Career Compromise in Immigrant Professionals in Canada

by

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Abstract

This study presents the investigation of the career transition experience of immigrant skilled workers with a focus on their experiences with career compromise and the coping strategies that they used. The grounded theory approach of qualitative analysis method was used to analyze 20 interview transcripts with participants who had received their education/training and had at least 1 year of work experience prior to immigrating to Canada. The interviews revealed that the career transition journeys of immigrant skilled workers were thwarted with acculturation and career-seeking barriers, which made their career transition experiences quite compromising. The findings support the notion of positive compromise whereby the participants utilized their human agency and open-mindedness to deal with their career compromise. An immigrant vocational theory and an immigrant career compromise theory are proposed. Practical implications and future research directions are discussed.
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Chapter 1

1 Introduction and Literature review

1.1 Introduction: Background to the Study

International migration has long existed since the eighteenth centuries but is now occurring at an accelerated rate (Richmond, 2002) and it is currently continuing to increase (Ahonen et al., 2009). The increased migration rate is due to global changes, such as the rapid speed of air transportation and instantaneous electronic transfer of information and capital (Richmond, 2002). Therefore, there have been unprecedented movements of individuals across the world in search of better life opportunities, and employment opportunities in particular (Marsella & Ring, 2003; Richmond, 2002).

Canada is by far one of the most multicultural countries in the world, largely due to its high immigration rates (Chen, 2008; Sinacore, Mikhail, Kassan, & Lerner, 2009). In recent decades, there has been strong immigration resulting in an increase in the foreign-born population in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2008). From 1986 to 2006, the immigrant population went from accounting for 15.6% to 19.8% of the Canadian population. In 2006, international migration accounted for two-thirds of the population growth. Due to sustained immigration yet low percentage of new European immigrants, there has been an increase in the visible minority population in Canada over the last two decades. Between 2001 and 2006, 60% of the immigrant individuals were from Asia and 10.5% were from African countries. This increase in the volume and diversity of immigration challenges the local government and community to facilitate the economic and cultural integration of the immigrant individuals into Canadian society (Sinacore et al., 2009).

In Western countries such as Canada, baby boomers are reaching retirement age. Therefore, there is an impending decrease in the size of the local workforce. As such, there is an increasing dependence on increasing immigration as one of the means to increase national productivity and ensure the overall economic well-being (Salminen, Vartia, & Giorgiani, 2009). In 2006, 54% of the immigrant individuals migrated to Canada under the “economic” category as opposed to under the “family reunification” category in the early 1980s (Statistics Canada, 2008). Since
2006, immigrants have been selected largely for their likelihood to stimulate the economy based on their age, education level, and language abilities.

Despite being selected for their ability to integrate into the workforce of their new host country and contribute to the labour market, immigrants experience systematic employment-seeking and social/cultural barriers during the process of their new career development (Chen, 2008; Heilbrunn, Kushnirovich, & Zeltzer-Zubida, 2010; Yakushko, Backhaus, Watson, Ngaruiya, & Gonzalez, 2008). Some factors leading to their experienced difficulty in acquiring employment include: employers requiring Canadian work experience and not recognizing their foreign credentials; immigrant individuals’ lack of knowledge of the technical language necessary for the job; cross-cultural differences in language; work culture differences; and differences in social customs (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Sinacore et al., 2009; Yakushko et al., 2008). The majority of recent immigrant professionals move to their new country of residence with professional training and the intention of further developing their careers (Chen, 2008). Unfortunately, of the immigrant individuals who are able to acquire employment, many of them tend to experience underemployment (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Reitz, 2001) and do not fair as well as their Canadian colleagues do (Statistics Canada, 2008).

In addition to struggling with career transition difficulties, immigrant individuals have to deal with acculturation and adjust to their new host country (Flannery, Reise, & Yu, 2001; Hays, 2001; Ortega, Rosenheck, Alegria, & Desai, 2000). They also have to deal with discrimination from the new host society, which negatively impacts immigrant individuals’ adaptation to the culture as well as takes a toll on their mental health (Berry, Phinney, Sam & Vedder, 2006; Lueck & Wilson, 2010). These acculturation and discrimination experiences are both shown to be interrelated to the career transitions of immigrant professionals, and affect one another (Chen, 2008). Immigrant individuals are therefore confronted with much to deal with in their immigration transition journey.

Due to the systematic barriers, immigrant individuals are forced to sacrifice/compromise their intentions of furthering their developing their careers (Chen, 2008; Sinacore et al., 2009; Yakushko et al., 2008). In their new country of residence, immigrant workers are found to make career compromises such as having to work in jobs that they are overqualified for and working in poor work conditions in order to earn an income to survive (Ahonen et al., 2009; Chen, 2008).
Through experiencing the many hardships and barriers, their self-identity, self-confidence, and career objectives take a toll and must be changed to fit their new circumstances (Sinacore et al., 2009; Yakushko et al., 2008). The challenging circumstances of their career transition also lead to adverse effects on their mental and physical health (Agudelo-Suarez et al., 2009; Aroian & Norris, 2003; Yakushko et al., 2008). However, there currently exists scant literature on the career development and career transition issues of immigrants (Yakushko, 2006), and specifically their experiences with career compromise.

Career compromise is an area that has been under explored within the career development literature. Although most major career developmental theories allude to and make mention of the phenomenon of having to make compromises in career development, few have sufficiently addressed it in an explicit and effective manner. Gati (1993, 1998) proposed three ways of framing career compromise and investigated how the perceived degree of compromise differed in each of these ways of framing. He discovered that the perceived degree of compromise and difficulty in career decision making was greater when the compromise is framed in terms of alternatives than when framed either in terms of importance of aspects or within-aspect preferences.

The only major theory developed and empirically investigated to specifically and explicitly address career compromise is Gottfredson’s (1981, 1996) theory of circumscription and compromise. According to Gottfredson’s theory of compromise, individuals must make sacrifices in their career goals for job prestige, sex-type, and field of interest because in reality, people very seldom are able to acquire jobs that fulfill all of these goals (Gottfredson, 1981). The theory is based on developmental theories, namely, Van den Daele’s (1968) description of cognitive development and Kohlberg’s (1966) cognitive-developmental analysis of children’s sex-role concepts and attitudes (Gottfredson, 1981). Gottfredson’s theory of compromise proposed that individuals will first compromise their interests before sacrificing their prestige or appropriate sex-type, with sex-type being the most prioritized goal. However, empirical findings failed to support this theory, thus Gottfredson modified her theory of compromise to incorporated the idea of different priority ordering of sex-type, prestige and interests according to the different levels of compromise (Blanchard & Lichtenberg, 2003; Gottfredson, 1996). However, studies still fail to conclusively support Gottfredson’s modified theory (Blanchard & Lichtenberg, 2003).
Chen (2004) recently proposed a novel approach to thinking about career compromise, called positive career compromise. The concept is that career compromise does not have to be a negative experience and that individuals have the ability to take control of a compromising situation to transform it into a positive experience. The characteristics required for positive compromise are the combination of human agency, which is the ability to take action with the intention or motivation to create a change in one’s situation (Chen, 2004, 2006; Cochran, 1997; Cochran & Laub, 1994), and open-mindedness, which is the ability to have an open attitude and flexibility to facilitate effective and creative thinking of solutions (Chen, 2004, 2006). Positive compromise is a valuable concept to be empirically investigated as it would provide a useful tool to help individuals who undergoing career compromise deal with their situation effectively and it would also empower them with a sense of control.

Therefore, there currently only exists a few theories that address career compromise with very little empirical evidence to support them (Blanchard & Lichtenberg, 2003; Chen, 2004; Gati, 1993, 1998; Gottfredson, 1981, 1996). There also exist few studies that have looked at the psychological effects (Tsaousides & Jome, 2008). Therefore, given the compromising career transition experiences that immigrant skilled workers face, the present study aims to shed more light on this overlooked process of career compromise in immigrant career development.

1.2 Rationale of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to explore career compromise of first generation Canadian immigrants who completed their post-secondary education in their country of origin, and have also worked in their chosen field outside of Canada for at least a year. Since Canada has one of the highest numbers of immigrant skilled workers in the world (Hawthorne, 2008), it provides an ideal context in which to investigate the career transition experience of this population. Immigrant skilled workers (‘immigrant skilled worker’ and ‘immigrant professionals’ are used interchangeably throughout this study) have been found to be confronted by many systematic barriers, which not only lead to underemployment and unemployment, but also to poor mental health and delay in adaptation to their new country (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Yakushko et al., 2008; Yost & Lucas, 2002). On top of dealing with career development barriers, immigrant skilled workers must also cope with acculturating into their new environment (Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006; Yost & Lucas, 2002).
The immigrant skilled worker population proves to be confronted by many barriers, which makes compromise a predominant issue. Through investigating semi-structured, in-depth interviews with immigrant professionals in Canada, the study endeavours to add to the scant literature pertaining to the process of career compromise, specifically that of immigrant skilled workers. Understanding the issues and barriers that immigrant skilled workers are confronted with and their processes of making career compromises and coping with systemic barriers will add to the thin body of literature regarding the career transition experiences and career development of immigrant skilled workers. It will also better equip career counsellors to more effectively help immigrants deal with transition barriers and enable government officials or communities to implement policies or programs to help immigrants to integrate into the local labour market.

The main research question of the study was “How do Canadian immigrant skilled workers experience and cope with their career compromise?” Secondary research questions under this broad investigation were “What are some of the key factors that influence immigrant professionals’ career decisions?” “What resources do immigrant individuals tap into to cope with their career compromise?” and “How do they cope with other transitional and compromising factors (such as acculturation) on top of coping with career compromise?”

The rest of this chapter consists of three main sections. The next section reviews the issues faced by immigrant skilled workers, which include: career compromise, career-seeking barriers, acculturation issues, effects of the barriers, and the coping strategies of immigrant individuals. The following section looks at the different career development theories that could be applied to this population to aid our understanding of their career development process. Lastly, the literature on career compromise will be reviewed and the new concept of positive career compromise will be discussed.

1.3 Issues faced by Immigrant Skilled Workers

1.3.1 Career compromise

Many immigrants, especially those who immigrate to North America under the ‘skilled workers’ category, expect to find meaningful work where they can continue to apply their skill set. They are granted immigration status based on their high qualifications and work experiences. Furthermore, they believe that North America is the land of opportunities where they will be able
to flourish and intend to pursue successful career development (Chen, 2008). However, due to many barriers that they face, immigrant individuals end up having to compromise their goals of continuing their career development and have to make career sacrifices for financial survival (Bauder, 2006; Chen, 2008).

Many immigrant skilled workers have been found to experience unemployment and underemployment (Berger, 2004; Reitz, 2001; Sinacore et al., 2009; Yakshko 2006; Yakushko et al., 2008) with their rate of underemployment being higher than native workers in Canada (Boyd & Schellenberg, 2007; Galabuzzi, 2005). For those who are employed, there are disparities between the work experience of immigrant workers and that of Canadian-born individuals.

Many immigrant professionals who are employed are underemployed and hold jobs that are physically demanding in industries where the potential for injury is high and/or hold jobs that are low in salary (Larsen, 2004; Pransky et al., 2002). In Canada, 42.1% of immigrant workers between the ages 25 to 54 were overqualified in terms of education level for their jobs while only 28.1% of Canadian-born workers were overqualified in 2008 (Statistics Canada, 2009). Foreign-trained immigrant professionals have been found to receive lower wages than Canadian-born workers (Alboim, Finnie, & Meng, 2005; Reitz, 2005), particularly those who landed in Canada within the last 10 years (Statistics Canada, 2009). Immigrants also had a lower share of union coverage; higher shares of involuntary part-time work; higher shares of temporary jobs; and lower shares of employer-sponsored pension plans and life insurance coverage than Canadian-born workers (Statistics Canada, 2009). In 2008, immigrants who landed more recently were more likely to work for smaller firms and in different occupational groups than Canadian-born individuals (Statistics Canada, 2009).

Even though the immigrant professionals’ income may eventually increase after about a year of being in the new country, it is unlikely that their occupational status and socio-economic status (SES) will increase back to or surpass their original occupational status in their country of origin (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Thomas 1992). Aycan and Berry (1996) found that well-educated Turkish immigrants who were under the independent immigration category experienced a significant decrease in income, occupational status, and SES in the first six months after they entered Canada. However, over a period of time, their income and overall status did begin to increase. In fact, those who had been in Canada for more than a year had an income that
exceeded that of what they earned prior to their migration. Unfortunately, their occupational status and SES were still well below that of what they were prior to their migration (Aycan & Berry, 1996).

1.3.2 Career-seeking barriers

The following sections discuss some common career-seeking barriers that lead to the immigrants’ compromising career transition experiences. The barriers include devaluation of credentials, language and accent barriers, cultural differences and discrimination.

1.3.2.1 Education and work experience

Individuals immigrating under the economic category are selected based on their abilities to fulfill criteria that ensure that they have high levels of education, language proficiency, and work experience (Chen, 2008; Heilbrunn et al., 2010; Sinacore et al., 2009; Yakushko et al., 2008). Therefore, immigrants in Canada often have higher levels of education than the local residents of Canada but their qualifications may not be considered transferable or equivalent to a Canadian one (Sinacore et al., 2009). However, once they have been granted immigration status, immigrant individuals’ credentials and education from their country of origin are often unrecognized in North America (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Chen, 2008; Hakak, Holzinger, & Zikic, 2010). Despite having impressive work experience from their countries of origin, immigrant skilled workers find it difficult to find employment because most employers require that their employees have Canadian work experience, which most new immigrant workers have never had (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Bauder, 2003; Nwosu, 2006; Hakak et al., 2010).

In Canada, it has been shown that the immigrant professionals’ foreign education is discounted and devalued (Boyd & Thomas, 2001; Esses, Dietz, & Bhardwaj, 2006; Hakak et al., 2010; Kustec, Thompson, & Xue, 2007; Reitz, 2005). In order to re-gain their qualification levels, immigrant individuals have to take expensive and culture-biased occupation-specific tests and/or gain retraining or re-accreditation (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Hakak et al., 2010; Sinacore et al., 2009), which leaves them with little time to dedicate to work. Some studies have shown the acquisition of local qualifications to be helpful to employment seeking (Zeng & Xie, 2004). However, there is little time left for the immigrant individuals to gain training due to the long work hours that they usually have to uphold, which makes it more difficult for them to acquire
better jobs (Ahonen et al., 2009). Even when immigrants are able to obtain local training, there remain other factors that negatively affect their career development in their new host country, such as language barriers and discrimination (Hakak et al., 2010).

### 1.3.2.2 Language and accent

Another prominent barrier pertains to language issues. Employers have been found to be hesitant to hire immigrant professionals due to the lack of proficiency in English of immigrant individuals’ (Hakak et al. 2010; Sinacore et al., 2009; Yakushko et al., 2008). Although immigrants who are granted economic immigrant status in Canada must pass the English fluency criterion, they still find themselves to be confronted with language barriers (Chen, 2008; Sinacore et al., 2009; Yakushko et al., 2008). One reason might be that while they are quite capable of reading and writing English, they lack fluency in speaking and listening in English (Chen, 2008). There are also cross-cultural differences in language whereby immigrant individuals lack the knowledge of cultural-specific uses of the language (Chen, 2008; Yakushko et al., 2008). Immigrant professionals also experience difficulty entering the labour market due to their non-Canadian accents, which causes others to perceive their English fluency to be deficient (Chen, 2008; Creese & Kambere, 2003; Hakak et al. 2010; Purkiss, Perrewé, Gillespie, Mayes, & Ferris, 2006). Although language courses are available, they do not focus on the technical language that would be useful for the immigrant individuals’ workplace (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Thomas, 1992).

Language proficiency has been taken as a good indicator of acculturation in past research (Lara, Gamboa, Kahramanian, Morales, & Bautista, 2005). Skills in both English and the immigrant individuals’ native language were found to contribute to the decrease in stress related to acculturation for Asian immigrant individuals in America (Lueck & Wilson, 2010). The loss of their native language was found to increase their experienced acculturative stress. Therefore, providing immigrant individuals with bilingual options may help them cope with and reduce their levels of acculturative stress. However, they would require a strong socio-structural support to facilitate this bilingual opportunity (Lueck & Wilson, 2010).

Not only does a lack of proficiency in English lead to employment-seeking difficulties and acculturation barriers, it may also make it difficult for immigrant individuals to access health care and other services because they cannot communicate with the service providers (Coffman &
Norton, 2010; Gee, Walsemann, & Takeuchi, 2010). Low English proficiency also makes it difficult for immigrant individuals to create social connections (Coffman & Norton, 2010), which have been found to dilute the negative effects of career transition and acculturation difficulties (Arends-Toth & van de Vijver, 2006; Blustein, 2001; Kagitcibasi, 2006; Lin, 2008; Stuart, Ward, Jose, & Narayanan, 2010) and help immigrants find employment (Hagan, 1998; Hakak et al., 2010).

1.3.2.3 Cultural differences

Cross-cultural differences in social norms between immigrant individuals’ country of origin and new host country can cause immigrants to experience anxiety (Chen, 2008; Yost & Lucas, 2002). Cross-cultural adjustment and career transition are very much interrelated with successful adaptation facilitating positive career transition experiences and successful career-seeking enabling cultural adjustment (Chen, 2008). However, immigrants tend to be unfamiliar with cultural norms of the new host country, which can lead employers to perceive immigrant skilled workers as being incompetent and therefore hinder immigrants from acquiring employment (Chen, 2008; Wang, 2002).

Cross-cultural differences in work culture, job-search and application process, and social customs add to the experienced difficulty of attaining positive career development experience (Yakushko et al., 2008). The North American work culture values multitasking and effective and efficient time management, which are not necessarily valued by all cultures. Therefore, the immigrant individuals may not possess those skills. Immigrants might have attained their jobs back in their country of origin through the help of connections through family members or friends. Therefore, they may not be familiar with the job-search and application process that is the norm in North America. The immigrant individuals also bring with them social customs from their home country, which may be very different from that of the North American culture. This may make it difficult for the immigrant workers to develop social networks that would be useful to facilitate their search for jobs or resources (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Hakak et al., 2010). For instance, Latin American immigrant professionals have reported that learning to search for jobs according to Canadian cultural norms and building professional networks in Canada to be demanding and difficult (Hakak et al., 2010).
1.3.2.4 Discrimination

Individuals from the host culture may see professional immigrants as being competition for employment and result in unfriendly or discriminatory behaviour towards the immigrant workers (Agudelo-Suarez et al., 2009; Chen, 2008; Lee & Westwood, 1996). Employers may be wary of causing resentment amongst the existing employees by hiring immigrant workers and therefore opt for hiring non-immigrant workers instead (Lee & Westwood, 1996). This factor contributes to the difficulty immigrants experience in acquiring employment.

The devaluation of the immigrant skilled workers’ foreign credentials, requirement of Canadian work experience and job-search barriers due to their accents can be seen as a subtle form of discrimination towards the immigrant individuals (Esses et al., 2006; Hakak et al., 2010). Research has shown that individuals with foreign accents are frequently seen as having lower aptitude, intelligence, and social status than individuals who speak with a local accent (Carlson & McHenry, 2006). These judgments, which may lead to differential treatment of the immigrant individuals, are based solely on accents without taking job skills into account (Creese & Kambre, 2003; Esses et al., 2006; Purkiss et al., 2006). Having Canadian work experience may often be relevant to the job; for example, having Canadian experience may indicate a cultural fit for the job or possession of knowledge that is specific and difficult to acquire (Esses et al., 2006). However, past research have also found employers with subtle prejudices to use the requirement of Canadian work experience to rationally justify the refusal to hire immigrant workers (Bauder, 2003a; Esses et al., 2006)

1.3.3 Acculturation

Due to its high immigration rate, Canada is by far one of the most multicultural countries in the world with two-thirds of its population growth resulting from immigration (Statistics Canada, 2008). Immigrant skilled workers come from all over the world and bring with them a host of different cultures. Not only do they have to deal with searching for a new career and adjusting to the company, they must at the same time deal with adapting to the new culture and integrate into society (Flannery et al., 2001; Hays, 2001; Ortega et al., 2000). This process whereby immigrants of a cultural group learn and assume the behaviours of another cultural group that they are exposed to is referred to as acculturation (Ho, 1995, p.12). According to Berry (2001, p.616), acculturation is a process that involves and results in consequences for both the dominant
cultural group as well as the minority/non-dominant group, but it has a much larger impact on the non-dominant group.

According to Berry’s (1980) acculturation model, the main acculturation strategies used by the non-dominant group are assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization (Berry, 1980; Berry, 2003). When the individuals do not wish to maintain their own cultural identity and want to adopt the new culture, they are said to be using the assimilation strategy. On the opposite spectrum, separation is when individuals wish to hold on to their original culture and avoid interacting with those belonging to the new host culture. Integration is the strategy whereby the individuals wish to maintain their original culture as well as wish to be a part of the new host culture. Lastly, marginalization is where the individuals neither wish to maintain their original culture nor do they want to interact with the new host culture. This last strategy is usually the result of a failed attempt at assimilation due to discrimination from the dominant group. Therefore, the acculturation strategies that immigrant individuals use are determined by both the newcomers as well as the dominant groups (Berry, 1974).

The experience of discrimination largely affects the adaptation process of immigrant individuals. Berry, Phinney, Sam and Vedder (2006) found that discrimination influences the way in which youth acculturate and that discrimination greatly undermines psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Increased levels of discrimination were also found to increase acculturative stress of Asian immigrant in America (Lueck & Wilson, 2010).

Canada announced its Policy of Multiculturalism in 1971 to enhance acceptance among all ethnocultural groups (Berry, 2006). It emphasizes both the maintenance of heritage cultures and identities as well as equal participation of all ethnocultural groups in the dominant society (Berry, 2006). Therefore, its goal is to achieve integration and not assimilation, separation, or marginalization of the dominant and minority groups.

Berry and Kalin (1995) and Berry, Kalin, and Taylor (1977) conducted two national surveys that investigated the attitudes that various cultural groups that constitute the Canadian population had on each other. Berry and colleagues (1977) looked at how large representative samples of Canadians evaluated English-Canadians, French-Canadians, Chinese-Canadians, and immigrants in general. Berry and Kalin (1995) assessed how comfortable Canadians were when they were around 14 ethnocultural groups. Both surveys revealed that each group held preferential
evaluations for their own groups over other groups. West and North Europeans were also viewed more positively than other groups and immigrants were viewed less positively than Canadian-born individuals of the same cultural origin. Immigrants were less accepted than residents who had already settled in Canada.

However, the national surveys revealed that there was a high endorsement of integration and low endorsement of separation, assimilation, and marginalization (Berry & Kalin, 1995; Berry et al., 1977). The members of the larger Canadian society saw cultural diversity as being a good thing and endorsed multicultural ideology as a good way for ethnocultural and immigrants individuals to relate to each other. That being said, individuals of French origin who lived in Quebec, and those with lower levels of education and income showed a lower acceptance for other groups. French Canadians who lived outside of Quebec, on the other hand, showed a higher acceptance for other groups. This might be due to the fact that French Canadians living outside of Quebec see multicultural policies and programs as supporting the maintenance of French culture and identity whereas those living inside of Quebec see it as supporting the cultural continuity of other groups (Berry, 1996; 2006). In 1999, the International Study of Attitudes Towards Immigration and Settlement (ISATIS) investigated whether background factors, such as cultural and economic security, predict attitudes of members of the larger society, including various immigrant ethnocultural groups. This study revealed that Anglophone Canadians possessed a higher sense of security in the maintenance of their culture than Francophones, whereas Francophones were more secure in their economic/employment well-being and personal safety (Berry, 2006). Therefore, when individuals are secure about their place in a pluralistic society, they tend to be more tolerant of diversity and more welcoming to immigrants.

According to Krau (1982), immigrant individuals should display openness to social contacts and acquire new social values in order to be accepted by work colleagues and the rest of the community. Therefore, successful adaptation requires social extraversion and social learning. Krau (1982) proposed a career model of immigrants consisting of career crystallization, vocational retraining, job entry and trials, establishment, and maintenance. Assuming that the immigrant skilled worker successfully reaches the stage of establishment, the stage of career maintenance can only be achieved after the immigrant individual has overcome the main difficulties in social adaptation and enculturation (Krau, 1982), which is the process by which a
person learns the requirements of the culture that he or she is in and acquires values and behaviours of that culture (Grusec & Hasting, 2007, p.547).

1.3.4 Effects of issues and barriers on immigrant skilled workers

The employment issues and barriers are stressful and can lead to poor mental health such as depression and anxiety in immigrants (Aroian & Norris, 2003; Yakushko et al., 2008). Immigrants who have trouble finding employment experience negative impact on their psychological well-being and delay in psychological, socio-cultural and economic adaptation to their new country (Aycan & Berry, 1996, Yost & Lucas, 2002). Barriers in finding employment and economic need lead the immigrant individuals to having no choice but to work under poor conditions (Ahonen et al., 2009). Working in poor work environments then lead to poor health and injuries (Azaroff, Levenstein, & Wegman, 2004; Malievskaya, Rosenberg, & Markowitz, 2004). Underemployment and unemployment also lead to loss of SES, which can have a negative effect on the immigrant individuals’ self-concept (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Sinacore et al., 2009).

An individual’s career is a form of self-identity (Chen, 2008). However, for many immigrants, they experience a loss of their vocational identity during their immigration transition due to the career-seeking barriers (Yost & Lucas, 2002). This loss of career identity results in a loss of meaning and selfhood in life, which leads to negative psychological consequences such as anger, worthlessness, hopelessness if they do not have the internal or external resources to cope (Chen, 2008). A decrease in occupational status and SES also leads to dissatisfaction with their lives and decreases the likelihood of immigrant professionals seeing themselves as being accomplished (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Sinacore et al., 2009). Their self-concept is negatively impacted by their perceived cognitive dissonance over their past and present status incongruence (Krau, 1982). Initial strategies used to cope with the cognitive dissonance may include attempts at adjusting the self-image by methods such as decreasing the self-image to suit their decreased status. However, a change in self-image may not be enough to cope with the existing career developmental issues (Krau, 1982).

The longer the period of unemployment, the more likely the immigrant workers experience stress, negative self-concept, alienation from society and difficulty adapting (Sinacore et al., 2009; Yakushko et al., 2008). Acquiring employment decreases feelings of isolation and facilitates networking and friendship building, which would facilitate learning of their new host
culture and English skill building (Yakushko et al., 2008). However, the immigrant population is faced with many barriers to finding successful work opportunities.

Of the immigrant professionals who managed to acquire employment, many of them have been found to experience discrimination at the workplace (Agudelo-Suarez et al., 2009; Lee & Westwood, 1996). Discrimination experienced by immigrant individuals at their workplaces, as characterized by experienced racism, mistreatment, dangerous working conditions, has been found to adversely affect their health (Agudelo-Suarez et al., 2009). Experienced ethnic discrimination in the form of negative treatment, prejudice, xenophobia (i.e. when people act as if they are afraid of immigrant individuals), harassment, and threats lead to higher levels of stress (Lueck & Wilson, 2010) and depression (Finch, Hummer, Kolody, & Vega, 2001).

Given the many challenges that immigrant skilled workers are confronted with in their career transition experiences, it is imperative for their overall well-being to develop skills to nurture a new career in their new country. It would be helpful to investigate immigrant skilled workers’ career transition experiences in order to help career counsellors or social workers more effectively aid immigrant professionals with their career transitions.

1.3.5 Coping strategies

Given the many barriers that immigrants have to face in their career and cultural transitions as well as the negative impact that these stressors can have on immigrant individuals, they must tap into their personal resources to cope. Immigrants have found to utilize a range of coping strategies in order to deal with these difficulties.

In the face of the many difficulties of their immigration transition experiences, immigrant individuals’ motivation and resilience have been found to facilitate success in their integration into the labour market of their new host country (Boneva & Frieze, 2001). This is consistent with Chen’s (1997) suggestion that perseverance is one of the key characteristics required to cope with career difficulties in an effective manner. Immigrant individuals should possess the will to continue trying in the face of difficulty by maintaining a positive attitude towards uncertainty and being prepared for difficulties, thereby being less affected by the stressful events. This ability to remain positive about uncertainty refers to the next coping strategy, flexibility.
The ability to be flexible and open in thinking about one’s career is another key characteristic that enables individuals to think of alternatives to more effectively cope with the stressful situation (Chen, 1997). In an ideal world, everyone would be able to attain his or her career goals. However, that is often not the case and more often than not reality falls short of what individuals hope for and expect their career development to be. Being able to perceive a compromising career situation in a more flexible manner would help lessen the negative thoughts being attached to the experience and thereby enhance the ability to think of alternatives to cope (Chen, 1997). Immigrant individuals’ existing coping strategies may not be sufficient for their new circumstances and they have to be flexible enough to change their coping strategies and develop new coping behaviours in order to prevent long-term stress and negative impact on their physical and mental health (Schmitz, 2001).

Previous studies have shown that having a high ability to tolerate ambiguity, in other words perceive uncertain or unfamiliar situations as challenging and interesting instead of stressful, enhances successful adaptation and prevent identity conflict of immigrant individuals (Leong & Ward, 2000; Yakhnich & Ben-Zur, 2008). Cognitive flexibility, such as open-mindedness and willingness to consider new and unconventional ideas, has also been shown to prevent distress levels by facilitating awareness of alternatives in any given situation and the willingness to be flexible and adapt (Yakhnich & Ben-Zur, 2008). Tolerance of ambiguity and cognitive flexibility haven been found to facilitate action-oriented coping and a sense of control in immigrant individuals (Yakhnich & Ben-Zur, 2008), whereas low ambiguity tolerance and non-flexible individuals have been found to be less receptive to cross-cultural adaptation (Leong & Ward, 2000; Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000).

Immigrants have also been found to use cognitive strategies to cope with the transition barriers. They have been found to cope with transition stress by re-framing, in other words by thinking about themselves and the situation differently in order to maintain a positive self-concept (Ahmad et al., 2004; Farley, Galves, Dickinson, & Diaz-Perez, 2005; Khawaja, White, Schweitzer, & Greenslade, 2008; Kosic, 2004; Kosic & Triandafyllidou, 2003). Immigrant individuals may also avoid thinking about the stressful situation in order to avoid mental distress (Acharya & Northcott, 2007; Goodman, 2004) or minimizes their experienced discrimination to avoid facing social rejection (Goldman, Gutek, Stein, & Lewis, 2006; Hakak et al., 2010).
Focusing on the future is another cognitive coping strategy that immigrants have been found to use in order to cope with their transition barriers (Goodman, 2004; Khawaja et al., 2008).

Another coping strategy found to help immigrants deal with the immigration barriers is action-taking (Gardner, 2002). Their search activity, such as their active, adaptive, and goal-oriented behaviours, and positive attitudes are important characteristics that help them cope with career transition difficulties. This is consistent with Chen’s (1997) proposed concept of projectivity, the idea of tapping into one’s human agency and undergoing constructive career planning and taking action, as being one of the main factors to help individuals cope with career difficulties. The emphasis is on the fact that individuals are not passive entities but should in fact take an active role in working towards career goals.

Social support has been shown to be another important source of coping whereby immigrant individuals receive emotional and instrumental to help cope with the stressful immigration transition (Blustein, 2001). Networking with people of the same country of origin has been shown to help immigrants find employment (Hagan, 1998; Hakak et al., 2010) and family relationships can help to dilute the negative impacts of acculturative stress (Arends-Toth & van de Vijver, 2006; Kagitcibasi, 2006; Lin, 2008; Stuart et al.; 2010) and general stress of immigration (Hovey, 2000). Those who do not immigrate with family have been found to socialize in order to buffer the loneliness due to the loss of familiar social ties (Ahmad et al., 2004).

### 1.4 Theories applied to career development of Immigrant Skilled Workers

The following addresses two major career development theories, as well as an adult career transition model, which are appropriate and applicable to the immigrant skilled worker population. They are mentioned here to help us understand the career development experienced by immigrant skilled workers.

#### 1.4.1 Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) was developed by Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994) and is based on Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory whereby the interaction of the individual’s environment, memories, beliefs, preferences, self-perceptions, and behaviour are taken into
account (Sharf, 2010). According to SCCT, career development is based on an individual’s experiences between the environment and personal factors (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000; Yakushko et al., 2008). Examples of personal factors are gender, race/ethnicity, disability/health status, and ability (Lent et al., 2000; Yakushko et al., 2008). The environmental factors are referred to as the contextual factors in SCCT and there are two types – background contextual factors and proximal influences (Lent et al., 2000; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002; Sharf 2010). Background factors are environmental factors that the individual cannot control such as availability of opportunities to develop learning experiences and experiences that lead to learned gender roles and academic skills (Sharf 2010; Yakushko et al., 2008). Proximal influences are the direct factors that affect the individual’s academic and career choices, such as available role models and opportunities in a desired field (Sharf, 2010).

The three key concepts of SCCT are the individual’s self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals. They are related to each other and affect each other in various ways (Sharf, 2010). Self-efficacy, a concept coined by Bandura (1989), is an individual’s beliefs about his/her abilities, which change according to the context of the situation. Self-efficacy affects the development of interests, which in turn affects his/her educational and career goals. Outcome expectation is the individual’s estimate of what the probability of a positive or negative outcome will be which also affects an individual’s interests and goals. Depending on the situation, self-efficacy may be more influential than outcome expectation or vice versa. An individual’s self-efficacy and outcome expectation leads to interests of certain things. An individual is more likely to develop an interest for an activity that he/she believes to have a high ability in and/or will lead him/her to success. An individual’s interests then leads to choices of certain goals that are related to their interests. Personal goals then organize an individual’s behaviour to guide their actions towards achieving those goals. These actions then lead to improvement in performance of the activities that are related to the goals. The outcome of the individual’s performance then leads to learning experiences, which loops back to affect his/her self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Personal factors or personal inputs and background contextual factors also affect self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Yakushko et al., 2008).

Immigrant skilled workers are affected by and have to deal with influences and contexts of their country of origin as well as that of their new country of residence, both of which are addressed by the concept of background contextual factors and proximal influences. The career
development and transition of recent immigrants are greatly influenced by their personal factors (including adaptability, resiliency, and values), which determine their ability to cope with the migration barriers and environmental factors, such as the circumstances of their relocation and influences from their country of origin. SCCT also addresses their unrealistic career expectations due to migration barriers as well as the negative effects on their self-efficacy, which would lead to a shift in interests and goals.

The migration barriers that immigrants face can be seen as the contextual factors that affect their self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Yakushko et al., 2008). Background contextual factors that may affect their career development include whether or not there is a culturally similar immigrant community available to help the immigrants transition and adapt to their new environment. Their familial, social, educational and economic factors from their country of origin are also background contextual factors that affect their new career development in their new country of residence. Other background contextual factors that influence the immigrant professionals’ career development include their sets of unwritten rules of social engagement, behaviours, perceptions and thoughts derived from their background and origins (Bauder, 2006; Bourdieu, 1977). These practices and ideologies exist within particular social and political settings and are changeable as the context changes. The rules and values from their country of origin also determine which jobs are considered prestigious and which are stigmatized (Bauder, 2006; Bourdieu, 1977). Immigrant and employment counselors in Canada sometimes believe that immigrants from different countries pursue different goals when seeking employment (Bauder, 2006). For example, immigrant individuals from South Asia are sometimes seen to pursue social status through their employment whereas immigrant individuals from Yugoslavia are seen to pursue work that facilitates a leisure life-style (Bauder, 2003b). However, the longer the immigrant professionals remain in their new country of residence, the more likely it is that they will begin to possess work goals and attitudes similar to those of the non-immigrant individuals.

A pertinent proximal influence that affects immigrants’ career development is oppression and discrimination (Yahushko et al., 2008). Discrimination is a barrier that many immigrants have to face, which negatively affects the development of their interests, skills and outcome experiences. This in turn decreases self-efficacy and outcome expectations, which hinders their ability to succeed in their career development.
The individual’s ability to cope with the immigration stressors can be seen as the personal inputs. Such abilities include cognitive flexibility, optimism and coping styles. According to Yahushko and colleagues (2008), an important personal factor that affects their transition is the ability to acculturate with the new host culture. The immigrants’ ability to change their attitudes, values and behaviours to adapt to those of the new culture facilitates successful transition to the new country and therefore assists in positive career development. For example, being able to adapt to the English language allows for job success. In fact, it also affects the individual’s psychological well-being. According to Miller and Chandler (2002) and Miller and colleagues (2006) immigrant women from former Soviet Union who were not acculturated and not proficient in English were found to suffer from higher levels of depression. Another form of acculturation pertains to culture specific skills such as multitasking, which is a skill valued by the North American culture (Yahushko, 2008). According to Yakushko and colleagues (2008), bicultural acculturation, whereby immigrants values both their home culture as well as the culture of their new host country, best facilitates successful career development – as opposed to only valuing the culture of one or the other.

Personal inputs and contextual factors both in turn affect the immigrants’ self-efficacy and outcome expectations.

1.4.2 Super’s Life-Span Life-Space Theory

In 1942, Super completed a vocational guidance textbook, *The Dynamics of Vocational Adjustment*, where he focused on the social context and personal needs of clients that are making career choices. He began developing theoretical propositions of career development in 1953 and in 1980, Super created the life-span, life-space theory. It focuses on the social context and personal needs of the individual undergoing career choice (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). He saw career choice as a developmental process and not a point-on-time event. Super’s theory emphasizes continuity in human development and the process of choice, entry, adjustment, and transition to new career choice over a whole life cycle.

Individuals are conceived as existing in two primary dimensions called life-space and life-span (Super et al., 1996). Life-space denotes the social positions occupied and roles that people play throughout their lives – child, student, leisure, citizen, worker, spouse, homemaker, parent, and pensioner. The importance that an individual places on each role depends on which point that
individual is in his or her life (Nevill & Super, 1986). For example, roles of leisure, student, and child are important in childhood whereas roles of citizen, and worker gain more importance in adolescence. Therefore, individuals differ in the importance that they assign to work according to the stage of life that they are at (Super, 1990).

Not only does the importance of life role change throughout an individual’s life, the nature in which they are involved in each roles changes too (Nevill & Super, 1986). Involvement of the life-role depends on an individual’s participation, commitment, knowledge, and value expectations. Participation involves taking action within a role. For example, learning about a role, improving skills pertaining to a role, or even just talking to people or reading about an activity related to the role. Commitment is the desire to be active or involved in a role, which may include future planning about a role. Knowledge involves gathering information about a role either by experiencing it or by observing it. Whether or not a role can fulfill an individual’s values refers to the value expectations of a role.

Life-span is the stages of career development that an individual goes through throughout his or her life. The individual begins with growth, whereby he or she becomes concerned about the future and works towards doing well in school, developing good work habits and attitudes, and increasing control over his or her own life. The next stage an individual undergoes is exploration. Here, he or she crystallizes, specifies, and implements his or her career choice. After which the individual goes through establishment, where he or she tries to stabilize, consolidate, and advance in an occupational position. If the individual is happy with the current occupation and would like to continue with that endeavour, he or she will enter the stage of maintenance. Here, the individual will try to hold on to what he or she has achieved, gain new skills and knowledge and find innovative means of performing. On the other hand, if the individual decides to change occupation, he or she will re-cycle through the first few stages starting with exploration. Disengagement is the final stage whereby the individual undergoes deceleration, retirement preparations, and retirement. The life-span describes the process in which the individual chooses and adjusts to the different roles in the life-space.

Life-span and life-space theory conceptualizes career choice as the implementation of one’s self-concept (Super et al., 1996). Career self-concept is the subjective view of one’s own abilities, interests, values and choices. It helps the individual understand his or her career experiences. As
an individual’s self-concept and environment changes, so too does the role of the life-span change as does the stage of the life-space change in order to accommodate a match between the individual’s self-concept and his or her career. A good match between the individual’s traits and those required of him or her in the environment predicts job success.

Super’s concept of re-cycling is particularly relevant to the career development experience of immigrant skilled workers. Super recognizes that not everyone follows his proposed life stages in the same order (Sharf, 2010). He acknowledges that most individuals will reassess their careers at certain points of their lives and undergo recycling and re-enter the exploration stage. Super’s life-span and life-space theory sheds light on how immigrant individuals must essentially start from the very beginning of their career development process and relinquish their pre-migration accomplishments.

Immigrants who leave their countries of origin leave behind their established careers in hopes of creating better lives for themselves using the skills that they gained from their country of origin. Therefore, they are choosing to re-cycle through the stages in order to hopefully find better opportunities to establish themselves in. However, as mentioned previously, immigrant skilled workers are faced with career development barriers that prevent them from attaining the occupations that they desire. For example, it is usually required of the individuals seeking employment to have some local work experience, which immigrant individuals not surprisingly do not possess (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Esses et al., 2006). Also, employers often discount and devalue their foreign training and credentials (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Boyd & Thomas, 2001; Hakak et al., 2010, Kustec et al., 2007; Reitz, 2005). Therefore, the immigrant individuals most likely cannot work in the same occupation as they had prior to their migration and have to acquire retraining or re-accreditation (Hakak et al., 2010). This means that immigrant individuals may in fact have to start from the early stage of growth.

Krau (1982) also recognized this reverting of career development in the immigrant population and developed a career model of immigrants based on Super, Crites, Hummel, Moser, Overstreet, and Warnath’s (1980) described unstable career pattern and Lyon’s (1965) concept of serial careers. Krau’s (1982) proposed immigrant career model consisted of the following stages: crystallization, vocational retraining, job entry and trial, establishment, and maintenance. Krau noted that the immigrant individuals would initially be confronted with the problem of cognitive
dissonance over their past and present status incongruence. In order to deal with this incongruence, they can either adjust their self-image or deny the existence of the incongruence (Krau, 1982). Krau looked at 89 new immigrants from U.S.S.R. and Rumania who participated in a vocational training program for accountants with a mean age of 32.8 and had resided in their new country for an average of 23.4 months. In order to study the transition to the maintenance stage, he also collected data from another 60 immigrants who had stayed in the country for 5.10 years. Krau (1982) found evidence to support his career model of immigrant individuals. The study provided support for the hypothesis that the immigrant individuals repeat career stages that they had already gone through prior to their migration at an accelerated pace.

1.4.3 Hopson and Adam’s Model of Adult Transitions

Another model that more explicitly addresses career transitions experienced by adults is Hopson and Adam’s (Hopson & Adams, 1977; Hopson, 1981) model of adult transitions. In this model, Hopson and Adam describe seven stages that the individual goes through when he or she experiences career transition (Sharf, 2010). The authors propose the mood and time related to each stage.

The first stage that the individual goes through is immobilization. Here, the individual will experience shock from the loss of their previous job. He or she will either feel depressed or excited depending on the nature of transition. At this initial stage, the individual will feel overwhelmed and unable to respond to the situation or make plans. This stage can last from a few moments up to a few months depending on the nature of the transition and the individual’s psychological makeup. Next, the individual will move into the stage of minimization where he or she tries to make the change appear smaller than it is. The individual might deny that the change exists or that the change matters at all to bring his or her mood back close to that prior to the change. In the third stage, the individual will experience self-doubt due to the uncertainty of what is going to happen in the future. The individual also commonly experience anxiety, sadness and anger due to the uncertainty. The individual then enters the stage of letting go where he or she starts to let go of the anger, tension or frustration and accepts what is happening. This is when the individual begins to start looking toward the future. The fifth stage the individual goes through is the testing out stage. At this stage, the individual feels confident that they can deal with the situation and have plans for how to network and move forward. The individual may also
give advice to others that are in the same situation. In the next stage, the individual undergoes *search for meaning* where he or she tries to understand how and why events are different. The individual will try to understand the feelings of others as well as those of his or her own, such as the individual’s own interests, abilities and values. The final stage the individual experiences is *internalization*. Throughout the prior stages of transition, the individual has developed new coping skills, evolved emotionally, spiritually or cognitively. Therefore, in this final stage, the individual is said to change his or her values and lifestyle as a result of the experience.

Like Super’s life-span and life-space theory, Hopson and Adams’ model of adult transition also helps to explain the stages of career transition experienced by immigrant individuals. However, Hopson and Adams’ model focuses predominantly on the related emotions and cognitions associated to each stage that the individuals experience. This is a very useful tool that can help us understand the emotional, psychological and cognitive experiences faced by immigrant skilled workers throughout the transitional period.

Career barriers faced by immigrant individuals result in experienced despair in their initial phase of career transition. Immigration career stress result in experienced poor mental health, delay in adaptation and a diminished sense of self (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Yakushko et al., 2008). Then, according to Hopson and Adams’s model, they will try to convince themselves that the change is not as severe as they thought it was through different cognitive means. They will then go through a period of doubting that they will be able to find their desired occupation in their new country of residence. Next, they will try to let go of the negative thoughts by accepting the situation they are in. Then they will begin to plan out their next steps in order to move forward in developing their new careers. The immigrant professionals will then attempt to understand why they experienced difficulties in their career transition and come to realize that there are many systematic career barriers specific to the immigrant population. Finally, the immigrants will hopefully have developed coping mechanisms to deal with the immigrant career barriers and adapted to their new environment and new career identities.

### 1.5 Career Compromise and Immigrant Skilled Workers

Currently, there are a scarce number of studies that have investigated the notion of compromise in immigrant populations. However, some studies have looked at how compromise affects
individuals, the different ways of making compromise and how that changes the affects on the compromiser.

Gati (1993) proposed three ways of framing career compromise – compromise in terms of occupational alternatives; compromise in terms of the relative importance of aspects; and compromise in terms of within-aspect preferences (Gati, Houminer, & Aviram, 1998). Compromising in terms of alternatives is a global evaluation and global compromises associated with each alternative and foregoing one alternative for another. The framework of compromising in terms of relative importance of aspects is the re-evaluation of the importance of the aspects of the options. Often this means the decreasing of the importance of specific aspects so that they don’t have as much of an impact on career decision (e.g. deciding that having more responsibility in a job is more important than working outdoors, even though the individual prefers having both aspects). Lastly, compromise in terms of within-aspect preferences is where individuals consider additional levels of relevant aspects as acceptable because optimal levels of all aspects are usually impossible (e.g. agreeing to work mostly outdoors when an individual initially regarded working outdoors all the time as optimal).

Gati, Houminer and Aviram (1998) found that the perceived degree of compromise and the difficulty in career decision making are greater when the compromise is framed in terms of alternatives than when framed either in terms of importance of aspects or within-aspect preferences.

Other research has looked more specifically at the process of career development in immigrants, which proves to be a compromising process. For instance, Bauder (2006) found that South Asian and Chinese immigrants in the Greater Vancouver area who experienced career barriers changed their career value from a career oriented one to one of economic survival. New immigrants bring with them a set of unwritten rules of social engagement and behaviour, as well as ideologies and values from their country of origin. However, they change their attitudes about their careers depending on the available opportunities and their affluence level in their new country of residence (Bauder, 2006; Bourdieu, 1977).

Unfortunately, studies have also shown that career compromise can have negative affects on individuals. Tsaousides and Jome (2008) found that, among college students, as the degree of compromise increased, the level of negative affect increased and the levels of positive affect and
work-related satisfaction decreased. Other studies have found self-reported job and life dissatisfaction, depression, difficulties in adjustment and negative effects on psychological well-being as a result of career compromise (Carr, 1997; Hesketh & McLachlan, 1991).

SCCT (Lent et al., 1994) describes the career migration barriers as contextual factors that lead to a negative learning experience which in turn negatively affect immigrant individuals’ self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Yakushko et al., 2008). A decreased sense of self-efficacy and outcome expectations would invariably lead to a compromise in the immigrant individuals’ career goals. Super and colleagues (1996) and Krau’s (1982) model tap into the need for immigrant individuals to change their initial career goals, relinquish their credentials and work experience and start re-building their careers from an earlier career development stage. Hopson and Adam’s (Hopson & Adams, 1977; Hopson, 1981) model describes the process of losing a job, which leads to self-doubt, and having to accept reality and presumably making adjustments to this new reality. The career models help to describe how immigrant individuals unfortunately cannot attain their ideal career aspirations due to career barriers and have to make compromises during the process of career development.

The theories and models allude to the career compromise that immigrant skilled workers must make. They help describe the issue of cognitive dissonance over their past and present career status. Some immigrant individuals may chose to adjust their self-image in order to experience status congruence while others may choose to deny the existing incongruence (Krau, 1982). In order to cope with the need to compromise by perhaps retraining, the individuals will have to develop a positive general attitude toward work and emotionally accept the new occupation.

However, none of these theories explicitly address the phenomenon of career compromise. There is yet to be a model that addresses the process of compromise that immigrant individuals must undergo due to immigration specific career barriers. There has only been one major theory developed to explicitly addressed career compromise, which was Gottfredson’s theory of circumscription and compromise (Gottfredson, 1981, 1996).

1.5.1 Gottfredson’s theory of Circumscription and Compromise

Gottfredson’s first attempt at conceptualizing her career development theory appeared in her 1981 monograph titled *Circumscription and Compromise: A Developmental Theory of*
Occupational Aspirations (Gottfredson, 1981). Much like Super’s theory, Gottfredson’s theory is based on many developmental concepts and research. Similar to Holland’s theory and theory of work adjustment, Gottfredson’s theory conceptualizes career satisfaction as a good match between the person’s traits and the environment. In other words, Gottfredson’s theory is a combination of trait and factory theories and developmental theories (Gottfredson, 1981; Gottfredson, 1996). It sees career choice as a developmental process beginning from childhood and that occupational aspirations reflect an individual’s self-concept. Career choice satisfaction depends on how well the career choice fits with the individual’s self-concept. However it differs from other major vocational theories developed in that it focuses on how the individual tries to place himself or herself in the broader social order through career choice first and use career choice to implement a psychological-self second (Gottfredson, 1996). Therefore, the theory focuses on social aspects of the self (gender, social class, intelligence) rather than personal elements (values, personality, plans for family) as those personal influences are bounded by efforts to uphold social identities.

According to Gottfredson (1981), the development of our vocational self-concepts is related to our childhood development. The main elements that are relevant to the development of our vocational self-concepts are gender, social class background, intelligence, and vocational interests. Gottfredson used other developmental theories to develop her stages of vocational development. For instance, the stages were adapted from Van den Daele’s (1968) description of cognitive development and Kohlberg’s (1966) cognitive-developmental analysis of children’s sex-role concepts and attitudes.

The first stage of development, orientation to size and power, occurs around ages 3 to 5. Here, children learn the concept of being an adult. Next they go through sex role orientation (from ages 6 to 8), where their gender roles are consolidated. Then at ages 9 to 13, they enter the stage of orientation to social valuation. They become more sensitive to social evaluations and their self-concepts of social class and ability start to determine their social behaviour and expectations. At age 14, they enter the last stage of orientation to the internal, unique self where the adolescents become more in tune with their internal feelings and unique abilities. In essence, children base their self-concepts from concrete observable things to more and more abstract and internal concepts.
The principles of circumscription are based on these stages of development. With each stage of development, the individual adds another criterion by which to evaluate the compatibility of different jobs. As the individual becomes more and more developed in his or her self-concept, their job alternatives become more and more circumscribed to fit their self-concept. The first level of circumscription is sex-type where all the occupations that are deemed inappropriate for the individual’s gender are eliminated. Next, jobs with prestige levels that are inconsistent with the individual’s social class are eliminated. At the same time, jobs that are too far above their conceived general ability are also eliminated. Lastly, adolescents eliminate jobs that are not in line with their interests, capacities and values.

The second part of Gottfredson’s (1981) theory deals with career compromise. Compromise is the process of adjusting one’s goals and aspirations to adapt to the external reality (Chen, 2004). Gottfredson was well aware that people might not be able to find jobs that fulfill their goals for job prestige, sex-type, and field of interest all at the same time. Since all the jobs that people want are sometimes very different from the ones that are available to them, they must compromise their career aspirations. Gottfredson’s theory of compromise was mostly speculative because there was little research done on these issues despite its acknowledged importance. It proposes that when individuals have to compromise their career goals, they will first sacrifice their interests (i.e. field of work) before sacrificing prestige or appropriate sex-type. Sex-type is the most prioritized and least likely to be sacrificed. This is related to the idea that sex roles is one of the first developmental stages and therefore it becomes one of the most fundamental self-concepts, which is why the individual will least likely to compromise that aspect of his or her self-concept. Thus, Gottfredson’s stages of compromise are parallel to the developmental stages of self-concept and stages of circumscription.

Gottfredson was commended for integrating the developmental and decision-making aspects of vocational behaviour; including nonpsychological and psychological factors; defining principles of interaction between development and choice and nonpsychological and psychological factors; providing an explicit account of career compromise; and taking in account much of the existing literature (Pryor, 1985).

Gottfredson’s theory of compromise stimulated research from mid 1980s to the early 1990s (Blanchard & Lichtenberg, 2003; Gottfredson, 1996). Although the studies provided support for
the importance of sex-type, prestige and interests, they did not support her proposed order of importance. For instance, Taylor and Pryor (Pryor & Taylor, 1986, 1989; Taylor & Pryor, 1985) found some evidence showing the idea that interests had the highest priority as well as some evidence suggesting that prestige was the most important factor. They also found that sex-type, prestige, and interests are interrelated and difficult to investigate independently. Holt (1989) examined preference for prestige and interests in engineering students and social work students. The engineering students were found to prefer high-status jobs regardless of interests and the social work students preferred jobs that fulfilled their interests regardless of job prestige levels. Leung and Plake (Leung, 1993; Leung & Plake, 1990) examined sex-type and prestige and found that prestige was more preferred over sex-type, especially for women who were willing to consider non-traditional occupations. Hesketh, Durant, and Pryor (1990) found evidence in the opposite order of that proposed by Gottfredson. They found that interests were least likely to be compromise, followed by prestige, and lastly sex-type. Consistent with Taylor and Pryor’s finding, Hesketh and colleagues (1990) proposed that an individual’s interests include consideration of prestige and sex-type, thus explaining the top preference in interests.

1.5.2 Modification of Gottfredson’s theory

In light of the empirical findings of her theory, Gottfredson modified her theory of compromise in attempt to clarify and reconceptualize the compromise process (Blanchard & Lichtenberg, 2003; Gottfredson, 1996). She incorporated the idea of different levels of compromise having different affects on the priority of sex-type, prestige and interests. A minor compromise involves choosing among acceptable job options whereas a major compromise involves choosing among unacceptable options and moderate compromise lies somewhere in between the two. According to this modified theory, individuals going through minor compromise will prioritize interests, then prestige and lastly sex-type being least important. Those who are in a moderately compromising situation will choose occupations that first satisfy their preferred prestige level, followed by interests, then sex-type. Finally, those who experience a highly compromising situation will choose occupations that first satisfy their sex-type, followed by prestige, then interests.

Despite Gottfredson’s attempt at creating a more accurate theory of career compromise, recent research shows that there remains room for improvement in this modified version. For example,
Blanchard and Lichtenberg (2003) tested 119 university students. They first simulated the process of circumscription by asking the students to categorize occupations as acceptable, unacceptable or uncertain (if they were undecided on whether the occupation was acceptable or unacceptable). Afterwards, the research participants were randomly placed into low, moderate or high levels of compromise. Those in the low compromise group had to rank occupations within their chosen acceptable career options. Those in the moderate compromise group ranked occupations that they categorized as uncertain. Lastly, those in the high compromise group ranked occupations that they categorized as unacceptable.

Blanchard and Lichtenberg (2003) found that for the low compromise situation, women followed the hypothesized pattern whereas men did not rate the three variables significantly differently. Blanchard and Lichtenberg suggested that this might be because interests and prestige may share much variance for men that these two dimensions cannot be distinguished. They also found that in both the moderate compromise and high compromise conditions, contrary to the hypothesized ordering of the three variables, prestige and sex-type were equally important and both were prioritized over interests. Blanchard and Lichtenberg suggest that Gottfredson may have underestimated the impact of prestige.

It seems that the preferential ordering of the three variables in the career compromise theory remains inconclusive. Neither of the hypothesized orders of the variables in Gottfredson’s 1981 monograph nor her 1996 modified version was supported. The empirical findings suggest that different people seem to prioritize different variables differently. For instance, the discrepancy between Gottfredson’s (1981) first proposed order of preference of the three variables and the empirical evidence that showed priority of prestige over sex-type in women who considered non-traditional work shows that her theory does not apply to those who do not fall into that traditional mind-set. Furthermore, the variables seem to be interconnected and therefore cannot be used as separate categories of priority as suggested by Taylor and Pryor, and Hesketh and colleagues (Prior & Taylor, 1986, 1989; Taylor & Pryor, 1985; Hesketh et al., 1990). Even after Gottfredson attempted to refine her theory of compromise in 1996, Blanchard and Lichtenberg (2003) showed that this ordering of variables still does not have predictive value.

The evidence suggests that Gottfredson’s ordering of sex-type, prestige, and interests is inconclusive. It also suggests that her quantification and categorization technique may not be a
suitable method to describe all individuals’ career compromise process. Further research needs to be done on Gottfredson’s theory of compromise. It would also be valuable to further investigate the differences between cultures and genders. Despite its flaws, Gottfredson’s theory of compromise is cited in literature reviews and used as a basis for many research in career development (Dodson & Borders, 2006; Packard & Babineau, 2009; Tsaousides & Jome, 2008, etc.). Gottfredson’s theory is still listed as one of the biggest contributions to the literature of women’s career development, offering a theory that addresses the socially constructed barriers of women’s career development, illustrating the existence of inequality between men and women (Coogan & Chen, 2007). It offers a theory for career researchers, scholars, practitioners, and women to understand the intricacy of women’s psychological needs and experiences in their career development (Coogan & Chen, 2007). This indicates that the field of career development is still very much in need of a more suitable theory of career compromise.

1.5.3 Positive Career Compromise

Compromise is often thought of as a passive and reactive process. This sense of losing control would most likely cause one’s self-efficacy to decrease. However, making career compromises does not have to be related to feelings of regret or loss and can instead be a healthy and positive experience (Packard & Babineau, 2009). In fact, in 2005, 89.4% of immigrant skilled workers in Canada were found to be satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs (Statistics Canada, 2009) despite the many systemic career barriers.

Individuals have the ability to initiate a compromise and thereby have more control over the process and outcome. This control-taking mind set also facilitates the individual’s ability to make negotiations of conditions of their compromise (Chen, 2004). Chen (2004) proposed the concept of helping individuals gain the ability to exercise more control over a reality that is often beyond human control by helping them gain coping skills and insights in the act of compromise, which he called positive compromise. In order to achieve positive compromise, an individual has to possess two key qualities, namely, human agency and open-mindedness.

1.5.3.1 Human Agency

Human agency is a concept coined by Bandura (1977, 1986) in his social cognitive theory. Bandura (2001) defined human agency as an individual’s ability and potential to exercise some
control over his or her life through foresight, motivation, affect, action-taking, self-awareness, meaning, and life purpose (Chen, 2006). Several career development theories that are grounded in social constructivism, such as SCCT, explain and use the construct of human agency (Chen, 2006).

Self-efficacy, outcome expectations and personal goals are the key components of SCCT (Lent et al., 2002). Self-efficacy expectations are people’s beliefs about their abilities (Bandura, 1989). According to SCCT, self-efficacy is the core foundation that allows people to exercise human agency (Chen, 2006). The building of self-efficacy is vital and facilitates the broadening of career options considered (Packard & Babineau, 2009). Adults may experience increase in self-efficacy when attaining an entry-level job or completing a certificate within a field of interest. Especially since the immigrant individuals have to face the many challenging systematic career development barriers, accomplishing such tasks as acquiring any job or credential would give them a sense of accomplishment. Acquiring a sense of achievement would increase the immigrant workers’ beliefs about their capabilities and therefore provide them with the motivation and intension to pursue their career goals.

SCCT elaborates on the interaction between human agency and the other key factors, such as outcome expectations, personal goals, and self-efficacy, thereby broadening the scope of human agency. It shows that human agency not only affects an individual’s career development, but human agency also impacts other interconnected factors such as interest development, attitudes and values etc. (Chen, 2006). According to Chen (2006), This notion of human agency is parallel to the one conceptualized by Bandura (2001). Human agency reflects self-efficacy and encompasses the integration of self-efficacy and important constructs of human intentional action such as, intrapersonal, interpersonal, contextual, and environmental factors in the individual’s life.

In the context of career development, human agency refers to the combinations of an individual’s intention and action that leads to making things happen (Chen, 2006; Cochran, 1997; Cochran & Laub, 1994). The emphasis is on, not only possessing the will to do something, but also on concrete action-taking (Chen, 2004). Intention guides action, while action materializes the intention (Chen, 2006). Neither one of these constructs alone suffice to initiate human agentic functioning. Individuals who possess human agency will have the intention to try their best and
take action in doing so even in the pursuit of a compromised career outcome. Possessing the motivation and the ability to take concrete action in compromising situations would allow individuals to exercise control over their compromising situation and facilitate a positive career outcome in the long run. Without the intention or ability to take any action in a compromising situation would not lead to any change in the individuals’ circumstances and it would not give them any sense of self-efficacy or any sense of control over their circumstances.

1.5.3.2 Open-mindedness

There may be gaps between what one intends to do and what one can do and situations surrounding an action plan may change. Therefore, intentions and action plans may need to be constructed and reconstructed (Chen, 2006). Having an open mind is essential for human agency to thrive. Open-mindedness is the concept of having an open attitude and maintaining the flexibility to think bigger and wider (Chen, 2004). Space for change in intention and action allows for more options to be considered and for motivation for further action to be enhanced (Chen, 2006). In other words, when an individual is more flexible and change-oriented, he or she will become more readily adaptable to changes and be able to create optimal changes to a compromising situation (Chen, 2004).

Without the ability to be open-minded in a compromising situation, individuals may fail to be able to see the different ways that they can deal with the situation in order to make the most out of it. Therefore, they may be unable to cope with the compromise and this may lead to negative impact on their mental health.

In order for individuals to be able to have a positive compromise experience, they must undergo proactive preparation, which is the combination of human agency and open-mindedness (Chen, 2004). In order to make the best out of a compromising career situation, individuals must possess the open-mindedness to be able to envision creative ways to best deal with the compromise (i.e. open-mindedness). At the same time, individuals must take action in developing the skills to carry out these optimal ways to deal with the compromise (i.e. human agency). The skills may include the ability to assess and weigh the benefits and disadvantages involved in the compromise, foreseeing and managing possible risks, and executing an effective and realistic plan of action (Chen, 2004).
Chapter 2

2 Methodology

The research methodology used in this study to examine the career compromise process of adult immigrant skilled workers in Canada is a qualitative methodology. More specifically a grounded theory approach was used. The following sections address the rationale for using qualitative methodology and describe the grounded theory approach used.

2.1 Rationale for Qualitative Design

Anthropologists and sociologists developed qualitative research methods in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Travers, 2009). Many of the qualitative methods have their roots in the anthropology, psychology, and sociology disciplines (Williamson, 2009). It has since grown into an inter-disciplinary field (Travers, 2009) and now covers a wide variety of conceptual principles and methodologies, incorporating the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, political science and psychology (Brod, Tesler & Christensen, 2009). Qualitative methodology has also been used in health sciences research to help improve health care provided to patients (Gillespie, Chaboyer, Longbottom, & Wallis, 2010; Jansen, Foets, & de Bont, 2010; Todres, Galvin, & Holloway, 2009). Research in the field of education also commonly utilizes the qualitative research methods in hopes of aiding enhancement in education provided to students (Angell, Stoner, & Shelden, 2009; Burch, 2010; Ntuli, Keengwe, & Kyei-Blankson, 2009).

The goal of qualitative research is to uncover truths that exist and develop a complete understanding of reality and the individual’s perception of what is real (Williamson, 2009). This is rooted in the descriptive mode of research, which is based on the idea that multiple realities exist and create meaning for individuals (Speziale & Carpenter, 2003). Qualitative researchers believe that individuals understand and know their reality in different ways (Williamson, 2009). The perceptions of the individuals are captured from an emic approach (from the insider’s viewpoint; Speziale & Carpenter, 2003) through different data collection methods such as interviews, observations, and written documents (Patton, 2002).

Qualitative research methodology varies widely in its terms, concepts, assumptions and analytic principles, allowing study designs to be tailored to specific research purposes and can add great
richness to data interpretation (Brod et al., 2009). It requires a nonmathematical process of interpretation that manages words, languages, and meanings (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994) from the full and rich descriptions provided by participants who are experiencing the studied phenomenon (Williamson, 2009). It usually involves the collection, analysis and interpretation of data that is not easily reduced to numbers and related to the social world and concepts and behaviours of people within it (Murphy, Dingwall, Greatbatch, Parker, & Watson, 1998). It differs from quantitative research in that it considers the social and cultural construction of the variables of interest as integral to the concepts under objective examination, rather than correlating or factoring out these influences (Brod et al., 2009). Qualitative analysis provides a means to explore subject areas of which little is known as well as a means to gain novel understandings of a known phenomenon (Stern, 1980).

Data can come from interviews, observations, documents, records, and films (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Therefore qualitative research has often been referred to as a soft science. In order to maintain credibility, scientific rigor can be accomplished by having a sound scientific study methodology and protocol, including a semi-structured interview guide, appropriate analysis of the data and documentation of findings (Brod et al., 2009).

Data analysis procedures involve conceptualizing and reducing data, elaborating categories in terms of their properties and dimensions, and relating through a series of prepositional statements (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It engages exploration, discovery and inductive logic (Patton, 2002). To explore the data in qualitative research coding is performed where data is broken down, compared, and then placed in categories (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Similar pieces of data are placed in similar categories and different data create new categories (Walker & Myrick, 2006). This coding is carried out to discover concepts and relationships in the data, which are then organized and reduced into theoretical explanatory schemes. These findings are then fed into descriptions, models, or theories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The subject matter of the current study is socially bound in that career development of immigrant skilled workers is very much related to and affected by the environment. In fact, most of the workers’ career development barriers come from their environment (Aycan & Berry, 1996). Additionally, the scant literature on career compromise in the immigrant context further calls for a qualitative methodology in order to gain some insight into this little known area of study.
2.2 A Grounded Theory Approach

There are many different approaches to conducting qualitative research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The most commonly used qualitative methods in the health sciences research are ethnography, phenomenology, and grounded theory (Williamson, 2009).

The grounded theory approach supposes that theory is grounded in data rather than presumed at the outset of the research (Brod et al., 2009). This is appropriate for the current study, as there currently exists insufficient literature on career compromise pertaining to immigrant skilled workers. Therefore, emergent theories should come from the data.

Glaser and Strauss developed grounded theory in the 1960s as a result of their research program on dying in hospitals (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Their goal was to derive a theory that is grounded in the data that is most suitable for the data and the area of research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser and Strauss (1967) combined two data analysis processes in order to properly generate theory from the data. The first process involves the analyst coding the data then analyzing the codes to verify a given proposition or hypothesis. The second process involves the analyst inspecting the data for properties of categories, using memos to track the analysis, and developing theoretical ideas (Walker & Myrick, 2006). They determined that neither of the processes were enough to properly generate theory from the data and developed a hybrid approach whereby the explicit coding procedure of the first process and the style of theory development of the second process through the constant comparative method (Walker & Myrick, 2006).

Grounded theory has since evolved and Glaser and Strauss have gone their separate ways, producing literature on their own methods of grounded theory (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Glaser has remained more faithful to classic grounded theory whereas Strauss and Corbin have revamped the classic method (Heath & Cowley, 2004). Although both Glaser’s and Strauss’s versions use coding, constant comparison, questions, theoretical sampling, and memos in order to generate theories, they differ in how these processes are carried out (Walker & Myrick, 2006). It is the methodology rather than the ontological and epistemological aspects of their versions of grounded theory that are the main course of divergence (Heath & Cowley, 2004). They place a different emphasis on induction, deduction, verification, and the form that the theory should take (Heath & Cowley, 2004).
Glaser’s method involves two levels of coding processes, substantive and theoretical coding (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Substantive coding consists of open and selective coding, where categories and their properties are produced. Theoretical coding is where the substantive codes are weaved together into a hypothesis and theory (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Strauss and Corbin’s method is divided into three levels, open, axial and selective coding (Walker & Myrick, 2006).

Both Glaser and Strauss acknowledge that the researcher will not enter the field free from ideas (Health & Cowley, 2004). However, whereas Glaser emphasizes that prior understanding should be based only on the general problem in order to maintain the analyst’s sensitivity to the data, Strauss sees specific understandings from past experience and literature as useful to stimulating theoretical sensitivity and generating theories (Heath & Cowley, 2004). For Glaser, knowledge in literature of close relevance can veer the emerging theory away from its true path whereas Strauss believes that it is important to be aware of what is known of the subject of investigation in order to formulate the research question (Heath & Cowley, 2004). Regardless of the approach being taken, Becker (1993) stated that the comparative method ensures sensitivity to the data (Heath & Cowley, 2004), which both Glaser’s and Strauss’ methods use.

Glaser views induction as the key process whereby the analyst moves from the data to empirical generalization to theory (Heath & Cowley, 2004). Glaser criticizes the emphasis on deduction where the analysts ask numerous questions and speculate about what might be rather than what exists in the data (Heath & Cowley, 2004). Verification of the data and categories is a constant process done through constant comparisons of incidents in previously coded data and newly coded data (Heath & Cowley, 2004).

Strauss and Corbin, on the other hand, use experience and literature to guide their analysis but maintain that the role of induction should not be over-stressed. Deduction should be followed by validation and elaboration from data comparisons to ensure emergence of data (Heath & Cowley, 2004) rather than forcing data to emerge.

For the purpose of this study, Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) method was used. One reason for this decision is that Strauss and Corbin’s method allows for more familiarity with the literature. Although there is an insufficient amount of literature on career compromise pertaining to the immigrant skilled worker population, there have been studies looking at Gottfredson’s theory of career compromise, some of the effects compromise has on career seekers, and the existing
barriers of immigrants’ career development. Knowing what has been found previously and how the prior theories fared helped guide this study to find more interesting questions to ask when looking at the data. The need to validate the findings by constant comparison was kept in mind throughout the analysis. All researcher presumptions about the topic were at the forefront of awareness so as to not sway the analysis.

Strauss and Corbin focused on developing the analytic techniques and providing guidance to novice researchers (Heath & Cowley, 2004). Since the researcher of this study was relatively new to grounded theory methodology and more accustomed to quantitative research, this further supported the selection of Strauss and Corbin’s methodology.

2.3 Procedures

The transcripts were selected from archival data belonging to Dr. Charles Chen’s Professional Immigrants Worklife Adjustment project. The transcripts contain interviews with immigrants who had come to Canada regarding their pre-Canada, initial-Canada, and current-Canada adjustment and career development experiences.

The transcripts were selected based on specific selection criteria in order to provide the most in-depth insight into the career compromise experiences of immigrant skilled workers.

2.3.1 Selection Criteria

The target population selected for this study were foreign-born adults who (1) completed their post-secondary education outside of Canada, (2) had been working outside of Canada for at least one year, (3) immigrated to Canada under the skilled workers category, (4) had been living in Canada for at least 3 years, and (5) made reference to making career compromises in Canada during the interview.

The first two criteria ensured that the participants received their credentials and experience elsewhere, thereby increasing the likelihood that they would have been confronted by the commonly experienced career barriers faced by immigrant skilled workers. The second criterion also warranted that the participants had already begun their career development process and had a good idea of what their career identity were. The third criterion certified that they possessed all the requirements necessary as stated by Canada Immigration in order to contribute to the work
force in Canada. The fourth criterion allowed for enough time for the participants to have gone through their new career development process in Canada, experienced the career barriers, made career compromises, and developed opinions and feelings about their compromise. The fifth and last criterion ensured that the participants had in fact undergone the process of career compromise.

2.3.2 Research participants

A total of 20 interview transcripts were selected from Dr. Charles Chen’s archival data from his Immigrant Worklife Adjustment project. There were 10 females and 10 males. The average age was 35.7, ranging from 31 to 44 years of age. Their country of origin included, Sri Lanka, Peru, Egypt, Bulgaria, Lebanon, China, Kazakhstan, Thailand, Uzbekistan, Tanzania, Ireland, Pakistan, Ukraine, Mexico, Albania, Philippines, United Arab Emirates, Malaysia, and France. The number of years that they had spent in Canada ranged from 3 to 12 years, with a mean of 6.5 years. All of the participants came to Canada on an Independent Skilled Worker visa. All participants had received at least a Bachelor’s degree and had worked for at least a year prior to coming to Canada.

2.3.2.1 Introduction to the Research participants

Each of the participants provided rich narratives to their own stories of career transition. In order to lay a foundation to facilitate the understanding and appreciation of the findings in the results section of Chapter 4, a brief description of each participant is provided below. The descriptions include information pertaining to their backgrounds, reasons for immigrating to Canada, expectations regarding their vocational transition, reported career compromise and feelings regarding those compromises, occupation at the time of the interview and future career aspirations. In order to keep the identity of the participants confidential, they were each randomly assigned a pseudonym.

P1 is a 39-year-old male from Sri Lanka who immigrated to Canada with his wife and two children five years prior to the interview. He obtained a Bachelor's degree in Science and a Chartered Accountant certificate in Sri Lanka. Prior to coming to Canada, he worked as a Certified General Accountant (CGA) and Certified Public Accountant in the Middle East where he was well paid and highly regarded. He decided to come to Canada to reunite with his brother.
who was living here, to provide his children with better education and to have a better quality of life. P1 was expecting to receive a job at the Canadian office of the same company he was working for prior to his migration. However, when he arrived in Canada, he was told that there were no positions available. P1 wanted a job that fit with his past experience and allowed him to spend time with his family. He managed to find some accounting jobs through friends and eventually landed an accounting manager position through a friend's recommendation. After he received his Certified General Accountant qualification in Canada, he was promoted to Financial Controller, which was what he had been doing for the past four years. He felt that the major compromises were a decrease in the level of work and salary. He expressed doubt and regret and said that “It was hard, because I had that opportunity of going back; my employers in the Middle East said, anytime you want to come back, you can come. So when you have that in mind, you think, did I make the right choice?” However, he persevered and found comfort in his family. He stated that he enjoys his current work and that even though he wasn't making a lot of money, he enjoyed his responsibilities, the training opportunities, etc. Overall he had enjoyed his vocational life experience in Canada. His goal was to become Chief Financial Officer and to gain job security.

P2 is a 37-year-old male who had been living in Canada for six years. He possessed a Bachelor of Engineering degree and Master of Business Administration (MBA) from his country of origin, the United Arab Emirates. P2 worked as an Engineer at a consulting firm in the United Arab Emirates and decided to come to Canada during a recession and had hoped to specialize in his field in a developed world country. P2 initially compromised working in his previous field of work in order to earn an income. However, he remained persistent and resilient in seeking jobs that were close to his field, which led to his success in attaining that goal. P2 makes an emphasis on the need to be an adaptive person, “Yeah, if you get the job, then you can adapt yourself, if you are an adaptive person.” P2 initially immigrated to Canada as a single man and he felt that this made him more flexible and adaptable. “So you can accommodate yourself to be with the standards of the job.” At the time of the interview, P2 had been working at an oil and gas company for eight months. This work was in the same field as his original work and he was satisfied with his employment. He acquired the job through an old friend who had recommended him for the job. Prior to that P2 had been working in multi-media/ IT business position that he acquired through job-hunting using the internet and newspapers. His goal was to become an
expert in his field and to perhaps move back to the United Arab Emirates to continue his career development.

P3 is a 37-years-old female who immigrated to Canada from the Philippines and had been in Canada for 10 years at the time of the interview. She held a Bachelor’s degree in Fine Arts and worked as an Animator and Industrial designer back in the Philippines. She immigrated to Canada to improve the quality of her life and satisfy her love for traveling. She stated that it is more difficult to attain visas to the US and Canada with her Philippine immigration status. She had gathered information pertaining to career opportunities in Canada prior to her immigration by attending seminars and reading. It appeared to P3 that it would be unlikely that she would be able to attain the same line of work in Canada since there was no demand for it. Therefore, P3 was prepared to take whatever job opportunities came her way. She partook in a number of jobs, such as being a Sales Worker in a boutique and had a relatively positive career development experience. However, she did perceive having to take part-time and/or work overtime in order to gain Canadian work experience to be compromising. At the time of the interview, P3 was working towards a Bachelor’s degree in Business at Ryerson and at the same time working as a Central Teller at Royal Bank of Canada, where she had been working for five and a half years.

P4 is a 39-year-old male from Bulgaria who had been living in Canada for 12 years. He received a Master's degree in Computer Engineering and led an affluent life working as an Engineer in a bank in Bulgaria. He immigrated to Canada because he wanted to further his career with some education and to see what other opportunities there were for his professional development. P4 took a few courses in order to facilitate his pursuit for a Master's degree in his field. However, he realized that a certification course would be more relevant and useful for him since he didn't want to go into academia. P4 initially had low expectations and was ready to take any job. He expected to not have the required qualifications and knowledge. However, he actively searched for jobs, sought professional help to improve his resume and applied for jobs that were in his field. His determination to remain in his field of work got him a position as a computer programmer. He decided to switch into another area of programming and underwent a pay cut and position demotion in order to gain the necessary experience for his interested area. When asked what career compromises he had to make, he said “I made on few occasions, actually on many occasions with the new job, compromises with the amount of remuneration because I thought the long-term benefits may be bigger by sacrificing part of my income, and it’s usually
proved to be right.” He also experienced being laid off and career development barriers due to being an immigrant. He was working as a Financial Senior Software Developer for five months at the time of the interview. Overall, P4 expressed that his experience has been “rewarding in a professional sense”. He planned on taking more certification courses and looking for managerial positions.

P5 is a 34-year-old female from Lebanon and had been in Canada for four years. She held a Bachelor’s degree in Electrical Engineering from Lebanon. After working as an Electrical Engineer for a while, she decided that she did not like it and took courses in IT, Microsoft certifications. She had been working as a Specialist/Coordinator at a cell phone company prior to her migration where she was doing well. She quit this job to come to Canada. Her siblings had moved to the United States and her parents were insisting that P5 move there too. However, she couldn't move to the United States easily and opted to move to Canada due to the easier immigration process. Initially, P5 did many part-time jobs, which she received through connections. Some of these jobs were related to her field and some were not. Her goal was still to return to the IT field of work. Fortunately, her part-time job at an IT department became a full-time position and she had been working as an IT Specialist/ Administrator for almost four years at the time of the interview. P5 had anticipated her career development in Canada to be challenging and found that she had to compromise her position and salary in order to make some money. Overall, she found her vocational development experience to be a positive one and that networking and making connections was essential to her successful career outcome. She felt that her job allowed her to start a family and she had been married for two years and is expecting a baby. Her goal was to remain at her current job.

P6, a 34-year-old female from Albania held a Bachelor of Arts degree in French and taught French in an elementary school and a high school before coming to Canada. P6 came to Canada to explore a different lifestyle and had been in Canada for nine years. First, P6 worked part-time for her immigration lawyer as a Clerical Worker, then as a part-time Waitress, and also as a Kosovo refugee interpreter for the government. After having received a Computer Science degree in Canada, she worked full-time as a Technical Support worker. She was, at the time of the interview, a Senior Technical Services Analyst. Although P6 expressed having had a relatively smooth career transition experience, she has had to compromise her main goal of returning into the teaching profession. She experienced barriers in finding teaching work
experience in order to retain her Teacher's re-accreditation. However, she was resilient and was continuing to take more courses to increase her chance on getting a teaching job.

P7 is a 35-year-old female from France, who immigrated to Canada six years ago. She also lived in the UK for seven years before coming to Canada. She held a Bachelor's degree in Business and Language and a Master's degree in International Relations. Prior to her immigration, she was working as a Marketing Assistant in a bank in the UK where she enjoyed working with the people and felt that she had learned a lot. She decided to come to Canada because she had always wanted to experience new things and it was easier to immigrate to Canada than to the U.S. P7 didn't do much preparation prior to coming to Canada and had expected it to be relatively easy to find employment in her field in Canada with her work experience. However, her career development had been a challenging journey. Her major career compromise was taking survival jobs such as working in call-centers at a bank. After about a year and a half, she applied for an internal marketing position and managed to re-enter her field of work, working as a Marketing Manager for three years at the time of the interview. She enjoyed the independence and flexibility of the job as well as her nice colleagues. However, because it was a small firm, she foresaw having to leave her current work place in order to advance in her career. Her future goal was to move from middle management to upper management and have a more decision-making role. She was planning on doing more networking within the Canadian Marketing Association and maybe going back to school to pursue an MBA to facilitate her goal.

P8 is a 39-year-old female from China who had been in Canada for nine years at the time of the interview. She had a Bachelor's degree in Chemical Engineering and had been working as an engineer at the Liaison Office of an American chemical company in her home country prior to her migration. She enjoyed her job very much and decided to come to Canada on the recommendation of a friend who was living in the United States. P8 felt confident that she would have an easy career transition due to her English ability. However, her goals of working in her field and furthering her education were thwarted when she met a man in her English class and fell pregnant. Her parents brought her child back to China while P8 worked in some part-time positions outside of her field of expertise for the sake of earning an income. P8 took a computer program diploma course but found it unhelpful in acquiring better jobs. She found it difficult to find employment without Canadian experience. Not only did she find that her past experience to be of little or no value, she felt that it was a barrier to her job-search. She found that employers
became suspicious of her if she was applying for anything outside of her field of experience. P8 expressed having had to compromise her field of work and that she coped with it by telling herself that it was better to work at any job than to sit at home. P8 conveyed a sense of disappointment and regret when she reported that her jobs back in China paid higher and the cost of living was lower than in Canada. However, P8 was resilient, and tried to remain positive. At the time of the interview, P8 was working as a general manager at a clothing store where she was employed by a Chinese employer. Her future goals were to pursue a Master’s degree in Engineering and become self-employed.

P9 is a 44-year-old female who had immigrated to Canada from China nine years prior to the interview. She had a Bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature and had been an English University teacher as well as an interpreter in China. She enjoyed her work very much but she wanted to “see the outside world”. She was offered a job in the U.S. Unfortunately, her husband couldn't get a visa and so they decided to immigrate to Canada since the immigration process was easier. P9 knew that she would have to go back to school to get a PhD in order to get the same vocational position in Canada, which she didn't want to do. Therefore, she expected to work in a different field. P9 worked as a waitress for the first three years. Then she took some courses in Accounting and worked a few part-time co-op accounting and administrative positions. Finally, she acquired a full-time co-op position working as an Administrator of Accounting and Administration. She had been working there for the past six years. She was also pursuing a CGA designation at the time. She felt that she compromised her dignity due to the discriminatory behaviour towards her at the workplace and expressed that it was “very painful.” Overall, she described her experience as a new worker in Canada to be “okay, but not quite satisfactory.” Her future goal was to attain her CGA designation and to get another job where work environment was better.

P10 is a 31-year-old male from Peru who had been in Canada for three years. He had a Bachelor's degree in Software Engineering (Computer Science) from Peru and had worked as an IT Consultant at an IT consulting firm prior to his migration. His work kept him very busy, he had little time for himself but he had a good salary. He decided to come to Canada because he felt that the people in his home country were narrow-minded and that his home country was politically, socially, and economically unstable. When he arrived in Canada he was looking to do an MBA and had expected it to be very difficult to find a job. However, he did not want to start
studying before he acquired a stable job. He was prepared to work as a factory worker at first. He did some survival jobs, such as telemarketing, for a few months then landed a job in IT for a few months through the Peruvian consulate. When asked whether there was a gap between his employment expectations and reality, he said “No, because I was expecting the worst. We have a saying, expect the worst and you will never be disappointed.” However, he stated that having to take a low paying survival job with his experience and qualifications was a career compromise for him. Finally, he got a job at the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO) through a private agency where he started a temporary Accounting/IT position. Due to his accounting and technical knowledge, they hired him as a Financial Analyst, which he had been doing for the past year. He liked that this job was stable and that they paid for his education. He was studying for the Certified Management Accountant at the time and had also previously taken some French courses. Overall P10 sees it as being a positive experience. His future goals were to buy an apartment downtown and to do more challenging process analysis work at the LCBO.

P11 is a 34-year-old female from Kazakhstan, who had been in Canada for seven years. She held a Bachelor's degree in Languages, specializing in French and English. Prior to her migration, she worked as a Translator, Interpreter, and Business Administrator at an Insurance Broker and at the American Embassy. She enjoyed the challenging work environment but she wanted to come to Canada for “professional development”. She was expecting her work experience from Kazakhstan to be very useful in helping her find a job in Canada. However, this was not her experience and she found it very stressful. She wanted to get an administrative job with the federal or provincial government but discovered that it's impossible if “you're not a Canadian citizen.” P11 reached out to an export and development cooperation office and got a volunteer position. She found that having to volunteer to be a compromising experience and felt “bitter” and “disappointed”. However, this position allowed her to network and end up with her job as an Administrative Coordinator at a company that put together conferences. She had been working there for the past year and a half. Her future goal was to go back to school to get an MBA and to be promoted to a manager position. She was even thinking of starting her own company one day. Overall, P11 was surprised at how difficult her career transition has been. She did not expect it to take her six years to get to her vocational stage at the time of the interview.

P12 is a 32-year-old female from Egypt who had immigrated to Canada three years prior to the interview. She had an MBA from Egypt and had worked as a Banker where she had a positive
work experience. She had a secondment in London, England, for less than a year and had enjoyed the experience. She then decided to move to Canada because she could speak English and she had heard that “they (Canada) welcome immigrants, and they still need people.” She expected to get a job in the same field because she thought that her qualifications and experience were transferable. She stated that, “I thought that there would be a lot of opportunities here, career wise, and in the quote-unquote “new country”, compared to Egypt.” However, she initially had to take part-time clerical jobs and call-center work at a bank for an income and to gain work experience. This decrease in job status was a compromise for P12. Then an immigrant friend of hers directed her to an organization that provides a resource of companies with internship programs for immigrants. So she got her MBA equivalency and attained an intern position working as an equity associate. Then she applied to full-time positions in the same company and she had been working there as a Banker for the past two years. Getting back to her field was most important for her therefore she is satisfied with the outcome despite the compromises that she has had to make. She was thinking about pursuing a Certified Financial Analyst certificate in the future.

P13 is a 34-year-old male from Malaysia who had been in Canada for eight years. He had a Bachelor's degree in Social Work and had been working as a Social Worker at a school prior to his migration. He enjoyed his work in Malaysia and had decided to come to Canada upon seeing a recruitment advertisement for educated people from Malaysia to immigrate to Canada. The recruiter told him that there were many job opportunities and he had expected to be able to continue his line of work and counsel children. However, he had to initially work as a Telemarketer as well as work in a call center before he found his job as a Social Worker. He also had to go back to college in order to get his re-accreditation. Through his placement training, he managed to network and got a job in his field. He had been working as a Settlement Counsellor for two years, helping immigrants and refugees find housing. However, he had to initially compromise by working part-time and at nights and weekends. His goal was to find a full-time position in the same field, such as working for the Child and Youth Ministry. He was even thinking about going back to school to get a Master's in Social Work.

P14, a 32-year-old female, immigrated to Canada from Thailand as a landed skilled worker five years prior to the interview. She held a Bachelor's degree in Accounting and had worked as the Financial Planner and analyst for KFC/Pizza Hut restaurant where she was well paid. She was
then hired to work in Canada as a Financial Analyst at Sears for one year. After her contract expired, she went to England and attained a Master's in Strategic Marketing. She then decided to move to Canada permanently because she wanted to start a new life and have new experiences because she liked the people here, the Canadian accent and the multiculturalism. She was expecting it to be difficult to acquire a job at the same level as she did back in Thailand. When looking for a job, P14's priorities were the level of income and that it was in the same field as her original field of work. At the time of the interview, P14 had been working as a part-time Administrative Bookkeeper for the past six months. She got the job through her stepfather, who was also her previous boss. She reported that “the connection in this country is very important, rather than the website, to get a job.” She said, “I expected to find a job in the website, in my search. That’s what I expected. But finally it’s from connection.” Even though her job doesn't pay very well, she was happy with it because she had more time to herself. At the time of the interview, she was retraining to get her Certified General Accountant certificate in hopes of increasing opportunities for better paying jobs. Overall, she was satisfied with her vocational life experience in Canada.

P15, a 36-year-old female, immigrated to Canada from Uzbekistan with her husband and one year-old daughter. She had been in Canada for five years at the time of the interview. She held a Bachelor's degree in Arts and Languages and had been a Teacher (teaching Russian and English) and Interpreter (in international organizations such as the World Bank) in her home country. She enjoyed her work very much and was rather successful, “always getting promotions.” Her decision to immigrate to Canada was due to the former republics becoming independent and Uzbek becoming the official language. Since P15 was not fluent in Uzbek, she decided to immigrate to Canada to look for better opportunities. She had also heard that Canada was ranked as the best country in the world to live in. P15 was expecting to get a clerical office job in any field. In the first four months, her husband supported her after which she sought employment agencies to search for jobs. Her initial experience was stressful and she stated that “It's a nice country, but there is a lack of job opportunities, and if you don't have Canadian experience, you cannot get a job. So it's very stressful for immigrants, because how can you get Canadian experience if you cannot get a job anywhere?” Other barriers she experienced included difficulty in the re-certification process, being overqualified for jobs she applied for and discrimination for her accent when speaking English. P15’s first position was a human administrative assistant. She
expected a higher salary. Although P15 wanted to "make a career in the legal area" because she felt that there was a higher demand than being an interpreter, she remained flexible and worked as an employment recruiter before switching back into the legal field. P15 reported that being underpaid was a compromise and although she expressed that “it's hard to survive if you make so little money”, she stated “but gradually, now I'm making better than what I was making before.” P15 attended college and acquired a Law Clerks diploma. She had been working as a law clerk for three years and was enjoying it very much and felt a sense of vocational identity. Her future career goal was to become a Senior Law Clerk.

P16, a 38-year-old male, immigrated to Canada from Mexico and had been living in Canada for five years. He had a Bachelor's degree in Industrial Engineering and a Master's degree in Finance from Mexico. Before coming to Canada, he was an Underwriter for insurance companies. He found employment to be unstable and opportunities to be scarce. Therefore, P16 and his wife worked in Chicago for a while but they both lost their jobs due to company restructuring. They then decided to migrate to Canada to search for opportunities. P16 had expected it to be easier to get a job as an Underwriter for an insurance company given his previous work experience and Master's degree. However, he soon found out that not having the Canadian Chartered Insurance Professional designation was a barrier to that goal. P16 stated that “Almost every employer wants some Canadian credentials … they basically don’t care about your experience, they don’t care about your preparation, they don’t care about anything. They want to see three initials after your name, like CIP.” Therefore, he opted to obtain a license with the Registered Insurance Brokers of Ontario and had been an Account Manager for an insurance broker for a year at the time of the interview. He did not find it stimulating, had expected a better salary and felt discriminated against for his accent. He initially dealt with his career compromises by maintaining a flexible attitude towards his vocational position. He also looked at the positive aspects of his job, such as the shorter work hours compared to his jobs in Mexico. P16 was also taking a course to get a designation in insurance at the time of the interview. He didn't like the courses and expressed that they were just a means to acquire the vocational title, “I’m not there to learn; I’m there to get the designation so I can get ahead in my career.” However, he believed that it would help him obtain his future career goal in acquiring a job he's interested in or get a job of the same position but in a bigger company in order to become more specialized.
P17 is a 39-year-old male from Tanzania who had immigrated to Canada eight years prior to the interview. He had received a Bachelor of Commerce focusing on Technology and worked as a Business Analyst at a downtown shopping center in his hometown. When he first arrived in Canada, P17 took on some part-time survival jobs working at a gas station and then working as a Security Guard. His initial goal was to find part-time work so that he could pursue a PhD in his field. He enrolled into a Ryerson certificate program two months after arriving in Canada. P17 completed a technology management and a project management certificate, which helped P17 get a job as a level one Technical Support worker. He was then hired to be a level two Technical Specialist. He had been working as a Technical Specialist for the past 5 years at the time of the interview. P17 had experienced a major obstacle of not having Canadian work experience, which hindered him from being employed, which is also what motivated P17 to return to school to gain some Canadian training. He found it difficult to juggle to work multiple jobs to make ends meet and to go to school at the same time. However, P17 showed resilience and perseverance and a positive attitude. He saw his journey as being a positive one that increased his sense of self-confidence and at the time of the interview, he had a family of his own and was expecting a child. His future goal was to gain more work experience and perhaps to acquire another certificate in order to get a higher paying position in the same field. He seemed optimistic about his future career and showed a lot of perseverance.

P18 is a 34-year-old female who immigrated to Canada from Ireland and had been living in Canada for seven years at the time of the interview. She obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in Languages (Spanish and French) from London and worked at Accounts Receivable at Bloomberg Financial Institution in London prior moving to Canada. She did not enjoy her work and found it to be too stressful. She also did not like living in London because she felt it was polluted, oppressive and the people were unfriendly. Therefore, she decided to move to Canada after her friends who immigrated to Canada encouraged her to move here. Also, her parents’ friends who had moved to Canada thirty years ago said that they would help her out. Her goal was to find a spouse who also had a Jewish background. P18 had expected it to be fairly simple to find jobs with her experience and qualifications. Most of her jobs were acquired through connections and she found the job recruiters to be of little to no help. By chance, she landed a job doing foreign exchange sales through meeting a Jewish man on the street. She had a negative experience at the foreign exchange job, expressing that she had been bullied. Therefore, she left
and started working at customer service at another company, CI Funds, which she received through a friend from her old work in London. She found it boring and was unhappy about the low level of prestige and salary. She stated, “I felt this was demeaning to me, to be assistant to people earning $35,000 a year... I’ve been dealing with millions of dollars back in England and here I am, some jerk’s assistant who’s got an ego the size of the country, and I have to deal with this crap every day?” She was fired after six months. P18 took some different courses in pursuit of acquiring other job opportunities, which didn't work out for her. Finally, she got a job as the Director of Cultural Affairs at the Israeli Consulate through her parents’ connections. She had been working there for about four and a half years at the time of the interview. However, she expressed that the work environment became “toxic” and had experienced some bullying. Overall she viewed her vocational experience in Canada to be quite negative. She decided to quit her job and go back to school to pursue a MBA degree and find a job in Corporate Social Responsibility.

P19 is a 34-year-old male participant who immigrated to Canada from Pakistan a little over three years ago. He had a Bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering and had worked as a Management Consultant in a Consulting firm prior to his migration. Overall, he described having had a good and challenging career back in Pakistan. He decided to come to Canada because he had found information on the high number of job opportunities in his field in Canada and mainly because he wanted to improve his quality of life. He expected that he would be able to get a good job in his field in Canada with all the work experience that he already had from his home country. At first, P19 had to compromise his field of work and took on some part-time jobs such as telemarketing for survival but found it difficult and was fired. P19 found it hard to adjust to the lower level positions and went back to Pakistan for six months. Through his job-search experiences, P19 learned that he should have been more open to work opportunities outside of his field but remain in the same level of prestige. He also took some courses to get his Project Management Professional designation, which opened up many job opportunities for him. After he returned, he was approached by a headhunter and ended up working as an IT Project Manager. He had been working there for two and a half years at the time of the interview. P19 viewed his overall vocational experience to be a positive one. He expressed that it gave him time to spend with his family. P19 was enthusiastic and continued to look for jobs that were more challenging and offered a higher income.
P20 is a 32-year-old male from Ukraine who came to Canada with his wife and his daughter six years prior to the interview. He held a Master's degree in System Administration/ Robotics. Prior to his migration he worked as a Systems Administrator at a Tobacco Corporation. He had always worked with computers and described his vocational life to be stable, educational and possessing room for career development. He decided to come to Canada because his wife had always wanted to move here. Both P20 and his wife had expected it to be easy for them to acquire employment in their fields. He had a hard time finding work that paid an adequate salary and had to make a career compromise by doing manual labour in a factory. He decided to place an advertisement for himself in a newspaper advertising himself as a computer technician, which attracted a few clients. He then got a job as a computer specialist through one of the people he worked for at the factory and had been working there for the past two years. He also did an online Microsoft Certificate Exam and got a certificate for it. He was not satisfied with his current job. He felt that the pay was too low and that the company was too small for career advancement. He wanted something better but couldn’t seem to find it. However, he did feel a sense of vocational identity due to the nature of the work being congruent to his past work experience. He was trying to start his own business with his brother in exporting cars from Canada to the Ukraine. However, he was not too hopeful about his future.

2.3.3 Data Analysis

The transcripts were coded using Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) analytic approach, which involved open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

During the process of open coding, the concepts were identified and their properties and dimensions were discovered in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It involved microanalysis where the data were broken down into discrete parts and analyzed in detail, line-by-line in order to generate the categories. Comparative analysis was used to decide whether the data is similar or different from the rest of the categorized data and grouping similar phenomenon under the same categories. Categories were further differentiated into subcategories, which described when, where, and how a phenomenon was likely to exist.

During axial coding, the subcategories were related to their category through statements depicting how they were related to each other (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Subcategories can be seen as conditions, actions/interactions, or consequences. Conditions are the “why”, “where”,

“how come”, and “when” descriptions of the category. Actions/interactions are the responses the individuals made to the issues or problems. They are usually the “whom” and “how” descriptions of the category. Consequences are what happen as a result of the actions/interactions or the failure of action/interactions to deal with the issue. Open and axial coding were not necessarily sequential steps.

A category was considered saturated when no new information emerged in the category from further coding. The next step, selective coding, involved integrating and refining the theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). First, the central/core category was selected to represent the main theme of the research. All the other major categories were related to this core category and it explained variation within categories. The concepts were then integrated. Reviewing and sorting through the memos that were kept throughout the analytic process facilitated the integration process. Memos are the written records of analysis, thoughts, interpretations, and questions that the researcher had throughout the process. Memos helped the researcher record the direction of the research and integrate the concepts.

After the overarching theoretical scheme was outlined, the theory was refined by reviewing for internal consistency and gaps in the logic, filling in poorly developed categories, trimming excess categories, and validating the scheme.

NVivo 9 computer software was used to analyze the interviews. Proponents of computer coding suggest that computer software programs are especially helpful for large amounts of qualitative data because they can reduce the amount of time spent on manual and clerical functions and increase the thoroughness of handling data (Brod et al., 2009). Computer software was geared to facilitate the analysis process but the actual analysis was very much still based on the researcher.

2.3.3.1 Methods for verification

The analysis was validated by comparing the scheme against the raw data as well as through an on-going discussion and collaboration with the study’s senior researcher, Dr. Charles Chen, and other members of the research team who had also worked on Dr. Charles Chen’s Professional Immigrants Worklife Adjustment project. Possible researcher biases based on the researcher’s own background were also kept in mind to prevent the analysis from being swayed by her personal biases.
The researcher shares a common status with the study’s participants in that she too is an immigrant. However, she entered Canada on a Study Visa as opposed to under the Skilled Worker category. She attained her post-secondary education in Canada and has reaped the benefits of that. Through her experience, she sees post-secondary education or training in Canada as a valuable means to achieving career goals. The researcher was therefore cognizant of the need to prevent from looking for data to support the idea that Canadian training facilitates career goals. She reminded herself to search for and report the participants’ views of what was important in coping with their career compromise.
Chapter 3
Results

All the participants struggled through their career transition journeys. They had all been working in their chosen field of work for at least a year prior to immigrating to Canada which most of them reflected upon positively about. Most of them immigrated to Canada with great expectations and hopes only to find out that the process was going to be a much more compromising one than they had prepared for. Each of them had their own story to tell but the analysis aimed to capture the common essence among their vocational transition experiences. Chapters three, four, and five present the findings of the major themes that emerged from the participants’ stories. All the themes that are reported were supported by at least 3 participants.

Each of these chapters describes a major theme that compromises a number of related sub-themes. Chapter three, *Pre-immigration*, presents the participants’ goals and expectations for their work life in Canada prior to their migration as well as their reasons for immigration. This section aims to set the stage for a better appreciation and understanding for the vocational transition process the participants went through in Canada. Chapter four focuses on their *Compromising vocational transition experience*. The focus is put on the journey that the participants had to go through in order to gain employment and what their experiences were around having to make career compromises. Presented in this chapter are their adjustment and adaptation issues, job-search decision-making influences, difficulties experienced, career compromises and their purposeful actions and the intentions of their actions. In chapter five, the participants’ coping strategies used during their career transition and their reflections about their compromising experiences are presented. The strategies that they used to deal with acculturation and career compromise, their feelings about the compromise, the impact the experience had on their lives and the lessons that they learned are discussed.

3 Pre-immigration

This chapter presents the participants’ reasons for immigrating to Canada and their vocational goals and expectations that they brought with them. Being aware of their reasons, goals and expectations for their journey will help develop an appreciation for their experiences during their career transition and compromise.
3.1 Reasons for immigration

Each participant had his or her own reasons for immigrating to Canada. The most pre-dominant reasons were family-related, education-related, for career betterment, to improve their quality of life, stemming from a desire to explore, and due to easy Canadian immigration process.

3.1.1 Family influence

A few participants had expressed that they had decided to immigrate to Canada in order to be closer to family, complying with spouse’s desire to immigrate to Canada, and in order to receive the appropriate medical attention not provided in their country of origin for a family member. P1 stated that “The one main reason for me to come here was that my brother was here long before me… So he was telling me, come here and settle down.” P17 expressed that his main concern was to find medical attention for his father’s condition:

There were a number of things; my dad was 50, and he needed a bypass surgery. Where we were, there was no bypass surgery done there. So if we had stayed there, my dad probably wouldn’t be alive. So we had to get out somewhere so he could get the (medical treatment).

For P20, his spouse’s decision played a role in their decision to immigrate to Canada:

Well, actually, when I met my wife, who at that time wasn’t my wife, all her life she wanted to go to Canada; Canada or Australia, one of those two countries. And she lived without a husband; she had a daughter, so she didn’t have a chance to come here… sometimes, some of her friends asked us why we hadn’t come here yet. So we said, why not? And the next day, we prepared all the documents, and sent them to the embassy, and forgot about it. And in one year, they asked us for an interview, and now we’re here.

3.1.2 Educational purposes

Some participants indicated that they had decided to come to Canada for educational purposes. For example, P4 expressed that, “Initially it was because I wanted to further my career with some studies. I wanted to go and study for Master’s or PhD or something like this.” P10 also had an educational goal:
But when I really started looking for a place to move, it was sort of a matter of luck that I chose Canada, because I was looking to study an MBA around the world, and I ran into McGill University. So at McGill University, they have... Well, in Ontario they have different rates for international students and different prices for immigrants and for Canadian citizens. So I started to check what that was. And I got the immigration website, and I started to get information, and I said, okay, let’s try it.

Educational purposes weren’t restricted to education for the participants, but also for that of the participant’s children. P1 expressed that he had wanted to provide better education for his children:

The Middle East is not a permanent place for you to live. After your children’s higher education, you have to find another place for them to study. Now there are universities coming up, but they should go to Europe or North America, or the other side of Asia for their studies.

3.1.3 Career betterment

Career betterment was another reason for immigrating to Canada that many of the participants endorsed. They expressed that they had come to Canada in hopes of advancing their careers, look for better job opportunities, and gain better work experiences.

For many of the participants, they felt that they had to move to a more developed country if they wanted to specialize in their field of work and gain job stability. P4 and P2 provided two examples of this concern:

I liked it (job in country of origin), though there were some limitations in terms of growth, like how much you can grow. There was not much advancing in terms of this particular area in which I’m specialized. I had to move to a different city, bigger cities with better opportunities. (P4)

You want to specialize. But there (country of origin) you cannot specialize, because the environment there, the system, will not let you specialize, there is no time. You just push the work. And if they need specialized work or specialized people, they just bring from outside. (P2)
P16 and P19 expressed concern about the job instability in their country of origin. P16 said that, “The only thing is the instability compared to Canada. Mexico companies… there’s too much instability, and if you are out of a job, it’s more difficult to get a job quickly, especially in the city where I grew up.” P19 expressed the same concern, “In Pakistan, I was doing good in my profession, I was making good money, I had a good life. But still there was a lot of uncertainty, due to the political instability, and the culture that we have.”

Many of the participants also expressed that they had come to Canada to look for better job opportunities. For instance, P12 thought that there would be more opportunities in Canada than in her home country, Egypt:

Canada is, from what I heard before coming, they welcome immigrants, and they still need people and all that… I thought that there would be a lot of opportunities here, career wise, and in the quote-unquote “new country”, compared to Egypt. So I thought I could really make something out of this.

P19 had researched the job market and decided to come to Canada because his sources informed him that there would be many opportunities to gain employment in his field of work:

When I applied for immigration to Canada, I did a little research and I really liked the service sector here. I came to know that there’s about 70% or more service sector here in Canada, particularly in my field. There are lots and lots of consulting firms doing lots of good jobs, and project management and supply management jobs. They’re quite good in Canada.

A few of the participants also mentioned coming to Canada to look for better job experience. For example, P4 stated that:

One of the reasons that I decided to try to immigrate was that I didn’t have the feeling of being worthy or the feeling of being given enough chances or the feelings that I am doing the best I can.
3.1.4 Improve quality of life

Many of the participants had also indicated the desire to improve their quality of life as a reason for their immigration. P17 expressed being drawn to Canada’s health care system, “It was the best choice for what was available; England or the US or here, and we had heard a lot of things about the health care here.” P14 had previously been to Canada for a year for a contract job and expressed that she really liked the people:

I like people in Canada too. That’s why, when I finished my Master’s, I came back here again, because I thought that Canadians were very kind, very supportive. I travelled a lot in the States and in England, and I thought that people here are more warm and welcoming.

P1 and P12 also stated that they wanted to come to Canada to start a new independent life. P12 expressed, “I wanted to start a new life on my own. I wanted to be more independent.” P1 similarly stated:

Back home, when you live with your community, things are not easy in the sense that you’re getting involved in so many things, like family matters, or you have to go into details. Here, the difference is, you can have your own peaceful life, you can select the way you want to live. (P1)

Under the same theme of the desire to improve one’s life was the concern of political and economic instability, which was shared by several participants. For example, P17 stated that:

There were a number of factors; the political conditions over there (country of origin) were getting bad, a lot of corruption, so we decided to come to Canada… We just wanted to get out of the political situation that was there, and make a better life.

3.1.5 Desire to explore

Another reason for the participants’ immigration was due to their desire to explore. They wanted to experience a different kind of life that was different from the one they had in their country of origin. For example, P6 stated “I guess it was my dream just to explore. When you are young, you just want to know more and learn more, so I had researched about Canada.”
There was a sense of desire to change their lives, which was reflected by P20, “Well, I love it, I love changes. That’s actually why I came here (Canada), because in Ukraine, in Kiev, after 12 years in, actually it was a good company but it was too stable.”

3.1.6 Easy immigration

Lastly, some participants had also referred to easy immigration as being a reason for choosing to immigrate to Canada. Many of them had originally wanted to immigrate to the United States but opted to immigrate to Canada because it was easier to gain entry. As illustrated by P6 who said, “Actually, I thought about (immigrating to) the United States at first, but seeing that I had friends there and they could not get the papers, Canada was a better fit for me.” P2 similarly expressed that “Because Canada was open for immigration at that time. If they made it (easy immigration) in the UK, I would apply for the UK, but at that time it was all closed in the UK.”

3.2 Expectations and goals

Prior to coming to Canada, they all had certain goals and expectations about what their vocational lives would be like. The major worklife goals and expectations were: the importance of finding a job; expected difficulty in vocational transition; continue working in the same original field of work; and going to school. Their expectations and goals most likely had an impact on their experiences of their vocational transition and immigration as a whole.

3.2.1 Importance of finding a job

All of the participants had expressed that finding a job was important and a priority. The three main reasons as to why finding employment was a priority were for the preservation of dignity and self-esteem; for career advancement; and most of all for income for survival.

A few participants expressed that being able to find employment affected their confidence, their sense of self-dignity, personal respect, and sense of self-efficacy. P1 said, “It (finding a job) was one of the high priorities. It affected the confidence. If you lose your confidence, you lose so many other things.” For P9 finding a job was related to her dignity, “…if you don’t have a job, you lose almost everything; personal respect, self dignity, self-esteem.” P15 and P18 reflected that having a job maintains a sense of self-agency of being independent. P15 stated, “I’m not a
Career advancement was a cause for the importance of finding a job for some participants. Their goal was to advance in their original field of work. For example, P4 expressed that his sole reason for coming to Canada was to develop vocationally:

It was very important (to find a job) because the main reason I decided to come here was to look for some professional development. It wasn’t an economic reason because I was well off in Bulgaria; it was mostly because I wanted to further my career.

P7 shared this sentiment and stated, “I’m very career driven, so that (finding a job) is very important to me.”

The majority of the participants mentioned income as the underlying reason for the importance of acquiring employment. Some of them felt that they had to earn the money to repay their family who lent them the money to come to Canada. For example, P3 said, “I think it (getting a job) was very important, because I wanted to give back the money that my parents gave me, because they needed it too.” Other participants spoke of the need to make an income to survive. For instance, when asked how important the role of employment and worklife was in her decision of immigration to Canada, P5 said, “Very important, because if you don’t have a job, you can’t live and eventually, if I can’t find a job, I have to go somewhere else where the jobs are.” Similarly, P11 stated, “It (finding a job) was number one. I didn’t have any income.”

3.2.2 Expectation of difficulty

Several participants expected their vocational transition to be a difficult journey. They took on a pessimistic attitude and did not expect that their careers would flourish right from the initial stages of their immigration. Several participants had expected to have to take on any job and did not have any expectations regarding the field or level of the job. P9, for example, didn’t expect to return to her original field of work because she knew that she did not have the level of education required in Canada:

I know that they need a PhD to work in the university, and they need to have certain theses, certain articles published in magazines and so on. So I’m not expecting that (to
get the university job). I didn’t expect to go back to my original profession because it’s a long way for me to get a Master’s and PhD.

P5 expected to work at a job that was at a lower level than her previous job, “I put my hopes to the lowest. I expected, even if I had to work for an entry-level position, I was willing to do that.” P9 similarly said, “I didn’t expect to start big from the first step. Wherever there is work, I just do it. Survive first.”

This low expectation had an impact on how they experienced and coped with their career compromise, which is most effectively illustrated by P10’s statement:

I was expecting to work in a factory for the first year if I were to start looking for a job. So my expectations were so low that anything above that was a success. So apparently, that was one of the best things that I did… I wasn’t shocked.

Some participants also expected job hunting to be a difficult process. They had been warned either by their friends or family or through their own information gathering that it would be hard for them to find a job as an immigrant. For example, P10 arrived at his expectations through information provided to him by his friends and P9 had researched employment rates in Canada:

My friends in Montreal, they told me that it was hard. There are a lot of Peruvians who are immigrants, not just here, but all over the world, Europe, the States. So basically I knew that, if in the first year I had to work in a factory, I would be more than happy. My dad told us, so I know that in advance. (P10)

I had known the unemployment rate is higher in Canada. I think at the time it was 8%, and in the States I think it is 4.5% and at the time around 4%. So I knew it would be a little bit higher and that it would be harder for me. (P9)

P4 expected his job-search to be difficult because he wasn’t confident in his level of knowledge and thought that Canada would be more advanced. When asked what his expectation and planning for his employment was, he said:

I didn’t have enough confidence that my education or technical background would be enough for me to function well when I came to Canada. The general knowledge I had
was that in North America, the technology is the most advanced technology in the world. So I was expecting that I wouldn’t know enough.

3.2.3 Expectation and desire to work in original field

Although those several participants had expected their vocational transition to be a difficult process, for most participants, their goals and expectations were to come to Canada and work in their original field of work. When asked how important the role of employment and worklife was in her decision to immigrate, P8 said, “I think it was very important, because I had been used to working all the time. I thought that for sure I would come here and I would find a similar job here as back home.” There was also a sense of striving not only to remain in the same field of work, but to also advance in their career. As illustrated by P7’s comment, “I really wanted a job that was more or less the same as the one I left behind, and I wanted progress in my career. I’m not interested in sort of going down.”

P1 had expected to get a job that at the Canadian branch of the same company he worked for prior to his immigration and P19 had based his expectation on his research on the job market regarding his field:

I was told that I would be able to get an opening at Ernst & Young, because I was at Ernst & Young for more than 10 years. So I had that expectation… After coming here in the summer, they said that they didn’t have any opportunities at that point. (P1)

For example, Stats Canada, I looked at that. I looked at Monster and Workopolis, just to see what kind of jobs are out there. When I saw the number of jobs in my profession, I got excited. (P19)

Several participants expressed confidence that their work experience from their country of origin would be useful in helping them attain employment without difficulty. P12, for instance, thought that his banking experience was transferable to Canada:

I thought at the time that my job was pretty mobile, because something like banking is something that you need anywhere. Having worked in an international bank… I thought it would be really transferable skills.
3.2.4 Goal and expectation for education or training

Lastly, a couple of the participants had also anticipated going back to school. P17 had come to Canada with the intention of going back to school full-time to attain a post-graduate degree and had anticipated working part-time. P4 and P8 were planning on going back to school if they had trouble finding work. P8 said, “My mother always said that you should get to work, if I don’t work, I should consider education, further study.” P4 also indicated thoughts about gaining more education:

I didn’t have enough confidence that my education or technical background would be enough for me to function well when I came to Canada… I was considering going for some studies before I start working just to get up to speed with things here.
Chapter 4

4 Compromising vocational transition experience

In this chapter, the participants’ experiences during their career transition in Canada are explored. During the interviews, the participants revealed their experiences throughout their vocational transition in Canada. They revealed that the transition was not one without difficulties. Not only did they have to deal with adapting to a new culture, they also had to adjust to career-compromising situations. This chapter presents the major themes that emerged from the participants’ descriptions of their career transition experiences. The themes pertained to the cultural adaptations they had to go through; their initially experienced difficulties; the various decision-making influences regarding their job-search; their experienced career compromises; and the actions that the participants took during their career transition as well as the intentions behind those actions.

4.1 Acculturation

Most of the participants spoke about having to adapt to the differences between their original culture and Canadian culture, as well as dealing with living abroad away from their families, during the initial stages of their immigration experience.

4.1.1 Adjustment

Many of the participants expressed having to adjust to Canadian cultural norms such as the cultural difference in communication. P14 illustrated the difference by comparing her communication style back in Asia and the communication style in Canada, “When you make a connection, you have to have a good personality, you have to keep quiet, that’s the Asian culture… But Canada has made me more outgoing, improved my personality and made me more of a leader.”

Some participants also had to adjust to Canada’s liberal culture, equality, people’s rights to freedom of speech, people’s openness and Canada’s multiculturalism. These cultural differences were welcomed by most of the participants and a little challenging for others to adapt to at first. P14 spoke about the sexism that she experienced in her country of origin, “Being female, we feel lower than a guy. They have power, they are stronger, whatever you say I just do… But now I
see the world differently and I adjust myself.” P19 enjoyed Canada’s freedom of expression and P5 had to adjust to the multiculturalism:

The best thing that I like about Canada is the freedom of expression. I came to know that discrimination laws are very strict. But at the same time, you’re given the freedom to exercise your own religion; to basically live your own life in the way that you think is best. (P19)

When I did the perfume job, it was a challenge. This was a new country, people looked different. There are people from all over the world. Back home, it’s only one colour. People were only Lebanese. If you get any (diversity), you get some from the Gulf, from the Arab Emirates, and that’s it. (P5)

Some participants also mentioned having to adapt to Canadian work standards. For example, P19 said:

One of the big changes that I had to adapt to and change was to reduce my speed. I used to do lots of hasty things, like multi-tasking at work. Overall the speed of my life was faster so I had to apply brakes on that.

Several participants also mentioned having to get used to getting around via the local transportation system. P4 expressed that, “At the beginning, the difficulties were with basic living situations, such as how to use the subway, how to use the TTC (public transportation system), where to get food…” A few participants, like P5, also expressed having to adjust to living away from their families, “The changes that I found were most difficult were kind of funny. Silly things like living alone. I had never lived alone before. I now have a different appreciation for my parents.”

4.1.2 Cultural barriers

Other than having to adjust to cultural differences, many participants also had to deal with cultural barriers such as feelings of discrimination and language barriers. P4 experienced feelings of being exploited as an immigrant worker:
There are lots of companies that figured out they can get the immigrants to do the job and underpay them...they will make you work overtime without pay, you work Saturday, Sundays, late. You don’t always get fair treatment, you don’t know your rights and basically for somebody who is new here, it takes a while to figure out these things.

P2 felt that the Canadian officials had given him negative attitude during his initial experiences in Canada:

The things that actually upset me is the attitude of the people. Especially the official people, when you go for the SIN card or for the official papers. They are very odd, they don’t have a sense of humour, they treat you like I don’t know what.

P3 experienced being stereotyped by her own ethnicity:

The Canadians, or other people of different nationalities, won’t ask you point blank, have you been a nanny? But a Filipino who has been here for 20 years will ask you because they think that everybody who comes from the Philippines are nannies.

Several participants also mentioned language, particularly their accents, as being a cultural barrier to acculturation. P9 stated that some people discriminated against immigrants with accents, “I think that Canadian people are very friendly, very nice. But there is still a percentage of people who don’t treat those who have speaking accents well.” P15 similarly echoes, “Most of us (immigrants) speak with an accent, but nevertheless, I feel sometimes we’re being discriminated.” Having an accent also created a negative work experience for P16:

I’m very annoyed by the accent thing... I hear people in my office mocking the accent of the Korean security guard or the accent of the Caribbean underwriter. So I hear that and I cannot help but think that they are also mocking my accent.

P20 found that his limited language skills made it difficult for him to get a job, “When I was going to interviews, the language was, I believe, my main difficulty.”

4.2 Experienced difficulties

Aside from having to deal with acculturation, the participants discussed having to deal with a range of difficulties during their initial phases of their lives in Canada. They spoke of the burden
of financial constraints and of having difficulty finding a job, reporting a range of job-search barriers and a lack of helpful aids.

4.2.1 Financial strains

Several participants expressed having had financial concerns and running out of funds to pay for their living costs and none to spare for anything else. This caused a great deal of stress for the participants who were not expecting this difficulty. For instance, P11 spoke about the unexpected high costs of living and the stress that it caused her and P15 talked about running out of the funds that she had brought with her in order to start a new life in Canada:

I landed in Toronto and I didn’t expect it to be so expensive… I moved downtown and I was pretty shocked by how expensive it is. I had savings, I had my settlement fund, but I discovered that it goes really fast. It was pretty stressful to discover that. (P11)

You leave everything back home and you come with a few suitcases only. Of course you have money, but you spend all this money the first month because you don’t have furniture, you don’t have an apartment, you don’t have a job, so you have to pay rent, buy food, clothes. (P15)

Under these stressful financial conditions, P5 was even considering returning to his country of origin:

There were no jobs, and I’m paying rent, and the rent was $900 a month. I can afford that for a few months, but I can’t do that forever. So I was thinking, if I can’t find a job within a year, I’ll have to go back home. (P5)

4.2.2 Difficulty finding employment

Related to the issue of financial strain was the difficulty that the participants had in finding a job. Many participants claimed to have had this difficulty. When asked what the main difficulties that she encountered when she first came to Canada, P12 said, “Getting work. It was a nightmare that lasted for a long time” and P14 similarly answered, “The first thing (difficulty) is about working, about finding a proper job.”
All of the participants were met with job-search barriers that prevented them from acquiring jobs. The most pre-dominant barriers were the lack of Canadian work experience, issues related to credentials, cultural barriers, economic and political issues, and lack of help.

None of the participants except for P14 had any previous work experience in Canada prior to their immigration. Most of the participants reported that not having any Canadian work experience was a major barrier to acquiring a job. P5 expressed that she repeatedly confronted this barrier, “I was told this over and over, if you don’t have Canadian experience, you won’t get a job… and every time I was applying for a job, I had that fear, that I don’t have Canadian experience.” P13 expressed a feeling of being judged negatively by employers for being a newcomer and not having any Canadian knowledge or experience:

So basically they think “Oh you’re new here, you don’t have any Canadian knowledge or Canadian experience.” As integrated as it (Canada) is, I pretty much know what’s going on after I’d gone to the interviews every time. They judge you right away.

P15 expressed being frustrated by the catch twenty-two situation of not being able to get the required experience because no one will give it while P7 felt frustrated that her prior work experience were not seen as sufficient:

It’s a nice country, but there is a lack of job opportunities. If you don’t have Canadian experience, you cannot get a job. So it’s very stressful for immigrants because how can you get Canadian experience if you cannot get a job anywhere? (P15)

All they were asking for was Canadian experience, which I didn’t have. On my resume, I stated clearly that I worked in London, UK, but they kept asking me if it was Ontario and I said no. It was pretty hard at the beginning because I worked in the second financial place in the world, and they were not very interested in my previous experience. (P7)

Most of the participants also reported issues related to credentials as being the source of difficulty in gaining employment. A lack of Canadian credentials was one of those barriers that many of the participants experienced in their quest for employment. Several participants reported that their qualifications were not recognized. For example, P7 was astonished that no one took her qualifications into consideration and instead hired her for her bilingual abilities:
It was a bit of a shock to me at the beginning that the only thing that they were looking at or interested in was the fact that I was bilingual. They were just pointing me at the call centers. I thought, “Come on! I’ve got an education! I’ve got experience!

Therefore, many participants reported that it was necessary for them to have gained credentials recognized by Canada in order to acquire the jobs that they wanted – mainly related to their previous professions. P13 reported having to go back to school to gain some Canadian-recognized credentials, even though he didn’t want to, in order to remain to his field of work.

I wanted to stay in the same profession because I didn’t want to start something else or go through taking other courses. But most of the places that I went to said, “Oh, you don’t have any Canadian education.” So that’s why I had to go to George Brown College to upgrade my CV.

P19, who had to gain training in order to get his Project Management Professional designation expressed the unexpected nature of having to gain qualifications, “the unexpected difference was that they really go for certifications in your profession.”

For those who wanted to gain re-accreditation, a few of the participants found it challenging to do so. P15 demonstrates this when she said, “Then I went to the OCT (Ontario College of Teachers) and applied for a license, but it’s a really long process. It’s not easy to get a license here.” Similarly, P6 also voiced the difficulty in getting re-accredited:

They just require so many documents to come directly from back home. You’d have to be there (in your home country) to actually do something to get those documents but you’re here (in Canada). You don’t have the luxury of going there. It’s not like going from Toronto to Mississauga. It’s an international trip.

Over-qualification was another credentials issue experienced by a few participants. On the one hand, participants like P18 was being offered jobs that she felt that she was overqualified for:

I dealt with a portfolio myself at Bloomberg. That didn’t seem to matter… I was thinking that Bloomberg would hold some regard in people’s minds. I thought maybe they would think, “Oh, she’s worked there, with traders and taught them financial market stuff, and
she’s learned yield curves and commodities” ... I’m not admin, where they put things in the database. I had a real job!

Oh the other hand, participants like P15 who felt that having qualifications was a barrier to finding a job “If I put in my Bachelor’s degree, some people won’t even have college diplomas, so I was kind of overqualified.”

Many participants also spoke about cultural barriers to their job-search, which included a difference in the application process, discrimination and language barriers. P1 felt that there were cultural differences between the way that people applied for and acquired jobs in Canada and her country of origin:

> When you ask for a job, you can’t do much other than submit your resume to the human resource. That’s all you can do here… you can’t do more than that. Someone can’t tell them to take you and say that you’re good. The employer will take you if they want to. There are no favours being done, which is different back home in the Middle East. If you’re working in a position, you can go and tell another person to hire someone else and they would do that for you.

Quite a few participants also felt that discrimination was another job-search barrier. P13 shared that, “they don’t recognize you in the organizations, especially an immigrant coloured person.” P14 also added that employers preferred hiring Canadian applicants rather than immigrant applicants, “If you have 900 people in the candidate market and only one position was available, they would prefer a Canadian. Because they don’t need any adjustment.”

Another cultural barrier that many participants experienced was the language issue. P15 felt that his limited fluency in English and his accent led to his experience of being discriminated against, “English is not my mother tongue, and I felt like I had been discriminated. For my accent.” P16 described having to adjust to the jargon for his job interviews, “For the first two of three interviews it was difficult to master the jargon. You know the jargon in your own language, but you don’t know the jargon in English.”

Many participants expressed that there was a lack of help for job-searching. Some participants such as P12 spoke of how not having the right connections was a barrier to her job-search. When
asked to talk about lessons that she learned from her job-search, she answered, “It’s who you know. It’s even worse than I imagined. It’s the same in Egypt. It’s just about who you know. But here, I don’t know anybody, that’s the difference.”

A few participants also reported that employment centres were not useful in helping them find employment. For example, P8 said:

I visited some employment centres. I just went there to use the computer to prepare my resumes. After I got my resume done, I tried to show the workers over there how my resume looked… but the problem is that, when I submitted the resume to the employers, I never got a response. So sometimes I think that this help is not really helpful. I didn’t really get useful help from employment centres. I still really felt like I was by myself.

P12 contributed to this topic regarding the lack of help by describing the lack of resources to help immigrants find employment:

I think the problem is that so many people come here and there are so few spots… I wish there was a way that it could be something that all the companies know about and they would participate in the program by giving internships to that program every year… But the way that the system is for immigrants to join the workforce is appalling.

Another job-search barrier mentioned by some participants was related to economic and political issues. Economic fluctuations and political unrest made it difficult for some participants to find employment. For example, P7 experienced a glitch in her job-search during 9/11, “Going back to 9/11, it was really hard to find something. A lot of people experienced that.” P20, on the other hand, was affected by the fluctuation of his job market, “when I came, it was half a year before the computer boom just crashed, and there was not enough jobs for me.”

4.3 Job-search decision-making influences

The participants reported a range of factors that influenced their decisions in the jobs that they searched for. The factors pertained to job opportunities, their career development, their family or significant others, income, their qualifications, and the location and transportation issues of the job.
4.3.1 Job opportunities

A few participants reported that the kinds of jobs that they were looking for depended on whether there were opportunities to get into that field. For example, P15 said, “At the beginning, I was looking for interpreter and translator positions, but there was not a high demand. So I immediately switched to other fields.” P3 was similarly influenced by the job market demand:

I didn’t want to go into health care, so I thought that I’d just get into finance… It’s hard to break into the film industry, so I’d better go with this (finance) because I know a lot of Canadian animators who don’t have jobs.

4.3.2 Career advancement

For several participants their career development was an influential decision-making factor in terms of job hunting. They reported job stability and the potential for career advancement to be priorities in the jobs that they searched for. P16 illustrates this with this statement:

Basically what I was looking for was a job that paid enough for what I thought was the level of my skills and experience that was also a long-term stable employment where I could get promoted and be able to go up.

4.3.3 Family or significant other

For some participants, their families and significant others also played a role in the decisions that they made for job-searching. P1’s main priority was to be able to spend more time with his family, “I didn’t want a very high career job, because my priority was spending time with my family.” P4 similarly prioritized family and said:

You have to account for your family and the other factors that may affect your family... The priorities in your life become different. When I initially came to Canada, I was single and I was totally professionally oriented… But then my priorities shifted towards my personal and family life so that affected my job and the decisions that I had to make for my job. For example, I had taken jobs that are less risky and I started looking for jobs at more stable companies than with companies that are riskier but where I could have made more money.
P11 expressed that after meeting her significant other, her priorities changed:

> I was considering moving to the United States and I started moving towards it. But when I met my significant other, I figured I’d start focusing on my personal life, building a family, and just taking it easy. So I stayed with the same company for almost 4 years.

### 4.3.4 Income

Income was a factor that influenced most of the participants’ employment searching decisions. They expressed requiring employment because they needed the money to survive. This influential factor is related to their experienced financial difficulties previously mentioned under experienced difficulties. P16 prioritized income over his field of profession, “My priority was to get a good enough salary to pay for the (rent). I didn’t mind getting a job in another area.”

P18 had started off expecting to get a job at a higher salary level than she could realistically get:

> I met up with this girl who sort of was a recruiter and I told her that I wanted to earn $60,000 off the bat. She looked at me and thought I was crazy. So when I was earning $30,000 it was a real shock.

Then, P18 began to search for employment just to earn an income, “Survival! I’ve got to pay my bills… I was out of work for so many months, I just had to get a job, any job.”

### 4.3.5 Qualifications and experience

Most of the participants also reported qualification related issues as being factors influencing their job-search decisions. The qualification related issues included the requirement of Canadian work experience; the participants’ desire to remain in their profession; and their desire to utilize their past experience in their employment in Canada. When asked what the major factors he had consider when he was trying to find employment, P5 answered:

> I was told over and over that if you don’t have Canadian experience, you wouldn’t get a job. So this was the major consideration. Every time I was applying for a job, I had that fear that I don’t have Canadian experience.
Many participants reported looking for professions in their original field of work. P1, who had been working as a certified general accountant and certified public accountant in his country of origin expressed that, “my intention was to get an accounting job in the finance field. That was the first priority.” P12 reported prioritizing his field of work over other factors of the job:

I wasn’t putting proximity into consideration whatsoever. I didn’t care about the money at the started. I thought maybe some internship, just something in my field that would put me on the right track. That was the only criteria I was looking for. I wasn’t looking for the financial remuneration; I wasn’t looking at where the job is. If it were on Mars, I would go.

In a similar vein, some participants prioritized utilizing their past experience in the jobs that they were looking for. For example, P19 was looking for jobs where he knew he could utilize his previous work experience as a management consultant:

First of all, my main target was to find a professional job. Because having worked in the consulting environment, I can work in any industrial sector, in any company, in a business process consultant position, or project management kind of position. So I targeted these two or three areas. If you have these skills, you can work in any company.

### 4.3.6 Transportation and location

Some participants were also concerned about the location of the workplace and how they would travel there. They prioritized jobs that they would be able to travel to without difficulty. For example, P4 expressed that he did not like commuting a long distance to work and preferred finding a job in Toronto where he lived:

A major factor (I had to consider when trying to find employment) was geographical location, because I always lived in Toronto, so commuting to work was a big issue depending on where it was. It was tough for me to go to Oakville every day in the traffic and come back.

### 4.4 Career compromise

All the participants reported having to make a range of career compromises. They also spoke about their justifications for making those compromises.
4.4.1 Compromises

Compromises or sacrifices in the jobs that they had to take included job type, level of work, their career development, their dignity, job stability, and unstable work schedules.

4.4.1.1 Job type

Many of the participants reported having to make compromises regarding the types of jobs that they wanted. Many reported having to sacrifice working in their original field of work and instead taking on jobs in any field. P8 had to sacrifice working in her field as an engineer and said, “I worked as an office administrator, not in my field. It was kind of a compromise, just to find any job.”

P15 had to search for jobs outside of her original field of work due to issues with accreditation, “First, I tried to get my license from the OCT, but because it’s so long a process, I had to look for a job in other fields.”

Some participants also reported having to sacrifice their job satisfaction and interests. P18 reported having to sacrifice her job interests, “I know there’s a reason why I wasn’t comfortable with all of these jobs. They just probably weren’t really for me. I know they don’t speak to me and my passions.” Similarly, P10 spoke about sacrificing job satisfaction and plans on leaving that job, “I don’t really plan to stay in that area for more than 3 or 4 years, because it’s not very exciting, not very challenging. But now they are paying.”

4.4.1.2 Job level and income

Most participants expressed feeling overqualified for the jobs that they were able to acquire. P12 reported being disappointed in having to take a job at a call center:

> I expected to get a job in my field, more or less at the same level, maybe one step back, but not 1000 steps back. I’ve never had to work in a call center in my life. It’s even worse than I ever imagined.

Some participants even had to dumb down their experience in order acquire jobs. P10 talked about having to remove his credentials in order to gain a lower level job:
In these kinds of jobs (survival jobs), you can’t use your real resume. You have to delete your education because there is no way they will call you if you put Bachelor of Engineering. Nobody will call you. You have to hide your education.

Another related sacrifice that many participants experienced was a lower salary than what they had expected to get. P5 reported having had to compromise job position and salary, “Major compromises. I’m willing to do anything. I had a better job, better position, and a better salary. But now I’m in a different country and I’m willing to do anything.”

### 4.4.1.3 Career development

Several participants experienced having to sacrifice developing a career in Canada in order to just find any job to survive. For example, P2 said:

> You just kind of compromise everything in getting the job, because you know it’s not a matter of finding things. You have to have some income and then you can look for something else… so you are just looking for income, you are not looking for a career at that time.

Many also reported that they had to return to a lower career development stage as being a major compromise. P5’s illustrates this compromise when he said, “I think I maintained going in the same direction. Maybe f I stayed back home I would have jump started to what I am right now. I didn’t have to go through those three years of being first support.” P11, who had been working as a translator, interpreter, and business administer in her country of origin had to volunteer in order to get the job that she wanted, “At that point, I was ready to volunteer, whatever it takes to get into the organization. So I immediately told him that I would be willing to join him on any terms to help him with whatever he needs.”

Most of he participants had to gain training, education or re-accreditation in order to gain the required qualifications to attain their desired employment. Not only did this mean that the participants were forced to return to a lower career development stage, it was also a financial burden on them.

Some of the participants reported having to take some courses, some others went back to school to get university degrees, several took language courses, and many had to get professional
certificates. For instance, P13 was required to take some courses in order to gain re-accreditation because some of the courses he did back home were not recognized in Canada. He said, “They said that some of the courses are recognized here and some are not… They asked me to do some upgrades, so that’s why I ended up going to George Brown College to get my diploma.” Some other participants, like P3, went back to university to get a degree. When discussing her choice to go back to university to get a Bachelor’s degree in Commerce, she said, “I decided to apply to Ryerson because I heard stories that if you apply for a college, employers won’t like it… They’d rather go for the university person than the college person.”

Several participants took language courses to learn English or French. For instance, P14 reported having to take English lessons because she was not confident in her language abilities:

> In Thailand, we have English as a second language, but we didn’t use it at all. We just studied it in the classroom. So I’m not confident about speaking English. Reading is fine, and writing isn’t a big deal. But listening was a problem because I didn’t use it everyday… First, I enrolled in ESL and co-op program for 3 months and 2 months for English study.

Many of the participants pursued a professional certificate in the field that they were looking to enter. P16 expressed that he was taking courses to acquire the Canadian Risk Management designation and that he was not enjoying the courses:

> Right now I’m taking a course to get a designation in insurance… The designation is called Canadian Risk Management. It’s just three courses, and it’s the same. I just completed the first one and it was horrible! ... But now I know that it doesn’t matter if I study well or not. I’m not there to learn. I’m there to get the designation so that I can get ahead in my career, which is something I recognize now. But it shouldn’t be that way, right?

P18 reported a similar experience of having to work towards a certificate for the benefit of her career. However, she was not pleased with the idea of having to get more training on top of the education that she already had:
I was studying for the Canadian Securities course because everybody was saying, “If you don’t have the CSC, you’re not going to get anywhere.” I thought to myself that I had just finished my degree and I don’t want to study anymore. But if that’s what you’re telling me, then that’s what I’m going to have to do… Now I’m going to go back to school, which is a really huge sacrifice.

4.4.1.4 Dignity

A few participants reported having sacrificed their dignity in their vocational transition here in Canada. P9 spoke about sacrificing her dignity when she experienced discrimination at work:

The compromise is that sometimes I think I sacrifice my dignity… Everybody knows about discrimination. I don’t know if he (my manager) knows human rights. But when they talk, they talk very rudely to you. So if you fight back, you might lose the job, so you have to compromise.

P12 expressed that she had to give up her prestige, which was an important thing in her culture back home and was something she had to adjust to:

In my country status is very important, even if it’s not the money, your job title or what you do is. So that’s the way I was raised… it was a change for me to accept that… I just thought, okay, if it’s a call centre, let it be.

4.4.1.5 Job stability

Some participants reported having to sacrifice job stability. They reported having to take jobs that were insecure, part-time, and had unstable work hours.

For instance, P5 had to take on multiple part-time jobs in order to make enough money to survive:

I was willing to take any job. I was doing those part-time jobs and if that had involved the right money, I would have kept doing that… at some point, I had four jobs in parallel. I did that 6 days a week. So I had Sunday free to go and get my groceries.
P14 had to sacrifice job security for the income. She said, “Yes (I was compromising job security). It was for 2 months and for $30 an hour. After that I might not have a job. I guess I gained something and I lost something.”

P13 had a temporary position working as a replacement staff and had to work unstable hours. When asked about compromises that he had to make, he said, “sometimes they ask me to work in a different shift, and I’m not used to working a shift… I started to work in two different shifts, and sometimes I have to work on the weekend.” He then described his job by saying:

It’s a different title and I have to work at night. It is a shelter so I have to work at night for twelve hours as a replacement staff… I think maybe they wanted to test me. To see how I work and how adaptable I am.

4.4.2 Intentions of compromise

Below are the most commonly reported reasons that the participants gave as to why they had to make the career compromises that they made. Their intentions behind their career compromises were to gain income to survive, to acquire their desired employment, and to advance in their careers.

4.4.2.1 To gain Canadian-recognized credentials

This reason for making career compromise is related to the credential related job-search barrier that the participants experienced. A couple of the participants found that because they didn’t have the Canadian recognized credentials, they had to compromise their career goals and expectations. For instance, P16 had wanted to return to working as an underwriter, which he had to sacrifice:

I guess the main one (compromise) was that I wanted to get a job as an underwriter, which was my experience. The main compromise was not getting that because I don’t have the CIP designation that they were looking for.

Therefore, some participants resulted in having to make career compromises in order to gain the required Canadian-recognized credentials. P16 revealed that he had to sacrifice his past experience and return to the career development stage of acquiring a designation. “Almost every employer wants some Canadian credentials. They basically don’t care about your experience.
They don’t care about your preparation. They don’t care about anything. They want to see three initials after your name, like CIP.”

4.4.2.2 To gain Canadian work experience

The requirement that most employers have for their employees to have had Canadian work experience forced the participants to make career compromises in order to gain this required experience. P3, one of the several participants who reported this justification for career compromise, reported having to take part-time positions in order to gain Canadian work experience. When asked what the major compromised she made were, she said:

That would be when I would tell the employer that even if you start me off as a part-time (worker), I will take it just so I can get this Canadian experience you’re talking about. So I didn’t demand the employer. I tried to beg them to hire me.

P10 expressed that he was willing to have foregone the salary in order to acquire the work experience. When discussing his experienced job-search difficulties, he said, “The main thing is that I was even considering working for free to get some Canadian experience. I probably would have done it if I didn’t get that job.”

4.4.2.3 Income for survival

Many of the participants reported having to make career compromises due to the necessity of earning an income to survive. Due to the job-search barriers that they experienced, they were not gaining the employment that they desired. At the same time they were unemployed and running low on funds, therefore, the participants had to sacrifice the jobs that they wanted and take any job that will provide them with the funds to survive.

P20 reported that his compromise was having to work in the factory and when asked why he decided to make that compromise he said, “Money only. You have to live somehow. And our daughter was going to school.”

P19 similarly compromised his desired type of work in order to make a decent income:

At that time I was in dire straits because I had spent a lot and I wasn’t really making money, but working hard. I was working 50, 60 hours but still not getting paid. Because
the type of employment I was in wasn’t paying me enough. So at that time I was ready to compromise anything and look for a job that could pay my bills.

4.4.2.4 To acquire desired employment

For most participants, the main purpose of making career compromises was to acquire their long-term goal of returning to their original profession or entering a new profession of interest. P3 and P13 both expressed having to make a compromise in their career development by going back to school in order to re-enter their original field of work. P3 said, “I liked this program, because if I graduate from this, I can go back to advertising. That’s what I was planning to do, go back to advertising.” P13 similarly stated:

Basically, I wanted to practice what I did, I wanted to practice the same profession because I don’t want to start something else… but most of the places I go to say “Oh you don’t have any Canadian education.” So that’s why I have to go to George Brown College.

P6, who was a French teacher back in her country of origin, expressed that she went back to school to attain a computer science degree in Canada in order to get a better job. When asked why she decided to do a Bachelor of Arts in Computer Science, she said, “My friends told me that since I already have French/English, if I have computers, it’s going to be easy and I won’t have to find survival jobs and at least I’ll have a decent job.”

P15, who had been working as a language teacher and interpreter prior to her migration, decided to enter the law clerk program at George Brown College. She explained that she wanted to switch into that field because there was a higher demand for that field of work:

At the beginning, I was looking for interpreter and translator positions, but there was not a high demand. So I immediately switched to other fields. Now I work in the legal field, and there is a high demand for legal positions. So I was looking where the jobs are, where it will be easy to get a job, where the demand is high. It’s in the legal area.

4.4.2.5 Career advancement

For several participants, they made career compromises in hopes of advancing in their careers. The compromise that they made in order to advance their careers was mainly related to going
back to school to gain further education or training. Therefore, they had to return to a lower career development stage, sacrifice the career advancement that they could have had, had their credentials and experience been recognized, in order to advance to higher levels in their career in Canada. The participants expressed that the training had no educational value and served mostly as a means to advance in their careers. For instance, when speaking about his experience in pursuing his Canadian Risk Management designation, he said, “I’m not there to learn, I’m there to get the designation so I can get ahead in my career.” P16 expressed a similar sentiment:

Right now I’m taking a course to get a designation in insurance… The designation is called the Canadian Risk Management. It’s just three courses, and it’s the same. I just completed the first one and it was horrible! ... But now I know that it doesn’t matter if I study well or not. I’m not there to learn. I’m there to get the designation so that I can get ahead in my career, which is something I recognize now. But it shouldn’t be that way, right?

4.5 Internal locus of control

Aside from taking it upon themselves to get some training to acquire Canadian-recognized credentials, the participants reported having taken certain actions throughout the compromising vocational transition experience. These actions that they took reflected a sense of human agency and self-efficacy. The most prominent actions that they took were being flexible, being persistent and resilient, networking, taking initiative in job-searching, and showing enthusiasm.

4.5.1 Flexibility

Due to the many job-search barriers that the participants had to face, most of them spoke about having to make changes, and in essence be flexible, during their career transition experience in Canada. They were flexible in two ways. They were flexible in their general attitude towards their career development. They were also flexible in taking any short-term opportunities while keeping their original end goal in mind and continuing to pursue that.

Many of the participants indicated taking on a flexible attitude towards their vocational development. They expressed it both explicitly and implicitly, implicitly through reporting the change in career goals that they later chose to pursue as a result of the environmental constraints.
P5, for example, explicitly reported that being flexible played an important role in his vocational development in Canada:

My personal action was being flexible. Whenever I meet somebody for the first time, I would make up a conversation, and I would let you know that I was looking for a job and that I am willing to do anything. I’m very flexible, hours and job-wise. So I think my personality made people see how open I was, that I would do anything.

P9 spoke about being happy regardless of whether she can get back into her original field of work and no matter what job she would get. She implicitly reported being flexible in her attitude in her vocational transition:

So after 10 years of being in Canada, I didn’t want to go back to my profession of being a university teacher because I think that in North America, you will feel good whatever you do. You do it, you want to do it, and you just do it. It doesn’t mean that I must go back to the same profession. I can still enjoy what I do.

Many participants were also flexible in the kinds of jobs that they took in the short-term while keeping their goals consistent. They saw the less desirable short-term jobs as just temporary and stepping-stones to getting to their eventual desired careers. P1 illustrates this in his description of the common situations that he encountered during his job-search in Canada. He said, “I was working in that law firm. I was not happy doing that job because I could do much more than that. So while working there, I was on the lookout.” P4 reported a similar experience:

The smart immigrants aren’t stupid. So when they get their experience, they use the company as a stepping-stone to get better positions. Like in CIBC, for example, where I am now, a very professional environment. But getting there indeed was an experience.

4.5.2 Persistence and resilience

Throughout their discussions of their career transition experience, most of the participants showed a great deal of persistence and resilience. They continued to strive towards creating a career for themselves in the face of adversity. When asked what important factors had an impact on his vocational adjustment in Canada, P2 responded:
When you’re aggressive in your job-search. You can’t relax. You have to just continue searching and say to yourself that you will get something. Keep going, even though all the doors close in front of you. You will find some time, somewhere, that one door is open. Then you can just jump there and take it.

P4 similarly discussed how his persistence and resilience was fundamental in his career transition:

I think it most crucial to be proactive, to look for it (a job) all the time, to do the best that you can. To me, it never came by chance. Finding a job was never a matter of chance. Nobody ever came to me, not even colleagues that I work with, and told me that they had an opening… I had only one chance when they (the company) were willing to take me on, but it (finding a job) was almost always a result of proactively pursuing something.

4.5.3 Taking initiative in job-searching

Most of the participants reported taking it upon themselves to reach out to the right people to apply for desired jobs and showed enthusiasm in order to increase their chances of being hired.

4.5.3.1 Networking

Many participants reported reaching out to people within their desired field of work to establish a connection in order to increase their chances of gaining employment within the field. When asked what she did in order to get a job that was more related to her previous vocational background from her home country, P14 reported networking with people within her field at a recreational club:

I built connections. In the tennis club, I met some people who were in the accounting area. I happened to meet accounting people and so I made connections… Because I know that networking here will give me a job, not a public search.

Some participants, such as P13, network in order to meet people to get more information and advice for their career development. P13 said, “I met a lot of interesting people when I went for the orientation at a job-search workshop… I’m interested because I just like to meet people. You share knowledge and experience.”
4.5.3.2 Getting professional help for job-search

Although not all of the participants found it useful, most of them actively sought out help from job agencies to find employment as well as to get help in improving their resumes. P15, for example, got some useful help in landing employment from employment agencies. She said, “I was lucky to get a job right away, but I had to start with low salary, and I had to go through employment agency first.”

P13 reported having sought out help from job centers to improve his resume. He reported, “Job centers helped me to adjust my resume, cover letter according to what someone (the employer) was looking for.”

4.5.3.3 Actively searching and applying for jobs

Most of the participants had been very active in searching for job postings online and in the newspapers. They would continuously send out resumes to job postings hoping to gain employment. They didn’t just sit back and wait for opportunities to arise. Although, applying to job postings weren’t always fruitful. When asked what she did to find her initial employment in Canada, she said, “Internet research of course. I applied to different positions through the Internet, and through the newspaper. I subscribed immediately to the Toronto Star.”

P11 revealed that she had spent a lot of time searching for job postings and sending her resumes to the companies during the initial stage of her immigration:

I was looking for postings in employment newspapers. Then I started going to companies’ websites in the industry that I was interested in. At first, I was doing associations, organizations, to see if they had administrative openings. Then I switched to the University of Toronto library, and I was spending at least 4 hours a day there, researching the company websites, postings, and sending my resume.

4.5.3.4 Showing enthusiasm

A few participants reported the importance of showing their enthusiasm of becoming employed for their desired jobs. P19 spoke about showing enthusiasm as being an important personal action that he took in order to create vocational opportunities for himself. He said, “Your own personal actions are very important. You have to express yourself and you really have to show
the interest if you want to move ahead.” When he spoke about the main lessons he learned from his job-search experience, P8 reflected the same opinion when he said, “I think I should always show my enthusiasm. If really want to do that job, I show my good attitude, willingness to work, etc.”
5 Coping strategies and reflections of compromise

This chapter presents the different coping strategies the participants used to cope with their life changes and the compromises that they had to make in their career development. It also discusses the participants’ reflections about their feelings regarding their career compromises as well as the effects of their vocational transition. Lastly, the main themes that emerged from their interviews regarding the lessons that they learned from their challenging job-search experience are presented. This list can also be framed as advice to other immigrant skilled workers who intend on coming to Canada or who already are in Canada and are struggling with their career development.

5.1 Coping and adaptive strategies

Some common themes arose from the way the participants coped with adapting to a new culture and country, as well as the way they coped with their compromising career transition experiences. They spoke of various social supports that helped them cope during the acculturation phase of their immigration and in times of vocational difficulties. They also presented many ways that they were themselves responsible for facilitating adaptation and coping to acculturation and career compromises, thus indicating the importance of human agency in coping with their immigration adversities.

5.1.1 Social support

Most of the participants reported having received mental and financial support from their friends and family during the initial immigration period as well as through the challenging career transition.

Many participants, such as P12, received help with accommodations and mental support from friends or family during the initial stage of their immigration:

I was living with the mom of one of my sister’s friends and it was a one-bedroom apartment. It was kind of hard, but I didn’t want to leave because I felt that it would have been very lonely.
P18 indicated that she was thankful to have her mother’s mental support when she said, “Thankful, I had my mum. I talked on the phone with my mum every day just trying to cope.” She also reported having received financial support from her parents. P18 said, “Thank God I have my parents! They’re still sending me money. They’re putting me through school now.” She then went on to say, “They bought me an apartment… They’re still sending me money.”

Some participants also found support from previously unknown individuals of the same cultural background. P6 did not have any friends or family with him in Canada and received help from a fellow Romanian lawyer who helped him with accommodations and gave her a job. He said, “It was hard to not have friends and family. During the first few weeks, I had a Romanian lawyer who helped me. He’s a very good man.” When asked how he knew the lawyer, he explained, “I did the (immigration) papers through them for a fee and that’s how I knew him.” He reported, “At the same time, I was employed part-time at their firm where I was doing some law clerical job.” Furthermore, P6 reported, “For the first few weeks, I lived at this lawyer’s place… I didn’t know how the renting works, so he helped me rent a house.”

5.1.2 Personal resources

When talking about how they coped and dealt with acculturation and career compromise, most of the participants spoke about personal changes and actions that they had taken. They spoke about their abilities to adapt and adjust, to persevere, to take on a positive attitude and taking action to cope with times of adversity. These abilities have an underlying state of flexibility. They were flexible in changing their attitude, accepting their new fate and continuing to work towards pursuing their new career development.

5.1.2.1 Being adaptive

Some participants talked about their own abilities to adapt to new and challenging surroundings. For instance, P2 illustrates when he said, “It’s not difficult because I’m an adaptive person. So I’m adapting after 1 to 2 months. I adapted quickly, so it’s not difficult of course. It depends from person to person.” P7 indicated that she had moved somewhere else before and that the transition was easier for her to cope with because she likes changes. When asked how she coped with the changes in her life, she said:
Pretty well, because I had moved before to different countries. I like change. I need change. I’m a person who does very well with changes. It’s kind of a need for me. I kind of need to move around and have new jobs. It’s not something that scares me.

5.1.2.2 Perseverance

When talking about their compromising career transition experience, a theme of resilience emerged from some participants’ discussions. This resilience helped them cope with the many challenges that encumbered them. P5 reported being offered his original position back in his home country but that he was persistent in staying in Canada. P5 said, “My previous boss said that anytime I wanted to go back that I was welcome. So I had a cushion. But I’m the kind of person that wouldn’t give up so easily so I wouldn’t go back.” P6 reflected persistence and perseverance in his statement: “I guess I’m a patient person, and I take things one by one and take it easy. So, these changes haven’t actually had any negative impact on my life.”

5.1.2.3 Staying positive

Throughout the challenging vocational transition experience, some participants showed the ability to maintain a positive attitude by reaching acceptance of their circumstances, focusing on the future and focusing on the good things that have happened. They turned to their inner self and changed their attitudes in order to cope with the difficulties.

P12 originated from Egypt where she reported they place a high value in prestige. She had to relinquish that value in order to cope with her career transition in Canada. She stated, “In my country, status is very important. Not money, but the status, your job title. So that’s the way I was raised.” He then described having to change his attitude to cope with his career compromise:

I don’t have any regrets or anything, but it was a change for me. You have to think outside of the box and you have to change your attitude totally. For me, it wasn’t a barrier. I just thought, okay it’s a call centre, let it be.

Despite the career compromise that P20 had to make, he remained resilient and positive by focusing on the long-term future:

The only compromise was when I worked in the factory. I didn’t have any choice. But there was some (choice) because I have pretty good experience working top jobs in
Ukraine. So it wasn’t hard for me to go into factory or labour work because I know that I can lose it and that I will change it (the job) sometime. So it was temporary.

Other participants, such as P14, focus on the positive aspects of their career development in Canada to cope with the compromising situations. P14 emphasized the permanence of his job over the lower pay and lower hours:

At the job that I’m working at now, they pay me $25 an hour and I work just a few hours, but I’m happy with that. I don’t make a lot of money, but it’s long term for now, for forever, as long as I want to (continue). So I don’t have to be panicked… You have to think about what you want now and in the future then find the proper appropriate decision.

P8 expressed that even though she was disappointed with her career transition experience, she remained positive when thinking about not having relied on welfare:

I think I’ve become realistic. I feel a little bit disappointed but I still try to be positive, because I never applied for welfare. I don’t want to live on welfare. I still have pride. I still want to work with my hands and not just complain about the difficulties to the government and ask them for support.

5.1.2.4 Taking action

When asked how they coped with the changes in their lives through immigrating to Canada, a few participants mentioned taking action to strive for a better circumstance. P1 decided to get his designation in order to get into his desired field of work:

The first thing I thought was that I’ll get my North American qualifications, do an exam and get my designations… because the CPA, the Certified Public Accountant, lots of them are working in Canada. That was the easiest way to step into the accounting field.

P17, on the other hand, actively sought out jobs as a way of coping to the transition. When asked how he coped with his life changes, he said, “I just coped. I just did what I had to do. The first thing I got was the internet service installed at home and started searching (for jobs). He also
described himself by saying, “I’m a go-getter, and if I know this is where I’m going, I’ll go get it and do whatever it takes to get it.”

5.2 Feelings regarding career compromise

When they reflected on their career transition journey, there were mixed feelings. However, most of the participants had negative feelings towards their career compromise. There were feelings of shock, shame, regret, resentment, and disappointment. Most of the participants also felt that the career transition was more difficult than expected. Some participants however had positive feelings about their overall career transition experience. They indicated feeling grateful for the good things aside from the career compromise and also positive feelings for long-term gains despite the difficult journey they went through to get there. Many participants reported feelings of acceptance where they expected it to be difficult or have merely learned to come to terms with the compromising experience and tried to remain positive.

5.2.1 Negative feelings

Many of the participants expressed negative feelings towards the challenges and difficulties that they had to face in their career transition. They expressed experiencing a gap in what they expected their experience to be. They also experienced feelings of shame, disappointment, regret and resentment.

5.2.1.1 Gap in expectation

Many participants expressed feeling that the career transition experience was more challenging than they had expected. They reported having to work in jobs that were less desirable in level, field and salary than they had expected. They also expected that their previous work experience would bring them better and more opportunities than they were met with. P11 illustrates this gap in expectation:

My very strong impression was that people don’t get a clear picture of what they’re getting into when they come to Canada. There are no reliable sources of getting this clear picture, especially for people who come on their own… I expected it to be a more smooth transition and I didn’t expect it to take years.
5.2.1.2 Shame

Upon reflecting on their career compromises, a few participants showed feelings of shame with their challenging experience causing them to doubt their own abilities. P6 said, “I didn’t feel like myself. I felt cheap.” P11 indicated that she felt shameful at how other people were looking at her:

I was very bitter. After 6 months of nonstop effort, I’m getting something that is pretty disappointing. Very disappointing. It’s not something that I was seeing myself doing. It’s not something that pays me a lot of money and it’s very disappointing. I was especially bitter that people (social and professional acquaintances) who were looking at you over the 6 months can’t believe that you can’t make it through and they start questioning your ability.

5.2.1.3 Disappointment

Not surprisingly, some of them had expressed feelings of disappointment regarding their career transition. Most of them had come to Canada with great career goals and expected the career transition to be easier than it turned out to be and the compromises that they had to make made the participants feel disappointed. For example, P1 had expected to acquire a position in the Canadian branch of the same company that she had previously been working in but only came to find out that there were no position available. To this, she said:

I came here with the expectation to work for Ernst & Young and that didn’t work out. So then I was a bit desperate…. You feel it and you are let down. So I looked for any job within the field.

P7, who had a Master’s degree, felt disappointed at the kinds of jobs that she was getting:

I was really down because I felt that there’s no way I went to university for this position… The first job I held here didn’t require for me to get a postgraduate or go to university. I was really down at the beginning.
5.2.1.4 Regret

Due to the compromising transition experience, some participants had also expressed a sense of regret for coming to Canada and felt that they would be better off if they went back to their country of origin. P7 illustrates this sense of regret in when she said, “Sometimes ask myself why did I move? Why did I leave everything behind? … One day I thought that maybe I should go back. I really did think about it because I felt as if I was going nowhere.” P12 expressed the same sentiment:

It’s as if I came here for nothing. What can be worse than that? … I expected to get a job in my field, more or less at the same level, maybe one step back but not 1000 steps back. I’ve never had to work in a call centre in my life. It’s even worse than I ever imagined.

She also reported thoughts of going back to her home country. She said, “It was a life changing experience because I felt that I would give it a couple of years and if the situation didn’t change, I was going to go back.”

5.2.1.5 Resentment

Some participants had also indicated feelings of resentment for the career compromises that they had to make. When asked how he felt when he had to make a compromise for his vocational choice in Canada, he reflected a sense of being cheated something that he was promised. He said, “First, I was not so happy. I was promised something else.”

P18 was told that she had to gain certain credentials in order to acquire her desired profession. However, she reported that the credentials did not help her gain employment in her field and she expressed resentful feelings:

I was studying for the Canadian Securities course because everybody was saying, “If you don’t have the CSC, you’re not going to get anywhere.” I thought to myself that I had just finished my degree and I don’t want to study anymore. But if that’s what you’re telling me, then that’s what I’m going to have to do. So I did the Canadian Securities courses and the CPH and of course, that was useless! It didn’t help me at all!
5.2.2 Positive feelings and acceptance

Some participants managed to cope with their compromises and felt positively towards their vocational transition experience or at least came to a state of acceptance of their journey.

5.2.2.1 Expectations for difficulty

Some participants reported having expected their career transition experience to be difficult, which facilitated the acceptance of their career compromises. For instance, P3 expected to have difficulty returning into her original field of work. When speaking about her expectations for her vocational life in Canada prior to her immigration, she said, “I had the frame of mind that I wouldn’t be able to get a job in my line of work. So I was really prepared, unlike other people who come here and get frustrated. P5 also reported having expected a difficult vocational transition:

Well, I did expect to have difficulty. I had a friend here, and I read a lot that you should give it 6 months to a year. That’s what I actually did. I didn’t have a gap (in my expectations and my experience).

Therefore, some participants expressed feelings of acceptance of their career compromises. For instance, P9 said, “Because I had already known before I came here that the job opportunities are a little bit less there, so I prepared how to survive… psychologically prepared. I didn’t expect to start at the top right from the beginning.”

5.2.2.2 Gratitude for the positive aspects

The participants reported the lack of negative feelings for the short-term pains due to the long-term gains. Some participants also reported being grateful for the positive changes that the transition brought to their lives.

When asked how he felt about making his career compromises, P19 and P4 illustrate a sense of positivism by looking at the long-term gain:

It was difficult, obviously, because everything was at stake at one point. As I said, I was willing to make any compromise. But at the end of the day, when I got this new job, life changed, things changed altogether. It’s like living happily ever after. (P19)
I didn’t feel bad because I was measuring the things in balance. What are the benefits, what are the pros and what are the cons? So I take a balanced approach to it and just look for the long-term gains… They usually paid off. (P4)

Some participants were able to look on the positive side of their career compromise. Their gratitude for the positive aspects of their jobs and for the other good things that the immigration had brought to their lives helped them refrain from feeling negative about their experience.

P16 feels positive by looking at the positive aspects of his job in order to offset the compromises that he has had to make. He said, “Even if I am not really excited about my job, it’s not a problem because it’s not the most important thing. I’m able to get out of the office by five, so I shouldn’t complain.”

P14 expressed acceptance of her career compromise by speaking about the positive impact her work had on her life. She said, “I’m working now, my job is not really unexpected, but I’ve got my own life. I don’t have much money, but I’m happy. I don’t work too hard.”

5.3 Effects of vocational transition experience

The participants’ career transition journeys had major impacts on their lives, both negative and positive. It affected their career identity, mental well-being, and personal lives.

5.3.1 Negative impact

Some of the common negative impacts that their career transitions had on the participants were a lack of a sense of career identity, lowered self-esteem, stress and depression, and an unsatisfactory personal life.

5.3.1.1 No sense of career identity

Some of the participants reported not feeling a sense of vocational identity because their jobs were not in the field that they foresaw themselves in, the work did not speak to their passions, they didn’t feel as if they were contributing to the company in a unstable/part-time position, or their jobs were not challenging enough. For example, P18 spoke about not feeling a sense of career identity in her job at the Israeli Consulate due to the lack of passion for the field of work she was in. She said, “My passion isn’t really in Israel culture. It has its place and I think that it’s
important, but my heart is in animal rights and protecting the environment.” P14 didn’t feel a sense of career identity because her job wasn’t challenging enough for her and she didn’t feel as if she was contributing the organization as much as she could have:

I think my job is supposed to be harder, more advanced and I think that’s how I would be able to utilize myself and be more beneficial to the organization or to Canada. I still have more abilities to be able to do something more and utilize things in a more positive way.

5.3.1.2 Lowered self-esteem

For some participants, the compromising career transition took a toll on their self-esteem, especially for those who had come with high expectations and career goals. P11 found it hard to regain her confidence after developing insecurities about not being able to find work. Upon reflecting on her vocational life in Canada, she said, “It’s very hard to build this trust and confidence again. I’m still thinking that I will not be able to get a job again and that I should hold on to this job that is not really working.” P8 expressed a sense of confusion and a lack of control and shame for not being able to succeed in her career transition. When asked how her vocational life has affected her whole life, she said:

I think this work is causing some confusion in my life. I try to struggle but it caused a lot of confusion. I don’t know what I should do. Especially since I’m 39 years old and I don’t know what I should do to make my life better, to have a better job.

5.3.1.3 Stress and depression

Some of the participants reported being stressed and depressed from their career transition compromises and struggles. Their stress and depression stemmed from gap between their expectations and reality, their work-related difficulties, or from the difficulty in gaining employment. P11 reported feeling both depressed and stressed when asked how she would describe her experience as a new worker in Canada:

It was very stressful, extremely stressful. You have to be a very strong character to keep going to stay positive. I was depressed after 2 years all I was doing was crying and I didn’t want to get up. I wanted to sleep and I was crying all the time. I didn’t want to go
out, I didn’t want to see anybody and it was not working out. I was extremely tired and exhausted. That’s not the way that I was raised.

P18 talked about the stress that she experienced when she was unemployed:

It’s been hell. I got through it, thank god for my parents, but there were certain times when I was going to have a nervous breakdown. For five months I had no job and it was in the middle of winter and I was alone and my friends disappeared because they didn’t want to hear about it anymore.

5.3.1.4 Unsatisfactory personal life

For some of the participants, their career transition challenges made it difficult for them to have a fulfilling personal life. They reported being too pre-occupied with their career development due to the challenging nature of the transition. Financial problems during the transition also caused strain to their family lives. P16 illustrates this experience upon reflection of the role of his vocational life on his new life in Canada:

There are some negative impacts in the sense that I feel that I should be earning a little more. When you have financial problems at home, it’ll start trickling down to everything you do and then you end up fighting because of the silliest thing… So it’s a balance. So I have a lot of time to be at home, but my wife and I need just a little more money, especially with a child.

P12 spoke about her vocational life taking up too much of her time to be able to be with her family. She said, “Well, I spend too much time to have a personal life. There is no personal life… it’s so intense that I just need to crash after a long workday. So I don’t feel like going out.”

5.3.2 Positive impact

Some of the positive impacts that their career transition in Canada had were the sense of vocational identity, increased confidence, better personal life, and motivation to advance in their careers.
5.3.2.1 A sense of vocational identity

Many participants reported feeling a sense of career identity because they did not experience a gap between their expectations and the reality that they were met with in Canada. Some of them had managed to re-enter their original field of work or gained vocational identity due to feelings of contribution to the organization that they were working for. P2 expressed that there was congruency in his expectations and reality. When asked if he felt a sense of vocational identity, he said, “Yes, in fact, this is what I was looking for from the beginning.” P5 acquired his career identity from re-entering his original profession. She said, “Well, that’s my identity, being an IT person. I feel like I fit into the job and I like what I do.” P17 felt a sense of career identity due to his contribution to the company. When asked if his job gave him some kind of identity, he said, “Yeah, it makes me feel like I am something. I’m doing something that contributes to a company.”

5.3.2.2 Increased confidence

Some of the participants reported experiencing an increase in confidence through overcoming their compromising career transition experience through their own agency. They felt that they were able to overcome the challenges with their own actions. P19 illustrates this with his statement, “I now believe in myself more, after having come to Canada because going through the tough times makes you tougher. So my self-worthiness had improved a lot.” P5 expressed the same sentiment, “I think I’m doing well. So I feel like I’m successful in being a newcomer, finding a job and maintaining a job.”

P15 reflects a sense of pride for his own agency:

I guess I have had a successful experience. I’m not flattering myself, but I went to college, I was working at the same time and I made a slow career start with legal assistant positions. Now I’m getting a law clerk position. It’s very competitive.

5.3.2.3 Satisfactory personal life

Many participants reported experiencing satisfactory personal lives because their jobs provided them with income and enough time to have a family life. For instance, when asked how P16’s vocational life has had an impact on other aspects of his life, he said:
In my specific case, it has a positive impact because my job doesn’t require a lot of hours. So that has a very positive effect on the rest of my life because I am able to spend time reading, spend time with my wife or playing with my child and going to the park. I don’t work on the weekends.

When asked the same question, P15 reported the benefits that her income brought her:

If you have an employment, you can afford a lot of things. IF you’re unemployed, unfortunately you cannot afford things… Financially it’s better, for instance, once we got the job with decent pay, we were able to buy a one bedroom condo…comparing that with the beginning when we started from scratch with a few suitcases, it’s quite an achievement for us.

5.3.2.4 Motivation for career advancement

For a few of the participants, who felt that their career transition was a success, they reported a sense of motivation to continue working towards getting higher work positions and to look for more challenging opportunities. P3 illustrates this when he answered the question of how his work experiences made an impact on the way he felt about himself:

I think it (his work experiences) made me more motivated, because even if Canada is much easier to look for a job than back home, I don’t want to sit on my bum and just wait for this opportunity to come.

P15, who found his overall career transition to be “very rewarding”, exuded a sense of motivation for furthering his career development:

Well, the needs are for me to grow because I like what I’m doing. So I have a need to see a career path there that I can follow. I hear that there are a lot of options in the big organizations. So it’s good for me to see some career path and some stability again.

5.4 Lessons learned from job-search experience

During the interview, the participants were asked to reflect on what were some of the main lessons they had learned from their job-search experience in Canada. They had also discussed their reflections about their experience throughout the interview. Their lessons are presented and
offered here as valuable information that could serve as advice to other immigrant skilled workers who find themselves confronted with the same challenges. The main lessons, listed in the order of the level of support for the theme, include taking initiative, networking and making connections, being flexible, resilience and perseverance, refining of resumes, having Canadian-recognized credentials, and job-search preparation.

5.4.1 Taking initiative

Many participants spoke about the importance of taking initiative to facilitate a successful career transition. They talked about active searches for jobs, following up on job searches, improving skills, showing interest and motivation, trying different things and networking (which will be elaborated on next). The emphasis was put on bringing oneself to start and facilitate the job search.

For instance, P4 emphasized the significance of taking action and actively searching for work:

> It was most crucial to be proactive, to look for it (work) all the time, to do the best you can. To me, it never came by chance. Finding a job was never a matter of chance. Nobody ever came to me, not even colleagues that I work with, and told me that they have a job opening.

P15 spoke about the importance of actively applying for work and following-up with HR afterwards. She said, “you need to have not only a good resume, you also need to prepare a good cover letter for every job you’re looking for, and then you need to follow up with HR as well.”

For P9, having and showing your motivation to work was of great importance. She said, “I also tell people, like my brother, when he was searching for a job, you need to be motivated… I think personal initiative and motivation are very important.” He also reported that his motivation landed him his employment “Because at the interview, they can see that I have the willingness to work. I was strongly willing to work.”

5.4.2 Networking and connections

Many participants spoke about the importance of networking and having the right connections. Through their career transition journey, they learned that the key to successfully gaining
employment is through connections and not simply through job applications. P5 spoke about the importance of networking and making connections:

> You need to be in contact with people. If you sit at home and surf on the internet and apply for jobs, you’re not going to be meeting anybody. At that perfume store, I made friends, some of them even tried to get me jobs in a bank… So just connections, making friends, socializing would lead to another job.

When she spoke about the important factors that impacted her vocational adjustment, P11 similarly said, “Well, meeting people, networking, and getting insider information, because the good jobs are not posted. You have to know people on the inside that will point you in the right direction.”

### 5.4.3 Flexibility

Being flexible was another factor that many participants reported being vital for successfully acquiring employment. They spoke of flexibility in terms of being open to taking any vocational opportunities that may present themselves as well as in terms of being adaptive to the Canadian job-search culture.

P15 and P19 spoke about the usefulness of being open to taking jobs that were not in the specific field that they were originally in:

> I think just because I never gave up, and I was looking for a job and I wasn’t looking just for one specific job. I was open to every opportunity. I’m a very flexible person, and that’s how I got a job every time I started looking for one. (P15)

> People landing in Canada as new immigrants should not just focus their efforts on only jobs that are related to their experience, because then you would be limited. That was the mistake that I initially made… So you should be open to the opportunities. (P19)

P14 spoke about the need to be flexible in adapting to the Canadian job-search culture and the way that people communicate:

> In Asian culture, when you make a connection, you have to have a good personality; you have to keep quiet… Sometimes you’re nice, but people don’t know because you kept
quite. You’re hiding it because you’re shy. But Canada has made me more outgoing, improved my personality, and made me more of a leader.

5.4.4 Resilience and perseverance

Many participants talk about the need to persevere and not give up in times of difficulty. They mention having been through the struggle and making the best of it and continuously striving for a better career development.

P4 stated that it is important not to be discouraged or give up and to remain hopeful:

> I found that during the job search, you should be discouraged. You just have to do it. It will come up at one point. It may take longer, it may take shorter, but there will be a job out there. I never had a situation where there wasn’t a job at all.

P7 shared her reflection on her own experience where her resilience in the face of a challenging career transition led her to a fruitful outcome:

> Well, I’m a fighter, so I’m not someone who would just give up because I got knocked on the head, that’s not me. I think that helped me because I’ve learned that whatever situation I find myself in, I fall back on my feet most of the time and I’m in a good position now. So it was worth sticking around and fighting for it.

5.4.5 Refining the resume

Adjusting their resume to match the job description of the positions that they were applying for was an important lesson that some of the participants had learned. They had to tailor their resume so that they didn’t come across as overqualified and they had to have all the exact skills that were required for the job. P9 discovered the necessity of matching the resume to the job when she asked her boss why she was hired:

> I talked to my manager and asked why I had been hired. She told me that not a lot of people could do the job. One lady who had applied for the job had graduated from a Canadian university and she was not hired because we thought that she was overqualified. If I go to a job interview, I think the most important thing is that all the
qualities and skills you have must fit the job. Not too much and not too few, but just right.

5.4.6 Canadian-recognized credentials

The requirement of Canadian-recognized credentials was mentioned as an important factor by several of the participants. P16 spoke about the weight that employers put on having Canadian credentials:

Almost every employer wants some Canadian credentials. They basically don’t care about your experience, they don’t care about your preparation, and they don’t care about anything. They want to see three initials after you name, such as CIP, CMA, or CEA.

P11 advised in gaining training if jobs-search efforts fail. She said, “If you cannot make business connections or social connections, go into a training program here in Canada without wasting time looking for employment.” Additionally, P3 mentioned that Canadian-recognized credentials are required for career advancement. He said, “Here in Canada, I think employers are looking for the number of experience as well as your career advancements. You’ll get promoted if you take an MBA and if you take this accreditation. That’s the big difference.”

5.4.7 Job-search preparation

A few participants talked about the importance of preparing for the job-search prior to the immigration as well as doing research on the company that the immigrant skilled worker intends on applying for. P18 advises, “If anyone was coming now, I would say do your research beforehand and try and set up interviews before you come. Find out what the market is like before you come.” P7 spoke about how her lesson from her experience has taught her to gain employment prior to moving elsewhere if she should immigrate again:

What I’ve gained from this experience is that if I do move somewhere else, I will have a job before I go because I don’t want to start from scratch again. Especially when you’ve reached a certain level in your career, there’s no way, I’m not going down again.
Chapter 6

6 Discussion

This study explored the vocational transition experience of the recent and new immigrant skilled workers in Canada with a focus on their experience around career compromise. The body of literature that investigates career compromise is scarce, as is the body of literature looking at career transition in the immigrant population. The current findings of this study offers insight into the challenges and compromises that immigrant skilled workers have had to face and how they dealt and coped with those challenges and compromises. The study also offers insight into the process of career compromise that immigrants undergo by using the findings to propose a theory of immigrant vocational transition and a theory of immigrant career compromise. The findings are discussed in six parts in this chapter. First, the findings regarding immigrant career transition challenges and effects of those challenges on immigrant skilled workers are analyzed in relation to the existing literature. The second part of this chapter examines the findings in relation to the major career development theories in the form of a proposed immigrant vocational transition theory. Next, an immigrant career compromise model is proposed in relation to the career compromise theories in the third part. In the last three parts, the practical implications of the study, the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are presented.

6.1 Career transition challenges and impact of challenges

Consistent with existing literature, this study revealed that the immigrant skilled workers had immigrated to Canada with intentions of generally improving their careers and quality of life (Richmond, 2002). However, consistent with past findings, they experienced many difficulties during their vocational transition (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Berger, 2004; Chen, 2008; Hakak et al., 2010; Yakushko et al., 2008). According to past findings, these challenges impact immigrant workers both negatively and positively (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Yakushko et al., 2008). The present findings supported this claim.

6.1.1 Immigrant vocational transition challenges

The immigrant skilled workers in this study experienced many barriers and challenges. Not only did they have to face acculturation issues, they also had to overcome financial and employment
barriers. Due to these employment barriers, the immigrant skilled workers had to make career compromises.

6.1.1.1 Job-seeking barriers

Past studies have shown immigrant skilled workers to face many career-seeking barriers, such as unrecognized credentials, requirement of work experience within the country, language issues, culture differences in the job search process and difficulty finding a well paying job (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Chen, 2008; Hakak et al., 2010; Sincere et al., 2009). The immigrant skilled workers in the present study experienced the same financial and job-seeking barriers.

None of the participants had any work experience in Canada prior to their immigration. However, most of them found that it was very difficult to gain employment without it. The participants found themselves in a catch twenty-two situation where they needed to have the work experience in order to gain the employment that no one would offer unless they already had the experience. Consistent with previous findings, most of the participants had also experienced being unable to acquire employment because their credentials were unrecognized by Canadian employers (Hakak et al., 2010; Kustec et al., 2007; Sincere et al., 2009). In order to re-enter into their original field of profession, they had to pursue re-accreditation or further education, which echoed previous studies (Hakak et al, 2010; Sincere et al, 2009). A few of the participants who had to gain re-accreditation found it a difficult process because all of their references and contacts were back in their country of origin. Some participants who had to gain re-training or take some courses expressed they did not enjoy it and felt that it was only a means to an end. Because their foreign credentials were not recognized, a few participants experienced being overqualified for the work that they partook in. On the other hand, having qualifications was a barrier to gaining certain jobs and the participants had to exclude their credentials in their resumes in order to acquire the position.

Another systematic job-search barrier faced by the participants was related to economic and political issues. This was consistent with past reports of rapid economic changes resulting in a decrease in demand for the immigrant individuals’ professional skills, therefore increasing the job-search barrier (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Employment and Immigration Canada, 1990;
Heilbrunn et al., 2010). The participants found that economic fluctuations and political unrest, such as the September 11th terrorist attacks, made it difficult for them to find employment.

Consistent with past findings, many participants of the current study experienced cultural barriers, such as discrimination and language barriers, during their job search (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Hakak et al., 2010; Creese & Kambere, 2003; Purkiss et al., 2006). Similar to existing literature, some participants experienced barriers to attaining employment because the employers discriminated against immigrant individuals and preferred to hire Canadians (Bauder, 2003a; Esses et al., 2006). Their limited fluency in English was another barrier in gaining employment and some participants even felt discriminated against for their accents when speaking in English. They also felt that they did not possess the jargon that was necessary to be successful in job interviews. This language and accent-based barrier is consistent with previous findings (Creese & Kambere, 2003; Hakak et al. 2010; Purkiss, Perrewé, Gillespie, Mayes, & Ferris, 2006; Sinacore et al., 2009). Many participants also experienced a cultural difference between the job application process in Canada and that of their home country. These differences included the way that people communicated in the job application process as well as customs regarding how to go about applying for the job. This supports past findings (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Hakak et al., 2010) that immigrant individuals bring with them a set of different social norms and had experienced different processes of acquiring employment back in their country of origin.

Many participants felt that there was a lack of helpful resources available for immigrant skilled workers. They spoke about not having the right connections to facilitate the job-search and the lack of help employment centres provided them. They felt that it would facilitate their job-search experience if there were more helpful resources targeted to helping immigrants gain employment.

Although past findings reported unemployment to be an issue with the immigrant population (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Berger, 2004; Chen, 2008; Lee & Westwood, 1996; Yakushko, 2006; Yakushko et al., 2008), this was not the case with the participants in the present study. Although they might not have found the jobs that they had intended to or hoped to, all of the participants were able to find employment.
6.1.1.2 Acculturation and cultural challenges

Consistent with the existing literature, the participants expressed having to adjust to the new host culture in Canada and experiencing cultural barriers to their transition to Canada (Flannery et al., 2001; Hays, 2001; Ortega et al., 2000). The present study supports past findings regarding acculturation barriers resulting from language issues, differences in work culture, social customs and discrimination (Creese & Kambere, 2003; Purkiss et al., 2006; Sinacore et al., 2009; Yakushko et al., 2008; Yost & Lucas, 2002).

Participants expressed having to adjust to the way of communicating in the Canadian culture as well as to the multicultural and liberal Canadian culture. They felt that Canadians were more open and allowed freedom of speech. Although the participants had to adjust and adapt to these cultural differences, most of the participants enjoyed these differences. Some participants also had to adjust to Canadian work standards, such as the speed in which the employees are expected to work.

The participants also reported experiencing discrimination in Canada. For example, there were reports of experience of exploitation at the workplace, being victim to racial stereotyping, negative treatment from Canadian officials and experiences of discriminatory behaviour towards their accents.

6.1.1.3 Compromises

There are only a scarce number of studies that have examined career compromise among immigrant individuals. Within this scant literature, immigrant individuals have found to change their career values and attitudes to prioritize economic survival, basing decisions on employment opportunities (Bauder, 2006; Chen, 2008; Bourdieu, 1977). This is consistent with the participants’ experiences.

Due to the job-search barriers, all of the participants experienced difficulty in gaining employment. All participants had therefore found themselves making compromises in order to earn an income to survive. Many of the participants came to Canada searching for better job opportunities within their field and a few expressed that they had come for a better job experience. However, many participants had to sacrifice their original profession or desired field of work and salary level due to the job-search barriers and take on any job. Some also reported
having to sacrifice job satisfaction and job interest. Having to take on jobs that are lower in level than their original profession was another sacrifice that most participants had to make. Some of them had to dumb down their previous work experience in order to gain employment. A few participants also felt that they had to sacrifice their dignity in their career transition because they had to give up job prestige by taking lower level jobs and they had to work jobs where they experienced discrimination in order to earn a living. The participants’ experiences with sacrificing their career goals, underemployment, receiving low salaries, and sacrificing their self-esteem echoed findings in existing literature (Alboim et al., 2005; Berger, 2004; Pransky et al., 2002; Sinacore et al., 2009; Yakushko et al., 2008).

Although many of the participants had immigrated to Canada in hopes of advancing in their careers and gain job stability, many participants sacrificed their career advancement and returned to a lower career development stage. For instance, most of the participants had to gain some form of training or education in order to be re-accredited or gain the qualifications that their desired employment required. Furthermore, some participants expressed a dislike towards the training that they had to partake in. Some participants also had to sacrifice job stability and take job positions that were insecure, part-time, or had unstable work hours in order to earn an income to survive.

When they spoke of their compromises, they expressed a sense of intention for making those sacrifices. Participants reported both short-term and long-term goals that motivated their compromise. The short-term intentions mentioned by some of the participants were to gain Canadian-recognized credentials and Canadian work experience. Many participants had to make sacrifices in their career goals in order to earn an income to survive. Most of the participants reported having made compromises, in order to reach their long-term goal of re-entering their original field of work or to gain their desired employment. For several participants, the career compromises were a means to advancing their careers. For example, some participants had to return to school to gain the required Canadian-recognized credentials in order to advance in their careers. Therefore, the participants had made sacrifices for their more immediate needs, such as income for survival, and for short-term goals in order to attain their long-term goals, such as gaining their desired employment and career advancement.
The participants’ sense of intention for making their compromises corresponds to the idea of using one’s human agency to take action with intention in Chen’s (2004) concept of positive compromise. This sense of intention or goal orientation also relates to the idea of possessing the characteristic of projectivity, the ability to plan one’s career in a constructive manner and take action to implement the plan Chen (1997).

6.1.2 Effects of vocational transition challenges

Immigrant individuals are faced with many barriers and difficulties in their vocational transition. These stressful barriers can lead to negative consequences to immigrant individuals’ mental well-being (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Sincore et al., 2009; Yakushko et al., 2008). Unemployment, underemployment and having to take jobs of lower SES can damage their sense of self and decrease their confidence and lead to life dissatisfaction (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Sincore et al., 2009). Although all the participants were able to eventually find employment, their short period of unemployment proved to be stressful. Underemployment indeed had a negative impact on the participants’ sense of self, mental well-being and personal life. However, consistent with past literature, small accomplishments such as acquiring an entry-level job or completing a certification within the individual’s field of interest can increase his or her sense of self-efficacy (Packard & Babineau, 2009).

6.1.2.1 Impact on psychological well-being

Most of the participants had expected to be able to find employment in their original field of work without difficulty and all of them had expressed that finding employment was of greatest importance. However, due to the employment barriers, the participants found it challenging to gain employment. Due to this gap between their expectations and the reality that they were faced with, some of the participants reported that they experienced depression and a great deal of stress. They reported being especially stressed while unemployed. When they were able to gain employment, many of them were unable to acquire the employment of their expectations and desires. Some of the participants reported their experience as a new worker in Canada also to be extremely stressful and depressing. The reported experiences of stress and depression supports previous findings of immigrants who experience career transition barriers (Aroian & Norris, 2003; Yakushko et al., 2008).
Immigrant individuals have been found to suffer from a decrease in self-confidence as a result of experiencing the career transition barriers (Sinacore et al., 2009; Yakushko et al., 2008), which was similarly reported by the participants in the present study. Having to make career compromises led to a decrease in self-esteem for some participants. They reported that it was difficult to have self-confidence after having been through such challenging circumstances and being unsuccessful to make their goals and expectations a reality. This is consistent with the SCCT concept of unrealistic expectations leading to negative effects on the individual’s self-efficacy (Lent et al., 1994; 2002). These participants who experienced a gap in their expectations and the reality that they were confronted with expressed having feelings of shame, disappointment, regret for coming Canada, and resentment regarding the compromises that they’ve had to make.

However, for the participants who did not experience a dissonance between their expectations and their experience in Canada, they reported having been affected in a positive manner through their vocational transition. Some participants reported experiencing an increased sense of confidence and agency from overcoming the vocational challenges through their own actions. This is consistent with Packard and Babineau’s (2009) findings as well as Chen’s (2004) proposed concept of using one’s own human agency in order to facilitate a positive compromise experience. Furthermore, for the few participants who felt that their career transition was successful, they were motivated to continue striving to advance their careers. Despite the difficult transition experience, some of the participants were able to feel positive about their experiences by focusing on the long-term gains, not the short-term pains, and by focusing on the positive aspects of their career development in Canada, such as having more time to spend with their families due to shorter work hours.

6.1.2.2 Impact on sense of vocational identity

All of the participants had already established their careers in their country of origin prior to immigrating to Canada. Most of the participants had expected to be able to remain in their field of expertise. However, this was not the case due to the job-search barriers. Therefore, similar to findings of previous studies, some of the participants did not feel a sense of career identity (Chen, 2008; Yost & Lucas, 2002). These participants reported that their jobs were not in the field they expected to be in, the work was not within their interests, they did not feel a sense of
contribution to the workplace due to unstable positions, or their jobs were not challenging enough for them. However, for the participants who did not experience a gap between their expectations and their experienced reality and those who were able to re-enter their original field of work or feel a sense of contribution to their workplace, they expressed having a sense of vocational identity. These present findings are consistent with existing literature on the negative effects of making career compromises on the individuals (Chen, 2008; Gottfredson, 2002). However, these findings also support the concept of positive compromise (Chen, 2004) in that even though all the individuals had to make compromises, some of them were able to use their own resources to reach their goals of re-entering their field of work and facilitate a positive experience. Their professional success in their new country of residence in the face of the many systemic barriers is also consistent with past findings (Boneva & Frieze, 2001).

6.1.2.3 Impact on personal life

Past findings showed that a decrease in occupational status and SES could lead to life dissatisfaction (Aycan & Berry, 1996; Chen, 2008). Consistent with this finding, some of the participants, who experienced challenges in their career transition, expressed that it was difficult for them to have a fulfilling personal life. However, their dissatisfaction was due to having to spend too much time and energy on overcoming career transition challenges and not enough time with their families. Another source of the dissatisfaction was due to strain in family life due to financial difficulties. On the other hand, other participants reported that their income provided enough money to facilitate a satisfactory personal life.

6.1.3 Coping strategies and lessons learned

The participants had to face many job-search barriers as well as acculturation and cross-cultural challenges. In order to thrive in their new country of residence, they utilized different coping strategies. Upon reflecting back on their immigration transition experience, the participants also imparted the lessons that they had learned as to what was or would have been useful to facilitate a successful transition. The most prominent ones are discussed below.

6.1.3.1 Social support

According to SCCT, background contextual factors, such as whether the individuals have familial or social supports available to help them through their transition, have an effect on the
individuals’ self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Lent et al., 1994). The participants indicated that having social support to help them financially and encourage them mentally was very important in facilitating their career transitions, which is consistent with previous findings (Arends-Toth & van de Vijver, 2006; Blustein, 2001; Hovey, 2000; Kagitcibasi, 2006; Lin, 2008; Stuart et al.; 2010). They reported receiving mental and financial support from their families, friends, and people of the same cultural background as them.

Similar to previous findings, networking was reported to be a useful strategy to finding employment (Hagan, 1998; Hakak et al., 2010). Many participants had learned that networking and building connections with the right people was the key to gaining employment. After initially failing to acquire employment, the participants discovered that rote job applications through job postings was ineffective and that networking and making connections were more successful strategies.

6.1.3.2 Human agency

Human agency is the combination of the individual’s action-taking and his or her intentions behind those actions (Chen, 2006; Cochran, 1997, Cochran & Laub, 1994). Chen (1997, 2004) proposed human agency as one of the main components required to facilitate an individual’s ability to cope with career compromise and career development difficulties. The participants in this study supported this hypothesis as well as previous findings that action-taking help immigrants deal with immigration barriers (Gardner, 2002). When asked how they were able to cope with acculturation and their career compromises, they indicated having to make personal changes, such as adjusting their attitudes, and taking action to make change happen in order to strive towards their goals. Upon reflecting on their compromising career transition, many participants stated that taking initiative played a vital role in facilitating a successful career transition. Some action-taking initiatives included following up on job searches, showing interest and motivation, networking, gaining Canadian-recognized credentials, and refining their resumes. All these actions were done with the intention of acquiring desired employment.

6.1.3.3 Flexibility

The second component that is pivotal to the successful coping of compromise is open-mindedness. This involves being flexible in changing one’s action plans and intentions according
to the circumstances (Chen, 2004). According to Chen (1997, 2004), this would allow the individual to create optimal changes to a compromising situation and thereby facilitate a successful career transition. Consistent with findings of previous studies, some participants reported their own abilities to adapt to new culture or surroundings and being able to take on a positive attitude towards hardships as a coping strategy (Leong & Ward, 2000; Yakhnich & Ben-Zur, 2008). These coping mechanisms have an underlying state of openness and flexibility. They also learned that being flexible or open to taking any vocational opportunities, even those that are undesirable to them, and being adaptive to the Canadian job-search culture are very important in the career transition process. Flexibility was both a means to strive for their goal as well as a means to cope with the compromise. The participants in this study supported the central concept of positive compromise as proposed by Chen (2004), where the combination of human agency and open-mindedness is necessary in order for individuals to proactively take action in a flexible way to make effective and meaningful compromises.

6.1.3.4 Perseverance

When talking about how they managed to cope and deal with the career transition difficulties and compromises, the participants indicated that their perseverance and resilience was their coping strategy, which is consistent with past findings (Bhagat & London, 1999; Boneva & Frieze, 2001). This finding is also consistent with Chen’s (1997) proposition that perseverance is one of the main key constructs that is essential for effectively coping in an individual’s career development. Even though some of the participants had the opportunity to return to their home country and regain their previous employment, they remained in Canada due to their inner strength and sense of determination. This was also mentioned as a lesson that they had learned upon reflection of their career transition experience. Many participants expressed that not being discouraged by difficulties and persevering in the face of challenges led them to successful vocational outcomes.

Related to perseverance is their focus on the positive aspects of their career transition. Some participants reported focusing on the positive aspects of a job that was outside of their desired choice. For example, they learned to appreciate shorter work hours and put less emphasis on prestige. Others focused on the long-term gains that they were working towards and less focus on the short-term compromises that they had to make. This evidence of immigrant individuals
changing their attitudes regarding their career compromise is consistent with the concept of 
open-mindedness or flexibility in thinking in order to adapt to changes and more effectively cope 
with and create changes to the compromising situation (Chen, 2004).

6.2 Immigrant vocational transition theory

During the interviews, the participants described their vocational transition experience from the 
beginning of their immigration to the reality that they found themselves in at the time of the 
interview. They also talked about their career compromise experience and how they coped with 
the challenges. Due to the systematic employment barriers that the immigrant participants were 
faced with, their career development transitions did not follow the regular career development 
path. Although major career development theories such as SCCT, Super’s life-span life-space 
theory, and Hopson and Adams’ model of adult transitions address adult career transitions, only 
Krau (1982) addresses career transition of the immigrant population. Immigrant individuals are 
faced with systematic barriers, such as issues with credentials and local work experience, which 
are not necessarily experienced by adults who are going though career transition within their 
home country. Therefore, this sections aims at providing a more up-to-date immigrant vocational 
transition theory by using the information gathered through the interviews with the participants 
and relevant portions of the major career development theories. The following sections represent 
the stages of the immigrant vocational transition theory (see Figure 1). The participants’ career 
compromise experiences and coping strategies will be addressed later under the immigrant career 
compromise theory.

6.2.1 Exploration

For all of the participants, being able to find employment was of great importance. Some of the 
reasons they had decided to immigrate to Canada included improving their quality of life as well 
as improve their career. They all had well-developed careers prior to their immigration and had 
successfully gone through the immigration procedures after passing the skilled worker criterion. 
Most of the participants had intended and expected to work in their original field of work in 
Canada and advance in their careers with only a few expecting the transition to be difficult. Due 
to their successful career development in their home country and expectations to re-enter the 
same position and level of work, most of the immigrant participants possessed a high sense of 
self-efficacy and high outcome expectations at the onset of their immigration transition.
Consistent with SCCT (Lent et al., 1994, 2000), the participants’ high self-efficacy and outcome expectations led them to be interested in and set their goals on acquiring their original field of work.

However, due to the systematic job-search barriers, such as a lack of Canadian work experience required by employers, lack of Canadian-recognized credentials, over qualification, discrimination and language barriers, the participants were initially unsuccessful in acquiring their desired employment. Furthermore, they were experiencing financial strain. They learned that in order to gain employment to earn an income to be able to survive, they had to make certain career compromises, such as sacrificing their desired type and level of job, their career development, their dignity, and job stability. This is consistent with SCCT (Lent et al., 1994, 2000, 2002) where the systematic barriers are the proximal contextual factors preventing a successful outcome, which then leads to a learning experience about the barriers in place and the actions required to overcome them.

This stage of working towards their specific career choices is consistent with the exploration stage of Super’s life-span life-space theory (Super et al., 1996) as well as the crystallization stage of Krau’s (1982) immigrant career model.

6.2.2 Shock

The challenges and sacrifices that the participants had to make were mainly unexpected and jarring to them. This experience resulted in the participants experiencing feelings of shame, disappointment, resentment, and regret for immigrating to Canada. This also led to a decreased sense of self-esteem, stress, depression, a lack of career identity, and unsatisfactory personal life, which is consistent with past findings (Aroian & Norris, 2003; Yakushko et al., 2008; Yost & Lucas, 2002). They learned that there are many barriers that prevent them from acquiring their desired careers and that they would have to make sacrifices to gain employment for survival. The participants’ career compromise experience will be discussed in more detail within the immigrant career compromise theory in the next main discussion topic.

The participants’ experiences are consistent with SCCT where the outcome of their efforts result in a learning experience about the employment barriers and a decrease in both self-efficacy and outcome expectations (Lent et al., 1994, 2000, 2002). This stage is also consistent with Hopson
and Adam’s (1977, 1981) stage of self-doubt within their model of adult transition where the individuals experience doubt, anxiety, sadness and anger.

For the few participants who expected their career transition process to be challenging, in other words had low outcome expectations, they did not experience the feelings that were associated with the shock.

6.2.3 Backtracking

The participants made career compromises such as sacrificing the type of job they had desired initially, their desired level of job, their career development/advancement, their dignity/prestige, and their job stability. Most participants experienced having to return to school or complete some training in order to be re-accredited with Canadian-recognized credentials. Other participants had to gain training in order to obtain a professional certificate in order to enter a new field of interest. This is consistent with Krau’s (1982) vocational retraining stage within the immigrant career model. The participants also had to take jobs that were incongruent to their expectations and desires, such as part-time positions or low/non paying positions, in order to gain the Canadian work experience that most employers required of their employees. This requirement for immigrant individuals to gain local training and work experience is consistent with past literature (Hakak et al., 2010; Sinacore et al., 2009).

Contrary to Super’s life-span life-space theory (Super et al., 1996), these participants did not only recycle back into entering the exploration stage, they had to re-enter the growth stage. This shows that immigrant skilled workers face an even more compromising set back in returning to an even lower career developmental stage than adults who undergo career transition in their country of origin.

6.2.4 Re-exploration

For most of the participants, the main purpose behind making their career compromises was to eventually acquire their desired employment. For instance, as mentioned, they made sacrifices to gain Canadian work experience and Canadian-recognized credentials in order to enter their original field of work or a new field of interest. They continued to work towards their career goals by taking the initiative in networking to make connections, getting professional help for job searching, actively applying for jobs, and showing enthusiasm. Due to their action-taking
initiative, all of the participants were able to find employment. This importance in action-taking with purpose in facilitating a successful career transition is consistent with Bandura’s (2001) notion of human agency as well as Chen’s (2004) positive compromise.

This stage of working towards their career goals and trying out employment is consistent with Super’s exploration stage (Super et al., 1996) as well as Krau’s stage of job entry and trial (Krau, 1982), and Hopson and Adam’s testing out stage (Hopson & Adam, 1977, 1981).

6.2.5 Establishment

The career development challenges and career compromises that the participants faced led to negative feelings and no sense of career identity, which supports past findings (Chen, 2008; Yost & Lucas, 2002). However, the participants who expected their transition to be difficult and those who managed to enter their desired field of work or attain feelings of contribution at their workplace reported feeling a sense of vocational identity. Some participants experienced an increase in their level of confidence and sense of self-efficacy from overcoming the career transition challenges and compromises. The participants who felt that their career transition was a success reported feeling motivated to continue working towards advancing in their careers, for example, getting higher paid positions and looking for more challenging opportunities within their field of work. These participants’ experiences are consistent with the establishment stage in Super’s life-span life-space theory (Super et al., 1996) and are consistent with the SCCT concept of a successful outcome leading to an increase in self-efficacy and outcome expectation (Lent et al., 1994, 2000, 2002). The positive experience they gained through taking action to reaching their career goals is consistent with the idea of using one’s own human agency in order to achieve a positive compromise experience (Chen, 2004).

Most of the participants had at most reached the establishment phase at the time of the interview and had not yet reached the maintenance stage. This may be due to the age of all the participants being 44 years of age or younger, therefore they were still hoping to pursue higher and better positions in their profession. For other participants who had yet to land a job of their interest or feel a sense of career identity, they continued their journey in the re-exploration stage.

The participants had learned many lessons through the actions that they took during their compromising career transition. They learned that taking initiative in their job-search,
networking, being open to all job opportunities, being adaptable to all surroundings, being resilient, and perseverance are all qualities that are important in order to facilitate a successful career transition. Their abilities to succeed in their career transition through their personal actions increased their sense of confidence and human agency. This process of learning what was important and useful for their career transition and their change in values and sense of self is consistent with the internalization stage of Hopson and Adam’s (1977, 1981) model of adult transition.

6.3 Immigrant career compromise theory

During the shock phase of the proposed immigrant vocational transition theory, the participants learned about the systematic job-seeking barriers. Due to these barriers and their financial strains, the participants also learned about the compromises that they would have to make in order to gain employment. This theory of immigrant career compromise provides insight into immigrant skilled workers’ experiences of career compromise and the way that they deal and cope with the compromise (see Figure 2).

6.3.1 Sacrificing it all

Gottfredson (1981, 2002) proposed that the manner in which individuals make career compromise is related to their stages of development. According to Kohlberg (1966), individuals first develop their sex role orientation, after which they become aware of social evaluations and social class, with awareness of internal feelings and unique abilities being the last stage of development. Based on this cognitive-development analysis, Gottfredson proposed that individuals hold most importance in the sex-type congruence of a job, followed by prestige, and least importantly congruency with their interests, capacities and values. Due to inconsistent empirical evidence, Gottfredson (1996) went on to modifying her theory of compromise to incorporate the differences in priority of interests, prestige and sex-type according to the level of compromise. Blanchard and Lichtenberg (2003) found that in times of high compromise, individuals prioritized prestige and sex-type as equally more important than consistency with their interests.

The participants in this study reported having to make a range of career compromises. Most of the participants reported having to sacrifice the level of the job and worked at jobs that they were
overqualified for. This is related to the reported sacrifice of their dignity that some participants made. They expressed that the jobs that they had to take required them to give up their value in prestige and that they experienced some discrimination at the workplace. Many of the participants reported having to sacrifice the type of employment that they had wanted to enter, such as their original field of work or a new field that they were interested in entering. Instead, they had to take any job opportunity in order to survive. Some participants also reported having to sacrifice their career advancement in returning to a lower stage of career development as well as sacrifice job stability in taking part-time or unstable jobs.

Contrary to Gottfredson’s theories of career compromise and Blanchard and Lichtenber’s (2003) findings, the immigrant participants in this study reported sacrificing both job type, which reflected their field interest, and job level, which reflected prestige. They did not show preference for one over the other and in times of financial strain, they were willing to compromise both in order to earn an income to survive. Although the participants did not mention compromise in sex-type of the employment, this study shows that this property may not be relevant when talking about current immigrant career compromise. To start off with, the participants did not all possess career titles that were consistent with traditional sex-roles. For instance, P13 was a male participant who was a social worker prior to his immigration, P8 was a female engineer and, P12 was a female banker. Therefore, it would be irrelevant to talk about whether or not they had to sacrifice sex-type consistency.

Therefore, it seems that in times of highly compromising circumstances, the immigrant skilled workers in the current study were willing to compromise a great deal in order to survive. Perhaps what is more useful and important to address is how the immigrant participants made these compromises and how they were able to cope with such compromising circumstances.

6.3.2 Positive compromise

Major themes that ran throughout all the participant interviews while the participants spoke of their career compromise were the types of compromise that they had to make, their intentions behind making those compromises, and a sense of internal locus of control while undergoing and coping with the compromise.
As previously mentioned, the participants had to compromise job type, job level, their dignity, career development, and job stability in the face of systematic job-seeking barriers. Behind these acts of making career compromise, the participants reported having both short-term intentions as well as long-term motivations. Their short-term goals included gaining Canadian-recognized credentials and Canadian work experience because most employers required them yet none of the participants possessed these credentials and experience when they landed in Canada. Another short-term intention was to acquire any job in order to make an income to survive, especially for the participants who experienced financial strain. One of the participants’ main long-term intentions was to acquire the employment of their interest, which included their original field of work or a new field of interest. Another long-term motivation was to advance in their careers of interest.

In order to perform the career compromising acts, the participants reflected a sense of personal resourcesfulness and self-efficacy. The participants made the executive decision to take their career development into their own hands by taking action to affect the outcome of their vocational transition, which revealed their human agency. They reported having to be open and flexible in changing their attitudes towards their career development and changing their career goals to suit their circumstances. They also had to be flexible and open to taking any short-term job opportunities while keeping their ultimate career goal in mind. Seeing the short-term compromises as temporary stepping-stones towards gaining their ultimate career goals motivated their flexibility. They also reported being persistent and resilient as facilitative to dealing with their career compromise. Even in times of difficulties, the participants did not give up and continued to strive towards their goals. Lastly, another means of dealing with career compromise that reflected their self-efficacy and agency was the participants’ initiative and action-taking. They took it upon themselves to network to make connections, get professional help for job-seeking, and actively searched for jobs while showing their enthusiasm for the employment.

The participants’ sense of self-efficacy, action-taking during the process of their career compromise, and their intentions and motivations behind those actions are consistent with the notion of human agency (Bandura, 2001; Chen, 2006). The participants’ reported flexibility and openness are consistent with Chen’s (2004, 2006) concept of open-mindedness in his proposed positive compromise theory. Chen (2006) stated that given the gaps in one’s intentions and what one can do in reality, one’s intentions and action plans may have to be modified, which requires
the individual to be open-minded. The participants in this study confirm that in times of career compromise, immigrant skilled workers utilize their human agency and become open-minded to deal with the challenges. Therefore, the notion of positive compromise is supported by the participants in this study.

6.3.3 Coping and positive experience

When talking about how they coped with having to make career compromises, the participants spoke mainly of relying on social support and on their own personal resources, namely, human agency, flexibility, and perseverance. The evidence for a need for social support (Arends-Toth & van de Vijver, 2006; Blustein, 2001; Kagitzibasi, 2006; Lin, 2008; Stuart et al.; 2010) and human agency (Chen, 2004) in order to cope with career compromise is consistent with existing literature. Most of the participants reported receiving mental and financial support from their friends and family during the compromising career transition. Some participants also received help from people of their own cultural background.

Aside from receiving support from others, the participants also coped through using their own abilities. Consistent with previous findings, the participants expressed that they were able to cope with their career compromise through their own abilities in being adaptive and flexible (Leong & Ward, 2000; Schmitz, 2001; Yakhnich & Ben-Zur, 2008); their ability to persevere in times of compromise (Boneva & Frieze, 2001); their ability to remain positive and accept their fate by focusing on their long-term goals (Ahmad et al., 2004; Farley et al., 2005; Goodman, 2004; Khawaja et al., 2008; Kosic, 2004; Kosic & Triandafyllidou, 2003); and taking action to change their compromising circumstances in pursuit of their final goals (Gardner, 2002). The findings supported the concept of perseverance, projectivity (human agency), and perspectivity (flexibility) as being effective coping strategies for career difficulties (Chen, 1997). The present study also found human agency to be both a means of performing the career compromise as well as a means of coping with the compromising situation.

Furthermore, consistent with the notion of positive compromise, using their own agency to overcome their compromising career challenges led some of the participants to experience an increase in self-efficacy and self-confidence (Chen, 2004). Therefore, Packard & Babineau’s statement (2009) that making career compromises does not have to be a completely negative experience and can in fact be a healthy and positive experience was supported.
Even upon reflecting on their compromising career transition experience, the participants reported personal action/agency and flexibility as being two of the most important factors in facilitating a positive career transition. This study provides evidence that positive compromise involves both goal gaining and positive experience. In other words, human agency and open-mindedness together lead to the ability to change a compromising situation into a fruitful one as well as the ability to cope with the difficulties and challenges while doing so.

6.4 Practical Implications

Consistent with past findings, the immigrant skilled workers in this study experienced a range of challenging barriers during their career transition journeys (Ahonen et al., 2009; Aycan & Berry, 1996; Hakak et al., 2010; Sinacore et al., 2009; Yakushko et al., 2008). These barriers include acculturation issues as well as systematic job-seeking barriers. This study also informs us of the inadequate resources that are available to immigrant professionals to help facilitate the vocational transition process. This information provides insight on what should be changed and/or implemented in terms of immigration policies as well as what counsellors should be aware of and address when working with immigrant clients. Practical implications of this study include preventative measures, which should be implemented prior to the landing of immigrant individuals, and remedial aid, which aims to help immigrants who have arrived in Canada, especially those who did not receive preventative help.

6.4.1 Preventative measures

All of the immigrant skilled workers in this study reported coming to Canada in search of improving their careers or their lives in general. Finding employment was important to all of the participants and most of them had expected to be able to re-enter their original field of work with only a few participants expecting it to be difficult to do so. Little did they expect the financial strains and systematic job-seeking barriers that they were confronted with when they arrived in Canada. Furthermore, many of the participants reported there to be a lack of resources to help immigrant individuals make the transition to the Canadian labour market. This gap in the immigrant individuals’ expectations and their experienced reality took a toll on their sense of self-efficacy in the shock stage of the immigrant vocational transition theory. For the few participants who expected their transition to be difficult, they did not report experiencing such a shock and did not experience a negative impact on their mental well-being. Therefore, as a
preventative measure to avoid mental and financial affliction, during their immigration process, immigrant individuals should be provided with information regarding all the job-related systematic barriers that immigrant professionals are often confronted with and the possible career development setbacks.

Immigrant professionals who had already undergone their career transition stages would be useful resources for new immigrants who are starting their immigration process to gather useful information regarding potential transition barriers. It would be useful if the immigration consulate or embassy could develop a contact list of alumni immigrant skilled workers so that new immigrants could easily contact them to learn from their past experiences and receive advice. Having the necessary information regarding potential career transition barriers prior to moving to the new country would equip new immigrants with realistic expectations to help them prepare for their career transition more effectively and prevent unnecessary shock or negative impact on their self-esteem.

6.4.2 Remedial aid

Since there has yet to be programs implemented by the government to warn immigrant professionals of the career transition barriers prior to their immigration, remedial aid needs to be implemented for new immigrant skilled workers.

The lack of resources available to immigrant professionals in addition to their reported financial struggles strongly indicate a need for vocational resources to be make more easily accessible to them as a form of remedial assistance. In terms of policy/program implementation, it would greatly benefit immigrant workers if employment agencies could partner with the government in developing programs to reach out to immigrant professionals and offer them work placement opportunities to help them gain the necessary Canadian work experience or inform them of how to gain re-accreditation. Since foreign credentials are mostly unrecognized or undervalued, perhaps re-accreditation programs that are geared specifically towards helping immigrant skilled workers re-gain their credentials should be developed and implemented. Developing work placements following the re-accreditation programs for immigrant skilled workers to help them re-enter their field of work would facilitate a smoother vocational transition for these highly educated and professional immigrant individuals.
Immigrant professionals are faced with a problem that is primarily practical in nature. They are confronted with the problem of being unable to attain employment, which threatens their ability to earn an income to survive, and is often accompanied by psychological distress, such as anxiety and depression. Therefore, in terms of career counselling, counsellors should provide immigrant individuals with remedial aid in the form of practical informative advice giving as well as emotional counselling to alleviate them of the negative impact of stress. Career counsellors who work with these individuals should educate themselves on the systematic barriers that immigrant workers often face and familiarize themselves with the useful resources, such as job placements or agencies and re-accreditation procedures. Counsellors should also be familiar with the stages of immigrant vocational transition so that they can help immigrant workers implement a plan for dealing with each stage effectively. This way, career counsellors can more effectively help immigrant professionals have a more positive career transition experience.

It would also be useful if the role of career counsellors could be further extended to being that of the immigrant individual’s advocate. The counsellor can represent immigrant individuals, who lack the necessary knowledge regarding the means to proceed with their career transition, to find the best career option. Since the counsellor would have access to the immigrant professionals’ information such as qualifications, work experience, and career goals, they would be able to most effectively represent immigrant professionals to look for the best re-accreditation route or work opportunities to suit the immigrant workers’ goals and human capital.

Due to the unexpected nature of the experienced systematic barriers and the negative impact that the transition has on immigrant professionals, counsellors should keep immigrant professionals’ incongruence in vocational expectation and loss of vocational identity in mind and ensure that they help immigrant individuals increase their self-esteem. Immigrant professionals who succeed in gaining immigration status, such as the participants in this study, have impressive credentials and work experience obtained from their country of origin. Therefore, experiencing difficulty in gaining employment and losing their sense of accomplishment proves to be detrimental to their sense of self. Counsellors should be sensitive to their loss of self-esteem and acknowledge their qualifications and credentials.

The immigrant individuals in this study reported a host of cultural barriers, such as, acculturation/adjustment challenges, and being victim to exploitation and discrimination at the
workplace. Many immigrant individuals come from cultures that are very different than the one of their new host country. Therefore, counsellors who work with immigrant clients should keep these cultural challenges in mind, be sensitive to these acculturation issues and use a multicultural counselling perspective. Coaching of soft skills such as interviewing skills or social interacting skills should be provided to immigrant professionals by counsellors or government programs. This would help immigrant individuals learn how to interact socially in a manner that is consistent with the cultural norms of their new host country. This would help immigrant individuals integrate and acculturate into their new host culture and it would facilitate the acquisition and maintenance of jobs. Counsellors should also help immigrant clients develop tools to deal with discrimination effectively and cope with the negative effects. In order to prevent exploitation of immigrant skilled workers by employers, the counsellors and/or government should provide immigrant individuals with information regarding their rights as workers in their new host country.

Despite the mostly unexpected career transition barriers, immigrant individuals in the current study showed the ability to tap into their human agency and become more flexible in order to make the best of their compromising situation and persistently strive towards their ultimate career goals. This evidence in support of positive compromise (Chen, 2004) is consistent with the solution-focused brief therapy framework (De Jong, 2007). The solution-focused framework takes on a positive view on human nature and assumes that people are competent and have the ability to construct solutions. The problems are not seen as intrinsic to the individuals but are instead a result of the ways they view themselves and the world. Despite life’s struggles, individuals have strengths and capabilities to improve their lives even though this strength is temporarily blocked by negative conditions. When individuals view themselves as competent, they can effectively seek out solutions to problems. Therefore, counsellors should help immigrant clients tap into their human agency and flexibility that they already possess to cope with and succeed in making the best out of their compromising career transition.

6.5 Limitations

A major limitation of the current study is that the interviews were conducted in English. For the majority of the participants, English was their second language. Therefore, it was difficult for the
participants to fully express themselves. This language barrier may have prevented useful information from being obtained in the interviews.

Another limitation of this study pertains to the use of archival data. This method limited the ability to verify the analysis of the interviews with the participants. It also limited the ability to investigate and refine additional information by following up with the participants. The researcher compensated for this limitation of verification by keeping in mind her own biases as well as continuously verifying and consulting with the principal investigator.

All the participants were willing volunteers, therefore there may be biases or unseen correlates among these participants that cannot be attributed to those who do not wish to volunteer. It is possible that those who were willing to undergo the interviews had more human agency and openness to begin with and therefore presented evidence in support of the concept of positive compromise. However, when selecting the sample of participants from the archive of interviews, the investigator tried to include participants with as wide a range of cultural backgrounds as possible and an equal distribution between genders.

6.6 Future research directions

This study aims to contribute to the scarce literature on career compromise focusing on immigrant skilled workers, whose career transitions prove to be most challenging. It is the investigator’s hope that this study will spark further in-depth research regarding the processes, coping strategies, and effects of career compromise on immigrant individuals.

Because the focus of this study was on the process, the coping strategies, and the impact of career compromise in general, some of the specific experiences during the participants’ transition were outside of the scope of this study and were not delved into deeply. For instance, a major compromise for the participants in this study was having to take a career development setback and gain re-training or further education to acquire Canadian-recognized credentials. It would be worth investigating how they went about gaining the credentials, how the experience was, and whether or not it was useful. Exploring these different experiences in more depth will provide a more complete picture of immigrant skilled workers’ transition experience.
It would also be useful to do a longitudinal study where the participants are interviewed again over a period of time to see how their career development has evolved, which stage of the career development they’ve entered and how useful their experience and efforts in overcoming their compromise were.

6.7 Conclusion

When the immigrant skilled workers in this study first arrived in Canada, they went through the exploration stage with high hopes and a high sense of self-efficacy. They had well developed careers in their countries of origin and had hoped to create better lives and better careers for themselves in Canada only to be thwarted by acculturation and systematic career development barriers. This called for career compromising actions on the part of these immigrant workers. For the skilled workers who had high expectations of what their career transition would be like, they entered the stage of shock where their sense of self-efficacy and hopes had taken a toll. Despite the difficulties, the immigrant individuals tapped into their human agency and open-mindedness in order to deal with making career compromises during the backtracking stage. They had to compromise everything, job interest, prestige, job satisfaction, career development, etc. However, the immigrant professionals remained resilient and possessed the ability to undergo positive compromise. They then entered the re-exploration stage where they used their human agency to continue pursuing their ultimate career goals. In order to cope with the stress of having to make career compromises, they utilized their own human agency, flexibility, perseverance as well as turned to social supports.

Although the initial shock of career compromise negatively impacted the immigrant professionals’ self-esteem and hope, their inner strength helped them make the best out of a challenging situation and helped them regain self-confidence. Even upon reflecting on their transition experiences, they acknowledged the importance of their own human agency and flexibility. This study provides positive and hopeful evidence that should empower struggling immigrant skilled workers. Their experience can be a positive one should they so choose to make it so.
References


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Figure 1. Immigrant vocational transition theory. A flow chart representing the proposed career transition stages that immigrant skilled workers experience.
Figure 2. Immigrant career compromise theory. This diagram represents the qualities that immigrant skilled workers require to deal with career compromise and the means in which they cope with the adversity of career compromise.