

**FROM RESISTING TO SUSTAINING:
EXPLORING SKILLED MIGRANTS' ALTERNATIVE CAREER PATHWAYS**

SOODABEH MANSOORI

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study employs a grounded theory approach to explore the lived experiences of skilled migrants in Canada who engage in *alternative careers*. The study investigates identity work and meaning-making processes of career actors who perceive alternative career options as “beginning again.” Through 30 semi-structured in-depth interviews, the findings identify three distinct alternative career pathways: *provisional*, *experimental*, and *reformist*; each characterized by a unique form of identity work and accompanying types of meaning-making. Each path provides distinctive insights into how skilled migrants cope with, and adapt to, the mismatches between their skills and new job demands, challenging and redefining their professional identities. Additionally, it highlights how each career pathway may shape migrants’ subjective well-being. This study advances the existing literature on major career transitions, specifically skilled migrant career trajectories inside local organizations, by highlighting how they reconstruct new professional identities and derive meaning in contexts that often fall below their qualifications and career aspirations. This study extends existing research on employability and career sustainability by integrating the dynamic processes of identity negotiation and meaning-making in the face of career transitions. It also builds on the existing meaning-making literature by highlighting the career narratives of those who must search for new meanings while pursuing “less than ideal” career opportunities. Finally, the findings provide practical implications related to outcomes of alternative career opportunities on migrant career success and, more broadly, for employers and policymakers.

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DEDICATIONS

To my spouse, *Keyghobad*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins with an overview of skilled migrant experiences in the host country. This overview establishes the foundation for explaining the purpose of this study and formulating the research questions. Subsequently, the significance and contributions of the study are discussed.

1.1 Skilled Migrants and Career Challenges

Migrants are a rapidly growing segment of the highly educated international workplace, and skilled migrants, in particular, are critical to the growth of advanced economies (Tharenou & Kulik, 2020). Growing worker mobility and international demands for skilled and specialized labour (Fernando & Cohen, 2016) have led to increased skilled migration, allowing it to become an essential part of national and global economies (Crowley-Henry et al., 2018).

Skilled migrants possess unique characteristics that distinguish them from other migrant workers (e.g., corporate expatriates and self-initiated expatriates), particularly in their motivations, requirements, socio-cultural integration, and lengths of stay in the host country (Baruch et al., 2013; Farashah et al., 2023). Typically, skilled migrants hold higher education levels than the native population (OECD et al., 2019) and are seen as a competitive advantage to the host country (Zikic, 2015). Research has defined skilled migrants as newcomers who hold at least a bachelor's degree and some work experience from their home country and who seek to permanently establish themselves and seek employment in the host country (e.g., Crowley-Henry et al., 2018; Harrison et al., 2019; Tharenou & Kulik, 2020; Zikic, 2015).

Studies suggest that the presence of skilled migrants addresses social challenges, such as the aging population in industrialized countries and the skilled labour shortage in specific sectors (e.g., Borjas, 2011; Silvanto et al., 2015). Furthermore, this population can be a significant

source of innovation, technology transfer, and skills advancement in the host country (Kerr et al., 2017; OECD et al., 2019). Thus, understanding skilled migrants' career trajectories and experiences is increasingly important for management scholars (e.g., Tharenou & Kulik, 2020).

Despite their potential, skilled migrants often encounter significant career challenges upon arriving in the host countries. Skilled migrants constitute the majority of the global migrant population, yet their skills and qualifications are often under-utilized in their host countries as they are judged overqualified for the jobs to which they apply (ILO, 2019). In addition, despite holding internationally recognized professional qualifications and work experiences, they are locally categorized as "foreign-trained" professionals; this classification often signifies that their "foreign" credentials are afforded lower value and do not meet national and/or local professional standards (e.g., Hakak et al., 2010; Ramboarison-Lalao et al., 2012).

In the Canadian context, the human capital migration model seeks to attract skilled migrants to fulfill labour market demands and enhance the country's economic growth (Oreopoulos, 2011). Yet, despite being a potential source of competitive advantage and strategic value for local employers (Zikic, 2015), skilled migrants' qualifications, skills, and experiences are often discounted in the host country (e.g., Crowley-Henry et al., 2018; Dietz et al., 2015; Hakak et al., 2010; Zikic & Richardson, 2016).

On the other hand, skilled migrants entering Canada with accumulated foreign career capital anticipate meaningful employment and career development (Grant, 2008). They often believe that, based on their credentials and their skilled migrant status, they should be able to obtain employment in their field that is commensurate with their qualifications (e.g., Tharenou & Kulik, 2020; Sardana et al., 2016). However, research indicates that only a minority of skilled migrants move straight into occupations commensurate with their home country qualifications

and work experience (Tharenou & Kulik, 2020). Thus, upon their arrival in Canada, the expectations of most skilled migrants are significantly disconnected from reality as they experience devaluation of their foreign qualifications and experience, known as “skills discounting” (Dietz et al., 2015). This experience often leads to serious career and professional identity consequences and ends in prolonged unemployment or underemployment (Fang et al., 2009; Zikic & Voloshyna, 2023). Relatedly, although most local organizations consistently express their concerns about skill shortages and needing to fill specific vacancies, many skilled migrants remain unemployed or underemployed (e.g., Dietz et al., 2015; Farashah & Blomquist, 2022; Palic et al., 2023). Dietz and colleagues have identified the notion of the “skill paradox,” explaining that the more skilled and qualified immigrants are, the less likely they are to find employment compared with their local counterparts. As a result, skilled migrants often experience psychological distress and professional identity crises as they struggle to reconcile their professional self-concepts with the realities of their employment situations.

These career barriers push many skilled migrants towards “alternative career” options; that is, they decide to change their occupations or pursue new career paths permanently in the host country. These alternative careers typically fall below their qualifications and experience, which is known as “occupational downgrading” (e.g., Akresh, 2006; Al Ariss & Özbilgin, 2010; Fernando & Parriotta, 2020; Ressia et al., 2017; Voitchofsky, 2018; Zikic & Richardson, 2016). As a major career transition challenge, occupational downgrading leads to increased psychological distress due to their unfulfilled expectations and the undervaluation of their human capital (e.g., Crollard et al., 2012). Importantly, it also causes skilled migrants to question their professional identity and re-evaluate how to navigate their downgraded new roles (e.g., Caza et al., 2018). Indeed, in the context of skilled migrant research, this question remains little

understood: how do skilled migrants experience these new career pathways or “alternative careers,” and how do they create meaning and find purpose in new work roles despite previously being established, often successfully, in their own career fields in their home countries?

1.2 The Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study aims to explore an in-depth understanding of skilled migrants’ lived experiences of *alternative careers*. The study explores identity work and meaning-making processes of skilled migrants who perceive alternative career options as “beginning again.”

Existing literature on migrant career transitions focuses mainly on early labour market experiences and coping efforts of skilled migrants before entering local organizations (e.g., O’Connor & Crowley-Henry, 2020; Sarpong & Maclean, 2021; Zikic & Voloshyna, 2020). In fact, previous studies in this area commonly examined migrants at the periphery of the labour market, namely those who were not yet engaged in any alternative careers. Less is known in the literature about career actors who are already part of alternative career trajectories (i.e., often less satisfactory options in the host country) and their search for purpose and meaning in this new work context (Sarpong & Maclean, 2021; Hajro et al., 2019). To investigate this gap, my study specifically focuses on skilled migrants who have been employed in alternative careers in Canada and who likely cannot return to their original careers. This group represents a critical segment of my study, which explores the specific challenges and/or opportunities they encounter within their alternative career context while facing occupational downgrading and career change. Moreover, the study delves more deeply into skilled migrants’ subjective perceptions and how they assign meaning to their downgraded alternative career pathways.

Much less is known about how skilled migrants find meaning in work roles that do not meet their expectations, level of education, or work preferences. Thus, this study focuses on how

individuals find meaning when their roles within alternative careers may not only be new but, most importantly, present a mismatch with their past self-definitions. This study also expects that skilled migrants encounter a complex process of career transitions and adaptation that involves reconciling their past professional identities with the requirements of new realities (Ashforth, 2001). In sum, employing basic ontological assumptions of interpretive paradigm (Gioia & Pitre's, 1990), this study focuses on an inductive understanding of how alternative career transition impacts skilled migrants' sense of self and a corresponding meaning-making process.

1.3 Research Questions

Given the background and the purpose of the study explained above, the following research questions guide this qualitative study:

1. How do skilled migrants enact alternative careers in their host countries?
2. How do skilled migrants develop new professional identities and subsequently create meaning in new roles while navigating alternative careers?

1.4 Significance and Contributions of the Study

This study aims to contribute to the literature in several ways. It first extends the existing literature on migrant career trajectories and the identity work and meaning-making of skilled migrants who currently enact alternative careers in the host country. Specifically, the study broadens existing research by emphasizing the experiences of employed migrants in “new” or alternative careers, thus extending beyond the traditional focus on challenges that migrants face in job searches and “pre-organizational entry” identity experiences. This study also enhances our understanding of role transitions and employability among skilled migrants by exploring how they navigate alternative career paths within new socio-cultural contexts.

Furthermore, the study contributes to the existing meaning-making literature by highlighting the career narratives of those who must enact new career options and search for meaning while pursuing less than ideal career options. In addition, by identifying three distinct alternative career pathways—*provisional*, *experimental*, and *reformist*—the study highlights the less explored interplay of professional identity and the meaning-making process. These insights also inform research on career sustainability by demonstrating how migrants sustain their careers through ongoing adaptation and strategic planning. Importantly, the findings advance employability research by highlighting the dynamic nature of employability, providing a deeper understanding of how individuals “rebuild” their employability through identity work and psychological resilience. Additionally, the findings contribute to understanding the impact of alternative career pathways on skilled migrants’ well-being. By exploring how different career paths affect migrants’ subjective well-being, the study highlights the significance of employment context in shaping skilled migrants’ well-being and mental health.

Finally, this study is relevant for many career actors who are unable to pursue their desired career options but who must still seek meaning and purpose in their careers. The practical implications may provide valuable insights for policymakers, local organizations, and immigrant settlement agencies who support skilled migrants in achieving career success and integration into new professional environments.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This chapter systematically reviews existing literature to establish a theoretical foundation for the study. The chapter is structured into two sections. The first section reviews the literature on career change, career transitions, and role transitions, emphasizing the intricate relationship between career and role transitions. Next, it explains the concept of identity work, exploring how shifts in career and role transitions require career actors to engage in identity work. Lastly, it aims to establish a foundational understanding of how career and role transitions, coupled with identity work, frame the professional trajectories of skilled migrants, setting the stage for an exploration of meaningful work.

The second section of the chapter focuses on the concept of meaningful work, investigating its significance and the various theoretical lenses through which it has been studied. It therefore offers a comprehensive overview of meaningful work from diverse perspectives. Subsequently, this section sets the stage for discussing meaningful work in the context of alternative career pathways of skilled migrants, highlighting how their unique experiences and challenges shape their pursuit of purpose and meaningfulness in their professional lives. Finally, the section links identity work to the quest for meaningfulness in the context of alternative careers.

2.1. Overview of Career Changes, Career Transitions, and Role Transitions

In today's labour market, increased globalization and rapid technological advancements have made careers more challenging and complex. Research has shown that individuals often transition across various boundaries, including occupations, industries, organizations, and countries (e.g., Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021). Recent studies show that career transitions may occur

both predictably and unexpectedly throughout individuals' life spans, ranging from typical school-to-work shifts to more unique and idiosyncratic work-to-work transitions (e.g., Akkermans et al., 2023).

While the literature on career transitions often uses the terms *career change* and *career Transition* interchangeably (Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021), they have distinct definitions. A career change is described as any significant change in work-related responsibilities or work context (Nicholson, 1984). This may include changing industries, switching from one occupational field to another, or completely altering one's professional trajectory (Carless & Arnup, 2011; Rhodes & Doering, 1983). Career transition, on the other hand, is defined as the period when individuals undergo a shift in roles or alter their perspective towards an existing role. Ibarra (2003) describes career transition as a process where individuals undergo significant changes in their professional roles or paths. Thus, a career transition signifies a *process* of moving from one phase of a career to another, which may include changes within the same field or industry, advancing to a higher level of responsibility, or even shifting to a different kind of field or industry. In fact, career transition emphasizes the process of change, characterized not only by external job changes but more profoundly by internal shifts in professional identity, values, and personal aspirations (Ibarra, 2003).

In this study, a career change for skilled migrants involves switching from their well-established career fields in their home country to an alternative career path (in either a related or completely different field) in Canada. While this switch may also represent a significant career change for skilled migrants, this study focuses on the *process of change* (i.e., career transitions) to explore how skilled migrants navigate the transition phase while engaging in an alternative career path.

Moreover, the literature suggests that to fully understand career transitions, it is crucial to investigate their accompanying role transitions and particularly the psychological adaptations and professional identity re-evaluation involved (Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra, 1999). Thus, while career transitions and role transitions are distinct concepts, they are interconnected. When an individual experiences a career transition, it inevitably involves one or more role transitions; each role demands a re-evaluation of one's professional identity (Ibarra, 1999). These role transitions specifically focus on the psychological process of adapting to new roles within an individual's career path, which includes managing changes in role-specific expectations, responsibilities, and professional identity alignment (Ashforth, 2001). This interconnectedness between career and role transitions becomes more pronounced in the contexts of skilled migration, where individuals not only change careers but also navigate the complexities of new cultural and professional domains, experiencing several simultaneous role transitions (Ashforth, 2001).

Most recently, George et al. (2022) have addressed a new perspective on career transitions, explaining it as a change to an individual's position in a social structure involving psychological, physical, relational, and behavioural movements. The authors argue that role transition experiences are complex, occur over time, and involve different interrelated movements. These movements, alone or combined, represent the transition experience of individuals and those surrounding them. In addition, the recent systemic review on career transitions by Akkermans et al. (2023, p. 4) defines a career transition as "a process during which an individual typically prepares for, undergoes, and adjusts to a significant change in work-related content and context in their career." The variety of definitions in seminal and recent research highlights the dynamic nature of career transitions. In conceptualizing career transitions

within the scope of this study while considering seminal approaches including Ashforth (2001) and Ibarra (1999), I adapted Akkermans et al.'s (2023) definition of career transition for the current context. Namely, to address the unique situation of skilled migrants, the definition has been explicitly contextualized to reflect the lived experiences of their career transition. Skilled migrants often face complex challenges beyond a typical career transition, including navigating significant shifts in professional roles and professional identities, and adjusting to new cultural and social environments in the host country. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, career transition refers to a dynamic process through which skilled migrants reshape their professional identities and realign their career paths in response to the socio-cultural environments of the host country.

This literature has also described a typology of career transitions by distinguishing between two major types of transitions: inter-role versus intra-role (Louis, 1980). In the inter-role, a new or different role is undertaken; in the intra-role, a new or different orientation to the existing role is adopted. Ashforth (2001) also distinguishes between micro and macro role transitions. Micro transitions “are defined as the psychological and (if relevant) physical movement between simultaneously held roles” (e.g., shifts between work and home roles). In contrast, macro transitions “are defined as the psychological and (if relevant) physical movement between sequentially held roles” (e.g., inter-occupational transition or exit from an organization) (Ashforth, 2001, p.7). This study focuses on the macro inter-role transitions of skilled migrants.

2.1.1 From Career Transitions to Identity Work

Individuals' sense of self is inherently attached and central to their work experiences (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). Yet it is known that career transitions initiate a discontinuity between individuals' self-concept and work role expectations, triggering a need for those who are

experiencing career transition to modify their professional identities by engaging in identity work (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Sonpar et al., 2020). Identity work is defined as individuals' engagement in repairing, maintaining, strengthening, or revising their identities (Snow & Anderson, 1987; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) to retain the continuity of their original professional identity. From the identity theory perspective, identity work occurs when conflicts and ambiguities in the work roles and role changes are experienced (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Role ambiguities and tensions may arise when a work role is new, when others do not see us as we see ourselves in a role, or when multiple roles conflict (Caza et al., 2018). Thus, any role transition resulting from a career change may necessitate engaging in identity work, as individuals need to learn to enact the expected role behaviours and establish a new sense of self within these new roles (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006).

Considering that identity work involves creating, revising, and sustaining identities, the majority of scholars have focused on the potential benefits of identity-based implications of identity work, such as resolving or reducing tensions, threats, or conflicts for individuals (Caza et al., 2018). For instance, identity work can help individuals reduce their perceived identity threat (Petriglieri, 2011). Studies have shown that individuals in stigmatized occupations can engage in identity work to avoid or minimize the threat of stigma by reevaluating their work (e.g., Ashforth et al., 2007). In addition, engaging in identity work may strengthen an identity (Caza et al., 2018). For example, Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) argue that individuals within "dirty work" professions (i.e., jobs often viewed negatively for physical, social, or moral reasons) manage to maintain a positive self-image despite negative perceptions and societal stigmas associated with their jobs. The authors have identified three ideological mechanisms, namely *reframing*, *recalibrating*, and *refocusing*, that "dirty workers" use to engage in identity work and construct

and sustain their professional identities. Reframing transforms negative views of the work into pride by emphasizing the work's required skills and resilience. Recalibrating perceptions adjusts standards to highlight the positive and necessary aspects of the work. Lastly, refocusing on positive aspects shifts focus from stigmatized elements of the work to its beneficial outcomes or essential nature.

Despite the benefit of identity work, the literature indicates there is no promise that identity work will always effectively reduce the conflict or construct a new identity; it may even create new issues (e.g., Beech et al., 2012). For example, studies emphasize that engaging in identity work during career transition may lead to unresolved ambiguity, leaving individuals in a liminal phase (e.g., Beech, 2011). Beech (2011), for example, describes liminal identity work as individuals experimenting with, reflecting on, and seeking recognition for new self-concepts as they navigate changes in their new roles or careers; however, this liminality phase often continues for a more extended period if identities are not fully integrated or recognized, leading to challenges such as identity conflicts or psychological stress.

Kulkarni (2020) provides a nuanced perspective on identity work, emphasizing the possibilities of holding on to some aspects of past professional identities while letting go of others to embrace new futures. Kulkarni's research focuses on soldiers who were severely disabled during military service, exploring how these individuals manage their identity transitions during rehabilitation and vocational training. The soldiers in Kulkarni's study engage in identity work that allows them to retain foundational elements of their self-narratives as soldiers, even if they transitioned to civilian roles. This continuity was facilitated through collectively and contextually modified imaginations of the future, supported by a familiar social context and reference groups.

Given the extant studies on identity work, very few studies have explored the role of identity work in skilled migrants' career transitions. One exception is the study by Zikic and Richardson (2016), which demonstrates how the identity work of two groups of skilled migrant professionals (i.e., medical and IT) differs and evolves as a result of identity salience and the contextual forces (i.e., systemic barriers encountered) in Canada. The study focuses on macro role identity transitions, showing the role of the institutional rather than organizational context. While this study makes a significant contribution towards understanding discontinuous career transitions and the resulting identity work of migrants, it is still unknown how skilled migrants disengage from their previously established identities and reconstruct a new professional identity in alternative careers. My study aims to extend identity literature by further exploring how skilled migrants engage in identity work, specifically when engaging in alternative career roles and within the specific socio-economic contexts of the host countries. Specifically, this study investigates identity work triggered by skilled migrants' lived experiences and unique challenges in the context of alternative careers.

2.1.2 Career Transitions in the Context of Skilled Migrants

The experience of migration as a significant career transition can trigger a desire for self-continuity (Zikic & Voloshyna, 2023) and, consequently, a search for meaning and purpose in the new work context. Existing literature on skilled migrant career transitions and re-establishment focuses much attention on their early labour market experiences and coping efforts (e.g., O'Connor & Crowley-Henry, 2020; Sarpong & Maclean, 2021; Shirmohammadi et al., 2019; Syed, 2008; Zikic & Voloshyna, 2020). That is, these studies have mainly addressed skilled migrants' career trajectories as a significant career transition before entering local organizations, and discussed professional identity challenges at the periphery (i.e., Zikic &

Richardson, 2016). For instance, Zikic and Richardson (2016) have explored the impact of institutional pre-entry scripts, that is, the formal and informal expectations, norms, and requirements for professional re-entry in a new country (e.g., credential recognition, licensing exams, or local work culture, etc.) on skilled migrants. The authors consider skilled migrants as outsiders who are attempting to enter the host country's local labour market; therefore, skilled migrants are at the institutional periphery (i.e., part of the external rather than internal labour market). Similarly, in the review article, Shirmohammadi et al. (2019) identify vital challenges skilled migrants face before entering the host country's labour market. These challenges include the non-recognition of foreign qualifications, language barriers, lack of local professional networks, undervaluation of foreign work experience, and cultural differences. Furthermore, scholars have identified the skill-related discrimination against migrants termed "skill paradox," explaining that the more skilled and qualified immigrants are, the less likely they are to find employment compared with their local counterparts (i.e., Dietz et al., 2015). Thus, these types of challenges that skilled migrants encounter often hinder job searches and local workplace integration, leading to unemployment.

In addition, one of the major transition challenges and most commonly examined issues in the context of skilled migrants' careers is occupational downgrading, a phenomenon in which skilled migrants find occupations below their qualifications and experiences (e.g., Akresh, 2006; Al Ariss & Özbilgin, 2010; Fernando & Partriotta, 2020; Ressia et al., 2017; Voitchovsky, 2018; Zikic & Richardson, 2016). Ramboarison-Lalao et al. (2012) report that some internationally trained physicians who were entirely discouraged by the local constraints decided to permanently change their careers to the nursing profession, and thus accepted downward career mobility. Research also shows that occupational downgrading results in a loss of occupational status

between the last position in the home country and the new one in the host country (e.g., Voitchovsky, 2018). In this context, studies have revealed that downward career transitions challenge migrants' sense of identity, often leading them to question and re-evaluate how they experience their new occupational role and what is happening to them (Caza et al., 2018; Dietz et al., 2015; Fernando & Partriotta, 2020). In addition, occupational downgrading among immigrants may increase psychological distress due to unfulfilled expectations and frustrations arising from devaluation of their human capital acquired in their home country (e.g., Crollard et al., 2012).

As explained earlier, existing literature addresses skilled migrants' career trajectories, emphasizing their struggles in securing employment that aligns with their qualifications in the host country (e.g., Shirmohammadi et al., 2019; Syed, 2008; Zikic & Richardson). However, a notable gap remains in understanding the lived experiences of those who have already embarked on a new career pathway (i.e., alternative career trajectories). Alternative careers refer to options available in the host country, often different but in some ways still related to the original profession or field in which skilled migrants were initially trained. These alternative career choices are often less satisfactory and may result in career actors' search for purpose and meaning in this new work context (Sarpong & Maclean, 2021; Hajro et al., 2019). Given that many of these alternative career options may lead to underemployment and downward career shifts (Harrison et al., 2019), it is expected that finding meaningful work can be a challenging and complex task for skilled migrants. As a result, this study delves into this less explored context by examining how these transitions affect skilled migrants' sense of self and their quest for meaningful work. Specifically, the study focuses on career actors who are engaging in alternative careers, where their new roles are often considered less than ideal and downgraded

compared to what they did in their home country. This scenario puts skilled migrants' previous sense of self at work in flux, triggering new questioning and search for meaning in these alternative roles that typically do not match their previous occupations. By exploring these dynamics, this research seeks to uncover how major work transitions leading to working in a new context may impact migrants' professional identity and related meaning-making process.

2.2 Theoretical Background

2.2.1 Role Exit Theory

The literature on role transitions discusses various theories that illustrate the process of role transitions. One foundational theory by Ebaugh (1988), or the "role exit" theory, involves disengaging from a role integral to an individual's identity and subsequently establishing a new identity in a different role while still considering the influence of the previous role. However, disengagement from an old role is a complex process, including changes to reference groups, friendship networks, and relationships with former group members, as well as a shift in the individual's sense of self (Ashforth, 2001; Ebaugh, 1988). Ebaugh (1988) outlines four critical stages of role exit: *first doubts*, *seeking an alternative*, *encountering a turning point*, and *creating the ex-role*.

First doubts. In the first stage, individuals who Ebaugh (1988) described as "exiters," begin to question and experience doubts about their role commitments, due to triggers such as organizational changes, job burnout, changes in relationships, and other critical events. First doubts lead individuals to show signs of dissatisfaction with their roles and to seek alternatives. This dissatisfaction, often recognized by others, can reinforce individuals' doubts, and strengthen their consideration of exiting a role.

Seeking alternatives. Once individuals become aware of and accept their dissatisfaction, they begin to reassess their commitments and explore other options. This search for alternatives is influenced by their aspirations and the realistic opportunities available. When alternatives are analyzed, individuals may engage in “anticipatory identification,” where they start adopting the attributes of their anticipated future roles (Ashforth, 2001). This anticipatory process allows for a psychological distancing from their current role, facilitating a transition towards new opportunities (Ebaugh, 1988).

Turning points. A turning point is a perception that old roles are “complete, have failed, have been disrupted, or are no longer personally satisfying,” coupled with the realization that exiters can begin something different in their lives (Ebaugh, 1988, p. 123). The turning point resolves doubts by encouraging individuals to make a final decision (Ashforth, 2001).

Creating an ex-role. The final stage occurs once individuals have left in reality. The concept of ex-role is defined as “a unique sociological phenomenon in that the expectations, norms, and identity associated with it do not so much consist in what one is currently doing but rather stem from the expectations, social obligations, and norms related to one’s previous role” (Ebaugh, 1988, p. 149). Completing a role exit involves more than just leaving a position; it requires individuals to reflect on the meaning of their previous roles, decide which aspects of that identity to maintain versus attempt to forget, and figure out how to present their evolved selves to others (Ashforth, 2001). These stages highlight the psychological adjustments and social interactions essential to the transition, underscoring role exit as a dynamic process of identity transformation rather than a mere change of occupation.

2.2.2 Expanded Role Exit Theory

While Ebaugh's (1988) theory mainly relates to voluntary role exit, Ashforth (2001) has expanded Ebaugh's model by re-ordering the stages to explain involuntary role exit. In Ashforth's (2001) revised model, the process begins with a "*turning point*," which acts as the catalyst for role exit. This stage leads to "*escalating doubts*," where individuals start to question their role and the reasons behind their exit, typically blaming external factors rather than internal ones. Following this stage, individuals "*seek an alternative*," exploring other opportunities and envisioning themselves in new roles. Finally, the process ends with "*creating an ex-role*," where individuals establish their identity outside their previous role in a new context. In fact, Ashforth's (2001) model focuses on immediate role loss that may generate emotional distress, shock, and a sense of liminality, a psychological state in which individuals lose a self-defining connection to work, and they are "betwixt or between" two identities (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). Ashforth's insights highlight the unique challenges of involuntary exits, including the intense emotions and identity confusion involved, contrasting with the more gradual and reflective process of voluntary exit as captured by Ebaugh (1988).

However, the common element in these theories and approaches is the adoption of Van Gannep's (1960) classic three-stage framework, namely the rites of passage approach—*separation, transition, and incorporation*—triggered by various life events. The separation stage, marked by doubt and stress (Ashforth, 2001), can be provoked by personal or professional life events, such as job loss or immigration. Regardless of whether individuals separate from their roles, jobs, organizations, or countries, they experience a similar range of psychological states. The transition stage is often described as "being nowhere" (Turner, 1969; Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016), characterized by ambiguity and a lack of a defined social domain. This period prompts

individuals to question their identity. This stage is very much in line with the liminality stage described above. The final incorporation stage signifies adopting a new role or status accompanied by renewed stability (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016) and completing the transformative journey from old to new identities. Finally, the incorporation stage signifies adopting a new role or position, symbolizing a new period of stability (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016).

2.2.3 Role Exit Theory in the Context of Skilled Migrants

While Ebaugh (1989) and Ashforth (2001) provide foundational perspectives into the general mechanisms of role exit and identity transitions, my study delves into the unique experiences of skilled migrants facing career transitions within alternative career contexts. These seminal works provide this study with a starting point and a conceptual lens for exploring how skilled migrants navigate disengagement from their past established professional identities while engaging in alternative career paths, often involving occupational downgrading. In fact, I explore the complex emotional and cognitive journey, particularly professional identity conflicts that arise from their new roles. Thus, the aim of this study is to explore how these conflicts and disruptions affect skilled migrants' sense of self and their capacity for psychological adaptation.

Furthermore, reflecting on these seminal works, I expect that the skilled migrants will be involved not only in changing their roles and occupations but also in redefining who they are or who they perceive themselves to be within the new contexts. I also expect that skilled migrants' narratives will reveal a dynamic interplay between professional identity and the meaning-making process. As a result, by contextualizing role transitions within the lived experiences of skilled migrants, and by focusing on understanding their identity work and search for meaningfulness, this study explores the specific challenges and/or opportunities they encounter within their alternative career context (marked by occupational downgrading).

2.2.4 Novel Perspectives on Role Transitions

Ebaugh (1988) and Ashforth (2001) provide foundational perspectives on role exit and identity transitions; however, a more recent study by Wittman (2019) proposes a novel perspective on the work role transition process, challenging these traditional views regarding significant identity shifts in individuals. Instead, Wittman (2019) develops a new perspective by focusing on identity stability, termed “lingering identities,” i.e., identities that are often rooted/attached to individuals’ former roles and continue significantly beyond role change. Contrary to the classic view of role transitions, Wittman (2019) proposes that identity adaptation is not the default response to the ongoing uncertainty many role-changers experience. In fact, lingering identities can provide a sense of continuity and stability while navigating role transitions. However, the author indicates that lingering identities may also hinder adaptation to new roles and environments if these stable identities conflict with new expectations and opportunities, potentially leading to distress and a sense of being stuck in past roles.

Moreover, other recent extensions of foundational theories also present a shift in studying role transitions from an attribute-based approach to an experience-based framework by incorporating psychological, physical, behavioural, and relational aspects (e.g., George et al., 2022). Specifically, George et al. (2022) argue that traditional research has overlooked specific contextual factors that influence transitions. In addition to highlighting the diverse elements of an individual transitioning, the authors emphasize the importance of interrelation between work and non-work domains, as well as individuals’ social networks, in the role transition process.

Although Wittman’s (2019) exploration of “lingering identities” provides valuable insights into how career actors’ past professional identities persist and influence their adaptation to new roles, my study questions how skilled migrants may resist, leverage, or transform their

identity work within alternative careers. By extending Wittman's (2019) study, my study further seeks to understand the interplay between potential lingering identities and the unique challenges and opportunities that skilled migrants face in a new work context.

While these recent studies have addressed new perspectives on role transitions and identity reconstruction, less is known about how specific populations, especially more vulnerable groups (e.g., skilled migrants) experiencing a completely new context (e.g., an alternative career in a host country), enact their career transitions. For example, George et al. (2022) provide a broader theoretical framework for role transitions and identity reconstruction, emphasizing the general experiences of role transitions. However, my study offers an in-depth exploration of skilled migrants' lived experiences within alternative career pathways in a specific geographical context, i.e., Toronto, Canada. While the framework of George et al. (2022) focuses on various movements of role transitions, my study also investigates the meaning-making process in the face of a major career transition, in particular, how different elements (e.g., psychological) of such transitions may affect skilled migrants and their process of finding meaning in their alternative roles.

2.2.5 Forgone Professional Identity

Moreover, Obodaru (2017) has developed a process model indicating how individuals cope with professional identities they have forgone by choice or force. The author represents the concept of "forgone professional identity," which is defined as the aspects of a professional identity that individuals have left behind but still retain as part of their self-concept; these involve the roles, skills, and professional identities that individuals were trained for and previously identified with but no longer actively practice. Even though these identities are no longer enacted in daily professional life, they may continue influencing individuals' self-

conceptions and aspirations. Obodaru's (2017) model identifies three strategies for enacting forgone professional identities: *real enactment*, *imagined enactment*, and *vicarious enactment*. Real enactment involves enacting professional identity through real activities and social interactions either at work or during leisure time. Imagined enactment refers to enacting a professional identity through imagination, involving imagined activities and social interactions, either in an alternate present or in the future. Vicarious enactment is observing and imagining close others enacting the forgone identity. In fact, Obodaru (2017) argues that individuals may continue to hold onto their past professional identities despite transitioning to new roles/occupations, highlighting the influence of past professional identities on current and future career aspirations. This model provides valuable theoretical insight that enhances my understanding of identity transitions; thus, forgone identity conceptualization may inform this exploration of skilled migrants' identity work process within alternative careers. Reflecting on Obodaru's work, I seek to further understand the struggle that migrants may experience in seeking to disengage from their past well-established professional identities while enacting alternative careers. In addition, since skilled migrants experience occupational downgrading within alternative careers, it is important to examine whether they employ any strategies to enact their forgone identities and maintain a connection to their past professional selves.

2.3 Overview of Meaningful Work

Meaningful work has been the domain of study in psychology, sociology, organizational studies, and business ethics for decades (Rosso et al., 2010); researchers of this area seek to identify how people approach, perform, and experience their work and workplaces (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Studies show that experiencing work as meaningful is the most important and valuable aspect of one's job, focusing on the significance and value individuals

attach to their work beyond mere job satisfaction (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Rosso et al., 2010). Some scholars suggest that perceiving one's life as meaningful reflects a sense of existential purpose or significance, whereas others may perceive their life as lacking meaning and, as a result, experience a diminished sense of existential significance (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009). Although the definition of meaningful work generally varies with little consensus in the literature, many scholars tend to agree that meaningfulness explains how individuals evaluate the significance and value of their work (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Rosso et al., 2010).

In addition, some researchers argue that to better understand meaningful work, we should first identify what "meaning" is (e.g., Martela & Pessi, 2018; Rosso, 2010). For example, Pratt and Ashforth (2003) have addressed the main distinction between "meaning" and "meaningful work." *Meaning* is individuals' perceptions or interpretations of various aspects within their environment; therefore, meaning is closely related to meaning-making, a cognitive process where people make sense of their experiences (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003), and can have positive, negative, or neutral valence (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). In other words, perceptions of meaning are eventually determined by each individual, although they are also influenced by the environment or social context (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). In contrast, *meaningfulness* or *meaningful work* is "work experienced as particularly significant and holding more positive meaning for individuals" (Rosso et al., 2010, p. 95). Thus, meaningful work is personally significant and has positive valence. This study has adopted both terms, meaningful work and meaningfulness, and uses them interchangeably.

Scholars have also demonstrated that the diversity in definitions of meaningful work highlights the subjective experience of work as significant, positively valued, and inherently satisfying, regardless of the specific nature of the job or the presence of challenges and conflicts

within the workplace setting (Blustein et al., 2023). However, other studies have challenged meaningful work's multidimensional nature, suggesting that meaningful work is not always linked with positive emotions but can emerge in situations of tension and conflicts, often accompanied by mixed or unpleasant feelings (Bailey & Madden, 2016; Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). Such experiences may even demand personal and family-related sacrifice (Bunderson & Thompson 2009).

Moreover, to better understand the concept of meaningful work, existing research addresses factors, such as individual, job, organizational, and societal that foster meaningful work (e.g., Blustein et al., 2023; Lysova et al., 2019). For instance, the job characteristics model developed by Hackman and Oldham (1976) suggests that specific characteristics of a job, such as autonomy, skill variety, task identity (control over the completion of the task), and task significance (impact of the job on others), can lead to meaningful work experiences. In addition, the literature on meaningful work also expands traditional job design research, suggesting that individuals do not merely attach meaning based on the characteristics of their jobs. Instead, they proactively redesign the tasks and relational boundaries of their jobs to create meaning out of their work (e.g., Berg et al., 2010; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). For example, hospital cleaners can perceive their work as healers or caregivers to patients. Thus, this perception of the job is likely more meaningful to hospital cleaners than a perception that simply focuses on the tasks that constitute their jobs (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Research has reported that individuals' idiosyncratic narratives and dynamic life stories help them interpret and understand their lives when these narratives are applied in a professional context, and therefore help them find meaning in their work (Lysova et al., 2019).

In contrast, some studies have illustrated how organizational policies and practices (e.g., human resources practices) can also enhance work's meaningfulness (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003) whereas others note that meaningful work is fostered in social contexts (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003) that provide opportunities for individuals to engage in positive work relationships (e.g., Colbert et al., 2016), and experience a sense of belonging through organizational memberships, groups, or communities (e.g., Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Scholars have also examined the effect of occupational context on the "experience of meaningful work" (e.g., Blustein et al., 2023). For example, literature has explicitly addressed meaningful work in the context of low-status work (e.g., Laaser & Bolton 2021), such as "dirty work" that is physically, socially, or morally tainted (Ashforth & Kreiner 1999); the work of refuse collectors (Bailey & Madden, 2017), and animal shelter work (Schabram & Maitlis, 2017). These studies show that in all these occupational contexts, individuals can experience their work as both meaningful and meaningless. Thus, meaningfulness is not a final state to be achieved but a constantly evolving phenomenon (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). That is, it is unnecessary for individuals to always align perfectly with their ideals or work; in fact, they may encounter considerable conflict and uncertainty, and mixed feelings. Lastly, societal factors (e.g., economic constraints, cultural norms, marginalization, etc.) can also influence the shaping of meaningful work (Blustein et al., 2023; Lysova et al., 2019).

2.3.1 Meaningful Work: Theoretical Background

Various theoretical models across disciplines (e.g., management, organizational behaviour, vocational psychology) have been utilized to understand the factors that facilitate the experience of meaningful work. However, it has been somewhat challenging to establish a

specific theory to define the construct of meaningful work (Bailey et al., 2019). Thus, below, I review the prevalent theoretical frameworks.

Rosso et al. (2010) propose a theoretical model illustrating two central psychological dimensions, namely “self-others” and “agency-communion.” The self/others dimension reflects individuals’ effort to make their work meaningful towards themselves or others. In contrast, the agency/communion aspect refers to individuals’ motives, where “agency” is about creating, differentiating, or expanding elements, whereas “communion” is building connections or unity. This theoretical model suggests that a sense of purposeful action is crucial to meaningful work experience because it indicates a “directedness” or development toward something valuable to self, others, or both.

Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009), on the other hand, have focused on meaningfulness from the individuals’ perspectives, suggesting a theoretical model somewhat similar to Rosso et al. (2010). However, their core dimensions consist of “self” versus “others” and “being” versus “doing.” Lips-Wiersma and Morris (2009) have identified four sources of meaningful work: *developing and becoming self, unity with others, serving others, and expressing the self*. The authors suggest that the experiences of meaningful work involve tensions between the needs of the self and the needs of others, and the need for being as well as the need for doing (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009; Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012).

Another theoretical model developed by Steger and Dik (2010) posits that meaning arises when individuals are able to make sense of their experience or exhibit *comprehension*, that is, their ability to understand who they are, how the world works, and how they fit with and relate to the life around them. These aspects of comprehension develop the second component of meaning, called *purpose*, referring to individuals’ identification of, and intention to pursue,

particular highly valued and overarching life goals, as well as directly or indirectly serving the greater good (Steger & Dik, 2010). This model proposes that comprehension provides the foundation for finding purpose, actively pursuing purpose enhances comprehension, and the dynamic between comprehension and purpose equips individuals with the perception that their work is a source of meaning in their lives.

Most recently, Lepisto and Pratt (2017) have developed two perspectives on meaningful work: *realization* and *justification*. The central claim is to identify the core barriers to meaningful work and the theorized solutions. In fact, Lepisto and Pratt (2017) argue that each perspective's core problem and solution proposes different assumptions about what meaningful work is. While the realization perspective explains meaningful work as fulfilling the needs, motivation, and desire related to self-actualization, the main barrier to meaningful work is restricting work conditions (e.g., lack of autonomy or skills), leading to alienation (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). The authors argue that the solution for this barrier focuses on enriching these aspects of individuals' work (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003), which can counteract alienation and create meaningful work through fulfilling self-realization. The justification perspective, however, identifies the primary obstacle of meaningful work as *anomie* (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017), a subjective experience of uncertainty and ambiguity related to basic norms, values, and worth of the work individuals engaged in (Durkheim, 1984). Given this core issue, the solution centres on enriching individuals' "account-making" activity, which may provide insights into creating meaningful work. Account-making is individuals' story-like interpretation, including descriptions, explanations, predictions about relevant future events, and affective responses (Orbuch, 1997). Hence, a justification perspective focuses on overcoming anomie-like conditions by asking "Why is my work worthy?" (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017).

On the other hand, Pratt and Ashforth (2003) have developed a conceptual framework for understanding meaningful work across various contexts, focusing on the role of identity formation and its impact on individuals' sense of meaningfulness. The authors first discuss the concepts of "meaningful in work" versus "meaningful at work" to address how individuals derive meaningfulness from their roles and membership within organizations or communities. *Meaningfulness in work* arises from what one does (i.e., one's work role). This concept has been the focus of work psychology scholars. The experience of meaningfulness in work emerges primarily through the design and perceived fit of an individual's job role and social interactions encountered during the performance of one's role (Kahn, 1990). *Meaningful at work*, however, is a subjective assessment, evolving from being a member of an organization or community (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Importantly, this distinction is rooted in identity theory (Stryker & Serpe, 1982) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985), suggesting that identity is primarily influenced by what one does (what am I doing?) and by one's social groups/memberships (where do I belong?). While the path to meaningfulness is through identity, meaningfulness (why am I here?) can be obtained by integrating individuals' identity (who am I?) with their roles (what am I doing?) and membership (where do I belong?) (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). The authors also emphasize that this framework is dynamic and may involve shifts depending on how meaning seekers view their identities, membership, roles, and purpose.

Similarly, in a recent related study, Weller et al. (2023) demonstrate that meaningfulness is achieved through identity work. The authors investigate how volunteers in disaster response contexts create meaning through narrative identity work. Weller and colleagues have identified three primary narrative identities: *helpers*, *heroes*, and *the hurt* that volunteers use to frame their experiences and find purpose in their challenging roles. By constructing these narratives,

volunteers can maintain a positive self-concept and navigate the emotional and cognitive demands of their work. The study highlights the importance of personal agency and contextual adaptation in the process of meaning-making, demonstrating how individuals proactively use narrative strategies to create a sense of purpose and identity in their roles.

Drawing on the insights from both Pratt and Ashforth (2003) and Weller et al. (2023), my study explores how skilled migrants engage in a dynamic and ongoing identity work as they transition into alternative careers. Similarly to the narrative strategies observed by Weller et al. (2023), skilled migrants may use personal narratives to interpret their experiences and find meaning in their new professional contexts.

2.3.2 Meaningful Work in Alternative Careers: Skilled Migrants

Existing literature has shown that individuals as career actors actively desire and seek meaningfulness and purpose in their professional lives (e.g., Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). In fact, “meaningfulness” is said to be a self-project that involves pursuing a particular goal and seeking a purposeful life (Weller et al., 2023). While the literature has addressed how individuals seek and create meaning in various work contexts, little is known about the role of “alternative careers” in searching for meaning among skilled migrants. Thus, in this study, I explore how skilled migrants find meaning in their alternative work roles. In particular, I focus on understanding the role of past expectations and experiences originating from skilled migrants’ established work identities in the home country, contrasting them with the new work context of alternative career roles they currently enact. For some migrants, transitioning into alternative careers may necessitate accepting jobs that lack the meaningfulness they desired and anticipated. In other words, career actors at the focus of this study may have to cope with jobs that are simultaneously meaningful, fulfilling some purpose or goal in life, yet on the other hand,

meaningless in relation to their original work identity (Weller et al., 2023). Thus, this study explores whether creating meaningfulness in alternative careers may involve letting go of their past, often preferred and well-established identities, while striving to embrace new alternative career identities.

Moreover, existing research has discussed broadly the temporal nature of meaningful work (Bailey & Madden, 2017). However, unlike the general temporality discussions, my study delves into unique temporal discontinuities that skilled migrants encounter. That is, by exploring migrants' original identity and connections to work in their home country as a type of referent for their current alternative career as well as their meaning-making, the study seeks to understand this temporally embedded nature of meaningful work. In other words, how past understanding of what is valued and meaningful may impact a skilled migrant's current career context and search for meaning in alternative careers. In fact, research has illustrated that meaning arises in reflection on past experiences, awareness of the present, and anticipation of the future (Muzzetto, 2006). Bailey and Madden (2017, p. 6) also indicate that current "events in the here-and-now never exist in isolation but are embedded within an individual and social timescapes that casts some events or experiences in a more meaningful light than others." Thus, our present experiences are influenced by and connected to our past contexts and future expectations, and this interconnectedness affects how we interpret and value them. Relatedly, career actors seek to perceive themselves as temporally continuous beings who have a past that flows into the present and future. This ability to perceive self-continuity is integral for coping with disruptive changes, especially in the context of career discontinuity triggered by migration, whereby many local barriers may appear to threaten that self-continuity over time (Zikic & Voloshyna, 2023).

In addition to the role of time, meaningfulness literature has highlighted the idea of “congruence” or “fit” between individuals’ motivations, values, and career goals, and those of their environment (i.e., job, organization, and society) (Lysova et al., 2019). Research supports the idea that with a greater person-job and person-organization fit, individuals experience more meaningful work (e.g., Barrick et al., 2013; Tims et al., 2016). However, less is known about creating meaningfulness in work situations that present some type of “mismatch” or lack of fit that does not meet the expectations, the level of education, or the work preferences of the individual actor. Hence, this study aims to bridge the gap by exploring how skilled migrants experience their new roles given the potential misalignment with their original identities and experiences of meaningful work. I seek to understand whether this mismatch prompts an urgent search for new meanings and how this disconnect may affect individuals’ understanding of self. The study does not focus on any dispositional factors of these actors, but on their unique personal narratives of creating meaningful work and the ongoing dynamic experiences of alternative careers. Thus, I explore the alternative career meaning-making process as possibly a more complex and uncertain affair, forcing migrants to adjust to the local work context and new occupational expectations.

2.3.3 From Identity to Meaningful Work

The literature illustrates that making sense of the world is inevitably linked to one’s identity (Ashforth, 2001; Pratt, 2000; Weick, 1995), essentially answering the question of “Who am I?”. Only after resolving this primary inquiry can a career actor address the subsequent crucial question related to meaningfulness: “Why am I here?”. Indeed, earlier studies have argued that the path to meaningfulness is through identity; that is, individuals find meaning by integrating their identity into their work roles and membership in them (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003).

According to Pratt and Ashforth (2003), when individuals observe some sort of “fit” or “alignment” between their identity and the roles they engage in, they then perceive their roles and work as meaningful. Similarly, meaning creation is an ongoing process and constantly unfolding. Based on earlier research, it is expected that identity-related processes that explore the question, “Who am I?” are at the heart of meaning creation (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003), and this exploration may be especially critical during alternative career transitions that require constant questioning and revising of one’s identity. That is, this research focuses on studying identity’s mediating role in crafting new meanings in alternative careers. In this study specifically, I focus on exploring any changes in how meaning seekers view their identities, memberships, roles, and purpose following a migration transition. Migration transition is a more holistic type of transition that affects both one’s career and life in general, and it is often seen as creating ‘career discontinuity’ in particular.

Thus, it is expected that migrant career actors in alternative careers may engage in efforts to revise, maintain, and possibly seek to repair a personal sense of meaningfulness (Weller et al., 2023). This study also builds on existing studies that have examined the construction of desired identities in the pursuit of “worthwhile” lives and meaningfulness of unique groups such as volunteers (i.e., Florian et al., 2019), as well as employees whose work may be somewhat mundane or even “dirty” (Ashforth & Kreiner, 2014; Rosso et al., 2010). Similarly, meaningfulness has not always been the explicit focus of identity-work scholars, as more attention has been paid to identity work because of one’s search for self-enhancement, individuality, and belongingness (Caza et al., 2018; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Instead, in this qualitative exploration of alternative career narratives, I aim to simultaneously understand the

identity projects and related meaning-making processes, particularly when the match between individuals' expectations and skills may not be reflected in the type of roles they are enacting.

2.4 Summary

This chapter has provided a systemic literature review on career and role transitions, identity work, meaningful work, and their interrelatedness. The purpose of the chapter is to explore what is already known and addressed about these concepts in the current literature. Consequently, it has provided insights into possible gaps and questions that may be answered by studying the context of skilled migrants and alternative careers.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This chapter presents the methodology of the study and the research design that was developed to answer the following research questions:

1. How do skilled migrants enact alternative careers in the host country?
2. How do skilled migrants develop a new professional identity and subsequently create meaning in new roles while navigating alternative careers?

In this chapter, first, I explain the research methodology, including a discussion of the interpretive paradigm and typology development as theoretical frameworks for this study. Next, I describe various steps in the research design, such as the rationale behind selecting the participants and sampling techniques, the recruitment process, the choice of specific data-collection methods, and the approaches to data analysis procedures.

3. 1 Interpretive Paradigm as a Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the interpretive paradigm, which informs the qualitative methodology. The interpretive paradigm seeks to understand how social actors create and are influenced by meanings within real-life settings, assuming that these meanings shape perceptions and reactions to the real world (Gephart, 2004). This paradigm explains the social world primarily from the perspective of actors directly involved (Burrell & Morgan, 1979) and emphasizes the importance of exploring individuals' subjective experiences and the meanings they construct through social interactions (Denzin, 2001).

This approach is particularly applicable to studies focusing on subjective experiences and the nuanced meanings individuals attach to their lived realities (Schwandt, 1994), such as the professional identity construction and meaning-making process examined in this study. Thus,

this study aligns with the interpretive tradition, highlighting how skilled migrants interpret their lived experiences and how these interpretations shape their behaviour (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The literature suggests that while individuals interpret the external world and respond by taking actions based on the meanings and interpretations they assign, the meaning is viewed as a dynamic process that constantly evolves and can always be reinterpreted (Denzin, 2001).

Philosophically, this study has engaged with the ontological assumptions of interpretivism about the nature of reality: the view that reality is subjective and varies among individuals (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In fact, ontologically, interpretivism suggests that reality is not a static, external object; instead, it is constantly shaped and reshaped through individual experiences and social interactions (Blumer, 1969). Applying this approach, this study views the alternative career pathways and professional identities of skilled migrants as dynamic, shaped by their interactions within the host country's professional and social domains. This perspective facilitates a richer exploration of the complex process by which skilled migrants navigate their new roles, highlighting how these processes are influenced by both individual aspirations and the socio-cultural context of the host country.

From an epistemological perspective, this study has employed qualitative techniques such as in-depth semi-structured interviews, allowing deep engagement with participants' lived experiences. The interviews capture the rich and personal narratives of skilled migrants, which provide insights into how they navigate their new realities, offering a detailed understanding of their identity work and meaning-making processes (Greetz, 1973; Kvale, 1996).

In sum, the interpretive paradigm seemed well-suited for investigating how skilled migrants interpret and navigate the complexities of career transitions in a new country. By adopting this paradigm, I aimed to uncover the nuanced and dynamic process of identity work

and meaning-making among skilled migrants, providing insights into how they adjust and find meaning in their new work context.

3.2 Research Design

This study's research design outlines the methodological approach for analyzing data collected through in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews to address the research questions.

3.2.1 Research Context

This study took place in Toronto, Canada, known as a migrant-welcoming context. Skilled migrants, in particular, are seen as a major source of a country's human capital and growth for decades (Reitz et al., 2014). Canada is well known for attracting an exceptionally diverse and skilled population of newcomers and facilitating their entry through a human capital based model and immigration policies. As an important and unique context for studying the career trajectories of these newcomers, Toronto is a major global city that allows access to a diverse sample of skilled migrants. In addition, the focus on skilled migrants remains of interest to management scholars as this group still remains a "large and growing workforce that often falls beyond our reach and hence is typically neglected in classic management research" (Bamberger & Pratt, 2010, p. 668).

According to Statistics Canada, migrants who have been in the country between one and five years are still considered "recent newcomers," and the period of adaptation is generally agreed to be up to five years; some research even suggests up to ten years to fully integrate (Statistics Canada, 2011). While citizenship eligibility in Canada can be requested after three years of living as a permanent resident (the status of our sample), most migrants begin this process after their third year in the country. Thus, within this context, skilled migrants in our

study meet the criteria of undergoing a significant life and work transition, requiring a substantial amount of time to achieve a sense of belongingness, and particularly, to re-establish careers.

3.2.2 Sampling

This study utilized three sampling strategies: theoretical sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990), and the snowball technique. Guided by the research questions, the study utilized purposeful sampling to seek skilled migrants who changed their career paths and found employment on alternative career paths, likely without the possibility of returning to their mainstream careers. In particular, the study purposefully focused on skilled migrants from the health care sector (e.g., physicians, nurses, pharmacists, dentists, etc.) as they experienced a major career derailment due to external local labour market barriers (Zikic & Richardson, 2016).

Patton (2002, p. 273) highlights the effectiveness of purposeful sampling, stating, “the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry.” By focusing on health care professionals, the study delves deeply into the complex dynamics of skilled migrants’ career transitions within a highly regulated sector. This focus provided rich insights into how skilled migrants reconstruct their new professional identities and adapt to new roles. In addition, through this sampling strategy, the study investigated skilled migrants’ motivations for pursuing alternative career paths, the incentives that motivated their engagement in identity work, and the factors that influenced them to create a meaningful career in a new context.

While the literature indicates that purposeful sampling drives theoretical sampling (Patton, 2002), the next step was to utilize theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling is based on

the premise that the categories and themes identified in the initial stages of data collection (specifically the interviews for this study) should guide the subsequent rounds of data collection (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As a result, I first engaged in a cyclical process of collecting, analyzing, and coding data. Then, guided by earlier analysis insights, I searched for subsequent participants with relevant experiences needed to address the research questions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Therefore, the insights derived from previously conducted interviews were instrumental in shaping the focus of subsequent interviews. This approach helped me gain a deeper understanding of emerging concepts, properties, and dimensions (Corbin & Struss, 2008).

In addition, as the study progressed, I realized the need for additional and deeper exploration of emerging categories. Thus, a limited use of snowball sampling was employed towards the end of the data collection process. This technique involves recruiting participants through referrals from existing study participants. Specifically, it was used when I requested study participants to recommend others with relevant or similar experiences. Overall, the use of immigrant settlement agencies (explained in the next section) combined with snowball sampling effectively helped me identify additional participants fitting the study criteria.

Finally, during the interviews and analysis, I noted that the developed categories provided considerable depth and breadth in understanding the experiences of alternative careers (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Consequently, I clearly described alternative career pathways using the categories and concepts that emerged in the analysis. Then, I realized that the categories had reached the point that sufficient sampling (i.e., saturation) was appropriate for this study. As a result, the data collection was ended following the principle proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), stating that theoretical saturation is achieved when the research questions are adequately answered. Theoretical saturation refers to the point that “subsequent data incidents that are examined

provide no new information, either in terms of refining the category or of its properties, or of its relationship to other categories” (Locke, 2001, p. 53). While modification and further refinement of the categories are always possible, to avoid endless iterations I adopted a pragmatic approach in determining whether the study had a plausible explanation for the research questions and whether it offered considerable breadth and depth when explaining the phenomenon (Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

3.2.3 Data Collection Sources and Final Sample

I built the sample by contacting several local immigrant settlement agencies in the Greater Toronto Region that offer what is known as “Bridging and Sector-Specific Programs” for skilled migrant professionals. These programs support internationally educated professionals in securing non-licensed employment, but that are still broadly within the same sector or area of interest (e.g., health care). Participants of these programs are introduced to the local labour market context and are able to learn about a range of sector-specific options in Canada as well as locally desirable job-seeking strategies, helping them translate their foreign human capital into a locally desirable profile (Turin et al., 2021). Several major settlement agencies in Toronto region (e.g., ACCES employment) agreed to participate in this study. They distributed the research advertisement to potential clients who completed/graduated from their “bridging programs” (i.e., programs that facilitate transitions to alternative careers) and fit the criteria for this study. In addition, as explained earlier, this study used a snowball technique as a secondary recruitment strategy to accompany purposeful and theoretical sampling.

By the end of the study, our total sample included 30 individuals out of 48 who initially showed an interest in participating. All participants had backgrounds in the health care sector and had made a switch to an alternative career path, likely without the possibility of returning to their

mainstream careers (see Table 1 on the next page for demographic details). The average tenure of their experience was 1.5 years in alternative careers in related or different fields compared to their original occupations back in their home country. All participants had lived in Canada for three years on average, and of the total sample, females comprised 57% while males comprised 43%. The sample consists of very diverse internationally educated health care professionals, including medical specialists and non-specialists, who came from seven different countries.

It is crucial to note that although the sample in this study is diverse in terms of age, gender, country of origin, etc., the aim was not to link these dimensions directly with the participants' experiences to generalize the findings. This approach aligns closely with the classic qualitative methodology. Indeed, the diversity of the sample enabled me to explore similarities and differences in alternative career experiences among individuals from various countries. It was anticipated that the experiences of skilled migrants in alternative careers represented the type of phenomenon that grounded theory was particularly well-suited to study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Therefore, the purpose of the study was not to explore any objective reality (e.g., specific demographic variables) but to analyze the unique experiences of skilled migrants that shaped their sense of self and meaning-making process in an alternative career.

Table 1. Demographic Information

#	Name	Age	Gender	Original Career/Home Country	Alternative Career in Canada/ Years	Years in Canada	Type of Alternative Career Pathways
1	Rosa	30s	F	Pharmacist / IND	Data Analyst < 1	1	Reformist
2	Nancy	40s	F	Psychologist / IND	Employment Counsellor/ 1	2	Reformist
3	Susan	45s	F	Psychiatrist /IRN	Psychotherapist/ 1	4	Reformist
4	Kate	20s	F	Medical officer-Researcher/ NGA	Infection Control Manager/ 2	2	Reformist
5	Sarah	30s	F	Dentist/ IND	Treatment & Patient Coordinator/1	1	Experimental
6	Moe	30s	M	General physician/ BGD	Senior Medical Assistant/ < 1	5	Provisional
7	Rani	40s	F	Gynecologist /PAK	Project Coordinator/<1	4	Provisional
8	Mati	30s	M	Pharmacist /BGD	Account Manager/ 1	2	Reformist
9	Ali	40s	M	Pharmacist /EGY	Sales Manager/ 1	3	Experimental
10	Alisha	30s	F	Psychiatrist /IND	Psychotherapist/ 2	4	Experimental
11	Kevin	40s	M	Pharmacist/ NGA	Senior Business Manager/<1	1	Reformist
12	Alan	30s	M	Pharmacist/ IND	Data Analyst/ 2	3	Reformist
13	Rita	30s	F	Dentist/ IND	Project Manager/ 2.5	3	Reformist
14	Shiren	30s	F	Nurse/ PAK	Project Coordinator/<1	2	Provisional
15	Tim	30s	M	Family physician/ARG	Community Outreach Worker/ 1	2	Provisional
16	Keith	30s	M	Pharmacist /NGA	Account Manager/ 2	3	Reformist
17	Anna	30s	F	Dentist/IND	Mask-fit Tester/<1	3	Experimental
18	Maya	50s	F	Psychiatrist /IRN	Psychotherapist/ 1	5	Reformist
19	Elma	30s	F	Medical Doctor/ BGD	Clinical Research/ < 1	3	Experimental
20	Peter	40s	M	Medial Doctor /EGY	Medical Case Coordinator/ 2	3	Reformist
21	Linda	30s	F	Nurse /IND	Patient Safety & Quality Analyst/ 4	5	Reformist
22	David	50s	M	Ophthalmologist /IRN	Optometrist/ 1	5	Reformist
23	Andrew	30s	M	Physiotherapist /IND	Salesforce Administrator (IT)/ 1	2	Reformist
24	Radeen	50s	M	Pediatrician /PAK	Community Ambassador in clinic/2	3	Experimental
25	Nadia	40s	F	Dermatologist/EGY	Lactation Consultant/ 2	4	Experimental
26	Aileen	45s	F	Medical Doctor/ EGY	Youth Worker/ 1	5	Provisional
27	Ryan	30s	M	Pharmacist /NGA	Project Coordinator/ 1	2	Experimental
28	Diane	35s	F	Pathologist /IND	Laboratory Technician/ 1	2	Experimental
29	Sam	50s	M	Medical Doctor/IRN	Medical Aestheticians/ 2	5	Reformist
30	Beth	30s	F	Dentist /NGA	Claims Consultant/ <1	1	Reformist

Note:

ARG: Argentina, BGD: Bangladesh, EGY: Egypt, IND: India, IRN: Iran, NGA: Nigeria, PAK: Pakistan

F: Female, M: Male

3.2.4 Data Collection: Interviews

3.2.4.1 In-depth Interviewing. The interview is a key qualitative data collection technique for exploring how individuals perceive and experience their world; it provides unique access to individuals' lived world via their descriptions of their activities, experiences, and opinions in their own words (Kvale, 2008). Literature indicates that from the interpretive point of view, the purpose of using the interview technique is to construct meaning (Langley & Meziani, 2020). This approach assumes that interviews that create an environment of openness, trust, and rapport can successfully access the interviewee's personal experiences and capture their true meaning (Alvesson, 2003). Using this approach within this study, helped me gain more profound insights into skilled migrants' perspectives, detailed descriptions of their lived world, and deeper meanings of their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Thus, the purpose of this study was not to generalize but to focus on in-depth semi-structured interviews with skilled migrants, exploring an emic understanding of what an alternative career "feels like" from the migrants themselves, who were immersed in the process of living and managing this type of transition (Gioia & Pitre, 1990).

3.2.4.2 Interview Protocol. The interview protocol of this study aimed to explore skilled migrants' perceptions of their lived experiences (Gioia et al., 2013) resulting from a major career transition in Canada. The interview protocol was grounded in the existing literature, my understanding of the topic, and pre-interview preparation. The protocol began with broad questions, and as the interview progressed, my focus shifted toward more specific and refined questions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). To deepen understanding, I sought and explored key words, ideas, and themes, using follow-up questions to encourage the participants to elaborate on critical aspects of the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The interview protocol was also designed with the

flexibility to be continually revised, allowing it to adapt and capture emerging themes at various stages of data analysis (Krauss et al., 2009).

Moreover, to gather detailed information, I utilized principles of ethnographic interviewing, integrating three primary types of questions into the protocol: descriptive, structural, and contrast (Pratt & Kim, 2012; Spradley, 1979). *Descriptive questions* are broad questions asking participants to describe something, such as an event or a typical day. This type elicited rich, detailed narratives that provided deep insights into skilled migrants' lived experiences and perspectives. *Structural questions* are designed to understand how participants organize information or perceive structure in their environments. These questions helped me identify categories and the relationships between them that skilled migrants used to interpret their world. Lastly, *contrast questions* explore and verify the similarities and differences between concepts identified in the study. These types helped me refine the understanding of key terms and the distinctions skilled migrants made between them.

Finally, the interview protocol focused on the following three main areas: 1) the interplay between skilled migrants' past career trajectory in their home country and their motivations to pursue alternative career options in Canada, 2) skilled migrants' lived experiences of the career transition process, challenges, and ways of understanding themselves (i.e., "Who am I?") in the context of the alternative career trajectory, 3) ways of understanding (i.e., "Why am I here?"), that is, focusing on meaning-making process and accompanying attempts at crafting a new professional identity while actively pursuing alternative careers (see Appendix C for the interview protocol).

3.2.4.3 Interview Process. I conducted 30 semi-structured online interviews (via Zoom) between 2022 and 2023 in the Greater Toronto Area. Each interview lasted between 60 and 80

minutes, and all interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to assist in analyzing a large amount of data collection. This study has obtained ethical approval from the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board, and it conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. All participants signed an informed consent form electronically (see Appendix B). In addition, Before conducting the interviews, all participants had received information about the study's purpose and potential outcomes (see Appendix A). They had also been notified that all collected data would be kept anonymous and confidential, with all identifiers removed from the text. I had informed the participants that if any of their quotes were to be used to illustrate the findings, a pseudonym or an identification number would replace their real names, and all references to their actual names or organizations would be eliminated.

3.2.4.4 Challenges and Resilience in Interviewing Skilled Migrants. The literature suggests that interviewing migrant populations and other minority groups necessitates particular care and attention (Sanchez-Ayala, 2012) as they are often seen as vulnerable, marginalized, and “forgotten” groups (Binggeli et al., 2013). Indeed, Sanchez-Ayala (2012) emphasizes that the most important aspect of interviewing this population is how the researchers (interviewers) acknowledge their positionality, reflecting on the ways they can potentially influence the interview. Guba and Lincoln (2001) advise researchers to employ naturalistic methods to recognize issues from their own experiences that may impact the interpretation of participants' stories. One way of doing this is through self-reflexivity (Denzin, 1994). Personal reflexivity involves researchers examining how their own values, experiences, interests, and beliefs have influenced their research (Willig & Rogers, 2017).

In addition, while literature indicates that skilled migrants often demonstrate strong motivation and a higher level of risk-taking to integrate into the local context (Boneva & Frieze, 2001), the employment challenges they face, such as exclusion and discrimination in the local labour market (Dietz et al., 2015), may reduce the level of trust between them and researchers, sharing their stories during qualitative interviews.

As a skilled immigrant myself, living in Canada, I maintained a reflective journal throughout this study to enhance the process of self-reflexivity. Specifically, I recorded my own story of migration and the thoughts and feelings that arose to reduce and clarify researcher bias and influence as I worked with participants during the interviewing process. Moreover, in terms of positionality, I positioned myself as an “insider” (Sanchez-Ayala, 2012); that is, I shared similar migrant experiences with the participants. Literature denotes that this approach may have positive effects and may facilitate building the relationship between interviewer and interviewee. Thus, “it produces rich, detailed conversation based on empathy, mutual respect, and understanding” (Valentine, 1997, p. 113). In addition, being an insider placed me in a favourable position to gain first-hand information from the participants through similar factors, such as life experience, career journey, cultural background, etc.

All in all, following recommendations of some qualitative scholars, I adopted strategies such as preparation for the interview, refining the interview questions, asking questions with simple language (rather than complex terms), and gaining more in-depth knowledge of the interviewees’ biographies (e.g., Alvesson, 2003; Kvale, 2008; Sanchez-Ayala, 2012).

3.2.5 Data Analysis

This study employs basic ontological assumptions of the interpretive paradigm (Gioia & Pitre, 1990) to explore an inductive understanding of how alternative career transition impacts

migrants' sense of self and a corresponding meaning-making process. Driven by the assumption that the identities are co-constructed in the research settings (Brown, 2015), the study used interviews as the primary source of data to explore skilled migrants' experiences of alternative careers. The process of data analysis was guided by the standard elements of the grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Corbin & Strauss, 2008), where each subsequent stage of the analysis, known as iteration, allowed the author to move back and forth between emerging concepts, data analysis, and relevant literature (Locke et al., 2022).

I began the analysis with a thorough review of the interview transcripts and an understanding of how to fracture the text into discrete meaningful fragments, trying to assign a provisional name to each specific incident (Locke, 2002). First, I interpreted the experiences of the participants sentence by sentence, creating *working units of meanings* that were assigned specific codes. I analyzed codes and raw data to find similarities and differences in emotions, values, and reflections to uncover experiential patterns of migrants' alternative careers. One of the most important aspects of the analysis was the constant comparison of participants' experiences to reach intertextual coherence (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997). Constant comparison of similarities and differences in alternative career experiences enabled me to distill conceptual categories represented by different clusters of codes. At the same time, I worked on analytic memos to focus on the deep meanings of the participants' experiences and uncover connections between instances of alternative careers. Hence, the interviews were analyzed in three stages (open, axial, and selective coding) while regularly applying the comparative analysis technique and cycling back and forth between the interviews and the theories that informed my thinking.

3.2.5.1 Stage 1: Open Coding. At this stage, I conducted several iterations of coding on all interviews (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), continually moving between the emerging theme and the data. In this initial stage of coding, I remained as close to the data as possible, using the actual words or passages from the participants to preserve the original meaning of the data (Miles et al., 2013). This open coding process enabled me to examine, compare, and categorize the “raw” data while assigning each distinct idea or incident a “name” that represented a specific phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During this stage, I coded working units of meanings, assigning them the most essence-capturing attributes (Saldaña, 2009). For example, a direct quote of a participant referring to professional identity expressed as “*But then I tell myself. . . . It’s not that I’m not a doctor. I have practiced. . . . It’s just that I’m not able to practice here [Canada], does not mean that I cannot call myself a doctor in this country.*” These and similar codes that signaled a strong attachment of the individuals to an old professional identity were assigned to the category of “*resisting identity work.*”

In contrast, other transition narratives revealed the temporary and provisional character of individuals’ career paths. For example, when direct quotes of participants referred to future opportunities, future exploration, and readiness to let go of their original professional identity attachment, I coded them as a *gradual acceptance of the new self and continuous transformation*. Based on these initial codes, I developed a category known as “*morphing identity work.*” Finally, I realized that another group of participants expressed willingness to accept their career changes and the new alternative career context with much more certainty and readiness. I coded their experiences, such as *complete disengagement from past professional identity and/or fully adopting the reality/new self*, leading us later to a category termed “*sustaining identity work.*”

The same logic of coding was followed in creating meaning-making categories, as described later in this section.

At this stage, I also grouped all relevant first-order codes (e.g., similar descriptions of skilled migrants' experiences); this grouping ultimately led to the second-order themes. Moreover, to fully understand the data, I focused on words or phrases with deeper meaning, identifying metaphors and posing related questions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Finally, throughout the analysis, I utilized the NVivo program, entering all codes to ensure the connections among codes and consistency of the groupings.

3.2.5.2 Stage 2: Axial Coding. At this point, the goal was to combine the initially generated codes into categories (second-order themes) by identifying common elements in participants' experiences. I organized first-order codes into distinct abstract categories, aligning them according to the similarities and differences observed in the experiences of skilled migrants in order to construct the conceptual links or distinctions among the codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In fact, I translated the raw data into terms and language similar to those in the literature (Gioio et al., 2013). These second-order themes were considered higher levels of abstraction (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), serving as a foundation for the theoretical model.

During this stage, the connections between categories found in the previous stage were uncovered. For instance, I discovered that three types of alternative career identity work, namely *resisting*, *morphing*, and *sustaining*, corresponded with three different types of alternative career meaning-making (i.e., *utilitarian*, *anticipatory*, and *progressive*). In each case, participants revealed their experiences of why they continued to pursue specific career pathways in the context of "who they were." For example, participants who engaged in resisting identity work not only encountered difficulties in constructing a new professional identity but also faced

challenges in finding value and unique meaning from their alternative careers. This perspective led me to the “utilitarian meaning-making” category, containing open codes such as *lack of passion in alternative careers*, *alternative careers as a stepping-stone*, and *utilization of past skills towards the next role*.

Moreover, I found that individuals with morphing identity work sought meaning and purpose within their alternative careers but mostly as a way of exploring further and finding future career opportunities. In fact, this led to a category (during open coding above) defined as “anticipatory meaning-making” based on open codes, like *expectations of future growth* or *exploring meaning in alternative careers*.

Lastly, for skilled migrants with sustaining identity work, I found that they could more easily identify new meanings within their alternative careers. These were most often tied to their ability to advance further in their new careers, and specifically, they found purpose and meaning through learning and development. Therefore, some examples of those open codes, such as *skill advancement in alternative careers* or *continuous learning*, led to the development of a new category termed “progressive meaning-making.”

During this stage, as approximately one-third of the data were analyzed (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), I realized that not all individuals experienced alternative careers similarly. Driven by this notion, I continued collecting data to compare and contrast what was already found. The goal was to confirm the concepts that had emerged and were relevant to the research questions were repeatedly met in the data and, therefore, were significant (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). For example, one of the concepts discovered in data was “*fully embraced new self*.” Thus, to further develop this concept, I focused on interviewing those open to the new alternative career experience and ready to accept their new career move. Therefore, in the process of data

collection, I attempted to search for skilled migrants who were eager to move to a new career and did not regret facing new challenges. This search was conducted with the assistance of immigrant settlement agencies, which will be explained in the following sections.

Simultaneously, with the progression of data collection and analysis, I observed that other participants were more resistant to changes in their alternative careers; specifically, they were holding on to their original professional identity and aiming to return to their original careers. Analyzing this experience led this study to propose a new concept of “*refusal to embrace career changes.*” Here, I realized that there was a need to search for those migrants who intended to stay in their alternative careers temporarily with the goal of returning to their original occupations in the future.

3.2.5.3 Stage 3: Selective Coding. Finally, according to Strauss and Corbin (1990), the selective coding stage allows the researcher to build relationships among the categories (second-order themes). That is, by relating the analytic categories to one another, the goal is to build an overarching theoretical framework and visually present a model that encompasses the theory building. This stage was pivotal in identifying the core phenomena that shaped the participants’ lived experiences and their adaptive strategies in the new professional landscape.

At this point, I recognized that the participants could be clustered into three distinct pathways, each describing unique identity work and corresponding processes of meaning-making in their alternative careers. Thus, three alternative career pathways emerged, namely: *provisional*, *experimental*, and *reformist*. In fact, these three pathways as aggregated dimensions emerged from the grounded theory data analysis, leading me to develop a comprehensive typology that captures the diverse experiences of skilled migrants in alternative career pathways. This aggregation involved a systemic process (as previously explained) where skilled migrants’

experiences were analyzed to uncover underlying patterns and commonalities, which were then grouped into comprehensive categories.

The literature indicates that regardless of whether a researcher is revisiting an existing typology or developing a new one, it is crucial that the typology be accompanied by a theoretical framework (Snow & Ketchen, 2014). In this study, the typology integrated these alternative career pathways into a theoretical model, illustrating the complex interplay between identity work and the meaning-making process. Each path is detailed with specific characteristics and examples derived directly from the data, clearly representing how skilled migrants navigate and redefine their careers in a new context. The critical aspect of this typology is an examination of the career transition from past to present professional identities, consisting of the core struggles and adaptations skilled migrants face. It also shows the pivotal role of career transitions on skilled migrants' well-being.

In addition, it is worth noting that to develop a typology, some qualitative studies (e.g., Stapley et al., 2022) have used ideal-type analysis, which synthesizes the most significant characteristics (optimal case) found across various cases, creating a model that represents a pure form of observed phenomena. While this type of typology development focuses less on generating theories from data and more on organizing and understanding data by creating highly generalized categories, this study aims to develop a typology deeply grounded in and emergent from the actual data and participants' experiences, leading toward the generation of a coherent theoretical framework.

Lastly, a visual model (see Figure 1) was developed to represent three pathways, illustrating a better understanding of the study's findings. Thus, this model not only serves as a

summary of the theoretical insights but also as a tool for enhancing the dependability and applicability of the typology.

3.3 Enhancing the Quality of Analysis: Trustworthiness of the Data

The literature on methodology implies that trustworthiness in qualitative research serves as the main tool for researchers to persuade the audience that the findings of the study are significant and valid (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). To justify the findings, this study relies on the naturalistic (i.e., qualitative) inquiry approach, using interpretive paradigm logic in data analysis. To assess the quality of the data analysis and establish trustworthiness, I adhered to the evaluation criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1986), which include *credibility*, *dependability*, *confirmability*, and *transferability*.

Credibility. This criterion addresses the issue of fit between respondents' viewpoints and the researcher's representation of them (Schwandt, 2001). To ensure that interpretation of the data was credible, various strategies were used in this study. Prior to the data collection process, I spent sufficient time to better understand the context (e.g., alternative career pathways for skilled migrants in Canada, bridging programs offered through settlement agencies, etc.). I also attempted to build rapport and trust with participants during the interviews, creating a safe space for them to reflect on their lived experiences and share more profound insights. This rapport also enabled me to actively look for cues and patterns in the participants' responses and ask follow-up questions that probed deeper into their initial answers. In addition, I used a debriefing strategy (Lincoln & Guba, 1986) by presenting the data analysis and study findings to my dissertation supervisor to prevent bias and enhance credibility. Using a persistent observation strategy, I constantly revisited the interview recordings or transcripts multiple times to ensure that nuanced details were not overlooked and that interpretations were consistent with the data provided.

Dependability. To achieve dependability, I documented and developed detailed records of each step of the study. This process includes detailed records of how data was collected, how interview questions were developed, how decisions were made throughout the analysis, and how themes and conclusions were derived from the data. Maintaining a comprehensive and transparent audit trail demonstrates that the research process is logical and traceable (Schwandt 2001).

Confirmability. To enhance this criterion, I used the reflexivity practice suggested by Guba and Lincoln (1982). Reflexivity is defined as “attempting to uncover one’s underlying epistemological assumptions, reasons for formulating the study in a particular way, and heretofore implicit assumptions, biases or prejudices about the context or problem” (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 379). As explained earlier in the data collection section, I kept extensive notes in the reflexive journal where I documented my own backgrounds, beliefs, and how those could impact the research process. Thus, this practice helped minimize the influence of my preconceptions on data interpretation.

Transferability. To ensure the transferability of this study, I used sampling and data saturation strategies. For example, utilizing purposeful sampling (i.e., choosing skilled migrants with health care backgrounds who made a switch and were employed in the alternative career paths) might enhance the transferability of the study findings to other occupations within skilled migrant populations. Similarly, achieving saturation was crucial as it ensured that the data collection process was thorough enough to cover all aspects of the phenomenon being studied, which in turn supported the transferability of the finding.

3.4 Summary

This chapter explained the rationale for choosing a qualitative method for the study and how the qualitative design guided me in responding to the research questions. The chapter described the suitability of this particular design and the type of sampling, data collection procedures, and steps involved in data analysis. It also depicted how the rigour of the study had been evaluated by referring to the trustworthiness of the data.



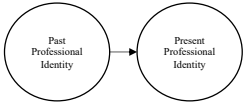
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter begins by responding to the following research question: how do skilled migrants enact alternative careers in the host country? On a related note, how do skilled migrants develop a new professional identity and subsequently create meaning in new roles while navigating alternative careers?

The findings presented here are based on the three pathways identified during qualitative analysis and discussed in the previous chapter, namely, *provisional*, *experimental*, and *reformist* (see Figure 1 on the next page). To answer the first research question, I examined the interplay between skilled migrants' past career trajectories back in their home country and their motivation to pursue alternative career options in Canada. Thus, each pathway presents unique narratives reflecting the skilled migrants' lived experiences of their career transitions. For the second question, the study investigated how skilled migrants reconstructed their professional identities and found meaning in new work contexts while simultaneously facing a mismatch between their skills and new role expectations. For each pathway, the study explored participants' reflections on their professional identity within the context of alternative careers (who am I in the alternative career?) and alternative career meaning-making (why am I here?). The findings suggest a unique portrait of each career pathway as reflected by individuals' lived experiences within alternative career paths. The following section presents a detailed description of the findings for each individual alternative career pathway. In each path, I describe the two main characteristics of alternative careers, including *alternative career identity work* and *alternative career meaning-making*, which emerged from the data.

Figure 1: Alternative Career Pathways

Alternative Career Pathways			
	Provisional Pathway	Experimental Pathway	Reformist Pathway
Alternative career identity work	Resisting identity work	Morphing identity work	Sustaining identity work
Alternative career meaning-making	Utilitarian meaning-making	Anticipatory meaning-making	Progressive meaning-making
Past vs. present professional identity			
Time orientation: identity and meaning	Focused on the past identity/Lack of new meanings	Letting go of the past identity/Focused on present and future meanings	Focused on the present identity/Creating present and future meanings
Impact of alternative careers on well-being	Negative impact, seeking positivity	Both positive & negative impact, striving for maintaining a positive perspective & resilience	Positive impact, striving for growth despite challenges

4.1 Main Findings

4.1.1 Alternative Career as a Provisional Pathway

Based on the analysis, the participants were categorized into three groups. The first group, known as the *provisional pathway*, illustrates those skilled migrants in this pathway view their alternative careers in Canada not as permanent shifts in their professional lives but as temporary steps towards their ultimate career goals. The provisional path seems to be a conduit for skilled migrants to gain Canadian work experience, build new professional networks, and secure financial resources for their families. Skilled migrants pursue these roles out of necessity while still striving to fulfill longer-term aspirations, such as obtaining licensure or additional education relevant to their original professions.

The findings have especially identified individuals' sense of de-identification with their current roles. That is, skilled migrants often avoid identifying with their new self-concept,

viewing it merely as a stop along the way until they can achieve their ultimate career goals, such as returning to their original profession or reaching a higher-status position in a related field in Canada. This perspective led to the development of the “resisting identity work” category, where maintaining an established professional identity was prioritized over redefining or reconstructing a new or alternative self. Simultaneously, “utilitarian meaning-making” emerged as a predominant theme, where alternative careers were viewed in terms of practical utility. These roles were seen as a stepping-stone leading to their desired career paths or, at times, as necessary engagements to meet immediate practical needs rather than sources of true career interest or passion.

4.1.1.1 Alternative Career: Resisting Identity Work. While an alternative career context triggered identity work for all skilled migrants, this group struggled with a deep attachment to their original professional identity. Their narratives revealed resistance to change, indicating an ongoing effort to maintain their dominant mindset, seeking to align their career plans with their past roles. This often-rigid connection to their past selves led individuals to strongly resist any possible modifications to their professional identity; their focus was on defending and maintaining their original selves. The analysis has shown that this rigid commitment may inhibit individuals’ ability to fully embrace the evolving nature of their alternative careers.

As individuals in this group did not truly disengage from their old roles, they often avoided forming any ex-role in the context of their alternative careers. Instead, their alternative career narratives center on what I defined as resisting identity work. That is, they resisted considering new careers as any type of career change due to an ongoing and strong attachment to their original professional identity. This attachment

made it challenging to develop a new sense of self or allow for any real connection or acceptance of the alternative career work context. These career actors resisted viewing themselves in a new role; this resistance was often linked to the significant investment of time, effort, and dedication they had made in their past careers. Therefore, these past investments led to a strong sense of self-worth tied to their original professional identity and, most importantly, a desire for continuity of that past self. For instance, Moe explained how he held onto his past professional identity.

I don't want to identify at all in this [alternative career] because it is not who I am, and it is not the reflection of my own knowledge, skill, ability or intellectual capability or anything. I don't identify here at all. I never say that I do this. I say that to survive and before the time being. My future goal is [to become a doctor]. I want to do this. This is how I identify. (Moe, 6)

Moe's narrative above indicates his resistance to change and his reluctance to identify with his new alternative career, as he rigidly holds onto his past professional identity as a medical doctor. Participants in this pathway, including Moe, emphasize the disconnection between their current role and their sense of self, clearly expressing their aspiration to return to their original profession. This finding may resemble the lingering identity effect whereby, in this case, skilled migrants seem to maintain a sense of continuity to their past selves and as a coping mechanism in response to a significant career transition.

In addition, when asked to reflect on what he had missed the most in his current role compared to the one in his home country, Moe shared, *"I miss seeing the patients and treating them, having the human relationships and also having the intellectual . . . like solving the problems. In this job [alternative career] I don't need to solve any problem. This job is running my family. . . . but there is a lack of belonging. I don't belong this [current job]."*

While Moe's current role provides financial stability, it fails to fulfill his need for a sense of

belonging and identification with the new role. This approach highlights the temporary and pragmatic nature of skilled migrants' alternative career paths, which they do not view as an integrated part of their original professional identity. It also highlights the specific challenges skilled migrants face in redefining new professional identities that are misaligned with their self-concept.

Similarly, participants in this path recognized that the expectations and responsibilities of their current position within alternative careers do not match their competencies or the level of skill they used to perform in their home country. This mismatch between past achievements and current positions creates a cognitive conflict and a type of dissonance that makes it difficult for skilled migrants to accept their new selves.

It's hard to absorb what I'm doing right now. . . . I'm not for this junior position, right? I have more competencies to prove myself at work. . . . The kind of work expectation for this role is way smaller than what I was doing back home. . . . this [alternative career role] is what I was telling others to do for my own projects back home. Now I'm the one who is doing this coordination, administrative stuff. . . . It's so hard to accept that I'm doing this right now. (Shiren, 14)

Shiren's narrative above provided a rich exploration of how skilled migrants engage in identity work when their new roles completely diverge from their previous professional identities. However, it moves beyond this discussion by highlighting that skilled migrants' struggles are not just about changing professions. It includes an ongoing negotiation between past professional achievements and the realities of the present career paths, and it is embedded in an entirely different cultural and professional domain. This scenario makes the process of professional identity adjustment more complex than typically discussed in the literature. In addition, reflecting on Shiren's statement, "*It's*

hard to absorb what I'm doing right now. . . . I'm not for this junior position," it directly highlights the psychological conflict as she struggles to accept the reality of her current situation during their career transition journey. While career transitions typically involve emotional and cognitive conflicts and dissonance, narratives from participants like Shiren in this pathway reveal the complex and dual pressure experienced by skilled migrants. These individuals have to not only transition into new roles but also confront and reconcile the conflicting demands of their new professional contexts with their established self-conceptions.

Furthermore, many of the respondents in this pathway were currently pursuing alternative career roles, often due to structural/systemic barriers related to re-entering their original professions in the Canadian context. Yet, these obstacles were not the primary focus of their identity narratives, nor were they mentioned as reasons to engage in these alternative careers. Instead, they focused on their own agency and determination towards their future selves rather than any real consideration of external influences.

Aileen, for example, highlights her professional identity as a physician. While looking more holistically at her situation, she still indicates resistance to change and the ability to return to her original occupation:

My main identity will not change. I was a physician, then a mom. So, this is how I see myself. . . . I didn't think about how to identify myself because I feel like what I have is what I have. No one will take it from me, and I can make a decision to go back anytime and practice my own job. (Aileen, 26)

Aileen's determination that her original professional identity remains unchanged and her belief that she can return to her home country anytime to resume her previous occupation together indicate a strong resistance to any possible change imposed by the alternative career context. In fact, Aileen's narrative shows how skilled migrants strategically use their

individual agency, leveraging their past accomplishments to navigate present uncertainties. This approach demonstrates their strong sense of control and resilience over their career pathways at the time of transition.

4.1.1.2 Alternative Career: Utilitarian Meaning-Making. By understanding individuals' resistance to identity work in relation to the question of "who am I?" in the context of alternative careers, these migrants equally struggled with finding satisfying answers to the question, "why am I here?". Their perceived mismatch between their original professional identity, their occupational expectations, and the nature of their alternative careers made finding new meanings and satisfaction in alternative careers almost impossible.

These career actors seem to be stuck within the boundaries of their original mindset rather than fostering an open-minded approach to excel and potentially seek new meanings. These individuals lacked passion for their current alternative career roles, viewing them mostly in utilitarian terms. This attitude resulted in failing to creatively seek any new meanings and/or purpose in alternative careers. An alternative career was simply seen as a tool for re-establishing their original careers. I have conceptualized this as utilitarian meaning-making, which is founded on one's desire to use the alternative career as a stepping-stone while refusing to explore and seek any unique or more genuine meanings at the moment. Instead, the meaning-making process is tied to individuals' past skills and knowledge, and they utilize it once again in alternative careers if feasible. Rani's narrative below exemplifies this argument.

That's [alternative career] not my interest. That's not my passion. Whatever, I feel that the job that you do, you should have a passion for it. And that way you will be happy doing it and you will bring those positive vibes back home and it will lead you to a success and you move towards the ladder of that job and then you excel in it. . . . So, I don't feel it because I don't have the passion for this job. I am doing it to support my household and build capacity in my CV to get into residency. I have passion for

something else. . . . but, whenever I see that my medical education can help me here, and it is making a difference, I feel that, okay, I am adding value somewhere. So, it gives me some satisfaction. (Rani, 7)

This narrative reflects the utilitarian and, in some sense, stagnant nature of individuals' meaning-making in this provisional pathway, whereby Rani simply feels she "needs" this job to achieve certain personal and future career goals. The sense of purpose, or "adding value" in this case, comes through only when her established expertise from the past (medical knowledge) comes to light. Her focus on "passion" is closely linked to finding meaning, as not finding passion in an alternative career may seem like engaging in meaningless work. Finally, Rani's inability to advance and the absence of positive spillover from work to "positive vibes at home" describes the power of purpose at work to influence her life outside of work.

Similarly, other participants in the provisional pathway demonstrated the utilitarian nature of their meaning-making process. Tim's narrative below explains how his pragmatic approach leads him to focus on the utility of his current role for future career goals rather than seeking new meaning, purpose, and fulfilment in the job itself.

For me, this job, it was like opening the door to the Canadian job market, it's very important. They don't pay me well, but for me, it's a good way to have Canadian experience. . . . I got to know the culture better. . . and maybe that might open a door for me to get into the health . . . center. . . . I mean I am good with it [alternative career] but it's not like, you know, what I've been trained for. . . . So for me, it was just like a very good personal experience. (Tim, 15)

Tim's narrative shows how skilled migrants actively engage in their new professional context. This perspective shifts the migrants' discourse from focusing on only survival or accepting compromised careers to one of deliberate utility, where even underemployed or downgraded positions are viewed as potentially valuable for gaining crucial local experiences. Hence, an

alternative career option is not always perceived as a drawback; instead, it may serve as a fundamental building block for skilled migrants in constructing professional growth within a new country.

4.1.1.3 Summary. The findings reveal how resisting identity work and utilitarian meaning-making identify the provisional pathway for skilled migrants. In this pathway, individuals often find themselves in roles that serve as temporary solutions rather than meaningful career choices. This leads to resisting identity work or reluctance to fully embrace these new roles due to a strong attachment to their original professional identities. Simultaneously, utilitarian meaning-making emerges, where these roles are viewed as practical tools to achieve specific goals such as gaining local experience or bridging to more aligned career opportunities. This approach represents a pragmatic mechanism within the provisional pathway, where skilled migrants utilize their current alternative positions while holding onto their established professional identities, hoping for future alignment with their career aspirations and passions. The findings highlight the unique challenges and strategies skilled migrants employed in this particular alternative career pathway experience.

4.1.2 Alternative Career as an Experimental Pathway

Unlike the first pathway, individuals in this path have moved beyond the realm of their past professions in how they view themselves and their new roles. While skilled migrants in this pathway still view their alternative career roles as somewhat temporary, their path can be best described as *experimental*. In fact, individuals are able to let go of their original professional identity and at least partly de-identify from their old selves. Yet they are still exploring and experimenting with gaining new skills and experiences within their alternative careers, with the goal of moving to other, more desired, careers in the future. This process of

exploration provides insightful narratives into how they navigate their career transitions, balancing their current roles with the pursuit of their future career goals. Thus, this pathway is characterized as “identity work,” an ongoing (re)evolution of the self-concept, as well as “anticipatory meaning-making,” where participants focus on future possibilities and growth.

4.1.2.1 Alternative Career: Morphing Identity Work. In contrast to those in the provisional pathway, individuals in this path describe a noticeable change in how they view themselves in the context of alternative careers, though they have not yet reached the desired end state. While they may have temporarily disengaged from their past professional identities, they are still searching for new meanings for themselves and more satisfying roles. Therefore, this partial de-identification has allowed them, to some extent, to adjust and align with the new expectations of their current alternative career roles.

As a result, this orientation enables them to explore new aspects of themselves and search for identities that better reflect their evolving aspirations. I conceptualize this type of identity work as “morphing,” as it reveals a dynamic process, still in flux, whereby individuals observe and navigate changes in their professional identity triggered by the demands and requirements of the current alternative career role. Contrary to the rigidity and resistance observed in the first pathway, individuals in the experimental pathway are experiencing and accepting change; they are morphing and continuously transforming their sense of self. Diane’s narrative below is a clear example of the morphing type of identity work.

It was a difficult time in the beginning. . . . Back home, you’re used to everyone calling you a doctor. But it’s been like a year and a half now . . . and slowly, slowly I’m getting used to it, I’m not a doctor and I’m not licensed to practice in this country, so slowly and slowly. . . . Maybe like in four years down the line I don’t know what I will identify with then. (Diane, 28)

Diane's story is an indication of a gradual professional identity shift. Indeed, over time, her perception of self slowly evolves from identifying herself as a doctor to exploring a new identity, which she is still searching for and which might align better with her present reality. Diane's uncertainty about the future highlights her morphing identity, reflecting her continuous search for a professional role that aligns better with her evolving career goals. In other words, the process of identity evolution is not just about who Diane is now but who she might want to become in the future, highlighting the present versus future aspect of the morphing identity in this pathway. In classical identity work literature, identity transitions are often seen as distinct phases with clear boundaries between old and new identities, but the morphing identity work in this study represents a continual state of flux, acknowledging that skilled migrants may never fully disengage from their original professional identities while continuously integrating new aspects of self that emerge from their current career contexts. Similarly, Sarah's narrative below reflects morphing identity work through her identification and her current (but perhaps not permanent) acceptance of her alternative career as a treatment coordinator. Her narrative signifies the dynamic nature of the morphing identity work.

I do identify myself as a treatment coordinator because that's what I do on a daily basis, and I am quite confident in that role . . . and I kind of enjoy it. The role here, it's good but now I feel there's not much scope for growth . . . because it is a limit. . . . I wouldn't want to do this long, only for short-term. (Sarah, 5)

Sarah's identification with the new role, and her enjoyment and confidence in it, underscore the present adaptation aspect of the morphing identity work. Her acknowledgment of the role's limitations and her desire for growth illustrates the future aspirations component, reflecting her continuous search for a more fulfilling and growth-oriented career path.

Furthermore, Sarah's preference for an alternative career as a relatively short-term solution reflects her ongoing process of self-exploration. While Sarah is in a state of flux and partially content with her current role, she remains well aware of its limitations and hopes for new opportunities that might offer future growth. This perspective indicates the constantly evolving and adaptive nature of her morphing identity work. As individuals navigate the growing demands of their alternative careers, the gradual adjustment and realization of the new reality characterizes morphing identity work. Importantly, this study has found that morphing identity work, unlike the resisting process described above, leaves individuals open to further exploration of new career options. As these career actors are currently immersed in new fields, they seek to understand and create new definitions of who they are. For instance, Anna explains that as she redefines her professional identity, she becomes more open to considering different paths and roles that better fit her current evolving skills.

Initially, my identity used to be a dentist and I would identify myself as a dentist. But since I am not in that field anymore, I would like to identify myself as a public health professional. So, I think, since I am in a hospital, a government-run organization, and contributing to health care, I would like to identify myself as a public health care professional. . . . this [alternative career] isn't my field . . . but I know that this job is teaching me the skills for my new career in public health. (Anna, 17)

Anna initially identifies herself as a dentist, which indicates a strong professional identity linked to her past career. However, since she is no longer working in that field, she is in the process of redefining her professional identity, indicative of the morphing identity work. This process reflects a proactive approach to career adaptation, where she actively seeks to align her self-concept with her current and future professional aspirations. Unlike resisting identity work, whereby individuals hold onto their past identities and resist change, morphing identity work involves accepting the new reality while being open to further exploration and adaptation. In

fact, Anna has accepted the reality that returning to her original career path is not a viable option and is still actively searching for new self-definitions, changing, and exploring new career options. Nevertheless, other skilled migrants in the experimental pathway may still somehow attempt to return to their original professions while engaging in morphing identity work. For instance, Alisha explains how she balances her current alternative role as a psychotherapist with her future aspiration to become a psychiatrist (her original profession) in Canada.

My goal is to be a psychiatrist but until I become that I don't just want to sit here and do odd jobs. I want to do something I'm passionate about; it is still in the field in mental health, close to psychiatry. I will continue doing similar things, that's what is my passion. Do I love it? Yes. Do I still want to be a doctor? Yes. In the sense that I am happy where I am, but I would be happier if I was a doctor. But if I don't ever get to do that, will I still be happy just being a psychotherapist? Probably, yes. (Alisha, 10)

Unlike the rigidity of past professional identities observed in the resisting identity work, Alisha's story exemplifies a flexible, exploratory mindset, which is central to the morphing identity work. Alisha's narrative indicates a temporary alignment with her current identity as a psychotherapist, even if she still desires to become a psychiatrist. This dynamic evaluation between her present and future professional selves shows the strength of morphing identity work. In addition, her engagement and adaptation to a new role, which is not her ultimate career goal, illustrates only a phase of identity exploration within the morphing identity work process. Moreover, Alisha's narrative also illustrates how skilled migrants may maintain a balanced and flexible perspective; that is, they might be content with their current new roles and open to the possibility that their ultimate goal may not be achieved, yet this does not diminish their current professional satisfaction. Her narrative contrasts with classical career transition literature, which often emphasizes linear career progressions and clear-cut

identity transformations. Instead, Alisha's story illustrates a more fluid and iterative process, where temporary roles serve both as a means of professional engagement and stepping-stones towards future aspirations.

Overall, participants' narratives illustrate that morphing identity work involves an ongoing transformation of one's professional self-concept. These individuals are not just adapting to new roles but are actively redefining and exploring their identities in response to evolving alternative career conditions.

4.1.2.2 Alternative Career: Anticipatory Meaning-Making. In contrast to utilitarian meaning-making described in the provisional pathway, this path presents a more positive, forward-looking mindset whereby individuals find meaning by exploring new opportunities afforded by the alternative career context. At the same time, they recognize that their current alternative career role may not be their final career destination, and they anticipate future changes. I conceptualize this form of meaning-making as "anticipatory," as the individuals are not currently settled enough to actively identify more permanent meanings in their current alternative careers. Instead, they focus on and anticipate forthcoming changes that may bring new purpose and meaning. They do not feel they have entirely "arrived" and embedded themselves into the context where they are prepared to settle. While motivated and driven, they still need to delve deeper to find more fitting and satisfying meanings within their future alternative careers. For instance, Ryan explains:

It's [alternative career] temporary. I believe that I will not be in the same position for an unduly long time. But that offers me a good exposure into the Canadian public health system in general, even if it's from the periphery. So that's like an area that I saw the opportunity, and I was like, okay, this makes sense. . . . So, it is an important role to be in, always a learning process for me, which fulfills me. . . . I'm happy to do this for now. (Ryan, 27)

In this narrative, although Ryan’s current role might be at the periphery within the health care domain, he values this role and the learning process that is “why he is there,” even if temporarily. This perspective implies that in his present role, Ryan finds more meaning in the context of his future career. His focus on continuous learning and personal growth within his present role is a critical component of anticipatory meaning-making, signifying that he finds fulfillment not from the position itself but from the opportunities it creates for future advancement, where current experiences are valued in the context of future aspirations. This narrative also highlights how skilled migrants actively seek to integrate new knowledge and experiences, viewing their current role as integral parts of a larger career trajectory.

In exploring the concept of anticipatory meaning-making further, it became clear that individuals perceive their current roles beyond the present context, considering them in terms of future potential and career growth. This perspective involves recognizing the worth of current experiences in alternative careers as an important step towards future career opportunities. An example of this mindset is captured in the narrative of Elma below.

It [alternative career] is worth doing. . . . it's giving me a vast experience in the cultural and in the job perspective I want to explore more in this field. It will give me a broad spectrum of opportunities in the future. It is really very good. (Elma, 19)

Elma’s desire to further explore the new field denotes a proactive and forward-looking approach. The narrative exemplifies anticipatory meaning-making by combining satisfaction in the present role with the anticipation of future career development. The findings suggest the dynamic interplay between present engagement and future aspirations as the main aspect of anticipatory meaning-making within the experimental pathway.

This form of meaning-making is novel in that it emphasizes not just the immediate benefits of the job but also the future possibilities and growth that come from these

experiences. Unlike the traditional view of career satisfaction, which often centers on present job contentment, anticipatory meaning-making focuses on the long-term potential and strategic value of current roles. Elma acknowledges the considerable value of her current role, emphasizing the “vast experience” gained both culturally and professionally. This highlights a broader and more dynamic process of meaning-making that includes cultural adaptation and professional learning. This perspective reveals that skilled migrants are not merely coping with their current situations but are actively engaging in a forward-thinking process that integrates their present experiences with future aspirations. This approach aligns with the broader concept of sustainable careers, where continuous learning and adaptability are crucial. It also broadens the scope of meaning-making in career transitions of skilled migrants.

Further analysis within this pathway has shown that individuals are simultaneously eager to explore more within their current roles. While they may not be fulfilled with the current situation, they are constantly seeking deeper understanding and mastery in their new fields. This exploratory approach is a core aspect of anticipatory meaning-making, where individuals view their current roles not as endpoints but as important platforms for growth and development. Ali’s story below expresses a strong desire to delve deeper into his alternative career, illustrating this proactive and exploratory attitude.

It [alternative career] is something I want to explore more and give more attention to it. I’m still exploring but I’m trying to engage in . . . I’m learning from my current job. I cannot deny that I’m learning. So, there is something that keeps you motivated. . . . or at least satisfied that you’re doing something, you’re learning every day, something new. Every day I have new learnings from the Canadian perspective, from the life sciences. (Ali, 9)

Ali’s emphasis on exploring his new role and his commitment to “learning from a

Canadian perspective” indicates that Ali’s current experience and meaning-making are evolving in the context of his current role and the new competencies he is developing. This perception is crucial to anticipatory meaning-making as it reflects the insight that individuals’ current experiences, even those that may seem peripheral, have unique meanings as opportunities for future career fulfillment. Thus, in this case, alternative careers are seen as an exploratory stage, where acquiring new skills and knowledge is meaningful for career actors in order to reach a more desired position in the future. Ali’s narrative demonstrates how some skilled migrants integrate both present engagements and future aspirations, finding meaning in their current roles while maintaining a clear vision for future growth. This insight provides a more nuanced understanding of the meaning-making process among skilled migrants who pursue alternative careers. The findings also suggest that the sense of ongoing development and engagement within this pathway can mitigate feelings of uncertainty and provide a sense of purpose, even when the ultimate career goal has not yet been achieved.

4.1.2.3 Summary. Overall, the experimental pathway features two main concepts: morphing identity work and anticipatory meaning-making. The pathway exhibits a dynamic and exploratory process where individuals actively redefine and adjust their professional identities, reflecting a partial disengagement from their past careers. Individuals in this pathway view their new roles not as an ultimate career destination but as part of the journey towards future aspirations. This mindset allows them to embrace current opportunities as meaningful platforms for growth and learning, balancing present engagement with the anticipation of future professional development. This pathway, therefore, represents a balance between adaptation to present circumstances and preparation for future career advancements.

4.1.3 Alternative Career as a Reformist Pathway

In contrast to the first and second pathways, individuals in this group have moved to a greater level of acceptance of who they are and why they chose the alternative career, often experiencing it as a conscious career change that characterizes a new chapter in their life. I define this path as a *reformist pathway*, whereby skilled migrants experience conscious acceptance and a mindful connection to their alternative careers. Individuals in this pathway are goal-driven and see the alternative career as an opportunity to advance through learning and development. Unlike provisional and experimental pathways, individuals in the reformist path intend to stay in their alternative career roles for an extended period, aiming to move to higher-level positions in the future. This pathway is exemplified by “sustaining identity work” and “progressive meaning-making” concepts, which are explained in more detail below.

4.1.3.1 Alternative Career: Sustaining Identity Work. Individuals in this pathway exhibit a much more definite de-identification and let go of their previous professional life and history. They more explicitly demonstrate new identity formation and an ability to embrace alternative careers as a new career trajectory. This type of identity work has been defined as “sustaining identity work”; a process in which individuals experience the ability to sustain their new identity through continuous crafting and redefining of their sense of self. They engage in an ongoing alignment of their identity with their skills and aspirations and respond to the demands and opportunities of the alternative career path. Unlike morphing identity work seen earlier, individuals who engage in sustaining identity work are no longer exploring or seeking to find themselves in new work opportunities. Instead, they demonstrate a strong sense of arrival to a new destination and are aware of what is possible and

achievable in their alternative careers. They express full dedication to their alternative careers, looking to achieve future career goals within this sustainable path. Beth's story below is a clear indication of sustaining identity work concept. Beth explains her de-identification from her past professional identity as a dentist. Yet Beth intends to accomplish her future career goals and success through further learning and development in her current alternative career.

I have come to a place where I've accepted that I'm not practicing dentistry. . . . I've made my peace with that. So, now I'm looking for what's the other thing that I can do to bring value to the life of others, to my environment, to my society. . . . I feel like, yes, I have played my part as a dentist, yes. And now I'm onto the next phase of where I am. . . . For me, this [alternative career] is a job where I'm learning to grow. I would consider it a change, I'm not exploring. I have my mind set on some things. I have my goals. So, I'm just trying to further learn and develop to get there. (Beth, 30)

Beth has reached a point of acceptance of her career change, indicating a complete de-identification from her previous profession as a dentist. Unlike those in provisional and experimental pathways, Beth is not in a state of temporary adjustment or exploration; she has decisively embraced her new role, which she sees as a long-term career. Her narrative is the exemplar of sustaining identity work, where she has moved beyond exploration and is actively crafting a new professional identity. This process involves Beth's engagement in aligning her current identity with the new demands of the alternative career. Her conscious decision to leverage her skills in the new context demonstrates a clear sense of arrival and commitment to her alternative career, seeking to achieve future career goals within this path.

Beth's story provides insights into how skilled migrants can move beyond merely coping with career transitions and adapting to new career contexts. Instead, they actively engage in identity crafting that supports their future career goals. This process of sustaining identity work highlights the potential for achieving a stable and meaningful professional

identity even in alternative careers, broadening our understanding of career transitions. Her narrative also demonstrates how skilled migrants can achieve career sustainability by actively shaping their professional identities to ensure continuous personal and professional development, even in the face of significant career changes and challenges.

While some participants, like Beth, reflect on the acceptance and a forward-looking approach to new opportunities, others reported a more profound and definite disengagement from their past professional identities. The findings suggest that this shift, in some instances, is not just about acceptance but a complete redefinition of the self, illustrating another aspect of sustaining identity work. For example, Peter's narrative below depicts this idea.

I don't identify myself as being a doctor anymore. it's over. I can't say I'm a doctor, because I don't practice anymore. . . . I don't think about it anymore because you're no longer part of this kind of role anymore. You're something else. You're completely different . . . you're in a new environment where you want to learn . . . so I just focus on learning in this new job [alternative career]. I concentrate on doing well. Yeah, and that's how I continue. (Peter, 20)

Peter explicitly states his disengagement from his previous professional identity as a doctor. Such a decisive detachment is indicative of sustaining identity work, whereby individuals not only navigate away from their old professions but also consciously let go of the identities associated with those professions. Furthermore, Peter's engagement in learning and focusing on doing well in the new job indicates that his desire to develop a strong new identity and his sense of self are now closely tied to his alternative career. According to the findings, the shift from a past professional identity to a new one is grounded in individuals' current roles and work environment, representing a unique characteristic of sustaining identity work in the reformist pathway. In fact, it is all about building and nurturing a new professional identity that aligns with current realities and future aspirations.

While migration literature often focuses on the significant struggles skilled migrants face in the new work context, sustaining identity work, as evidenced by Peter's narrative, shows a complete and deliberate redefinition of the self. Sustaining identity work emphasizes the potential for skilled migrants to achieve stability and fulfillment in their alternative careers by fully embracing and integrating into their new professional environments. This insight broadens the scope of career transition literature by showcasing the dynamic and ongoing nature of identity work among skilled migrants, emphasizing the role of sustaining identity work in fostering a fulfilling career.

Relatedly, skilled migrants in this pathway highlight their dedication to their new roles in alternative careers. I asked participants about their commitment to these roles and their desire to stay in the particular pathways they had adopted. Nancy's narrative below reflects this commitment.

I definitely identify myself with [alternative career] because. . . I have really taken it upon myself to learn more about this field and to learn as much as I can about it. I feel like this is something that I'm good at now. I felt like this was a decision that I made, and I need to stick with it and look at this as a new chapter, basically, it's new, I'm just starting off with a new career . . . so I'm constantly updating myself in the field.

(Nancy, 2)

Nancy's commitment to her alternative career indicates a unique aspect of the sustaining identity work. Unlike those who may still be in a state of flux or resistance, Nancy has firmly decided to invest in her new path, indicating a strong sense of agency and control over her career transition. This proactive approach not only reinforces her new professional identity but also provides a sense of purpose and direction. Her narrative exemplifies the importance of making conscious decisions and the willingness to embrace new opportunities as integral to successful career transitions. By continually updating her knowledge and skills, Nancy ensures that her

professional identity remains relevant and aligned with her career goals. Additionally, Nancy's experience emphasizes the importance of continuous learning and self-improvement in sustaining a new professional identity, highlighting how skilled migrants can achieve stability and fulfillment in alternative careers through dedication and ongoing development.

4.1.3.2 Alternative Career: Progressive Meaning-Making. The findings illustrate that sustaining identity work has empowered individuals to invest in their chosen alternative career path and align themselves with the new context. This investment, in return, fosters a sense of purpose and satisfaction, allowing for *progressive meaning-making*. This concept involves individuals' meaning-making as a more conscious and decisive effort to find a more profound and long-term value within alternative careers. This type of meaning-making is founded on individuals' desire for professional growth and advancement within their alternative careers, seeing this path as an avenue for continual self-development and career progression rather than as a stop on a career journey or a temporary transitional phase. This perspective fosters a sense of empowerment and purpose as their career choices are aligned with their long-term goals.

Additionally, this approach shifts an alternative career pathway from merely a job to a meaningful transition of growth and achievement. While participants in this pathway have found meaning through skill development and career advancement, their alternative career is not experienced as a mere transitional phase but rather as a meaningful choice for professional growth, as described in Linda's narrative below:

If I had plans to go back to nursing, then I'd say yes, this was a transitional job. But this is my actual job now. . . . So I said, this is my career path . . . you know, I'm learning so much, the pay is not bad and it's a good hospital. And plus, there's work-life balance. So, it's healthy personal and professional growth ahead of me. (Linda, 21)

Linda's statement reflects a substantial mindset shift. Linda has moved from viewing her new career as a temporary solution to embracing it as her primary career path. The evolution in her perspective is prevalent in progressive meaning-making; it represents a shift from perceiving an alternative career as a necessity to embracing it as a chosen and valued pathway. Linda's sense of fulfilment from her compensation, work environment, and work-life balance demonstrates that her needs and expectations are being met, and she has completely invested in her current alternative career. Furthermore, Linda's emphasis on learning opportunities when she mentions, "*I am learning so much,*" indicates the importance of ongoing professional development as a crucial aspect of the progressive meaning-making concept.

Furthermore, Linda's story illustrates how sustaining identity work empowers skilled migrants to view their alternative as a strategic and fulfilling career choice. This perspective shift is crucial for skilled migrants, as it transforms their career trajectory from one of necessity to one of opportunity and growth. The concept of progressive meaning-making, therefore, underlines a conscious and deliberate effort to derive long-term value and satisfaction from alternative careers. Linda's experience highlights the importance of aligning career choices with personal and professional goals, fostering a sense of purpose and empowerment.

While I observed the value of learning and skill development in anticipatory meaning-making (i.e., the experimental pathway), the findings suggest clear distinctions between these two pathways regarding the learning aspect. In anticipatory meaning-making, the emphasis is on how current experiences and learning can be leveraged for future opportunities. For example, individuals might pursue a specific certification or training not only for the benefit

it brings to their current role but also because it aligns with a future career goal they aspire to achieve. Thus, the learning process in anticipatory meaning-making is often motivated by the desire to qualify for or transition to a different and higher position/role. In fact, it is about building a bridge to future career goals, where the current role is a stepping-stone rather than a destination.

In contrast, learning and skill development in progressive meaning-making are often considered central components of career fulfilment and progression within the current alternative careers. Indeed, individuals focus on deepening their expertise, skills, and capabilities as part of ongoing personal and professional growth. This distinction between the two pathways highlights a novel aspect of meaning-making in career transitions among skilled migrants. Progressive meaning-making involves a more integrated and intrinsic approach to learning, where the current role is not merely a stepping-stone but a meaningful and valuable career destination. This perspective highlights present achievements, aligning with the broader concept of sustainable careers, which prioritize continuous development and adaptability within individuals' current professional contexts. The findings indicate that the meaning-making process is more holistic; it is not merely about preparing for the next career move, but about finding value and meaning in the current position. Rita's narrative below clearly exemplifies this argument.

Every day there is something new to learn because I'm still into that learning phase. I got my one license for PMI, now I'm onto another one. . . . So, again, I have reached this goal, doesn't mean the end of the story. . . . You have to do continue learning and doing more courses, certain certifications, in order to keep stand out from others. . . . And that is something I always wanted to do to get new skills and, you know, develop further. (Rita, 13)

Rita's narrative reveals that progressive meaning-making in alternative careers involves a deeper engagement with one's present role, finding value in continuous learning, and achieving personal growth and satisfaction.

Overall, the findings indicate a meaningful fulfillment for individuals in this pathway as they continuously advance and progress within their chosen trajectory, perceiving it as a sustainable career in the host country. This alternative career pathway shifts the narrative from merely a job to a journey of growth along with conscious investment in long-term career progression and personal fulfillment.

4.1.3.3 Summary. In the reformist pathway, the findings show a distinctive shift towards acceptance of new roles with a more profound commitment to alternative careers. This pathway is represented by two concepts: sustaining identity work, where individuals have firmly de-identified from their past professional identity, embracing their new roles with a clear sense of belonging and purpose; and progressive meaning-making, where the focus is on long-term growth and fulfillment within these careers. Unlike the provisional and experimental pathways, individuals here view their roles not as temporary or stepping-stones but as integral to their career trajectory, exhibiting a strong sense of direction and commitment to their current professional paths.

4.2. Section Two: Additional Findings

4.2.1 The Impact of Alternative Careers on Skilled Migrants' Well-Being

In this section, I describe the findings related to the profound impact of alternative career paths on the well-being of skilled migrants. The study explored the interplay between the experience of the career transition and individuals' physical, mental, and emotional health in the context of three distinct pathways: provisional, experimental, and reformist. Each

pathway presented unique challenges and opportunities, affecting the well-being experiences and responses of skilled migrants in their new career paths.

The provisional pathway is characterized by significant physical and mental pressures on individuals as they struggle to align past professional identity with present realities. They face the dual pressure of engaging in their new roles while holding on to their original professional identities. This struggle often leads to physical exhaustion, mental stress, and feelings of uncertainty about the future. The experimental pathway represents an intermediate stage, where individuals are often in flux, exploring new professional identities within their alternative careers. This exploration triggers a continuum of emotional responses, ranging from distress and uncertainty to resilience and adaptation. In contrast, the reformist pathway predominantly shows a more positive impact on individuals' lives, emphasizing personal and professional growth and improved work-life balance, although not without its own set of challenges. Below, each pathway is presented with further details.

4.2.1.1 Provisional Pathway. Participants in this pathway emphasized the significant impact of a career change on their physical and mental health while engaging in an alternative career. These individuals reported physical exhaustion primarily due to the demands of their new jobs (e.g., long working hours) or additional commitments they had to engage in at the same time, such as studying for their licensing exams. They also expressed mental health challenges, being overwhelmed and even depressed. For instance, Moe explains how his current alternative career affected his physical and psychological health.

Yes, it impacted my physical and mental health. Sometimes I thought that, okay, not going to the job is better, but still I have to have the money. So I have to go. . . . my main goal is to study, do the exams . . . so when I start studying I'm physically exhausted. And, because I have to travel to the job and do the job 8 hours, 10 hours really efficiently and then back, so physically it's very challenging. . . . Mentally, you are exhausted. . . because you have your family work to do so even the weekends are

gone. So what is the future? There is no future in this way. (Moe, 6)

Moe's narrative highlights the significant physical and mental burden that alternative careers can impose on skilled migrants. It also illustrates their challenge in balancing the job demands with their personal and professional goals. His account extends beyond the typical occupational stress discourse to explore how physical and mental exhaustion can be connected to the broader challenges of transitioning to a new professional identity in a foreign context. This exploration provides a richer understanding of the multi-dimensional pressures that skilled migrants face, which include economic necessities and the pursuit of professional aspirations. This insight also uncovers the deeper identity-related anxieties that arise when professional roles do not align with personal and professional aspirations in the context of skilled migrants.

In addition to the physical and mental impacts of alternative careers on individuals' well-being, the findings also shows the spillover effect of an alternative career on family members and personal lives. For example, Rani's narrative depicts the difficulty in authentically explaining her new career situation (i.e., change and transition) to her children, addressing the challenges of navigating career transition and professional identity shifts not just individually but within the family context.

Yeah, of course. . . . families feel it with too . . . there is a stress. You feel frustrated, so it actually spread s. . . impact on my kids . . . sometimes my little one, she seven years old, she says, "Well, you are already a doctor. Why do you say that you are becoming a doctor in Canada?" So, I have to tell her, yes, I am a doctor, but they need certain exams here [Canada] and they don't allow everybody . . . it is hard for them to understand the things. . . . And when I got to interview [for medical residency] . . . my son, he is 11 years old, he was very excited . . . and he told me, "Mommy, whatever the result is, I am in school but do message me" . . . I couldn't tell him the result because it was not good news. So, then he came home and he said, "Mom, why you didn't message me?" So, then I told him I didn't get it and he was very upset. (Rani, 7)

Rani's narrative illustrates a complex interplay between professional identity shifts and family dynamics for skilled migrants navigating significant career transitions. Her experience reflects not only the personal stress of adapting to a new professional role but also the extensive impact on her family. In fact, her children's reactions (ranging from confusion to disappointment) highlight the emotional spillover effects of her career struggles. This scenario reveals not simply skilled migrants' adaptation to their new alternative careers; it also addresses the family aspect of career transitions, which is implicitly linked to their professional lives. As a result, this observation offers a nuanced understanding of the dual challenges faced by migrant parents, who must navigate their own professional identity issues and manage the spillover effects on their families while providing emotional support to their children.

Interestingly, although participants in the provisional pathway experienced considerable challenges and negative impacts on their physical and mental health and personal lives, a few tried to seek positivity, striving to maintain a positive mindset despite challenges.

Yeah, it affects my personal life a little bit, but of course, it is good to have money, and. . . Yeah, that's a good thing. . . I try to look to the good, to be, like . . . positive all the time. I do not like to be in a low mood in general . . . This is not the end of the world. I try to be positive. (Aileen, 26)

While acknowledging the adverse impacts of the alternative career on her personal life, Aileen's narrative illustrates her deliberate effort to maintain a positive approach, especially valuing the financial benefit her new job provides. This pragmatic advantage is critical for coping with the pressure and distress of career transition challenges.

Throughout further analysis, I identified the importance of mental and emotional resilience for skilled migrants like Aileen while simultaneously experiencing and struggling with a major career transition. The findings suggest that any efforts to maintain an optimistic attitude, focus on the positive aspects of alternative careers, and avoid low moods are beneficial for well-

being. This aspect of Aileen's experience not only reinforces the role of resilience in skilled migrants' career transitions in the literature but also expands it by illustrating how migrants actively construct and utilize resilience in ways uniquely shaped by their specific circumstances. This illustration provides new insights into the dynamic processes of career adaptation and psychological coping among skilled migrants. It also adds a nuanced dimension to our understanding of how skilled migrants use personal agency to navigate complex career transitions, integrating practical benefits and emotional strategies to foster stability and progress in their new environments.

Overall, our data shows that skilled migrants in this pathway did face substantial physical and mental health challenges stemming from the tension between maintaining their past professional identities while accepting the new career realities.

4.2.1.2 Experimental Pathway. While the provisional pathway presents a complex emotional and physical struggle, the experimental pathway introduces a more nuanced experience. Participants in this pathway also encountered diverse experiences that significantly impacted their physical well-being, mental health, and personal lives. As I delved into the experiences of these individuals, I discovered stories indicating a variety of emotional experiences of both positive and negative impacts resulting from their career change. For instance, some participants explained their psychological and mental challenges, such as feelings of distress, frustration, uncertainty about the future, difficulty in defining their career change to family/friends, and adverse mental effects on their close family members. However, others reported stability in their psychological well-being despite dealing with challenges. Diane's and Alisha's stories below exemplify how individuals in this pathway struggle with a mental strain in their alternative careers.

Not physically. . . . But mentally alone, when you change your career, you look at it once in a while, what I'm doing is better? Even though I say it's a stepping-stone, I don't know whether it will lead me to where I want to go. I don't know. So, yeah, mentally it does make you think. I would not lie that I am mentally satisfied. It does take a toll on you. Like there are certain days when you would think, why am I even doing this? . . . Yeah, it does mentally. (Diane, 28)

It definitely has impact . . . especially the process of giving the [medical residency exam] . . . the uncertainty. . . . I would say the first two years when I did not have anything else to hold me together, my alternative career. . . . it's the distress of the unknown, not knowing where your life is going. . . . For now, we're here, we're in an alternate career but we will see. (Alisha, 10)

Diane's and Alisha's experiences in the experimental pathway illustrate the profound mental and emotional burden that career transitions can often impose on skilled migrants. Diane's doubts about her career trajectory describe the state of liminality experienced by many skilled migrants, who recognize their current roles as stepping-stones, yet face uncertainty about their final destinations. This persistent ambiguity however can lead to chronic mental strain, as the constant questioning of one's career decisions may destroy confidence and adversely impact emotional well-being. In fact, Alisha's narrative links emotional strain with specific professional challenges locally. Her story reveals not just the psychological impact of her job itself, but a distinct type of anxiety triggered by uncertainty over the validation of her credentials. This scenario describes her stress, where the uncertainty of professional outcomes impacts personal and even family well-being, thus illustrating a clear spillover effect.

Alisha's experience shows how navigating certification processes in the host country, closely linked to one's professional identity enactment, can be both a direct and indirect source

of stress. This example further reinforces the complex links among skilled migrants' career transitions, family well-being and personal mental health.

Similarly, there was clear evidence again of how career shifts in this pathway severely impact individuals' family members. Ryan, for example, described how the long working hours in his current role affected his family.

Yes it has impacted. . . . Because I was working night shifts and it was always a struggle to try to get all the times to get my kids to go to school because I still wanted to be a part of their lives and they were not really happy that they were seeing me less, and less and less. So, that did have its own impact, so yes. That affected how I felt, really. (Ryan, 27)

Ryan's narrative clearly describes how the requirements of his current job directly conflict with his family responsibilities, particularly his children's daily routines. This highlights the concept of work-family conflict, a classic and well-established issue in the career studies literature, where job demands interfere with family life, leading to reduced ability to perform in either domain. This conflict demonstrates how decreasing family interaction affects the emotional well-being of both himself and his family members.

Unlike the anxieties discussed in the narratives of Alisha and Diane, which centered around professional identity and credential recognition, Ryan's concerns are rooted in the immediate effects of his work schedule on his roles outside of work. This distinction emphasizes the multifaceted nature of the challenges faced by skilled migrants, who, like all other workers, still need to maintain a work-family balance to fulfill non-work obligations, while reconstructing their professional identities. These findings provide further insights into how skilled migrants struggle to balance unique job demands (i.e., professional identity challenges) and family responsibilities, leading to chronic stress and burnout and impacting their own health and well-being and that of

their families. Despite observations of the adverse effects of career shifts on participants' well-being as they engage in alternative careers in this pathway, some participants reported a certain level of stability in their mental condition during career transitions. For example, Anna's narrative below explains both the challenging and positive dimensions of her career change. She addresses how she manages her emotions related to her professional identity shift within her new alternative career path.

Yeah, it definitely has impacted . . . it's kind of hard. Personally, it gets very hard to explain to your friends and family why you are not doing what you studied for almost 5 to 7 years. I practiced dentistry for four years in India and I study for five years, so it's hard to explain, but I think it's eventually it's all right. Eventually it just gets better. . . but, I don't think [this career change has] been very traumatizing. . . . I chose to come to move to Canada, so you have to accept what comes with it. (Anna, 17)

Anna's narrative represents both the challenges as well as the positive aspects of career transition in relation to well-being. On the one hand, Anna's situation highlights how the challenges with her professional identity affect her external image, while she attempts to accept the reality of her morphing sense of self. This aspect of her experience involves emotional conflict and adds stress, as she attempts to justify her career choices to others. This challenge reflects the broader issue inherent in the professional identity conflict. Specifically, skilled migrants need to reconcile their past professional identity with their current situation, which is often more complex compared to typical career transitions issues faced by non-migrant populations. This insight also suggests how societal expectations and professional identity intersect to influence one's well-being.

Anna exhibits an optimistic outlook towards her current situation. The last part of her narrative also demonstrates her resilience and ability to handle the changes in her

new career path. Her mindset reveals that although skilled migrants face challenges within their alternative careers, mental and emotional resilience play a critical role in managing distress and uncertainties associated with career transitions among skilled migrants. Consequently, the impact of alternative careers on migrants' well-being is characterized by the dynamic interplay between psychological challenges and resilience, as individuals explore new professional identities and navigate the challenges of their new career roles.

4.2.1.3 Reformist Pathway. Contrary to the previous pathways, the reformist pathway offers a different perspective, more oriented towards positive change and growth. Participants in this pathway generally reported that alternative career experiences had a positive impact on their lives and well-being. In fact, many individuals described personal and professional growth due to their career transitions. They expressed satisfaction with their financial independence, the acquisition of new skills, and the opportunity to engage with a different health care system as medical professionals. Additionally, some participants noted improved work-life balance and a sense of fulfillment from contributing to their family's well-being. The following narratives from Mati and Lind exemplify how the positive impact of alternative careers may facilitate individuals' career transition journey, contributing to the enhancement of their psychological well-being.

I would say [this career change] has impacted my life positively. I have learned so much about the Canadian health care system. I have learned a lot knowledge-based in the field of public health. . . . And yes, financially, of course it has impacted my life. . . . Emotionally, I'm happy. . . . I am glad that I can go to work and do the things that matter to me. (Mati, 8)

I'd say there's no negative impact because the job that I have, it gives me a good sense of work and life balance . . . the stress level is not too much. . . . So it's had a positive impact

because, you know, I'm learning so much. And then, you know, the pay is not bad, and it's a good hospital . . . so, it's healthy personal and professional growth. (Linda, 21)

Unlike the traditional narrative of skilled migrants' career transitions that focuses on the challenges and their negative outcomes, the reformist pathway presents scenarios where skilled migrants still experience personal and professional growth. Mati's experience highlights his professional growth through his in-depth knowledge of the Canadian health care system. This professional development signifies a successful transition and adaptation to a new work context. Mati's expression of contentment points to his resilience and overall positive well-being, which is vital in navigating career transitions. His narrative illustrates how acquiring new skills and financial security can provide a strong foundation for a positive career mindset. In addition, Mati's narrative highlights the idea of a sustainable career, whereby ongoing learning and adaptation to new roles support long-term professional and personal growth. This approach facilitates career transitions, enhancing both professional fulfillment and psychological well-being among skilled migrants.

Linda's narrative provides a unique perspective that differs from what is commonly the case for skilled migrants, which often highlights the adversities faced during career transitions. Linda's experience underlines the importance of work-life balance, which is often disrupted in the context of migration due to the pressures of adjusting to new professional environments. Her ability to maintain a balance between professional responsibilities and personal life contrasts with the more common narrative of work-life conflict and stress among migrants; this approach demonstrates that alternative career transitions can be managed in a way that supports both professional and personal fulfillment of skilled migrants.

While the reformist pathway often leads to positive experiences of personal and professional growth, the study also reveals some experiences of stress and pressure in this

pathway due to the nature of participants' new careers, or the challenges of managing their work with other commitments. For instance, Beth mentions, "*It could affect your health in a way . . . couple of weeks were so stressful. So, it is nobody's fault. It's not that my organization gives me stress. The nature of the work itself is stressful. The phase of life that I'm in . . . the reasons could be many but again, it is what it is . . . but, for personal life no, no impact*" (Beth, 30). Similarly, Rita reported a somewhat negative impact mainly due to overload.

It has impacted my mental health . . . initially, because I was doing a lot of other courses. . . . That is something which took a toll on my personal health too, because I was doing . . . things at a time, full-time job, learning and getting set to take exams, but I knew when I was moving here that it's not going to be easy. (Rita, 13)

Beth and Rita's narratives imply that even when skilled migrants experience smooth transitions in their alternative careers, they may still encounter distress and psychological challenges in their new roles. However, the findings demonstrate that despite these obstacles, participants perceived the challenges as an integral part of their chosen career paths. Indeed, the challenges were always due to their desire to excel further and supported their ongoing career plans, unlike the stories in the previous two pathways. For example, Beth acknowledges facing stress in her job; however, she still views these challenges as an expected part of her career journey, and not as indications of failure or poor decisions regarding her migration or career change. Similarly, despite challenges, Rita accepts the reality of her career change and develops a proactive approach, showing psychological resilience in navigating her career transition. This insight suggests a nuanced understanding of work-related stress, where the stressors are seen as inherent to the new role and life circumstances rather than external obstacles.

While career transition literature acknowledges that the intrinsic demands of new roles can be significant stressors, skilled migrants' acceptance of these challenges as part of their

career journey illustrates a form of psychological resilience and a proactive mindset, where stress is viewed as a manageable and anticipated aspect of professional growth.

Thus, in the reformist pathway, participants' experiences and genuine satisfaction with alternative careers play a critical role in shaping their psychological well-being. These individuals view their career transitions not merely as necessary adjustments but as valuable opportunities for personal and professional development. Their positive perspective towards these changes is crucial in fostering their mental and emotional health. Moreover, skilled migrants' ability to be resilient and remain optimistic in facing challenges is vital for sustaining their psychological well-being. Lastly, individuals' positive perspective in this pathway helps them not only embrace their career change but also use their career transition journey as an opportunity towards more fulfilling and sustainable careers.

4.2.1.4 Summary. This section explores the impact of alternative career pathways on skilled migrants' well-being, revealing three unique experiences characterizing each path. In the provisional pathway, individuals experience a significant negative impact on their well-being, struggling with physical and mental stress, with only a few managing to find positivity amid these difficulties. The experimental pathway portrays a more balanced experience, where individuals navigate both positive and negative effects, demonstrating challenges as well as newly acquired resilience. In contrast, the reformist pathway predominantly highlights positive outcomes, whereby participants experience personal and professional growth and improve their work-life balance and fulfilment despite facing specific stressors. Together, these pathways illuminate the diverse realities of skilled migrants, emphasizing the critical role of individuals' psychological well-being and perspective in navigating career transitions in the host country.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This qualitative study explored two important and related processes: identity work and meaning-making among skilled migrants pursuing alternative careers. Considering specific contextual and time dimensions, the findings indicate that skilled migrants experience three unique alternative career pathways: *provisional*, *experimental*, and *reformist* (see Figure 1).

This study contributes to a less examined aspect of migrant careers, namely, their work experiences away from their original career choices. The study also combines important answers to identity-related questions (Who am I?) with meaning-making questions (Why am I here?), thus contributing to these important but somewhat less understood relationships in the current literature. Finally, the findings of the study are unique as they illustrate how individual career actors navigate and craft their way through less than ideal career pathways. Thus, my study adds new knowledge about the critical role of alternative careers in how skilled migrants may develop sustainable careers and rebuild employability. Finally, this study also sheds light on the profound impact that alternative career pathways have on the subjective well-being of skilled migrants. It examines how the nuances of each pathway influence individual perceptions of well-being, revealing a complex interplay between career transitions and health outcomes, which also contribute to migrants' experiences in the host country.

In the following sections, this chapter discusses specific theoretical implications of the three identified alternative career pathways: provisional, experimental, and reformist. Next, it explains overall contributions to the literature on role transitions, career sustainability, employability, meaningful work, skilled migrants, and skilled migrants' well-being. Subsequently, practical implications for policymakers, employers, immigrant settlement

agencies, career counselors, and migrants themselves are considered. Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study and directions for future research.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

5.1.1 Provisional Pathway: Temporal Roles and Career (Ir)Reversibility

Career actors engaging in the provisional pathway stand out in terms of their resistance to change and inability to psychologically move and accept the alternative career as their new role. This resisting type of identity work is linked to the fact that individuals perceive an alternative career as a temporary and reversible role (Glaser & Strauss, 1971; 2010). They are most focused on the future possibility of re-establishing their original careers. Based on recent theorizing on role transitions (George et al., 2022; Wittman, 2019), the question then becomes whether this resisting type of identity work may in some way be beneficial in the context of their identity in the host country or not. In fact, while this resisting style, combined with utilitarian meaning-making, may allow career actors to be more proactive in search of work related to their original career choices, their resistance to change may not always be the most adaptive response for the skilled migrant context. Namely, the resisting approach may prevent them from exercising the necessary flexibility and openness to change when it comes to all-encompassing life and career transition challenges in the new country (e.g., Nardon et al., 2021). Moreover, identity flexibility is found to be required, especially when re-establishing careers due to structural boundaries that may not be easily overcome (i.e., Zikic & Richardson, 2016) as migrants staying too long in survival or provisional pathway roles, for example, reverting to their original or even a more suitable alternative option becomes unlikely or even impossible.

This pathway, as a result, presents cases that are perhaps the most complex and difficult career situations to address, in terms of career assistance. These career actors possibly require a

more proactive approach, suited to the local labour market, and this may take them some reflection and time to understand their new career and identity transition (Nardon et al., 2021; Zikic & Voloshyna, 2020). Yet, simultaneously, there may be some potential benefits in resistance to change, such as allowing for some self-continuity, stability, and preserving self-worth, which are especially valuable during times of significant transition and adjustment (Wittman, 2019). In other words, skilled migrants in the provisional pathway tend to maintain strong connections to their original professional identity; this ‘lingering identity’ context could serve as a coping mechanism and a response to their extreme role change and new context. Thus, this state of resistance, often due to the strength and salience of the original professional identity, and its lingering effect (Wittman, 2019) may serve both protective roles but also can become a barrier over an extended period of time.

Thus, based on the findings (see Chapter 5), the resisting identity work within the provisional pathway can also have dual implications for skilled migrants in terms of subjective well-being. On the one hand, maintaining self-continuity with past professional identities supports psychological well-being by preserving a sense of self and purpose. As well, skilled migrants’ utilitarian meaning-making approach and proactive mindset may allow them to accept their alternative career roles in more pragmatic ways and as tools to achieve specific (higher) career goals. On the other hand, the rigidity and their attachment or original career path may limit an individual’s capacity to be open and consider other career options, thus limiting their identity exploration and adaptation; this limitation may lead to psychological distress and eventually compromise the individual’s well-being. Similarly, balancing and witnessing the gap between their established past identity and the realities of the new professional environment can become increasingly challenging and stressful over time. That is, hanging on to a past identity

and a vision of self that can no longer be enacted in the host country may be difficult to accept and harm the individual's career. For instance, resistance to change may prevent skilled migrants from acquiring new skills and knowledge necessary for success in their new context, hindering their professional growth and adaptability. Thus, the provisional pathway highlights a duality where the resistance to change acts both as a coping mechanism and a potential obstacle to well-being.

5.1.2 Experimental Pathway: Liminality and Meaning-Making Hesitation

Career actors pursuing the experimental path have made a temporal disconnect with the past and are cognizant of ongoing career changes. Thus, they have some basic acceptance of the new role and beliefs associated with it (Ashforth, 2001). Yet they are still morphing in the sense that they are not fully aware of where this change will take them next. While they have de-identified from their past professional identity, their current alternative career roles are not fully acceptable to them either. Their pathway is also defined as liminal; while in flux, they may have “unlearned” established identities, but they have not yet adopted new ways of being (Beech, 2022; Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). Unlike the first pathway, these individuals are also not bothered by the lack of continuity to their past roles, as they seem to be seeking new meanings in alternative future roles.

However, when exploring their meaning-making process in more depth, they have a hard time identifying any specific aspects of the new role that may provide them with a sense of meaningfulness. Instead, their narratives center on what I conceptualized as anticipatory meaning, more focused on what future career moves may potentially bring. They perceive the alternative career as an opportunity or exposure. That is, their search for learning opportunities in their alternative career context provides them with current satisfaction and meaning. In addition,

findings related to this pathway resemble the dynamic interplay described by Rouse (2016). While that study focuses on the psychological disengagement of founders (study participants), it still finds the simultaneous nature of anticipatory identification with the new role as well as de-identification with the past. In Rouse's (2016) study, anticipatory identification with future roles among founders facilitates the effects of de-identification, offering a forward-looking perspective. This anticipation reinforces the gradual shifting of their identity from their past to future roles. By building on these ideas, my study finds that once skilled migrants accept disengagement from their past roles that they can no longer enact locally, they start to engage in what has been conceptualized here as anticipatory meaning-making. Thus, I extend this earlier work by also exploring meaning-making in addition to identity; I find that de-identification can lead to looking for new meaning targets and aspects of the role that will bring meaning and purpose to their careers in the future.

Thus, while Rouse (2016) suggests valuable insights into the entrepreneurial journey of disengagement and re-engagement with new ventures, my study extends the understanding of anticipatory processes. Specifically, I examine them through the lens of skilled migrants facing a dual challenge: one, redefining professional identity, and two, having to downshift their careers and revise their career expectations in a new country. Unlike founders who navigate within a familiar entrepreneurial environment, skilled migrants must reconcile their professional selves within entirely new contextual and societal contexts that add more complexity to the identity negotiation process. As a result, this study not only extends the discourse on anticipatory identity and meaning-making processes to include the nuanced experiences of skilled migrants, but also highlights the interplay between individual agency and systemic barriers in shaping these major transitions.

Furthermore, this pathway informs career literature by illustrating how being in a state of career flux and liminality can variably impact skilled migrants' transition pathways and career decisions (Akkermans et al., 2023). This contribution is crucial as it reveals the complexity of career transitions and the need for more nuanced approaches to understanding the aftermath of the career transition.

5.1.3 Reformist Pathway: Embracing Sustainable Career Progression

The third pathway into an alternative career identified in this study, or the reformist route, is marked by sustainable identity work. Individuals within this path have fully accepted their alternative career roles and new ways of being. Their narratives may somewhat resemble those of non-alternative career actors in a sense that they are seeking growth and development and don't seem to look backwards (Obodaru, 2012; 2017). Their identity work was defined as sustainable because they have made peace with their new sense of self and the new context in which they work. Career actors in this path are focused on the future continuity of their roles over time; they have enacted and accepted their transition course, and their perceptions of the self are characterized by a high level of individual agency (Brown, 2015). Unlike those pursuing a provisional pathway, individuals in this pathway have fully let go of their past professional identity and do not experience any sense of lingering identity either. These individuals have embraced the alternative career as a destination or a sustainable career choice (De Vos et al., 2020), where they wish to stay and grow; their search for meaning is progressively emerging. As they continuously acquire more expertise in their alternative career choices, they also simultaneously derive new *meanings* and look for new professional identity targets.

5.2 Contributions to the Study of Role Transitions

This study builds on and extends existing knowledge on role transitions by focusing on a more encompassing type of migrant career transition; that is, individuals at the center of this study are simultaneously experiencing not only psychological disengagement from the past roles in their home country, but much more holistically they are adapting to and becoming part of the new societal, national, and cultural context (e.g., Obodaru, 2017; Zikic & Voloshyna, 2023). As a result, the experiences of alternative careers are, in fact, stories of how people “begin again,” extending earlier studies on basic organizational exit experiences (i.e., Rouse, 2016). For instance, Rouse’s 2016 study, discussed earlier in this section, found that despite experiencing a major career transition, founders of companies remain within familiar social, cultural, and geographical boundaries. However, this study broadens the scope of Rouse’s (2016) work by applying the concept of “beginning again” in the context of alternative careers, where skilled migrants not only experience major role transitions and disengagement processes but also must adapt and navigate transitions across different social, cultural, and geographical contexts. Thus, my research may provide new insights by illustrating how a more encompassing type of career transition can be experienced and managed beyond familiar contextual and societal boundaries.

Furthermore, the findings extend earlier work on discontinuous career transitions necessitated by traumatic life events (Haynie & Shepherd, 2011). Similarly to Haynie and Shepherd (2011), this study identifies the importance of rebuilding foundational assumptions about oneself and connections to the past professional identity, yet in some cases, it also finds the opposite to be the case. Namely, my study focuses on the duality of maintaining connections with past careers while at the same time recognizing the necessity of disengaging from previous professional selves. For example, for career actors in the experimental and reformist pathways, it

was important to experience some level of disengagement from their past selves, as only then could they seek more meaningful connections to their current roles. Although connecting to “past selves” in Haynie and Shepherd’s (2011) study is crucial for reconstructing a professional identity and coping with the new reality, this study conversely reveals that for some skilled migrants, connection to past professional identities may sometimes limit their integration into new roles. In fact, the current research finds that too much focus on the continuity with the past professional identity, as in the provisional pathway, can limit and almost disable the career actor from any necessary change. All in all, my study contributes to the broader literature on downward role transitions, specifically by offering a more nuanced understanding of the benefits of maintaining lingering identities (Wittman, 2019; George et al., 2022) versus more active identity reconstruction processes.

5.3 Contributions to the Study of Career Sustainability

Sustainable careers refer to “sequences of career experiences reflected through a variety of patterns of continuity over time, thereby crossing several social spaces, characterized by individual agency, herewith providing meaning to the individual” (Van der Heijden & De Vos, 2015, p.7). This concept emphasizes the importance of continuity, adaptation across different contexts, and the active role of individuals in shaping their career paths. Yet, the specific dynamics of these elements remain underexplored within the context of skilled migrants.

This study introduces three distinct alternative career pathways, thereby contributing to the literature on career sustainability and expanding upon the conceptual framework proposed by De Vos et al. (2020). While De Vos and colleagues provide a valuable foundation for understanding sustainable careers, my study builds on and extends their paradigm by exploring the unique transition challenges of skilled migrants and how these may inform the sustainability

narrative. Contrary to the broader scope of De Vos et al.'s (2020) conceptual model, my research delves more into the nuanced challenges of alternative career options and how these may inform sustainable career progression. This investigation reveals how skilled migrants strive to align their professional aspirations with alternative career options in the new context while actively navigating and reshaping these environments in pursuit of meaningful and sustainable careers. Each pathway provides a unique perspective on how sustainable careers are constructed in the context of skilled migrants.

5.3.1 Provisional Pathway and Sustainable Careers

The provisional pathway presents one dimension of career sustainability that extends beyond the conventional adaptability and personal development emphasized by De Vos et al. (2020). While De Vos et al. focus on how individuals continuously develop and adapt to sustain their careers, my findings suggest that developing a sustainable career following a transition also involves acquiring new skills and adapting to new roles while simultaneously maintaining psychological resilience.

5.3.2 Experimental Pathway and Sustainable Careers

This pathway aligns with De Vos et al.'s (2020) discussion on “dynamic learning” to sustain a career; however, it introduces the concept of anticipatory meaning-making. In this pathway, skilled migrants do not view their current roles as final destinations but as strategic steps toward future opportunities. This anticipatory approach means always looking ahead while finding value in their current experiences as they prepare for future advancement. This dynamic relationship between present engagement and future aspirations suggests that a sustainable career may involve strategic planning and preparing for future career opportunities. By highlighting the exploratory nature of alternative careers, this pathway enriches De Vos et al.'s framework,

showing that sustainable careers of migrants may involve continuous and proactive learning and exploration of options.

5.3.3 Reformist Pathway and Sustainable Careers

This pathway allows skilled migrants to view their alternative careers as sustainable only by aligning their professional identity with their skills and aspirations while continuously embracing learning and deriving meaning through this skill development. The reformist pathway extends De Vos et al.'s (2020) study by demonstrating how skilled migrants achieve long-term career sustainability through the complete redefinition of their professional identities while actively navigating and reshaping their new context. Thus, my study may expand the sustainable career paradigm and De Vos et al.'s study by introducing the new concept of “sustaining identity work” as an important yet little-considered aspect of sustainable careers, which may be especially important in the face of migration and major career transitions. In fact, my study demonstrates that career sustainability can be achieved through the reconstruction of professional identity, thus adding to the current constellation of how sustainable careers are defined.

5.4 Contributions to the Study of Employability

The concept of employability focuses on individuals' ability to secure and maintain employment that aligns with their career aspirations and competencies (De Vos et al., 2021). This is particularly salient for skilled migrants, who often experience unique challenges in finding employment in the host country. The findings of this study underscores the dynamic nature of employability within alternative career pathways in the context of skilled migrants.

By introducing three distinct alternative career pathways, this study contributes to the employability literature and extends the recent work by Forrier et al. (2024). While Forrier et al. (2024) mainly focus on the concept of alignment or “fit” between an individual's skills and job

demands to enhance employability, they do not necessarily focus on rebuilding employability as a result of major career transitions. While their framework provides a foundation for understanding employability in terms of skill acquisition and utilization, my study goes further by integrating the complex psychological and identity-related challenges of rebuilding employability among skilled migrants. The current study highlights that employability is not merely about having the right skills but also involves navigating professional identity reconstruction, psychological resilience, and adaptation to new professional contexts.

Below, I explain more specifically how each pathway extends Forrier et al.'s study, illustrating the relationship between employability and how it is experienced differently across various alternative career pathways in the context of skilled migrants.

5.4.1 Employability Through the Provisional Pathway

In this pathway, skilled migrants perceive their alternative careers as temporary roles while striving to return to their original professions. This insight suggests that employability is strongly tied to their past professional identities and the perceived irreversibility of their career paths. This study is partially in line with Forrier et al.'s (2024) study, addressing the interplay between personal agency (maintaining their professional identity) and the structural constraints of their new environment (the need to adapt to less than ideal jobs). However, my study extends Forrier et al.'s framework by incorporating the role of identity work; that is, it explores how the fit is negotiated through identity work. Thus, the current study emphasizes that employability and the idea of fit are not static, but rather an ongoing negotiation between past identities and current job requirements. My work highlights that employability is not just about finding a job that matches one's skills, but rather should be seen as an ongoing and evolving journey of

aligning one's professional identity with the dynamic challenges and the changing landscape of career opportunities.

5.4.2 Employability Through the Experimental Pathway

Migrants in this pathway engage in morphing identity work, gradually adapting their professional identities to align themselves with new roles within alternative careers. Unlike Forrier and colleagues' study focusing on immediate fit, this pathway shows that employability can involve a forward-looking approach where current roles are seen as platforms for future employability.

5.4.3 Employability Through the Reformist Pathway

In the reformist pathway, skilled migrants embrace their alternative careers as new and fulfilling career choices. This approach goes beyond Forrier et al.'s (2024) framework by illustrating how skilled migrants continue to rebuild their employability in the context of new roles over time. While my study aligns with Forrier et al.'s (2024) long-term perspective on employability, it extends their study specifically by focusing on the dynamic process of identity transformation and the role of meaning-making in achieving career success and growth. These elements provide a richer and more nuanced understanding of employability, emphasizing the interplay between external career opportunities and internal identity work and fulfillment.

5.5 Contributions to the Study of Meaningful Work

This study also enriches the meaningful literature by demonstrating that meaning-making processes may vary in quality according to the focus on *utilitarian*, *anticipatory*, and *progressive* types, all within the context of alternative careers. These unique perspectives on meaning-making extend our understanding of meaningful work by suggesting a dynamic continuum. My study provides a more fine-tuned exploration of how meaning-making can range from more

practical aspects related to the fulfillment of immediate/practical needs to a more anticipatory search for meaning in the context of future opportunities, for example.

Notably, for individuals enacting alternative careers as a way to begin again, meaning-making may have a more nuanced role and be somewhat secondary to other work-related needs. That is, careers in general may be understood in more pragmatic and provisional terms, sometimes even as a tool or a springboard from which individuals anticipate finding new meanings in the future. Thus, alternative career narratives point to the potentially different quality and value placed on the meaning-making process versus meaning-making in non-alternative careers. Contrary to existing research on meaningful work, which typically considers individuals who already feel in control of their career destiny, the findings of this study highlight a different quality to meaning-making in alternative careers. In this context, pursuing purpose and meaning may look different (i.e., focusing on basic survival and learning new skills as meaningful work) and may not always be the individual's primary focus. Hence, my findings challenge to some extent the existing view that assumes individuals primarily seek meaningful work throughout their career journey. Instead, the quality and role of what is considered meaningful work may change based on the career context and circumstances, especially in the aftermath of a major career transition.

Moreover, with regard to finding meaning, current literature has addressed the significance of "congruence," or fit between individuals' motivations, values, career goals, and surrounding environment (i.e., job, organization, and society) (e.g., Lysova et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the findings of this study indicate novel insights into how individuals find meaning first and foremost in a satisfactory match with their previously established skills and abilities, focusing on their prior sense of self versus any new meanings that may exist in the alternative

role. My study suggests that at least initially achieving a “meaning match” between individuals’ past skills and the requirements of new roles is the foundation for engaging in any further meaning-making process. This approach results in integrating individuals’ past professional identities with present realities and circumstances, which I feel leads to some type of “identity peace” in this study. Identity peace refers to reaching a point of acceptance where individuals become comfortable with developing or re-evaluating their professional identity in the new context. This sense of identity peace seems to be a precursor for more higher-level meaning-making processes. In this way, I highlight the intricate relationship between identity processes and meaning-making, something that has been under-explored in research to date (Lepisto et al., 2015). In fact, skilled migrants’ reflection on their past careers, acknowledging and valuing their skills and knowledge, enables them to integrate their past professional identity and experiences into their present and future selves, allowing for new career narratives. By doing so, skilled migrants create a foundation that leads them to search for meaning in their new roles despite the challenges posed by less than ideal alternative careers. This intricate connection between identity and meaning-making provides a novel perspective and contributes to the meaningful work literature. It also opens avenues for further research into the role of downward career transitions, specifically in pursuing meaningful work.

5.6 Contribution to the Study of Skilled Migrants

This study advances our knowledge of skilled migrants’ career trajectories in several ways. First, by building on the existing literature that mainly focuses on the early labour market experiences and pre-organizational entry challenges, this study shifts the narrative towards those who have already transitioned into alternative career trajectories in the host countries. Thus, unlike previous studies that primarily address the initial difficulties and coping strategies of

skilled migrants before their full integration into local organizations (e.g., O'Connor & Crowley-Henry, 2020; Sarpong & Maclean, 2021; Zikic & Richardson, 2016), this research explores the lived experiences of skilled migrants who are currently enacting, in most cases, less than ideal alternative careers. Therefore, the current study enriches the discourse on migrants' career re-establishment by introducing three distinct alternative career pathways. In fact, it provides deeper insights into the dynamic and ongoing adaptation, identity work, and meaning-making processes that skilled migrants experience as part of alternative career pathways. Understanding these crucial, self-defining processes that frame migrants' professional trajectories in the host country is critical yet overlooked. It builds and extends existing work addressing complex professional identity struggles and occupational downgrading, a common scenario for many skilled migrants across the globe (Zikic & Richardson, 2016). Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of unique and complex post-entry experiences, highlighting the vital role of alternative career pathways for many skilled migrants internationally (Zikic et al., n.d., under review).

5.6.1 Contributions to the Study of Skilled Migrants' Well-being

This study also contributes to the literature on migrant well-being by demonstrating how different alternative career pathways can impact skilled migrants' subjective well-being. Existing literature has explored some factors that influence migrants' well-being; however, less is known about how subjective perceptions of well-being are closely linked to alternative career challenges.

Many studies have established that immigrants are typically healthier than the native-born population. This phenomenon, known as the "Healthy Immigrant Effect" (HIE), suggests that immigrants often arrive in the host country in better health compared to native-born populations due to selective migration processes (e.g., Aglipay et al., 2013); it tends to favour

healthier, younger, and more educated individuals who can endure the challenges of migration and resettlement (e.g., Chiswick et al., 2008; Vang et al., 2017). However, the literature also highlights that this health advantage may decline over time due to various factors including challenges of acculturation (e.g., Koneru et al., 2007), low job market integration (e.g., Raihan et al., 2023), unemployment and underemployment (e.g., Dean & Wilson, 2009), gender effect (e.g., Spadavecchia & Yu, 2021), discrimination (e.g., Edge & Newbold, 2013), lack of social support, separation from family and friends, and possible shifts towards less healthy lifestyles post-migration (e.g., Bilecen & Vacca, 2021; Vang et al., 2017).

Unlike the broad scope of the healthy immigrant effect (HIE), my study expands on this concept by illustrating specifically how enacting less than ideal alternative career paths can influence migrants' subjective well-being, leading them to reassess their perceptions of well-being in a new work context. This study differs from and complements the HIE perspectives, which places less focus on the role of an individual's agency and subjective well-being experiences in relation to their career progression. By focusing on the concepts of alternative career identity work and meaning-making, this study argues that the well-being of skilled migrants is also shaped by how they navigate and reconstruct their professional identities and find relevant meaning post-migration. This perspective expands the HIE discourse by exploring how individuals navigate and assess their well-being in each alternative career pathway.

For instance, the provisional pathway highlights substantial physical and mental pressures as individuals struggle to align their past professional identities with present realities. This argument aligns with existing research observed in HIE studies, suggesting that such burdens can intensify the decline in skilled immigrants' health over time due to increased distress and a potentially poor fit with their careers. However, the findings also acknowledge that some

individuals within this pathway have managed to adopt a more positive mindset in relation to uncertainties and changes in their professional lives, even if sometimes these may seem more pragmatic in nature. On the other hand, the experimental pathway, characterized by a mix of challenges and growth opportunities, offers a different perspective. It suggests that while some aspects of this type of work experience can be detrimental to health, others can, in fact, provide resilience and adaptation and even promote well-being post-migration. Contrary to the typical downward trend observed in the context of HIE trajectories, the reformist pathway shows that skilled migrants can embrace alternative career roles, demonstrate resilience and optimism, and experience personal and professional growth, overall leading to enhanced subjective well-being.

In fact, my findings recognize and highlight the role of individual agency among skilled migrants within alternative pathways, as well as the role of unique experiences within each career pathway on skilled migrants' subjective well-being. These findings allow for a better understanding of the complex and individualized nature of health and well-being perceptions among immigrants within a specific work context and move beyond a more uniform approach often seen in the HIE discourse.

5.7 Practical Implications

5.7.1 Skilled Migrants

The findings of this study provide essential guidance for skilled migrants who engage in alternative careers. Recognizing that each migrant's experience and needs are different, the study argues that alternative career pathways may not be equally engaging or meaningful for all career actors; it may take time to find the right fit with one's professional identity, meaning, and purpose in the new career paths. In other words, there is no "one size fits all" when it comes to choosing alternative careers. This study informs skilled migrants about different scenarios within alternative career pathways they may encounter, identifying specific insights and identity-related

issues for each path. Thus, skilled migrants who seek to engage in alternative career options can have realistic expectations of different pathways and be prepared for potential challenges and/or opportunities while engaging in each pathway.

5.7.2 Migrant Settlement Agencies

The study also highlights the significant role of bridging/alternative career programs for newcomer migrants. Several migrant settlement agencies in Canada (e.g., ACCES employment in this study) offer many sector-specific programs that support internationally trained professionals in finding jobs in their own or related fields. Each program provides migrants with customized sector-specific training designed to orient them to their sector in Canada. These agencies often have networks with various outreach programs to employers who may be actively involved in developing, delivering, and recruiting from bridging programs. As a result, this study informs the migrant settlement sector of how they may enhance their existing bridging/alternative career programs. For example, programs could be enhanced by creating realistic expectations of different alternative career pathways and perhaps improving program delivery by offering mentorship and counselling geared towards the unique challenges that skilled migrants may face in each alternative career pathway identified in this study. For instance, mentors or career counsellors may connect migrants with peers who have successfully navigated the major transition from their original careers to new roles. Peer mentoring can also provide real-life insights and encouragement, making the transition, especially via the provisional pathway, for example, more achievable and less isolating. Finally, building stronger partnerships with influential private sector employers can give settlement agencies a more powerful voice in their advocacy efforts for newcomer migrants' employment.

5.7.3 Local Organizations

Similarly, local organizations and HR departments hiring skilled migrants can also benefit from this study. Considering the nuanced characteristics of each career pathway and its impacts, HR leaders may be encouraged to develop new initiatives or interventions tailored for skilled migrants seeking to adapt and integrate into new roles. For instance, they can include customized onboarding programs that identify the unique challenges that individuals may face based on the findings for each pathway (i.e., by finding ways to integrate past skills and experiences that skilled migrants bring into the new culture and workplaces). HR leaders might also consider implementing continuous professional development opportunities specifically geared towards skilled migrants—for example, by focusing on bridging gaps in industry-specific knowledge or interpersonal skills that are critical for advancement within their new roles. This type of initiative can facilitate a smoother transition and integration of skilled migrants into the Canadian workplace, speed up identity transitions, and create a more meaningful workplace. Although some employers and HR departments may hesitate to invest in employees who intend to stay temporarily in their current roles (e.g., skilled migrants within the provisional pathway), the benefits of doing so can still be noticeable. By implementing the above strategies, employers can enhance integration between diverse groups, eventually leading to productivity increases for all employees, including those who may stay only temporarily. Moreover, the diverse perspectives and skills migrants bring to the local organization are often invaluable assets that, if managed well, can drive innovation and significantly enhance competitive advantage in the labour market. Thus, investing in skilled migrants, even provisionally, can foster a more positive and inclusive work environment.

5.7.3.1 Career Coaching and Workplace Engagement. This study has wider applications, outside of the skilled migrant context; those seeking career guidance are not always recent migrants. Specifically, the findings from the current study can also inform those offering general career coaching of three unique ways in which individuals can adapt and prepare for career options. Depending on the type of pathway, individuals pursuing alternative careers may also utilize differential effort and motivation at work; this variation can significantly impact job engagement and, eventually, turnover as well. For example, individuals pursuing the provisional pathway may be least likely to fully engage with their roles or even their colleagues, compared to those in the experimental or reformist path.

5.7.4 Government and Policymakers

This study highlights the importance to government and policymakers of promoting more comprehensive bridging and alternative career programs for skilled migrants. For instance, government and policymakers may consider our findings on how migrants experience alternative careers differently as they provide support to more migrants and cover a broader range of challenges in various professions. Initiatives related to strengthening alternative career funding and program content may have a powerfully positive effect on the career success of newcomers and, ultimately, their contributions to local organizations and society overall.

5.7.5 Migrants' Well-being Across Stakeholders

The findings of the study illustrate the impacts of different alternative career pathways on the psychological well-being of skilled migrants. This insight can inform employers and other stakeholders of the importance of employee well-being and support systems, and of the need to develop more customized mental health programs based on the specific needs of migrants. This type of support is particularly crucial for those skilled migrants within provisional and

experimental pathways, for example, who are struggling with various career pressures or uncertainties. For instance, individuals feeling isolated or stressed in provisional roles might benefit from counselling interventions that focus on coping strategies related to work stress and integration difficulties. Conversely, those in more stable pathways might benefit from programs that focus on enhancing satisfaction and maintaining mental health.

5.8 Limitations and Future Research

In examining the overall portrait of the three alternative career pathways (provisional, experimental, and reformist) and their narratives, this study found that current narratives were overwhelmingly focused on skilled migrants' agentic ability to craft successful alternative careers; none of the pathways addressed the relational aspects of skilled migrants' career changes, particularly the need to immerse themselves in new relational networks. Similarly, the study provided little insight into how alternative career transitions may be related to or even triggered by the non-work or family domain. Thus, future research should further explore the roles and meanings related to social connections and life outside of the professional context in shaping skilled migrants' alternative careers.

In addition, participants in this study were interviewed at one point in time, yet careers are dynamic and constantly evolving, influenced by various factors at personal and professional levels. Future research may employ a longitudinal approach to further understand whether skilled migrants switch or evolve between the three career pathways. Such an approach will allow for an exploration of how skilled migrants adapt to evolving circumstances and how these adaptations influence their identity development, career fulfilment, and overall well-being over time. Additionally, a longitudinal study may help researchers identify the key factors that facilitate or hinder progress within these pathways, offering valuable insights for policy-makers, career

counselors, and migrant settlement agencies. The findings from the longitudinal study might be crucial for developing strategies aimed at enhancing the integration and career success of skilled migrants in their new environments.

Another direction for future consideration could be to consider in more detail the differences between the narratives of skilled migrants in this study and those of migrant professionals at the periphery, described in Zikic and Richardson's (2016) study. Specifically, the participants in the current study did not emphasize many structural barriers or any external forces that may have led to their alternative career pathways. Thus, future research may explore further the role of contextual factors in shaping alternative career paths of skilled migrants.

Furthermore, while this study explored the experiences of skilled migrants mainly within health care professions, the applicability of these findings to other occupational sectors remains an open question. Future research may investigate a variety of occupations across different industries (e.g., engineering, IT, education, etc.) to explore how skilled migrants navigate the challenges and opportunities within their alternative career pathways in these professions. This expanded exploration will help in understanding whether the patterns identified in this study are consistent across other professional contexts.

Finally, this study also calls for quantitative exploration of alternative career pathways to further understand how various aspects of the career actors, such as gender, personality, place of origin, or different occupations may impact their choices of alternative career options.

5.9 Conclusion

This study has critically explored different lived experiences of skilled migrants as they navigate alternative career pathways in their host country of Canada. Through in-depth qualitative analysis, the study has demonstrated three distinct pathways: *provisional*,

experimental, and *reformist*; each representing unique challenges and adaptation strategies employed by skilled migrants. These pathways not only show the complexity of skilled migrants' career transition experiences but also highlight how they engage in three unique forms of alternative identity work (*resisting*, *morphing*, and *sustaining*) and alternative meaning-making (*utilitarian*, *anticipatory*, and *progressive*) within each pathway.

The study contributes to a deeper understanding of how career re-establishment in a new country may occur and how career actors employ adaptation strategies in response to less than ideal career options. The study also contributes to the broader discourse on the healthy immigrant effect (HIE), illustrating the nuanced impacts of different alternative career pathways on skilled migrants' subjective well-being. Finally, the findings inform important outside entities such as policymakers, employers, migrants' settlement agencies, and career counsellors on how to better support migrants' career transitions.

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Figure 1: Alternative Career Pathways


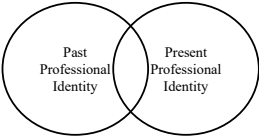
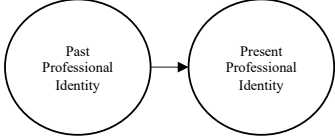
Alternative Career Pathways			
	Provisional Pathway	Experimental Pathway	Reformist Pathway
Alternative career identity work	Resisting identity work	Morphing identity work	Sustaining identity work
Alternative career meaning-making	Utilitarian meaning-making	Anticipatory meaning-making	Progressive meaning-making
Past vs. present professional identity			
Time orientation: identity and meaning	Focused on the past identity/Lack of new meanings	Letting go of the past identity/Focused on present and future meanings	Focused on the present identity/Creating present and future meanings
Impact of alternative careers on well-being	Negative impact, seeking positivity	Both positive & negative impact, striving for maintaining a positive perspective & resilience	Positive impact, striving for growth despite challenges

Table 1: Demographic Information

#	Name	Age	Gender	Original Career/Home Country	Alternative Career in Canada/ Years	Years in Canada	Type of Alternative Career Pathways
1	Rosa	30s	F	Pharmacist / IND	Data Analyst < 1	1	Reformist
2	Nancy	40s	F	Psychologist / IND	Employment Counsellor/ 1	2	Reformist
3	Susan	45s	F	Psychiatrist /IRN	Psychotherapist/ 1	4	Reformist
4	Kate	20s	F	Medical officer-Researcher/ NGA	Infection Control Manager/ 2	2	Reformist
5	Sarah	30s	F	Dentist/ IND	Treatment & Patient Coordinator/1	1	Experimental
6	Moe	30s	M	General physician/ BGD	Senior Medical Assistant/ < 1	5	Provisional
7	Rani	40s	F	Gynecologist /PAK	Project Coordinator/ <1	4	Provisional
8	Mati	30s	M	Pharmacist /BGD	Account Manager/ 1	2	Reformist
9	Ali	40s	M	Pharmacist /EGY	Sales Manager/ 1	3	Experimental
10	Alisha	30s	F	Psychiatrist /IND	Psychotherapist/ 2	4	Experimental
11	Kevin	40s	M	Pharmacist/ NGA	Senior Business Manager/<1	1	Reformist
12	Alan	30s	M	Pharmacist/ IND	Data Analyst/ 2	3	Reformist
13	Rita	30s	F	Dentist/ IND	Project Manager/ 2.5	3	Reformist
14	Shiren	30s	F	Nurse/ PAK	Project Coordinator/ <1	2	Provisional
15	Tim	30s	M	Family physician/ARG	Community Outreach Worker/ 1	2	Provisional
16	Keith	30s	M	Pharmacist /NGA	Account Manager/ 2	3	Reformist
17	Anna	30s	F	Dentist/IND	Mask-fit Tester/ <1	3	Experimental
18	Maya	50s	F	Psychiatrist /IRN	Psychotherapist/ 1	5	Reformist
19	Elma	30s	F	Medical Doctor/ BGD	Clinical Research/ < 1	3	Experimental
20	Peter	40s	M	Medial Doctor /EGY	Medical Case Coordinator/ 2	3	Reformist
21	Linda	30s	F	Nurse /IND	Patient Safety & Quality Analyst/ 4	5	Reformist
22	David	50s	M	Ophthalmologist /IRN	Optometrist/ 1	5	Reformist
23	Andrew	30s	M	Physiotherapist /IND	Salesforce Administrator (IT)/ 1	2	Reformist
24	Radeen	50s	M	Pediatrician /PAK	Community Ambassador in clinic/2	3	Experimental
25	Nadia	40s	F	Dermatologist/EGY	Lactation Consultant/ 2	4	Experimental
26	Aileen	45s	F	Medical Doctor/ EGY	Youth Worker/ 1	5	Provisional
27	Ryan	30s	M	Pharmacist /NGA	Project Coordinator/ 1	2	Experimental
28	Diane	35s	F	Pathologist /IND	Laboratory Technician/ 1	2	Experimental
29	Sam	50s	M	Medical Doctor/IRN	Medical Aestheticians/ 2	5	Reformist
30	Beth	30s	F	Dentist /NGA	Claims Consultant/ <1	1	Reformist

Note:

ARG: Argentina, BGD: Bangladesh, EGY: Egypt, IND: India, IRN: Iran, NGA: Nigeria, PAK: Pakistan

F: Female, M: Male

Table 2. Selected Quotes

Provisional Pathway	Exemplar Quotes
Alternative Career : Resisting Identity Work	<p>“It’s hard to absorb what I’m doing right now because this is what I was telling others to do for my own projects back home. Now I’m the one who is doing this coordination, administrative stuff...It’s so hard to accept..., that I’m doing this [alternative career] right now (14)</p>
Alternative Career : Utilitarian meaning-making.	<p>For me, this job is simply opening the door to the Canadian job market. It was very important. They don’t pay me well. But for me, it was a good way to gain Canadian experience...but still it’s not that I’m doing health things....it’s not like, you know, what I’ve been trained for.... It’s just good local personal experience.”(15)</p>
Experimental Pathway	
Alternative Career : Morphing Identity Work	<p>“My goal is to be a psychiatrist but until I become that I don’t just want to sit here and do odd jobs. I want to do something I’m passionate about; It is still in the field in mental health, close to psychiatry. I will continue doing similar things, that’s what is my passion. Do I love it? Yes. Do I still want to be a doctor? Yes. In the sense that I am happy where I am, but I would be happier if I was a doctor. But if I don’t ever get to do that, will I still be happy just being a psychotherapist? Probably, yes. ”(10)</p>
Alternative Career: Anticipatory Meaning-Making	<p>“I do identify myself as a treatment coordinator because that’s what I do on a daily basis....So, I’m confident of my job and I kind of enjoy it. The role here, it’s good but now I feel, but there’s not much scope for growth now because it is a limit....I wouldn’t want to do this forever, only for short-term.”(5)</p> <p>“It[Alternative career] is something I want to explore more and give more attention to it. I’m still exploring but I’m trying to engage in marketing which is related my past job. I’m learning from my current job. I cannot deny that I’m learning. So there is something that keeps you motivated, ...or at least satisfied that you’re doing something, you’re learning every day, something new. Every day I have new learnings from the Canadian perspective, from the life sciences.” (9)</p>
	<p>“It [Alternative career] is worth doing....it’s giving me a vast experience in the cultural and in the job perspective... I want to explore more on this field. It will give me a broad spectrum of opportunities in the future.it is really very good.” (19)</p>
Reformist Pathway	
Alternative Career : Sustaining Identity Work	<p>“I definitely identify myself becauseI have really taken it upon myself to learn more about this field and to learn as much as I can about it. I feel like this is something that I’m good at now. I felt like this was a decision that I made, and I need to stick with it and look at this as a new chapter, basically. it’s new, I’m just starting off with a new career. I’m still learning the ropes... so I’m constantly updating myself in the field .”(2)</p> <p>“I don’t identify myself as being a doctor anymore. it’s over. I can’t say I’m a doctor, because I don’t practice anymore..... I don’t think about it anymore because you’re no longer part of this kind of role anymore. You’re something else. You’re completely different..... you’re in a new environment where you want to learn... so I just focus on learning in this new job [Alternative career]. I concentrate on doing well. Yeah, and that’s how I continue.” (20)</p>

**Alternative Career:
Progressive Meaning-Making**

“Personally, I am satisfied, and I'm enjoying it....current role is a platform where I'm upgrading my skills and I'm thinking, okay, if I can have this experience with this skillset, I'd be able to get even better position I am thinking, okay I'm advancing my career...So that's how I'm looking at this current role.” (12)

“Every day there is something new to learn because I'm still into that learning phase. I got my one license for PMI, now I'm onto another one. So again, I have reached this goal, doesn't mean the end of the story.. You have to do continue learning and doing more courses, certain certifications, in order to keep stand out from others... And that is something I always wanted to do to get new skills and, you know, develop further” (13)

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPATION INFORMATION SHEET

WHO ARE WE?

We are a team of researchers from York University with passion, personal experience of migration and extensive research agenda focusing on careers of skilled migrants. The lead researcher, Dr. Jelena Zikic, has ongoing and successful collaborations with various migrants' settlement agencies; her work has been published by academic journals as well as media outlets such as the Globe & Mail and Harvard Business Review.

WHAT WE ARE STUDYING IS IMPORTANT:

While Canada welcomes many skilled migrants into our economy, many newcomers experience labour market challenges and are pushed towards alternative career options (often lower status jobs than original occupation). To gain more insight into this important career and life transition, we wish to interview skilled migrants to learn about:

- Motivations and experiences of alternative career options in Canada
- Current work challenges and future career plans

WHY WE NEED YOUR HELP & WHO IS ELIGIBLE:

To learn about these major career transitions, we are looking for skilled migrants who are:

- Currently employed in an alternative career path (possibly after a Bridging/Alternative career program)
- Interested in volunteering 1hr of their time (on-line/Zoom interview) by sharing their current work experiences in Canada

OUR STUDY WILL BENEFIT:

Our practical and actionable recommendations will assist:

- Skilled migrants in coping with alternative career transitions
- Provide new knowledge to organizations assisting migrants in choosing new careers
- Assist employers with better understanding of newcomers' needs in alternative careers

TOKEN OF APPRECIATION:

The participants will receive a gift card in the value of \$30 as well as the Study Report

If you are interested in participating or would like more information, please e-mail: soodabeh@yorku.ca

Soodabeh Mansoori, Ph.D. Candidate, York University & Jelena Zikic, Associate Professor, York University

This study has been approved by the Ethics committee of York University and all results are strictly confidential, while interviews are stripped of any identifiers.

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Immigration plays a critical role in shaping Canada's economy. Individuals immigrate to Canada seeking to apply their skills and talents, anticipating meaningful employment and career growth in their own career fields. However, due to the various local barriers, many skilled migrants are pushed towards alternative career options; they decide to change their desired occupations or pursue new career paths in Canada.

As a result, our team of researchers aims to gather information and learn more about skilled migrants' lived experiences of an involuntary career change in Canada. In fact, we plan to investigate a group of skilled migrants who were forced to change their original careers permanently due to local career barriers in Canada and are currently employed in an alternative career path. To gain more insight into skilled migrants' lived experiences of this transition, often accompanied by working in a lower position, and formulating recommendations, we need to learn from you!

Your participation in this study will involve answering questions in an informal interview with the researchers. Questions will focus on your motivation and factors that lead you to pursue a new career path and overall, your experiences of this transition in Canada, how you coped, and whether the new career provides relevant meaning for yourself.

a.) Interview details: The interview will last about 1 hour. With your permission, it will be audio-taped, so that we can transcribe it for analysis. All personal information, such as your name, personal characteristics, age, gender, geographic location, employers' names, and names of companies will be removed from the interviews, and cannot be identified in any way. In order to guarantee anonymity pseudonyms will be used.

b.) Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not influence the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

c.) The Risks: While we do not anticipate any known risks/ discomforts to you from taking part in this research, please contact the researcher at any time should you feel any emotional discomfort/ distress and we will provide you with possible support services/ resources.

d.) Withdrawal from the Study: You can stop participating in the interview at any time, for any reason, if you decide. Your decision to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

e.) Confidentiality: All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or

publication of the research. Your data will be safely stored in a locked facility and only research staff will have access to this information. All audio recordings of the interviews will be secured by security passwords and will be stored electronically. The data will be retained during 24 months after collection and will be destroyed after this period. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

The researchers acknowledge that the host of these interviews, that is, technology (Zoom) may automatically collect participant data without their knowledge (i.e., IP addresses). Although this information may be provided or made accessible to the researchers, it will not be used or saved without the participant's consent on the researchers' system. Further, because this project employs e-based collection techniques, data may be subject to access by third parties as a result of various security legislation now in place in many countries, and thus, the confidentiality and privacy of data cannot be guaranteed during web-based transmission.

f.) Questions About the Research? This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, you are welcome to contact jelenaz@yorku.ca or the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, York Research Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

I agree for my voice to be digitally recorded _____ YES _____ NO

I agree for direct quotes from my interview to be used under a pseudonym ___ YES ___ NO

Participant's name: _____

Participant's Signature : _____

Date: _____

Researcher's name : _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Work experiences before moving to Canada

1. What kind of work did you do back in your home country, before moving to Canada?
2. Did you have any information about Canadian employment requirements and the job market in your profession before coming to Canada? If so, to what degree were you expecting to return to your own profession in Canada?

Work experiences after moving to Canada

3. What kind of work do you do at the moment?
4. Were there any challenges you faced? How did you cope with the challenges you faced?
5. How was your experience with the settlement agency (Bridging Program)? What motivated you to enter this program?

Career Transition

6. How did you feel about having to pursue a different career path in Canada? Please explain how you managed this change/transition

Professional Identity

7. Do you identify yourself as a [new job title]? Do you feel that this job is right for you?
8. What do you miss the most in your current job compared to what you did back home?

Meaningful Work

9. Do you feel that your current work is worth doing? Do you feel fulfilled with what you do at the moment?
10. What gives you the most satisfaction in this new job? And do you intend to stay in this job?
11. To conclude, what do you see as a next step in terms of your career or where would you like to see yourself?

APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your current age group?

20-25 26-30 31-35 36-40 41-45 46-50 50+

2. Where is your country of origin? _____

3. What is your marital status?

- Single
- Married
- Other: _____
- Prefer not to say

4. What is the highest level of education you have completed prior to moving to Canada?

- High school diploma or the equivalent (GED)
- College diploma
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree
- Other: _____

5. How long did you work in total (in all jobs you held) back in your home country?

- Less than 1 year
- More than 1 but less than 2yrs
- More than 2 but less than 3yrs
- More than 3 less than 5yrs
- More than 5 less than 7yrs
- More than 7yrs

6. When did you move to Canada? _____

7. After you moved to Canada, what level of education or what courses have you completed here?

- Bridging program or similar (Name the program: _____)
- College diploma
- College certificate
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree
- Other: _____

8. How long have you worked in total (in all jobs you held) since arriving to Canada?

- Less than 1 year
- More than 1 but less than 2yrs
- More than 2 but less than 3yrs
- More than 3 less than 5yrs
- More than 5 less than 7yrs
- More than 7yrs

9. How long have you been employed with your current employer in Canada?

- Less than 1 year
- More than 1 but less than 2 yrs
- More than 2 but less than 3yrs
- More than 3 less than 5yrs
- More than 5 less than 7yrs
- More than 7yrs

10. What is the size of the organization you currently work for?

- Less than 100 employees
- Between 100 and 500 employees
- 500+ employees

11. How would you define your current job level?

- Entry level
- Middle-level
- Senior level
- Executive

12. What is the exact role that you currently hold? _____

13. To what degree do you feel overqualified for the job you currently hold?

- 1 Not overqualified at all
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Extremely overqualified

14. To what degree do you perceive the current role as a lower position compared to the one you held back home?

- 1 Not at all lower
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5 Extremely lower than back home

15. In which category below does your total compensation at your job fit, including bonuses, but excluding benefits?

- Under \$19,000
- 20,000- 29,000
- 30,000-39,000
- 40,000-49,000
- 50,000-59000
- 60,000-69,000
- 70,000-79,000
- 80,000-89,000
- Over \$100,000