Optimal Life-Career Development of Immigrant Professionals

by

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Abstract

Literature addressing Canada’s immigrant professionals has primarily focused on the negative aspects of life-career transition. Research themes have centered on discouraging features of migration such as barriers, discrimination, underemployment and unemployment. Surprisingly few studies have explored how, in spite of personal and environmental barriers, some new Canadians have found they have flourished in their new country. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of a group of immigrant professionals who believe they have successfully transitioned in the life-career domains.

Using a grounded theory approach, 20 individuals were interviewed about their experiences. Analysis revealed that a combination of internal and external factors contributed or hindered their life-career trajectories. Meaning making, social support and behavioural coping emerged as primary coping strategies. Issues with language and accreditation emerged as significant barriers to life-career development. Practical and theoretical implications are discussed.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Research on those who have persevered and flourished through the transition of immigration remains minimal. The majority of literature has focused on negative aspects of immigration such as the challenges and barriers related to acculturation and adaptation. This emphasis has provided psychologists useful insight into the often bleak circumstances new Canadians face and has assisted counsellors in understanding the contextual circumstances common to many immigrants.

However, little is known about the positive side of immigration (Houle & Schellenberg, 2010). The present research explored the lived experiences of immigrant professionals who have successfully transitioned to the world of work in Canada. For this study, success is defined as a psychological sense of accomplishment and the extent to which an individual feels they have achieved meaningful goals in the life-career domains (Mirvis & Hall, 1994). Participation criteria included individual satisfaction with current employment status and a positive perception of the immigration experience overall. In addition, all participants were employed in a professional capacity prior to immigration and had obtained the equivalent of a college or university degree or a trade designation before their arrival to Canada. A qualitative analysis using grounded theory methods of 20 semi-structured and largely open ended interviews with immigrant professionals was performed.
Goal of the Study

This study aimed to explore the narratives of immigrant professionals who are gainfully employed in Ontario. The first theoretical goal was to discover personal variables (i.e., individual strengths) that have facilitated behaviour related to positive life-career transition. For example, literature consistently suggests that self-efficacy is an important individual characteristic in career development (Bandura, 1989) and is therefore an important concept to explore within the immigrant population.

A second theoretical need, as articulated in multicultural career literature, is to compare theories across different populations (Gomez, Fassinger, Prosser, Cooke, & Luna, 2001). Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) is useful for investigating the environmental and individual conditions which enable immigrant professionals to pursue certain career options in the face of challenging and often deterring conditions (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). As well, a positive psychology framework is useful for examining the individual strengths involved in successful transition (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001; Seligman & Peterson, 2003). Positive psychology theory uses a strength-based approach in understanding individual processes of adaptation and the development of overall life satisfaction and well-being. The aforementioned theoretical frameworks complement one another in that SCCT emphasizes person-context variables in the career domain and positive psychology emphasizes person-context variables in the life domain and both were used in the present study.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the current study was to bring attention to the positive aspects of life-career transition that some immigrant professionals experience. The construct life-career refers to the integrative nature between vocational life and the broader domains that are involved a person’s lifetime (Chen, 2002) such as overall well-being in the social, personal and financial life
spheres. Through semi-structured interviews, the study aimed to discover the intrinsic and unique strengths characteristic of this population. The primary research question was “How do immigrant professionals experience the adjustment process in Canada?” Secondary research questions included: What are the primary personal and contextual hindrances to life-career development? What are the personal and contextual supports in life-career development? What are the key coping strategies used in response to life-career challenges?

Rationale of the Study

Research that explores the successful transition of immigrant professionals is remarkably lacking (Houle & Schellenberg, 2010). Among professionals working in Canada, the immigrant population has become a significant source of intellectual power relied upon to meet Canada’s economic and business demands (Bloom & Grant, 2001). The literature suggests that most immigrants face significant post-migration barriers, however, very little is known about those who have achieved success in Canada. Although a significantly higher proportion of newcomers to Canada are not able to meet their life-career expectations (relative to their qualifications) (Freidland & Price, 2003), some individuals have. As such, it has become paramount to understand how successful individuals have succeeded in the life-career domains. The purpose of the present study is to better understand the experience of positive transition. More specifically, this study explores the internal and external barriers and supports that are characteristic of the life-career transition experience by individuals who feel that they have succeeded.

The scarcity of research on immigrant professionals who have successfully transitioned, is problematic. First, current career theories cannot be applied to immigrant populations with confidence. The majority of research samples remain Western in origin (Gomez, et al., 2001; Klasse, 2004; Lopez et al., 2005). Second, the majority of studies that have focused on immigrants have focused on the challenges of immigration (e.g., barriers and discrimination).
There is very little empirical research premised on the perseverance of immigrant professionals. Given the lack of research on immigrants who have flourished through the process of immigration, the time is ripe for the inclusion of professional immigrants in positive psychological research. A qualitative approach is most appropriate for this population because it fosters the emergence of life-career themes that are identified as important by participants themselves.

**Significance of the Study**

The present study gathered information that is relevant to individual immigrants’, government, educators, employers and counsellors. Individuals who are considering immigration or are already in the process may benefit from hearing how other individuals have successfully coped with the challenges of immigration. Furthermore, social service, education and health care workers can benefit by increasing their understanding in how immigrants respond to the barriers of transition. Understanding the context driven and personal variables in adaptability can help those who are working with individual immigrants, to more effectively assist individuals to achieve their life-career aspirations. In addition, this research serves to generate knowledge that will contribute toward affecting change at the government level, as there remains a significant discrepancy between Canada’s economic needs and the utilization of immigrant skills. Finally, individual employers are continually in need of up to date information pertaining to foreign qualifications. Given Canada’s fragmented accreditation system, employers and universities are making ill-informed decisions pertaining to foreign qualifications (Brouwer, 1999). This research aspires to encourage much needed future studies in the area of immigration in order to meet the demands of Canada’s economic climate as well as to assist individuals in reaching their life-career goals.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Relevant literature pertaining to the life-career development of immigrant professionals will be reviewed below. The review consists of four sections. 1) literature pertaining to Canada’s social and economic climate, including the exploration of Canada’s current immigration conditions, and the relevant economic features of the Canadian labour market, 2) overview of the barriers faced by new Canadians, 3) an exploration of current acculturation research, 4) coping strategies, and 5) contemporary career development theories discussed in the context of a positive psychology framework. Throughout the review, the term immigrant professional is used to refer to individuals who have completed post-secondary education and have obtained professional work experience in their home country prior to immigration.

The Canadian Context of Immigration

Canada has placed increasing emphasis on attracting highly skilled individuals from around the world. Canada pioneered the points system of immigration in 1967 and continued its commitment to welcoming newcomers by decreasing the minimum points required from 75 to 67 in 2002 (Blustein, Kenna, Murphy, DeVoy, & DeWine, 2005). The points system prioritizes professional and trade qualifications, English and French language proficiency and relevant work experience.

There are certain trends that have contributed to the rise of immigration in Canada. First, the decrease in eligibility requirements encouraged highly skilled individuals to migrate to Canada (Picot, Hou, & Coulombe, 2007). To illustrate, in 2005 over 67% of immigrants held management or professional occupations before migration (Blythe, Baumann, Rheaume, & McIntosh, 2009). Second, immigration has played an important role in shaping Canada’s
population growth. Approximately 5.4 million residents in Canada are immigrants or 20% of the total population (Dean & Wilson, 2009). Currently newcomers account for almost 60% of Canada’s total population growth and are expected to become the predominant factor to population growth by 2030 (Statistics Canada, 2006). Third, globalization trends have facilitated the movement of professionals educated in Canada to other countries. Between 1991 and 1996, approximately 178,000 Canadian professionals went to the United States in pursuit of greater vocational prosperity and of these; approximately 126,000 remained permanently (Zhao, Drew, & Murray, 2000). Fourth, the majority of new Canadians (57.3%) are within the prime working ages between 25 and 54 compared to 42.3% of Canadian-born individuals in this age group (Statistics Canada, 2006). Fifth, immigrants tend to hold higher educational certification than the Canadian public. An estimated 36% of immigrant men and 31% of immigrant women hold university degrees compared to 18% of Canadian-born men and 20% Canadian-born women. Within the skilled worker category, approximately 72% have at minimum, one university degree (Alboim, 2002). These data highlight the significant impact and potential contribution immigrant professionals are exercising on Canada’s population growth and employment climate. In fact, the need for immigrant professionals has become an essential factor in order for Canada to sustain and further its competitive position in the global economy (Blair, 2005).

**Immigration and Employment**

Canada has developed the reputation of a land of great occupational opportunity. This representation, in part, stems from having low unemployment rates (Hiebert, 2006). Despite these promising economic trends and a relatively welcoming immigration policy, immigrants continue to experience alarmingly high levels of unemployment and underemployment (Basran & Zong, 1998; Bauder, 2003; Zong, 2004). The first Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to
Canada revealed that 54% of immigrants were looking for work four years after their arrival (Schellenberg & Maheux, 2007) and of those who found work, 60% settled for positions for which they were overqualified (Dean & Wilson, 2009). Zong (2004) conducted a nationwide survey of 1,150 Chinese immigrant professionals in Vancouver, Toronto, Ottawa, Saskatoon, Calgary and Edmonton. Results revealed that only 31% had obtained comparable employment to their background, 43% accepted positions below their skill level and 22.4% never found employment. The majority of jobs available to newcomers underutilizes their education and skills, are part-time and lack long-term security (Reitz, 2005; Alboim, Finnie, & Meng, 2005). Such findings resonate well with Brouwer’s (1999) statement “...immigrant doctors driving taxis and foreign-trained chemists delivering pizzas are well-worn clichés and part of our cultural consciousness” (p. 3).

Underutilization of professional immigrants affects not only the individual but also many aspects of Canadian society. A nationwide survey of small and medium sized organizations conducted by The Canadian Federation of Independent Business found that two-thirds of the firms who had hired within the last year, suffered from skilled labour shortages (Alboim, 2002). Among these businesses about 4.4% of approximately one million jobs remained vacant (Debus, George, & Petkov, 2008). Similarly, the manufacturing sector identified lack of skilled labour as a major constraining factor to growth. Specific skilled labour shortages are highest in the engineering sector (37%) and followed by manufacturing management (32%) (Alboim, 2002). Experts agree that Canada’s job market will increasingly need workers with a high level of educational attainment. However, Canadian educational institutions are not producing the number of skilled professionals to meet emerging labour demands (Bloom & Grant, 2001). Experts have predicted that in 2011, labour shortages will have intensified nationwide and that 100% of labour force demands will be dependent on immigration (Bloom & Grant, 2001).
The literature and statistics described thus far, have in part, fueled a surge of research interest from the fields of anthropology, sociology, political science and economics, whereas the field of psychology has fallen behind (Berry, 2001). Psychologists have slowly begun filling this void through acculturation research, grounded in anthropology (Berry, 2001) and intergroup relations research, grounded in sociology (Brewer & Brown, 1998). The recent expansion in immigration studies has helped open the doors of communication between disciplines traditionally exclusive of one another. The integration of research across multiple disciplines will assist counselling psychologists to more effectively comprehend the realities of the immigrant experience and therefore, deliver effective and culturally appropriate treatment. Additionally, cross-discipline research will provide policy makers and Canadian employers with information vital to developing strategic plans that meet Canada’s economic demands, in addition to helping to fulfill the life-career requirements of new Canadians.

**Barriers to Life-Career Development**

**Reaccreditation Processes**

The majority of newcomers arrive to Canada through the skilled worker program. They expect to find employment that reflects their qualifications, skills and experience. Sadly, for many, reaccreditation barriers quickly shatter vocational aspirations. Brouwer (1999) identified the primary obstacles in reaccreditation to be: 1) Canadian academic institutions which are operating without the necessary information regarding foreign grading and curriculum systems. Therefore, they are unable to make qualifiable decisions about a person’s work experience and education experience, 2) Canada’s occupation regulation institutions are fragmented. There is no national body concerned with credential evaluation. Rather, foreign credential and regulatory bodies vary across provinces. Those who wish to work in a regulated profession (i.e., engineers,
doctors, teachers, electricians) must obtain a provincially issued license from the respective occupational regulatory body, 3) Organizations are lacking in knowledge and systems required to recognize and use the skills immigrant professionals possess. Without a national credential regulatory body, employers are left to make up the rules on an ad hoc basis. This can be extremely confusing and discouraging to a newcomer. Many individuals site lack of Canadian experience as the primary barrier to employment, yet, there are few formal systems in place to facilitate access to employment during the initial immigration phase. The influences of these systemic barriers are worsened by the fact that many individuals arrive to Canada without prior knowledge of such barriers (Brouwer, 1999). Accessibility to information is hampered by the jargon and bureaucratic complexity characteristic of the institutions and processes involved.

Reitz (2001) estimated that approximately $2.6 billion dollars is lost annually through the underutilization of immigrant professionals. Experts argue that the issue stems from organizational inability to employ the expertise professional immigrants offer (Reitz, 2005). Rather than encouraging immigrants to contribute and prosper in a country that is in need of their mastery, the underutilization of immigrant expertise, moves individuals to abandon their vocational dreams and accept positions far below their qualifications (Dean & Wilson, 2009). In addition, the aforementioned challenges can have significant effects on one’s sense of social status, which may further impede the likelihood of positive career development. Lack of professional and educational recognition can leave a person feeling “lumped” together with all immigrants resulting in a loss of professional identity and may foster the development of mental health issues (Boekestijn, 1988, Dean & Wilson, 2009).

Reaccreditation and Well-Being

Scholars agree that the complex and costly reaccreditation process can often leave a person feeling devalued or without meaningful work (Ministry of Training & Colleges and
Universities, 2002). A new Canadian who derives a sense of purpose and meaning from work may feel demoralized by this devaluation and experience an overall sense of powerlessness. Research to date, shows that well-being, happiness, self-satisfaction, life satisfaction and self-esteem are correlated with employment status (Dooley, Fielding, & Levi, 1996; Frankish et al., 2007; Platt, Pavis, & Akram, 1999; Ross & Mirowsky, 1995).

Theorists suggest that a correlation between mental health and employment lies in the connection between positive self-identity and work. A healthy vocational life can strengthen a person’s self-identity through the achievement of social status, economic independence and the social contact often associated within working environments, all of which heighten overall life satisfaction and well-being (Bird & Ross, 1993; Ross & Mirowsky, 1995; Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, & Perhoniemi, 2007). In addition, research has shown that stresses associated with work-life are connected to physical health issues such as cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders and high blood pressure (Arber & Lahelma, 1993; Dooley et al., 1996; Dean & Wilson, 2009). The challenges and stresses of reaccreditation, underemployment and unemployment result in costly mental and physical health consequences on individual persons as well as on Canadian society. Sadly, immigrant professionals are welcomed to Canada because of their specialized skills and professional identities, only to find that reaccreditation barriers severely impede their ability to use and further develop those very skills. Additionally, reaccreditation barriers prevent opportunities for language acquisition and specialization. Most professional occupations have a language and communication system specific to their specialization and culture. The longer a person is not working in their profession, the harder it becomes to learn the required communication skills, further stifling the prospect of becoming professionally successful.
Language Proficiency

Language barriers severely influence work-life adjustment processes. The lack of opportunity for engagement in high-level communication impedes the development of professional language skills. This is especially significant in work environments that use complex and technical language (Chen, 2006a). Language proficiency is a primary factor in job selection processes (Atkins & Kent, 1989) and likely plays a significant role in decisions related to retention and advancement. Professional language expectations include: proficient report writing, advanced communication and comprehension skills, negotiation, persuasion, and conflict resolution expertise as well as the ability to comprehend and utilize advanced terminology (Lee & Westwoon, 1996). Again, lack of opportunity for professional engagement impedes the acquisition of communication skills employers require. Although helpful, English as a Second Language courses offered by the Canadian government likely do not provide adequate opportunity for learning specialized language skills. Brouwer (1999) argues that new immigrants lack the resources required for learning the technical language that characterizes most professions. The professional language demands of Canada’s contemporary business culture and the lack of resources available to immigrants for learning professional language skills, often leaves a qualified person feeling powerless to compete despite having appropriate work and educational expertise (Lee & Westwoon, 1996; Imberti, 2007). Individuals may develop feelings of inadequacy because their oral and written communication is far below their level of expertise. In addition, research has shown that difficulties with language may promote discrimination (Hakak, Holzinger, & Zikic, 2010).

Discrimination

Discrimination is a significant barrier facing immigrants. It manifests in both blatant and subtle forms. Blatant discriminatory practices are easily identified and are socially and politically
unacceptable in Canada, while those who express subtle forms of discrimination do so in ways that justify their actions (Esses, Dietz, & Bhardwai, 2006). For example, employers often site lack of Canadian experience as a justifiable reason for not hiring an otherwise qualified individual (Bauder, 2003). Under certain conditions, lack of Canadian experience is a legitimate reason (i.e., certain positions require knowledge of the Canadian market and culture); however, in some situations it can be a form of subtle prejudice (Esses et al., 2006). Research in the linguistic and communication disciplines has shown that a person’s accent affects the way an interviewer perceives that individual’s intelligence, status, kindness, solidarity, and ethnicity (Purkiss, Perrewe, Gillespie, Mayes, & Ferris, 2006). Creese and Kambere (2003) investigated the life-career narratives of African Canadian women in Vancouver. They found that their African-English was the most problematic barrier to employment. The participants stated that rather than responding to the content of their speech, interviewers would either ignore what they had said or correct their speech even though the majority of participants were fluent in English and received post-secondary education in English.

A second form of subtle discrimination is the discounting of educational and professional capital acquired before immigration. Statistics reveal that while 90% of Canadian-born individuals who study medicine are working as physicians, only 55% of those educated abroad work in Canada as physicians and 33% are employed in occupations unrelated to medicine (Boyd & Schellenberg, 2007). Other discriminatory variables include workplace discrimination (e.g., a bias against immigrants holding leadership roles leading to less prestigious positions, denied access to further training resulting in de-skilling (Shih, 2006), territoriality (e.g., immigrants perceived as outsiders), and competition (e.g., immigrants seen as taking jobs away) (Boekestijn, 1988). The systemic discrimination that immigrant professionals face poses serious health and vocational risks (Yakushko, Backhaus, Watson, Ngaruiya, & Gonzalez, 2008). The
culminating effects of discrimination can have an assaulting effect on self-identity and meaning in life (Lee & Westwoon, 1996). Such effects can impede a person’s ability to make positive adjustments needed to integrate in a new society.

**Acculturation Processes**

Self-identity undergoes a period of transition during the migration process. Leaving one’s homeland involves the dissolution of relational affiliations that once served as social sources of support. Transitioning to a new country and learning the skills necessary to regain needed support systems requires that a person learn new ways of being. The process of acculturation plays a significant role in one’s adaptability to a new culture. Acculturation processes are the most studied factor in immigrant health research (Flannery, Reise, & Yu, 2001). They are defined as complex interactional processes that involve cultural, interpersonal and intrapersonal variables that influence a person’s ability to modify their attitudes and behaviours in order to successfully adapt (Berry & Sam, 1997). Historically, acculturation success was viewed as being largely based on language proficiency. The more advanced the written and oral communication, the more likely adaptation to their host culture (Yakushko et al., 2008). Recently, researchers have acknowledged that acculturation processes are far more complex and multifaceted than originally thought, extending beyond the realm of language (Sam & Berry, 2006). This shift in perspective has popularized the term biculturalism: the valuing of one’s own culture, skills and experience before migration while developing and using the skills necessary to successfully adapt to a new culture (Yakushko et al., 2008). The bicultural identity that emerges from this process allows for engagement and retention of original identity, while adapting to or identifying with their new culture (Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001). Although this multidimensional conceptualization has become the predominant framework from which to view a new immigrant’s process of cultural adaption, there is minimal research that examines this
perspective. Professionals continue to refer to new immigrants as being more-or-less acculturated, which promotes a linear and one-dimensional view of individual change processes (Phinney et al., 2001)

In contrast, a multidimensional framework views acculturation as including change that is indirect (i.e., relations between people and their environments), delayed (i.e., psychological adjustments take time) and reactive (i.e., rejecting the new culture) (Berry, 2003). Berry (2003) has formulated a three-step process in acculturation. First, positive psychological adaptation is a state of contentment achieved in the areas of life-career achievement, personal and cultural identity and psychological health. Second, socio-cultural adaptation involves mastery of day-to-day life tasks and has empirically been shown to have a linear improvement over time whereas, psychological adaptation tends to suffer immediately after contact (e.g., initial arrival and declines very slowly over time). The third step is economic adaptation, which pertains to full and active participation in economic life. Economic adaptation is predicted by migration motivation, perception of losses associated with migration (e.g., support systems) and the status of vocational identity. The three layers of adaptation are interconnected and lack of success in one area directly impedes chances for success in the other two. The complexity and interconnectedness between domains involved in acculturation processes has stimulated much research into the coping strategies used in cross-cultural transition.

**Individual Coping Strategies**

The discussion thus far highlights research regarding the numerous difficulties and challenges that newcomers face. The hardships of immigration are well documented across academic disciplines. However, for many, the long process of resettlement is based on each individual’s coping skills and the ability to develop and use external resources. Surprisingly little empirical attention has been given to how immigrants persevere. Perseverance can be defined as
“voluntary continuation of a goal-directed action in spite of obstacles, difficulties or discouragement” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 229). This small but growing body of literature has documented the existence of coping strategies that people employ to help them overcome presented obstacles.

**Narrative Construction and Social Support**

The core of a person’s sense of self-identity is largely premised on the meaning individuals generate and attribute to life events. Narrative construction theory rejects objectivism and asserts that individual constructions and perceptions of truth are reflections of the internal perspective of the person telling the story (Sharf, 2006). Neimeyer (2004) postulates that the transposition of life experience into a narrative context involves three processes. First, the personal dimension entails the individual deconstruction of sequences of experience and the organization of these events into episodes. Individual episodes compose rich depictions of the setting of each experience that include the characters, plots, and underlying themes. Second, the interpersonal dimension involves the social transmission of developed narratives (Neimeyer, 2004). Concerning immigrant populations, the opportunity to recount challenging life events with significant others can facilitate social support, healing and growth. Khawaja, White, Schweitzer and Greenslade (2008) found that social support served to buffer the effects of stress and promoted positive adaptation in refugee populations. Therefore, one’s ability to engage in narration at the interpersonal level may serve as a coping strategy during the pre, initial and post immigration transition. Finally, narrative processes that occur at the broader social level may help establish the necessary context for generating meanings that represent the larger societal environment.

Narrative construction, as a positive coping mechanism, is relevant to the immigrant experience because it helps explain the processes people draw on, in order to make sense out of a
potentially chaotic situation (Ehrensaft & Tousignant, 2006). Bruner (1990) refers to narrative construction as a principle component in adaptability processes. Engagement in narrative processes primes a person psychologically to better manage conflict and contradiction. Neimeyer and Levitt (2001) further the argument by stating, “By formulating coping as a narrative endeavor, we are advancing a framework in which people are viewed as ‘motivated storytellers,’ an approach that helps us think in an integrated fashion about adaptation and self-change” (p. 10). They clarify the strength of resilience as being largely dependent on one’s ability to generate organized narratives. Organized narratives act as a “space” for the teller to shift from less adaptive perspectives, (i.e., self as victim), to more beneficial self-views (i.e., self as active coper) (Neimeyer & Levitt, 2001).

**Locus of Control**

Cognitive processes are used to adjust to the various stresses associated with moving to a new country. Research in personality and cross-cultural psychology has identified locus of control as a relevant factor to positive adjustment (Garcia, Ramirez, & Jariego, 2002). Originating from Rotter’s (1954) (as cited in McFarlane et al., 1980) social learning model, he defined locus of control as the way in which people perceive their own behaviour in relation to a particular outcome. Rotter defined locus of control as the following:

> When a reinforcement is perceived by the subject as following some action of his own but not entirely contingent upon his action, then in our culture, it is typically perceived as the result of luck, chance, fate, as under the control of powerful others, or as unpredictable because of the great complexity of the forces surrounding him. When an individual interprets the event this way, we have labeled this as a belief in external control. If the person perceives that the event is contingent upon his own behavior or his
relatively permanent characteristics, we have termed this a belief in internal control. (p. 126)

Rotter (1966) extends this definition to include the role of past performance. Experiences affect an individual’s locus of control and their perceptions of how they will perform in future endeavors. For example, an immigrant who perceives past successes as largely the result of their own internal control is more likely to believe that they are able to exert control on future outcomes. This cognitive process may also help override the significant negative messages received from society during initial transition. Franks & Faux (1990) conducted a study investigating the relationships between demographic characteristics, stress, mastery, and social resources in Chinese, Vietnamese, Portuguese and Latin American immigrants. They found that stress perception and sense of mastery over stress, was related to positive outcome. Further, locus of control is considered a stable and generalizable personality characteristic (Lefcourt, 1982), internal locus of control is associated with information seeking and processing (Wolk & Ducette, 1974), and greater well-being (Lefcourt, 1982). Overall, this literature suggests that given the multitude of stressful circumstances immigrants face, those with an internal locus of control orientation, may be better able to address the challenges of transition. Locus of control is closely related to the theory of human agency: both emphasize the role of experience and self-perceptions on an individual’s outcome expectations.

Theories of Career Development

The proceeding section examines current career development literature from a positive psychology and social cognitive career theory framework. To date, little research has been conducted with immigrant professionals from a positive theory framework, while SCCT theory has been used somewhat more frequently with this population. Through an extensive literature
review of contemporary career theories and the emerging field of positive psychology, the author hopes to highlight how integration of these distinct frameworks may better inform our understanding of the life-career adjustment of immigrant professionals in Canada.

**Theory of Human Agency**

The discipline of psychology has largely concentrated on the repair of pathology. Some argue that the origins of this focus lie in the way in which the field evolved as a scientific discipline in the 20th century. Specifically, after WWII, scientists became increasingly aware of the potential involved in the treatment of mental illness through the medical model. Attention was brought to the newly developed grant system, which promoted research premised on the medical paradigm (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001). Before this shift, psychological research focused on curing mental illness however there was also an emphasis on humanistic centred issues such as how people create meaningful lives, processes of identifying and developing higher talent and also, curing mental illness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001). However, the 20th century saw an eruption of inquiry into the identification and treatment of human suffering. The research framework became one almost exclusively based on curing disease (Seligman, 2004). Since then the medical model used to study suffering has made significant strides in treatment. On the other hand, its impact on the prevention of illness remains minimal (Seligman & Peterson, 2003). In response, researchers have begun to emphasize prevention and the role of individual strengths and agentic functioning on individual well-being. Albert Bandura’s (1989) theory of human agency has played a key role in the development of contemporary theories that reflect humanistic accounts of how individuals function and persevere.

Human agency is an integral facet of the career development process (Bandura, 2001a; Gushue, Scanlan, Pantzer, & Clarke, 2006; Gushue, Clarke, Pantzer, & Scanlan, 2006). A person
with a strong sense of agency believes that their actions are both meaningful (i.e., they matter) and are actual (i.e., they exist) (Cochran, 1997). According to Chen (2006) “If career is recognized as a life process, it is vital to identify and understand the human participation in this process. Life career phenomena do not exist without human involvement” (p. 12). By emphasizing individual participatory processes in life-career development, attention is brought to the subjective nature of individual career trajectories (Sharf, 2006) and how each subjective world uses its own sense of agency to navigate through life processes. From this perspective, each person is an agent because they are actively creating meanings, organizing their experiences, and choosing how meanings will affect life-career endeavors (Delle Fave, 2006).

Bandura (2001b) defines human agency as the:

- Intentionality for shaping future plans and courses of action, temporal extension of agency through forethought, self-regulation of motivation, effect, and action through self-influence, and self-reflectiveness concerning one’s functioning and the meaning and purpose of one’s life. (p. 12)

These features allow for the discovery of self-potential and the cultivation of action plans that facilitate positive change processes especially during stressful circumstances (Chen, 2006b). In essence, human agency is what allows individuals to feel a sense of control in building and maintaining meaningful and productive lives.

Given the many barriers and ambiguities characteristic of the immigration experience some researchers have suggested that a strong sense of agency can help new Canadians overcome certain challenges and to create meanings from their experiences that encourage empowerment and perseverance. For example, individuals with a strong sense of agency who overcome adversity related to racism and oppression may have developed the skill of creating optimal distance from the oppressive stimuli. Such emotional distance can help a person
minimize the perception of the threat and create meanings that help build resilience and perseverance (Thompson & Neville, 1999). Such notions parallel the famous message by Victor Frankl (1992) that suffering without meaning or purpose is most devastating. The purpose of bringing attention to the role that agency may have in helping individuals build resilience, is not meant to suggest acceptance of unjust circumstances. Instead, the goal is to bring attention to the possible ways individuals can use their own dynamic systems to confront and persevere through harsh contexts. An equally relevant question is to explore how adverse experiences could promote adaptive or optimal functioning (Constantine & Sue, 2006).

Research in the existential domains of human functioning has begun to flourish. However, immigrant professionals are virtually nonexistent in such investigations. Samples remain primarily white and Western in origin (Lopez et al., 2005). This study aims to explore the role of agency in immigrant professionals and examine if and how, a sense of agency has influenced the life-career trajectories of new Canadians. More specifically, this research will explore the most vital mechanism for the development and maintenance of agency that is, self-efficacy (Bandura, 2000).

**Self-Efficacy Theory**

Self-efficacy is the foundation mechanism of all human agency processes. Other factors can serve as motivators; however, without the core belief that one’s actions will lead to desired goals, there is little incentive to persevere (Benight & Bandura, 2004). Albert Bandura (1998) coined the term self-efficacy and defines it as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the course of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 624). This is an intuitively appealing concept, the more self-efficacious one is; the more able they are to achieve meaningful goals. This idea, in part, explains why some individuals persevere and even flourish in the face of adversity.
Research to date on the cognitive and motivational factors of human agency has shown that self-efficacy is the single most supported mechanism of human action (Benight & Bandura, 2004). Given this significant position, exploring the role of self-efficacy in the workplace is a worthy pursuit. Stajkovic & Luthans (1998) conducted a meta-analysis of 114 studies that examined numerous factors related to workplace success. They found a significant, positive correlation between self-efficacy and overall work performance. Based on their findings, the authors developed task specific guidelines to help employers identify and build employee self-efficacy. The guidelines include the provision of: 1) accurate and clear task descriptions, 2) specific instruction on means for achieving tasks, 3) cognitive and behavioural training programs to enhance self-efficacy, and 4) objective standards from which individuals may gauge their accomplishments. These recommendations highlight the practical utility in applying self-efficacy theory to benefit both employers and employees. By nurturing the development of self-efficacy in the workplace, employees may develop greater job satisfaction and therefore, overall life-satisfaction (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997).

Within workplace task specific parameters, self-efficacy is understood as domain specific (Bandura, 1977, 1997). Individuals encompass belief systems that reflect the perceived ability to coordinate the skills required to attain goals under specific and somewhat predictable conditions (Maddux, 2005). Task specific measures of self-efficacy are useful and reliable in predicting the actions people employ under specific circumstances (Maddux, 2005). An alternative to a task-specific framework is general self-efficacy. General self-efficacy refers to a person’s global beliefs about their ability to act within novel and ambiguous situations (Luszcynska, Gutierrez-Dona, & Schwarzer, 2005). Schwarzer & Jerusalem (1995) developed the generalized self-efficacy scale in 1995 and define it as a person’s perception of their ability to handle a variety of stressful situations. In this study, the participants are a group of 20 individuals who have
immigrated to Canada and have expressed positive life-career transition. As discussed, new Canadians face a myriad of personal and professional challenges in a variety of contexts. For this reason, the study adopts a generalized view of self-efficacy in order to first explore coping styles and self-perceptions across a broad range of novel situations. Before understanding task specific efficacy among immigrant professionals, it is important to first generate a picture of how this population copes with a variety of challenging situations. Eventually the literature may contribute to the development of task specific guidelines that specifically address workplace self-efficacy among immigrant populations.

According to Bandura (1997) there are four sources of efficacy information, which include experiences of mastery, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion and physiological and affective states.

First, the experience of feeling a sense of mastery during task performance creates an opportunity for one to recognize their strengths. In time, through successes and failures, people learn that success requires sustained effort. As resiliency develops, a person’s self-efficacy may strengthen resulting in greater awareness of other opportunities for growth. This development establishes a set of core beliefs that represent one’s global self-views about their ability to persevere (Bandura, 1997). In addition, the impact of individual cognitive styles on self-appraisal must be considered in evaluation. For example, Aspinwall and Brunhart (1996) found that optimistic explanatory styles correlate with active coping behaviour and the ability to attune to information needed for problem solving. Therefore, performance outcomes are likely mediated by both personal and situational factors which attribute to individual variability in whether self-efficacy is heightened, left unaffected or lowered by the same performance (Bandura, 1997).
Second, vicarious learning entails the comparison of one’s performance to that of another (Bandura, 1997). As individuals experience superior performance relative to norm groups, their self-efficacy increases.

Third, verbal persuasion and social support affects how people view their capabilities. Gloria, Kurpius, Hamilton, and Wilson (1999) studied 98 African American students at a predominately white university. They found that individuals who had positive and supportive relationships demonstrated greater academic persistence than those who did not have such ties. Positive feedback may encourage people to work hard and promote the skills needed to reach their goals. The last source of efficacy involves the influence of physiological and emotional states. That is, certain emotional and physiological states may increase confidence in one’s abilities, while others may hinder it. Individuals can alter efficacy beliefs by enhancing their physical well-being, reducing stress levels and negative emotional arousal and correcting inaccurate appraisals of bodily states (Cioffi, 1991).

Bandura (1997) posits that of the four sources of self-efficacy, experiences of mastery are the most influential in building positive and stable beliefs because they involve the greatest amount of individual engagement in direct, personal experience. However, all four sources are reciprocally connected through complex interactions between an individual and the environment over time (Byars & Hackett, 1998). Because immigrant professionals in Canada experience a range of challenges that are unique to their status as newcomers, it is important to understand the mechanisms that facilitate or hinder the development of self-efficacy in a new environment. Ruggiero and Taylor (1997) found that individuals whose perceptions of discrimination are such that they are able to minimize the likelihood of internalizing the abuse are able to maintain a stronger sense of control despite negative conditions. Other studies have found that a strong sense of control relates positively to well-being, which may lead to heightened individual
openness to experience that promote further opportunities for mastery and growth (Ryff, Keyes, & Hughes, 2003).

The discussion on self-efficacy has focused on the role of individual beliefs and actions; however, established and emerging psychological theories recognize that individuals rarely, if ever, act in complete isolation. Collective efficacy refers to the nature of individual embedment in social contexts. Bandura (1997) defined collective efficacy as “a group’s shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment” (p. 477). Collective efficacy theory acknowledges that often the outcome a person is seeking usually requires interdependent processes and efforts. These collective efforts facilitate the attainment of goals through the knowledge and skills of individual members but also through the interactive transactions among group members (Bandura, 2000). The ability to achieve collective efficacy enables a person to flourish within groups, organizations and societies (Maddux, 2005). Furthermore, it influences the choices a person makes about their future goals and their ability to use resources that help maintain a sense of control, especially in challenging situations (Bandura, 2000). Although most scholars recognize the important role collective efficacy plays in the workplace, there has been minimal research on the subject (Bandura, 1997). There is a need in psychological research to explore the complex and socially mediated interactional processes characteristic of workplace environments.

Within the context of the immigrant professional experience, individual mechanisms of life-career development exist simultaneously with external factors. Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) strongly supports this view by incorporating person, behaviour and environmental factors involved in life-career processes. SCCT theory is based on Bandura’s theory of human agency but incorporates vocational theory with social cognitive theory.
Social Cognitive Career Theory

Social cognitive career theory developed by Lent, Brown and Hackett (1994) is an extension of Bandura’s social cognitive theory. SCCT incorporates Bandura’s triadic reciprocal system, which includes environmental, personal and behavioural factors involved in life-career development (Sharf, 2006). This model represents a relatively new effort to understand how people develop interests, what decision-making processes they employ and how they reach success (Lent et al., 1994). SCCT examines cognitive person variables (i.e., self-efficacy, outcome expectations and goals) and how they interact with environmental variables (i.e., physical, economic, and social). By bringing attention to the interaction between personal and environmental factors, an SCCT framework is useful in discovering the proximal and distal factors that facilitate or hinder career development (Yakushko et al., 2008). Proximal and distal influences include person inputs (e.g., race, sex, abilities), background contextual factors (e.g., availability of opportunities) (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2000), and contextual influences (e.g., discrimination, political events) (Yakushko et al., 2008). This interaction is a complex system through which all variables exercise mutual effect on one another (Lent et al., 1994). The integration of person-environment variables has been somewhat hindered in psychological research with much work focusing exclusively on individual-person variables (Lent et al., 2000), with little employment of immigrant samples.

Concerning the immigrant professional population, using an SCCT framework allows for context sensitive inquiry that may better capture both environmental and individual aspects of the transition experience. To illustrate, Gomez, Fassinger, Prosser, Cooke, and Luna (2001) employed an SCCT framework to investigate the career trajectories of prominent Latin American female immigrants. The model they developed included contextual, cultural and personal variables within a family-work interface. Using a grounded theory approach, the emergent model
echoed the fluidity inherent in a continuously changing person-environment interaction (Gomez et al., 2001). Their findings provide a strong rationale for this study by elucidating the role of individual strengths (e.g., curiosity, perceptions of chance, agency) in life-career success.

Findings from this study may enrich SCCT theory by exploring the role of these variables in the career development of immigrant professionals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

**Positive Psychology Theory**

Positive psychology theory developed from a desire to understand how “normal” people flourish under everyday benign circumstances (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001). At the time, psychologists knew very little about what makes people healthy and happy. In reply, positive psychology researchers expressed interest in discovering how people grow, negotiate challenge, create meaning, develop a sense of mastery and act in ways that lead to optimal functioning (Ryff et al., 2003). The exploration of such processes mandated the reframing of research questions (Peterson, 2006). Inquiry that emerged included questions such as how individual actions relate to well-being, why do some people thrive under adverse conditions while others become defeated, or what sources of strength do people look to during times of chaos. Such questions were not absent from literature before the emergence of positive psychology. For example, Carl Jung (1933) conducted extensive work on creativity, play and peak life experience. As well, the work of Carl Rogers (1961) introduced the concept of the fully functioning person. These works emphasized the humanistic processes of how people become autonomous beings with a sense of purpose and mastery (Ryff et al., 2003). However, some have suggested that such studies became lost in an era overwhelmingly devoted to diagnosis and curing mental illness (Ryff et al., 2003). The foundation of positive psychology is largely devoted to understanding the nature of human strength and virtue. A primary goal has been to develop an empirically sound language permitting psychologists to identify and assist people in
nurturing strength and resilience (Peterson, 2006). Such work has the potential to help new immigrants create psychological and environmental buffers that may facilitate the prevention of illness and promote flourishing in the life-career domains. Positive psychology might also be used to help develop effective coping behaviours to address the socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-political challenges common to the immigrant experience.

**Virtue and Strength – A Classification System**

Positive psychology research has three areas of focus. First, it is the investigation of the “pleasant life” that includes positive emotions (Seligman, 2004), positive subjective experience (Seligman & Peterson, 2003) and overall life satisfaction (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001). Second, it is the exploration of the “good life” which includes positive traits (Seligman, 2004) and the individual capacity for love, vocation and interpersonal relations (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001). Third, it is the investigation of the “meaningful life” which includes institutions that enable the good and pleasant life (Seligman & Peterson, 2003), and the individual capacity for respect, nurture, tolerance and work ethic (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001). A decade of research has transpired a body of literature centered on resilience, positive coping, meaning making processes and life satisfaction (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001).

Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman developed the Values in Action (VIA) classification of character strengths and virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The primary goal of the VIA system is to provide an equivalent classification system to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) of mental illness. However, strengths of character replace symptoms of illness. VIA offers a new psychological language premised on a strength-based philosophy in understanding how human beings function optimally. It is important to note, that with the advent of this alternative classification system the intention is not to replace the DSM but to include both the DSM and the VIA manual in assessment and treatment. Users of both systems argue
that when combined, these manuals complement each another by addressing the weaknesses and strengths within each person and their environment. VIA includes six core virtues with each virtue defined by its own signature strengths. Peterson (2006) defines strength as: “The psychological ingredients - processes or mechanisms - that define the virtues...they are distinguishable routes to displaying one or another of the virtues...they are dimensional traits - individual differences-that exist in degrees” (p. 30).

The VIA system includes the following six virtues: 1) wisdom which is defined by the cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge (Snyder & Lopez, 2007), 2) courage, which involves the expression of will despite internal or external opposition, 3) humanity that is defined by strengths that are most involved in interpersonal engagement, 4) justice which relates to acts of civic virtue and responsibility through one-to-group or community interaction, 5) temperance that includes strengths that encourage emotional self-regulation and protect against excesses, and 6) transcendence, which includes strengths that facilitate the forging of universal connections and meanings (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Currently, the VIA classification of strengths is designed to work with adults in Western, English speaking countries (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). However, preliminary work has begun for the use of VIA as an assessment tool with non-Western populations. Nevertheless, the origins of the strengths identified in VIA are grounded in extensive cross-cultural research. Scholars have aimed to incorporate a broader cultural framework in understanding valued strengths and practices that are relevant across cultures (Asakawa, 2004; Compton, 2001; Constantine & Sue, 2006; Delle Fave, Bassi & Massimi, 2003; Dahlsgaard, Peterson & Seligman, 2005; Delle Fave & Bassi, 2009b; Nansook, Peterson & Ruch, 2009; Utsey, Hook, Fischer & Belvet, 2008; Walsh, 2000).

Research that examines strengths involved in career trajectories of minority populations reveals that curiosity, a quality of wisdom and knowledge, is an important personal factor in life-
career success (Gomez et al., 2001). Similarly, Richie and colleagues (1997) examined the life-career stories of 18 highly prominent African American-Black and White women. The most salient characteristics these women attributed to their career success included the ability to persevere in the face of challenge, reliance on internal standards and judgment, and an intrinsic passion for their work regardless of external reward (i.e., intrinsic motivation). When combined, these studies suggest that of the VIA virtues and strengths, the virtue of wisdom and its characteristic strengths of creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning and perspective, contributed significantly to the positive life-career development of these minority populations.

**Theories of Wisdom and Knowledge**

Positive psychology literature uses two explicit theories to define the virtues of wisdom and knowledge (Snyder & Lopez, 2007). Sternberg (1985) proposed the balance theory of wisdom. Balance theory postulates that the attainment of wisdom occurs through the process of balancing self-interests with environmental contexts (Sternberg, 1998). Balance theory recognizes that, often, people form judgments in the context of competing and ambiguous interests. This process begins with the presentation of a dilemma that requires the activation of previously learned reasoning abilities. A person’s life narrative and values are then expressed in the tacit knowledge they use to generate solutions. Producing solutions that respect both individual values and environmental contexts draws on sophisticated problem solving capabilities. The final step is to produce multiple solutions and examine the extent to which each solution requires a person to either adapt to the environment, shape the environment to fit the chosen solution, or select a new environment that is more conducive to the chosen solution.

Similar to the balance theory of wisdom, the Berlin wisdom paradigm emphasizes individual processes involved in the organization and application of knowledge. Baltes and
Staudinger (2000) define wisdom as the “ways and means of planning, managing and understanding a good life” (p. 124). They present three criteria used in the acquisition of wisdom. First, life-span contextualism, which requires the consideration of life contexts (e.g., love and work), cultural values and the impact of time passage on proposed solutions. Second, the relativism of values and life priorities, which entails forming perspectives that reflect value differences across diverse people and relevant societal contexts. Finally, to process complex or novel information, a person must engage in flexible and open-minded thinking. Combined, these theories suggest that the acquisition and maintenance of wisdom and knowledge serve to enhance one’s capacity in understanding the perspectives of others, to develop more vivid worldviews and to create and to implement appropriate action plans in pursuit of desired goals (Snyder & Lopez, 2007). Positive psychology research has established five main individual strengths that facilitate the cultivation and preservation of wisdom. These include creativity, curiosity and interest in the world, judgment and critical thinking, love of learning and perspective. The complex and novel circumstances specific to the transitional experience, likely require that an individual engage in curious and exploratory behavior.

Curious individuals tend to exhibit a greater degree of openness to experience and flexibility when individual preconceptions do not fit existing circumstances (Peterson, 2006). Kashdan, Rose and Fincham (2004) define curiosity as including the following:

An important motivational component that links cues reflecting novelty and challenge (internal or external) with growth opportunities. A primary facilitator of personal growth is sensitivity to its pre-requisites. Curiosity prompts proactive, intentional behaviours, in response to stimuli and activity with the following properties: novelty, complexity, uncertainty, and conflict. (p. 291)
Kashdan et al., (2004) define curiosity as either diversive or specific. Diversive curiosity involves behaviour that reflects the active seeking of novelty and challenge. This form of curiosity fosters contact with new stimuli and awareness of opportunities. Specific curiosity entails the cultivation of in-depth knowledge through the exploration of specific stimuli (Kashdan et al., 2004). Such stimuli tend to be complex and usually require further obtainment of information (Krapp, 1999). Processes related to both forms of curiosity are intrinsically motivating because engagement assumes complete individual absorption in tasks and results in the creation of meaningful interests and goals. Engagement in curiosity involves a four-step process that includes: 1) use of attentional resources by scanning and self-orienting in novel contexts, 2) cognitive and behavioural exploration of stimuli, 3) flow-like engagement, and 4) the integration and assimilation of stimuli (Kashdan et al., 2004). Execution of exploratory behaviour leads to personal growth and positive subjective experience. Permeating each step of the process is the ability to self-regulate one’s attentional resources. Self-regulatory tendencies emerge in childhood and set the stage for exploratory behaviour in adulthood.

**Life-Span Theory**

Donald Super (1980) is credited for having developed the most comprehensive theory of life-span career development. Positive psychology theory parallels Super’s life-span career theory in that both emphasize growth across the life span. Growth is achieved through the individual flourishing in multiple life roles (e.g., worker, citizen and parent). Like positive psychology theory, Super emphasizes the role of education, insight, play, growth and meaning-making in career development (Robitschek & Woodson, 2006). When individuals view their personal growth across the various life stages they are better able to identify individual strengths that relate to life-career well-being (Robitschek & Woodson, 2006).
Life-span theory credits early childhood experiences as laying forth the foundation of adult exploratory behaviour. Life span theory addresses career issues across the life course and attributes the role of curiosity to exploratory behavior in adult life-career development (Sharf, 2006). According to Super, the cultivation of one’s self-concept begins in childhood. Self-concept includes planful action, career decision-making processes, time perspective, and the development of interests and self-control (Sharf, 2006). Super considers curious behaviour as the foundation of these processes and represents the basic of all human drives (Sharf, 2006). Curiosity initiates exploratory behaviour, which begins when a child selects a key figure to observe and imitate. Over time, this process leads to the obtainment of information that cultivates personal interests and goals, which lead to planful behaviour in adulthood (Sharf, 2006).

Curiosity’s role in implementing behaviours related to positive life-career development is supported by both positive psychology and life-span theory. Relative to the immigrant professional, both frameworks would hypothesize that successful transition (i.e., satisfaction with life-career achievement in a new country) relates to one’s ability to engage in curious and exploratory behaviour. After all, the obtainment of information (e.g., vocational, legal, economic, social, language, etc.) is an integral part of the preparation process of moving to a new country. A second benefit of curiosity relates to its role in promoting engagement in optimal experience. Cross-cultural research has shown that optimal experiences result from individual engagement in complex activities (Massimini & Delle Fave, 2000). Optimal experiences arise through the process of deep engagement in skill acquisition that is dependent on exploratory behaviour. To generate such experience individuals must actively pursue this acquisition rather than passively wait for it (Kubey & Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). A review of the perspectives on optimal experience and the theory of flow provide an important backdrop for understanding why
curiosity and exploratory behaviour may play a vital role in successful immigrant life-career transitions.

**Theory of Flow**

Theories of optimal experience began with creativity research in the 1960’s (Nakamur & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005). Psychologists became interested in learning about the nature of intrinsically motivating behaviour (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Deci and Ryan’s (1985) self-determination theory represents a theory of optimal motivation, which assumes that human beings have a built-in drive to learn and grow (Deci, 1975; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). This built-in propensity emerges from intrinsically motivating processes that facilitate task engagement. Enjoyment of tasks precedes the valuing of external reward (Sheldon, 2006). Through this work, the theory of flow emerged (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Similar to processes of curiosity, flow experiences are intrinsically motivating and are defined as including the following components:

The subjective experience of engaging in just manageable challenges by tackling a series of goals, continuously processing feedback about progress, and adjusting action based on this feedback. Under these conditions, experience seamlessly unfolds from moment to moment, and one enters a subjective state. (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005, p. 90)

In order to enter a state of flow, the following conditions are required: 1) complete absorption, 2) selective attention to stimuli (Massimi & Delle Fave, 2000), 3) intense and focused concentration, 4) the merging of action and awareness, 5) loss of self-consciousness, 5) a sense of control, 6) distortion of temporal experience, and 7) intrinsic motivation (Snyder & Lopez, 2007). Immersion into flow processes heightens one’s capacity to maintain full involvement in a given task (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005). Like self-efficacy theory, flow theory requires the careful balancing between one’s skills perception and the ability to act on those skills within
perceived opportunities. Subjective psychological and physical states provide feedback about the interactions occurring between person and environment. For example, states of boredom signal the need to adjust either skill level or the challenge, in order to resume the flow experience (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005). Boredom may be indicative of a person having obtained skill mastery for the task. Task adjustment that reflects greater complexity and challenge is needed to alleviate boredom and return to a state of flow. Flow theory assumes that people are intrinsically motivated toward experiencing heightened levels of engagement and when flow states are disrupted, (i.e., boredom) most yearn to re-enter. This model assumes Vygotsky’s (1978) principle of the intrinsic human desire and ability for growth. Flow experiences provide individuals the opportunity for evolving, mastery development and individual growth across the lifespan.

To date, the flow model has not developed into a formal theory of career development. A review of the literature suggests that the time is ripe for this emerging framework to enter the field of career psychology. The first rationale for this position is that at the core of flow theory is an appreciation of the dynamic person-environment interaction. The interactionist focus parallels that of other contemporary career models in that individual processes are understood within environmental contexts (Magnusson & Strattin, 1998). Csikszentmihalyi (1985) coined the term emergent motivation to characterize this interaction. Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi (2005) define emergent motivation as including the following:

Experience is shaped by both person and environment, we speak of emergent motivation in an open system: what happens at any moment is responsive to what happened immediately before within the interaction, rather than being dictated by a preexisting intentional structure located within either the person (e.g., a drive) or the environment (e.g., a tradition). (p. 91)
From this vantage point, emergent motivation can represent the proximal goals that emerge through the person-environment interaction. Environmental challenges (e.g., learning a new computer system) interact with a set of skills (e.g., a person’s technical skill set) and results in the creation of proximal goals (e.g., “I want to learn this new system within two weeks”). The ability to match skill set to environmental challenges, in part, stem from previous experiences of mastery and are a crucial component to positive career development.

Another argument supporting the incorporation of flow theory into established career theories involves its focus on mastery development through individual strength identification and growth. Flow theory is embedded in a positive psychology framework and the pursuit of flow experiences relies heavily on positive psychological constructs. For example, consider a person whose presenting concern is a lack of workplace engagement. A positive psychology counsellor would help identify that individual’s signature strengths and together, they would create an action plan that allows further manifestation of their strengths. They would consider environmental contexts and limitations as well as individual skill level. Over time, daily engagement in activities that promote individual strength results in a greater sense of mastery. Everyday use of character strengths helps to match a person’s skills to challenges.

These notions are not new to the field of career psychology. Bandura (1997) states that experiences of mastery are the most vital component in the development of self-efficacy because of their deeply engaging and personal nature. However, flow theory, in combination with positive psychology constructs, offers a systematic methodology for individuals to autonomously regulate strength development and to maintain awareness of their internal systems ability in controlling this regulation (i.e., human agency). In effect, it encourages individuals to forge their own paths of mastery while also recognizing environmental hindrances and limitations. Furthermore, incorporation of positive psychology strategies for strength development, may
contribute to an increased sense of meaning in life. Research consistently links the presence of meaning to well-being. Those who are able to maintain a strong sense of purpose, report higher levels of life satisfaction, positive affect, openness to experience (Compton, Smith, Cornish & Qualls, 1996) and increased physical health (Sone et al., 2008).

**Multicultural Positive Psychology**

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2001) define positive psychology research as involving the subjective (i.e., well-being), individual (i.e., strengths) and social (i.e., virtues and interpersonal relationships) domains. The cross-cultural generalizability of these conceptual definitions has been difficult to establish due to the deeply bound connection between constructs and cultural values and contexts (Compton, 2001; Sandage, Hill, & Vang, 2003). Further, a review of the literature shows that much of positive psychology research has primarily focused on Western participants and perspectives (Walsh, 2000). Failure to recognize the culture-bound nature of theory and practice can perpetuate oppressive practices that can severely negate therapeutic outcome for individuals from non-Western backgrounds (Constantine & Sue 2006). Constantine and Sue (2006) further the argument by highlighting the impossibility of using culturally bound constructs with individuals who do not belong to the culture from which the construct has evolved. Instead, psychologists must incorporate the values, beliefs and practices of the specific cultural background of the individual they are working with. Although positive psychology has made significant efforts to investigate cross-cultural implications, to date there are few studies that examine how culture affects individual meaning making processes and optimal functioning in diverse populations (Lopez et al., 2005).

Key founder of the positive psychology movement, Martin Seligman, recognizes the complexity and limitations of the culturally bound nature of classification systems. Both the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM-IV) and the World Health
Organization’s National Classification of Disease (ICD), are laden with idiosyncratic, culturally tied values (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005). He argues that positive psychology researchers and practitioners are cognizant of these issues and have begun extensive investigations into ensuring a multicultural positive psychology. Dahlsgaard, Peterson and Seligman (2005) conducted a literature review of the philosophical and religious traditions of China (Confucianism and Taoism), South Asia (Buddhism and Hinduism), and the West (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). They found significant expressions of all six virtues in each tradition. For example, Hindu and Buddhist traditions address the virtue of wisdom through the attainment of transcendental knowledge of the self. While, Confucian traditions state that the development of wisdom is achieved through education and experience. These descriptions are different in how wisdom is attained but are similar in that all three traditions emphasize the significance of higher knowledge. Similarly, the virtue of transcendence is not explicitly named in every tradition but the notion of life encompassing a higher purpose and meaning (religious and otherwise) was addressed in all traditions (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005).

The multicultural applicability of the cognitive constructs of positive psychology is receiving increased research attention (Lopez et al., 2005). One approach is to examine differences across cultures. Chin (1993) proposes a model of difference that includes a comprehensive valuing of cultural differences and contexts. He argues that such a model incorporates cross-cultural differences of values and lifestyles and shifts the perspective from a deficit hypothesis to a difference hypothesis. A multicultural positive psychology of differences explores the role of cultural and contextual factors in diverse expressions of strength and virtue (Sandage et al., 2003). On the one hand, a framework of differences is beneficial because it incorporates the strengths and weaknesses of many cultures. However, it can promote
perceptions of homogeneity among people who belong to a specific culture and notions of separateness between cultures.

The issue of cross-cultural application of positive psychology is far from resolution, however researchers have begun to increasingly explore the applicability of a strength based approach in multicultural contexts (Asakawa, 2004; Delle Fave & Bassi, 2009a; Nansook et al., 2009). Park, Peterson and Ruch (2009) conducted on-line surveys of 27 nations (N = 24,836). They examined differences among nations in how individuals achieved overall happiness in life. Results revealed that happiness was consistently sought through means of pleasure, engagement and the development of meaning in life. The means of achieving happiness among the nations that participated in the study was overwhelmingly consistent with positive psychologies theory of flow and the intrinsic human desire for a meaningful life. Although such research is promising in the goal of developing a more multicultural positive psychology a major limitation is that no study to date has explicitly asked people what happiness means to them (Delle Fave & Bassi, 2009a). Literature consistently suggests that there is a need to examine the applicability of positive psychology’s constructs across culture, the diverse constructions of life meaning across cultures and identifying the individual and environmental strengths and limitations across cultures (Lopez et al., 2005). This study includes the investigation of the contextual and personal variables involved in life-career transition. The engagement model of person-environment interaction (Neufeld et al., 2006) was judged relevant to the present investigation because of its emphasis on the interaction between context and person in career development.

The Engagement Model of Person-Environment

The person-environment model emphasizes the interaction between a person (i.e., strengths and weaknesses) and the environment (i.e., resources and stressors) that affect how a person defines and develops personal strengths (Rasmusson et al., 2003; Wright & Lopez, 2005).
Individual engagement acts as the mediating variable between all person-environment interactions and the outcomes of these interactions. Negotiation, participation and evaluation processes that occur within the person-environment context define engagement (Neufeld et al., 2006). The first criterion, negotiation, is an ongoing process that occurs between a person and their environment and requires mutual adjustments that facilitate accommodation. Positive psychological constructs most involved in accommodation processes include flexibility, adaptive behaviour, acceptance, resilience and problem solving (Neufeld et al., 2006). The second criterion, participation, defines the degree of positive interaction in the psychological, physical and emotional domains. For example, a state of flow is the result of participatory processes between person and environment that results in the matching of individual strengths with environmental resources. The final component of engagement includes the emotional and psychological evaluation of the quality of interactions. Positive psychology constructs related to evaluation include optimism, subjective well-being, self-efficacy, responsibility and loyalty (Neufeld et al., 2006). Positive results of these processes (which are mediated by individual and sociocultural variability); include individual goal attainment and environmental enhancement. A unique feature of this model is that it allows for the identification of strengths and assets as well as the weaknesses and liabilities in both person and environment. Concerning the population of the current study, such a framework can identify the environmental and individual factors that help or hinder career-development in a new country.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

The present study used a qualitative methodology and more specifically, a grounded theory approach to explore the life-career narratives of 20 individuals who have successfully transitioned in the life-career domains. The following chapter consists of four sections. First, a rationale for a qualitative approach is provided. Second, detailed descriptions of grounded theory methods are explored. Third, the procedures for data collection and analysis are explained. Finally, the background and personal assumptions of the researcher are discussed.

Rationale for Qualitative Methodology

Glaser and Strauss (1967) are credited for having developed the first systematic set of guidelines for conducting qualitative research. Prior to this, users of qualitative methodology relied primarily on mentors and direct immersion into the field to learn qualitative methods (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008). At the time, Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) work represented a radical shift in research paradigms. The research climate reflected a popularity of quantitative methods that were considered superior in the areas of objectivity, unbiased research, the replicability and generalizability of findings, and the development of empirically driven theory (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008).

Recently qualitative research methods have become a popular framework from which to investigate life-career processes and development (Young et al., 2001; Blustein, Schultheisses, & Flum, 2004). Lee, Mitchell and Sablynski (1999) define qualitative methodology as occurring in natural settings, as encompassing flexible methodologies that use modes of analysis, which may be counter to the prevailing notions of control, reliability, and validity. Further, this approach values epistemological research questions concerned with understanding how people perceive
the world (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). The goal is to discover variables of meaning and how people develop meaning rather than to test that which is known (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Individual perceptions are grounded in complex historic, social and cultural contexts (Blustein et al., 2004; Stead, 2004) and some argue that traditional quantitative methods cannot sufficiently explore and capture the rich complexity of individual experience (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). In sum, qualitative methods are an appropriate methodology because they facilitate access to the subjective world and allow researchers to develop meaningfully rich understandings of these inner worlds.

The current study used a qualitative design that is grounded within the constructivist-interactionist paradigm. The constructivist perspective assumes that reality construction is a subjective process dependent on context, culture and history (Blustein et al., 2004), that reality is individually constructed (i.e., there are no ultimate truths) (Hansen, 2004), and all realities are equally valid (Ponterotto, 2005). Additionally, this perspective emphasizes the role of context and individual narrative. The researcher chose the constructivist paradigm because it is: flexible (i.e., exploration of narratives from many angles), fluid, evolving and dynamic (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), and compatible with humanistic philosophy (i.e., individual experiences are valued in their own right).

Another philosophical tradition employed in this study involves the interactionist philosophy. According to Strauss (1993) “We are confronting a universe marked by tremendous fluidity; it won’t and can’t stand still. It is a universe where fragmentation, splintering, and disappearance are the mirror images of appearance, emergence, and coalescence. This is a universe where nothing is strictly determined” (Strauss, 1993, p. 19). Strauss (1993) emphasizes the multi-layered and ambiguous nature of individual internal and external worlds. How people engage in this continuously changing world, is in part, determined by the interactions between
their actions, emotions and environmental factors (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). George Herbert Mead (1934) argued that human behaviour can only be understood through the exploration of individual meanings and symbols. According to Mead human action is largely a reflection of the meanings people attribute to environmental objects and the symbolic self (Mead, 1934, as cited in Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 20). Blumer (1969), (as cited in Corbin & Strauss, 2008) states that:

The peculiarity consists in the fact that human beings interpret or “define” each other’s actions instead of merely reacting to each other’s actions. Their “response” is not made directly to the actions of one another but instead is based on the meaning which they attach to such actions. (p. 2)

Such meanings are continually created, recreated and modified through the ongoing interactions between multiple factors. Over time, through contact between person, environment and experience, interactions become symbolically significant. As symbolic significance develops people begin to give meaning to their experience (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005).

In order to understand how individuals have contended with difficulties and persevered, a detailed exploration will be conducted of individual meanings. How do immigrant professionals define and understand their failures and successes? What factors and interactions do they believe had the most significant impact on their ability to persevere?

**Grounded Theory**

The present study used the grounded theory approach which is one of the major branches of qualitative methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1965). Grounded theory was chosen as the most appropriate for the present study for two reasons. First, the primary goal of this approach is to generate theory that is grounded in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This approach gives voice to the lived-experience of individuals who have successfully transitioned in the life-career
domains. Second, the growing popularity of constructivist and interactionist paradigms in psychological theory and research, has made grounded theory methods especially useful in studying individual narratives. Grounded theory methods consist of flexible yet systematic guidelines for collecting and analyzing data (Charmaz, 2006a).

The primary goal of grounded theory is to derive theory from the data itself. Constructivists posit that all data and ideas are the result of interactions between individual perspectives, contexts and situations (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008). Grounded theory reflects such a paradigm by incorporating methods that are inherently interpretative and interactive (Charmaz, 2006b). For example, researchers will select grounded theory strategies based on their interpretations of the data and the emerging analyses of the data. The entire research process involves creating and recreating interpretations through progressively more abstract levels of analysis (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008). What makes this methodology particularly useful is its ability to develop theory through multiple levels of analysis over time rather than beginning research with a theory in mind. Emerging theories that are grounded in the interactions found in the narrative of the participants, facilitate the discovery of important factors and concepts that the participants themselves describe as having played an important role in their life-career development.

A grounded theory approach was chosen because (1) flexible, fluid and systematic methods are most appropriate to studying and understanding the subjective inner world of each participant, (2) the interactions between internal (i.e. strengths and weaknesses) as well as external (i.e. socio-political, socio-cultural and socio-economic) factors need to be explored, and (3) the study aims to construct a theory that explains the phenomenon from the direct experiences and perspective from the participants rather than testing a hypothesis.
Procedure

Data Collection

The researcher has received approval to use archival data from Dr. Charles Chen’s 2008 study: Professional Immigrants Worklife Adjustment Project. Dr. Chen and his research team conducted semi-structured interviews with approximately 100 individuals who immigrated to Canada. The interviewers used semi-structured questions that explored the individual narratives of (1) life-career experiences before coming to Canada, (2) life-career experiences after initial arrival, and (3) present life-career circumstances. The interviews have been transcribed and entered into NVivo 8, which is a qualitative research software and database. As a graduate assistant of Dr. Chen’s, the researcher has had the privilege of recently reading and coding the transcripts of 25 individuals. This experience brought to attention that within this large pool of data, a significant number of participants expressed a genuine level of satisfaction with their transition. The researcher also noticed that the overwhelming majority of participants described having drawn from personal strengths to adapt to their new world. The coding experience brought attention to the nature of interaction between individual strengths, coping behaviour and individual satisfaction with present circumstances. The archival data that is used in this study can help psychologists better understand the nature of individual strength and perseverance.

Participant Characteristics

The population of the current study included immigrant professionals who have arrived to Canada holding university or college degrees from their home country. In addition, participants are between the ages of 25 and 65 and worked in a professional capacity prior to immigration. In terms of country of origin, the researcher included individuals from a broad range of backgrounds (e.g., Europe, Africa, South America and Asia).
Data Analysis

Grounded theory methodology relies on coding, sorting and organizing data (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). According to Charmaz (1991) analysis begins by exploring general questions through the reading and re-reading of data. In-depth reading facilitates researcher immersion into the narrative of each individual and helps researchers to develop a general understanding of individual experiences during the pre and post immigration phase.

From 100 transcripts the researcher has chosen 20 participants. Each of the 20 transcripts have been re-read and briefly summarized in a journal. The summaries include key phrases, themes and ideas that individual participants have identified as having a relevant role in their life-career transition. In addition, the journal served as a forum in which the researcher expressed her reactions, questions and ideas as they related to each transcript.

In grounded theory, there are two main coding phases. The first phase consists of open coding which includes line, segment or incident coding (Charmaz, 2006a). Line-by-line coding involves reviewing, dissecting and labeling the data. Segment-by-segment coding facilitates examining behavioural or narrative material. Incident-by-incident coding provides the basis for making comparisons between the data (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008). The purpose of phase one is to remain as conceptually open as possible so that relevant themes and categories may emerge. The second phase involves sorting, synthesizing and organizing the most significant and frequent codes identified in phase one (Charmaz, 2006a). All coding processes were entered into NVivo 8 and examined for emergent themes and significant interactions.

In addition, grounded theory methods make significant use of memos and annotations. Beginning in the initial analysis stage, the researcher created annotations for ideas related to specific parts of the interview text. The purpose of annotations is to keep track of ideas that emerge from a specific word, sentence or entire section of a transcript. The second form of
journaling includes memo writing that involves spontaneous ideas or reflections that occur while coding. Such processes keep the researcher involved in the analysis and help to increase levels of abstraction (Charmaz, 2006a). The researcher has created two types of memos. The first is a general journal that is used to record all responses that emerge while working with the data. The researcher will use this journal to express her “gut” reactions and ideas and hoped that unfiltered expression allowed for the emergence of serendipitous ideas. The second form of journaling makes use of a memo that is attached to each individual transcript. Similar to the general journal, the researcher recorded all responses.

The goal of this methodology is to maintain an open and analytic research position that emphasizes the subjective, lived experience of each individual participant. The researcher hopes that her work will give voice to individual experiences and that this voice, will contribute to psychologists better understanding the nature of individual strengths and perseverance.

**The Role of the Researcher**

The field of psychology has long emphasized the need for scientific objectivity in research practices. According to Corbin and Strauss (2008) absolute objectivity in research is rarely if ever achieved. Researchers are bound to weave their own perspectives, training, knowledge, assumptions and biases into each project (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Pure objectivity is an unachievable goal because all research begins with a level of pre-existing theory and professional knowledge that will inform research in varying degrees (Sandelowski, 1993). Rather than attempting to achieve pure objectivity, Corbin and Strauss (2008) recommend that researchers use sensitivity as a tool beginning in the initial phases of research. Researcher sensitivity has shown to help investigators remain tuned in to what the data is telling them (e.g., noticing relevant issues and events). Similarly, Rossman and Rallis (1997) refer to researchers as learners who “construct an understanding of their topics through the questions they ask, the
contexts they study, and their personal biographies” (p. 26). They recommend that qualitative researchers commit to exploring their perspectives, biographies, interests, biases and opinions on an on-going basis throughout the research process.

**Personal Biography**

My father came to Canada in 1970. At the time, he was ambitious to start his work-life in a country that would offer his children opportunities for growth. On his first visit, he explored government agencies that offered information on how to settle in Canada. At the end of his three-month stay, he decided that Canada was where he wanted to raise his children. Three years later, he and my mother immigrated to Toronto permanently.

I, the researcher am born in Toronto, my first language is Serbo-Croatian and I identify as a Serbian-Canadian. Growing up my parents did not allow English to be spoken in our home. Although grateful for the opportunities their new country offered, they expressed a strong commitment to maintaining their cultural identity. As a child I spent my summers living with my relatives in the former Yugoslavia.

I spent my early adulthood traveling and found myself working in the human resources field by my mid-twenties. These experiences brought to light my passion for vocational and counselling psychology. In the last year, I have been employed by a private practice where my primary duties include vocational assessments and counselling with immigrant populations. I have also served as a graduate assistant for Dr. Charles Chen’s Professional Immigrants Work-Life Adjustment Project.

**Assumptions and Biases**

(1) Although I am educated and raised in Canada, I identify as someone with a bicultural identity. I have continued my parent’s commitment to maintaining our culture in my immediate family (i.e., my daughter speaks Serbian and we visit Eastern Europe regularly). Upon careful
reflection of my identity development, I became cautious about not assuming that all new Canadians desire to maintain their culture of origin in the same way that my family has. As discussed in the literature review, acculturation processes vary and are dependent on many factors. Thus, it is important to elicit from the interviews how each individual participant views their own unique cultural adaptation processes. (2) Throughout my childhood and early adulthood, my parents and their community, instilled in me a yearning to attain vocational success. Through having witnessed their struggles and sacrifices as immigrants, I have developed the belief that my life-career success directly honours their individual sacrifices. As a result, I have pursued life-career paths that were not available to them. Upon reflecting on the origins of my own vocational motivation, I realized that my assumptions of the importance of meaning and purpose in the work domain might not be relevant to others. For example, some individuals may emphasize work as a source of finance rather than a source of meaning in life.

In order to maintain awareness of the above mentioned assumptions and also assumptions that may emerge throughout the research process, I kept a personal journal to record my thoughts, reactions, questions, and concerns that may in any way affect how I perceive each individual story.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS: PARTICIPANT SUMMARIES

Interviews of 20 individuals who immigrated to Canada were conducted and comprised the data for this study. These interviews provide a rich narrative for which to explore each individual’s transition through the pre, initial and post immigration process. The following section outlines summaries of each participant’s life-career development including their level of education, reasons for immigration, adjustment experiences and present state of employment.

Participant 1

Participant 1 (P1) is a 39 year-old-woman who immigrated to Canada from Guyana in 2004. She immigrated with her spouse and two children. In Guyana, she completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in Tourism. She worked as a manager of travel services for two years. During that time, she discovered a passion for teaching and returned to university to complete teachers college. She worked as a public school teacher in Guyana for two years. P1 described her life-career in Guyana as “satisfying”. Both she and her husband were gainfully employed and enjoyed a relatively high socioeconomic standard of living. Her interest in moving to Canada began in 2001 when she attended a two-week exchange program at a Canadian University. The program provided her the opportunity to learn about Canada. Given the “developing and unstable” economic circumstances in Guyana, she and her husband chose to emigrate. Her father was already living in Canada for ten years and was not able to transition from being a principal in Guyana to a teacher in Canada. She stated that her friends and father warned her that if she wanted to teach, she would have to complete a Canadian teaching degree. P1’s response included the following:
I am determined. I do not let my emotions get the better part of me. When my father said you have to go back to school…Well if that’s what I have to do, I will take our money and do it…My husband was very skeptical. He does not like to take chances but I like to take chances. (P1)

Her narrative conveys the impression of a person who is able to maintain a functional degree of certainty despite financial problems, familial responsibility and receiving contradictory information about job search processes in Canada. Although P1 was prepared to use savings for school, unexpected events changed her path. She attended a job club for one month and learned about licensing and reaccreditation processes. She initiated the process shortly after and said, “I applied in September and received my license in December. People could not believe it was happening. I got all this negative feedback from people and when this happened, I thought what were you talking about?” (P1). Presently, she is employed as a kindergarten teacher and derives a sense of purpose and meaning from her work that is expressed in the following statement:

I am very excited about my job. I love it. It feels very natural for me…It becomes a natural part of you. It is amazing to teach little minds new things, how they react to the things they do and the way they look at you. It is a wonderful experience. (P1)

P1 plans to return to university to complete a Masters of Education degree and hopes to become a principal.

Participant 2

Participant 2 (P2) is a 28 year-old-male who immigrated to Canada in 2006 from Hungary. He completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics and a Masters of Business Administration. During graduate school, he attended an exchange program at a Canadian university for one year and then returned to finish his degree in Hungary. After graduation, he became a marketing manager at a large international bank. Although he described himself as
“satisfied” with his life-career status in Hungary, he wanted a greater challenge. He stated, “There were some limits that I had reached and I wanted to move beyond” (P2). After two years of employment, he decided to apply through the Skilled Worker Program. As part of his preparation process, he submitted an on-line application to work for his current employer in Canada.

After a number of phone interviews, he was presented a conditional offer of employment. Despite the uncertainty of his employment, he described himself as able to handle the ambiguity, “I was confident enough to take the risk. I came over and I got the job” (P2). Throughout the interview, P2 presented himself as an individual with a strong sense of internal control, meaning that, he perceived his vocational outcome as largely the result of personal control and action (Thompson, 2005). He commented that,

I was focused and I knew what I wanted to do…It was a career decision to move to Canada. My career was important. If I had not found anything meaningful or challenging enough, then I probably would not be here. (P2)

He is currently employed as an assistant vice president at an international bank for the last 12 months and described himself as being “100% satisfied” with his vocational life in Canada.

**Participant 3**

Participant 3 (P3) is a 31 year-old-male who arrived to Canada in 2004 from Peru. He completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in Computer Science and worked as an information technology consultant for four years. P3 described himself as “hating” his job in Peru despite being a “successful professional” and earning a “good salary” (P3). His desire to emigrate began at a young age:
I always knew that there was a world beyond what I had in my home country. Besides the political, social and economic problems of my country, I often wonder that if I liked my country, those things would not have mattered as much. (P3)

He described himself as a person who enjoys reading, daydreaming and participating in cultural activities. He stated that his hobbies served two important purposes. First, by engaging in pleasurable activities he was able to cope with his discontent. Second, his interest in living in a multicultural society initiated the immigration process.

P3 described his first two years in Canada as “difficult”. He made the following statement:

I was expecting to work in a factory for the first year. My expectations were so low that anything above that would have been a success. Apparently that was one of the best things I did because I was not as shocked. (P3)

Initially, he worked in a factory, data entry and telemarketing positions. He coped with working in lower level positions through social support. He identified lack of Canadian experience as the primary barrier in his job search. He was prepared to volunteer in order to gain Canadian experience. He is currently employed as a financial analyst in the public sector and stated, “I am very satisfied. I work for a very good employer” (P3). His long-term ambition is to work in the arts sector.

**Participant 4**

Participant 4 (P4) is a 39 year-old-male who immigrated to Canada in 2002 from Sri Lanka with his spouse and two children. He worked as a certified general accountant in Sri Lanka and Dubai for ten years. His sectors included insurance and finance. P4 referred to work-life in Dubai as rewarding:

When you work in the Middle East, you are considered a professional. You are treated so well. I was provided a house, car and travel opportunities. However, there is a big
disparity between having a Sri Lankan passport and a North American passport. You get double the salary if you are from the other side. (P4)

He decided to immigrate to Canada in pursuit of a better quality of life for his children and also to reunite with family members living in Canada. P4 identified language as his primary barrier. Although he is fully fluent in English, (i.e., educated in English and communicated in English at work) he discovered that people did not understand him correctly. He called this discovery, “An unexpected event… My English was not at the level I initially thought it was”. He obtained his CPA and CGA accounting designations and is now gainfully employed as an accounting manager.

Participant 5

Participant 5 (P5) emigrated from the Ukraine in 2001 with his spouse and son. He has a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Masters of Arts degree in Science. He was employed as a forensic scientist for over 20 years. His employers included the Ukrainian government and the United Nations. His interest in immigrating to Canada began during his term at the UN where he worked with a group of Canadians. Through these relationships, he learned about Canadian work-life and decided to settle in Canada for a “better standard of living”. Initially, he worked as a security officer while searching for a professional job and studying English.

Despite P5’s limited command of English, he conducted internet searches of forensic laboratories in Toronto, sent letters of introduction to each laboratory, and then followed up with a phone call. He recruited the assistance of friends (whose command of English was strong) to help him write and edit the letters. His job search strategy generated a couple of interviews. He stated, “It was not so easy. After the interviews, I asked if I could have a tour. I wanted to look around. This is my area. This is my expertise” (P5). Throughout the interview, P5 displayed a strong sense of internal control despite having significant language barriers. To illustrate,
There were difficulties. It was difficult to find the first job and I would say that almost every immigrant encounters this problem. But in general everyone can find some sort of survival job and that is nice. The rest depends on a person’s effort. (P5)

He is currently employed as a forensic scientist at a laboratory for the last four years and describes himself as satisfied with his vocational life in Canada.

**Participant 6**

Participant 6 (P6) is a 42 year-old-male who emigrated in 1993 from Sudan. He has a graduate degree in Pharmaceutical Studies. He worked as a hospital pharmacist for one year and stated that overall, he was satisfied with his profession but dissatisfied with the pay, hospital conditions and political instability. At the time, his sister was living in Canada and had successfully transitioned to working as a pharmacist. P6 initiated an extensive preparation plan. He obtained his education and employment records and registered with the Pharmacy Examining Board of Canada and the Royal British Examining Board. He arrived to Canada with $5000 and used this money to buy books and register for his Canadian practice license. The following quote illustrates his initial experiences in Canada:

> It was bad. I was forced to go back to school because North American English is slightly different from British English and I had to learn the dialects. I enrolled in a co-op program that prepared immigrants to face life in Canada. The bad thing was that I had to work survival jobs like cleaning, door-to-door sales and factory work. Things I never imagined doing in my whole life. To be honest, I was not happy. Not at all satisfied. (P6)

He failed his exams due to multiple constraints (i.e., language, not having the time to study, finances). However, in retrospect he considers himself fortunate, “I am lucky. I look at other people and they are still struggling” (P6). He has been working as a pharmacy technician in the private sector for ten years. He no longer believes that becoming a pharmacist is a realistic goal
and has therefore adjusted his vocational goal. He plans to continue working as a pharmacy technician but in a hospital setting. Although P6 expressed disappointment in not becoming a pharmacist in Canada, he was able to adjust his goals in a way that brought him as close as possible to his ideal job and work setting. For example, he lowered the level of his position (i.e., pharmacist to technician) but sustained his commitment of working in a hospital setting.

**Participant 7**

Participant 7 (P7) is a 50 year-old male who emigrated in 2003 from Albania with his wife and two sons. He has a Bachelor of Science degree in Geology. In Albania, he worked as a geologist in the public sector for 23 years and expressed satisfaction with his pre-Canada work experience. He chose to immigrate to Canada for a “better life”. Initially he enrolled in a three-month English program but financial constraints forced him to terminate his studies. In order to support his family he worked in a plastic and aluminum parts factory. He stated, “I did not feel very good about this work but I had to do it” (P7). In order to cope and initiate a change process, during his time off, he attended multiple geology conferences. At one such event, he met a geologist who eventually presented him an offer of employment. He attributes his current vocational success to this unexpected event. He has since been employed as a geologist. He stated, “I am very satisfied. I have learned a lot about the geology industry in Canada”. His five-year vocational plan includes mastering English, obtaining degree reaccreditation and completing his licensing exams.

**Participant 8**

Participant 8 (P8) is 37 year-old-male who emigrated in 2001 from the United Emirates. He has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Engineering and a Masters of Business Administration. He worked as an engineer at a consulting firm in the United Emirates. He described his vocational life in the United Emirates as “satisfying” and enabling him to enjoy a relatively high standard of
living. However, he was dissatisfied with the “generalist” model of business that predominated at most organizations. He stated, “There you cannot specialize because the environment there will not let you specialize. If a company requires specialized expertise they simply bring them in from other countries” (P8). His primary reason for immigration was to pursue specialization in his field. He expected the process to unfold quickly and was surprised by the many barriers to employment in Canada. The following quotation reflects the surprise he felt when he discovered the many barriers to employment:

I had about seven years of experience. I thought I would continue along my way. But I learned that there is something that is called ‘hidden discrimination’ that may prevent a person from finding what they are looking for. Even if you are competent, have the expertise, the hardware and the resume. If you do not learn to play it right, you will not find the job that you are searching for. (P8)

P8 is currently employed as a project engineer at an oil and gas company. Despite his initial challenges, he described himself as satisfied with his current vocational life. He attributes his success to personal action.

Personal action is very important in creating opportunities. If you are not acting on behalf of yourself, you will not find anything. You have to be dynamic, you have to have initiative. You have to be creative and find ways and means to seek out the job that you are looking for. (P8)

**Participant 9**

Participant 9 (P9) is a 39 year-old-male who emigrated in 2003 from Mauritius. He holds a Bachelor of Commerce degree and a Diploma in Accounting. He worked as a financial officer for a government airline. Prior to immigration, he travelled to the Far East and expressed a passion for exploring cultures different from his own. He immigrated to Canada to pursue career
opportunities. He remarked, “I wanted to use what I had studied in school and to apply it in my workplace. Somewhere I could really work hard and see the results”. In preparation, he read a number of reports published by the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations and was attracted by Canada’s climate of economic stability. He immigrated on his own and planned to sponsor his wife. Unexpectedly, the sponsorship process took four years. Living in Canada without his wife for an extended period negatively affected his well-being.

Concerning his job search experiences, he stated, “I did not find it difficult to find a job here. I am bilingual. French is my mother tongue and I discovered a high demand for bilingual people”. He identified lack of Canadian experience and Canadian work hours as a significant challenge for him:

In some places, you really do not have the work-life balance. I resigned from a construction company because from the first day I was working until ten or eleven every night. Even on the weekend, we had to go to work. I had to resign without having found another job. I just could not do that. (P9)

He is currently employed as a financial accountant with an international insurance company and stated, “I love my job. The people are really nice and friendly. Even though I am a foreigner, they really helped my adjustment. I really enjoy what I am doing right now” (P9).

Participant 10

Participant 10 (P10) is a 31 year-old-woman who immigrated to Canada from Bulgaria in 2002. She has a Masters Degree in Clinical Psychology. In Bulgaria, she worked as a counsellor in a school and a private practice. She immigrated to Canada in pursuit of personal growth. She stated the following:

It was a big surprise for me to come to Canada. I liked my work, my friends. I enjoyed my life. But it felt like the right thing for me to do at that moment. It felt like the biggest
challenge. I thought, that if I am telling my clients that you have to take risks in order to become more than you are, how could I continue saying that if I did not do it myself. I just had to do it. (P10)

Initially, P10 expressed openness to working outside of her field and below her level of qualification. However, she was disappointed in not being able to secure a job during her first six months after immigration. As such, she resorted to welfare and used the opportunity to obtain volunteer experience. While on welfare support, she obtained a volunteer position at a large mental health hospital. Through the internal email systems, she learned about jobs, training and networking opportunities. She was able to maintain her drive and focus during this time despite having significant financial challenges and feelings of despair. She eventually secured an offer of employment as an addictions counsellor from her volunteer setting and has been satisfied with her vocation for the last three years. P10 stated, “I am very satisfied. I have no regrets. I got everything I wanted although I don’t want it anymore”. Through her challenge and hardships, she discovered her true vocational calling and has decided to pursue a PhD in neuropsychology.

Participant 11

Participant 11 (P11) is a 40 year-old-male who emigrated from Germany in 2005. He has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Computer Science. He worked as a senior marketing manager for an international telecommunications company for over 15 years. He described his life-career in Germany as an “exciting and fun time of my life”. His work was “challenging” and “rewarding”. Throughout the interview, he expressed being motivated to “enjoy” his work. He and his wife decided to immigrate to Canada in order for her to study medicine. At the time, his organization was downsizing and as part of his package negotiation, he secured the services of an outplacement agency in Toronto. He attributed this support as a primary factor in his career success. Their services included, “Providing information about what employers are looking for,
resume writing, mock interviews, interview skills and contract negotiations” (P11). He is currently employed as a director for product marketing and described himself as satisfied with his vocational life in Canada.

**Participant 12**

Participant 12 (P12) is a 50 year-old-woman who emigrated in 2003 from India. She holds a Masters of Arts degree in Social Work and Philosophy as well as a Doctorate of Philosophy in Social Work. She has over 20 years of social work and research experience. P12 speaks about her work in an enthusiastic and passionate tone. She derived a personal sense of meaning through social work. However, she found the extensive travelling and corporate sexism in her country of origin as a significant barrier. She struggled managing her role as a mother and a professional in a predominantly male environment. For example, management would disclose rude remarks concerning her dual roles. These issues extended to her private life. Her family took issue with her commitment to work (i.e., she worked long hours and travelled a great deal). In an effort to build a more balanced work-life, she, her husband and child moved to Africa. They realized that life in Africa did little to shelter their family from “work burnout” and decided to try Canada. Their primary motivating factor was to establish a “better quality of life”.

As part of the preparation process, P12 obtained reaccreditation of her degrees. Given her strong command of English, her extensive international work experience and her advanced educational qualifications, her expectations were to obtain employment in her field shortly after immigration. She described being in a state of “shock” upon discovering how difficult it was to obtain work in her field. P12 identified “lack of Canadian experience” as the primary barrier to employment. She recalled being “depressed” during those initial years in Canada. She also noted that the common practice of volunteering to gain experience and to network in Canada was a barrier as it was a new concept for her. Eventually, volunteering allowed her to gain Canadian
experience, learn about her industry and to network with other professionals. Despite these positives, she recalled volunteering to be a bittersweet experience. Sadly, she experienced discrimination in her volunteer setting, “People look at you like a new immigrant and that is very hard” (P12).

A third barrier to her job search included her qualifications. She felt over qualified for most positions. She decided to remove her doctorate degree from her resume. Despite her initial struggles and the multiple barriers presented, P12 described herself as being satisfied with her current positions. She has been working as a case manager and counsellor for three years. Although her current employment status is below her level of qualification, she described herself as satisfied with her vocational transition. What she appreciates about her current employer is the “multicultural environment and feeling valued”.

**Participant 13**

Participant 13 (P13) is a 43 year-old-male who emigrated in 2006 from Zimbabwe. He has a Bachelor’s degree in Social Work and has worked as a social worker for not-for-profit organizations in Africa. P13 had initiated the reaccreditation process in Canada. When asked if he anticipated his job search process becoming easier once his degrees are accredited he stated, “I don’t know if I will get a job then”. Despite this belief, he maintained a strong commitment to his profession and stated that regardless of whether he practices social work, he will continue contributing to his field. Initially he expected to receive some support in his job search process:

We hear that when you get to Canada, you are going to get a job. You will get a support system. People are aware that there is some kind of support and they know that it is not enough. But they also understand that at some point, you’ll get a job. What people do not know is that the jobs they are talking about are minimum wage jobs and many people
only find that out once they are here. They may not get jobs in their areas of training.

(P13)

P13 articulated his disappointment in what he perceived as covert discriminatory barriers that immigrants face in Canada. He stated, “It makes you feel like less of a citizen. That’s when you really know this is what it means to be an immigrant”. His primary coping response included trying to see the positive side in every situation and learning how to “re-invent” himself. His story articulates a capacity for creative decision-making and flexibility. For example, to gain Canadian experience he started writing about the immigration experience. At present, he has placed his goal of practicing social work on hold and is pursuing an independent business as a consultant and writer.

**Participant 14**

Participant 14 (P14) is a 43 year-old-woman who emigrated in 2000 from Bulgaria with her husband and two children. She completed two Masters of Arts degrees in Philosophy and Language (Russian and English). She worked as a teacher in Bulgaria for over 20 years. As part of her preparation process, she completed her second Masters of Arts degree in English.

I started learning English for the purpose of immigration and I learned it to the highest possible level, Masters of English literature. I wanted to make my professional fluency as good as possible in order to survive when I came to Canada as an immigrant. (P14)

She and her husband chose to immigrate because of Bulgaria’s unstable economic and political climate. She described her initial experiences in Canada as challenging. Initially, she enrolled in university courses, worked “survival jobs” and sought accreditation while raising a family. Her application for reaccreditation has been rejected multiple times. She is currently employed as an English as a Second Language Instructor for a Public School Board. She made the following statement:
My office is in the basement. But I am very happy. I decorated my room, personalized it.
These are my students and although I am teaching in a basement, I am so happy. You cannot imagine. This is my universe. (P14)

Despite having experienced significant barriers in her job search, she upholds a strong sense of perseverance that is based on the meaning she derives from her work. She is still trying to receive accreditation for her degrees and has completed a University Teaching Certificate in English as a Second Language.

**Participant 15**

Participant 15 (P15) is a 39 year-old-male who emigrated from Tanzania with his parents and siblings. He has a Bachelor of Commerce degree and worked as a business analyst in the retail sector. His reasons for immigration were to build a life in a politically stable country. In addition, his father’s health was deteriorating and he required access to better health care. P15 described his immigration experience as “challenging”. He stated that, “Initially, I lost all my confidence. It was demoralizing. I was ready to pack and go. You go from being a university graduate to pumping gas. It was hard, mentally. But somehow I had it in me to keep going” (P15). He has been employed as a technical specialist for the last five years, while supporting his family and attending part-time studies at University. P15 described being moderately satisfied with his current state of employment and overall, very satisfied with what he has achieved in Canada within five years. Despite the ongoing difficulties, he believes that he can “do anything”.

**Participant 16**

Participant 16 (P16) is a 34 year-old-male who immigrated to Canada in 1999 from Malaysia. He has a Bachelor degree in Social Work and two years of work experience in his field. Prior to coming to Canada, he travelled through Asia for one year. He attributed a “chance event” as initiating his interest in immigrating to Canada. One day while walking down a street
in Malaysia, he noticed a recruitment advertisement describing Canada’s need for international professionals. He attended an information session and decided to initiate the process. He received immigration status within seven months. He and a friend moved to Canada together. P16 initially lived with his friend’s Canadian relatives. He credited this support as a primary factor in helping his adjustment to a new country. P16 is currently employed on a part-time basis as a settlement worker. Although he derives meaning from his work (i.e., he enjoys helping new immigrants) he is discouraged about not having attained full-time employment. In addition, he was denied degree accreditation. In response, he completed a two-year college level social work program. P16 feels that his Canadian education has helped his job search but he is disappointed in the discrepancy between his level of work and education experience and his current job. To address this discrepancy, P16 plans to complete a Bachelor degree in Social Work from a Canadian University in pursuit of minimizing this gap.

Participant 17

Participant 17 (P17) immigrated to Canada in 2004 from Sri Lanka. She has a Bachelor of Arts and a Masters of Arts in Sociology. She worked as a high-level project and research co-coordinator for the United Nations, World Health Organization and Red Cross. In addition, she worked in many African, European and Asian countries. She speaks multiple languages including English, French, Spanish, Hindi, Tamil and Singhalese. She immigrated to Canada to join her husband who also works in the field of international aid and development. P17 is currently employed as an immigration settlement counsellor. Although she describes herself as relatively successful in Canada, she has encountered professional barriers in her vocational development such as being denied reaccreditation. Also, she identified lack of Canadian experience as a significant barrier. She stated, “the common barrier is lack of Canadian experience” (P17). She has decided to pursue a Masters of Arts in Immigration Studies and
hopes that a Canadian degree will alleviate this barrier. P17 attributes being “lucky” as a major enabler of her return to school. Her current employer is partially financing her tuition and her husband is gainfully employed.

**Participant 18**

Participant 18 (P18) is a 46 year-old-female who emigrated with her daughter and husband from Romania. She has a Bachelor of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering. She described herself as a “career woman”. She worked as a mechanical engineer in both the private and public sector. During the interview, she expressed passion for her work and stated that her career provided her with a sense of meaning and purpose. At the time, Romania was a communist country and although both she and her husband worked in highly regarded professions, their earning potential was limited by the system. They could not afford a house or a car and lived with P18’s mother. In addition, she faced sexism in her profession. She defined the engineering sector as “predominantly male”. She often felt judged as being a “bad mother” because of her long work hours. This manifested into covert discrimination such as being denied access to promotions because of her female status. She and her husband chose to immigrate to Canada to pursue a better quality of life and provide their young daughter with greater opportunities.

P18 initially hoped to obtain work as an engineer or chemist but an unpredictable event changed her path. Her daughter experienced difficulty transitioning to a new country. In response, P18 placed her career on hold until her daughter psychologically and physically recovered. She decided to volunteer at her daughter’s school as a means to support her. Her volunteer position led to a job as a special needs teaching assistant. P18 has been working for the public school board for seven years and stated, “I love kids. Working in a school is very worthy for me”. Although she is satisfied with her role, she expressed disappointment in earning well
below her true income potential (i.e., as an engineer). In addition, she finds it difficult to relinquish her status as a “professional”. A primary coping strategy for P18 was continued learning about her profession including reading relevant literature. She also found her teaching work meaningful in that she was able to directly help children. Deriving meaning from her work helped her to cope. She is currently working toward completion of a special needs teaching assistant designation.

**Participant 19**

Participant 19 (P19) immigrated to Canada from China. She has a College Diploma in Teaching. In China, she worked as a teacher, educational consultant and editor. One of her positions involved assisting individuals with immigration processes. Her role as an educational consultant was to advise people on foreign accreditation procedures. She met her Canadian spouse in China. Although she was relatively satisfied with her career, she stated having felt confined in her profession and desired to “have more fun with her work” and “experience more of what life has to offer”. Her reasons for immigrating in order of importance are to attain a Canadian university degree, to experience more freedom in life and to get to know her husband’s family. Looking back on her immigration experience, she feels that she was “lucky”. She had the support of her husband’s family and this social support allowed her to adjust to Canada at her own pace and without pressure. She completed a Bachelor degree in Economics at a Canadian University. She is currently employed as a sales associate for a financial company. The following quote illustrates her positive sentiments toward her current position, “I love this job. I have the time, the experience and the dedication. I am very excited, very eager to really work”.

**Participant 20**

Participant 20 (P20) is a 40 year-old-woman who immigrated to Canada from Argentina. She completed a Bachelor degree in Economics and worked as an economist in the public
services sector (i.e., financial, education and aerospace). She described her life-career as successful but felt limited in being able to develop her career. Her primary reasons for immigration were to develop professionally. The immigration process lasted three years and during that time, she studied English extensively. She stated that she maintained realistic expectations of how her job search process would unfold. However, she was shocked at how long it took to obtain employment and that her command of English was not strong enough. She immigrated alone leaving behind a large network of family and friends. She described her initial experiences in Canada as “difficult”. She felt isolated and lonely. To address the job search barriers, she adjusted her initial goals to include working “survival jobs” for the first two years. She is currently employed as a research analyst in the financial services sector.
Chapter V consists of the findings that emerged regarding the life-career development of 20 immigrant professionals. The results present the themes that emerged within the following categories: 1) the challenges of immigration, 2) coping strategies, 3) the role of chance and luck in life-career development, 4) the role of individual strengths, 5) perceptions of career as a calling, and 6) participant reflections and recommendations.

Challenges of Immigration

The individuals in this study indicated a high degree of satisfaction with their life-career transition to Canada. However, a common theme all participants brought forth centered on the challenges of immigration. The challenges these individuals described depict the discouraging contexts of their life-career trajectories and the various obstacles that they were able to overcome. The majority of individuals stated that prior to and during the initial period of immigration, they anticipated difficulty. Most adjusted their goals accordingly (e.g., accepting survival jobs initially). Despite their reported preparedness and flexibility, 19 out of 20 participants reported feeling “shocked” at the degree of hardship. The following chapter examines the challenges of immigration as articulated by the participants of this study.

Educational and Qualification Issues

The participants of this study comprise a highly educated and vocationally experienced group of individuals. At minimum, all 20 participants arrived with a university degree and some had multiple advanced academic degrees. The majority of participants applied through the Skilled Worker Program, which emphasizes educational and vocational experience. Not surprisingly, they expected eventual degree recognition. Basran and Zong (1998) state that a
significant barrier for immigrant professionals involves professional institutions failing to recognize foreign credentials. Institutional inadequacy imparts unreasonable power to individual employers for determining credential and professional equivalency.

Ten participants talked about having undergone immense difficulty with reaccreditation processes (P4, P6, P10, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16, P17 and P18). They discussed the frustration they experienced with the disorganized and idiosyncratic nature of reaccreditation procedures. Many initiated the process and then gave up because of time and financial limitations. In addition, some individuals described feeling professionally devalued because of this prominent barrier. For example, P10 arrived to Canada with a Masters degree in Clinical Psychology. Initially, she could not secure employment in her field and resorted to the welfare system. During that time, she began the reaccreditation process and eventually received degree equivalency. Despite this success, she was not able to register with her professional college:

I could not become a member of the college of psychologists because of the regulations. In order to become a member of the college, you have to have studied in Canada or the States. There is no way you are going to come with a degree from somewhere else and become a member. They ask for 1000 hours of supervised practice. Nobody is going to supervise you for 1000 hours unless you studied here. (P10)

Similarly, P13 attained equivalency for his Bachelor of Social Work but found that employers did not recognize his degree, stating, “It hit me hard” (P13).

Some participants reported that in order to receive reaccreditation they had to complete qualifying courses. For many, these courses were a repetition of previous coursework. For example, P16 spent four and a half years upgrading his courses in order to receive reaccreditation for his Bachelor of Social Work. After investing significant time and money, he found that employers still did not recognize his degree. To combat this barrier, he is considering obtaining a
Canadian University degree. As well, P12 arrived to Canada with two Masters degrees and a PhD in Social Work. She became a member of the Canadian Association of Social Workers and applied for reaccreditation. All three of her graduate degrees combined were reaccredited to the level of a Masters of Social Work. Similarly, P17 upon discovering that her degree would be devalued, decided to return to university to obtain a Canadian Masters degree. She did not want to spend the time and money taking courses that she had already taken:

If you come here with a Doctorate, they evaluate you as a Masters. If you come here with a Masters, they evaluate you as a Bachelor. It is always one level down. My Masters degree is in Applied Sociology. Therefore, they asked me to redo my Master’s…I thought if I have to do a Masters I should do it in another field. (P12)

At the time of the interview, she registered to begin a Masters degree in Immigration and Settlement Studies.

P4 initiated a creative solution to his reaccreditation problems. He arrived to Canada as a Certified Public Accountant from Sri Lanka. He realized that it would be easier to obtain his American credentials prior to writing the Canadian exams, “The American exam gives a lot more exemptions for Sri Lankan chartered accountants” (P4). It was more difficult for him to obtain his Canadian license as a Sri Lankan accountant (with ten years of experience working for an international financial company) than it was to obtain a Canadian license as an American accountant.

P14 arrived to Canada with two Masters degrees and worked as a teacher for many years in her country of origin. Shortly after arriving to Canada, she applied for reaccreditation through a University. The following quotation illustrates the difficulty she experienced.

I got an evaluation from the university admissions department…They suggested that my documents were not original…They beat around the bush…Then they degraded my
degree. It was very humiliating and offensive...This evaluation was worth nothing because they confirmed that I have some kind of education that’s not equivalent to a Canadian degree…I had to start from scratch and apply through another institution….I paid $120 at that time and waited for two months…The Ontario College of Teachers kept changing their regulations. In 2003, they had a requirement for a qualifying test…I passed this test. The next year they cancelled this test. I went through that for nothing. I got a high score and then they cancelled the test. Why did they do that? To make our lives more difficult and to make us suffer. (P14)

At the time of the interview, she was planning to continue the reaccreditation process despite having struggled with the system for over seven years. In the interim, she obtained an English as a Second Language teaching certificate and described herself as extremely satisfied with her career. She stated, “I am so happy, you cannot imagine” (P14). Similarly, P18 was accused for having unauthentic documents. She responded to the individual, “What do you mean, I said, I’m sure they are originals” (P18). She was notified later that her documents were missing a stamp from the University of Budapest.

Only one participant described having had a positive experience with reaccreditation.

I’m 100% sure that the fact that I studied here before and that it was an exchange program between the two universities, helped. They thought this guy studied here before so what he studied at his university is probably similar to what we offer at Canadian universities. (P2)

Five participants expressed being judged as “over qualified”. On five occasions P17 was explicitly told that she was declined a position for being over-qualified. This became a significant barrier for her. She stated, “Employers should understand that someone who is new to Canada is looking for a job in their field…They don’t expect a management role…You have to
enter somewhere…From their side, they probably think that I probably won’t stay for that long‖ (P17). Similarly, P10 expressed feeling “too good but not good enough”. To address the issue of being over qualified, P12 removed her PhD credentials from her resume. She stated, “One thing I learned is to remove your higher education from your resume” (P12). P13 also removed significant work experience in order to not appear over qualified. He stated, “Once I removed some of my qualifications I was called for an interview” (P13).

Collectively, the participants in this study described facing educational obstacles in Canada, yet individually, they each found unique ways of managing and overcoming educational restrictions in order to pursue their vocational goals.

**English Language Proficiency**

Proficiency in language continually emerged throughout the narratives of participants as a significant factor in their life-career adjustment. Eighteen participants immigrated to Canada with a strong command of the English language. These individuals had studied English as a second language prior to immigration, had completed their university education entirely in English or had worked in English speaking environments. Among this group, nine individuals stated that English proficiency was not a barrier in their life-career adjustment while nine cited English as a significant barrier despite having a strong command of English (P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P9, P14, P16, P18 and P20). Two participants arrived to Canada with minimal knowledge of English and cited this as a significant barrier (P7 and P18). The following explores the emerging themes among those who described language as a barrier but had a strong command of English.

Some participants arrived to Canada with advanced degrees in English. For example, P14 completed a Masters degree in English literature prior to immigration. Despite her proficiency, she mentioned the negative impact that “stress and anxiety” had on her ability to communicate:
The problem was listening and speaking. I was not confident and when I spoke I made mistakes and especially when under stress and anxiety. It makes you embarrassed. You stumble with your language and the expressions you use are weird, because you are translating directly from your language. A lot of paraphrasing was involved. (P14)

A number of individuals had worked in predominantly English speaking environments before immigrating to Canada. Despite having an excellent command of English, they struggled with professional communication. For example, P4 spent ten years working for an international finance company and was schooled in English. The following quotation illustrates his surprise when he discovered that people could not understand him.

I would say the unexpected thing would be the fluency in my language. It was not at the level that I thought. I thought it was better but when I was climbing up the workforce… I realized people have issues with my English. Some people did not understand me. It could be my pronunciation or the terminology that I use. I use British English. (P4)

P5 worked as a forensic scientist at the United Nations with a team of English speaking individuals and felt that English was his “biggest barrier”. Similarly, P9 arrived to Canada with a high proficiency in English and identified professional language as a significant barrier.

Maybe to speak like a Canadian. I do not know, the way you speak, not have that accent. It sounds funny but it is very important because after a certain level, you can’t move further because of communication and accent…This is my perception, I don’t know whether it’s true or not. This is what I feel and see. When you are in the workplace and you see the top people, the middle management and then bottom level management, you can see the difference. (P9)

Two individuals immigrated with no prior experience in English. P7 worked as a geologist for over 20 years before immigration and stated that his primary barrier was English.
He eventually obtained employment as a geologist. Likewise, P18 worked as a mechanical engineer in the pharmaceutical industry in her country of origin. She immigrated with a minimal command of English. The following paragraph describes how limited she felt because she could not adequately express herself to others.

The hardest part was that I did not know English. I am very strong in my language… I found it very difficult not knowing English…I felt disabled because I could not explain myself. I could not show people that I was not dumb and that was very painful. This was the worst experience…I did not take English classes because our immigration happened so fast. (P18)

P18 committed herself to studying English. She was able to obtain a strong command of English but still felt frustrated by the degree of limitation language barriers imposed:

Sometimes I feel frustrated because I see people with excellent English but their knowledge is not good. I have met people who cannot explain the earth’s orbit but are teaching kids! I was very upset. Many times, I sat in the staff room and I did not talk to anyone. I would just listen because I was afraid I would say something with a grammar mistake. Sometimes I felt they were not listening to me because I do not speak fast enough...Very nice people, I get along with everybody but I have that frustration. (P18)

As such, although participants came to Canada with varying levels of command of English, language proficiency continued to emerge as a significant factor in their life-career adjustment.

Lack of Canadian Experience

A dominant theme that arose in this study was a lack of Canadian work experience as a significant barrier to life-career adjustment (P3, P4, P6, P7, P9, P10, P15, P16, P17, P19 and P20). Many individuals described having a sense of “absurdity” over what Canadian experience
actually means. For example, P3 was asked if he studied Microsoft Office in Canada or Peru. He quizzically wondered what difference that made.

P17 immigrated to Canada with extensive professional experience in Europe, Asia and the United States. In addition, her command of the English language resembled that of a native Canadian. The following quotation illustrates her confusion about how employers conceptualize “Canadian” experience:

The common barrier is Canadian experience. To be honest, I do not understand the concept. I do not understand what Canadian experience means. A computer is a computer; whether I operate it in Sri Lanka or here, it is the same. If I can work in Switzerland, if I can work in the States, why can’t I work in Canada?…I would get called to interviews and when they asked ‘How long have you been in Canada?’ …From that point on they would speak differently… because you don’t have Canadian experience. This is frustrating, because I do not see any reason why you need Canadian experience to work in Canada…Maybe it is for someone who does not know the language, because there are positions where they need bilingualism. I have always been called for those interviews, because I speak French and Spanish. At the same time, even though you have all that, there comes a time when you have been in Canada for only two or three months and it becomes a barrier. It is a barrier for no reason…I write a project report for an international organization and it is the same report that I write here. There is no difference. (P2)

Similarly, P9 felt that employers emphasizing “Canadian” experience devalued his previous experience:

The experience back home was not valued here. That is a big problem. Even though what I am doing here is very similar to the job I was doing back home. Accounting
concepts are the same everywhere, all around the world…Although what I am doing now is a little more advanced, I still don’t understand why they don’t recognize what I did before. (P9)

Employers emphasizing Canadian experience appear to have created what some referred to as a “vicious cycle”. These individuals commented on the difficulty in getting that first job without having Canadian experience. P10 stated, “Nobody will hire you without Canadian experience, but how can you get Canadian experience if you don’t get hired?” Many resorted to “survival” jobs in order to obtain initial Canadian experience (P6). However, “survival” jobs often served to deepen the “vicious” cycle by creating financial dependency on these jobs rather than working toward developing their chosen vocational paths. For example, P15 was working 60 to 70 hours a week while attending school. He described himself as “Miserable. I was ready to pack it in and go back” (P15).

Overall, many participants described a paradox of needing to have previous Canadian work experience in order to attain employment, which served to be a negative factor in their life-career adjustment, with some resorting to “survival” jobs to remedy this, which unfortunately, did not align with their vocational goals and appeared to serve as somewhat of a set-back in attaining these goals.

**Discrimination**

A significant number of participants in this study reported feeling discriminated against in some form in Canada (P4, P6, P8, P10, P12, P13, P16 and P17). Some participants noted being discriminated against for their “country of origin” and that non-immigrants “treat you like a second class citizen” (P8). This idea was echoed in P17’s experience. She was invited to interview for most of the positions that she applied to. Her resume included well-known organizations, such as the United Nations and the World Health Organization. However, the
following describes the occurrence of a change in attitude once interviewers realized that she is not Canadian. “I never had an issue, because from the very beginning, people were calling me for interviews…But the thing is, once they realize that you are a newcomer they become insecure….That picture is very strong” (P17). Similarly, P16 stated feeling judged as a “new immigrant” rather than being evaluated for his credentials and experiences.

P12 decided to volunteer as a means of getting Canadian experience. In that process, she experienced ageism.

A professor decided to take me as a volunteer in his research department. I went to his office to get the formalities sorted out. I will not ever forget one nurse…She said, ‘You want to volunteer? At this age, you want to volunteer?’ And she is screaming out to somebody...'She’s the one, at the age of 46, she wants to do volunteering’…I came home and I thought, what is wrong? … In India, we have this age issue, age and sex and all. I thought, a Western country is a country where they do not care so much about this…And she was Caucasian, a part of the dominant culture. I thought, how could this be?...I went home and told my son…People look at you as if you are a new immigrant and that’s very hard. There is some kind of attitude. (P12)

P13 believes that in Canada there is an “inherent resistance towards the mobility of professionals”. He witnessed situations where people were laid off from their jobs just before qualifying for full-time status. He stated,

I saw that a lot and the sad thing is that in some instances, the practices really border on outright discriminatory practices and immigrants keep quiet because they know it is so hard. Where do you go? What do you go? You have kids to feed…Will the fighting help you pay rent. (P13)
He also learned to assess interviewer’s questions:

> The way an employer treats you in the interview probably is the way they will treat you later on. If – as an example – one ends up saying more about your personal life than what you can bring to the organization…It makes me wonder whether the interviewer’s really interested in me as a worker or is more concerned about where I come from. (P13)

Subtle forms of discrimination were also a common theme. P10 coined “smiling racism” to describe the “politely” delivered overt racism she experienced. She stated feeling “immobilized” by “smiling racism”. “It is very difficult to cope with because if it’s open racism, if it’s hostile and aggressive, you can say things. However, if it’s smiling, what can you do?”.

**Coping Strategies**

Individuals with a wide range of cultural, educational and vocational backgrounds were interviewed for the present study, yet despite these differences, a number of participants stated that they were eventually satisfied with their vocational experiences in Canada. More specifically, 14 participants expressed satisfaction with their present employment. As well, six asserted an overall sense of vocational satisfaction, however, were not entirely fulfilled with their current position. These six individuals expressed self-appreciation for having been able to overcome barriers and achieve a level of success. In addition, they expressed a sense of hope in their vocational future and had implemented a plan of action to achieve their goals. Given the general contentment among participants, albeit to differing degrees, common categories of coping were evident in their responses. The following chapter explores the coping strategies that were reported.

**Behavioural Coping Strategies**

Behavioural coping strategies are defined as deliberate and conscious efforts to adapt to stressful situations (Farley, Galves, Dickinson, & de Jesus Diaz Perez, 2005). The majority of
participants articulated having strong behavioural coping skills that they used to combat barriers and stress. To illustrate, P13 encountered immense difficulty in his job search as a social worker. Despite having an excellent command of English, extensive work and post-secondary education, time and again he was declined offers of employment. He decided to attend Canadian culture, business and language courses designed for new immigrants. Through this experience, he discovered a passion for writing. He started writing about the immigration experience and the individuals he met during his courses:

In the process, that is when I found my need to write. I started writing about the things that were going on…I decided to write a story about the students…The courses were well below the skill level of these people from South America or Eastern Europe…They were highly educated people…You know the guy is a brilliant mathematician but he just can’t practice! (P13)

Writing served two functions. First, it helped P13 process the emotional hardship he was experiencing at the time. It provided him a forum to express himself. Second, it helped him gain Canadian experience, “I decided to start writing about immigrants as part of my Canadian experience” (P13). He eventually published his work and began a career in writing.

Other participants engaged in activities as a means for feeling better. Staying physically and mentally nourished appeared to help people momentarily forget their worries:

I would go outside and laugh…One day I said to my husband, ‘You know what? People must think I am crazy because I get dressed every day after the kids go off to school and I just go out’…..The fact that you can get up and get dressed and leave your house, you can just go outside, is amazing. (P1)

The majority of participants were able and eager to identify their personal weaknesses. Such insight helped P4, (who described himself as an internally oriented person who does not
“share much with others”), develop a plan of action that imposed socialization. He decided that going back to school would provide a social forum as well as help him address his job search barriers, “I will get my North American Qualifications. I’ll write the exams and get my designations” (P4). He completed his course work and exams within six months while working two part-time jobs.

Sixteen participants sought Canadian College or University training as a way of coping. Additional training was perceived as a means for gaining Canadian experience and a forum for networking. P20 reported that studying at George Brown College helped facilitate networking and social contact. She stated, “The thing that I liked about my courses was that I met different people, made friends and gained experience. I took the classes mainly for that purpose” (P20). In addition, seven participants reported that employers’ valued Canadian degrees over foreign degrees and in some instances people felt discriminated against for being over qualified. P10 made the following statement:

When I started getting into the field, I would go for job interviews and talk to professionals. People would be intimidated by my Masters degree and at the same time think that I am stupid and not good enough because I am an immigrant. It’s a strange situation and there is no win. Too good but not good enough. (P10)

P10 enrolled in a certificate program in social work at a University. She felt that her Canadian training had a positive impact on her employability, “It helped having it on my resume” (P10). Others chose to obtain Canadian education in order to maintain and up-date their professional knowledge:

Here, if you stay idle, you won’t get anywhere. You have to be dynamic and keep moving…You really have to upgrade yourself in terms of your studies. It is very important if you want to move up in your career. You have to get new designations. (P6)
Social Support

Social support can be defined as “the perception or experience that one is loved and cared for, esteemed and valued, and part of a social network of mutual assistance and obligations” (Taylor et al., 2004). All 20 participants recognized social support as a primary facilitating factor in career development and helped them cope with stress. Some participants found that connection with other immigrants or individuals with similar cultural backgrounds were helpful. Others found that such relationships promoted further isolation. The message conveyed by the latter group was that over identification with your own cultural group prevented socialization with non-immigrant Canadians. P5 stated that he deliberately did not seek contact with people from his own cultural background, “I didn’t seek any support from my community. If you want to succeed, you should not establish any relationship with your community. It allowed me to learn English and to be involved in the wider environment” (P5). Instead, he relied on his immediate family for support. Similarly, P12 found that the tragic circumstances characterized by most people’s immigration experience, were discouraging. She chose one friend to rely on who had a positive work experience. P12 made the following statement:

Some of my experiences were very shattering. Many people were equally helpless and they were so negative. You cannot associate with them. You need positive people. I have not found many. Except for my one friend. She used to call me every day. She would say ‘I cried just like you. It will all be over and you will look back and smile.’ Which I am now doing. Also, I got into a nice church, which I liked. The people were so happy, so welcoming. It is a “real” kind of church; I always wanted to be a part of. I was so happy. I was so absorbed. They were so supportive. I really enjoyed it. Even today, that is my home church and I just enjoy being part of it. It is like a family. (P12)
P3 also withdrew from his cultural community because he wanted to “break” with his culture. His reasons for coming to Canada included expanding beyond his culture of origin. He expressed positive regard for creating friendships with people from other parts of the world.

In contrast, other participants found that connecting with people from their own cultural background helped them develop a sense of community and support. P6 discussed the powerful validation he received from members of his community:

I had to accept what I had, deal with it and become satisfied because happiness comes with satisfaction. Talking to friends, seeing people in the same situation. Knowing that I am not alone. It is not a personal thing that I am a failure that I am a loser. It is something common that happens to everybody. This helped me adapt to this new situation. (P6)

He goes on to describe the value of social support he received from colleagues he met at various training programs:

I went to training courses and while doing my placements, I got a lot of experience, a lot of guidance. I was able to talk to many different people and members of different groups. I learned about different vocations and job markets… I think encouragement from your friends… I think that is important. I have found that people who are by themselves become depressed. (P16)

P9 immigrated to Canada with the expectation that he could sponsor his wife shortly after his arrival. It took four years for her immigration approval. P9 credited his employer for empathizing with him and supporting him.

I got depressed thinking of about her. She was back home and I was here and we didn’t know if she would get the visa or not… I noticed it affected my work performance… Thank god I had a nice employer and they understood me. They said ‘It’s okay if you need a break. If you need to rest. (P9)
Meaning-Making

Bruner (1990) posits that the “processes and transactions involved in the construction of meaning” helps a person understand their experiences and actions (p. 33). Such understanding can help individuals to ascertain how their beliefs and desires interact with their context. This notion was echoed in all 20 interviews. Many individuals talked about having to engage in a “mental shift” when deciding to come to a new country (P13). Indeed all 20 participants engaged in some shift in thinking that they felt was necessary to cope with the challenges of beginning a life in a new country. The concept of meaning making emerged as a coping strategy, wherein individuals appeared to transcend beyond the limitations of their status by giving meaning to their working lives beyond just the execution of skills and monetary gain. To illustrate, P18 transitioned from having worked as a mechanical engineer in Europe to a special needs assistant in Canada. Throughout the interview, her level of satisfaction was expressed on a continuum. On the one side, she mourned the loss of her professional identity and recognized the injustice in earning far below her potential and qualifications. On the other hand, she celebrated the opportunities for growth and sense of personal meaning her new career offered. In addition, whereas she often felt isolated in her previous profession, she recognized that her new occupation compensated for its shortcomings through the fulfillment of her social needs. The following quotation illustrates the meaning this individual derives from her job:

I love kids, I like working in a school, for me it’s very worthy. For example, today I worked with a boy in grade one. I have been working with him for about a month. He struggles with fine motor skills, so his cutting is very choppy. He also struggles with spatial sense. He cannot see patterns and things like that. I worked with him every day for 10 or 15 minutes and today he came to me with a letter that said ‘I like you because you taught me how to cut in many different ways and you are awesome and stuff like that’. I
cried. So it is very worthy, even if you work every day and it becomes routine, but with
kids, never. I like helping them. In our school, many kids come from many immigrant
families, broken families, sometimes they do not have lunch and we share our lunches.
(P18)

Similarly, P14 transitioned to a position below her level of qualifications but expressed an
intense appreciation for the sense of purpose her current position provided her:

I teach in the basement. This is my school but I am very happy because I decorated my
room, I personalized it. These are my students. I have been teaching in a basement since
2003 and I am so happy, you cannot imagine. This is my universe. (P14)

One participant referred to her work and personal life as a single entity. She credited her
spiritual self as a primary coping strategy. When asked whether she felt she had a chance to
further her career in Canada, she replied, “I know that I don’t have a chance. I’m not
disappointed about it” (P12). However, when asked about the importance of her vocational life to
her overall life in Canada she stated the following:

It is very important. It gives me a sense of meaning. It makes me feel happy. My spiritual
life is on one side and career life is on the other. I am contributing to people’s lives. My
clients are happy and I just revel in that. When I see the smile on their faces, it gives me
joy. (P12)

P12 does not separate her work life from her personal life. To clarify, she stated, “My
work is one way of worshipping god…The two are merged, integrated” (P12). Further, she
discussed the spiritual joy she receives from work and stated that being spiritually rewarded
supersedes the task of earning more than she needs to live.

P16 described himself as satisfied with his current profession. However, he is
disappointed that after so many years in Canada he has not been able to secure full-time
employment. Rather than focusing on his disappointment, he concentrates on the opportunities for growth and work-life balance his current employer offers. Similarly, P1 talks about the value of earning a living as surpassing her need to work in her profession. She received a powerful sense of validation for being able to earn a living. Such meaning making helped her while working in a factory:

It was a different kind of job. It was not a job that I enjoyed…I got work for one month in a warehouse…At the end of the week when I got my pay check I was so very happy, because I earned it. (P1)

Another participant coped with monetary loss by recognizing, “I have learned. It has really widened my knowledge base” (P11). He expressed passion about learning about his profession in a North American context and believes that his acquired knowledge will serve to strengthen his career.

The Role of Chance, Luck and Certainty

The majority of participants discussed themes of chance, luck and uncertainty (18 participants). Chance events were conceptualized as unforeseen occurrences, which influence specific outcomes. Chen (2005) delineates between chance events characterized as “highly predictable” and chance events that are “unpredictable” (p. 84). Although they are similar categories, they can produce different outcomes. For instance, unpredictable chance events may heighten a person’s sense of uncertainty, whereas more predictable chance events may promote more certainty. Chen (2005) posits that the degree and magnitude of sense of certainty in response to chance events can have significant ramifications on individual coping abilities. Such events were identified in the personal, technological, socio-economic and political domains by individuals in this study.
The participants in the present study stated that chance events played a significant role in their life-career development in Canada. Furthermore, some events were perceived to have helped while others were seen to hinder attaining their goals. Seven participants identified their ability to maintain a sense of inner certainty (while confronting an ambiguous situation) as having facilitated a positive outcome. These individuals were able to execute a sense of control and maintain a sense of comfort in not knowing how things were going to unfold. The role of luck also emerged as a common category and was closely related to chance. The following section begins with an exploration of the role of unexpected events, luck in the transition process, and concludes with a discussion of individual perceptions of uncertainty.

**Chance and Luck**

Five participants attributed a chance event as having directly led to employment. P1 was informed by a number of friends and colleagues that the only way she could become a teacher was to have her degree reaccredited or to attend teachers college at a Canadian university. One evening while watching television, she noticed a career counseling commercial. The woman in the advertisement was “talking about what she does and how she helps women find jobs. I called her…She met with me…and said you have to volunteer” (P1). Shortly thereafter, P1 obtained a volunteer position at a school and was offered a teaching position within the year. P6 also attributed a chance event as having helped him attain employment. Although his friends “laughed” at him, he decided to contact each pharmacy listing in the yellow pages directory. “I bought the yellow pages and I contacted all the employers under the pharmacy section...Until I found a job…When I told my friends, they looked at me and said you made that up” (P6). This chance event illustrates the importance of taking a chance on unpopular job search strategies. In addition to having the courage to cold call pharmacies, P6’s action reflects perseverance. He was
able to withstand the negative feedback and maintain a subjective sense of certainty despite the lack of support.

Similarly, P13 attributed his career development to chance events and his ability to notice and appropriately respond to such events. The following passage depicts the unexpected circumstances that led to his first writing contracts in Canada. “So far my three major clients have been people in social services and the music industry”. He described meeting these individuals, “Just by chance! We were moving someone…Just one of those chance meetings, a businessman who used to be a reverend and by chance the other lady was a businesswoman. She’s done a lot of work in Africa…” (P13). He secured three contracts with these individuals, which led to additional networking and employment opportunities.

Participants P18 and P2 identified their current employers as a source of positive chance events. P18 expressed gratitude for her manager’s flexibility and openness to see beyond her status as “immigrant”. She commented, “Actually, I’m very thankful, because she saw beyond my language. She is a very good specialist person. She knows all the kids in the school by name, and teachers. I’m very thankful, because she gave me a chance” (P18). Although P18 used the term, “fate” to describe her meeting this individual she also suggested that her personal action and commitment to doing her job “well” facilitated the presentation of such a chance event. Paralleling this notion of chance events and personal action, P2 made the following comment:

This is a chance. You do not always get chances twice in your life, so I took it and it was hard. I worked so hard and it is all good now. What I really appreciate is that if you have the right attitude and they see that you really want to make it, you really want to learn, they give you the tools to learn, they help you. (P2)
For other participants, chance events played a large role in their decision to immigrate. P10 commented that her decision to move to Canada was entirely based on unplanned events. She stated, “Nothing was planned, I think everything was just very fluid. It was very much accidental… I just had an opportunity and I decided to take it but it wasn’t something that I planned or wanted, it just happened like that” (P10). Others understood chance events as having played an integral role in their preparation to immigrate. P14 attributed difficult political changes in Bulgaria as having prompted an unexpected career move, which ultimately prepared her to immigrate. Prior to immigrating, she obtained a second Masters of Arts in English literature, which she felt has played a significant role in her ability to teach in Canada:

After the political changes, at the end of 1989, I had to study again because everything had changed and students were not interested in learning Russian anymore. This political situation affected my personal life. It was good because I got a chance to learn English language and literature. It was a chance for me to start all over again and to go back to school, but not just school, but university for the second time. (P14)

Another theme that emerged was the role of luck in life-career adjustment. Fourteen participants identified “being lucky” at some point as a significant positive variable. The following is a list of the domains of luck that participants identified. First, being lucky for having the “right” skill set before immigration (P1). Secondly, being lucky having attained significant education and work experience before immigrating (P13 and P18). Third, some identified a general sense of being lucky (P3, P6, P15 and P20). Fourth, being lucky to have social support (P16). Fifth, feeling lucky to have their current employer (P3, P9 and P18). Finally, feeling lucky for having executed effective job search strategies (P1, P2, P3, P5 and P19).

P9 stated that he felt lucky to have achieved a significant level of vocational satisfaction despite having faced many barriers and challenging circumstances:
It was very challenging initially. When you come to Canada as an immigrant, you come here with your luggage, you do not have anything... You start everything from scratch. I was quite lucky. When I hear the experience of other immigrants, I did not suffer that much. I was able to find nice accommodation, a nice place to live... Factors that facilitate my advancement are my coworkers and my director... Always willing to help and assist me in everything that I am doing... Even in some things that are not related to work, they all support me. They know that I am new and they know that it is difficult to adjust and they do everything they can to facilitate my adjustment. I consider myself to be very lucky because I know that many people don’t have this opportunity. (P9)

Overall, chance appeared to have been a significant factor in participants’ perceptions of their career development, and even for some, in their decision to immigrate. As well, “luck” or “being lucky” was viewed as a positive and propelling element in life-career adjustment.

**Positive Uncertainty**

Research on decision-making processes has identified positive uncertainty as an effective strategy when one a person is facing ambiguity. Gelatt (1989) defined positive uncertainty as a decision making strategy that helps people address “change and ambiguity, accept uncertainty and inconsistency, and utilize the non-rational and intuitive side of thinking and choosing” (p. 252). A popular theme mentioned by most participants included the ability to maintain a positive sense of certainty in an otherwise ambiguous situation. For example, many participants found themselves continually ascertaining the accuracy of job descriptions. Often times, the nature of the information would depend on the source of the information (e.g., online job sites contained misleading and inaccurate information). Other participants talked about adjusting goals and strategies to accommodate continually changing circumstances. Such experiences could easily trigger a sense of chaos and panic. The participants described that on the one hand, they are
expected to show a high tolerance for stress and ambiguity while on the other hand have to meet financial and familial needs. Seven participants commented that their ability to attain a sense of certainty while living in a state of change and insecurity facilitated adaptability. The emerging theme of positive uncertainty conveyed an image of individuals’ ability to trust that things will work out and that actions often based on instinct would lead them there. This concept is illustrated in the following quotation outlining P10’s decision to immigrate to Canada:

It is just life…I never thought that I would go outside of Bulgaria. I liked it there. It was a big surprise for me. But it felt like the right thing to do at the moment, it felt like the biggest challenge for me and I was thinking, if I’m telling my clients, you have to take risks, you have to become more than you are, how am I going to keep saying that if I don’t do it myself. I had to do it. (P10)

Similarly, P14 also discussed her strength of being able to take action under uncertain circumstances. For example, she applied to multiple newspaper and on-line job postings. She was often called for interviews for which she had no recollection of what the job entailed. Either the posting contained little information or too much time had lapsed between her original application and receiving the interview call. She made the following statement:

You are asking me how I tried to find a job in Canada, there was not such a thing. We just took our chances with our eyes straight into the fire…In this newspaper; I found a few telephone numbers that I was interested in, because sometimes the advertisement was not that clear. They are looking for people but they do not explain the nature of the job. From time to time, I would go to these interviews and my husband would ask, ‘where are you going?’ I told him, honestly, I do not know what I am going to do. I am just going for a job interview. I will see if I can do this or not. (P14)
Participant P19 chose to immigrate in pursuit of greater uncertainty. She described feeling stifled by the lack of options in her country of origin. She expressed enthusiasm for having the opportunity to live in a country with so many choices and options. She stated, “But here there are so many choices and you just feel the space here is so big”. (P19) She found comfort in uncertainty and change.

Participants who attributed chance, luck and their ability to respond appropriately to overcoming difficult situations appeared to demonstrate a high degree of flexibility. For example, P10 stated, “Nothing was planned. I think everything was just very fluid. It was very much accidental”. Throughout the interview, she conveyed a high degree of flexibility and this flexibility was expressed in her openness to new experience and change. Similarly, P11 also identified as a highly flexible individual:

In general, I am not a person who is tied to a certain place. You can place me anywhere and I will find my way and make the best of it…I guess with any job these days, it is a matter of how long this particular job will be around. I will cross that bridge when I get there…There is always a difference between the job you take and what it turns out to be. Sometimes it is positive and sometimes it is negative…I really didn’t have any expectations. (P11)

Participant P14 also commented on maintaining lower expectations during the first few years of being in Canada. In response to being asked whether she experienced a gap between her expectations before immigrating and her vocational experiences, she stated,

There wasn’t a gap because I didn’t have any expectations. No information, no help, no friends, no expectations, no dreams. Just come and survive. I can babysit or wash dishes with my two Master’s degrees. I was prepared for the worst and hoped for the best. (P14)
Other participants also attributed flexibility as a significant factor in adaptability. P8 stated that he adapted within “two months” because he is the type of person who can be placed anywhere and would be able to adapt. Similarly, P9 stated that, “I am very open to change and if I wasn’t I would never have come here”. As such, the notion of positive uncertainty emerged as a positive and adaptive factor in the narratives of participants, and was also linked to flexibility in facing the various challenges of their life-career adjustment.

**The Role of Individual Strengths**

As the participants discussed their life-career adjustment to Canada, many themes of personal strength emerged. Given the achievements attained by each individual, it was not surprising when the analysis revealed multiple personal attributions that participants identified as significant variables in successful transition. The following chapter explores each participant’s concept of individual strength. The most salient properties of individual strength included wisdom, motivation, perseverance, sense of personal control and career calling.

**Wisdom**

The concept of wisdom has been described to include personality traits involved in the “acquisition and execution of knowledge” (Peterson and Seligman, 2004), individual capacity for “good” judgment (Baltes and Smith, 1990), the ability to practice acceptance of successes and failures (Peterson and Seligman, 2004) and the simultaneous use of knowledge for inter, intra and extrapersonal gains (Sternberg, 1998).

The aforementioned notions of what constitutes wisdom were echoed in all 20 interviews. Participants expressed a creative and passionate capacity for knowledge attainment and execution and recounted situations in which these tasks led to positive outcomes. With regards to the strength of wisdom, two major themes emerged: the acquisition of wisdom and the execution of wisdom. Expressions of wisdom were articulated through the narratives of
participants with respect to their employment, their personal and vocational identity, and personal sacrifices and mistakes.

With respect to wisdom acquisition, the large majority of participants conducted a significant amount of research prior to immigration (P3, P4, P6, P9, P11, P12, P13, P14, P18, P19 and P20). Two participants networked with colleagues in their current place of employment (P11 and P4). These individuals worked for large international organizations and hoped to discover Canadian opportunities through their current contacts. Other participants conducted extensive online research on licensing and reaccreditation processes. The Canadian citizenship and immigration website was a popular source of information. Other individuals directly contacted organizations for whom they were interested in working for. For example, P17 stated, “I did a lot of research about the existing organizations in Canada. I was really focusing on international organizations, so I wrote to Amnesty International, the United Nations, Red Cross and Oxfam”.

Some participants talked about the importance of knowledge acquisition regarding work culture. P9 identified value in learning as much as possible before asserting her opinions at work:

Listen, always be curious, eager and be brave…The way you deal with your co-workers, your boss, the regulations, the way you get paid, anything…No matter what kind of job, you have to be very conscious in the beginning. You are not familiar with the environment, with the people…Try to listen more and see what the situation is like. (P19)

P12 discussed the significance of attending many interviews even if they were unsuccessful because of the knowledge she gained. She described herself as having become a skilled interviewee as the result of her job search process. When asked to describe something valuable that she learned, she replied with the following:
The words you use need to be replaced with the kinds of words that people like…I prepared and I had lots of interviews. Eventually I helped people with their interviews. In my field, you interview a lot…I knew the range of questions that could ever come and what answers are expected. Nothing will be a surprise. (P12)

Similarly, P14 and P18 discussed the significance of knowledge acquisition and execution in their current place of employment. P14 asserted, “There are no difficulties. I think I know everything…I extensively use the library and I’m familiar with every book on the shelf…I know what book I need for each lesson”. Likewise, P18 stressed the positive impact her “curious” nature had on her work performance. She commented, “I like to learn new things all the time. I’m very curious…I started this job not knowing much about it but probably because of my curiosity…I read stuff and that’s probably why I got better and better” (P18).

Ten individuals discussed the significance of knowledge application in their present position. More specifically, many individuals mentioned using what they had learned through the immigration process in their current position. For instance, P17 was able to help other newcomers in Canada by sharing the knowledge she gained as an immigrant:

I do a lot of organizational research and I am very careful in what I am applying for…Everyday you learn something…It gives you a different experience. Now, when a professional newcomer comes to me, right now, I know how to guide them…Because I went through it. (P17)

In the same way, P14 was able to teach her students about processes of transition through her experiential knowledge. She also expressed enthusiasm for being able to offer information relevant to other immigrants. The following describes how she conceptualized acculturation:

I taught a lesson on culture shock. I knew the four stages…The first ten days you are a tourist enjoying everything…You are proud that you belong to this place and that you
found a new home. After ten days, you look at the people who are shopping with full bags but you do not have a job, you do not have money and you are miserable. You blame everybody and everything. Why did I come here? Why did I quit my job? Back home I had enough money to survive and I was happy in a way, satisfied to be doing something…Once you find a job and you have enough money to meet your necessities…Then you start to adjust. The moment that you find a job that you are satisfied with, in your professional field…You are in stage three, when you start adjusting and incorporating yourself into the system. (P14)

Many participants who talked about the execution of knowledge conveyed an image of acceptance and immersion into the tasks they were pursuing. Acceptance has been defined as “Active, nonjudgmental embracing of experience” (Hayes, 2004). In this study, individuals expressed a conscious openness to the demands of their experience and by doing so appeared to be better able to respond to certain situations. For example, P1 talked about not “fighting” against the way things are but accepting them and working with what you have. The following describes how she used such thinking to address a resistant student of hers.

I am not here to beat anything. I am not here to fight with anybody. That brings me to one of my experiences when I was doing supply work…These kids feel like everybody is there to fight them. One day I said, ‘you know what, if you don’t want to do your work, that’s fine. I’m not here to fight with you to do your work’…. It changed a child. She actually started to do her work….I do not fight anything….I accept things for what they are. (P1)

An accepting attitude appeared to have helped some individuals immerse themselves in a process or task. Immersion, allowed them to master the knowledge they needed. For example, P6 stated, “You have to learn it, you have to absorb it and you have to be part of it”. Such engagement was
also conveyed in P20’s discussion on the importance of becoming completely involved in the interview preparation process. “I remember that when I got the opportunity to interview for my present job…I prepared for the interviews because I had four interviews. So, I prepared very well because I knew that it would be difficult to have an opportunity like that one” (P20). Others remarked on immersing themselves into continual attunement with the changing job market. P4 was adamant about “staying in touch with the market” in order to avoid becoming redundant in one position and maintaining his competitive edge.

All 20 participants related the acquisition and execution of knowledge to their well-being and identity. P10 stated that although she had found employment in her field and attained vocational satisfaction, her work experience in Canada helped her realize that she wanted a career change “It was great…I got what I wanted and now I have changed my mind. I want to do research and become a professor” (P10). She experienced a complete shift in her professional identity because of the knowledge she gained through her work experience.

The theme of knowledge retention and growth relating to career development emerged as a significant contributor in the maintenance of professional identity. Ten of the individuals’ interviewed actively sought out opportunities for learning that allowed them to maintain and further their previous expertise, regardless of whether their current roles required such knowledge. Knowledge acquisition was a key priority for these individuals. For example, P18 transitioned from working as a mechanical engineer to a special needs assistant. Despite this radical shift in profession, she maintained that, “I still study what I studied before. I keep informing myself. I am interested in natural stuff. So I keep reading. I keep training myself about what I studied before. I cannot let that go” (P18). Likewise, P6 stated, “Never give up on more education. Always read more books, magazines, learn new technology”. The intrinsic desire for continued learning was present in these individuals.
Seven individuals connected learning from their experiences with a positive change in their sense of self. P10 discussed the positive changes he experienced after having acquired the necessary skills to address the challenges of adjusting to a new work environment:

Problems with co-workers or a new program is created… It is not about just following the procedures, if you want to do something that will have an impact, you have to be very direct, very assertive. I think working there made me very assertive and that is good…I realized that it does not matter where you go. It is what you do. (P10)

She elaborated on how she has changed as an individual as a result of her learning experiences:

My self-esteem has grown tremendously…I know how difficult that was…It was psychological but also objective. Overcoming everything, being alone here…Knowing that I can do that and knowing what I have become…Who I am…I would not make a different choice…I would do it again. (P10)

Similarly, one participant mentioned having ―toughened‖ up because of her work experience. ―I survived telemarketing only a year and 8 months. That was enough to make me a tough skinned, thick skinned person. It changed my personality‖ (P14). In the same way, P3 commented on a change in his communication style. He discovered the importance of talking to people about shared interests. ―I noticed that people are more open to you if you have something in common with them…You start talking with Canadians, you start learning about geography, history, how they feel…This way they are more open to you‖ (P3).

Interestingly, P13 stated having deliberately chosen to work in a survival job for the experience of it:

Just out of interest’s sake... I am one of the few people who have not worked in a factory and so I decided to get that experience. To see what it feels like to work in a factory, doing a manual job…I did that for two days! Just to get a feel of what it means to do it.
…Let me get the experience, what does it feel like to work in a factory, doing a manual job. (P13)

A number of individuals demonstrated a perceptual ability to view their mistakes and sacrifices in a strengthening rather than diminishing way. A common perspective emerged among all 20 participants, which reflected an ability to adaptively utilize emotions and rationality when responding to hardships and challenges. In addition, the majority of individuals were able to identify and work with personal and contextual limitations and strengths. For example, P12 immigrated to Canada with a PhD in Social Work and was a seasoned social worker. Despite her expertise, she encountered significant contextual limitations and decided to work in England for a few months to gain Western experience. Based on previous experience she knew that she would be able to attain work in England and expected that this experience would help her to eventually secure employment in Canada:

I left with no Canadian experience to England. I was working in a call centre when I took the position in England…They received me as a person from Canada and recognized my degrees…. They gave me the highest possible scale for a social worker because they understand our degree system…So they didn’t treat me as an immigrant or anything…So you felt like you were just like anyone else, you started working, your inputs were the same, in no way less, so you felt good about it. When I came back after a few months, I had more confidence to do things here. That gave me much more confidence and I started going for the interviews and I thought, so what if I do not get it? I can always go back. (P12)

P12 expressed the ability to use her knowledge in a way that helped her address certain contextual barriers (i.e., lack of Canadian experience). She felt that her British experience minimized the subjective importance that Canadian employers where placing on her lack of
Canadian experience. In addition, her perspective reflected an aptitude for creative problem resolution.

Some participants demonstrated a determined capacity for learning from their mistakes:

If I make a mistake… I always learn from it and I wouldn’t look at it as if it was a bad thing. Sometimes I would laugh….I walk out knowing how to correct myself… You know things happen because you need to appreciate what you have. If these things did not happen, if I did not go through these stages in my life, I would not have appreciated what I have right now. (P1)

She goes on to explain her style of learning that conveys a positive perception of mistakes that she made:

Trial and error. When I started to work, I was not as confident as I am now and that came with time and you always correct yourself from the mistakes that you make. When I started to work, it was difficult for me to come out of the train… I would get lost and I would always laugh about it. It’s things like that. You correct yourself every time you make a mistake. (P1)

Over all, the concept of wisdom was pervasive throughout the narratives of participants in this study. This was in terms of the acquisition and execution of wisdom in the sphere of employment, self-perception (both vocationally and personally), as well as the sacrifices and mistakes that participants’ felt made a difference in their life-career development in Canada.

**Motivation**

Analysis of the narratives of the current study showed a unique pattern of variability among motivational factors. Understanding the personal motives of immigrants can help unveil an understanding of how people are able to develop a satisfying life-career trajectory while experiencing the stresses of immigration. The participants in the present study appeared to have a
natural capacity for self-reflection, while actively responding to their environment. Some theorists contend that how people combine individual motives with surrounding environment helps explain why some flourish while others deteriorate while under extreme stress (Nurmi & Salmela-Aro, 2006). The following section examines individual motives and their interaction with the environmental context.

Motivation as an emerging construct was explored in the current study. Individual narratives revealed a rich image of what motivated and excited each participant. Some were motivated by challenge and learning. To illustrate, P18 identified continued learning as her primary endeavor, “I spent so much time in school. My target is learning”. Although she described being satisfied with her current position, she is considering a career in research that would enable her to better satisfy this need. P2 also identified learning as a core motivation. His primary reason for immigrating to Canada was to “Learn more about business, learn more about banking and finance and I can say that I’ve learned a lot. Maybe even more than I expected, which is good” (P2). Similarly, P19 expressed enthusiasm for having the opportunity to work in an environment that demands ongoing learning:

It is challenging for me right now but I am very excited. I will learn new things and I will help them…I feel that there are many new things to learn every day and it is going to challenge me a lot. I feel very good about that. (P19)

Five individuals distinguished a quest to find meaning and purpose as a core motivation. P15 identified his current employer as providing him with the opportunity to contribute to the organization. The following quotation exemplifies the strong sense of purpose he generated from having made an original contribution at work:

It makes me feel like I am something. I am doing something that is contributing to a company. It feels pretty good because they’re using something that I’ve created, that I’ve
started from scratch and that’s a good feeling” (P15). Likewise, P13 generated significant meaning from his former occupation as a social worker that despite being unable to practice in Canada, he maintained an enduring commitment to his field, “I’ll find a way of contributing to the field of social work, one way or another, without necessarily being an employee (P13).

The pursuit of meaning and purpose helped P10 cope with and overcome multiple vocational barriers:

It was very difficult but I am grateful for all of it. What I care for most is not the pragmatic things but the abstract gains that I have made. As I told you in the beginning, I did not come here to be richer or to have more opportunities or to have something practical, but to challenge myself so that I have integrity and I can practice what I preach.

To me, this experience is invaluable in the sense of who I have become as a result. (P10)

For some participants, the meaning they generated from their vocational lives affected their self-identity and sense of pride. The following quotation illustrates one individual’s desire to succeed in Canada:

My motivation was to be proud of myself. That in Canada I have achieved something in front of my community, in front of my friends, in front of my colleagues back home, in front of my parents…There wasn’t a choice to give up, to go back and to say, ‘oh, I tried in Canada, but I couldn’t find a job’. This was not a choice. I would be ashamed. I would kill myself before I would do that. I am a very ambitious person. I had to succeed. I had to show my kids that you have to achieve something in life. (P14)

In addition, the large majority of the participants expressed being motivated to feel passion for their careers. To illustrate, P14 stated, “I was born to be a teacher. This is deep in my heart. I love my job. I am a devoted and dedicated teacher, and I enjoy it”. Likewise, P2 reflected, “I
love it, I think this is what I wanted to do. I find it very interesting. For some my work might be boring but I love it” (P2).

Motivation appeared to exert a strong influence on the individual capacity for goal adjustment. Fifteen individuals discussed goal adjustment in terms of what they were willing or not willing to compromise (P1, P3, P4, P6, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P14, P16, P17, P18, P19 and P20). Analysis revealed that individual compromise was in part, related to motivation.

Three patterns of goal adjustment emerged. The first pattern included individuals who adjusted expectations of their functional positions (i.e., vocational roles) but were non-negotiable in terms of the industry or domain that they wanted to work in. For instance, P13 expressed a significant gap between his previous and current work experiences. He decided to adjust his goal of working as a social worker to include more junior level positions but maintained his commitment to the helping profession. P14 adjusted her goal of working as a teacher to include other educational roles. However, she maintained her commitment to remaining in the educational domain. P4 expressed appreciation for his field having multiple functional levels. He stated, “In accounting, you can be a chief financial officer or you can be an accounts payable clerk. There are so many levels” (P4). He was able to adjust his functional goal but remained adamant about staying in the accounting profession.

A second pattern of goal adjustment that emerged involved sustaining original functional goals but widening the scope of industry. For example, P17 decided to continue working as a researcher and project co-coordinator but adjusted her domain to include working with immigrants in Canada. Similarly, P11 remained committed to working in his previous functional capacity but opened up to working in other industries, “I would have widened the scope” (P11). P16 also maintained his desire to continue working in social work but adjusted his domain from working with children to working with adult immigrants.
The third pattern of goal adjustment included individuals who adjusted their functional job goals as well as the domains or industries under consideration. For instance, P18 transitioned from mechanical engineering to working as a special needs teaching assistant. Although she experienced a drastic career transition, she expressed that her goal adjustment satisfied her need for continued learning. Similarly, P19 adjusted both her functional and industry goals. In China she worked as an educator and consultant. Upon arriving to Canada, she obtained a Bachelor of Economics and became a financial sales associate.

These individuals expressed a positive outlook on these compromises and not surprisingly, expressed satisfaction with having been able to satisfy their core motivations in life (e.g., continued learning, feeling challenged and finding a sense of meaning and purpose). As such, motivation had multiple purposes and forms in the narratives of participants, but always appeared to be a key factor in their approach to satisfying their life-career trajectory while managing the stresses of immigration.

**Perseverance**

All twenty participants identified having experienced difficult circumstances in pursuing their desired life-career trajectory. Fifteen individuals described how they were able to persevere toward their goals. P14 discussed the hardship she had experienced during her first job in Canada. She stated, “My generation is not comfortable with computers…This was a great disadvantage” (P14). She worked in a call centre when she first arrived in Canada. The following quotation illustrates the distress she experienced when expected to use a computer and her ability to persevere despite wanting to run away:

My first job in Canada was as a telephone interviewer…They provided brief training and then put me in front of the computer with a telephone in my hand and I had to call people, ask them questions and put their answers into the computer. Can you imagine how slow I
was? I could not finish a single interview that first night. I wanted to cry. Just before the break…The supervisor said ‘You are not good for anything but try to finish this shift’ I was so desperate and I wanted to leave but I decided to finish the shift. I went back the next day…Suffering, crying, not knowing what button to press, how to talk to people…It was terrible but I survived. I said, ‘I’m going to stay in this job until they kick me out’…Never give up. (P14)

P17 described the challenges of working long hours every day in a “survival” job:

It was really stressful…I worked 12 hours a day, I got up in the morning, I went to work, I went home, it’s over, the next day same thing. I felt relief when the weekend came…I think there are certain things that we immigrants have to go through, especially in the beginning and if you are strong enough, you can make it. (P17)

P1 expressed frustration with not having been able to attain a low-level survival job for the first few months after her arrival. She experienced a breaking moment and asked the interviewer, “Tell me something, what qualifications do I have to have to work in a factory?” Her frustration appeared to fuel her perseverance, “I just kept calling and calling and bugging them, I said, I need to work, I need to work. Eventually I got work for one month in a warehouse” (P1).

P6’s persistence was evidenced in his continued attempts for obtaining his license after three rejections. The following passage depicts his incredible capacity to continue despite significant barriers:

I do not give up easily and I am very patient. I appealed to the Pharmacy Examining Board of Canada to give me a fourth chance. I am still looking forward to becoming a pharmacist…There is always a second chance…Do not give up the fight, you can always become a pharmacist one day. (P6)
P6’s perseverance was uniquely expressed. For instance, although he preserved his dream for becoming a pharmacist he was able to synchronize a second plan should he fail. As previously mentioned he was willing to adjust his functional goals but was not willing to abandon working in the pharmaceutical industry.

P12’s perseverance was expressed through the way in which she handled being discriminated against. She realized that, “Nobody else at the time could help me. You have to help yourself…After that remark, ‘you immigrants’…It hurt me so badly…I was shattered to pieces that night but I gathered myself and pulled myself up” (P12). P12 later drafted a letter outlining the injustice in this person’s behaviour. This was a means for her to bring back of sense of control in an otherwise demeaning situation. She was considering sending the letter to the head of HR and filing a complaint.

Other participants explicitly stated the role that their ability to persevere had on their success. The following are statements participants made in relation to their ability to persist: “Just keep struggling, keep going. Do not let things get in your way” (P15), “It is a struggle. It took almost one year for me to get a job. It is a struggle and a lot of work but you have to keep going. Motivate yourself” (P16), “I would say there are possibilities if you are persistent! If you want to achieve something, you can” (P5).

**Locus of Control**

Internal locus of control has been defined as a person’s perception that the “self” (e.g., ability and identity) is able to exert substantial control over outcomes and has been associated with greater individual persistence (Weiss & Sherman, 1973). An internal locus of control is eloquently reflected in P17’s statement, “I know for sure that even if there are barriers to employment, it’s not going to be a total barrier for my future life. I know for sure that I will make it one day. I have had that all before. I have that within me” (P17).
Analysis revealed that all 20 participants highlighted instances in which they expressed an internal locus of control. For example, P10 exuded a strong sense of confidence in her ability to be direct and proactive during difficult situations:

There were a lot of difficulties at every level. I just did the best I could, whatever was required...A lot of problems needed to be addressed directly, right away and with no reservations...It doesn’t matter where you are, what matters is what you do. (P10)

Likewise, P4 talked about his individual “knowledge” and “commitment” as the primary variables in whether he succeeds in his current workplace. He stated, “If I elaborate my commitment...If I see something wrong, I will go after that and find the reasons for that and come up with suggestions for improvements” (P4).

P18’s strong sense of internal control was reflected in her plan to “improve her qualifications” to help her combat vocational barriers. She also believes combating barriers involves working with and changing the rules. She stated, “Rules are made by people and those can be changed. We can start something” (P18). By “starting something”, she was referring to the possibility of affecting change among management and government.

Some individuals identified their personal actions as leading to positive life-career transition. P11 referred to making a “plan of attack” which involved a multitude of search strategies. He was also prepared to adjust his plan should he fail. Similarly, P13 referred to having learned how to sell himself in job interviews as a key skill in employability. He stated, “One has to be very skillful and be able to convince the people who are hiring that you can do the job” (P13). He also believes that because he is an immigrant he needs to “put more effort than a person who is trained in Canada” (P13). In the same way, P15 decided to return to school once he “realized that it is hard to get a job without Canadian experience”.

Interestingly, P5 identified the impossibility for a newcomer to “absorb so much information”. For him, this limitation required that individuals invest a lot more time in “reading and learning as much as possible”. He felt that this action “made it much easier when you have a general idea of what’s going on” (P5).

P16 stated that he “didn’t find any barriers because of his ability to “adapt”. Interestingly, despite having mentioned disappointment in his struggle to secure full-time employment, he emphasized self-factors as predominating over external limitations such as, taking courses, doing field placements, seeking mentorship and networking. Such a stance highlights an internal locus of control.

Some participant’s sense of control was reflected in their ability to accurately assess Canadian business culture. To illustrate, P2 used the term “rat race” to classify the Canadian world of work:

Opportunities only come if you do something. I had to apply… I had to prepare for interviews… I do not think that opportunities come to you here. There is a rat race and huge competition. If you don’t do well, if you don’t want to be the best, there’s going to be someone else who’s going to be the best… I had to learn that on the job. You have to be proactive and ask if you need something. I ask a million questions… In these multinational organizations, you have to always be positive… That is one part of your attitude. (P2)

In the same way, P8 identified his “personal action” as having created opportunities”. He stated, “If you are not acting on behalf of yourself, you will not find anything. You have to be dynamic, have initiative, be creative and you have to find ways and means to find the job that you’re looking for” (P8). He also identified the importance of getting people to trust you. He stated, “You have to make other people dependent on you for a lot of things. You can take their
confidence and trust into the future. They become confident in me” (P8). An internal locus of control was evident in the narratives of all 20 participants, indicating that this perspective of self-control over outcomes was an important and valuable perspective in their life-career development.

**Career Calling**

Research on the correlates of vocational satisfaction has indicated relationships between career calling and overall life-career satisfaction. Individuals who perceive their work as a calling, tend to express a unique passion toward their work that is rooted in the perception of their employment as contributing to a higher purpose (Seligman, 2002). Career calling has been defined as recognizing skills, values and abilities and the application of these elements to a person’s work (Sharf, 2006). Research has indicated that employees who judge their work as a calling, report higher levels of overall life satisfaction than those who perceive their work as a means to an end (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Wrzesniewski and colleagues (1997) interviewed hospital cleaners and found that those who viewed their cleaning jobs as a calling tended to re-craft their roles as contributing to the comfort and healing of patients. Not surprisingly, they also reported higher levels of life satisfaction (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Other studies have revealed that the way in which individuals perceive their work is a function of their personality traits and not the job itself (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001).

All individuals in this study were asked whether they felt a sense of vocational identity in their work. Eighteen participants concluded that they felt a strong sense of career identity in Canada. Overall, participant responses yielded variability in how this identity was perceived. Fifteen participants stated that they had a strong career identity while having maintained their pre-Canada professional identity (P1, P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P8, P9, P10, P11, P12, P14, P15, P16 and P17). For example, P12 stated, “I revel in my client’s happiness”. She acknowledged that
working provides her “bread and butter” but it also brings her a sense of “joy” and “integrity” in life. She expressed gratitude toward her current employer for facilitating her sense of identity. “I feel valued for who I am. As a case manager…My decisions are valued” (P12).

Similarly, P14 described herself as being “born to teach” and through teaching, she feels that she has become a Canadian, “I feel like I was born here”. In addition, she mentioned feeling “useful” in her work because “people come to me for help.” During the interview she clarified that compensation was her least motivation in work. She stated, “I know how to become rich but I couldn’t trade my job for anything because money wouldn’t give me that satisfaction. I feel happy…Through teaching I will never become rich. Teaching is more like volunteer work” (P14). Likewise, P4 emphasized feeling a sense of identity:

My authority at work in terms of controlling the budget and approving payments and reimbursement…Also my superiors have given me a lot of opportunities to train…I may not be getting market level salary because I work for a not-for-profit organization but there are things that you can’t quantify by money such as job satisfaction and authority.

That takes you a long way. (P4)

In response to being asked to describe his vocational identity P8 responded, “It is my life”. He stated that his vocational identity is largely rooted in his current employer, “When you work for a company, you have to commit yourself to the company. Commitment gives you a sense of identity. You identify with the position, the company and culture…It gives you a sense of pride” (P8). He also emphasized being completely involved in his work, “You have to put your fingers, hands and your whole body into what you do” (P8).

Three participants mentioned feeling a strong sense of identity while having transitioned to a new career (P13, P18 and P19). P19 described herself as “Loving this job”. She commented on having found a sense of direction in her new path. P13 stated, “My vocational life is very
important to me. It is something people identify me with”. Despite still trying to re-establish his pre-immigration identity in Canada, he said, “I’ll find a way of contributing in the field of social work, one way or another”.

**Participant Reflections and Recommendations**

During the course of the interview, participants expressed enthusiasm for sharing advice and recommendations to others based on their immigration experiences. Themes that emerged under this reflections and recommendations category included recommendations for government, advice for other immigrants and individual lessons learned.

**Recommendations for Government**

Nine participants shared ideas about how government agencies could more effectively deliver information (P1, P2, P3, P7, P10, P11, P14, P15 and P16). Some individuals critiqued these organizations for providing inadequate and sometimes incorrect information to new immigrants. The following excerpt reflects the disappointment P10 felt about not receiving information that could have helped her get out of the welfare system quicker:

> I was on welfare for a while, because I could not find work. The caseworkers, they treated me as...a person who did not want to do anything...They did not tell me anything. They just asked me questions to fulfill their paperwork requirements... They did not give me any support or information, did not refer me to any services or anything. They did not tell me that I am entitled to an educational allowance to do some post graduate courses...I found that out later from a friend...That is really unfortunate. (P10)

Others stated that access to more pertinent information before immigrating to Canada would have alleviated multiple stressors. Many assumed that because they qualified for the Skilled Immigrant Category (i.e., they met the educational and professional requirements and expected to be filling labour shortages) that licensing and entry into the workforce would be
easier than it actually was. For example, P1 commented that access to licensing information would have enabled her to prepare her documents and letters prior to immigration.

P15 recommended that the government initiate a “one stop shop” for immigrant professionals. The services could include information about obtaining important documents. He stated, “A resource centre that helps you get your SIN or housing…A centre that helps people initially” (P15). P14 recommended that services be categorized according to profession. For example, services could be organized according to professional domains such as education, engineering or health care. Reiterating this idea, P10 commented that the services that exist are too basic:

There are services for new immigrants but they are very basic although important…But for educated immigrants, there is no service, nobody helps you. The agency will help you find a job at Pizza Pizza but there is no agency that helps you find a job as an engineer or a psychologist and no agency that tells you, listen, in order to become that, in order to start working, you need to do the following. (P15)

An additional service could include information on reaccreditation processes. P2 commented that there are two issues involving reaccreditation. First, the lengthy process prevents a person from working sooner and this could have a negative impact on their professional identities and skills. Secondly, many individuals go through this process only to have employers not recognize their degrees in the end. P3 recommended, “There should be research interviewing employers”. Such research could clarify the criteria employers are using to recognize or not recognize foreign degrees. Corresponding to the notion of providing more accurate and specific information, P16 made the following statement:

I think that the government should really keep a ‘real’ picture of what is going on here.

Such as, they will recognize your degree if you redo your degree...I mean, back home
some people have good jobs, they have a life and they give up everything to come here. It is very unfair. (P3)

Another avenue for attaining information could be through mentorship programs. P2 commented that although he tried, he was not able to connect with a mentor. He had hoped to be connected with a French speaking Canadian and eventually qualify for bilingual jobs. He stated, “I wish that French education was free for immigrants” (P2).

**Job Related Recommendations**

Networking emerged as a means for integrating into a new society and finding appropriate employment. For example, P3 emphasized networking as the key variable in job success:

> When I say networking, I mean with absolutely everybody. The main thing that I got from those workshops from the government was networking with other immigrants. You could think these guys are in the same situation as me, so they won’t help me. But one of them might get a good job and you now have somebody working there. (P3)

P17 credited networking as a channel for people to familiarize themselves with you:

> People come to know your face, your talents and knowledge. That is very important for immigrants because we have not studied here. We do not have a circle of people. We are total strangers when we come here. You have to build that networking structure for yourself. (P17)

Similarly, P1 believed that immigrants need to establish meeting people and creating a good impression, as a primary goal. For her, networking superseded qualifications:

> It comes down to one thing in Canada for you to get a job…Somebody needs to know you. If nobody knows you, you’re not going to be hired…You’ve got to appreciate what’s happening because you want someone to say, ‘she is a good person’…I have
come to appreciate the fact that, I’m not here to beat anything, I’m not here to fight with anybody… I do not fight anything. I came here, and this is it. I accept what it is. (P1)

P17 and P4 affirmed the on-going nature of networking. They expressed the notion that if a person closes off ties with individuals outside of their organizations, they may miss opportunities to learn about other opportunities, some of which may be better than their current employment. In addition, P4 emphasized the importance of “Taking care of yourself. When an employer does not need you, you are out the door the next day. As an employer, I have fired people because of organizational needs” (P4).

Three participants indicated that job search processes are different from what they were accustomed. P13 commented on the structure of job interviews. He stated, “In Canada, everything is so structured. The interviews are structured and strict...Even for low level jobs you have to go through a series of tests and many interviews” (P13). He talked about the importance of individual preparedness for the specific interview structure in Canada.

P6 commented that every organization has its systems of operation. He stressed that regardless of one’s knowledge and professional capacity, individuals must re-learn systems specific to their employers. He stated, “We learn from the day we are born until the day we die...Each job environment has its own system. You have to learn it, you have to absorb it and you have to become a part of it” (P6). Mirroring the concept of learning new systems, P4 learned that many members of an organization conduct recruitment. If for example, human resources is hiring for a position in a specific technical department, they will screen for resumes that contain the exact terminology of the job description. They may not be familiar with other expressions of the same information. It is therefore necessary for candidates to cater their resumes to each specific position.
A number of participants were not familiar with the concept of volunteering before immigration (P1, P10, P12, P17 and P18). Through networking, they learned that many industries and employers use a volunteer framework as the preferred choice for assessing candidates before hiring them. In addition, these individuals commented that volunteering provided the opportunity to practice English and learn about Canadian work culture:

I can definitely say that volunteering was very helpful in Canada…It gets you in the field. You meet many people and volunteers can be hired. I think that if somebody wants to volunteer they should do their research and find the best place, not just start volunteering anywhere but volunteering for the purpose of finding work and getting in the field. If it’s just giving back and doing something meaningful for others, then of course, it’s a different story. But as a tool to start your career, it’s very important and I’m happy with that. (P10)

Similarly, P18 worked as a volunteer at her daughter’s school. She was eventually offered a position as a special needs teaching assistant. P1 also learned about the educational and licensing system through her volunteer work. Although both of these individuals were pleased with the outcome of their volunteer experience, they expressed feeling a little confused about why they had to volunteer in the first place given their education and professional experience. P1 stated, “It was unexpected when people said ‘you need to volunteer’. I thought ‘why do you need to volunteer? That was not explained to me” (P1).

**Changes in Perceptions of Self**

Three participants discussed the importance of not being shy and sometimes having to “force” yourself to engage with others even if contrary to how one is feeling. For example, P9 said, “You have to be very outgoing. If you stay on your own, being shy, it won’t land you anywhere” (P9). Likewise, P19 remarked, “Go try it. Really, do not hesitate. Especially when
you have not found a job…Try anything. Even if you do not like the job…It will lead you to something…and you will feel good about yourself, instead of just waiting” (P19).

P18 stated that initially she and her husband thought that Canadians were ignoring them because of their status as immigrants. Over time, they realized that they themselves were creating this barrier because of discomfort in speaking in English:

In the beginning we thought that Canadians were putting us in a corner because we don’t speak English and we came from Eastern Europe…Then we realized it was actually us. We backed up because of language. We did not express ourselves and we did not show who we were. That is why we were treated like that and things changed. (P18)

Similarly, P6 noted, “There is one fact, it doesn’t matter what degree you have…Go for more education and training”. He stressed the importance of not resenting the system for making you feel less worthy than those educated in Canada. He used the analogy of a qualified Canadian moving to Egypt and having to undergo the same training and licensing requirements as immigrants do in Canada. P13 mentioned feeling the need to “re-invent” himself in Canada. He stated that personal action is very important in creating opportunities, “Initiative is very important in this country. If you don’t have initiative and think ‘Well, I’m such and such. I cannot do something’ you are not likely to succeed. Immigrants have to learn to re-invent themselves when necessary”.

Differences between Canada and Country of Origin

P2 expressed appreciation for the “flat” power structure in Canadian organizations. He is partial to the mobility that flatter organizations offer individual employees:

I don’t think it’s that important what title you have here. If you want to be a CEO in Germany, you have to have a PhD. You have to walk up the ladder and businesses are much more bureaucratic. Here they are very flat. For example, two levels higher than me,
is the senior vice president…I feel that the same amount of work is done with fewer
type here than in Europe…The title is not that important. What’s important is what I do
and my achievements and whether I’m able to meet my objectives or not. (P2)

Four participants commented on the positive lifestyle differences between Canada and their
countries of origin. For example, P4 came from a more collectivist culture and felt that he was
over extending himself in order to meet these requirements:

Back home when you live with your community, things are not easy… You are involved
in so many family matters…Here you can have your own peaceful life. You can select
the way you want to live…There every day you have a funeral or a wedding. (P4)

Reminiscent of this notion that life is more relaxed in Canada, P14 stated the following:

We live in a basic condominium. We have the necessities and I feel like a human being,
not like back home. Back home you have to save and its very cold in the winter. You
have to put on two or three layers…Here in Canada you feel like a normal human being.
We’re very grateful for the chance to have come to Canada, regardless of everything that
we mentioned before. We are so happy. You cannot imagine. It is close to paradise. (P14)

Two participants commented on their enjoyment of living in a more “open” society, “People are
more open-minded and friendlier…Back home they are too conservative. They do not talk
openly” (P16). Analogous to P16’s sentiments, P19 stated that she appreciated the freedom
available in Canadian society:

Freedom to be yourself and to explore whatever you want to do. People will not really
judge you because people here are from everywhere…I find that relaxing, there’s so
much space here. You can also see different people as well. With my culture, there is a
sort of constraint there. You go to school, get a good job and get married. (P16)
P19 elaborates on “freedom” by including “psychological” freedom. “In my culture, psychology is very personal and people try not to talk about it…But here, if you have problems you can get help…In my culture people are hiding it…In Canada, universities offer counselling” (P19).

P11 shared his negative view on vacation allowances. A top negotiation priority with his current employer included vacation time. He stated, “That is something that is very different in Europe…I am trying to spend as much time with my wife and making the best out of life” (P11).

In addition, he struggled with the “political correctness” characteristic of many Canadian organizations:

You have to get used to this whole area of political correctness, which in other countries is not that important…They had this big discussion about whether it was merry Christmas or happy holidays…Also in Canada you are not supposed to put your picture or age on your resume…Which is foolish because as soon as I have a face-to-face interview with someone…I may think they are too old or too young and I won’t hire them…These are the little things that are for the sake of political correctness but only complicate things more than anything else. (P11)

P2 expressed frustration with not being able to speak his mind at work:

People here communicate in different ways…Whenever you talk to your colleague or your boss you have to be very professional and nice. Whereas in Hungary, you do not always have to be nice or professional, you can speak your mind. You cannot do that here. For example, if someone makes a mistake in your team…You cannot say ‘Hey what did you do? You have to find another way to express ‘do it differently next time’…In the same situation in Hungary, I would have spoken my mind…This is challenging because I’m the kind of person who speaks his mind and if I don’t speak my mind, people can see what I am thinking from my expression. (P2)
Similarly, P5 often felt that people thought he was being “aggressive”:

Sometimes they found me aggressive but I am not aggressive. I only wanted to defend my point of view. It’s a subtle cultural difference…People are very calm and don’t articulate themselves often…In my culture, we raise our voice for no reason…Here it is considered offensive…But we don’t mean it like that, its just nice and plain…You see the difference when your co-workers are immigrants or Canadians…I am in an environment with no immigrants! (P5)

P9 expressed feeling that the work culture in Canada is more stressful. He stated, “Back home, everybody knew each other and you job environment was very friendly” (P9).

Many individuals worked in the call centre and customer service sector upon initial arrival to Canada. P13 struggled speaking on the phone for eight hours a day:

Jobs where one has to speak on the phone for almost eight hours a day … Very tough for someone who’s coming from a culture in which you only speak on the phone for three minutes, that’s enough. Its expensive! You cannot afford to speak that long on the phone! (P13)

P14 also described cultural differences affecting her ability to do door to door sales. She stated, “I was going door to door collecting charitable donations. At that point I didn’t know that in Canada donations are tax deductible and I felt like a beggar” (P14). Both P14 and P13 emigrated from countries in which such professions were non-existent. They initially struggled psychologically adapting to the possibility that people could earn a living in such a way.

Some participants commented that life in Canada was more difficult than back home. P1 explained that in her country of origin once a person obtained their university degree, finding appropriate employment was not difficult. “You got to college and there’s a job waiting for you. There is no stress, you do not fight for it and you do not have to worry about it. But now coming
to Canada, it’s a big difference. You really have to earn it” (P1). Similarly, P8 stated, “Life here is harder and more demanding also. You need to work to survive, you cannot work to enjoy” (P8).

P2, P16 and P17 commented on the difficulty of finding full-time employment. P17 stated, “I always wanted a full time job, because from my culture, we don’t have this system of part time or contract jobs…I had to ask ‘What do you mean by part time job?’ A job is always full-time in my country so you don’t have this insecure feeling…Here it was contracts” (P17).

Over all, the participants in the present study expressed enthusiasm and appreciation for the opportunity to reflect on their life-career transitions. They provided rich and meaningful recommendations at the collective level (i.e., government programs and cultures) and specific advice to other individuals undergoing the immigration transition.
CHAPTER VI
DISCUSSION

The current study explored the life-career experiences of individuals who immigrated to Canada, mainly through the Skilled Worker Program. Given the high requirements involved in qualifying for immigration, all 20 participants emigrated with significant work and educational experience. In addition, 18 participants arrived to Canada with a strong command of the English language. The primary goal of the present study was to examine the personal and contextual factors that hindered or advanced the life-career trajectory, as identified by each participant.

The preceding chapter illuminated both the positive and negative individual and external factors that influenced the life-career experiences of the participants in the current study. This chapter evaluates the emergent themes and examines how they compare to available theories in the literature. Such a comparison serves to explore how the current findings coincide or diverge from the contemporary career psychology and positive psychology literature. As well, recommendations for research, government agencies, counsellors, immigrants and employers are made.

The Challenges of Life-Career Transition

Some research on the transitional experiences of immigrants has suggested that a significant percentage of those who immigrate to Canada tend to be satisfied with their experience. For example, in a joint study conducted by Statistics Canada and Citizenship and Immigration Canada, researchers interviewed approximately 12,000 immigrants after living in Canada for six months. Second interviews took place two years later with about 9,300 individuals. Third interviews ensued four years after arrival to Canada, with approximately 7,700 immigrants. Results indicated that approximately 75% of the participants were satisfied with their life in Canada and 87% said that they would not reverse their decision to emigrate (Houle &
Schellenberg, 2010). The same study also compared individual’s pre-immigration expectations with current standards of living. Results revealed that 43% described life in Canada as somewhat better or much better than what they expected, 33% stated that it was about what they expected and 24% stated that it was somewhat or much worse than what they expected (Houle & Schellenberg, 2010). Overall, this research suggests that the outcome of immigration is satisfying for the majority of new Canadians.

However, the results of the aforementioned study have been contested, with the argument that the interpretation of the results did not account for important participant characteristics (Houle & Schellenberg, 2010; Schellenberg & Maheux, 2007). It has been noted that the participants in the study included individuals who immigrated through the refugee, family and skilled immigrant worker category. Only 34% of participants were skilled worker applicants and by the third interview, only 8% of the sample were individuals whose earnings succeeded $60,000 per year. Further, only 2-3% cited employment and economic opportunities as a positive factor in their experience (Schellenberg & Maheux, 2007). In addition, the studies high attrition rate (37%) raises the question of whether dissatisfied individuals dropped out of the investigation (Houle & Schellenberg, 2010).

The study discussed above highlights the challenges of interpreting data based on the experiences of immigrants, due both to the complexities of the population and the multi-faceted challenges of the immigration process. As well, extra-caution is required when the results of studies are made publicly available, as they may convey an unrealistic message to those individuals who are considering immigration or have already immigrated. The present study highlights the existence of somewhat “unrealistic” expectations among the participants during their initial period in Canada. Indeed, a large majority of participants experienced a significant
discrepancy between their pre-immigration life-career anticipations and the reality that confronted them during their initial years in Canada. Many hypothesized that their unlikely accounts stemmed from the information published on the internet by various government agencies.

One way to minimize such discrepancies is to acknowledge the potential for developing a satisfying life-career in Canada, while recognizing and alerting individuals to the inevitable systemic, personal and social barriers. Some researchers posit that although the immigration process may be satisfying for some individuals, for the larger majority it is often a difficult process (Arthur & Merali, 2005). The majority of participants in the present study stated that the experience of immigration was a challenging one for them.

**Reaccreditation Processes**

The current sample was comprised of a number of highly educated and vocationally seasoned individuals. Although many reported that they were satisfied with their life-career in Canada, all 20 participants articulated having undergone challenging trials and tribulations, with re-accreditation processes identified as a significant limitation.

The findings of the present study are in accordance with previous research identifying barriers to life-career transition embedded in the Skilled Worker Program, such as, degree requirements and work experience in country of origin (Bauder, 2003). For example, in a study examining the reaccreditation experiences of ten individuals, the disorganized and complex accreditation processes were highlighted (Brouwer, 1999). Bauder (2003) argues that the non-recognition of foreign credentials reflects the systemic exclusion of skilled immigrants from professional levels in the workforce. Furthermore, researchers estimate that more adequate assessment of foreign credentials would provide Canadians with approximately $4.1 to $5.9 billion more in annual income (Bloom & Grant, 2001). To clarify, although immigrants arrive to
Canada with comparable credentials to that of Canadian educated individuals, the processes of assessment are very different (Thompson, 2000). Immigrants confront the harshest barriers to education recognition of any other group in Canada (Bloom & Grant, 2001).

This sentiment was expressed in P13’s comment that Canadian employers express an “inherent resistance towards the mobility of professionals”. In accordance with P13’s claim, research has shown that Canadian employers are not confident in international credentials even when they are accredited by a Canadian university (Bloom & Grant, 2001). This pervasive bias diminishes access to appropriate employment (Alboim, 2002). In addition, there are significantly higher costs involved for foreign-trained individuals to prove their accreditation and the regulatory bodies do not consider these costs. Such practices exemplify the existence of systemic monetary differentials involved in the accreditation and registration processes that depend on a person’s country of origin (Thompson, 2000) and enforce the division of labour according to country of origin and place of education, rather than on quality of education and experience (Bauder, 2003).

Provincial regulatory bodies (e.g., medical, law, social work and teaching), can impose stringent standards that involve multiple examinations and for many, mandate further education prior to accreditation (Bauder, 2003). Given these limitations, a significant percentage of individuals in the present study decided to pursue Canadian university or college education instead of pursuing degree accreditation. Rather than fulfilling coursework that was similar to their previous studies, they opted to start from scratch by pursuing a Canadian degree. This is a significant limitation to building a career in a timely manner and is insensitive to individual financial responsibilities.
Lack of Canadian Experience

A second significant barrier, as identified by the participants in the current study, was the lack of Canadian experience. Eleven participants were bewildered by the considerable influence this barrier imposed on their employability and this barrier has been examined in the literature.

Basran and Zong (1998) interviewed 404 East Asian and Chinese professionals (e.g., doctors, engineer, teachers and other professionals) in British Columbia and found that 73% reported downward professional mobility as the result of lack of degree recognition and the stifling effects of lack of Canadian experience. In their study, only 5% experienced upward professional mobility. This data suggests that lack of degree accreditation minimizes employment opportunities and perpetuates the vicious cycle of un-employability due to lack of Canadian experience.

A major misfortune, as identified by the participants in the present study, was lack of access to information on accreditation and job search processes prior to immigration. Eighteen participants reported feeling “surprised” and some felt “shocked” at the extent of influence their lack of “Canadian experience” had on their life-career transition. Most participants adjusted their initial goals in order to gain access to the employment market. These individuals commented that had they been able to access clear and accurate information prior to immigration, they would have been better able to prepare for the time and financial constraints involved. In addition, 12 participants immigrated with spouses and children. For these individuals the onerous and costly processes of accreditation mitigated their chances of practicing their pre-Canada profession.

The implications of this barrier extend beyond the realms of preventing a person from obtaining their chosen employment. Work experiences provide a valuable learning opportunity for individuals. Work environments offer social contact, professional and language learning opportunities and can encourage an individual to feel productive and useful (Young & Valach,
2004). Consistent with the literature, participants in the current study reported that the barrier of not having such Canadian experiences had a negative impact on their well-being, such that some pondered the possibility of returning to their country of origin.

The decline in individuals’ sense of well-being as the result of the challenges of immigration has been well documented in the literature (Bhui et al., 2003; Dean & Wilson, 2009; Friedland & Price, 2003; Gonzales, Haan, & Hinton, 2001). For those participants who had pre-arranged employment in Canada there was a markedly significant difference in well-being. These individuals reported feeling more positive during the initial few years in Canada and were less depressed. In addition, by being able to start working shortly after their arrival, they were able to access much needed support. They felt encouraged and sustained by their employers and colleagues through opportunities for mentorship, training and professional language development.

**Language Difficulties**

A third significant barrier as identified by participants was English language proficiency. Eighteen of the participants in this study immigrated to Canada with a strong command of English. Some individuals received pre-Canada university training in English, others worked for organizations that used English as the dominant language and for others, ESL courses prior to immigration was a part of the preparation process. Although many participants demonstrated an excellent command of English, nine participants identified English language proficiency as a significant barrier. These findings were somewhat unexpected due to the strong language skills the majority of individuals acquired prior to emigrating.

The literature on factors involved in transition to a new country, identifies language proficiency as the most significant factor in successful transition (Arbona et al., 2010; Chiswick & Miller, 2002; Masgoret & Ward, 2006). In the present study, half of the participants who
identified language proficiency as a barrier, found that their strong command of English did not mitigate their experience of immigration stress and many individuals reported feeling “shocked” at their perceived level of inefficiency in English after coming to Canada. In addition, several participants reported feeling disadvantaged for speaking British English instead of Canadian English. Other language difficulties identified by participants included differences in professional language and corporate communication used in their country of origin and Canada.

Some participants reported feeling self-conscious in their language abilities. The most significant means for addressing these issues was through work itself. Being involved in a work culture and learning through successes and failures, strengthened professional language and communication proficiency. For those who were not able to secure employment for a significant period after their arrival, these problems persisted and were a cause of significant distress.

The implications of these demanding and according to some, discriminatory language proficiency practices can have significant negative effects on individuals’ mental and physical health (Dean & Wilson, 2009). The aforementioned challenges of immigration can lead to an erosion of previous skills and a diminished sense of confidence (Brouwer, 1999). In sum, the results of this study converge with previous literature in that reaccreditation processes, lack of Canadian experience and language proficiency are identified as prominent barriers to life-career transition. Despite these challenges, the majority of individuals in the present study conveyed the desire and ability to persevere.

**Coping**

In the present study, all of the participants identified coping strategies they used to help them address the challenges of life-career transition. Coping strategies are defined as the thoughts and actions associated with an individual’s ability to deal with a stressful event (Stone, Helder, & Schneider, 1988). Coping literature suggests that the way in which a person reacts to a
stressful event is modulated by their perceptions of the event, available supports and personal coping mechanisms (Green, Choi, & Kane, 2010). Congruent with this literature, the coping tactics identified by the participants in the current study included meaning making and behavioural strategies.

**Narrative Construction and Meaning Making**

The hardships involved in immigration are well documented across academic disciplines. However, researchers and clinicians know far less about the coping strategies used by newcomers to address the challenges of immigration. In the present study, coping strategies appeared to foster resilience in the face of adversity. The term resilience refers to the human processes of adaptation (e.g., self-regulation and motivation) that are used to help an individual “bounce back” from challenging situations (Luthans, 2002). The idea of an individual being able to recover and even flourish from hardship and loss is reflected in the emerging theory of posttraumatic growth. The aim of posttraumatic growth research is to understand the “traumatic disruptions of people’s worlds of meaning and their frequent reports of positive personal transformation” (Neimeyer, 2004, p. 53).

Analysis of the present results indicates that through narrative processes, individuals engaged in cognitive meaning making processes that appeared to foster further strength and resilience. This finding is consistent with the coping literature, wherein resilience appears to be, in part, an outcome of the meanings people attribute to significant events (Ehrensaft & Tousignant, 2006). For example, a prominent theme among the narratives of participants was focusing on opportunities of growth in difficult situations that were characterized by loss (P1, P12, P11, P14 and P18). For example, P1 viewed certain hardships she experienced during her initial period in Canada as opportunities for “trial and error”. She regarded mistakes that she had made as facilitating the development of her self-confidence. Similarly, P18 regarded the loss of
her pre-Canada career identity as an opportunity to transition to a field that provided her with more contact that is social. Although she mourned the loss of her previous vocation, she consistently expressed a strong propensity toward developing meanings that helped her make sense of her loss.

A relationship between meaning making, narrative construction and resilience was apparent in the present study, which is in accordance with existing literature. Neimeyer and Levitt (2001) posit that individuals employ narrative processes to help them cope with negative experiences. The exercise of creating and expressing stories helps individuals to make sense of their past and present, as well as to develop insight into chosen future endeavors (Neimeyer & Levit, 2001). In essence, narrative construction helps individuals to forge meanings that facilitate coping behaviour (Ehresnacht & Tousignant, 2006).

In the present study, participants appeared motivated to share their stories with other immigrants as well as the interviewers. Some contend that the motivation to share one’s story is in part, a reflection of the human need for interpersonal connection (Neimeyer & Levit, 2001). Compatible with the literature, (Berry, 2006, Khawaja et al., 2008; Liebkind, 2006; Oppedal, 2006), participants appeared to rely heavily on social support to cope with immigration stress. As such, sharing narratives appeared to help individuals construct valuable meanings, and reinforce a sense of support, interpersonal connection and the creation of further opportunities for learning.

**Behavioural Coping Strategies**

The literature on coping styles has identified two major styles of coping: active- and emotion-focused coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). A significant feature of active coping includes trying to change or solve problems (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

The participants in the current study indicated a predisposition toward problem-focused coping behaviours that included generating solutions, gathering information, pursuing social
support, changing environments, executing action, and reframing the meaning of problems. It was apparent that the majority of participants obtained some Canadian education as a means for addressing the problem of degree accreditation, lack of Canadian experience and problems with professional language proficiency (16 participants). To illustrate, instead of having her degree devalued, P17 chose to pursue a Masters of Arts degree. This decision was both strategic (e.g., it solved her issues with reaccreditation) and allowed her to maintain a sense of control over the situation. In addition, she chose a graduate program that complimented her previous work and educational experience. Similarly, P4 decided to pursue post-secondary education as a means for obtaining Canadian work experience (i.e., practicum placements) and to develop his communication skills. Other behavioural coping strategies that emerged included volunteerism. For many, the concept of volunteering was novel and helped them gain valuable Canadian experience.

Many of the immigrant professionals in the present study expected to use their skills shortly after immigrating to Canada. Despite their disappointment with and frustration towards systemic barriers to their successful transition, they continued to express a commitment to taking initiatives and contributing to their new society.

Theoretical Implications

There has been consensus among scholars that research on the life-career development of immigrants and minority populations is remarkably limited (Brown, 2002), and at present, few of the current career theories can be applied to immigrant populations with any degree of confidence. Given the absence of non-Western populations in research (Walsh, 2000), as well the rise in immigration (Dean & Wilson, 2009) and Canada’s economic dependence on foreign expertise (Bloom & Grant, 2001), the time is ripe for the expansion of current career theory research to include models that are applicable to immigrant professionals.
In the last decade, researchers have increasingly relied on a Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) framework to study the life-career processes of minority populations (Gomez et al., 2001; Shinnar, 2007). SCCT emphasizes the interactions between environmental and personal factors (Lent et al., 2000) and their effects on individual career outcomes. More specifically, it concentrates on the role of individual skills, previous performance, self-efficacy and outcome expectations on individuals’ life-career trajectories (Sharf, 2006). The results of the current study indicate that SCCT is indeed a useful framework with which to explore the dynamics of life-career processes employed by immigrant professionals.

**Individual Strengths**

The constructs of self-efficacy and internal locus of control are frequently found in the career theory literature. Self-efficacy has been defined as the individual belief of a person having control over their environment (Benight & Bandura, 2004; Snyder & Lopez, 2007). Whereas locus of control has been broadly defined as individual perceptions of how people’s behaviours affect outcomes (Rotter, 1966).

The results of the current study indicated that all 20 participants identified a strong sense of self-efficacy as having a significant role in their successful life-career transition (e.g., “I know for sure that I will make it one day...I have that within me” P17). The acquisition and execution of knowledge was identified by the majority of participants as a main ingredient in the preservation of self-efficacious beliefs. Knowledge acquisition and execution appeared to facilitate the experience of mastery, which according to Bandura (1997) is the primary route to strengthening self-efficacy. In addition, all 20 participants stated that at certain points in their transition, an internal-locus of control helped them to maintain a sense of command of an otherwise confusing or vague life-career situation. Gomber-Munoz (2010) examined the role of efficacy on illegal workers in the United States and found that individuals employed self-
efficacious beliefs in order to cultivate a sense of well-being within unpredictable and strenuous conditions of employment. For an individual, believing that one has a certain level of control, as well as the ability to execute that control in order to produce favorable outcomes, appears to play a significant role in building meaningful and productive lives (Gomber-Munoz, 2010).

In the present study, personal action emerged as a major component in the life-career development of participants. Indeed, 16 participants sought additional Canadian College or University education, and the majority of participants expressed the importance of networking, volunteerism and resourcefulness. Such actions were perceived by participants as important contributors to their adjustment. These findings support the literature on the positive impact of human agency in life-career development (Bandura, 2001a; Gushue et al., 2006), wherein human agency reflects the combination of interpersonal constructs that include self-efficacy (Chen, 2006b) as well as individual strengths, such as wisdom.

The present analyses revealed that the interaction of certain individual strengths with specific features of environmental contexts, culminated in what some have referred to as positive subjective experience (Seligman & Peterson, 2003). All 20 participants mentioned instances in which their innate quest for knowledge led to positive outcomes. For example, P18 stated that her inquisitive nature promoted her engagement in tasks that satisfied her curiosity (Kashdan et al, 2004). P18 credited the extensive research she conducted at the library as having improved the specific knowledge she needed in order to excel in her new field in Canada. Snyder and Lopez (2007), state that task specific curiosity requires complete mental absorption from the individual thus facilitating the experience of a positive subjective experience. Positive subjective experiences are a precursor to the establishment of effective action plans (Snyder & Lopez, 2007).
In sum, all 20 participants exemplified instances in which their individual strengths facilitated positive outcome and perseverance. Further research is needed to incorporate broader cultural frameworks in understanding and identifying the many individual strengths that are involved in life-career development (Constantine & Sue, 2006; Nansook et al., 2009).

**Luck, Chance and Positive Uncertainty**

The concepts of luck, chance and positive uncertainty were mentioned by 18 participants and were described as having a significant positive impact on their life-career development in Canada. These individuals also commented on the importance of being able to recognize chance events, as well as their own skills necessary for quick mobilization to act in response to such events. For example, P6 stated that during his job search, he always carried a bag with him containing resumes. He articulated the importance of being prepared to respond to a help wanted sign. These findings are compatible with Chen’s (2005) proposition that chance events have “a special role in the process of human control” (p. 252). Further, participants who recognized their ability to make use of chance events reflected Chen’s (2005) category of “combined chance” events (p. 257). These individuals recognized both the positive and negative aspects of the event.

At first, participants were not able to ascertain clearly whether the event would produce positive or negative results, however, they were able to maintain an open outlook and inner locus of control throughout their exploration of potential results. For example, P14 talked about the economic and social hardship she experienced during the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. During the interview she commented on her ability to recognize the opportunity for change in an otherwise challenging situation. This period of her life was marked by an abrupt and negative chance event that prompted her to re-consider her career. She was able to complete a Master’s degree in English literature (in her country of origin) while she waited for the
approval of her immigration application. These findings necessitate further research in individual perceptions and ability to respond to chance events.

The majority of individuals in the present study expressed a high level of enthusiasm and commitment toward satisfying certain ambitions. Common life-career goals included continued learning, and the pursuit of a sense of meaning and purpose in life. Such personal motivations surfaced as major variables of consideration in the decision-making process. That is, individual compromise was in part, related to personal motivations. For example, P18 compromised her previous professional status as an engineer and embarked on a career as a special needs teaching assistant. Throughout the interview, she stated that continued learning was a primary goal. Although she grieved the loss of her former career, she found satisfaction in her present job because it fulfilled her motive for continued learning. She was therefore comfortable with the compromise she had made. Some theorists’ contend that human beings often attempt to minimize uncertainty in order to feel in control, however, such actions may garner the opposite result in that individuals can experience a loss of control (Langer, 2005). Instead, the likelihood of attaining a favourable outcome is heightened through accepting that life-career processes are in constant flux; requiring ongoing encounters with uncertainty, and the ability to make informed decisions based on compromise (Chen, 2005). Gottfredson’s (2002) theory of career compromise is based on the following components:

Relinquishing their most preferred alternatives for less compatible but more accessible ones. Individuals often discover...that they will be unable to implement their most preferred choices...They have to reverse the choice process and reconsider their less preferred alternatives, perhaps even one’s they earlier ruled out as inaccessible. (p. 187)

The participants in the current study echoed such notions of compromise in their execution of goal adjustment. The three patterns of goal adjustment included: 1) adjusting functional roles but
not vocational domains, 2) maintaining original functional goals but broadening the industry in consideration and, 3) adjusting both the functional goals as well as the domains. Further, individuals expressed acceptance of their compromises and an overall level of satisfaction with their decisions. Largely, their willingness to compromise was based on the awareness of both internal and external limitations. Chen’s (2004) theory of positive compromise fits well with the experiences and perceptions of these participants. Chen (2004) expands on traditional definitions of compromise to include the proactive exertion of “control over a reality that is very often beyond human control (p. 20). This notion emphasizes that people often need to “give up something in order to maintain or gain something” (p. 20). In essence, it highlights the gains and losses involved in compromise and emphasize human agentic processes that are involved in making such decisions (Chen, 2004).

**Career Calling, Vocational Identity and the Meaningful Life**

A unique finding in the present study was the maintenance of pre-Canada vocational identities, regardless of participants’ current employment status. Overall, six participants stated that their current jobs were at the same level or higher than their pre-Canada positions. Eleven participants worked in the same domains but at lower levels and three participants transitioned to entirely separate careers. Overall, 17 participants expressed having a strong sense of career identity in Canada. These individuals commented on the sense of purpose and meaning they derived through the expression of their vocational identities. Further, they conveyed a strong commitment to the continued pursuit of meaningful work lives. These findings assert that vocational identity may be sustained and expanded through the generation of meaning and purpose from a person’s work life.

The field of positive psychology has placed increasing attention to the relationship between calling, sense of meaning and life-career satisfaction (Peterson, Park, & Seligman,
Many career theorists argue that given the changing world of employment, characterized by migration, technological innovations and other environmental factors, individuals are increasingly relying on subjective, personal factors to develop satisfying life-careers (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Some career scholars have proposed the concept of career calling, as a unique variable that encapsulates the multiple subjective processes that are understood to enhance life-career satisfaction. Dik and Duffy (2009) provide the following definition of career calling:

A calling is a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation. (p. 427)

From this vantage point, the concept of intrinsic motivation emerges as an important source of a person’s sense of calling. Indeed, a key influence of having a sense of calling in life-career development lies in its ability to transform an individual’s employment from a “job” into a “vocation” (Cochran, 1990). An individual with a sense of vocation tends to view job tasks as “rewarding in and of itself” and express higher levels of engagement in order to satisfy intrinsic pursuits (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005, p. 89).

In the present study, the narratives of 18 participants revealed that the pursuit of challenge, learning, meaning and purpose, served as core motivations. Among these participants, seven individuals worked in the educational and helping professions and alluded to the derivation of spiritual or religious achievement by being called to their professions. For example, P12 stated, “Through work I am answerable to God. It brings me spiritual joy…My clients are happy and I just revel in that, when I help them. When I see the smile on their faces, it gives me joy”. Although it was beyond the scope of the present study to explore the religious and spiritual gains achieved through the subjective experience of having a calling, the analysis suggests that
further inquiry into the spiritual components of motivation would be a fruitful route for future research.

In addition, consistent with motivation research, the aforementioned participants expressed significant motivation toward helping others. Researchers have coined the term *prosocial motivation* to describe, “an allocentric psychological state—the employee’s attention is directed toward the thoughts, feelings, preferences, and welfare of other people in the interest of improving their lives” (Grant, 2007, p. 399). Many participants referred to their helping professions as directly benefiting the lives of others’ and expressed a deep sense of pride in such accomplishment.

**Implications for Policy and Counselling**

Results of the present study draw attention to the reality that barriers to successful life-career transition are present for the majority of newcomers. The individuals who participated in the current study exemplify a unique group of immigrants. That is, they immigrated with advanced degrees and work experience and possessed strong English language proficiency. Based on these qualifications, it may be expected that these individuals would transition through immigration somewhat smoothly. Although all 20 participants were satisfied with their transition, the majority also brought to attention the significant barriers to success. Given the pervasive implications of these transitional challenges, it has become increasingly important for counsellors, employers and policy makers to address these multi-faceted barriers when developing and enhancing the systems and services that influence newcomers to Canada.

**Implications for Counsellors**

The current study combined the terms “life” and “career” in order to capture the integrative nature of these domains and the broader range of aspects that constitute a person’s lifetime (Chen, 2002). The life-career construct suggests that a person’s vocational life affects
and is affected by personal life. In the context of treatment, mental health providers cannot separate the career and life domains and therefore, require skills that effectively address issues in life-career development overall. This integrative approach elicits a back and forth movement between personal psychotherapy and career counselling, as well as interchangeability between the role of counsellor and psychotherapist.

The results of the current study suggest that professional immigrants, who also arrive to Canada with a strong command of English, are not immune to the many barriers that affect successful life-career development. Analysis revealed that these barriers stem from both the contextual and individual domains of participants’ experiences.

The immigration experience entails multiple stressors, some of which stem from individuals’ pre-immigration experiences, which is an important consideration for counsellors. For example, P4 worked for a large international accounting company in the Middle East for ten years. He and his family enjoyed a relatively high standard of living before coming to Canada. During the interview he talked about how difficult it was for them transition from living in a house to a small apartment. In addition, because he worked in a predominantly English-speaking environment before coming to Canada, he was shocked to discover the inadequacy of his language skills. A second source of shock concerned the incongruence between his pre-Canada vocational expectations and his post-Canada work experiences. He perceived his skills as internationally transferrable (i.e., he worked for an international American company) and he assumed that his English was proficient (i.e., educated and worked in an English environment before coming to Canada).

Given the multiple origins of barriers facing immigrants, a SCCT framework can be applied to help increase a counsellor’s capacity to understand and respect the background, context-driven challenges, and personal attributions that affect life-career development of each
individual (Yakushko et al., 2008). From an SCCT perspective, a client’s key pre-Canada experiences would be identified and addressed with respect to how the experiences are contributing to the person’s current life-career transition difficulties. An SCCT therapist would explore the implications of these experiences on the client’s perceptions of self-efficacy and present life-career expectations, such as how his perception of his English-language proficiency may have changed upon coming to Canada, and whether this is impacting his confidence when interacting with others in the professional sphere. What makes SCCT especially relevant to the professional immigrant’s experience is its emphasis on how current life experiences are moderated by an individual’s experiences both prior to and after immigration.

Another important consideration for counsellors when working with professional immigrants, is the counsellors awareness and incorporation of the client’s culture into the therapy process. By placing individuals’ culture at the core of therapy, therapists can genuinely prize and validate each client’s unique worldview. Some argue that through the location of culture into the core of therapy, a clinician’s treatment formulation can more fully cater to the needs of each individual client (Collins & Arthur, 2007). Furthermore, a culturally sensitive and respectful approach can allow a therapist to use any treatment modality or technique as long as the individual’s cultural identity remains present in all stages of therapy.

Deen (2002) emphasizes the importance of counsellors creating a “survival kit” plan of action for immigrants, with each client’s cultural worldview being incorporated into all levels of the survival plan (p. 16). Deen (2002) refers to such incorporation as “cultural empathy” and differentiates this form of empathy from traditional conceptualizations of empathy by including the recognition of cultural values and expectations that are affecting the client’s present experience (p. 14). Given the vastly heterogeneous characteristics of Canada’s immigrant
population, cultural empathy becomes a principle factor in establishing a sound therapeutic alliance and for positive treatment outcome.

Cultural empathy may strengthen a therapist’s assessment skills by tuning into the cultural and idiosyncratic world of each client. Theorists have named this approach culture-infused counselling. Collins and Arthur (2005) define culture-infused counselling as involving the following criteria:

The integration of attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, and skills essential for awareness of the impact of culture on personal assumptions, values, and beliefs, understanding of the worldview of the client, and coming to agreement on goals and tasks in the context of a trusting and culturally sensitive working alliance. (p. 48)

A counselling climate of cultural attunement facilitates the exploration of differences between a person’s pre-Canada cultural norms as well as Canadian-specific norms. Increasing such awareness can help to strengthen a client’s intercultural competence. Collaboratively, a counsellor and client work toward synthesizing a person’s strengths and limitations in order to increase their chances for successful life-career transition.

An additional counselling consideration is related to recent research examining individuals’ propensity for positive personal growth following adverse experiences (Fazio, 2009; Neimeyer, 2004). This has been referred to as stress-related, benefit-finding or posttraumatic growth, and pertains to the positive changes that individuals attribute to the learning and personal transformations that they have experienced following a loss or trauma (Helgeson, Reynolds, & Tomich, 2006). A recent meta-analysis of 87 cross-sectional studies revealed that individuals who engaged in cognitive strategies that emphasized benefit-finding, were better able to reduce their levels of distress following a traumatic event (Helgeson et al., 2006). For example, one such cognitive strategy involves temporal comparisons individuals make when attempting to reconcile
the difference between how they perceive the function of certain attributes in the present, as compared to how that attribute was perceived by them in the past (McFarland & Alvaro, 2000). These processes are largely mediated through individual self-schemas (McFarland & Alvaro, 2000).

In the current study, the majority of participants talked about how they have changed as the result of having overcome difficult experiences. Encouraging such exploration within a therapeutic context could bring to light stable, individual strengths or adaptive personality attributes that a client can use to foster further resilience and positive life-career development in a new country.

Implications for Policy

There has been a growing body of research exploring the life-career transition of immigrants and this research has brought forth valuable insight into the unique sociocultural challenges specific to immigration (Ataca & Berry, 2002; Yakushko et al, 2008). Although the sociocultural elements are important variables influencing successful transition, systemic barriers continue to prevail as the foremost hindering factor to successful transition (Reitz, 2005).

The majority of participants in the present study identified systemic barriers (e.g., reaccreditation, language, lack of Canadian experience) as far more difficult to address than dealing with issues of loss or cultural transition (e.g., leaving their homeland and adapting to a new cultural context). This suggests that a primary barrier stems from ineffective government policy and employers’ perceptions of immigrant workers. Research has shown that over $2 billion is lost annually due to the underutilization of immigrant skills that is largely caused by a lack of qualification recognition (Watt & Bloom, 2001). The experiences of participants in the current study support the notion that immigrant skills are underutilized in Canada. Even for those participants who received education reaccreditation, they continued to face the issue of
employers not recognizing their qualifications. The idea that employers prefer North American and European professional experience is not a new one (Bauder, 2003) despite the fact that research has shown that two-thirds of unutilized immigrant’s skills are transferrable in the Canadian work context (Reitz, 2005).

The points system of the Skilled Worker Program was designed to encourage highly skilled professionals to immigrate to Canada (Picot et al., 2007). This was in part fuelled by Canada’s economic need for more professional workers to meet the demands of a growing knowledge based economy (Reitz, 2005). However, one main issue lies in the discrepancy between the Skilled Immigrant Worker Program, and the accreditation processes currently in place (Basran & Zong, 1998). An individual’s work experience and education prior to immigration are recognized throughout the application process, however, once granted status in Canada, the same criteria do not apply. The majority of participants in the present study commented about the shock they experienced upon discovering that their professional status lost all meaning in the real world of work.

Some have noted the apparent lack of influence the Canadian government has in enforcing policy and practice changes among regulatory agencies and employers (Hiebert, 2006), and this needs to be further addressed. Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize the benefits of relaying these systemic challenges to individuals prior to immigration, such that newcomers can be better prepared (i.e., psychologically and financially) to address the challenges ahead. In addition, it is important that career counsellors assist clients in identifying and developing means of addressing these challenges through the formation of creative and problem resolution career-development plans.
Limitations of the Study

This study revealed that despite significant challenges in adjusting to a new country, many individuals are able to use their internal strengths to adapt to and address certain barriers, however, there are several limitations that need to be addressed. One limitation pertains to the potential sources of bias in the analysis and interpretation process of this qualitative study. The researcher analyzed, coded and interpreted the data, and to some extent, her assumptions and theoretical interests may have affected her interpretations. In qualitative research methods, this is a commonly cited concern. This inherent facet of qualitative design was minimized by reading each transcript multiple times before beginning the analysis process. The purpose of re-reading transcripts was to develop a thorough understanding of the life-career experiences of each participant, and to generate a deepened sense of familiarity of each participant in the researcher. A second technique used to minimize researcher bias was the extensive incorporation of direct quotes. The aim of this process was to continually refer back to the direct source of each interpretation, and to retain ongoing transparency in the researcher’s interpretations.

A second limitation pertains to the sample, and in particular, sampling restrictions. The participants in the present study were self-selected. All 20 individuals committed the time and effort to participate in a project that would enrich psychological theory and practice by helping counsellors, policy makers, employers and immigrants, to more effectively transition to a new country. In addition, these participants all stayed in Canada (i.e., they did not return to their native countries), as such, there may be a higher level of perseverance in the present sample than in the typical immigration population. Furthermore, these individuals demonstrated enthusiasm for sharing their stories. Future studies may benefit by including other potential variables that can correlate with the individual desires to participate and share stories.
The present study included individuals from diverse ethnic, social and professional backgrounds. Additional sources of data (i.e., several interviews with each participant) may have enriched the data by allotting more time for individual reflection. A longitudinal study including multiple interviews may have yielded valuable information concerning different factors involved in their longer-term life-career trajectory. For example, as the participants in the current study attained higher positions in their fields, what factors were considered most important in facilitating this promotion? Furthermore, how would their perceptions of their life-career transition barriers (e.g., language proficiency) change over time?

As the current study was exploratory in nature, it was broad in scope. The semi-structured and largely open-ended interview questions aimed to explore the wide-ranging circumstances of each individuals’ experience, in order to draw over-arching themes in the life-career transition of these newcomers. The large scope of the current study may have led to less depth in responses, in that participants spoke about a wide range of topics in one interview. The retrospective nature of the questions may have yielded responses affected by selective attention, and memory, such that the results are limited to the salient themes that emerged at a specific point in time for each individual.

**Future Directions**

The primary goal of the present study was to attend to the void in the current literature on the life-career development of immigrant professionals. More specifically, the study aimed to shed light on the experiences of those individuals who have successfully navigated their life-career transition. Very little is known about immigrants who have flourished in the life-career domains and more particularly, what strategies led their success.

An interesting finding of the current study was the limited impact of English language proficiency in individual perceptions of language barriers. Future studies could investigate the
role of language among immigrants who arrive to Canada with a strong command of English. Gaining an in depth understanding of the language barriers among individuals who are already proficient in English could assist educators in developing more effective English language training programs. For example, educational seminars for new immigrants could incorporate more professional language training to newcomers.

Concerning the challenges of immigration, social psychology has paid increasing attention to the nature of prejudice and discrimination against immigrants. Although such research has provided valuable insight into certain origins of race related discrimination, it has not fully explored the implications that blatant and subtle forms of discrimination can have on the well-being of individuals (Yakushko, 2009). Given that, over 20% of Canada’s current population is comprised of immigrants (Dean & Wilson, 2009), counsellors are likely seeing a significant amount of immigrant clients (Yakushko, 2009). Currently there is a paucity of research on the psychological effects on immigrants who have experienced discrimination because of their status as newcomers. It was beyond the scope of the present study to examine the effects of discrimination. Explicit attention on how discrimination affects these individuals, and the coping strategies employed by those who have been able to minimize and persevere through such difficulties, can help counsellors to develop more effective treatment plans.

**Conclusion**

Internationally trained professionals who have successfully transitioned to the workforce in Canada, experience both positive and negative states in the adjustment process. Nonetheless, the findings of the current study suggest that individuals demonstrate a strong propensity for growth and resilience. Active coping strategies and meaning making, appeared to play a significant role in an individual’s ability to succeed against the odds. Further, the participants in the present study demonstrated a remarkable aptitude and motivation toward learning. Such
findings suggest that within each participant there was a relatively stable internal locus of control. That is, individuals believed that they had the skills and personal resources to succeed. A number of internal and contextual variables likely mediate such intrapersonal capacities.

Concerning these personal variables, it is important for counsellors and employers to acquire knowledge on how to help newcomers expand already existing personal resources. Further, much work is needed from the Canadian government to implement policy changes concerning accreditation processes. If the context driven barriers to life-career transition are not minimized, newcomers will continue to face unjust challenges and the Canadian economy will continue to suffer from the underutilization of highly skilled individuals. Immigrants are an integral component in Canada’s expanding knowledge economy and facilitating a more reasonable life-career transition experience stands to benefit all Canadians.
References


Schellenberg, G., & Maheux, H. (2007). Immigrants’ perspectives on their first four years in Canada: Highlights from the waves of the longitudinal survey of immigrants to Canada. *Canadian Social Trends, 1*-34.


Table 1: Demographics

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