a field that aligned with his evolving priorities and personal goals, helping him reclaim a sense of agency.

Lydia's shift from teaching to counselling reflects a different trajectory. Her decision was deeply rooted in her experiences with systemic inequalities and violence, which inspired her to address these challenges through her work. "I decided to become a counsellor after witnessing the violence against women in Canada, which I hadn't expected to see here," Lydia shared. She pursued training in psychology, eventually working for a non-profit organization that supported women facing systemic challenges. Her new career aligned with her passion for advocacy and empowerment, creating a path that resonated deeply with her values and aspirations.

Similarly, **Esther**'s journey illustrates how participants adapted their expertise to new roles when systemic constraints blocked access to their original fields. As a respiratory oncologist from Czech Republic, Esther faced significant barriers to resuming her medical career

in Canada. Recognizing that regaining her former position was unlikely, she began exploring adjacent healthcare roles. This included training in massage therapy, holistic health, and physiotherapy. Reflecting on her journey, Esther explained, "One has to work, and one has to open new doors… if one door is closed, there must be some windows in that house." By pursuing these alternative roles, Esther remained connected to healthcare while navigating systemic constraints, showing how exploring alternative paths can balance pragmatism with aspirations and provide professional continuity.

Maha's experience offers a different perspective. As a former emergency room physician in Iran, she faced significant challenges re-entering the medical field in Canada, navigating systemic barriers alongside the demands of family responsibilities. Reflecting on her circumstances, she decided to pursue self-employment in digital marketing. "It wasn't what I trained for, but I tried to see it as an exploration. Maybe I could make something of it," she explained. Digital marketing allowed Maha to combine creativity with flexibility, helping her balance personal priorities while establishing a new career.

Across these narratives, participants demonstrated a willingness to reflect on their circumstances and take deliberate steps into new fields or industries. These transitions, while challenging, underscored the importance of aligning work with evolving values and priorities. By exploring alternative paths, participants navigated systemic barriers and took steps to reclaim agency, reshaping their professional and personal trajectories.

4.2.3.3 Leveraging Networks

For many participants, leveraging networks played a pivotal role in navigating the challenges of the reorientation phase. Social connections—whether through family, professional peers, or local communities—provided crucial opportunities, resources, and insights that

participants used to address systemic barriers, transition into new fields, or strengthen their standing within their current domains. This adaptive approach reflects participants' intentional efforts to engage with their social environment as a means of moving forward in their career journeys.

Christopher's story highlights the transformative impact of referrals. Upon arriving in Canada, Christopher, a former civil engineer from Nigeria, faced significant challenges in securing employment. Despite applying to over 40 roles within the first week, he received no responses and grew increasingly desperate. Reflecting on this period, he shared, "In those first 15 days, I was so desperate," even offering to take on manual labour roles while waiting for replies. A breakthrough came when an acquaintance of his wife referred him to a company he had not even applied to. Acting quickly, Christopher reached out to the company's HR department and shared his CV. The referral and his proactive follow-up led to an interview and his first role as a project coordinator at a construction firm. Christopher credited this referral with helping him overcome initial barriers and secure his first foothold in the Canadian job market.

Maha, who transitioned from medicine to digital marketing, also leveraged her networks to establish herself in a new field. She connected with local business communities and potential clients, building a reputation that allowed her to grow her entrepreneurial endeavours. Reflecting on this experience, she noted, "In a new country, networking isn't just helpful—it's essential. You have to build trust and connections to succeed." By actively engaging with her community, Maha was able to create opportunities that aligned with her evolving priorities and personal goals.

Across these narratives, participants demonstrated the intentional use of social connections as a means to navigate systemic barriers, discover new opportunities, and adapt to changing circumstances. These transitions, while challenging, underscored the importance of

aligning work with evolving values and priorities. By leveraging networks, participants took steps to reclaim agency, reshaping their professional and personal trajectories.

4.2.3.4 Redefining the Role of Work in Their Life

For some participants, the reorientation phase was not only a time to explore alternative paths or leverage networks but also a moment to fundamentally rethink the role of work in their lives. This adaptive approach involved shifting their focus from career-centric aspirations to a more holistic understanding of fulfillment that incorporated their personal priorities, values, and well-being. By redefining work's role, participants aligned their professional pursuits with broader life goals, allowing them to navigate systemic challenges while maintaining a sense of agency.

Miguel's journey highlights this approach. After repeated burnouts in managerial positions, Miguel began reassessing the boundaries between his work and personal life. Reflecting on this period, he shared, "I realized I needed to protect my energy and focus on what really mattered—my family and myself." Miguel decided to step back from roles with excessive responsibilities, instead prioritizing balance and sustainability. Alongside his professional adjustments, he started a podcast to explore his personal interests and connect with others outside of traditional work. This shift allowed Miguel to reclaim a sense of purpose that extended beyond his occupation, emphasizing well-being and personal fulfillment as central to his redefined work-life balance.

Similarly, **Ali**'s experience illustrates how evolving priorities can reshape one's view of work. As an engineer and former head of the gas recycling section at Iran National Oil Company, Ali had a highly successful career before migrating to Canada. However, recurrent layoffs in

Canada's oil and gas sector disrupted his professional stability. Although he was eventually able to secure a job through his wife's network, these experiences prompted him to reflect on the volatility of his field and reevaluate the role of work in his life. "I used to think work was everything, but now I see it's just one part of who I am," he explained. Ali began to explore ways to derive meaning from domains outside of his professional life, such as family and personal interests. This reframing allowed him to navigate the uncertainties of his career with less strain, as he no longer tied his identity solely to his professional achievements.

Both Miguel and Ali demonstrate how redefining the role of work in their lives served as an adaptive approach during the reorientation phase. By stepping back and reassessing their values, they created space to focus on what mattered most to them, whether that was family, creative pursuits, or personal well-being. This shift not only alleviated the strain of misaligned roles but also reinforced their ability to adapt to evolving circumstances, laying the groundwork for greater agency and alignment in the future.

The adaptive approaches adopted during the reorientation phase reveal how participants responded to triggers by engaging in more profound reflections that reshaped their professional and personal trajectories. By enhancing their skills, venturing into new industries, leveraging networks, and reevaluating the place of work in their lives, participants demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability. These actions were not merely reactive but reflected a growing awareness of their capacity to influence their circumstances, laying the foundation for regaining work meaningfulness.

However, these adaptive approaches did not occur in isolation. The reorientation phase was deeply embedded within a social context that influenced participants' decisions and trajectories. Social interactions played a critical role in shaping their experiences, offering

support, guidance, and validation that often bolstered their efforts. In the next section, I will explore the nature of social interactions during the reorientation phase, examining how relationships and networks facilitated participants' transitions and contributed to their evolving sense of agency.

4.2.4 The Role of Social Interactions in the Reorientation Phase

As ISMs progressed into the reorientation phase, social interactions evolved. While the role of social interactions in the survival jobs phase was primarily for emotional support and practical guidance on navigating day-to-day life in a new country, in the reorientation phase, they became instrumental in facilitating knowledge sharing, understanding systemic barriers, learning about bridging program opportunities, identifying cultural barriers and necessary adjustments, discovering opportunities for growth, finding more suitable jobs, and securing referrals. By engaging with diverse networks, participants were able to tap into resources that supported their ongoing journey toward regaining and reconstructing work meaningfulness. These interactions often led to tangible outcomes, such as job referrals, guidance on workplace norms, and access to skill development programs, enabling ISMs to regain their professional momentum and redefine their career trajectories.

4.2.4.1 Tapping into Networks for Knowledge Sharing and Referrals

In the reorientation phase, ISMs became more proactive in seeking instrumental support to navigate systemic challenges and identify career opportunities. Social interactions were pivotal in this process. Participants became more open to learning from peers, including those with similar experiences, who provided valuable insights and strategies.

For **Mahshid**, a pivotal moment came when she confided in a woman who was taking care of her daughter in daycare. Feeling lost and overwhelmed, Mahshid explained, "I don't know what I should do in this country. I was working as a software engineer in my country, Iran. Now I'm a maid. They ask me to wash dishes and mop floors. I'm not the one who can do that." The woman empathized with her struggles and introduced her to a bridging program at Humber College. "She told me, 'It's only a six-month program.' That was a window on that dark room for me," Mahshid recalled, highlighting how this encounter helped her reimagine her career possibilities and take a crucial step forward.

These examples underscore how instrumental support through social interactions helped participants access resources, overcome barriers, and reshape their career pathways. By engaging with supportive networks, ISMs like Mahshid identified opportunities and developed the confidence and tools needed to act on them.

4.2.4.2 Reassessing Priorities through Social Interaction

In the reorientation phase, social interactions played a significant role in helping ISMs reassess their priorities and redefine their professional aspirations. Conversations and observations prompted participants to reflect on their circumstances, consider alternative career paths, and make decisions better aligned with their evolving goals and personal situations. These interactions often provided clarity, encouragement, and practical insights, enabling ISMs to adapt their priorities to fit their current realities.

Daniel's experience exemplifies this process of reassessment. Feeling unfulfilled in his banking role, which he described as stressful and underpaid, Daniel began to explore other career possibilities. He initially became curious about real estate after observing the work of a real

estate agent during the process of purchasing a home in Canada. This sparked his interest, and subsequent interactions with classmates and instructors during his real estate training provided him with the technical knowledge and motivation to transition into the field. Reflecting on this shift, Daniel explained how he recognized that real estate offered a better balance between professional fulfillment and financial stability compared to his previous role.

This example illustrates how social interactions, and situational exposure can act as catalysts for reevaluating priorities and shifting career trajectories. Through these engagements, participants like Daniel found new perspectives and actionable pathways to move beyond roles that no longer aligned with their evolving goals. This process highlights the dynamic interplay between personal observations and external input in reshaping professional aspirations during the reorientation phase.

4.2.4.3 Social Interactions as Catalysts for Growth

During the reorientation phase, social interactions played a critical role in enabling ISMs to acquire practical tools and techniques that significantly influenced their professional advancement. These interactions often involved learning strategies through bridging programs or mentors, which participants applied proactively to create opportunities, demonstrate their potential, and accelerate their career trajectories.

Miguel's experience provides a compelling example of how social connections and proactive engagement can drive career growth. A former CEO in Mexico, Miguel initially found the concept of informational interviews—informal conversations designed to learn from experienced professionals—both unfamiliar and culturally uncomfortable. "In Mexico, you don't invite strangers for coffee—it's weird and actually dangerous," he remarked. However, while

participating in a bridging program, Miguel learned about the importance of informational interviews in Canada and decided to embrace the strategy despite his initial hesitation.

Miguel started by reaching out to his director and expressing his ambition to become a project manager. In response, she outlined key skills he needed to develop, including executive presence and communication. Motivated by her feedback, Miguel enrolled in a professional development program and applied the techniques he was learning, including conducting informational interviews. "I started doing two, then four, then eight," he recounted. Through these interactions, Miguel built connections with directors and vice presidents, gaining valuable insights into their roles while making himself visible as a dedicated and capable professional.

The impact of Miguel's proactive efforts became evident when his director, impressed by his growth and initiative, offered him a promotion to project manager within three months of their initial conversation. Miguel reflected on the rapid progression and said, "I asked her what I needed to do to become a project manager, and she said it would take years. But then she offered me the role after just 90 days. Out of a coffee meeting, I got a job."

Miguel's story highlights how leveraging social interactions and incorporating feedback into actionable steps enabled him to navigate systemic challenges and achieve significant career milestones. His experience underscores the power of proactive engagement and adaptability, showing how ISMs can use social connections as catalysts for growth and professional advancement.

4.2.4.4 Bridging Cultural Expectations and Integration

As ISMs' language skills improved and they became more confident, they engaged with broader networks, balancing cultural expectations from their home countries with the demands of

integrating into Canada's professional environment. This phase often required participants to challenge deeply ingrained beliefs and adopt new perspectives on work and career.

Miguel's experience illustrates this process. Feeling emotionally and financially broken, he attended a networking event where a branch manager encouraged him to consider banking as a career. Coming from a culture where work was often viewed as a necessary evil, Miguel was initially resistant. "Everybody said, 'With your master's degree, you should work at a bank.' I didn't want to lose my soul," he admitted. A friend, however, challenged his perspective, telling him, "If you say things like that, you'll never find an appropriate job here." This advice helped Miguel recognize the need to adjust his approach to align with Canadian workplace norms.

Through mentorship and networking, Miguel not only secured a position at TD Bank but also began to redefine his professional identity. "I was on fire," he explained, reflecting on his ability to adapt to cultural expectations while advancing his career through a series of promotions. His journey highlights how social interactions can play a crucial role in helping ISMs bridge cultural gaps and integrate into new professional landscapes.

The reorientation phase marked a critical turning point for ISMs as they shifted from surviving to strategically navigating their professional landscapes. Through a combination of social interactions, proactive learning, and adaptive approaches, participants began redefining their priorities, acquiring new skills, and leveraging networks to create growth opportunities. This phase was characterized by a growing sense of agency and the ability to engage with the Canadian job market on their own terms. While many participants still grappled with systemic barriers and cultural adjustments, the tools and connections they developed during this phase laid the groundwork for deeper alignment between their work and their evolving aspirations. These experiences set the stage for the next phase, where ISMs moved beyond navigating challenges to

actively regaining a sense of work meaningfulness by reshaping their professional identities and reconnecting with a broader sense of purpose.

4.4 Regaining Work Meaningfulness Phase

The regaining work meaningfulness phase represents a pivotal culmination in participants' journeys, where earlier experiences of survival and reorientation gave way to a deeper sense of integration and fulfillment. Unlike the abrupt shifts or jarring triggers of prior phases, this stage unfolded as a gradual process of realignment between participants' evolving aspirations, values, and professional realities in their new context. It was marked by clarity in understanding their place as immigrants, the opportunities available to them, and how their work connected to a broader sense of purpose.

In this phase, participants moved beyond coping mechanisms and temporary solutions, focusing instead on creating a stable and meaningful professional path that resonated with their personal growth and long-term goals. They demonstrated an increased ability to reconcile their past professional identities and skills with their current circumstances, finding ways to adapt, reimagine, and integrate these elements. This process often involved redefining success and meaningfulness, not as a restoration of their pre-migration careers but as the creation of something new yet still relevant to their past within the Canadian context.

Central to this phase was a growing sense of settlement and belonging, which enabled participants to feel settled and connected in their environment and more confident in navigating challenges. Social interactions played a critical role during this stage, fostering connections that affirmed participants' professional identities, created opportunities for impact, and provided the support needed to thrive. Moreover, participants described a renewed sense of purpose,

characterized by their desire to contribute meaningfully, often inspired by the hardships they had overcome and the support they had received along the way.

While participants continued to face challenges such as workplace inequities or systemic barriers that adversely impacted their sense of work meaningfulness, these episodic challenges no longer felt as overwhelming as before. With greater clarity about their realities and aspirations, they approached such obstacles with enhanced resilience and confidence. This phase exemplifies how global work meaningfulness is not a fixed endpoint but an evolving process of continuous adjustment, reflection, and integration. By embracing the opportunities and constraints of their new lives, participants found ways to align their work with their values, contributing to a work life that felt both purposeful and impactful. The following sections explore the dominant features, driving forces, and adaptive approaches that defined this transformative phase.

4.4.1 Dominant Features of Regaining Work Meaningfulness Phase

The regaining work meaningfulness phase marked a period of evolving clarity and integration in participants' journeys. This phase was characterized by participants deepening their understanding of their place in Canada, their aspirations, and how their work aligned with their broader sense of purpose. Rather than a turning point, this phase represented a gradual culmination of the adjustments and strategies they had developed in earlier stages, allowing them to create a more stable and meaningful professional path. Participants reported feeling more settled and optimistic, supported by a clearer understanding of their possibilities and an enriched sense of belonging.

It is important to note that while this phase represents a period of greater alignment and fulfillment, not all participants reached this stage. For those who did, regaining work meaningfulness was not a permanent resolution. Some later encountered new disruptions—such as organizational restructuring or personal circumstances—that led to renewed erosion and required re-engagement with earlier adaptive strategies.

A central feature of this phase was the development of a *growing alignment between realities and aspirations*. Participants' goals became increasingly aligned with their current circumstances as they better understood their realities and possibilities in Canada. In the survival jobs phase, participants experienced significant discrepancies between their pre-migration aspirations and the realities of survival work in Canada, which often led to frustration and disillusionment. During the reorientation phase, their reference points shifted from their past aspirations and experiences, and they began to compare their circumstances with those of their peers in Canada, helping them recalibrate their expectations. In the regaining work meaningfulness phase, participants' reference points became even more realistic as they developed a clearer understanding of their place as immigrants in Canada. This shift enabled them to pursue goals that were both valuable and attainable, fostering a sense of progress and achievement. As **Miguel** reflected, "I realized I could still fulfill my purpose in a different way, and that made all the difference." **Howard** shared a similar perspective, noting, "It's not the same as back home, but I've adjusted my expectations. Now, I find satisfaction in aligning my skills to what is possible here."

Another defining feature was the *reconciliation of past and present*. In this phase, participants sought to integrate their pre-migration professional identities and skills with the realities of their new environment. This process was not about replicating their previous roles but

about finding ways their prior expertise could enrich their current opportunities. Participants reflected on their past to create continuity while adapting to their present context, shaping a professional identity aligned with their evolving sense of self in Canada. **Daniel** captured this sentiment, sharing, "I realized my skills could be valuable here in ways I hadn't expected. It wasn't about doing the same thing but about finding a way to apply what I knew to a new path." Similarly, **Sun** remarked, "You leave everything behind and emigrate. You come here as nothing. But over time, you find ways to connect your past to your present, and it helps you to rebuild who you are."

Participants also expressed *feeling more settled*, a key feature that distinguished this phase from earlier ones. They described being more established in their new environment, with a growing sense of belonging that contributed to their stability. Connections with others reinforced this sense of settlement, providing practical and emotional support. **Miguel** likened this process to adapting to new norms: "Once you tune into the Canadian frequency, you can do better. It's like playing the game with new rules. It gives you a sense of clarity and stability that wasn't there at the start." **Sam** emphasized, "It takes time, but eventually, you realize you're building a foundation here, one that makes you feel like you're part of something stable." While participants continued to face challenges such as workplace inequities or systemic barriers that impacted their sense of work meaningfulness, these no longer felt as overwhelming as before. Having more clarity about their realities and aspirations, they approached such obstacles with greater resilience and confidence.

Additionally, participants experienced a *renewed sense of purpose* rooted in their clearer understanding of their place in Canada as immigrants and their growing recognition of the opportunities and possibilities available to them. This renewed purpose was deeply connected to

their evolving sense of self-efficacy, cultivated through the agency they experienced in aligning their work with their values and aspirations. Their progress over time demonstrated that they could influence their circumstances and navigate challenges effectively. As **Miguel** explained, "The progress I've made shows me that I can influence my circumstances. It's not about doing the same as before but finding a meaningful way to contribute and grow here." **Arthur** highlighted the intrinsic motivation this phase brought: "Intrinsic motivation drives me. It's about proving to myself that I can achieve something meaningful, even when the circumstances are challenging." Unlike earlier phases, where the future often felt uncertain or unattainable, participants in this phase gained greater clarity about why their aspirations mattered, how these aspirations connected to their broader meaning in life, and how they aligned with their true selves. This clarity provided the emotional and psychological momentum needed to continue pursuing their aspirations while adapting to new challenges.

Together, these dominant features—*growing alignment between realities and aspirations, reconciliation of past and present, feeling settled, and a renewed sense of purpose*—illustrate how work meaningfulness was not a fixed state but a dynamic process of continuous adjustment and integration. By building on their earlier experiences and developing a clearer understanding of their aspirations and possibilities, participants shaped professional and personal lives that resonated with their evolving sense of purpose.

4.4.2 Driving Force in the Regaining Work Meaningfulness Phase: Need for Coherence and Purpose

The participants' *need for coherence and purpose* was the primary driving force in the regaining work meaningfulness phase. These needs emerged as a contextualized manifestation of

their broader need for meaning, tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities of rebuilding their lives and careers after migration. As participants progressed through earlier phases, their motivations evolved from meeting immediate survival needs and alleviating tensions to a deeper drive to integrate their evolving identities with their work and make valuable contributions to their new communities.

The need for coherence in this phase was about aligning participants' past, present, and future. Participants sought to integrate their pre-migration professional identities, skills, and values with the realities of their current environment and the possibilities for their future aspirations. This was not merely about replicating their past careers but about reimagining how their experiences and values could create a sense of alignment in their current lives. **Arthur** shared, "The connections I made showed me how my past experiences could still be relevant and meaningful in my new life here."

This reconciliation process helped participants construct narratives that connected their migration journeys with their professional trajectories, enabling them to see their progress as meaningful. **Howard** emphasized this connection, stating, "It's not the same as back home, but I've adjusted my expectations. Now, I find satisfaction in aligning my skills to what is possible here." Such alignment allowed participants to pursue goals that resonated with their evolving sense of self and felt attainable within their new contexts.

The need for purpose was equally significant, stemming from participants' growth through hardships and the help they had received along the way. Many participants expressed a strong desire to give back, not only to their communities but also to others who were navigating similar struggles. This motivation was deeply tied to their sense of gratitude and the realization that their experiences could serve as a source of support and inspiration for others. As **Miguel**

noted, "I heal myself by serving others. People appreciate the message, and it's like, 'Thank you, I learned.'"

Participants' desire to make a positive impact often extended beyond professional roles to include community and relational contributions, reinforcing their sense of belonging and purpose in their new environment. This drive to give back reflected their recognition of the interconnectedness of their journeys and the collective impact they could have.

A growing sense of clarity and agency was underlying these needs for coherence and purpose. Participants' progress over time showed them that they could influence their circumstances and create a sense of meaningfulness in their work lives within their new environment. This belief in their ability to shape their trajectories reinforced their motivation to pursue work that aligned with their values and aspirations.

Together, the need for coherence and purpose drove participants to create work lives that felt both integrated and impactful. By reconciling their past and present, embracing opportunities for growth, and finding ways to give back, they navigated this phase with a renewed sense of purpose and agency, shaping a future that resonated with their evolving identities and values.

Transitioning from the driving forces that propelled participants toward coherence and purpose, the next section delves into the adaptive approaches they employed to achieve this realignment. These approaches demonstrate how participants navigated and adjusted their purpose, often redefining it in ways that allowed them to experience work meaningfulness within their new environments. By weaving together their past experiences and current realities, participants gradually shaped pathways that connected their work with their evolving aspirations and values.

4.4.3 Adaptive Approaches in Regaining Work Meaningfulness Phase

The journey toward regaining work meaningfulness reflects an adaptive process shaped by participants' responses to evolving personal identities within a new cultural and professional context. As they moved beyond initial coping strategies, participants began taking deliberate actions to align their work with broader aspirations and values, even when these diverged from their original career paths. This evolution was influenced by key contextual factors, including their occupations, cultural backgrounds (country of origin), family roles, and age (life and career stage). These elements shaped not only how participants initially experienced erosion but also the specific adaptive approaches they employed to re-engage with meaningful work.

In this section, I outline five adaptive approaches through which participants realigned with meaningful work: *broadening, expanding, evolving, narrowing, and rechanneling*. Each approach reflects a nuanced interplay between individual agency and contextual influences, highlighting how participants creatively reconstructed work meaning in ways that honoured both their personal values and situational realities.

4.4.3.1 Widening the Scope to Include New Elements (Broadening Purpose)

Broadening involves recognizing the value of one's work by reframing it as a more specific version of their primary purpose. This adaptation helps participants find meaningfulness by reconnecting their current work to their primary purpose. Rather than shifting away from their original purpose, participants abstracted their primary purpose to reinterpret how their current roles could fulfill their broader purpose in new ways.

Occupational backgrounds seemed to influence how participants broadened their purpose; for example, former teachers often focused on fostering student or community growth, while healthcare providers prioritized patient care. Additionally, some participants' perspectives

hinted at culturally rooted values around societal contribution, which may have influenced their openness to broadening their purpose of roles in ways that benefited others, regardless of specific job titles.

For instance, **Ella**, the former English language teacher from Turkey, initially felt disconnected in her role as a daycare assistant. She struggled to see how her purpose, previously tied to academic teaching, could align with early childhood education. Over time, she broadened her concept of teaching to include emotional and social development, noting, "It's not just about academics; it's about making them better human beings." This shift allowed her to view her role as not only educational but developmental.

Similarly, **Grace,** the former physiotherapist from the Philippines**,** transitioned from working with underprivileged communities in the Philippines to serving a more diverse patient base in Canada, where the sense of urgent need was less intense. Initially, this shift felt disheartening, as her purpose had been deeply rooted in responding to urgent health disparities. However, by broadening her understanding of contribution, Grace adapted her sense of purpose, recognizing that "Even if the urgency isn't the same, helping someone improve their well-being still matters." This broader understanding of her purpose allowed her to reconnect with her current role in a meaningful way, even within a different context.

4.4.3.2 Adding New Goals Alongside Existing Ones (Expanding Purpose)

Expanding purpose involves enriching one's work by pursuing additional goals that complement and extend the original purpose. Unlike broadening, which abstracts the primary purpose and the current role to reconnect them together, expanding adds more aspects of work to the primary purpose that can make work meaningful—creating more diverse ways in which work

is perceived as meaningful. This pathway allowed participants to retain their primary sense of purpose while adding new facets that provided further fulfillment. For some participants, family roles and cultural expectations played a role in shaping how they expanded their purpose. Participants with strong family obligations, especially mothers, found ways to incorporate work-life balance, while others, such as those from cultural backgrounds valuing collective success, expanded by blending professional growth with contributions to their community or team, adding layers of social responsibility.

For example, **Hannah**, a healthcare worker, initially focused solely on patient care as the core of her work purpose. In Canada, however, she expanded her purpose to include the collaborative and supportive aspects of her work environment, noting that "It's not just the patients; it's also the team. Working with colleagues who respect and support each other has added a new layer to what I find meaningful." This shift reflects how she began valuing her role not only for its direct impact on patients but also for the sense of belonging and community it offered, which aligned with her desire for a harmonious work environment.

Sam, a project manager, also expanded his purpose by combining career growth with a commitment to mentoring others. As he advanced professionally, he found fulfillment in guiding colleagues, reflecting, "It's not just about my role anymore; it's about helping others achieve their goals." This expansion aligns with his cultural background, which values collective achievements and community support. By integrating mentorship into his role, Sam added dimensions of social responsibility, blending his individual career aspirations with meaningful contributions to his work community.

4.4.3.3 Transforming Purpose to Align with Higher Values (Evolving Purpose)

Evolving purpose involves a more profound transformation, where a participant's sense of purpose changes to reflect higher-order values that have become significant in their lives. This evolution often leads participants to redefine their work goals or career paths entirely, reflecting a shift in priorities and personal growth. Evolving differs from broadening and expanding in that it represents a fundamental change in what participants value, often redirecting their work focus altogether. For many participants, this transformation was influenced by age and life stage, as older individuals tended to prioritize flexibility and personal fulfillment over career prestige. This shift was sometimes intensified by cultural values emphasizing family and stability over professional ambition as one advances in life.

For instance, **Lydia**, a former teacher from Iran, transitioned into counselling in Canada, a shift driven by her evolving desire to support trauma survivors and advocate for social justice. She explained, "It's no longer just about education; it's about helping people rebuild their lives." This change reflects her alignment with values of advocacy and healing, marking a transformation from her previous purpose as an educator to a new purpose rooted in social impact. Lydia's transition also coincided with a later stage in her career, where her focus moved away from career advancement toward meaningful contributions to society, shaped by her life experience and personal growth.

Similarly, **Daniel** experienced this evolution as he moved from a banking career to real estate, driven by a desire for autonomy and fulfillment beyond financial success. Reflecting on this shift, he noted, "Real estate gave me the freedom I was seeking, something banking didn't offer." As Daniel reached a mature stage in his career, this change reflected a growing emphasis

on independence and personal growth rather than career prestige. His evolving purpose, shaped by both his age and life stage, led him to prioritize work that offered personal satisfaction and balance, aligning with values that had grown in significance over time.

4.4.3.4 Redefining Work's Role in Life Meaning (Narrowing Purpose)

Narrowing purpose involves reducing expectations for work's contribution to overall life meaning and redefining the meaning of work in the broader context of one's life meaning. This shift reflects a reorientation of priorities, where stability, personal well-being, and family responsibilities become more central than professional identity or ambitious career goals. By consciously narrowing their focus from work, participants found fulfillment outside of work, treating work as one aspect of their lives rather than a primary source of meaning.

For participants from cultures where work status traditionally plays a significant role in identity, narrowing purpose often signalled a profound value shift—from a career-centred perspective to one emphasizing family-centred meaning and long-term sustainability. This redefinition allowed them to maintain balance and align their work with their evolving life priorities, fostering a sense of harmony between professional and personal spheres.

Miguel entered Canada with a strong sense of purpose rooted in his experience as the CEO of a historic coffee company in Mexico, where he sought to create large-scale impact through his work, helping thousands and supporting his employees. Reflecting on this ambition, he shared, "My purpose was to help thousands of people through my work." However, upon migrating, Miguel faced significant challenges as he transitioned into survival jobs, such as working at Tim Hortons and in a restaurant—roles that did not align with his skills or sense of

purpose. Feeling disconnected, he noted, "I remember crying on my way home, sometimes feeling completely lost."

As Miguel advanced in Canada, he secured roles with greater authority in the corporate sector, but the influence and responsibilities of these positions did not fulfill him as he had hoped. He explained, "I thought a good position in a big company would bring back that sense of purpose, but it felt hollow." This realization led him to redefine his life's meaning, focusing on areas where he could still contribute meaningfully, albeit on a smaller, more personal scale. Turning his attention to family and community, he found a renewed sense of purpose. He started a podcast series to share his journey, aiming to inspire and mentor other immigrants. "Through my podcast, I get to connect with people who may be feeling lost like I was," he explained. "It's not thousands of people, but it's real, and it matters." By narrowing his expectations of what work should provide, Miguel was able to invest in close, sustainable contributions, finding fulfillment as a mentor and family role model.

Ali, an engineer from Iran, embodies a different form of narrowing. Initially, Ali had aspirations for a prestigious engineering career, yet his experiences in Canada reshaped his priorities. "When I first came here, I wanted to prove myself, to get that big role," he recalled. However, as he navigated the Canadian job market, he came to appreciate the stability of a functional position that allowed him to focus on his family and maintain control over his work-life balance. He explained, "I found that relationships and stability were more important to me than status. I don't need work to define who I am anymore."

For Ali, work became a reliable, stable part of life, providing structure and financial security without needing to serve as a primary source of meaning. Instead, he looked elsewhere—toward relationships, community involvement, and family—to find purpose and

fulfillment. "Work is just one piece of the puzzle now," he shared. "I'm at peace with it because I have other things that matter more." Ali's approach allowed him to treat work as a controlled and functional aspect of his life, compartmentalizing it to create space for other, more meaningful pursuits. For both Miguel and Ali, narrowing work purpose reflected a conscious prioritization of stability and family-centred meaning in life over career-centred ambition.

4.4.3.5 Changing the Means to Fulfill Original Goals (Rechanneling Purpose)

Rechanneling purpose involves changing one's means of fulfilling a core professional purpose when previous paths become blocked. Unlike Evolving, which involves changing values, Rechanneling maintains the original purpose but modifies the approach to stay aligned with that purpose amidst new constraints. This pathway allowed participants from professional fields with well-defined pathways, such as healthcare and the arts, to stay connected to their goals even when the specific roles they had previously pursued were no longer accessible. For many, this rechanneling was also influenced by cultural values around perseverance, driving them to find alternative ways to sustain their professional identity.

For **Esther**, remaining in professional healthcare was essential. Originally a respiratory oncologist in Czech Republic , her purpose was rooted in providing expert care. After migrating to Canada, Esther faced multiple barriers in resuming her medical career, but she remained resolute: "One has to work, and one has to open new doors. If one door is closed, then there must be some windows in that room, right?" When her path as a physician closed, she adapted by pursuing other roles in healthcare, moving to massage therapy, then holistic health, and eventually physiotherapy. Her resolve never wavered as she continually sought ways to stay professionally engaged in healthcare.

Through physiotherapy and eventually teaching advanced rehabilitation techniques, Esther sustained her professional identity in healthcare, finding new ways to live out her purpose. Now, as both a practicing physiotherapist and instructor, she reflected, "I love my work. I love every moment of it... It's a combination of work, teaching, and being with young people." By rechanneling, Esther stayed true to her original purpose, continually adapting but never compromising her commitment to professional healthcare.

Similarly, **Sophia**, an artist from Iran, rechanneled her purpose in creative expression after facing barriers in Canada. In Iran, Sophia had built a successful career creating murals and participating in exhibitions, using her art to convey social and political themes. Yet, upon arriving in Canada, language barriers and lack of local experience pushed her to take on unrelated jobs. Over time, she adjusted her artwork to appeal to a broader audience, integrating global themes that could resonate in her new context. Eventually, Sophia secured a position as an art instructor, balancing teaching with her personal art practice. She shared, "I had to adjust my art to speak to a wider audience... it became more about teaching global themes rather than just Iran." Through rechanneling her creative purpose into teaching, Sophia stayed true to her artistic roots, regaining a sense of meaning in her work by adapting her skills to fit her new environment.

This section identifies five distinct adaptive approaches—broadening, expanding, evolving, narrowing, and rechanneling—that ISMs employ to regain meaningfulness in work after migration. As migration often led to a profound erosion of participants' sense of purpose and work's significance, they engaged with work in adaptive ways, transforming how it contributed to their broader life meaning under new, sometimes challenging, circumstances. These pathways represent flexible forms of meaning reconstruction, allowing participants to

redefine work as a worthwhile aspect of their lives even when misalignment with their original aspirations persisted.

The findings highlight that contextual factors—such as occupation, cultural background, family roles, and age—significantly shaped participants' adaptations, influencing both shared patterns and individual nuances in their pathways. For example, occupational backgrounds provide unique frameworks for expanding or rechanneling purpose, while cultural values shape resilience and collective contributions. Family responsibilities often lead to a prioritization of stability or a shift from career-centred to family-centred goals, and life stage influences the depth and direction of evolving or narrowing purpose. These contextual elements contributed to the unique ways participants navigated and redefined work meaningfulness, allowing for both common pathways and personalized adaptations.

As participants employed adaptive approaches to reconstruct work meaningfulness, social interactions emerged as a critical enabler of this process. While adaptive approaches reflected participants' individual strategies to navigate personal, cultural, and professional shifts, the role of social interactions highlighted the relational and communal dimensions of their journeys. Social interactions not only facilitated participants' ability to validate their professional identities and reimagine their purpose but also provided emotional support, inclusion, and practical opportunities essential for navigating their new environments.

In the next section, the focus shifts to exploring how these interactions—ranging from recognition and belonging to giving back and networking—contributed to participants' evolving sense of work meaningfulness. These connections were not just supportive but also transformative processes that helped participants bridge the gap between their past identities and aspirations and their new realities in Canada.

4.4.4 The Role of Social Interactions in Regaining Work Meaningfulness Phase

Social interactions played a crucial role in shaping participants' experiences and progress during the regaining work meaningfulness phase. These interactions were not merely transactional but became pathways for deeper integration, growth, and fulfillment in their new environments. Four key themes emerged: *affirming professional identity and impact, fostering belonging and inclusion, contributing and giving back, and active networking.*

4.4.4.1 Recognition of Professional Identity and Impacts

For many participants, social interactions provided a crucial means of validating their professional identities and recognizing their positive impacts. After enduring periods of underemployment in survival jobs, being acknowledged for their skills and efforts profoundly impacted their confidence and sense of worth. **Aidan** reflected, "It's very interesting for me that I am engaged in projects that are valued. It's like a dream for me." These moments of recognition not only allowed participants to rebuild their belief in their professional capabilities but also reinforced their sense of alignment with their evolving purpose, a critical aspect of regaining work meaningfulness.

This was especially evident in **Sun**'s experience, where a mentor's praise highlighted her adaptability and contributions to a team: "He told me, 'Your work ethic and dedication are your biggest assets,' and it made me feel seen after so long." Such interactions encouraged her to see her progress as meaningful, motivating her to take further steps toward growth and alignment with her professional aspirations. By feeling valued in these ways, participants began to experience greater coherence between their past achievements and their current roles.

For others, these interactions played a pivotal role in maintaining their professional reputation within communities of peers. **Daniel** described how reconnecting with colleagues in Canada validated his skills and bolstered his determination: "When people from the industry recognized my past achievements, it felt like my career wasn't lost. It gave me the courage to start building again." These instances of recognition underscored the transformative power of social interactions in fostering a renewed sense of professional identity and impact. By reinforcing their confidence and highlighting the relevance of their skills, these interactions enabled participants to reframe their work experiences as valuable and connected to their broader life purpose, thus advancing their journey to regaining work meaningfulness.

4.4.4.2 Fostering Belonging and Inclusion

Belonging and inclusion emerged as critical elements in the regaining work meaningfulness phase, where social interactions played a pivotal role in helping participants feel connected to their new environment. This sense of connection went beyond professional spaces, including community networks and informal relationships that helped them feel seen as worthy of belonging. **Mahshid** reflected on this sense of integration and shared, "It was not easy to start from scratch, but when I saw how people here appreciated even small steps, it gave me a sense of being part of something bigger. Slowly, I felt like I belonged."

Grace echoed this sentiment, explaining how forming new connections in Canada helped her navigate feelings of isolation: "At first, I tried to isolate myself because I felt embarrassed about the work I was doing compared to my profession back home. But as I started to connect with others, I realized they weren't judging me. They respected my efforts, and that changed how I saw myself." This marked a significant shift from earlier phases, where participants often

grappled with feelings of shame or inadequacy tied to survival jobs. In the regaining work meaningfulness phase, these interactions helped participants redefine their self-perception, moving from self-doubt to a sense of acceptance and belonging. These interactions helped participants overcome initial feelings of displacement and build a sense of belonging that was essential for their emotional and psychological well-being.

Social inclusion was not limited to personal validation; it also extended to feeling valued in their communities. **Grace** shared how the inclusive environment gradually made her feel at home: "When I worked with others who understood what it was like to start over, it created a bond. They didn't see me as less than them because of my struggles—they saw me as someone who could contribute." These experiences helped participants feel connected and supported, fostering a foundation for their continued growth and engagement in their new lives.

4.4.4.3 Helping Others and Giving Back

In this phase, many participants found meaning and fulfillment through helping others and giving back, often inspired by gratitude for the support they had received during their struggles. Social interactions became a platform for transformation, where participants turned their hardships into valuable lessons to uplift others.

Miguel described how serving others became a source of healing and self-discovery: "I heal myself by serving others. I found myself again by helping people, by giving my time even though I was a mess. People appreciate the message and say, 'I learned more in the last 20 minutes than in my last two years in Canada.'" His efforts to mentor and support others not only allowed him to process his own challenges but also reinforced his sense of purpose.

Similarly, **Sophia**, an art instructor, reflected on how her role extended beyond teaching skills: "It's not just about teaching the skill… it's about touching their authentic self, being open, and connecting on a human level." By creating a safe and supportive space for her students, she helped them navigate personal struggles, from identity issues to societal pressures. Her connection with them bridged cultural and emotional divides, fostering a shared sense of trust and growth. This deep bond not only enhanced Sophia's fulfillment but also underscored the meaningful impact of her contributions in her new environment.

Mia offered a unique perspective shaped by her experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although delivering gifts might not seem impactful at first glance, she reflected on how this role took on deeper meaning during a time of widespread isolation and uncertainty: "Even if it wasn't my dream job, during COVID, it felt like I was making a difference. People were stuck at home, disconnected, and receiving those deliveries brought them a moment of happiness and hope." For Mia, the impact of her work went beyond material transactions—it became a way to alleviate loneliness and bring joy to other people during a challenging time. However, she distinguished this experience from her broader sense of work meaning, emphasizing that "true meaning comes when you know you're helping someone in a lasting way." Despite this distinction, her role during the pandemic helped her recognize the power of small acts of service in contributing to others' well-being.

Aidan, who volunteered with newcomers, shared how this experience allowed him to reconnect with his own journey: "I saw myself in their struggles, and helping them find their way gave me a sense of fulfillment that I hadn't felt in a long time. It's not just about helping them; it's also about finding purpose in their stories and seeing my journey reflected in theirs." By offering

guidance and support, Aidan found not only a way to assist others but also a path to rediscover his own sense of value and direction.

For these participants, helping others was more than an act of service—it was a reciprocal process that reinforced their own sense of worth and purpose. Through mentoring, teaching, or volunteering, they transformed personal challenges into opportunities for connection and impact, solidifying their place in their new environment while giving back to the communities that had supported them.

In the next chapter, the discussion section, I will build on these findings to analyze the theoretical and practical implications of these findings.

5. DISCUSSION SECTION

This chapter synthesizes the key findings of this dissertation, connecting them to broader scholarly conversations about work meaningfulness, emphasizing its dynamic and context-sensitive nature in the experiences of International Skilled Migrants (ISMs). It first overviews the findings, then situates the study's contributions within existing theoretical frameworks and discusses the implications of these insights for theory and practice. Finally, the chapter addresses the study's limitations and outlines directions for future research, providing a foundation for advancing scholarship on work meaningfulness and its evolving dynamics across diverse contexts.

5.1 Discussion of Findings in Response to the Overarching Research Question

The central aim of this study was to explore how International Skilled Migrants (ISMs) navigate the erosion of work meaningfulness and, for those who do, regain it in the context of migration. The findings revealed that this process was not linear or uniform across individuals but followed identifiable patterns. These patterns reflected a phased progression, with participants transitioning through three broad stages: survival jobs, reorientation, and regaining work meaningfulness. In each phase, participants responded to distinct challenges and needs, demonstrating evolving interpretations of their work and adapting through context-sensitive strategies. While the triggers for transition varied, a consistent theme was the shifting relationship between participants' work and their broader sense of self, purpose, and possibility in their new environment.

Although the phases were derived inductively from participants' narratives, their progression reflects a broader process of reconstructing meaning that resonates with

sensemaking literature (e.g., Weick, 1995; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Rather than passively adjusting to their circumstances, participants actively reinterpreted their experiences through cycles of reflection, reappraisal, and adaptation. Their journey—from responding to disorientation and loss to exploring alternatives and eventually integrating new meanings—mirrors the arc of sensemaking as a movement from disruption, through bracketing prior assumptions, to reestablishing coherence. I did not deliberately apply theoretical stages to guide this analysis; rather, the process emerged organically from participants' narratives. As they navigated ambiguity and worked to reconcile identity, context, and aspiration over time, a coherent progression became apparent. One element that stood out across phases was how participants gradually reframed how they evaluated their situations—shifting from comparisons with their past professional lives or idealized migration outcomes to more grounded reference points, such as current realities, peers in similar situations, or revised personal values. These evolving frames of comparison supported their ability to reconstruct meaning in work that once felt disconnected from their sense of self.

The findings across these three phases reveal a dynamic and context-sensitive account of how work meaningfulness is disrupted and gradually reconstructed over time. Each phase was marked by distinct dominant features, underlying needs, and adaptive responses, which together illuminate how ISMs make sense of, and respond to, shifting constraints and possibilities in their work lives. In the following sections, I revisit each phase through an interpretive lens, examining not only the conditions and responses participants described but also how their evolving aspirations, shifting reference points, and reconstruction of identity and purpose shaped their journey toward regaining meaningfulness in work.

5.1.1 Survival Jobs Phase

Upon arrival, ISMs encountered significant challenges, such as difficulty in transferring professional credentials, prolonged searches for work aligned with their expertise, cultural adjustments, and a pervasive sense of limited agency in shaping their professional trajectories. Many had to take on "survival jobs," general roles that did not align with their skills or professional identities.

During this phase, participants employed various adaptive approaches to navigate the misalignment between their aspirations and the realities they faced, including embracing transitional purposes, employing self-worth affirmation strategies and diluting existing misalignment through reframing. Participants adopting transitional purposes reframed their survival jobs as temporary but necessary steps toward meaningful goals, such as supporting their families or preparing for future opportunities. Others engaged in self-worth affirmation strategies—such as maintaining connections with professional networks, volunteering, or continuing skill development—to preserve their sense of professional identity and competence, which was critical for those who struggled to reconcile their current roles with their self-concept. These approaches were not used in a mutually exclusive manner; while some participants relied solely on transitional purposes, others found that transitional purposes alone were insufficient and complemented them with self-worth affirmation strategies.

Additionally, some participants employed reframing to dilute misalignment, reducing its emotional strain by downplaying the significance of shortcomings of their survival jobs and reinterpreting these roles to better align with their current realities. For example, they might view survival jobs as just one part of a broader life purpose or focus on other meaningful aspects of their lives, such as caregiving or personal growth. Participants often combined these approaches,

using them simultaneously or shifting between them based on their evolving circumstances. This multifaceted coping framework allowed them to tolerate and navigate the challenges of the survival jobs phase while maintaining hope for eventual alignment with their aspirations.

Social interactions played a critical role in facilitating these adaptive approaches. Support from family, former colleagues, and close-knit professional networks reinforced participants' ability to reframe their circumstances and sustain their strategies. For example, encouragement and validation from loved ones helped participants maintain hope and tolerate their survival jobs as temporary. Connections with professional peers in their premigration occupation provided a sense of recognition, enabling participants to affirm their self-worth despite the misalignment in their work. Conversely, some participants selectively withdrew from social groups or interactions that they perceived as judgmental or stigmatizing, protecting their sense of dignity and resilience. These social dynamics acted as buffers against the erosion of work meaningfulness, enhancing participants' ability to navigate this challenging period.

It is important to note that not all participants perceived themselves as underemployed during this phase, even when their work objectively fit the definition of underemployment (e.g., using minimal skills or expertise). Some participants viewed their circumstances as temporary and necessary, particularly those pursuing Canadian training to re-enter their field or industry. Others prioritized non-professional aspects of life, such as family responsibilities or personal well-being, which made their current work feel less misaligned with their broader life goals. These diverse perceptions highlight how individual contexts and priorities shaped participants' experiences of the survival jobs phase.

In sum, this phase was not about career advancement but about meeting the immediate need for survival and creating the foundational conditions required to eventually pursue

professional alignment and personal fulfillment. The necessity to secure financial stability, support their families, and adapt to the new cultural and occupational realities drove participants' efforts during this period. By employing adaptive approaches—whether finding transitional purposes, affirming self-worth, or diluting misalignment—alongside the support of supportive social interactions, participants demonstrated resilience and flexibility. These strategies enabled them to persist in their survival jobs, endure the challenges of misalignment, and maintain hope for future opportunities to align their work with their broader aspirations.

5.1.2 Reorientation Phase

The reorientation phase marked a critical turning point in ISMs' journeys as they moved beyond the reactive coping strategies of survival jobs. Escalating tensions—arising from persistent misalignments between their realities and aspirations—drove participants to deeply reflect on their circumstances and seek more sustainable paths forward. Triggers such as job loss, recurring rejections and burnouts, encountering workplace inequities, and reaching a breaking point in tolerating misalignment compelled participants to reexamine their priorities and consider more deliberate and strategic approaches.

To alleviate these tensions, participants used adaptive approaches that allowed them to navigate systemic barriers and reshape their professional trajectories. These included strategic skill development, such as pursuing certifications or training to overcome barriers like unrecognized credentials; exploring alternative career paths, shifting into fields better aligned with their evolving values and priorities; redefining the role of work, integrating professional goals with personal well-being and family considerations; and leveraging networks, actively engaging with social connections for guidance, referrals, and insights into career opportunities.

These approaches reflected participants' growing recognition of their volition as they began taking incremental steps to influence their circumstances despite ongoing challenges.

These adaptive approaches not only helped participants address the tensions of the reorientation phase but also offered incremental successes that reinforced their sense of volition and agency. Each step—whether obtaining a certification, exploring a new career path, leveraging networks, or redefining work's significance—demonstrated participants' capacity to influence their circumstances, gradually shifting their focus from perceived limitations to emerging possibilities.

Through this process, participants transitioned from reactive coping to intentional exploration, setting the stage for the next phase, where they began to reclaim work meaningfulness by reshaping their professional identities and aligning their work purpose with their broader aspirations.

5.1.3 Regaining Work Meaningfulness Phase

The regaining work meaningfulness phase marked a period of clarity and integration in participants' journeys. This phase was characterized by key features such as growing alignment between aspirations and realities, reconciliation of past professional identities with present circumstances, a sense of settlement and belonging, and a renewed purpose. Unlike earlier phases, this stage was not defined by reactive coping or dramatic turning points but by gradual, purposeful adjustments that helped participants reshape their professional and personal lives in ways that resonated with their evolving values and aspirations.

The driving force in this phase was the need for coherence and purpose. Participants sought to integrate their pre-migration professional identities and experiences with the realities of

their new environment, creating a narrative that aligned their past, present, and future. This sense of coherence was critical in helping participants see their progress as meaningful and their professional paths as viable within their new context. Alongside this, the need for purpose drove participants to leverage their growth through hardships to make meaningful contributions, often motivated by gratitude for the help they had received during their journey. This dual need for coherence and purpose motivated participants' efforts to rebuild meaningfulness in work in this phase.

Participants employed a variety of adaptive approaches to achieve this alignment, including broadening, expanding, evolving, narrowing, and rechanneling their purpose. These approaches enabled participants to creatively address misalignments between their aspirations and realities, fostering a sense of agency and progress. For example, some reframed their roles (broadening), integrated additional goals (expanding), or transformed their values to prioritize higher-order purposes (evolving). Others reduced their reliance on work as a central source of meaning (narrowing) or adapted their means of fulfilling professional goals when previous paths were inaccessible (rechanneling).

However, it was not merely the alignment between realities and aspirations that led to regaining work meaningfulness. More important was the ability to reinterpret and re-anchor meaning—an interpretive shift often involving changes in how participants framed their situation and compared themselves to others or past ideals. As participants' understanding of their environment matured, they began to shift their reference points—moving away from constant comparisons with pre-migration achievements or expectations and toward more grounded, context-aware evaluations of where they were and what they could realistically pursue. This shift helped them reduce the emotional weight of misalignment and supported the reconstruction of

significance and purpose in ways that felt personally and socially meaningful. For example, participants who broadened or expanded their purpose not only aligned with current realities but also redefined their work's significance by connecting it to societal impact or new dimensions of personal fulfillment. In this way, the sense of significance and purpose became central to the process of regaining work meaningfulness beyond realignment.

It is important to emphasize that regaining work meaningfulness did not mean restoring work to its pre-migration role or significance. Instead, participants often reconceptualized what work meant within their evolving contexts, drawing on what they had learned about themselves, their environments, and what was realistically attainable. This reconceptualization allowed them to adapt their sense of purpose in ways that aligned more closely with their current values and possibilities. For example, participants who evolved their purpose shifted their priorities toward higher-order values such as contribution and legacy, while those who narrowed their purpose redefined work as a functional but not central part of life—something that supported their broader sense of meaning rather than defining it. This flexibility in how work was positioned within their life meaning was key to regaining meaningfulness under new constraints.

Alongside this, many participants also began shifting their reference points—gradually moving away from comparisons with pre-migration roles, ideals, or expected migration outcomes. Instead, they anchored their evaluations in more grounded and realistic comparisons, often drawing from their peers' experiences or their own revised aspirations. This shift was not necessarily conscious or deliberate, but it played a subtle yet powerful role in helping participants reframe their situations in ways that supported meaning reconstruction. It eased the emotional strain of perceived setbacks and helped participants recognize growth, coherence, and accomplishment in paths they had previously resisted or overlooked.

This phase illustrates the final arc of a broader meaning-making process—one that began with disorientation and coping, moved through reflection and recalibration, and culminated in a renewed and more integrated understanding of work's role in participants' lives. While experiences of meaningfulness remained dynamic and occasionally disrupted, participants had developed more stable anchors—rooted in clarity about who they had become, what they valued, and what was realistically possible. These anchors enabled a renewed sense of purpose and significance in work, offering a more enduring foundation for navigating future uncertainties—even if not immune to further shifts or erosion.

In addition to internal recalibrations of purpose and reference points, social interactions played a critical enabling role in supporting participants' efforts to regain work meaningfulness. Validation from professional networks helped participants affirm their evolving sense of purpose and recognize their contributions. Social interactions also served as enablers, providing access to resources, opportunities, and mentorship that supported adaptive strategies. For instance, participants rechanneled their professional goals through referrals or guidance, expanded their sense of purpose through collaborative work environments, or redefined their roles by learning from peers.

Moreover, many participants found fulfillment in giving back through mentoring or contributing to their communities. These reciprocal interactions reinforced their sense of belonging and purpose, transforming social connections into platforms for meaningful contributions. By leveraging these interactions to receive and provide support, participants bridged the gap between their evolving aspirations and the realities of their circumstances, further aligning their work with their values.

This study's insights into regaining work meaningfulness align with and extend earlier research (Vough, 2008) that has examined how individuals respond to shifts in their work context. While Vough's (2008) research provided important conceptual groundwork by exploring the dynamics of finding and losing meaning, her study was conducted within the relatively stable environment of an architectural organization. At that time, meaningful work was primarily understood as alignment rather than the interplay of significance and purposefulness, and her pathways reflected responses to threats rather than active reconstruction. Some pathways in this study appear similar at an abstract level—such as narrowing purpose, which mirrors Vough's process of minimizing or expanding, which shares commonalities with her notion of substituting. However, this research emphasizes a more nuanced view: narrowing purpose here is not merely a coping mechanism but a deliberate realignment of work's role in life, often driven by shifting priorities like family or well-being. Similarly, expanding purpose involves not simply replacing one source of meaning with another but blending and integrating new dimensions that enrich meaningfulness over time. By introducing new pathways, such as evolving and rechanneling, this study demonstrates how ISMs actively reshape their sense of meaningful work in response to the unique challenges of migration. Where Vough's work conceptualized meaningful work largely as a property tied to stable contexts, this research insists on understanding erosion and reconstruction as a dynamic process—one that is ongoing, adaptive, and deeply influenced by cultural dislocation, systemic barriers, and personal growth.

Although presented as the final stage, regaining work meaningfulness does not represent a conclusive endpoint for all participants. For some, it was a momentary alignment that was later challenged again by changes in work conditions or life circumstances. This underscores the

fluidity of work meaningfulness and highlights the need to view it as an ongoing process that may involve repeated cycles of erosion and realignment.

Together, the dominant features, driving forces, adaptive approaches, and role of social interactions illustrate how participants transitioned from survival-oriented coping mechanisms to purposeful engagement. The regaining work meaningfulness phase was not a fixed destination but a dynamic process of evolving clarity, agency, and alignment, enabling participants to reshape their professional paths while integrating their values and aspirations.

In responding to the overarching research question, this study uncovered a dynamic and evolving journey through which ISMs navigated and reconstructed work meaningfulness. The process unfolded across three interconnected phases, each marked by distinct challenges and adaptive strategies. Participants focused on meeting immediate survival needs in the survival jobs phase, enduring significant misalignments between their aspirations and post-migration realities. This temporary tolerance of discomfort was driven by the urgency of their circumstances. Over time, the misalignment grew into a broader and more complex challenge, reflecting the layered difficulties of adapting to immigration, compounded by additional external and internal factors.

To address these escalating tensions, ISMs began taking more strategic actions, recognizing their capacity to influence their circumstances. As they experienced incremental successes, they gained a sense of agency, marking a pivotal transition into the reorientation phase. This phase represented a turning point as ISMs shifted from reactive coping to purposeful adaptation. By engaging in deliberate strategies such as skill development, redefining work's role, and leveraging social networks, they began alleviating tensions and exploring sustainable paths forward.

Gradually, ISMs gained greater clarity about their realities and opportunities in Canada. With an increased sense of alignment and settlement, they adjusted their purposes to reflect their evolving identities and aspirations. Although participants felt comparatively more settled at this stage, meaning-making remained an ongoing process. Some still struggle with workplace challenges that adversely impact their sense of work meaningfulness. However, with more stable anchors—clarity about who they were in Canada and what they could realistically aspire to—these challenges were less overwhelming than the global erosion of work meaningfulness experienced at the onset of immigration.

5.2 Theoretical Contributions

This dissertation deepens our understanding of work meaningfulness by examining how International Skilled Migrants (ISMs) in Canada navigate the complex, adaptive journey to regain meaning in their work. Unlike traditional perspectives, such as Allan (2017), Carton (2018) and Steger et al. (2012), which often present work meaningfulness as a stable or fixed construct, the findings in this study reveal it as a fluid, context-sensitive process. ISMs, faced with shifts in jobs, cultural contexts, and personal goals, frequently engage in a dynamic reconstruction of their relationship to work. This reconstruction is marked not by a simple return to previous interpretations of purpose but by an active reshaping that integrates new values, perspectives, and circumstances.

Through adaptive approaches, participants continuously aligned work with a broader sense of life meaning, revealing that work meaningfulness is not a static goal but an ongoing, multidimensional process. By exploring these strategies, this research contributes to the discourse in several key areas: the dynamic alignment of global work meaningfulness (Bailey &

Madden, 2019), bridging and showing the relationship between self-oriented and others-oriented frameworks (Rosso et al., 2010), personal and social adaptive processes (Bailey & Madden, 2019), and realization and justification perspectives (Bailey et al., 2024; Lepisto & Pratt, 2017), understanding of work meaninglessness (Bailey et al., 2019; Mercurio, 2019), dynamic work orientations (Dobrow, 2013; Schabram et al., 2022), insights into Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017), and the adaptive approaches participants used to sustain resilience and adapt their work purposes (Bailey & Madden, 2019).

5.2.1 Contributions to the Meaningful Work Literature

This dissertation advances the meaningful work literature by uncovering how International Skilled Migrants (ISMs) navigate the erosion and regain work meaningfulness through phase-specific adaptive approaches. By examining ISMs—a population uniquely positioned to experience profound and prolonged disruptions to their work meaningfulness—this study moves beyond previous studies to explore meaningful work as a dynamic, relational, and context-sensitive phenomenon.

The findings challenge traditional models that treat meaningful work as a static or stable construct, revealing it instead as an evolving process. As ISMs transitioned from survival jobs to reorientation and ultimately to regaining work meaningfulness, their adaptive strategies evolved from reactive coping mechanisms to proactive exploration and integrative reconceptualization. This progression underscores the fluidity of work meaningfulness and highlights how individuals reshape their relationship with work over time in response to changing external contexts and internal aspirations.

This study responds to the call of Bailey and Madden (2019) for research on global experiences of meaninglessness, offering a longitudinal perspective on how individuals reconstruct meaningful work amidst systemic challenges. By identifying adaptive approaches tied to specific phases, the research provides a nuanced understanding of how individuals balance short-term coping strategies with long-term pathways of purpose reconstruction. Conceptualization of phase-specific adaptations broadens existing theories, emphasizing work meaningfulness and its temporal and evolving nature.

Furthermore, this research moves beyond self-oriented frameworks to highlight the critical role of relational and social dynamics in regaining work meaningfulness. Social interactions emerged as central to participants' adaptive strategies, offering validation, belonging, and inspiration while enabling them to navigate systemic barriers and reconstruct their sense of purpose. This relational perspective responds to Rosso et al.'s (2010) critique that meaningful work literature has traditionally underemphasized the social contexts that underpin meaning-making processes. By illustrating how ISMs leveraged relationships to buffer against meaninglessness and facilitate growth, this study underscores the importance of relational and contextual dimensions in reconstructing work meaningfulness.

The study also bridges realization and justification perspectives on meaningful work (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017) by demonstrating how ISMs reconcile their contributions to others with self-oriented dimensions, such as evolving aspirations for self-actualization. This integrative approach aligns with recent calls by Bailey et al. (2024) to examine connections between contribution and self-actualization. It offers a more nuanced understanding of how individuals navigate the interplay between personal growth and broader societal impact in shaping meaningful work experiences. By highlighting how ISMs balance their evolving sense of self

with their contributions to others, this study provides fresh insights into the dynamic relationship between self-oriented aspirations for self-actualization and others-oriented aspirations for self-transcendence in shaping a sense of global work meaningfulness.

Ultimately, this research introduces a dynamic framework for understanding meaningful work as an adaptive and relational process that evolves over time. By situating the analysis in the context of ISMs, the findings contribute to the literature by demonstrating how systemic, cultural, and relational factors shape the reconstruction of work meaningfulness. This perspective challenges static models and offers a more holistic view of how individuals align their work with evolving identities, values, and aspirations across their life trajectories.

5.2.2 Contributions to Understanding Dynamic Alignment

For over twenty years, scholars have used terms such as "fit," "match," and "alignment" to explain how and why individuals find meaning in their work (e.g., Bailey et al., 2019; Kim-Lim et al., 2023; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Scroggins, 2008). Early discussions in the management literature acknowledged that meaningfulness is an ongoing, unfolding phenomenon and noted that alignment between one's identity, organizational culture, and work roles is rarely an "all-or-nothing" state (e.g., Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2017; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). However, the prevalence of cross-sectional approaches in meaningful work research has often overlooked the dynamic and evolving nature of this phenomenon.

This dissertation demonstrates that alignment is, in fact, a multidimensional and adaptive process. My findings reveal that individuals actively use adaptive strategies to achieve a sense of alignment that resonates with their personal life meaning and the evolving demands of their work roles, helping sustain work's meaningfulness over time. Rather than simply restoring a fixed

alignment between beliefs (aspirations) and experiences (realities), participants often redefined or reinterpreted their professional identities and purposes to realign them with a new sense of self, life context, and work environment. As participants faced changes in their work circumstances, values, or sense of identity, they adapted by anchoring themselves in a deeper sense of life purpose or self-worth. This connection to something more enduring provided stability and resilience, helping them navigate uncertainty and shifts while maintaining a consistent sense of direction and purpose. These findings also resonate with sensemaking perspectives (e.g., Weick, 1995; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014), where individuals reconstruct meaning through ongoing interpretation and adjustment in response to disruption. In this view, changing reference points and adaptive reinterpretations enable individuals to regain coherence and navigate ambiguity, while deeper values and life purposes often function as more stable anchors across these transitions. This perspective emphasizes alignment as fluid and responsive to the shifting realities of life and work, providing a more nuanced view of how individuals continually navigate, redefine, and sustain work meaningfulness across changing environments and life stages.

5.2.3 Contributions to Understanding Work Meaninglessness

Despite increasing attention to meaningful work, the concept of work meaninglessness remains underexplored. Existing studies, such as Bailey et al. (2019) and Mercurio (2019), highlight the absence of clarity regarding how and under what circumstances work becomes meaningless, the interplay between meaningfulness and meaninglessness, and the agential responses individuals employ to navigate these experiences. While some research addresses degradation, purposelessness, or disrespect as factors that contribute to work meaninglessness,

there is limited empirical insight into how individuals actively resist, reframe, or adapt to meaninglessness, particularly within broader systemic and cultural contexts. This study addresses these gaps by offering a nuanced understanding of work meaninglessness as a dynamic, context-sensitive, and multifaceted experience influenced by three processes of perceived misalignment, gradual erosion of meaning, and experiences of active harm. It also explores the adaptive strategies individuals use to mitigate its impact.

The findings of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of work meaninglessness, framing it as a subjective and dynamic experience rather than a static or absolute state. While the concept has traditionally been described as work feeling negative, purposeless, or insignificant (e.g., May et al., 2004), this research highlights its nuanced nature, shaped by individual agency, contextual factors, and adaptive strategies. Importantly, work meaninglessness is rarely manifested as total (where no aspect of the work holds meaning for the individual) or enduring among participants.

This study aligns with Pratt and Ashforth's (2003) perspective that meaningfulness and meaninglessness are ongoing, dynamic phenomena rather than static end states. The findings further support their assertion that experiences of work are rarely all-or-nothing, with "pockets" of alignment and misalignment often coexisting. Participants' experiences reveal that work meaninglessness can emerge through three distinct processes: perceived misalignment, gradual erosion of meaning, and experiences of active harm, each representing a different way individuals encountered meaninglessness in their work. Misalignment arises when there is a disconnect between an individual's aspirations, values, or identity and the realities of their work. For example, survival jobs often exemplified this type of meaninglessness, as participants felt their roles failed to align with their skills or professional goals. Despite this, many mitigated the

impact of misalignment by reframing these roles through transitional purposes, such as supporting family or preparing for future opportunities.

Erosion, on the other hand, reflects a gradual loss of connection to meaningful aspects of work over time. This was evident in participants who, after prolonged exposure to systemic barriers or repeated setbacks, experienced a diminished sense of professional identity or worth. Unlike misalignment, which is situational and often temporary, erosion represents a deeper, more cumulative challenge that participants addressed through strategies such as affirming self-worth or redefining work's role in their broader life purpose.

A more extreme form of meaninglessness, active harm, emerged in cases where participants perceived their work environment as toxic or fundamentally conflicting with their values. These experiences went beyond the absence of meaning to actively undermine participants' well-being and sense of integrity. However, even in these situations, participants demonstrated agency by seeking ways to dilute the negative impact, such as reducing the significance of work in their life's meaning, leveraging social interactions to maintain resilience and often quitting their jobs.

These variations in meaninglessness highlight its dynamic and layered nature. Meaninglessness often coexisted with pockets of meaningfulness, as participants found ways to extract value from their circumstances despite underlying challenges. For instance, survival jobs might feel professionally insignificant but still hold the purpose of providing financial stability or supporting loved ones. This interplay underscores that meaninglessness is not a binary state but a complex spectrum influenced by individual perceptions and contextual factors.

The agency played a central role in navigating meaninglessness across these forms. Participants employed adaptive approaches to reframe their experiences, align their realities with

their aspirations, or mitigate adverse impacts. They actively transformed their relationship with work by broadening, expanding, evolving, rechanneling, or narrowing their purpose. Social interactions further shaped these adaptive strategies, providing validation, guidance, and a sense of belonging that buffered against the more profound effects of meaninglessness. Moreover, cultural narratives emphasizing duty, sacrifice, and resilience often allowed participants to reframe their work's significance within a larger purpose, mitigating its negative impact.

This research expands the understanding of work meaninglessness by positioning it as a dynamic and context-sensitive experience deeply influenced by individual agency and social contexts. Rather than an absolute absence of meaning, it emerges as a multifaceted state where meaninglessness and meaningfulness often coexist. By illuminating these dimensions and variations, this study offers a more nuanced framework for understanding how individuals navigate and transform experiences of meaninglessness in work.

5.2.4 Contributions to Dynamic Work Orientations

The concept of work orientations—encompassing individuals' overarching beliefs about the role of work in life—has traditionally been viewed as relatively stable. Early scholarship (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997; Schabram & Maitlis, 2016) defined work orientations in terms of broad categories, such as job, career, and calling, often treating these distinctions as fixed attributes. While this framework provided a valuable foundation, it also set the stage for an assumption of stability that influenced subsequent research. Over time, however, scholars began to question this static perspective. For instance, Dobrow (2013) demonstrated that even a calling—commonly perceived as one of the most stable orientations—can evolve, shifting in response to behavioural engagement and changing social contexts. More recently, researchers

have expanded on these findings, highlighting the importance of exploring how work orientations can dynamically adapt to life circumstances (Schabram et al., 2022).

My findings further reveal a nuanced view of how the role of work in contributing to life meaning—and what makes work meaningful—can adapt significantly. While life meaning itself may remain relatively stable, the way work connects to and reinforces that meaning evolves dynamically in response to individual and contextual changes. Work orientations are central to this connection, shaping how individuals interpret work's role in aligning with their broader meaning in life.

Participants who primarily derive meaning from work through self-worth affirmation tend to display a more stable (or "sticky") connection between their work and life meaning. In contrast, work meaningfulness becomes more adaptable for those who emphasize contributions beyond self-actualization—such as engaging in self-transcendent activities like mentoring or community service. For these individuals, work is not fixed in its role but instead exists along a spectrum, shifting between central and instrumental positions depending on how well it aligns with their broader sense of purpose.

Participants framed work as instrumental during the survival jobs phase, focusing on immediate needs. As they adapted, they recalibrated the work's position on this spectrum, allowing it to become more central when it aligned more closely with their life meaning. This process underscores the fluidity of work meaningfulness and highlights the dynamic and context-sensitive nature of work orientations. It challenges static views, suggesting that the role of work in life meaning and the perceived meaningfulness of work are both shaped through ongoing interpretation and adaptation, influenced by internal and external factors over time.

5.2.5 Contribution to Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2017) identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as core psychological needs that drive motivation and well-being. While my research does not directly extend SDT, it offers complementary insights into how autonomy and relatedness manifest in the pursuit of work meaningfulness, especially in constrained contexts such as survival jobs or major life transitions.

In challenging work environments, such as survival jobs, participants experienced autonomy not through control over external circumstances but by exercising choice in how they interpreted and responded to their challenges, thereby finding meaning through adaptive responses. This internal flexibility aligns with SDT's concept of autonomy while adding nuance, illustrating how volition and autonomy can still be present within externally limited conditions.

Moreover, while SDT emphasizes relatedness as fostering motivation through interpersonal connection, my findings suggest that for ISMs, relatedness often includes broader contributions to family and community. These broader contributions reflect a sense of meaningful work that extends beyond immediate interpersonal relationships to encompass collective and societal goals. While SDT focuses on interpersonal connection as a core need, these findings highlight how relatedness in meaningful work can manifest in diverse ways, particularly when individuals derive motivation from fulfilling collective responsibilities or serving others.

These insights resonate with SDT's principles while also offering conceptual refinements that may enhance the theory’s cultural and contextual sensitivity. In constrained environments, such as survival jobs, individuals may balance personal agency with relational and collective motivations, aligning their actions with broader purposes. More significantly, my findings

suggest that volition—central to SDT's concept of autonomy—is not always an internal or individual state. Rather, volition can be gradually reconstructed through interpretive flexibility, social validation, and culturally rooted relational commitments. This reframing positions volition as a dynamic, socially influenced process, which may be especially relevant for understanding motivation and meaning-making in collectivist cultures or under structural constraints. In this way, the study extends SDT's application and invites further exploration of how its core needs manifest across diverse sociocultural and life contexts.

5.2.6 Contributions to Literature on Career Transitions of Immigrants

This study makes an important contribution to the literature on the career transitions of International Skilled Migrants (ISMs) (e.g., Berry, 2005; Farashah & Blomquist, 2021; Hajro, Stahl, Clegg, & Lazarova, 2019; Matejicek, 2010). Much of the existing research on immigration has relied on deficit models (e.g., Cobb et al., 2019; Grant, 2005), which highlight the challenges ISMs face—particularly underemployment—and emphasize its negative consequences for well-being, job satisfaction, and life satisfaction (e.g., Chen, Smith, & Mustard, 2010; George, Chaze, Fuller-Thomson, & Brennenstuhl, 2012; Groleau & Smith, 2019; Khalil, Lietz, & Mayer, 2021; Wald & Fang, 2008; Wassermann & Hoppe, 2019). While these studies have been critical in drawing the attention of policymakers and organizations to the structural barriers ISMs encounter, they often portray immigrants as permanently disadvantaged, unable to break free from the constraints of survival-level employment.

This research challenges that prevailing narrative by adopting a longitudinal perspective to explore how ISMs navigate their career transitions over time. In the initial survival jobs phase, immigrants' focus is indeed on meeting immediate needs; however, as they settle into their new

environment, their reference points shift and their needs evolve from basic survival to the pursuit of meaning and fulfillment. By examining how ISMs actively respond to these challenges, this study highlights their agentic strategies for regaining work meaningfulness and illuminates the individual and environmental factors that support this process. Rather than framing ISMs as trapped at the bottom of a hierarchy, this research reveals the dynamic ways in which they reclaim agency and reconstruct meaningful careers in the face of persistent obstacles.

Matejicek's (2010) work, "(Re)constructing the meaning of work: experiences of internationally trained female physicians who immigrate to Canada," provides a valuable starting point at the intersection of immigration and the reconstruction of work meaning. Like this study, Matejicek focused on ISMs and the processes through which they rebuild a sense of meaning in their professional lives. However, there are important distinctions. While Matejicek's research centers exclusively on unemployed internationally trained female physicians, this study incorporates a more diverse sample in terms of both occupation and gender. Moreover, while Matejicek's work primarily addresses identity reconstruction and broader meaning-making, this study explores work meaningfulness as currently defined, emphasizing both significance and purposefulness.

Additionally, the nature of the participants' experiences differs significantly: Matejicek examined how her participants reconciled their professional losses and made peace with not working as a physician. At the same time, this study focuses on ISMs who are currently employed and engaged in actively regaining meaningfulness. This shift from coping with loss to regaining a sense of meaningfulness in work further underscores the difference in emphasis between the two studies. Finally, Matejicek employed narrative analysis, which yielded results that remain at the narrative level. By contrast, this research used grounded theory and ideal-type

analysis to abstract the findings and contribute to broader theoretical frameworks. Together, these distinctions highlight how the present study builds on Matejicek's contributions, offering new insights into how ISMs reconstruct work meaningfulness and paving the way for more nuanced understandings of the immigrant career transition journey.

In sum, this dissertation advances the meaningful work literature by framing work meaningfulness as an adaptive, relational, and context-sensitive phenomenon. It introduces phase-specific adaptive approaches, highlights dynamic alignment as an ongoing process, and conceptualizes work meaninglessness as emerging through processes of misalignment, erosion, and active harm. The study also sheds light on the fluidity of dynamic work orientations in response to evolving contexts and offers complementary insights into SDT by demonstrating the flexibility of autonomy and relatedness in constrained environments. By bridging realization and justification perspectives and emphasizing the relational dimensions of meaningful work, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how individuals navigate and reconstruct meaningful work across life transitions.

These insights have practical implications for ISMs, managers, HR professionals, immigrant service provider organizations and policymakers in supporting ISMs' integration and well-being. The following section presents recommendations to help stakeholders create programs and environments that enhance ISMs' meaningful work experience in diverse professional landscapes.

5.3 Practical Implications

This dissertation provides valuable insights into the dynamics of work meaningfulness for International Skilled Migrants (ISMs), offering tailored considerations for various

stakeholders. These insights, derived from ISMs' lived experiences, emphasize resilience, adaptability, and the evolving interplay between work, life, and the contexts of both home and host countries. The following suggestions outline actionable steps for ISMs, supervisors/managers, HR professionals, immigrant service providers, and policymakers based on the findings of this research.

5.3.1 Practical Implications for ISMs

Understanding that survival jobs are a common phase in the migration journey can alleviate feelings of isolation and self-blame. Many ISMs face similar challenges, often tied to systemic barriers rather than individual shortcomings. Recognizing this context can help ISMs focus on actionable steps, such as building local networks, seeking mentorship, and exploring skill development opportunities. These efforts, though incremental, can facilitate a transition to more meaningful work. Embracing temporary purposes in this phase can also provide hope and direction, reinforcing the understanding that this stage is temporary and that persistence will lead to better opportunities.

5.3.2 Practical Implications for Managers

Supervisors and managers can benefit from recognizing that many ISMs view their early job roles as transitional. Understanding this dynamic allows managers to provide support that aligns with ISMs' aspirations, such as offering flexible arrangements to accommodate family responsibilities or creating pathways for professional development. It is also critical to acknowledge the impact of unrecognized credentials. Many ISMs enter organizations with low salaries due to unrecognized qualifications, and while they may initially accept these roles, they are unlikely to stay if their credentials and skills are not eventually recognized and valued.

Acknowledging ISMs' contributions, offering salary adjustments or promotions as they demonstrate their capabilities, and fostering inclusive work environments can enhance engagement and retention. Demonstrating empathy toward their unique challenges and valuing their professional backgrounds strengthens organizational trust and loyalty.

5.3.3 Practical Implications for HR Professionals

HR professionals can take steps to support ISMs by improving communication during the hiring process. When ISMs' applications are unsuccessful, even small improvements in communication—such as promptly notifying applicants of their status—can prevent unnecessary waiting and uncertainty. Where possible, providing constructive feedback on why they were not selected and how they can improve for future opportunities can be transformative. Additionally, directing ISMs to immigrant service providers, bridging programs or other resources for skill development or mentorship can help them better navigate the job market and feel more empowered in their career journeys.

Once ISMs are employed, prioritizing family-centred resources can create a foundation for stability and engagement. Recognizing that ISMs often need to address family obligations before focusing on career advancement, when HR policies include benefits such as flexible work schedules, childcare support, and relocation assistance not only improve retention but also enable ISMs to participate more meaningfully in their roles. Additionally, onboarding processes that validate ISMs' prior experiences and provide structured pathways for skill alignment with organizational goals can enhance their sense of belonging and motivation.

5.3.4 Practical Implications for Immigrant Service Providers

Immigrant service providers play a crucial role in facilitating ISMs' transitions by offering programs that address both professional and personal needs. Bridging programs that connect ISMs with employers, mentors, and peer networks can provide valuable opportunities for career progression. At the same time, family-centred support systems, such as financial counselling and transitional job placement, are critical for stabilizing ISMs' immediate circumstances. Counselling and emotional support services can further help ISMs navigate the psychological toll of migration, fostering resilience and confidence in their journeys.

Creating community support groups can also be highly beneficial, enabling ISMs to assist one another in areas such as housing, childcare, and other daily challenges. These groups can be organized around shared cultural or linguistic backgrounds, offering targeted support for specific ethnic communities, or structured more broadly to foster diverse networks. Such initiatives help newcomers connect with others in similar situations, providing access to valuable knowledge, resources, and a sense of belonging that eases the transition into their new environment.

5.3.5 Practical Implications for Policymakers

Policymakers can address systemic barriers by streamlining credential recognition processes and ensuring that retraining opportunities are accessible and aligned with local market demands. Beyond these systemic adjustments, providing realistic pre-arrival information to skilled immigrants could offer a balanced view of the challenges they may face in Canada. This preparation would help ISMs develop informed strategies for their transitions and mitigate potential disillusionment.

Policymakers might also consider funding bridging programs offered by immigrant service organizations and creating mechanisms to match ISMs with these resources before their arrival in Canada. Early connection to these programs could facilitate smoother transitions by helping ISMs build networks, understand local job markets, and access mentorship or retraining opportunities upon arrival. Additionally, integrating culturally sensitive career counselling and family support resources into broader policies could enable ISMs to stabilize and thrive in their new environments.

Policymaker advocacy can have a profound impact. During the recent period when Canada welcomed Ukrainian newcomers, we observed how extensive advocacy efforts encouraged widespread community engagement and citizen-led support. This suggests that when policymakers actively champion the integration of ISMs and participate in initiatives such as support groups, they not only increase the visibility and accessibility of resources but also inspire greater public involvement. Strengthening this advocacy can create a more inclusive and supportive environment, ultimately improving ISMs' transitions and long-term integration.

In addition, it is crucial to implement regulations to protect immigrants from exploitation in the early stages of their arrival. The urgency for survival often compels newly arrived immigrants to accept jobs with extremely low pay, creating conditions that some organizations may exploit. This initial dependence on inadequate income can trap ISMs in a cycle that is very difficult to break, hindering their ability to transition into more meaningful and sustainable employment. Establishing oversight mechanisms and enforcing fair labour practices would help prevent exploitative working conditions and ensure that immigrants are treated with dignity and respect, reducing the risk of conditions that resemble modern slavery.

By addressing these insights across various stakeholder groups, this research highlights the importance of creating systems and environments that acknowledge the challenges ISMs face and harness their resilience and adaptability. These practical implications are intended to promote inclusion, provide meaningful support, and pave the way for ISMs to rebuild and sustain work meaningfulness in their new contexts after migration.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions

While this dissertation offers rich insights into the dynamics of work meaningfulness for International Skilled Migrants (ISMs), it is important to recognize its limitations and highlight opportunities for future research.

This study is cross-sectional in design, relying on participants' retrospective narratives to reconstruct their experiences across distinct phases of their journeys—survival jobs, reorientation, and regaining work meaningfulness. Retrospective accounts are shaped by participants' interpretations of past events, raising potential concerns about recall bias and selective memory. However, meaning-making is inherently retrospective and evolving, aligning with the constructivist epistemology of this study (Bailey & Madden, 2017; Vough, 2008; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Immigration and the erosion of work meaning are significant and memorable events, making retrospective accounts reliable for capturing participants' constructed narratives of regaining work meaningfulness (de Vaus, 2001:127). Moreover, by framing interviews to focus on distinct phases, this study approximated a longitudinal perspective, offering structured insights into how work meaningfulness evolves over time.

Future research could address this limitation by adopting longitudinal designs that track ISMs' experiences over time (i.e., prospective research design), providing real-time insights into

the processes of meaning erosion and regain. Such studies could capture immediate reactions to disruptions and the gradual development of adaptive strategies, offering a more dynamic understanding of how work meaningfulness evolves during key transitions.

This dissertation also focuses on the experiences of ISMs within Canada's unique cultural and socio-political context. While participants were drawn from diverse professional and cultural backgrounds, the sample may not fully represent all ISMs, particularly those in informal employment, with lower formal education, or without legal immigration status, who likely face distinct challenges and systemic barriers that were not captured in this research. In addition, future research could explore the experiences of ISMs from English-speaking countries, who may encounter different, and potentially fewer, challenges in navigating the Canadian labour market. Despite these limitations, the study provides a nuanced understanding of ISMs' experiences within Canada and offers a foundation for future comparative research across different migration systems, labour markets, and cultural and socio-political contexts.

A notable limitation of this study is that 65% of participants were from Iran, which may raise concerns about the diversity of perspectives represented. However, the Iranian participants in this study displayed significant diversity in professional, personal, and migration experiences, which contributed to a broad range of insights. As a result, this concentration of participants did not noticeably skew the findings, especially given that the identified dominant features, driving forces, adaptive approaches, and social interactions were shared across the broader sample.

Nonetheless, cultural and institutional norms vary widely across countries, and these differences can shape ISMs' migration and coping experiences. For instance, many participants in this study were unaware of the systemic barriers and job market obstacles they would face in Canada, a challenge that significantly impacted their ability to navigate initial disruptions. By

contrast, ISMs from other cultural countries may experience less shock if they receive better pre-migration information or have stronger networks that prepare them for these challenges. Such differences could influence the resources ISMs draw upon and the strategies they use to cope and regain work meaningfulness. Future research can explore how cultural contexts and information-sharing practices within communities affect ISMs' preparedness, resilience, and ability to adapt, providing a comparative lens on mechanisms for regaining work meaningfulness.

Future research should explore whether individuals from different professional contexts or life circumstances employ unique adaptive approaches to regain work meaningfulness. This study identified phase-specific adaptive approaches, including broadening, expanding, evolving, narrowing, and rechanneling purpose, as central to ISMs' strategies for navigating the erosion and reconstruction of work meaningfulness. However, individuals in other contexts may exhibit distinct pathways or variations of these strategies. For example, professionals nearing retirement, those whose roles are increasingly replaced by AI, or individuals unable to continue their careers due to health issues might adapt differently, offering new insights into the dynamic and context-sensitive nature of regaining work meaningfulness.

Future research could uncover additional adaptive approaches by studying these and other groups, offering deeper insights into how work meaningfulness is reconstructed across diverse contexts, life stages, and professional disruptions. This broader exploration would not only refine existing frameworks but also reveal context-specific strategies that enrich our understanding of the adaptive processes underlying meaningful work.

In this study, I observed that existing models of meaningful work (e.g., Rosso et al., 2010; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012) do not fully capture mechanisms present in more collectivist cultures, such as those experienced by some of my participants. For example, Rosso

et al. (2010) categorize transcendence as a mechanism through which individuals go beyond personal goals and desires, yet their framing remains rooted in actualizing the individual's agency. In contrast, the self-transcendence some of my participants described was more relational and collective. It involved going beyond the self through deep connections with others, where serving family, community, or a collective purpose was not merely an extension of their personal identity but a central aspect of their identity and purpose.

This distinction suggests that, for my participants, self-transcendence might be better aligned in the intersection of Communion and Others of Rosso et al.'s model rather than Agency and Others, as it emphasizes interconnectedness and relational purpose over individual agency (see section 2.1.2 for the original model). These findings highlight the need for cross-cultural studies to examine how cultural contexts influence the pathways and mechanisms of meaningful work, offering broader insights into the interplay between culture and work meaningfulness. Future research could further explore these dynamics, contributing to more inclusive theoretical frameworks that better represent diverse cultural experiences.

While this dissertation primarily focuses on adaptive approaches for regaining work meaningfulness, it also sheds light on the dynamics of work meaninglessness as a multifaceted phenomenon. The findings reveal three processes leading to meaninglessness: perceived misalignment, gradual erosion of meaning, and active harm, each affecting individuals' resilience, mental health, and professional trajectories. Future research could explore other processes and create a more comprehensive framework. Additionally, future research could explore how these forms of meaninglessness arise, interact, and influence adaptive strategies in diverse professional and cultural contexts.

This study also highlights how work meaningfulness and meaninglessness often coexist, with individuals extracting pockets of meaning even in predominantly meaningless roles. Future research could delve deeper into the conceptual distinctions between work meaninglessness and no work meaningfulness, exploring what constitutes the additional dimensions of meaninglessness beyond the mere absence of meaningfulness. Investigating how these two constructs interact could enhance our understanding of their dynamic relationship and influence individuals' ability to sustain work meaningfulness.

Additionally, while this study emphasizes individual strategies, the role of organizational and policy interventions remains underexplored. However, my interactions with participants demonstrated how structured, reflective conversations helped them reconnect with their sense of achievement and purpose and articulate future aspirations. By guiding ISMs to recognize their resilience and reframe their experiences as heroic narratives, they reported feeling empowered and more aware of their progress and potential. These outcomes suggest that interventions such as mentorship programs and inclusive hiring practices could have similar positive effects, offering immigrants opportunities to reflect, connect, and grow. Future research could explore the broader impacts of such interventions, providing actionable insights for organizations and policymakers seeking to support ISMs in their professional transitions.

Finally, given the findings that meaning in work is often integrated with broader life purposes, future research could delve into the interplay between disruptions in work and life meaning. Examining how individuals recalibrate life and work goals in tandem during significant transitions could deepen our understanding of the relationship between work meaningfulness and overall meaning in life.

By addressing these limitations and pursuing these avenues for future research, scholars can build on the contributions of this dissertation to advance our understanding of ISMs' adaptive strategies and the broader dynamics of work meaningfulness in diverse contexts.

5.5 Conclusion

This dissertation advances our understanding of work meaningfulness as a dynamic, relational, and evolving phenomenon, particularly in the context of International Skilled Migrants (ISMs) in Canada. This study highlights the fluid nature of meaningful work by examining how ISMs navigate disruptions, adapt to new environments, and redefine purpose. It challenges static alignment models and emphasizes the importance of adaptability, resilience, and relational dynamics in complex transitions.

The findings reveal that work meaningfulness is not merely restored but reconceptualized and reconstructed through a range of adaptive approaches that reflect ISMs' capacity for flexibility and growth. These approaches span multiple phases of transition and demonstrate how individuals integrate evolving professional identities with their broader values and aspirations. By addressing the interactions between individual strategies, cultural influences, and broader systemic structures, this research provides a nuanced perspective on how ISMs navigate work and life transitions, finding new ways to align their work with changing contexts and personal aspirations.

While this study presents the regaining work meaningfulness phase as a distinct point of alignment, it does not assume this state is permanent or universally achieved. For some ISMs, alignment was temporary and later disrupted by new challenges such as layoffs, family responsibilities, or systemic barriers. Others did not fully reach the regaining phase but found

partial alignment in earlier stages. This reinforces the evolving and cyclical nature of meaningful work and the need to view its reconstruction as an ongoing, adaptive process.

Furthermore, this study underscores the critical role of relational dynamics, including the family, in buffering the erosion of meaning and shaping work meaningfulness. For many ISMs, family serves as both a source of motivation and a stabilizing force during periods of uncertainty. Family priorities often influence ISMs' decisions regarding their careers, shaping how they navigate transitions and redefine purpose. Alongside family support, professional networks, mentorship, and community connections emerge as vital factors in facilitating ISMs' adaptation and fostering a sense of belonging. These relationships not only support professional growth but also provide emotional and psychological resources that enable ISMs to sustain hope and motivation during challenging periods.

Ultimately, this research reinforces the importance of viewing work meaningfulness as a dynamic and adaptive process embedded within personal, cultural, and broader systemic structures. By shifting the focus from fixed outcomes to a process-based phenomenon, this study offers valuable insights into how individuals continuously reconstruct meaning in their professional lives. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of meaningful work and offer practical implications for scholars, ISMs, managers, HR professionals, immigrant service providers, and policymakers, fostering more inclusive and supportive environments for meaningful work in a globalized world.

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APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

The following is a list of adopted construct definitions in this dissertation:

Agency: Agency is defined as the capacity to act intentionally and purposefully within the world (Rosso et al., 2010; Bandura, 1989, 2001).

Autonomy: Autonomy refers to acting with a sense of volition and self-endorsement, where individuals self-organize their experiences and behaviours in alignment with their integrated sense of self (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Integration: the degree to which immigrants have the knowledge (including fluency in the national language and ability to navigate the host country's labour market) and capacity (refers to mental, social and economic immigrant resources) to build a successful and fulfilling life in the host country" (Harder et al., 2018).

International Skilled Migrants (ISMs): Adopted from International Human Resource Management, ISMs are migrants with at least a bachelor's degree or equivalent who have moved to work and live abroad permanently (Cerdin et al., 2014; Hajro et al., 2019).

Meaning in life: Ward and King (2017) defines meaning in life as a subjective judgment about how people feel their lives matter, make sense, and are directed toward a purpose. It emphasizes that meaning in life is an essential aspect of well-being, both hedonic and eudaimonic, and encompasses three key components:

- **Purpose**: Refers to having goals, direction, or a mission in life. It reflects an individual's sense of direction and long-term aims that organize and motivate actions.
- **Significance**: Denotes the feeling that one's life matters, contributes to the world, or is valued in the social context. It also includes generativity, the desire to make lasting contributions that extend beyond one's personal existence.
- **Coherence**: Involves perceiving one's life and the world as understandable, ordered, and predictable. It reflects an integrated understanding of experiences and a sense that life makes sense (note that this is different from they way I defined need for coherence in the regaining work meaningfulness phase of my analysis in the context of ISMs journey).

These components are interrelated and contribute to an overarching sense of meaning, forming the foundation for personal and professional well-being.

Meaning of work: Prath and Ashforth (2003) defined *meaning* as the individual's "output of having made sense of something" (Rosso et al., 2010: 94). In this sense, meaning can have positive, negative, or neutral valence (Allan et al., 2019; Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). Meaning of work refers to the expectations individuals have in general from their work, what it means, and the role it plays in their life (e.g., their work orientation: work as a paycheck, as a duty, as a calling) (e.g., Rosso et al., 2010).

Underemployment: Underemployment generally refers to work that is considered inferior to full employment based on certain standards (Feldman, 1996). Scholars consider underemployment as a multidimensional construct including (a) possessing more education than a job requires; (b) higher skills and experiences than a job requires; (c) being involuntarily

engaged in insecure employment; (d) being involuntarily employed outside of their area of education, training, or expertise; or (e) earning fewer wages than their previous job or peers (Feldman,1996; Allan, Tay, and Sterling, 2017).

Work centrality. The *work centrality* construct measures the extent work is central to a person's life compared to other life domains (e.g., family, leisure, religion, community). The work centrality researchers consider the depth and strength of the relationship between the individuals and their work as indicators of work meaningfulness (Dubin, 1956; MOV International Research Team, 1987).

Work centrality to meaning in life: The concept of work centrality typically frames the importance or centrality of work based on its structural role in organizing other goals and how achieving work-related outcomes influences those goals. In contrast, the components of significance and purposefulness in definitions of meaning in work focus on the intrinsic, moral, or societal value of work and its broader impact on life. In this dissertation, work centrality to meaning in life refers to the extent to which the domain of work serves as a central source for deriving meaning in one's life.

***Work meaninglessness*:** the subjective experience of work or/and its context as negative, purposeless and/or insignificant (e.g., May et al., 2004; Mercurio, 2019).

Work meaningfulness: the subjective experience of work or/and its context as purposeful and significant (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003).

APPENDIX B: INFORMATION LETTER

Title of Study: From Surviving to Thriving: The Dynamics of Regaining Work Meaningfulness in Career Transition of International Skilled Migrants

Who is doing the study? Sanaz Matin Koosha is a Ph.D. candidate at Gustavson School of Business, University of Victoria, doing this study as part of her dissertation under the supervision of Dr. A.R. Elangovan, Dr. Roy Suddaby, Dr. Rick Cotton (from the University of Victoria) and Dr. Soo Min Toh (from the University of Toronto).

What is the purpose of this study? To investigate how professional immigrants' sense of work meaningfulness changes upon their immigration and over time and how they deal with the barriers and regain their sense of meaning in their work. This study helps to inform and empower other professional immigrants to succeed in experiencing a work-life imbued with a sense of meaning in Canada.

Where will the study take place, and how long will it take? If you choose to participate, Sanaz will send you a brief online survey link. This survey has simple questions that verify if you meet our research requirements. It takes about 10 minutes to complete. You will get a response within 24 hours informing you of your eligibility. After that, Sanaz will arrange a convenient time and place for you, in-person or on platforms like Zoom, for a 1 to 1.5-hour interview.

Who is eligible to participate in this study? The target population includes foreign-born adults who: 1) immigrated to Canada to settle permanently; 2) have been living in Canada for over one year; 3) hold paid employment (full-time, part-time, or self-employed) at the time of the study; 4) had been employed prior to immigrating to Canada; 5) either hold a university degree with at least two years of work experience in their home country, or have a minimum of six years of work experience in a specific occupation requiring specialized skills without a formal degree; and 6) have experienced underemployment in Canada, defined as working outside of their original area of expertise, education, training, or prior experience; earning lower wages than in previous roles or compared to peers; or working in insecure or poor working conditions, such as long hours or high workload.

What will be involved, and what will I be asked to do? As part of this research, you will be asked to answer a short online survey. This prescreening survey includes around 18 simple questions about the time and country you immigrated from, your education and years of work experience in your home country and the hours and conditions of your employment in Canada.

After verifying your eligibility for participation in this study, you will be interviewed about your positive and negative work experiences in your country of origin and Canada. Please note that this study does not aim to evaluate your work performance and does not need to know which organization you are (were) working for. Instead, Sanaz is trying to learn more about your relationship with your work before and after coming to Canada.

If you agree, the interviews will be audio-recorded to ensure your stories and experiences are recorded accurately. If you decide to talk off the record, you can ask Sanaz to stop recording at any time. The audio file will be transcribed by Zoom or Trint (an automatic online transcriber) and then manually checked and modified for accuracy by Sanaz. The audio files and the transcriptions will be kept safe in a password-protected file on Sanaz's personal computer and a backup on a password-protected external hard and will be permanently deleted after fifteen years from the interview.

Your participation in this research must be completely **voluntary**. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or explanation. When you inform Sanaz about your willingness to withdraw from the study, your data will be discarded immediately.

Some of you may have a **personal connection** with Sanaz. Please feel free to withdraw from the study at any time. Voluntary participation is the right of everybody in this study. Please know that whether or not you choose to participate, your relationship with me will not be affected.

What are the possible risks and discomforts? In this study, Sanaz is going to ask you to reflect on quite personal experiences, and it might be exciting and enjoyable to share some of them and perhaps sad and difficult to share others. Sanaz hopes that you feel safe sharing your experiences with her, and she respects your decision to keep some of your experiences to yourself and share those experiences you feel comfortable with or are willing to share.

Who will see the information that I give? We will keep confidential all research records that identify you in the following manner:

At the end of this document, you will see a list of fake names (Pseudonyms). You will let Sanaz know which you chose for yourself. You can also choose a fake name other than the list. Sanaz will assign that fake name to your data for the rest of this study so that your name will appear only on the consent form that only Sanaz can access. For data analysis and reporting the results, she will use your fake name so that you know who you are, but there is no other identifiable

information in these reports for others to recognize you. The result of this study will be published in academic journals and Sanaz's dissertation and will be shared with other researchers. When reporting, segments of your experiences may be quoted along with other participants' experiences without identifiable information.

The only exception to this is that Sanaz will use the Trint application to transcribe the interview, Qualtrics to develop the survey, and also, in situations where the interviews are conducted on Zoom, it is possible that information about you may be accessed without your knowledge or consent by the US government in compliance with the US Freedom Act.

Are there any benefits from taking part in this study? The study may benefit you by helping you identify why and how your jobs have been meaningful to you. The summary of the results will be shared with you after the research project is completed, and you will gain valuable insight into what makes work meaningful for other professional immigrants and what strategies they use to maintain this sense of meaningfulness. By participating in this project, you will contribute to the empowerment of other professional immigrants in Canada and other individuals struggling to find meaning in their works.

Will I receive any compensation for taking part in this study? There is no financial compensation for participation in this study.

What if I have questions? You can contact Sanaz Matin Koosha at any time if you have questions regarding participation in the study at (the email address was here).

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study or raise any concerns by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria.

What else do I need to know? After participation, you may be contacted by Sanaz to review the general findings of the research and provide feedback. If you are interested in reviewing the findings, please check below or write "yes" in front of it:

□ I would like to be contacted to have the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the findings.

Emailing back, filling out and submitting this information letter, indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

Please choose a Fake first name for yourself and write it in the following (a list of options is provided in the appendix).

Signature of participant **Date**

Printed name of the participant **Participant Pseudonym (Fake name)**

What is your pronoun? (he/she/they)

Please retain a copy of this letter for your reference.

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

From Surviving to Thriving: The Dynamics of Regaining Work Meaningfulness in Career Transition of International Skilled Migrants

Participant Pseudonym:	
Location:	Date:
Start Time:	End Time:

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. I realize that I am going to ask you to reflect on quite personal experiences, and it might be exciting and enjoyable to share some of them and perhaps sad and difficult to share others. I hope that you feel safe sharing your experiences with me and I respect your decision to keep some of your experiences to yourself and share those experiences you feel comfortable or are willing to share.

Please note that this study does not aim to evaluate your work performance. Rather, I am trying to learn more about your personal relationship with your career before and after coming to Canada. I will use a pseudonym name in the published results, and your responses remain unidentifiable and confidential.

Also, please know that you may opt out of this study at any time, for any reason, either during the interview or after it, and any data collected from you will be destroyed.

[If we did not exchange the consent form before]: Before we begin, I need to share some information with you [I will review the informed consent form verbally and allow the participant to read the form for themselves]. Then, I take their signature on the consent form.

I will ask you if you consent to participate in this interview and audio record our conversation. Only If you agree, I would start recording.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin? [Take note of questions asked and answer them.]

Do you consent to participate in this interview? [Allow participant to answer]. Do you consent that our interview be audio recorded? [Allow participant to answer].

<u>Start Audio Recording</u>

Interview Questions

Section A. Interviewee Immigration Background

Perhaps you can start by telling me about yourself. I understand from your responses to the prescreening survey /our earlier conversation that you came to Canada (recall information about time and program obtained from earlier prescreening questions)

1) How come you decided to move to Canada? (push and pull factors, triggers)

Section B. Interviewee Education, Work Background, Previous source of meaning in work

2)-(version 1-university degree) In the short survey, you mentioned you have [degree]. What field was your educational background before coming to Canada?

Prompts:

- *How come did you choose this field?*
- *Did you like it? What was most valuable in that field of study to you?*

3)- (version 1-university degree) In the short survey, you mentioned you have …years of work experience before moving to Canada.Would you please briefly tell me about your occupational background before moving to Canada?

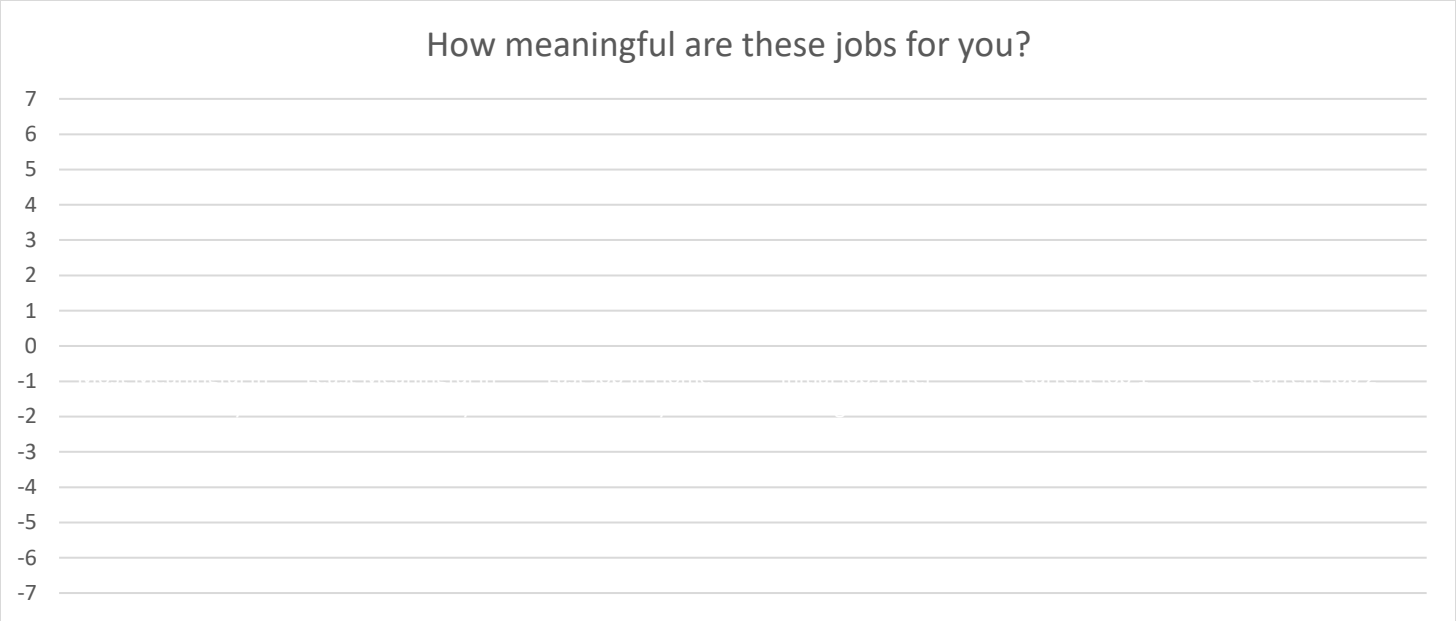
Prompts:

- *Industry (s)?*
- *Specification (s)?*
- *Job role (s)?*

4) Which of your jobs in your home country meant the most to you? What was meaningful about it? [emphesaize to understand last job work meaningfulness]

5) Which one was not meaningful or least meaningful? Why? [explore the erosion]

6) If you want to score the level of the meaningfulness of these works from minus 7 to plus 7, including 0, which score do you give each of them (The most and least meaningful one and the last job before moving to Canada)?



7) What were the characteristics of the most meaningful work in your view before coming to Canada? (Before coming to Canada, what qualities your job should have to call it meaningful?)

Section C. Work Experience in Canada,

8) From [ ]perspective in the plane coming to Canada, what were your expectations about your employment in Canada?

Prompts:

- *What difficulties did you anticipate?*
- *What kind of jobs did you intend to find to get your work life restarted in Canada? For how long?*

9) Can you take me through your career path after coming to Canada? Please start from your first try for job search.

- *What was your plan to get to your ideal work in Canada?*
- *What jobs did you search for?*
- *If started lower level, did you consider yourself underemployed at that time?*
- *What was helping you tolerate the situation? What were not helping? How did you brought yourself from that situation?*
- *How long have you been in that job(s)?*
- *How did you use to tell others about your job back home and here?*
- *How do people talk in everyday interactions about your job affect how you feel about it? Can you give me some specific examples?*
- *How can you bring yourself out of this situation?*

10) If you want to add them to our previous score maps of your jobs, where do you locate them in terms of their level of meaningfulness? (-7 to 0 to +7)

- *When from low to high:*
  How is helping to feel the higher score job more meaningful?
- *If a very different career was it always this score?*
- *Did you always think that your current job is meaningful, or has it changed over time? How?*
- *Comparing high scores together? Or low score together?*
- *How is it different in terms of meaningfulness from that job in the home country?*
- *How do you fill the gap or compensate for it?*
- *If not minus why?*
- *How do you deal with it?*
- *How often do you think of quitting your job?*
- *What keeps you at your job?*
- *What/who makes your life meaningful?*
- *Do you engage in any hobby, sport or activity which is meaningful to you?*
- *Do you say it is meaningless? Or less meaningful, or do you have negative feelings about it?*

11) Previously, you mentioned your view about the characteristics (qualities) of meaningful work before coming to Canada. Has it changed after experiencing work in Canada? If yes, how?

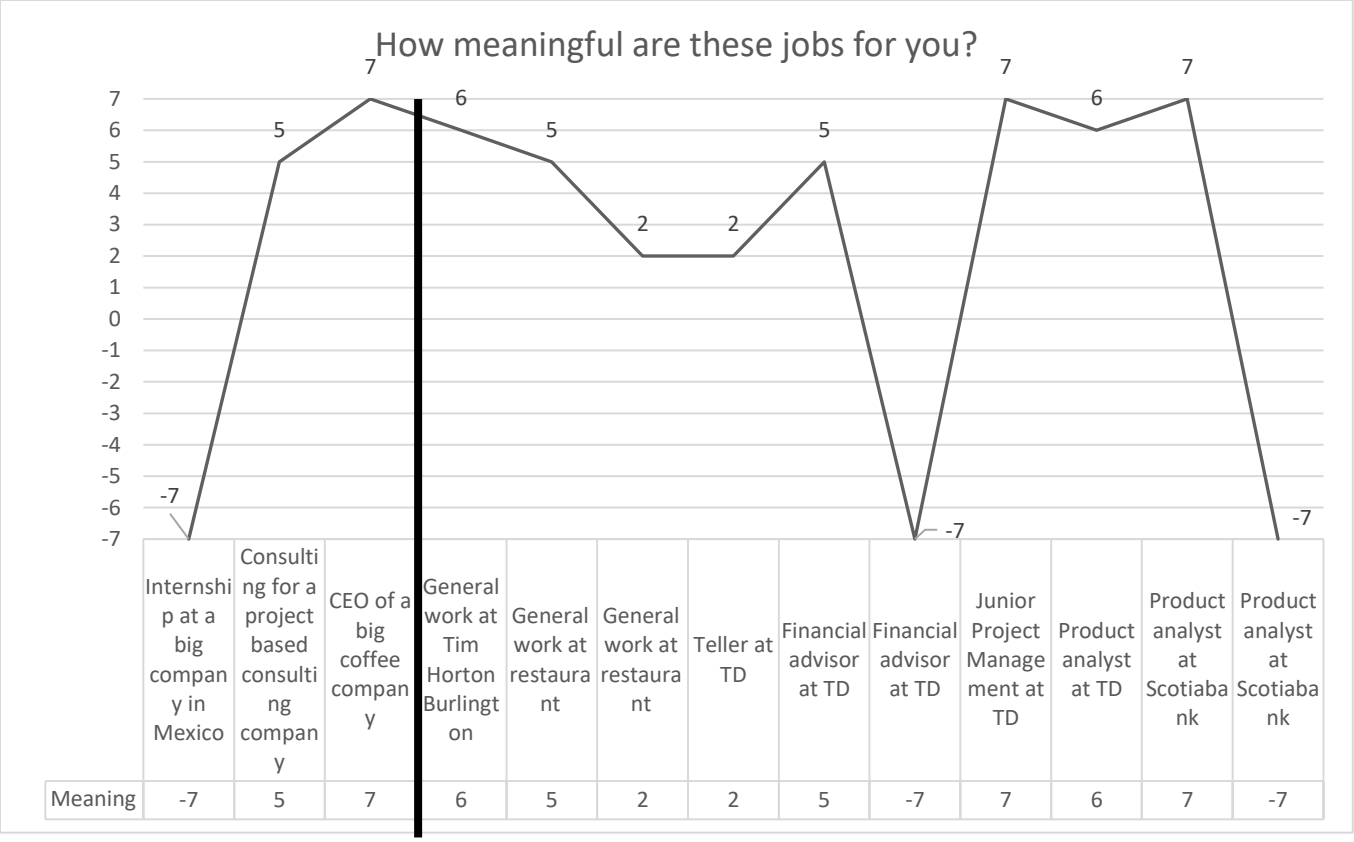


Figure 2-Sample of Work Meaningfulness Comparative Scores[7]

[7] It is important to note that these graphs were designed as an approach to operationalize changes in global work meaningfulness. However, during data analysis, I focused on participants' language and narratives rather than relying on numerical representations. This decision was made because participants' reference points were not consistent across jobs. Moreover, when describing situations that were closer in time, they often perceived them as more extreme. Finally, while these graphs were helpful for assessing fluctuations within an individual, they were not valid for comparisons across individuals due to differing reference points, definitions, and personal frameworks.

APPENDIX D: PRE-INTERVIEW SURVEY FOR PARTICIPANT SCREENING

1) What is your fake name in this study?

2) When did you immigrate to Canada?
   - ☐ Select a year: 1989-2023

3) How old were you at that time?

4) Who did you immigrate with? (Meaning when you immigrated with whom you were living)
   - ☐ Just by myself
   - ☐ Husband
   - ☐ Wife
   - ☐ Children
   - ☐ Others

5) What is your status in Canada?
   - ☐ I have a permanent Residency (PR)
   - ☐ Canadian citizen
   - ☐ Student status
   - ☐ Visitor status
   - ☐ Worker status
   - ☐ Refugee
   - ☐ Diplomatic status

6) Do you recall under which immigration class you applied?
   - ☐ Immigration sponsored by the family
   - ☐ Economic/skilled worker immigrants
   - ☐ Refugee
   - ☐ I don't remember

7) Where are you from?
   - ☐ Select a country

8) How do you describe yourself?
   - ☐ Female
   - ☐ Male
   - ☐ Non-binary
   - ☐ Others

9) What is your marital status?
   - ☐ Married
   - ☐ Widowed
   - ☐ Divorced
   - ☐ Separated
   - ☐ Single
   - ☐ Living with common law

10) Is Canada the first country you immigrated to?
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No

11) When you came to Canada, did you intend to live here permanently?
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No

12) Do you have a university degree from your country?
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No

13) What is your educational background before coming to Canada? Please choose your last level of education you had in your home country.
   - ☐ Primary/elementary school
   - ☐ Secondary/high school
   - ☐ Diploma
   - ☐ Bachelor degree
   - ☐ Master degree
   - ☐ PhD

14) Are you trained in a specific occupation in your home country (participated trade school or learned any skill as a profession)?
   Please specify

15) How many years of work experience did you have before moving to Canada?
    - ☐ Select from less than one year, 2,…30, More than 30 years

16) In Canada, have you ever worked below the level you were working in your home country? (regarding pay, organizational hierarchy, poor conditions such as security, workload, long hours)
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

17) Are you employed at this time?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

18) How many hours a week do you work in average?
    - ☐ Less than 30 hours a week
    - ☐ More than 30 hours a week

19) Do you consider yourself to be underemployed right now?
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC GRAPHS

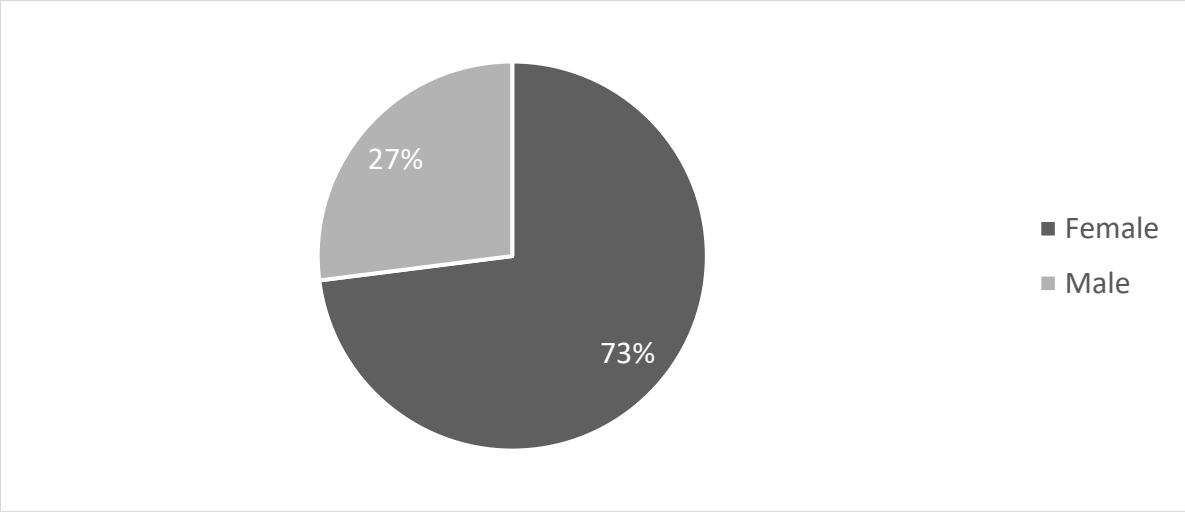


Figure 3- Gender Distribution of Participants

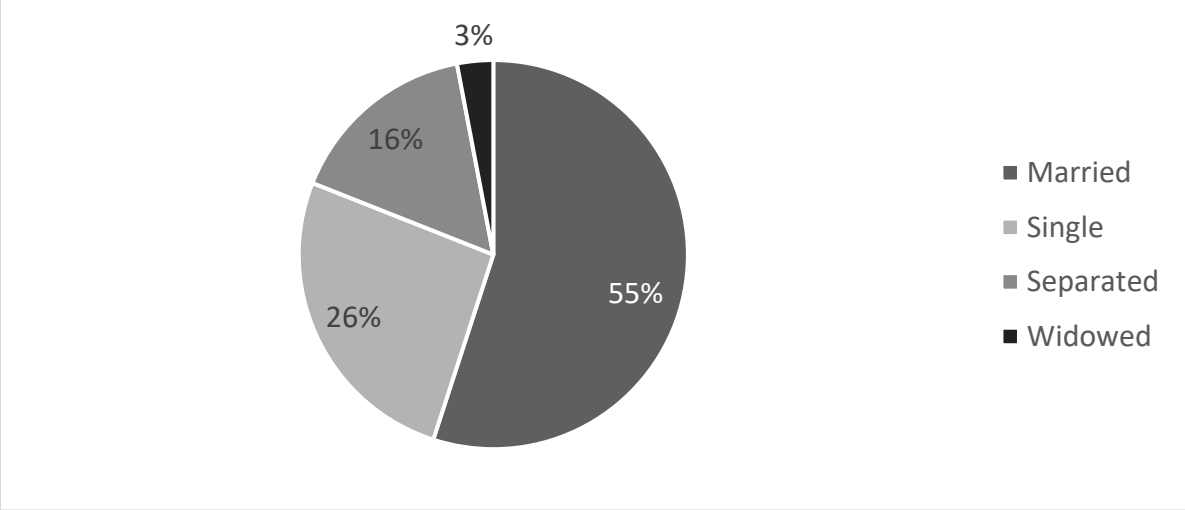


Figure 4-Marital Status Distribution of Participants

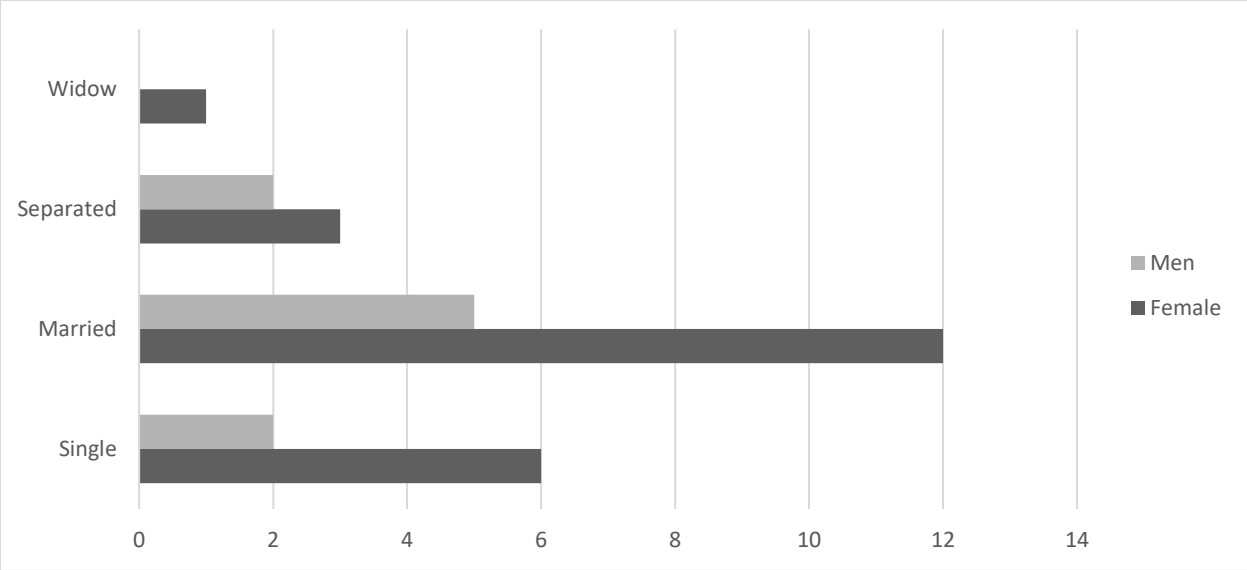


Figure 5- Distribution of Participants by Marital Status and Gender

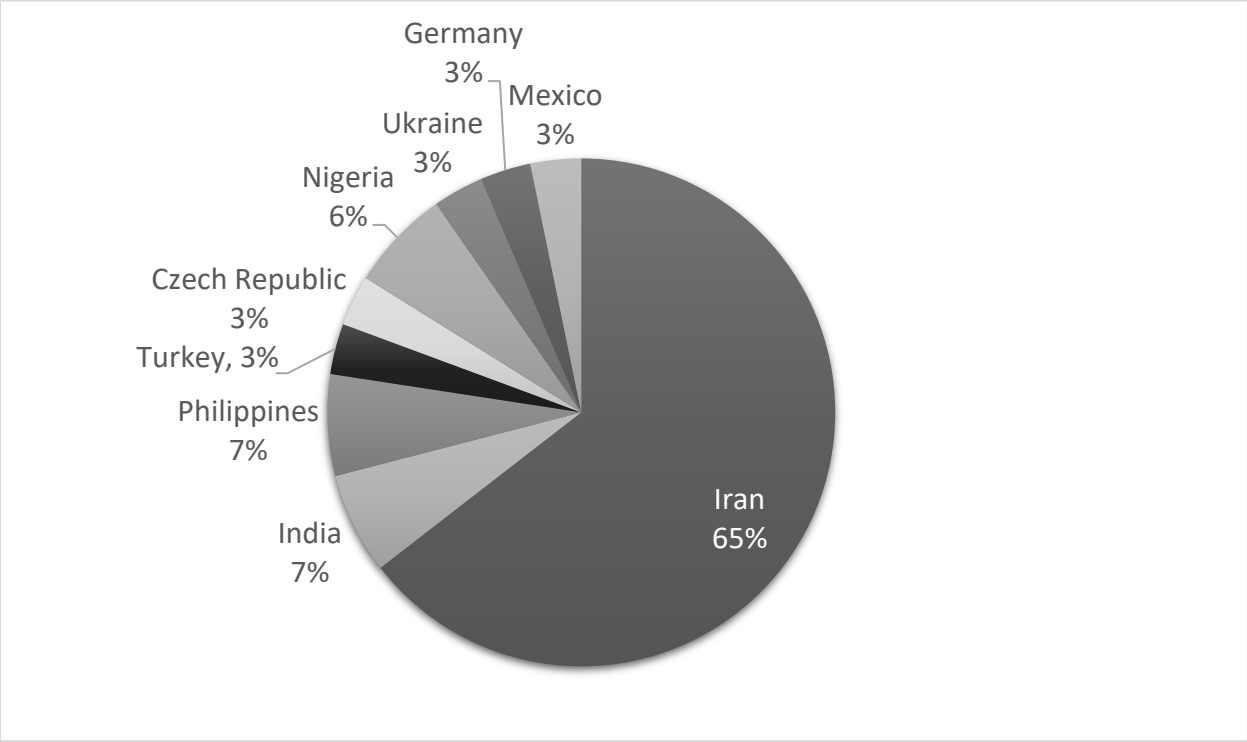


Figure 6- Distribution of Participants by Country of Origin

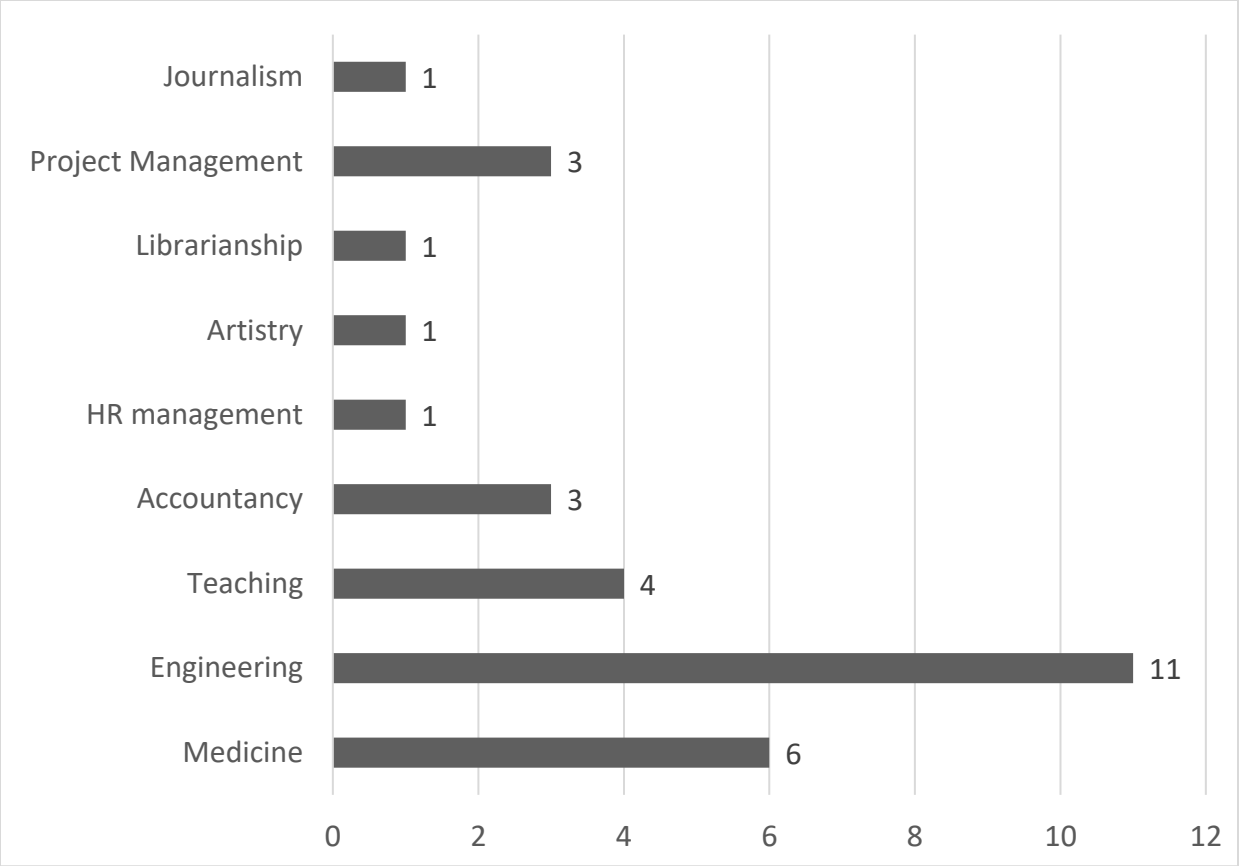


Figure 7-Occupational Background

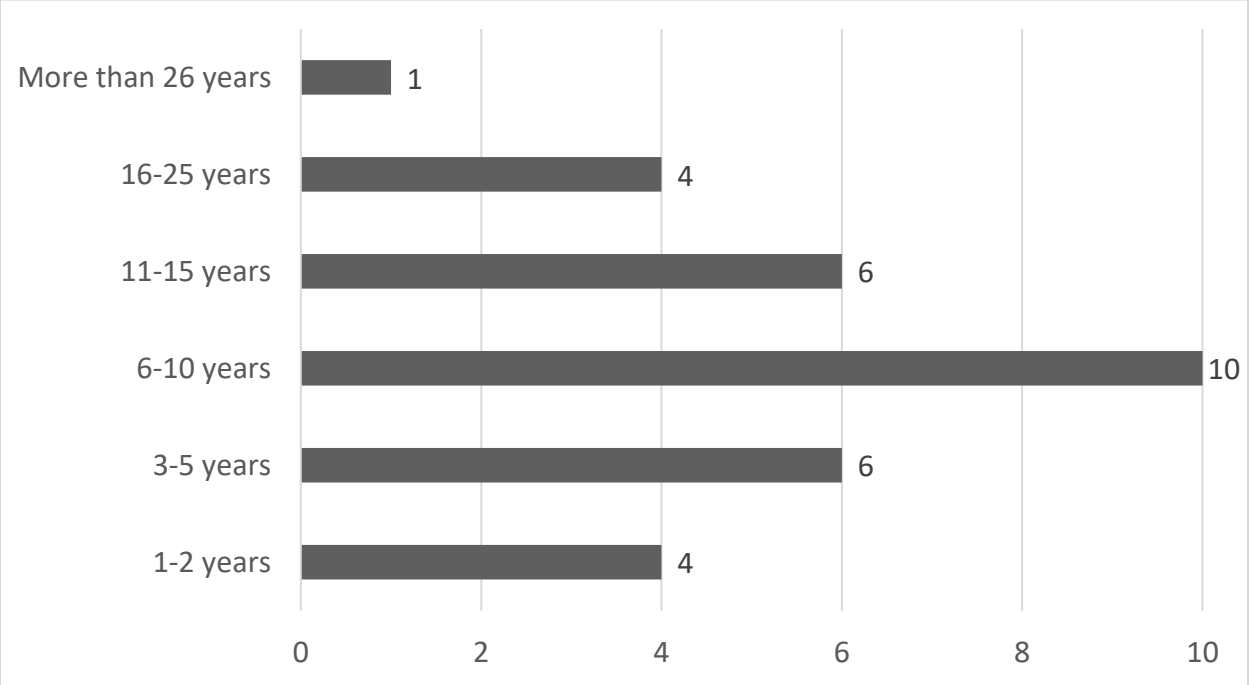


Figure 8-Duration of Residence in Canada

Table 2-Distribution of Participants by Career Stage and Work Experience at the Time of Immigration

Participants	Career stage	Work Experience	Number of Participants	Percent
Grace, Esther, Sun, Anahid, Roxana, Nora, Miguel	Limited experience	2-5 years	7	23%
Aurora, Christopher, Emma, Sam, Arthur, Sarah, Baran, Mahshid, Nadia, Mia, Ava	Early career	6-10 years	11	35%
Ella, Hannah, Daniel, Lynda, Aidan, Glory, Ali	Mid-career	11-15 years	7	23%
Khushi, Simin, Royal, Sophia, Maha, Howard	Advanced career	16-34 years	6	19%

Christopher

Aurora, Arthur, Aidan

Nora

Roxana

Mia, Anahid, Ella, Sarah

Royal

Simin, Maha

Nadia, Sam, Mahshid, Sophia

Hannah, Howard, Sun, Daniel

Lydia

Khushi, Miguel

Ava, Emma

Grace

Glory

Ali, Baran

Esther

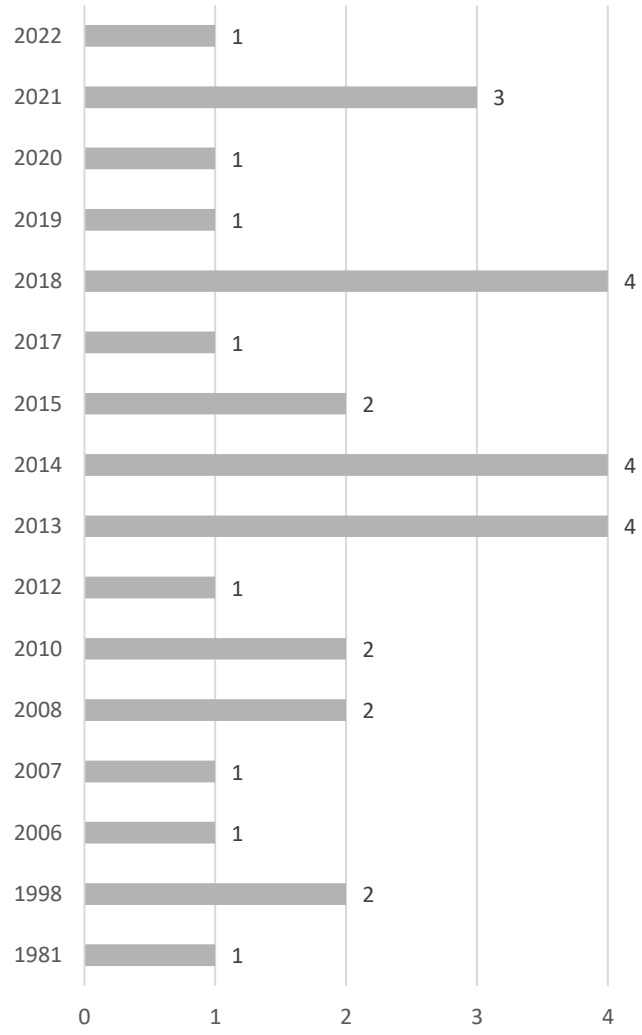


Figure 9- Participants' Distribution by Year of Arrival in Canada

APPENDIX F: PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Table 3-Participants Demographic Information

Participant Pseudonym	Initial Location in Canada	Year of Immigration	Age at Immigration	Age at Interview	Country of Origin	Immigration Application Class	Gender	Marital Status	Children
Aidan	Vancouver	2021	37	39	Iran	Student visa	M	Single	No
Ali	Calgary	1998	34	59	Iran	Economic-skilled worker	M	Separated	Yes
Anahid	Toronto	2018	34	39	Iran	Student	F	Single	No
Arthur	Victoria	2021	41	43	Germany	Sponsored by family	M	Married	Yes
Aurora	Victoria	2021	31	33	India	Economic-skilled worker	F	Married	Yes
Ava	Toronto	2008	31	46	Philippines	Economic-skilled worker	F	Single	No
Baran	Calgary	1998	29	54	Iran	Economic-skilled worker	F	Separated	Yes
Christopher	Victoria	2022	31	32	Nigeria	Sponsored by family	M	Married	No
Daniel	Montreal	2013	33	43	Iran	Economic-skilled worker	M	Married	Yes
Ella	Victoria	2018	38	43	Turkiye	Economic-skilled worker	F	Married	Yes
Emma	Toronto	2008	30	45	Iran	Sponsored by family	F	Married	Yes
Esther	Ottawa	1981	31	73	Czechia	Refugee	F	Married	Yes
Glory	Toronto	2006	41	58	Iran	Economic-skilled worker	F	Married	Yes
Grace	Toronto	2007	26	42	Philippines	Sponsored by family	F	Married	No
Hannah	Montreal	2013	33	43	Iran	Economic-skilled worker	F	Married	Yes
Howard	Toronto	2013	37	47	Iran	Economic-skilled worker	M	Married	Yes
Khushi	Toronto	2010	40	53	India	Student visa	M	Separated	No

Participant Pseudonym	Initial Location in Canada	Year of Immigration	Age at Immigration	Age at Interview	Country of Origin	Immigration Application Class	Gender	Marital Status	Children
Lydia	Toronto	2012	30	41	Iran	Economic-skilled worker	F	Widow	Yes
Maha	Toronto	2019	45	49	Iran	Economic-skilled worker	F	Married	Yes
Mahshid	Toronto	2014	31	40	Iran	Economic-skilled worker	F	Married	Yes
Mia	Toronto	2018	37	42	Ukraine	Economic-skilled worker	F	Married	Yes
Miguel	Toronto	2010	27	40	Mexico	Economic-skilled worker	M	Married	Yes
Nadia	Winnipeg	2014	43	52	Iran	Economic-skilled worker	F	Married	Yes
Nora	Toronto	2020	27	30	Nigeria	Economic-skilled worker	F	Single	No
Roxana	Toronto	2009	34	48	Iran	Economic-skilled worker	F	Separated	Yes
Royal	Toronto	2017	40	46	Iran	Economic-skilled worker	F	Single	No
Sam	Toronto	2014	31	40	Iran	Economic-skilled worker	M	Single	No
Sarah	Ottawa	2018	24	29	Iran	Student visa	F	Single	No
Simin	Vancouver	2015	54	62	Iran	Economic-skilled worker	F	Married	Yes
Sophia	Montreal	2014	34	43	Iran	Economic-skilled worker	F	Single	No
Sun	Vancouver	2013	25	35	Iran	Sponsored by family	F	Separated	Yes

Table 4-Participants Occupations and Immigration Motivations

Participant Pseudonym	Highest Education Level	Field of Study/Profession	Work Experience Before Migration (Years)	Occupation Before Immigration	Occupation After Immigration	Push Factors for Immigration in Home Country	Pull factors for Immigration in Canada
Aidan	Master	Civil engineering	11	Municipality Civil Engineer	Construction Coordinator	Situation in Iran	Job opportunities
Ali	Master	Petroleum engineering	14	Head engineer of National Oil company	Project coordinator, and supply chain consultant	• Poor economy after war in Iran • Lack of challenge and Opportunity	• Deam to see the other parts of the world • move out of the country because it was so colourful, so beautiful, so peaceful • looking for any opportunity to improve the life
Anahid	Master	Project Management and Construction	5	Project Manager in Construction Industry	PhD Candidate, Researcher and Instructor	• Country situation • Family circumstances	Being close to family who supposed to immigrate to US
Arthur	Master	Bookseller -Library and Information Science	6	Head of Acquisitions (University Librarian)	Special Projects Librarian (University Librarian)	• His wife could not find job in Germany • His Canadian wife wish to return to Canada	His wife found job in Canada
Aurora	Master	Human Resources	6	International HR Manager in a Multinational Start up	HR Administrator in An Insurance Company	• Family could not be apart 5 years	Husband getting PhD in Canada
Ava	Bachelor	Electronics and Communications Engineering	7	Production Design Engineer	Sales and Technical Support in Energy Sector	• she was bored • also she broke up with her fiancée	Mom living here
Baran	Bachelor	Petroleum engineering	8	Petroleum Engineer and Private Art Instructor	Procurement Specialist	social, economic, and political problems	• To accompany her husband who wanted to

Table 4-Participants Occupations and Immigration Motivations

Participant Pseudonym	Highest Education Level	Field of Study/Profession	Work Experience Before Migration (Years)	Occupation Before Immigration	Occupation After Immigration	Push Factors for Immigration in Home Country	Pull factors for Immigration in Canada
							move to Canada for a better life • A country where she can be valued as woman • opportunity to live up to her potential • Future of their children
Christopher	Bachelor	Civil Engineering	7	Environmental Engineering (Government Role)	Senior Coordinator at a Construction Organization	Economic issues in Nigeria	• Joining his wife • Work ambitions
Daniel	Bachelor	Accounting	13	Senior Manager in Accounting Department at a Central Bank	Real Estate Broker	Economical and political insecurity in Iran	For future of children
Ella	Bachelor	Teacher	12	English Instructor as a Private School	Daycare Supervisor and Early Childhood Educator	• Not feeling safe in Turkey • For the sake of Family	Husband Phd and job
Emma	Master	English-teaching	8	English Teacher and Manager of English Department, Bilingual Elementary School	Real Estate Coordinator and Supply Teacher for a School Board		Joining her husband who was living in Canada
Esther	Master	Physician	5	Respiratory Oncologist	Physiotherapist and Teaching Physiotherapy	Lack of Safety in Czech Republic	
Glory	Master	Nursing and community health	15	Supervisory Position in Emergency Room in Hospitals	Nurse and Teacher	Socio-political or Economic Conditions	• Cultural diversity • Sister living here • Better future for her daoughter
Grace	Bachelor	Physical Therapist	5	Physiotherapist	Physiotherapist	she mentioned it in choosing Physio to be able to immigrant to US	Joining her husband who was living in Canada

Table 4-Participants Occupations and Immigration Motivations

Participant Pseudonym	Highest Education Level	Field of Study/Profession	Work Experience Before Migration (Years)	Occupation Before Immigration	Occupation After Immigration	Push Factors for Immigration in Home Country	Pull factors for Immigration in Canada
Hannah	Bachelor	Nursing	12	Nurse in Private Advanced Hospital	Nurse in Oncology Clinic at a Hospital	Economic insecurity in Iran	For our children grow up where they have freedom of speech
Howard	Master	Architecture	20	Architect and Business Owner in Architecture and Construction	Architect and Business Owner in Architecture and Construction	Polititional and economical situation	Residency opportunity for Architects
Khushi	Bachelor	Charted Accountant	20	Financial Manager in Largest Telecom Company in India and Part time teaching	Associate Professor in Management		Education and career change
Lydia	Bachelor	English-teaching	13	High School Teacher	Mental Health and Addiction Counselor for Indigenous Communities	• Structural limitations in Iran • Religious restriction	• Childhood dream • Desire for opportunities for personal growth
Maha	PhD	Medicine-physician	20	Physician at a Prestigious Private hospital	Digital Marketer and Business Owner, Cardiac Sonographer in Training	Political limitations back home	Better future in Canada
Mahshid	Bachelor	software engineering	9	Software Engineer at Steel Company	Programmer at a large company	• Political problems • Economic problemAir pollution • No democracy	Future of my daughter
Mia	PhD	Metallurgy engineering	10	Digital Marketing (Travel Assistance Services)	Digital Marketing (Gift Delivery, Remote for Ukrainian Company)	• Instability in Ukraine • Career Stagnation	• Desire for stability • Possibility for long-term planning for family • Professional Opportunities
Miguel	Master	Finance	5	CEO of Coffee Company	Project Manager at a Bank	Insecurity in Mexico	• He did not want to regret • To raise his children in a safe country
Nadia	Bachelor	Associate degree in Architecture technology	9	Drafter at a Construction Company	Drafter at a Construction Company	Their business was threatened in Iran	

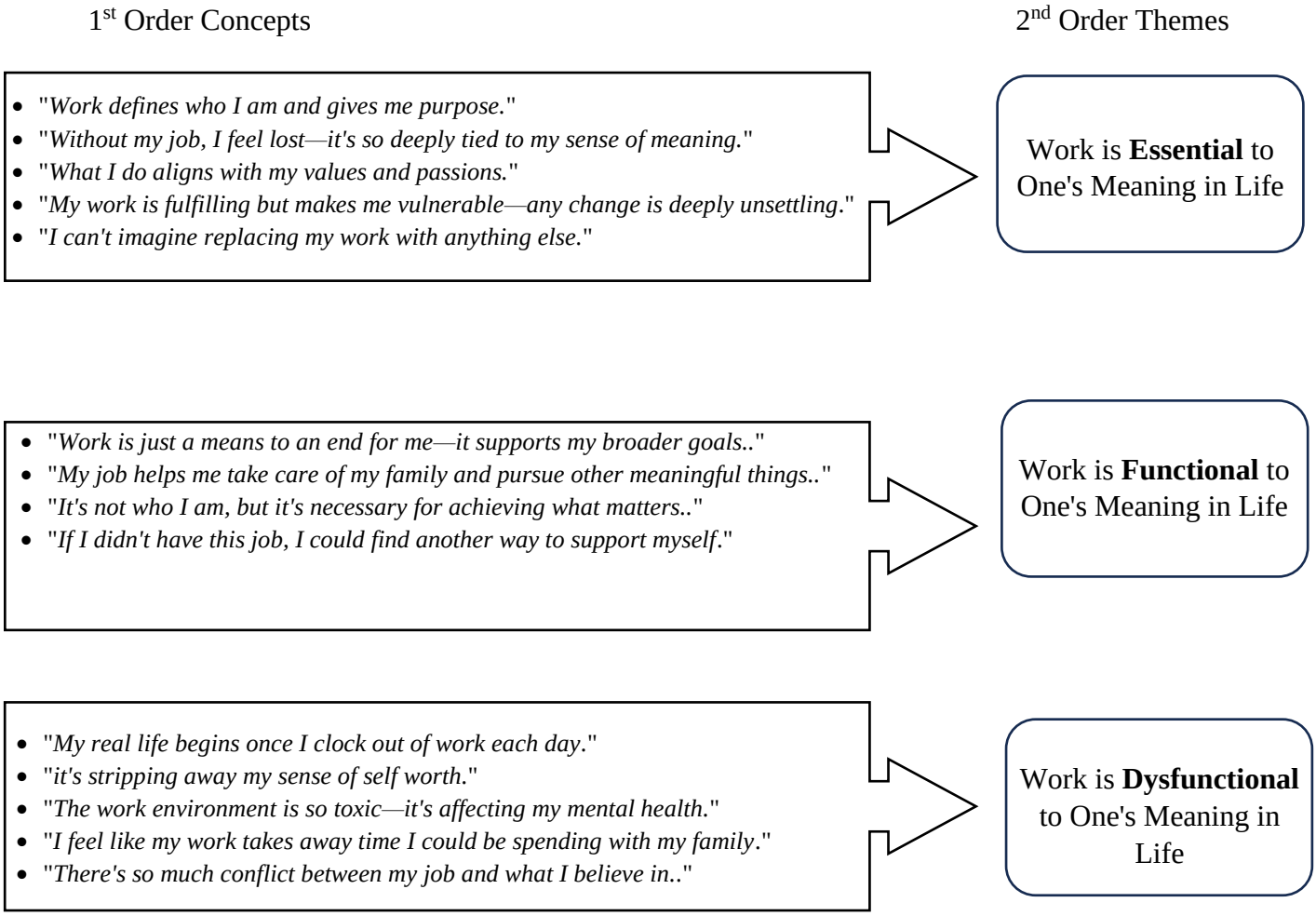
Table 4-Participants Occupations and Immigration Motivations

Participant Pseudonym	Highest Education Level	Field of Study/Profession	Work Experience Before Migration (Years)	Occupation Before Immigration	Occupation After Immigration	Push Factors for Immigration in Home Country	Pull factors for Immigration in Canada
Nora	Master	Journalism and Media	5	Marketing Communications Specialist	User Experience Designer at a Bank		• Aspired to see the world • Better educational opportunity
Roxana	Master	Linguistic-Bachelor in geology	4	Teaching English at University and Administrative roles in accounting and geology	Financial Advisor and Life Coach	Restrictions back home	• Better future for her son • To be able to travel freely with Canadian passport
Royal	PhD	Public Administration	18	Owner of HR Consulting Firm Lecturer at a University	Associate Dean, Business School in a Major Canadian City	• Discrimination of women in Iran • Limited opportunities for significant impact in the Iranian healthcare system • Personal aspirations and ambitions	• Desire to challenge the status quo and break through the perceived glass ceiling in Iran • Initial attraction to the U.S. and Germany for education and professional growth • Opportunities for postdoctoral positions in Canada, perceived as a more open and suitable academic environment.
Sam	PhD	Project Management and Construction	8	Project Manager at Infrastructure Construction Sector	Project Controls Lead at Infrastructure Sector	It was his childhood dream	
Sarah	Bachelor	Biotechnology	6	Entrepreneur and Administration works	Digital Marketing Agency	Lack if freedom or right as a woman in Iran	For better life
Simin	Bachelor	Pharmacist	34	Pharmacist	Insurance Agent and Investment Representative	Worsening situation in Iran	• Better life for children • Being adventurous wanting to experience
Sophia	Master	Graphic and painting	16	Freelance Artist and Art Instructor and Urban	Freelance Artist and Art Instructor at a College and Archivist in a Gallery	Social and political situation in Iran	

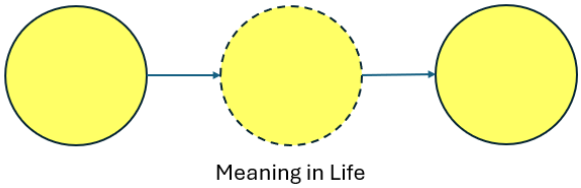
Table 4-Participants Occupations and Immigration Motivations

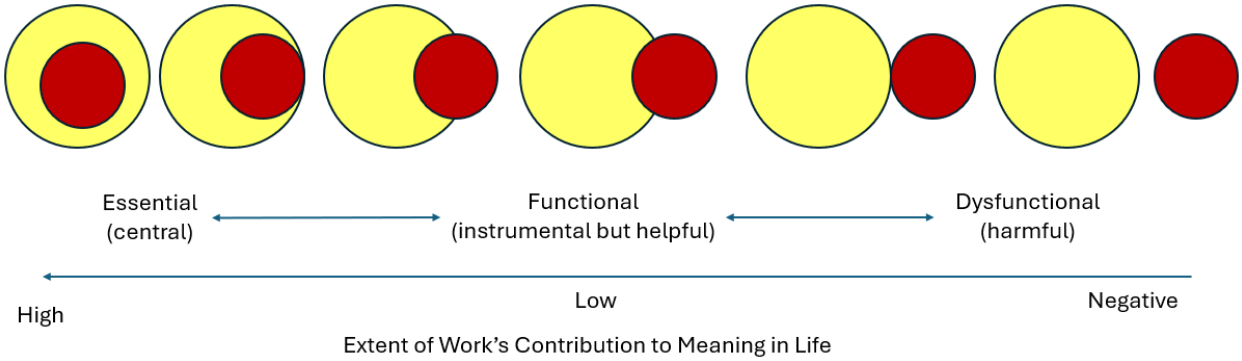
Participant Pseudonym	Highest Education Level	Field of Study/Profession	Work Experience Before Migration (Years)	Occupation Before Immigration	Occupation After Immigration	Push Factors for Immigration in Home Country	Pull factors for Immigration in Canada
				Beautification Specialist			
Sun	Bachelor	Environmental Engineering	2	Engineer and Family Business Coordinator	Fashion Designer (Entrepreneur) and Life Coach	• Poor living condition in Iran • Her divorce	• Son's future • Her own business

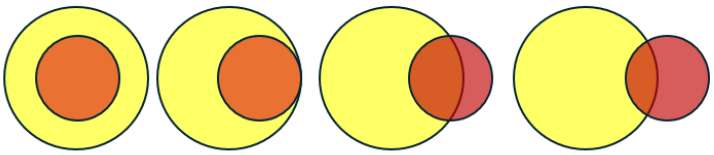
APPENDIX G: THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF WORK CENTRALITY TO MEANING IN LIFE



Legend for Virtual Coding of Work Centrality to Meaning in Life

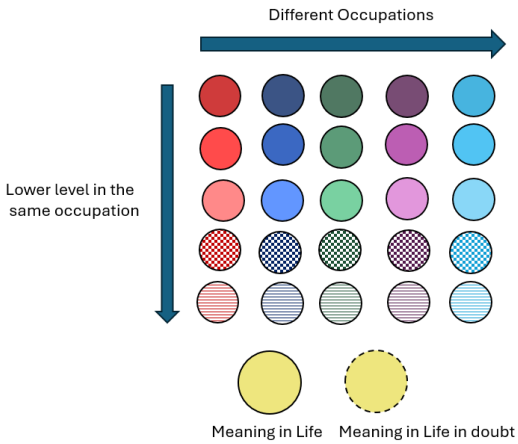






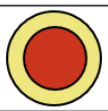
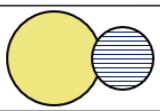
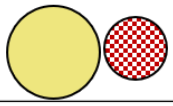
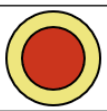
The position of Work Sphere to Meaning in Life is **Meaning of Work**

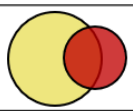
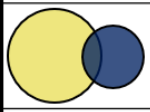
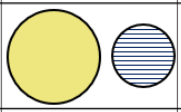
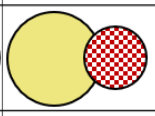
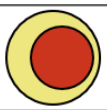
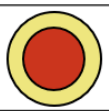
Intersection is where work feels **meaningful**

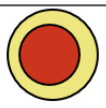
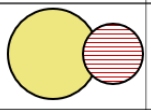
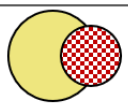
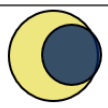
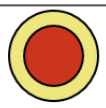


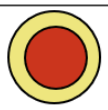
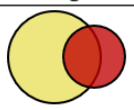
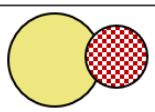
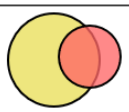
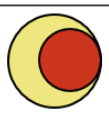
Forms of Re-engagement with Occupations After Migration

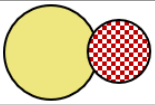
Returning to pre-migration occupations

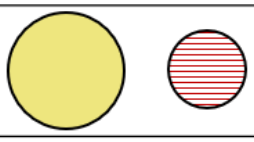
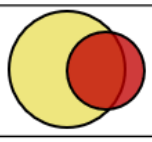
Grace	Before Immigration	After Immigration		
Visual				
Roles	**Physiotherapist**	**Factory Worker**	**Physiotherapist Assistant**	**Licensed Physiotherapist**

Mahshid	Before Immigration	After Immigration				
Visual						
Roles	**Software Engineer at Mobarake Steel Company**	**Home Baking Business**	**Bakery Store Worker**	**Technical Support at YMCA**	**Programmer in Downtown Toronto**	**Programmer at Large Company**

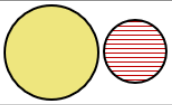
Sam	Before Immigration	After Immigration			
Visual					
Roles	**Project Planning and Controls Manager**	**Volunteer Construction Worker**	**Assistant Project Manager**	**Instructor (College)**	**Senior Scheduler, AECOM & Project Control Lead, TTC**

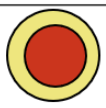
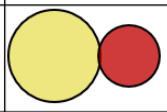
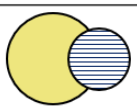
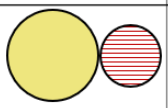
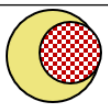
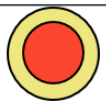
Ava		Before Immigration	After Immigration		
Visual					
Roles	**Production Design Engineer**	**Technical Support Role**	**Data Analyst at a Small Company in Montreal**	**Sales and Technical Support at a Distributor in Toronto**	**Sales and Technical Support in Energy Sector**

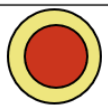
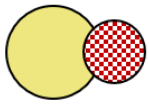
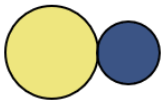
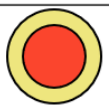
Howard	Before Immigration	After Immigration		
Visual				
Roles	**Architect and Business Owner**	**AutoCAD Technician**	**Design Consultant, Henderson and Studio JCI**	**Architecture and Business Owner**

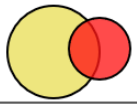
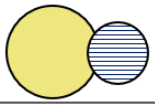
Hannah	Before Immigration	After Immigration	
Visual			
Roles	**Nurse**	**Healthcare Assistant (while pursuing nursing licensure in Quebec)**	**Nurse at Canadian Hospital in Quebec**

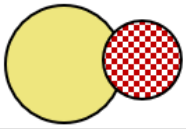
Reconnecting to purpose through similar roles

Esther	Before Immigration	After Immigration		
Visual				
Roles	**Physician in Czechoslovakia**	**Massage Therapy and Acupuncture in Canada**	**Holistic Health Practitioner**	**Physiotherapy Instructor and Practitioner (Current Role)**

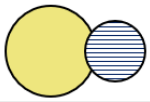
Ella	(Before Motherhood)	Before (After Motherhood)	After			
Visual						
Roles	**English Teacher at a Private School**	**English Teacher at a Private School**	**Children's Clothes Store Clerk**	**Responsible Adult at a Daycare**	**Early Childhood Educator**	**Lead Educator at a Daycare**

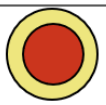
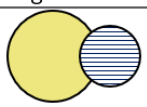
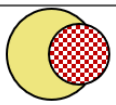
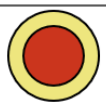
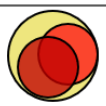
Royal		Before Immigration	After Immigration		
Visual					
Roles	**Owner of Consulting Firm "Third Wave"**	**Lecturer at a University**	**Postdoctoral Fellow at a Canadian West Coast University**	**Manager of Policy Team, Provincial Ministry of Health**	**Associate Dean, Business School in a Major Canadian City**

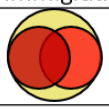
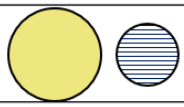
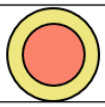
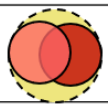
Nora		Before	After			
Visual						
Roles	**Marketing Communications Specialist (Nigeria)**	**Communications Manager (Germany)**	**Cashier in Grocery Store & other survival jobs**	**Project Manager, Canada Centre for Diversity and Inclusion**	**Communications Manager**	**UX Designer, RBC**

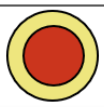
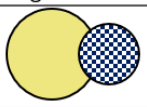
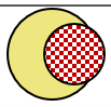
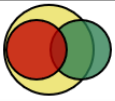
Christopher	Before Immigration	After Immigration	
Visual			
Roles	**Environmental Engineering**	**Project Coordinator at a Construction Organization**	**Senior Coordinator at Same Organization**

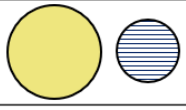
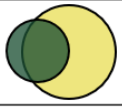
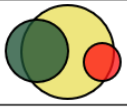
Reconstructing meaning through a mosaic of roles

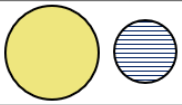
Roxana	Before Immigration	After Immigration			
Visual					
Roles	**Teaching English at High school and University**	**Retail Worker**	**Flight Attendant**	**Insurance Broker**	**Life Coach**

Glory	Before Immigration	After Immigration			
Visual					
Roles	**Registered Nurse**	**Chain Store Worker**	**Retirement Home Nurse**	**Hospital Nurse**	**Teaching Nursing**

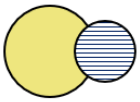
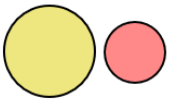
Sophia		Before Immigration	After Immigration		
Visual					
Roles	**Freelance Artist and Art Instructor**	**Urban Beautification Specialist**	**Retail Worker at Hudson's Bay**	**Art Instructor at a Canadian College**	**Freelance Artist and Exhibition Organizer**

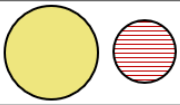
Emma	Before Immigration	After Immigration			
Visual					
Roles	**English teacher and Manger of English department at school**	**Insurance Seller at a Bank**	**Volunteer at Public School**	**Supply Teacher**	**Real Estate Coordinator**

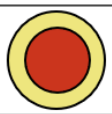
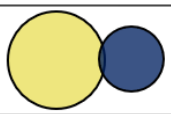
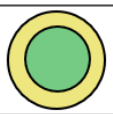
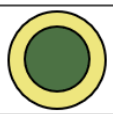
Maha	Before Immigration	After Immigration		
Visual				
Roles	**Physician**	**Amazon Business Owner**	**Digital Marketer and Business Owner**	**Cardiac Sonographer in Training**

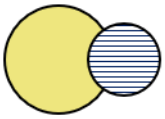
Sun	Before Immigration	After Immigration		
Visual				
Roles	**Worked in Father's Construction Company (Studied Environmental Engineering)**	**Retail Worker at Winners**	**Owner of Fashion Business**	**Life Coach**

Finding meaning in unrelated occupations

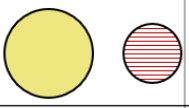
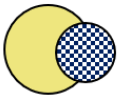
Daniel	Before Immigration	After Immigration			
Visual					
Roles	**Accountant at Central Bank in Iran**	**IGA (General Labor)**	**Shipping and Logistics Specialists**	**Teller at Scotiabank**	**Real Estate Broker**

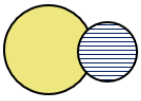
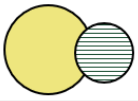
Lydia	Before Immigration	After Immigration		
Visual				
Roles	**High School Teacher in Tehran**	**Teaching Assistant at Private School**	**Counselor in Non-Profit Organization Supporting Women**	**Mental Health and Addiction Counselor for Indigenous Communities**

Sarah		Before Immigration	After Immigration	
Visual				
Roles	**Handicraft Business While studying biotechnology**	**Bakery Business While studying biotechnology**	**First Continued study Bio pharmacy, Then changed to Interactive Media Design Designing websites when in Co-Op**	**Digital Marketing Agency**

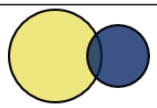
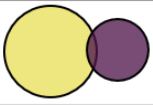
Khushi	Before Immigration	After Immigration		
Visual				
Roles	**Accountant Manager in the Telecom Sector (India)**	**Housekeeping at Hotel and Long-Term Care Facility**	**Postdoctoral Fellow**	**Assistant Professor**

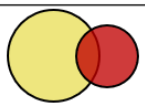
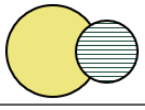
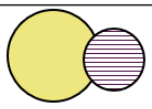
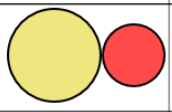
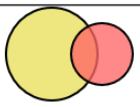
Shifting focus beyond paid work to other fulfilling pursuits

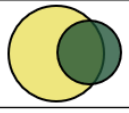
Miguel	Before Immigration	After Immigration			
Visual					
Roles	**CEO of Coffee Company**	**Coffee server at Tim Hortons**	**Worker at Restaurant**	**Bankruptcy Processing Facility**	**Project Manager at Bank, Mentor, Father, Husband, Community helper**

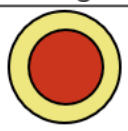
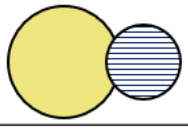
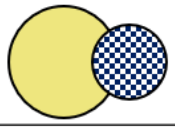
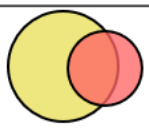
Ali	Before Immigration	After Immigration			
Visual					
Roles	**Junior Engineer to Head of Gas Recycling at National Oil Company**	**Gas Station Attendant**	**Factory Worker (Windows and Doors)**	**Schlumberger Canada – Field Engineer**	**CEO of supply chain consultant**

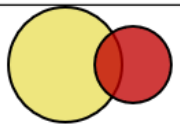
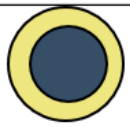
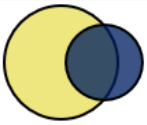
Still struggling

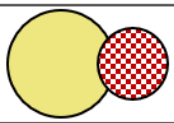
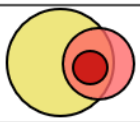
Nadia			Before	After		
Visual						
Roles	**Tailor (Sewing Clothes)**	**Insurance Company Owner**	**Construction Company (with Husband)**	**Tailor (Indian Clothing Shop)**	**Drafter (First Company)**	**Drafter (Second Company)**

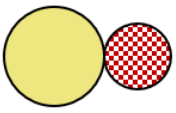
Baran		Before	After			
Visual						
Roles	**Chemical Engineer**	**High School Art Teacher & Private Art Instructor with Own Gallery**	**Grocery Store Worker**	**Day-care Worker and Gas Station Attendant**	**Petroleum Engineer**	**Procurement Specialist**

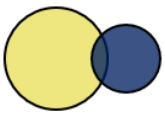
Anahid		Before Immigration	After Immigration	
Visual				
Roles	**Designer for Construction Contractor**	**Project Manager in Oil and Gas**	**Project Manager in the Construction Industry**	**PhD Candidate and Teaching and research Assistant**

Aidan	Before Immigration	After Immigration		
Visual				
Roles	**Municipality Civil Engineer**	**Cashier (Canadian Tire)**	**Customer Service Associate (Canadian Tire)**	**Construction Coordinator**

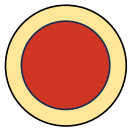
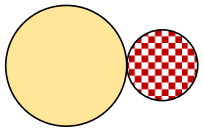
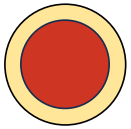
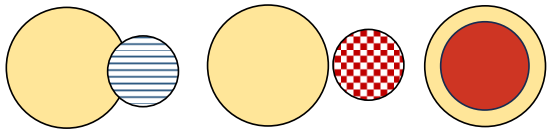
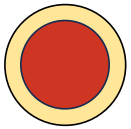
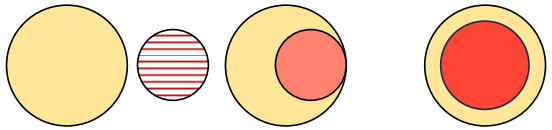
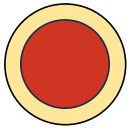
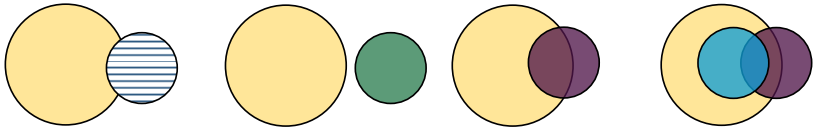
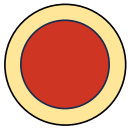
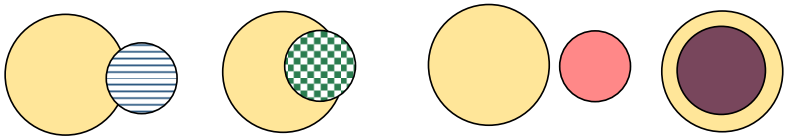
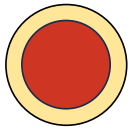
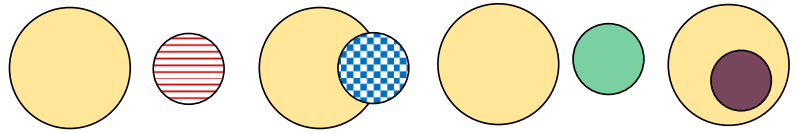
Mia			Before	After
Visual				
Roles	**Metallurgy Researcher (Academia)**	**(Parenting Website Entrepreneur)**	**Digital Marketing (Classified Ads, then Gambling Project)**	**Digital Marketing (Gift Delivery, Remote for Ukrainian Company)**

Arthur	Before Immigration	After Immigration	
Visual			
Roles	**Head of Acquisitions (University Librarian)**	**Open Scholarship Librarian**	**Special Projects Librarian**

Aurora	Before Immigration	After Immigration
Visual		
Roles	**Regional HR Manager in a Multinational Start up**	**HR Administrator at an Insurance Company**

Simin	Before Immigration	After Immigration
Visual		
Roles	**Pharmacist and Owner of Pharmacy in Iran**	**Insurance Agent and Investment Representative**

Forms of Re-engagement with Occupations After Migration In One Glance

Forms	Participants in Each Category	Contribution of Work to Meaning in Life Before Immigration	Contribution of Work to Meaning in Life After Immigration
Still struggling	Nadia, Baran, Anahid, Aidan, Mia, Arthur, **Aurora**, Simin		
Returning to pre-migration occupations	**Grace**, Mahshid, Sam,Ava, Howard, Hannah		
Reconnecting to purpose through similar roles	**Esther**, Ella, Royal, Nora, Christopher		
Reconstructing meaning through a mosaic of roles	**Roxana**, Glory,Sophia, Emma, Maha, Sun		
Finding meaning in unrelated occupations	**Daniel**, Lydia,Sarah, Khushi		
Shifting focus beyond paid work to other fulfilling pursuits	**Miguel**, Ali		

The Bold names are representative cases that best illustrate each form of occupational re-engagement.

APPENDIX H: CHRONOLOGICAL CASE RECONSTRUCTION

Participant's Fake Name
Occupation/Background Before Immigration:
Occupation/Background After Immigration:
Gender:
Country of Origin:
Year of Final Immigration to Canada:
Age at Time of Immigration:
Current Age:
Marital Status at Time of Immigration:
Children at Time of Immigration:

Early Career and Professional Identity

[Here, I described the participant's early career, professional achievements, or educational background. Include any formative experiences and how their identity and sense of purpose were tied to their work.]

Example:
Miguel began his career in Mexico as an intern at a large concrete company, followed by a consulting role where he developed international business plans. One of his mentors introduced him to a family-owned coffee company, which led to Miguel becoming the CEO of "*Church*," a historic coffee brand that had been in business since the 1800s. He quickly doubled the company's sales year after year for four years. Reflecting on this experience, he proudly shared, "*I was kind of like everything that I touch becomes gold.*" He was motivated to study International Business to become an entrepreneur and help thousands of people, a calling that was reinforced by his belief in making a proactive difference in others' lives. As he reflected, "*I want to help as many people as I can, and business is the way to scale that impact*." He earned a master's degree in finance to solidify his skills and prove his capability to his family, who doubted his financial ideas. "*I wanted to show them that my numbers weren't weak, so I paid for my master's myself*," Miguel explained.

Immigration and Initial Challenges

[I summarized their immigration story, focusing on what led them to leave their home country and the expectations they had upon arriving in [new country]. I highlighted any challenges they faced in securing work or adapting professionally. I included whether they immigrated with a spouse and/or children, and how that impacted their experience.]

Example:
In 2010, at the age of 27, Miguel made the decision to leave his successful career in Mexico and

move to Canada. His motivation was driven by the lack of safety in Mexico, where kidnappings were common, and his desire to raise a family in a safer environment. Despite having a bright career path in Mexico, Miguel chose to leave everything behind and test his capabilities independently. "*I wanted to see if what I had done was truly on me or if it was because of my network,*" he explained.

Miguel's initial expectations of success in Canada were high, but reality quickly set in. Although he thought he spoke English well, his accent made communication difficult, and he struggled to find work that matched his qualifications. A connection through a friend led him to his first job at Tim Hortons, where he found the simplicity of working eight hours a day refreshing compared to the 17-hour days he had been used to. However, after six months, the job lost its meaning. Miguel tried to implement improvements at the restaurant but was dismissed because, in his words, "*For them, I was the coffee server*." This led to a growing sense of frustration and self-doubt.

Work Centrality: Meaning Erosion or Shift

[In this part I discussed the participant's sense of meaning in work after immigrating, particularly if they experienced a loss of meaning or a shift in how work functioned in their life. I compared the centrality of work to their meaning in life before and after migration.]

Example:
Miguel's sense of work meaningfulness began to erode as he took on survival jobs that were far removed from his previous CEO role. Although he briefly regained a sense of purpose working at a restaurant where the owner trusted him with more responsibility, this autonomy wasn't enough to sustain meaningfulness. Eventually, Miguel worked at a bankruptcy processing facility, where the repetitive tasks left him feeling completely detached from his professional identity. He resorted to listening to podcasts to pass the time and meet his quotas. This period deepened his feelings of failure and led him to question whether he had made the right decision by moving to Canada.

Regaining Meaning in work and Professional Growth

[I explored any stages where the participant regained a sense of purpose or meaning in their work, either through a new role, self-reflection, or external support and highlighted any professional growth or changes in work centrality.]

Example:
At his lowest point, both emotionally and financially, Miguel was persuaded by a friend to explore opportunities in the banking sector. Initially reluctant to enter the banking sector, Miguel eventually took a position as a teller at TD Bank. His hesitation came from a deep concern about losing his values in what he perceived as a soulless industry: "*I don't want to work for a bank. I don't want to lose my soul. Like banks are bad*." However, a friend convinced him that his views might limit his employment prospects in Canada. This encouragement, combined with the

practical need for stability, led him to give the role a chance. Over the next five years, he was promoted six times, moving into roles such as Financial Advisor and Junior Project Manager. While this rapid career growth helped him regain some sense of meaning, Miguel faced cultural challenges, including the need for self-promotion and assertiveness in the workplace. Despite these challenges, he found that his professional identity was slowly rebuilding.

Current Work and Ongoing sense of meaning in work

[Finally, I summarize the participant's current professional status, their reflections on how work contributes to their life meaning, and whether they see their work as essential or functional. I included any reflections on how their family life or personal circumstances now interact with their professional journey.]

Example:
Today, Miguel works remotely as a Senior Project Manager at Scotiabank. While he appreciates the stability and flexibility of the role, he recognizes that it doesn't fully satisfy his deep desire for autonomy and personal growth. More importantly, his priorities have shifted significantly since becoming a father. "*Before, it was all about status and wealth. Now, what matters most is being there for my family—watching my kids grow and being a role model for them*." He is clear that achieving a balance between work and family is essential, and he no longer seeks titles or material success, stating, "*A happy wife, a happy family, and being there at their soccer games—that's real success to me.*"

In addition to focusing on his family, Miguel finds meaning by helping others through mentoring, coaching immigrants, and producing podcasts. His goal is to build a "*self-sustaining social enterprise*," which allows him to integrate his passions for teaching by example, contributing to society, and maintaining autonomy. "*This checks everything on my list—autonomy, helping people, and significant success*," he said, emphasizing how his work-life balance and desire to contribute to others now drive his career decisions.

Summary of Evolving Characteristics of Meaningful Work

At the end of the report, I also included a one-paragraph summary that captures how the participant's perception of meaningful work has evolved throughout their career. This focused on key changes related to the participant's motivations, priorities, and external circumstances across their work history. For example I highlighted:

- Key milestones (e.g., immigration, becoming a parent, job changes) that influenced shifts in how they viewed meaningful work.
- Shifts from growth-oriented or service-oriented work to more financially motivated or survival-focused work, if applicable.
- The evolving importance of work environment, recognition, and alignment with personal values in their understanding of meaningful work.

- I selected quotes that illustrate major transitions where work meaning shifted from essential to functional or dysfunctional and back.

Key Dimensions:

1. **Work Centrality:**
    - Essential to Identity vs. Functional Role
2. **Sense of Meaning:**
    - Erosion of Meaning vs. Regaining Purpose
3. **Work Environment:**
    - Challenges, Adaptations, and Changes in Roles
4. **Family Impact:**
    - Influence of marital status and children on professional journey
5. **Future Outlook:**
    - Plans to Continue Work or Shift Focus

Example:

1. **Work Centrality**: Initially essential to his identity as a CEO, but meaning eroded as he took survival jobs in Canada. Later regained meaning through professional growth but is now balanced with external activities like mentoring.
2. **Sense of Meaning**: Significant erosion after immigration, with a gradual rebuilding of professional identity over time.
3. **Work Environment**: Challenges adapting to Canadian workplace culture but successfully advanced in the banking sector.
4. **Family Impact**: His priorities shifted after getting married and having children, with work-life balance and being a role model for his kids now taking precedence.
5. **Future Outlook**: Miguel plans to continue working while focusing on meaningful external activities, such as mentoring and building his social enterprise.

(*For definitions of Essential, functional and dysfunctional work centrality to meaning in life, check Appendix F*)

APPENDIX I: PHASED CASE RECONSTRUCTIONS

[Participant's Fake Name]

1. Initial Job Search Phase:

- **Brief Overview**:
  In the initial stages of the job search, I explained what the participant first believed about finding work in their profession in Canada and how this view changed over time. I highlighted any realizations they had about challenges (e.g., lack of local experience) and described how much and in what ways they searched for jobs.

    - *Example*: Miguel arrived in Canada with high expectations, believing that his extensive professional background in Mexico would allow him to transition smoothly into the Canadian job market. However, he quickly encountered obstacles, including the need for Canadian experience, and ended up taking on survival jobs, such as working at Tim Hortons, to support himself.*"I came from being a CEO in Mexico, to working at Tim Hortons here. I remember thinking, 'How did I end up here?'"*"

- **Concrete Personal Reactions**:

  I described [Participant]'s actions in response to job search difficulties, such as applying for jobs outside their field or taking any available job.

    - *Example*: Miguel took on survival jobs, working at Tim Hortons and in restaurants, as he tried to navigate his new environment and seek out opportunities that would align with his qualifications. "*I was doing whatever I could, but I had no idea how to break into the market here. It was so frustrating*."

- **Concrete Social Reactions**:
  I identified how [Participant] engaged with social networks or agencies to find job opportunities.

    - *Example*: He leveraged his social networks and relied on friends to help him navigate this challenging phase. He also engaged with people who gave him advice on how to integrate better into Canadian professional life."*I talked to everyone, tried to make connections... without my friends, I wouldn't have known where to start.*"
- **Abstract Personal Reactions**:
    - I captured how [Participant] rationalized their situation, such as accepting underemployment as a temporary phase.

- *Example*: During this phase, Miguel was full of self-doubt and did not have the confidence that he could push forward in his professional life. His career transition filled him with uncertainty. "*I questioned myself every day, wondering, 'Is this all there is for me now?' I didn't know if I could ever do what I did before.*"

- **Abstract Social Reactions**:
  - I Identified how [Participant] reflected on external barriers, like the need for local experience or credentials.

  - *Example*: Miguel realized that societal barriers, such as the need for Canadian experience, were preventing him from finding a role that suited his qualifications. He recognized that he would have to rebuild his career from the ground up. "*I didn't understand why they didn't care about my experience back home. It felt like starting from scratch.*"

2. Dealing with Underemployment:

- **Brief Overview of Survival Jobs**:
  When [Participant] struggled to find work in their profession, they took survival jobs to support themselves or their family. In this section I briefly explained what survival jobs they did, how they coped with underemployment, and how they balanced financial needs with career aspirations.

  - *Example*: During his first years in Canada, Miguel worked various survival jobs to make ends meet. He found these roles unfulfilling and far removed from his previous professional life. He struggled emotionally, feeling that he was not living up to his potential. "*Tim Hortons was not what I had envisioned for myself... I remember crying on my way home sometimes, feeling completely lost.*"

- **Concrete Personal Reactions**:
  I describe any actions [Participant] took to address their underemployment, such as enrolling in courses or looking for temporary jobs.

  - *Example*: Miguel kept applying for better opportunities and worked extra hours in his survival jobs to save money. He was persistent, even though he doubted whether he would find a better job. "*I worked double shifts, knowing I had no choice but to keep going, but I wasn't sure if it would ever pay off.*"

- **Concrete Social Reactions**:

I described how [Participant] relied on social support, like seeking help from family or advocating in job interviews.

- *Example*: He relied on his network, asking for guidance and support from friends and acquaintances. Eventually, this led to new job opportunities. "*It was through connections that I found out about jobs in banking... I wouldn't have known about those roles otherwise*."

- **Abstract Personal Reactions**:
  I noted how [Participant] rationalized their situation, like attributing job challenges to external factors while protecting their self-worth.

  - *Example*: In this period, Miguel felt demoralized and uncertain about his future. He wasn't confident that he could overcome these challenges, and his previous sense of professional pride was deeply shaken. "*I doubted myself a lot. I didn't think I could make it. It felt like my past achievements didn't matter anymore*."

- **Abstract Social Reactions**:
  - I identified [Participant]'s reflections on social inequities or systemic barriers that influenced their career progression.

  - *Example*: Miguel reflected on how immigrants, like himself, were often overlooked despite their skills. He began to see the broader systemic barriers that held immigrants back. "*I realized the system wasn't set up for people like me. It wasn't just about me; it was about how the system worked*."

3. Turning Point or Motivating Event:

- **Distinguishing the Events**:
  I identified specific turning points or motivating events in [Participant]'s narrative. I briefly explained these events and how they marked a significant shift in their actions or mindset.
  - *Example*:
- **Event 1: Bankruptcy Processing Facility Job**
  - **Concrete Personal Reactions**:

    I documented the specific actions [Participant] took following this event.

    - *Example*: He embraced the job and worked hard, using it as a stepping stone to move closer to his financial background. "*It wasn't glamorous*,

but it felt like a step in the right direction... I could at least use some of the skills I had."

- **Concrete Social Reactions**:
  I identified how social interactions influenced [Participant]'s actions, such as unfair treatment or family support.

  - *Example*: Miguel's colleagues and managers supported his progress, allowing him to build new connections that would later open more opportunities. "*People there helped me grow and learn about the Canadian system... it was a crucial step for me*."

- **Abstract Personal Reactions**:
  I captured how [Participant] reflected on the turning point and what it meant for their career.

  - *Example*: This role restored some of his confidence. While he wasn't entirely out of underemployment, Miguel started to believe that he could eventually regain his professional footing. "*I started thinking, maybe I'm not done after all. Maybe there's still hope*."

- **Abstract Social Reactions**:
  I noted any broader social reflections that [Participant] had regarding this event, such as recognition of workplace inequities.

  - *Example*: He reflected on how this job gave him a better understanding of how Canadian business functioned, helping him bridge the gap between his past experience and his new environment. "*I learned how things worked here, and that gave me some of the context I had been missing*."

- **Event 2: [Name of Event] (if applicable)**
  - I followed the same structure for any additional turning points.

4. Evolving Work Meaningfulness Components

4-1. Meaning in Life:

- **Distinguishing What Matters Most**:
  I analyze what mattered most to [Participant] throughout their journey and in key decisions. I explain how their decisions were impacted by these priorities, starting from pre-immigration to their current situation.

    - *Example*: Miguel's meaning in life shifted significantly throughout his journey. While work remained important, he began to see his broader role in society as a mentor and a content creator. His focus moved beyond just professional success to include family well-being, and giving back through podcasting and immigrant mentoring. "*I realized life isn't just about climbing the career ladder. It's about contributing in other ways... I started mentoring other immigrants and creating podcasts to share my experiences.*"

    - Miguel's meaning in life evolved from a strong focus on professional success to a more balanced perspective that prioritized family. He recognized that while work was still important, his role as a father and husband took precedence. "*I want to be a man of example for my children*."
    - "*Before it was all about status and position, now it's about being there for my family.*"

4-2. Global Meaning of Work:

- **Changes in Centrality of work to Meaning in Life**:
  I explain how [Participant]'s understanding of the meaning of work shifted between being *essential* (personal and socially fulfilling) to *functional* (practical).

    - *Example*: Work remained essential for Miguel, but its scope in his overall meaning in life reduced. Rather than focusing solely on professional achievement, he began to balance work with his contributions to society and his family. His mentoring, podcasting, and community efforts became key elements of his meaning in life. "*Work is still important, but it's not everything. I'm also focusing on helping others, whether through my podcasts or mentoring people who are in the same place I was*."

4-3. Evolving Goal of Work:

- **Evolution of the Goal of Work**:
  In some cases, the goal of work itself (whether **contribution**, **self-development**, **self-expression**, or **unification with others**) may remain constant, but its **meaning** or how it's pursued can change over time. This section explains how [Participant]'s goal of work evolved, or how the meaning of the same goal shifted as their life circumstances, work roles, and personal priorities changed.

    - *Example* : Miguel's goal of work shifted from seeking status and professional validation to making meaningful contributions to society. He now seeks to help others navigate the immigrant experience, balancing this with his financial roles. *"At first, I wanted to prove myself again... now I want to help others through the same struggles I faced."*

4-4. Extent of Meaningfulness of Work:

Breadth:
After immigration, the factors that contributed to [Participant]'s sense of work meaningfulness shifted significantly. While the environment and sense of appreciation were important before immigration, these elements often took on different forms or became more pronounced after moving to a new country.

- *Example* : The factors that contributed to Mahshid's work meaningfulness shifted over time. In Iran, she found meaning in her role by advancing technology within her organization. In Canada, meaningfulness expanded to include providing for her family and learning to navigate a new work culture.

Depth:

I examined how deep the participant's sense of meaningfulness was compared to earlier or different work experiences.

- *Example*: While Mahshid's work in Iran was deeply fulfilling on a technical level, her sense of meaningfulness in Canada deepened as she overcame personal and professional challenges. The process of adapting to a new country and proving herself in the Canadian job market added a layer of personal growth that increased the depth of her work's meaning.

5. Multiple Job Contributions to Meaningful Work Life (For participants with multiple jobs):

In this section, I described how the participant's different jobs contribute to creating a meaningful work life. Discuss the roles each job plays in providing both **practical stability** and **emotional fulfillment**, and how the synergy between these jobs allows the participant to feel both personally and professionally satisfied.

- **Contribution of Job 1**:
  I detailed how the first job contributes to their work meaning, focusing on practical aspects like financial security, stability, or personal development.
- **Contribution of Job 2**:
  I describe how the second job enhances their sense of meaning, particularly in areas such as personal connection, passion, or emotional fulfillment.
- **Synergy Between Jobs**:
  I explain how having multiple jobs complements one another, providing the participant with both financial security and the emotional rewards they seek in their work.

Example: Roxana

Financial Advisor/Insurance Agent:

- **Security and Empowerment**:
  As a financial advisor and insurance agent, Roxana is helping individuals and families secure their financial futures. This role is deeply meaningful to her because it allows her to empower others by providing them with the tools and knowledge they need to protect themselves and their assets. After her own financial loss, she recognized the importance of financial education and security, and this role gives her the opportunity to guide others away from the same pitfalls."*I became a financial advisor because I didn't want others to experience the financial loss I did. Now, I help people protect themselves.*"

- **Functional Stability**:
  In addition to providing emotional fulfillment, this role also offers financial stability for Roxana and her family. The steady income from her work as a financial advisor gives her the flexibility to pursue her passion for coaching without the financial strain that often comes with starting a coaching business."*My financial advisor role provides me with the stability I need, while coaching gives me the passion I crave.*"

Life Coach:

- **Personal Growth and Connection**:
  Roxana's work as a life coach allows her to connect deeply with individuals and help them achieve personal growth. This role aligns with her desire to help others overcome challenges, find their purpose, and build fulfilling lives. Coaching brings her emotional fulfillment as she can witness the transformation in her clients' lives."*Coaching is where my heart lies. Seeing my clients grow and succeed gives me a sense of purpose.*"

- **Holistic Contribution**:
  Coaching allows Roxana to integrate her experiences, both personal and professional, into a holistic framework where she helps individuals not just with financial security but with emotional and mental well-being. By addressing both practical needs (through her financial work) and personal growth (through coaching), Roxana feels that she's making a well-rounded contribution to people's lives. "*I feel like my work now covers all aspects of life—security, well-being, growth... it all connects.*"

How These Two Roles Contribute to a Meaningful Work Life

- **Synergy Between Roles**:
  Roxana's roles as a financial advisor and a life coach complement each other. As a financial advisor, she provides practical solutions for security and stability, while as a life coach, she guides people on personal growth and self-fulfillment. This synergy allows her to feel that she's helping individuals not only survive but thrive, contributing to both their material and emotional well-being."*In both my roles, I feel like I'm helping people in a complete way—one gives them security, the other helps them grow.*"

- **Balance of Passion and Practicality**:
  Roxana has found a balance between her financial advisory work, which provides stability and structure, and her life coaching, which brings her passion and emotional fulfillment. The combination of these roles gives her both functional stability and essential meaning, creating a career that fulfills her on multiple levels."*Financial advising is more practical, but coaching is where my heart lies. Together, they give me a meaningful work life*."

End of This Draft