LEARNING EXPERIENCES AND CAREER SUCCESSES OF IMMIGRANT PROFESSIONALS IN CANADA

by

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A dissertation submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
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Abstract

Canada, a nation reliant on immigrants for economic growth, has invited millions of professionals to live here, but census and survey data show that a majority of newcomers do not integrate into the Canadian workplace at levels commensurate with their education and experience. The reasons for this are unclear. Many recent immigrant professionals turn to retraining as part of a plan to regain their former professional status, but the results of this strategy have not been fully examined. This qualitative study examined the work search and retraining experiences of recent immigrant professionals in Canada. Twenty-six men and 26 women, economic immigrants to Canada, well-educated professionals in their countries of origin, described the challenges they experienced in semi-structured interviews. The challenges they described included understanding the economy and managing their expectations for initial employment; work search difficulties such as lacking a professional network; the vagaries of chance and opportunity; and planning for retraining, sometimes to obtain an entire Canadian credential in their field.

Additionally, support programs offered to newcomers are not always based on a career development theory, nor are all career development theories tested against reality. The present study also uses the experiences described by the study participants to examine
the utility of career self-determination theory (Chen, 2017), an emerging career development metatheory grounded in the psychology of motivation. This study found the three basic career needs proposed by Chen – career autonomy, career competence, and career relatedness – plus a fourth motivational career need, career consistency, in the work search and retraining experiences of these immigrant professionals. Theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed, and suggestions for further research are provided.
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the Indigenous peoples all across Turtle Island. They have stewarded and cared for these lands for thousands of years. I am grateful to have the opportunity to work and conduct research here.

When I applied to OISE for this program of study, it was after working in college career centres for 2 years with dozens of immigrant professionals who seemed to be repeating education they already had. It was not obvious why these professionals were experiencing difficulties in finding employment in their fields in Canada. That was 2008, and other Canadian researchers had begun to ask about the factors affecting their career prospects in Canada around the same time. Ten years later, there is a body of research demonstrating that discrimination is still at work in the hiring process, and that there are some unique Canadian cultural factors that make labour market integration challenging for new immigrant professionals. It is my sincere hope that this work will inspire change in the hiring process and improvement in communication with arriving immigrants.

I would like to thank Dr. Charles Chen for his guidance and support. Overseeing the work of part-time doctoral students is challenging, and he has been patient. His breadth of knowledge and openness to sharing have been invaluable. In addition, I thank my OISE committee members, Dr. Abby Goldstein and Dr. Roy Moodley, and the external examiners, Dr. Jelena Zikic (York University, Human Resource Management) and Dr. Rick Halpern (University of Toronto, History). And I would like to thank the participants for sharing their stories with us. Many of these stories were painful to talk about, and many of the participants demonstrated high levels of insight into their
situations. It is my hope that the analysis here will be used to improve our federal and provincial immigration systems.

Finally, I would also like to thank Chris, my spouse, who spent many weekends alone or with friends (without me) so that I could complete this project. I appreciated his impatient reminders, metaphorical kicks in the pants, and regular haranguing about finishing this project. I love you.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Not till society wakes up to its responsibilities and its privileges in this relation shall we be able to harvest more than a fraction of our human resources, or develop and utilize the genius and ability that are latent in each new generation. (Parsons, 1909, p. 165)

Thanks to the field’s first theorist, Frank Parsons (Parsons, 1909), the notion of social justice is embedded in the origins of career development theory. The turn of the last century, not unlike today, saw a high degree of income disparity between the haves and the have-nots (Arthur, Collins, & McMahon, 2008). Recent immigrants to Canada, in particular those who arrived via the human capital points-based system that took account of their education and work experience, have fallen into the have-not group with a much higher frequency than might be expected given the potential with which they arrived. The present study examines this experience through the self-reports of recent immigrant professionals.

Newcomers to Canada represent the nation’s source of both population and labour force (and therefore economic) growth. Professionals who seem to have the kind of education and experience that would lead to success in their careers in Canada frequently do not successfully integrate into the Canadian job market. Many recent immigrant professionals turn to retraining as a solution to their employment challenges, however the success rate of this strategy is also unknown. I first became aware of these labour market integration challenges as I began my career in community college career services. Working in this field I met many mid-career immigrant professionals with bachelors’ degrees and more who were taking college-level (i.e., lower-level) training.
There was no published literature at the time that explained why this was happening, especially in a reasonably strong economy, so I embarked on this study.

For context, Canada admitted 1.1 million immigrants from 2001–2006, which represents more than two-thirds of the country’s population growth in that period (Chui, Tran, & Maheux, 2007). Newcomers have tended to settle in large population centres. As a consequence, in 2006, one out of every two residents of Toronto was born outside of Canada (Statistics Canada, 2009a). Of immigrants who arrived in the period 1996–2006, approximately 56% came from Asia, including South Asia and the Middle East (Statistics Canada, 2009b), in contrast to 18% of immigrants who came from Europe in that same period (Statistics Canada, 2009b). Immigrants to Canada tended to come largely from Europe from the time of the nation’s founding through the last century (Statistics Canada, 2009a). Immigrants from the USA and Europe totalled approximately 54% of immigrants before 1991 but only approximately 18% of immigrants from 1996–2006 (Statistics Canada, 2009b). In 2006, 10.6% of immigrants arrived from Africa (Chui et al., 2007), which also represents an increase of several percentage points over the decade before. In this highly multicultural milieu, newcomers strive to re-establish careers that will permit them to support themselves and contribute to their new society. Unfortunately, immigrants who have lived in Canada for fewer than five years experience twice the rate of unemployment faced by individuals born in Canada (Gilmore & Le Petit, 2008).

**The Relevance of Career Development to Immigration**

Canada has had a reputation for being a land of opportunity, however recent immigration and employment trends suggest that making a new life in Canada is often
very difficult for new immigrants. One study of Chinese immigrants to Ontario found that only 16% of former professionals retained the same or gained a higher level of professional status in Canada. Seven out of the eight individuals who made up that 16% had been engineers in China and established themselves as engineers in Canada. The remaining 84% of participants, which included medical doctors and computer specialists who given the shortages of these in some regions should have been employable, had dropped one or more professional status ranks since emigrating from China (Salaff & Greve, 2003). A similar study conducted in Calgary found that only 10% of immigrant men participating reported that they had good jobs appropriate to their education and skill level (Bhandari, Horvath, & To, 2006). This gap between potential and actual achievement in their worklives represents a career development dilemma that policymakers, service providers, and businesses struggle to resolve.

**Outcomes for immigrant professionals in Canada**

Currently, individuals born in another country make up at least 20% of Canada’s population (Statistics Canada, 2009a). As with people going through other kinds of transitions, these immigrants integrate into Canadian society, including the labour market, at varying rates. One study found that 47% of men (most common trajectory for men) and 27% of women (second most common trajectory for women) experienced quick integration: they gained full-time employment within a few months of arrival and were still employed at follow-up 4 years later (Fuller & Martin, 2012). The second and third most common trajectories, for 17% of men and 12% of women respectively, involved a delayed integration before stable employment was obtained. Immigrants undergoing this kind of transition tended to pursue education (men), and to focus on
family care and/or accept part-time employment (women). Other trajectories included redirection, in which immigrants who had quickly gained full-time employment left their jobs to pursue the kinds of activities engaged in by those who were unable to find work quickly in the first place. The most common trajectory for women was, unfortunately, exclusion or non-employment: 29% of the women did not find work over the 4 years of the study. Objectively, then, their outcomes are frequently poor.

**Education and Labour Market Mismatch for Recent Immigrants in Canada**

Due to Canadian immigration policy shifts, over 40% of immigrants to Canada in 2001 (Galarneau & Morissette, 2004) and over 58% of male immigrants in 2005 (Frenette, Hou, Morissette, Wannell, & Webber, 2009a) had already earned a bachelor’s degree, a large increase from the roughly 24% of recent immigrant men in 1980 (Frenette et al., 2009a) and 22% in 1991 (Galarneau & Morissette, 2004). Of Canadian-born men in 1980, only 14% had university degrees, increasing to only 20% in 2005 (Frenette et al., 2009a). Recent immigrant men, and immigrant women, are more highly educated as a group than the general Canadian population (Frenette et al., 2009a).

Yet the education and experience brought by recent immigrants is not reliably reflected in their incomes in Canada. Newcomers with at least a bachelor degree had an unemployment rate that was 3.85 times higher than their Canadian-born peers in 2001, and 2.4 times higher in 2016 (Keung, 2019). In 2008, 45.8% of all immigrants to Canada were classified as economic immigrants, a majority of them coming through the Federal Skilled Worker Program (this program was the source of 32.4% of immigrants to Canada), which was designed to address labour market shortages in Canada by facilitating immigration of individuals with desired skill sets (Citizenship and Immigration
In 2008, 54.7% of immigrants arrived intending to work in a professional field, 14.6% in a managerial field, and 25.0% in a technical or skilled field (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2008, p. 46). Incongruously, given the traditionally middle-class salaries associated with these fields, the median income for a recent immigrant in an urban area in 2006 was $16,800 (Statistics Canada, 2009a), which is at or below the so-called poverty line of between $16,603 and $21,199 for a single employable person living in an urban setting in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2009c). This income level stands in stark contrast to the goals and high levels of education and experience brought by recent immigrants to Canada.

The labour market for immigrants has been deteriorating fairly steadily since the 1970s, when a male immigrant typically earned 85% of what a male Canadian earned (Ferrer, Picot, & Riddell, 2014). By the early 1990s, immigrant men earned 60% of what Canadian men earned, and that rate has continued to fall. Up to the 1990s, immigration policy had focused on labour market shortages and occupation-based admissions. To foster the overall development of human capital in Canada, in 2002 we began admitting immigrants on the basis of a points system that valued skill in English or French, university education, and work experience. The government instituted this policy shift in the belief that immigrants possessing these attributes would adapt more effectively to life and work in Canada.

Labour market outcomes for immigrants who arrived under the human capital system were still dismal, and a decade and a recession later, there were 2.7 times as...
many immigrants facing poverty as there were Canadian-born individuals (Ferrer et al., 2014). Overall, while Canada now has a population with more tertiary education than either Australia (14% more in Canada) or the United States (18% more in Canada), the employment and economic outcomes of for people who have been admitted under the human capital, point-based immigration model have been poor compared to those of the labour market-based approaches of Australia and the United States (Koslowski, 2014). For example, Australia’s market-based approach resulted in 10% more highly skilled immigrants finding suitable employment between 2006 and 2011 than Canada’s approach did. In light of these differences, the Canadian immigration system underwent a shift back to a labour market-oriented model at the end of 2012 (Keung, 2012). The present study focuses on immigrants who arrived through the previous human capital model because they are still here building their futures as Canadians.

Statistics show that there is indeed a mismatch between high levels of education and low-skill jobs: in 2001, 25% of recent immigrant men with university degrees (38% of women), compared to 12% of Canadian-born men (13% of women), were working in low-skill jobs (Galarneau & Morissette, 2004). In 2005, according to the 2006 Census, almost 30% of recent immigrant men with university degrees worked in jobs that only needed a high school education; only around 11% of Canadian-born men with degrees were in the same situation (Frenette et al., 2009b). More alarmingly, recent immigrant men with degrees were earning an average of $0.48 for each dollar earned by a Canadian-born man with a degree in 2005; immigrant men with no university degree earned $0.61 for each dollar earned by their Canadian-born counterparts. This held true when the two groups were broken down by field of study and age (Frenette et al.,
Even immigrants employed in technology were earning 7.1% less than their Canadian-educated counterparts in larger cities (Hall & Khan, 2008), which is where new immigrants tend to settle (Statistics Canada, 2009a). Additionally, recent immigrant university graduates had 24.6% lower median earnings than Canadian-born individuals of similar age who had no university degrees (Frenette et al., 2009b). In 2013, the overall employment rate for immigrants with university degrees was 79.8%, while Canadian-born degree holders experienced 90.9% employment (Statistics Canada, 2014). On the other hand, immigrants without formal post-secondary education were employed at almost the same rate as their Canadian-born counterparts, 61.9% and 61.3% respectively. This is an example of a phenomenon occasionally called the skill paradox, a paradox in which more education does not lead to higher rates of employment for immigrants (Dietz, Joshi, Esses, Hamilton, & Gabarrot, 2015), nor does it lead to higher quality jobs (Frenette et al., 2009b). Clearly there is a mismatch between immigrants’ educational attainment and their employment opportunities.

**Levelling the field through Canadian training**

Does additional training in Canada bring immigrants up to par in terms of objective career success? Fang, Zikic, and Novicevic (2009) analyzed data from the 2003 Canadian Workplace and Employee Survey (WES), and found that self-initiated training did not affect the career success of immigrants or non-immigrants, however employer-sponsored training had a positive effect on non-immigrants’ careers. This is a very significant finding given the previously discussed wage gap and other employment challenges faced by immigrants. Recent immigrant professionals often pursue retraining
upon arrival in Canada, however initial research shows that even employer-sponsored training does not necessarily improve their situations.

Another factor, working on a team, was found to have a positive effect on three career success indicators – salary, promotion, and job satisfaction – for non-immigrants. Interestingly, working on a team had a positive effect on salary for immigrant professionals but not on promotion or job satisfaction. The reason for this was not evident from the WES data, but Fang et al. (2009) hypothesized that perhaps many immigrant professionals are not accustomed to working on teams because their home countries’ educational practices and work cultures are not team-based. The kinds of retraining that would have value for recent immigrant professionals, then, would focus on how to work effectively in teams. Fang et al.’s (2009) hypothesis is consistent with the self-reports of several immigrant professionals in the present study.

**Rationale for research on immigrant professionals**

Canada is a nation of immigrants: individuals who were born on foreign soil make up approximately 20% of Canada’s population today (Statistics Canada, 2009a). Many of these have spent their formative years in their countries of origin, and immigrated to Canada as adults, and statistics show that their career and employment opportunities are much more limited than those of individuals born and/or raised in Canada (Gilmore, 2009) even though immigrants are, on average, better educated than the Canadian-born population (Galarneau & Morissette, 2004). In fact, immigrants who have lived in Canada for fewer than 5 years experience twice the rate of unemployment faced by individuals born in Canada (Gilmore & Le Petit, 2008). This education–employment gap
is a phenomenon that has only arisen over the last few decades (Frenette et al., 2009a), and it is a serious social and economic issue that deserves further study.

The lack of both objective and self-identified career success among well-educated recent immigrants also fails to align with the implications of existing career development theories, in particular trait-matching theories, which suggest that education in a particular field should improve one’s career and employment prospects in that field. Research shows that this is sometimes true. For example, Chung (2006) found that university graduates in Canada have higher employment rates, and higher employment in full-time jobs, than any other group, based on Census and Labour Force Survey data. That this is not true for recent immigrant professionals demonstrates that there are factors affecting their career development beyond education–job matching.

Australia and Canada have adopted similar immigration programs and experienced similar trends throughout their histories, especially since the mid-1980s (Clarke & Skuterud, 2013; Colic-Peisker, 2011). Alarmingly, while employment rates for recently arrived Indian men with university educations are up since the 1980s in both Australia and Canada, their real earnings have eroded significantly compared to their Canadian-raised counterparts (Clarke & Skuterud, 2013). Chinese immigrant men’s employment rates are stagnant, their real incomes have dropped since the mid-1980s, and their having a university degree provides no advantage in the labour market according to the same study. Clarke and Skuterud (2013), two economists analyzing the phenomenon, suggested that the difference in earnings may be due to Australia’s adoption in the late 1990s of much stricter English language proficiency requirements in addition to their having had a stronger economy than Canada since the 1980s. In
addition, Australia has had a national minimum wage since the 1920s (Fair Work Commission, 2017) for which the stated target is a living wage that would allow one individual to support a spouse and three children. In Canada, the minimum wage, which is set by the provinces and territories, is not tied consistently to the cost of living (Retail Council of Canada, 2019).

Immigrants often pursue further training and education in Canada in order to improve their employability. The results of their investments in education are not always comparable to the results achieved by Canadians: data from the 2005 Follow-Up of Canadian Graduates survey found that the only sociodemographic factor affecting education–job match for university graduates in 2000 was immigration status (Boudarbat & Chernoff, 2012): immigrants were found to be much less likely to find a job commensurate to their educational background than matched Canadian counterparts. Clearly research-informed advice tailored to the situation of recent immigrant professionals needs to be developed, if the strategies used for career development by Canadian-born individuals are not effective for immigrants.

The Importance of Empirical Evidence to Theory

Scholars in the field have called for empirical research into existing career development theories for two decades (Sharf, 1997, 2002, 2006, 2010; Zunker, 1998, 2002). Trait-based career matching theories have strong empirical support, especially when they are put into practice early in a person’s career, however these theories have been criticized for failing to account for the changes in traits that occur over an individual’s lifetime. Conversely, constructivist career development theories have been criticized for placing too much emphasis on individual experiences and not enough on
Empirical substantiation (Sharf, 1997, 2002, 2006, 2010). Empirical research, which serves as an experience-focused validation of one or more patterns present in existent career development theories, may help to resolve some of the tension between the desire to acknowledge individual experiences and the need to find patterns in career development across groups of people. This would result in practical, research-based strategies for serving Canada’s growing immigrant professional population.

**Limitations of Current Literature and Theory**

Eminent career psychology theorist Mark Savickas and colleagues have identified five major gaps in the theories and empirical research on career development: (a) vocational behaviours are studied in isolation from each other; (b) many untested assumptions and limited samples; (c) lack of strong recommendations on how to intervene in modern dynamic environments; (d) theories are culturally blind and culture-bound; and (e) theories ignore socioeconomic and sociocultural factors (summarized in Watson, 2006). The research on the career development of immigrant professionals in countries such as Canada and Australia over the last several decades exhibits these gaps.

There is little recent empirical research connecting career development theories underlying services for recent immigrant professionals in Canada and their employment outcomes. Conversely, the empirical analysis of the job search outcomes of skilled immigrants to Canada by Guerrero and Rothstein (2012), and the human capital analyses of Fang, Samnani, Novicevic, and Bing (2013) and George and Chaze (2009, 2012) do not take career development theory into account. Chen and colleagues (Novak & Chen, 2013; Kennedy & Chen, 2012) have begun to apply the experiences of
recent immigrant professionals to evaluations of career development theories, and the present study continues in this vein. In particular, the present study attempts to look through the eyes of recent immigrant professionals to identify connections between relevant career development theories and their lived work experiences in order to determine the efficacy of different approaches.

**Metatheories and Career Self-Determination Theory**

Recently there have been calls in psychology for theoretical convergence (Sharf, 1997, 2002, 2006, 2010; Zunker 1998, 2002). Convergence – comparisons and integrations of existing theories – may help both scientists and practitioners to gain a more complete understanding of the modern notion of career development (Young & Valach, 2000).

In a highly culturally diverse context such as Canada, it may be prudent to seek metatheoretical understandings of broad aspects of human experience, such as motivation, since a theory developed in a particular place and time may not be sufficiently representative. The self-determination theory (SDT) of Deci and Ryan (2000) is one such theory. SDT is based on decades of accumulated research in psychology (see Deci & Ryan, 2000, for a detailed summary). A theory focused on motivation is relevant to the present research because motivation plays a role in the decisions made and actions taken by recent immigrant professionals seeking to establish a career in Canada, probably including retraining.

Deci and Ryan (2000, 2001, 2008) have found that there are three basic drivers of motivation, all of which are innate psychological needs. These are the needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Autonomy refers to “the organismic desire to
self-organize experience and behaviour and to have activity be concordant with one’s integrated sense of self” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 231). Deci and Ryan report that cross-cultural research suggests that these needs are universal; for example, studies in South Korea, Russia, and Turkey (Deci & Ryan, 2008), Japan and Germany (reported in Deci & Ryan, 2000), as well in the United States where they conduct their work, have shown that the satisfaction of the need for autonomy promotes psychological well-being. In addition, autonomy in the workplace has been shown to contribute to greater job satisfaction and work engagement in North America (see Deci & Ryan, 2008) and in a former Eastern Bloc (i.e., Soviet) nation (Deci et al., 2001).

Relatedness “refers to the desire to feel connected to others” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 231). Motivation is influenced by others to whom we feel or wish to feel attached (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Ryan and Deci (2000) described research that shows that individuals in an environment in which they feel cared for are more likely to adopt behaviours appropriate for that environment, for example behaviour appropriate to the classroom.

Competence is “a propensity to have an effect on the environment as well as to attain valued outcomes within it” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 231). Individuals are more motivated to engage repeatedly in activities that match their skills (Ryan & Deci, 2000). As an example, they noted that athletes will work relentlessly to become more competent than their competitors and gain great satisfaction from the work as well as from the competition. They worked especially hard when they felt that they were making their choices autonomously (Deci & Ryan, 2000).
A cross-cultural study that looked at the needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence found that American participants, whose culture emphasizes individualism over collectivism, perceived the most motivation from decisions they made independently, followed by decisions made by a trusted in-group. An East Asian sample perceived the most motivation from decisions made by the trusted in-group, followed by decisions made independently. Participants in both groups failed to be motivated by decisions made by nontrusted others (Zuckerman, Porac, Lathin, Smith, & Deci, 1978, as discussed in Deci & Ryan, 2000).

In a study of experienced workers, Dahling and Lauricella (2017) found that support for autonomy and competence in the design of a job contributed to a subjective sense of career success on the part of workers. In a study on job search outcomes for already-employed workers in Australia, it was found that workers who were forced to search for new work for reasons beyond their control, for example because they had only found contract or part-time employment which was not their preference, were less likely to find better work than workers who were searching for new work for autonomous reasons (Welters, Mitchell, & Muysken, 2014). A study of early career school teachers in the United Kingdom found that satisfaction of the three basic needs (autonomy, relatedness, and competence) was necessary but not sufficient for optimizing the teachers’ well-being in the highly complex social and regulatory environments in which they operate (Hobson & Maxwell, 2017). Clearly there are additional factors at work, at work.
Career Self-Determination Theory

Given the obvious connections between motivation and career development in the world and in theory, as well as the apparent career and cross-cultural applicability of SDT, Chen (2017) has proposed career self-determination theory (CSDT). CSDT proposes using SDT as a framework for integrating a few of the most widely known and widely researched theories in vocational and career psychology under the three key human needs identified in SDT to produce a metatheory for conceptualizing career well-being (Chen, 2017). In particular, Chen connects the concepts of autonomy, competence, and relatedness to the theories of Super (1990), Holland (1997), Krumboltz (1994, 1996, 2009), and Young and Valach (2004).

Career autonomy, the need to feel in control of one’s career decision-making, includes such factors as self-concept, vocational interest, and meaning-making. Self-concept connects very closely to Super’s (1990) lifespan, lifespace model of career development – this model emphasizes the many roles each individual takes across the lifespan, each of which affects the individual to a greater or lesser degree in different environments but contributes to the whole person. The many-faceted self-concept directs decisions and behaviour. The best-known theory of vocational interest is Holland’s (1997), who proposed a model that promotes work fulfillment via congruence between the person and the work. Decisions that take vocational interests and person-environment fit into account are much more likely to align with an individual’s self-concept, and therefore contribute to the individual’s sense of career autonomy. With regard to meaning-making and career development, decisions and activities that contribute to personally meaningful goals ought to contribute to career autonomy. The
contextualist career theory (Young, Valach, & Collin, 2002, as cited in Chen, 2017; Valach & Young, 2004) suggests that meaning is developed as individuals move through the different contexts that make up their lives, and that individuals construct their contexts, hence the groundwork for meaning, with the decisions they make for themselves. Each career decision therefore may contain a great deal of potential meaning, and as such, career autonomy may be exercised (or interfered with) in ongoing ways.

Chen proposes that career competence is the mechanism by which individuals are able to exercise career autonomy. Career competence is the broad range of capacities through which humans make decisions and take action; competence in any area of life may also be used in a work and career context. The mechanisms by which we recognize our talents and develop additional skills in a career development context were described by Krumboltz (1994, 1996, 2009). According to Krumboltz, individuals learn from the experiences of others as well as from their own experiences. Sometimes this learning is formal, as with education and training, and other times it is casual and occurs during the course of ordinary life. As humans recognize and develop their capacities, they begin to experience self-efficacy, which is the confidence that they can use those capacities effectively. The processes of making observations and gathering feedback, and thus developing career competencies, continues throughout one’s lifespan. Career relatedness, according to Chen, is a necessary social condition that connects career autonomy and career competence. In fact, all of the most widely recognized career psychology theories discussed so far, Super (1990), Krumboltz (1994, 1996, 2009), Valach and Young (2004), and even Holland (1997) to an extent,
assume that career and work occur in social spaces. Children grow up surrounded by adults (parents, teachers) and peers in the various contexts (homes, schools, and recreational spaces) where their career development begins to unfold. Their exercise (or not) of career autonomy and career competence is affected by their relationships in those contexts. A significant relationship and relevant life role might lead someone to a decision that they might not have made in the absence of that relationship and/or role, which is emphasized in Super’s lifespan, lifespace model (1990). This could be perceived as an impingement on career autonomy. The offer of a new job might be accepted or declined depending not only on the talents and learned capacities of the individual receiving the offer, which is emphasized in Krumboltz’s (1994, 1996, 2009) model and relates to career competence. The acceptance of the offer might also be affected by the individual’s existing relationships and the reputation of the organization for relational factors such as a caring team or manager, which would be a career relatedness factor also emphasized in Super’s (1990) model.

The three basic human needs that make up SDT proposed by Ryan and Deci (2000) – autonomy, competence, and relatedness – have been shown by Chen (2017) to have strong potential to serve as the basis for a career development metatheory, career self-determination theory. The theory has yet to be assessed for its utility, although there are at least a few pieces of existing research that support its tenets. A qualitative study examining the successful integration experiences of 20 Chinese immigrants to the Greater Vancouver Area identified four success factors (Amundson, Yeung, Sun, Chan, & Cheng, 2011). The most prominent of these was having a positive attitude, which included having confidence, being flexible, showing commitment to the
job, and having an open personality. This sounds very much like attitudes that relate to career autonomy. The second factor was resource development, that is, building networks and developing skills, especially communication and job search skills. The third factor was having skills and work experience from China which were in demand in Canada, and the fourth focused on support from family and community (Amundson et al., 2011). They are broken up differently, but these last three can be related to career competence and career relatedness.

Factors negatively affecting the career prospects of visible minorities and/or new immigrants to Canada that have been identified by a number of researchers include the devaluation of education due to increases in the numbers of Canadians pursuing post-secondary education; the types and quality of cultural capital brought by newcomers; the prevalence of ethnic enclaves which both help and prevent immigrants from entering the labour market; discrimination by employers; and recognition of immigrants’ foreign credentials (Nakhaie & Kazemipur, 2013). These factors seem to relate fairly clearly to CSDT: Career autonomy cannot be exercised fully when individuals are faced with inequitable access to opportunities for work. Career competence is affected by recognition, or lack thereof, of credentials and expertise in the new society. Career relatedness is affected by social networks, the development of which depend on social capital and the choice or necessity to operate in (or outside of) ethnic enclaves.

In fact, career relatedness may be the most significant of the three factors at least when an immigrant professional first arrives in Canada. Using the Longitudinal Study of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC) data from 2000–2004, which asked immigrants whether they found their current job through a variety of acquaintances and whether
they are members of various social groups, Nakhaie and Kazemipur (2013) found that 21% of respondents reported finding their current job through friends. An additional 10% found work through their past employer, although it was unclear whether this employer was in Canada or abroad. Family, teachers, and referrals made up only 6% of the sources of current jobs. Even though these relationships add up to less than 40% of the means through which recent immigrants had obtained their current job (at the time of the survey), these connections were stronger predictors of having a job than any other human capital factor such as education level or language skill. Interestingly, 41% of respondents in the LSIC had earned a Canadian credential at the time of the survey, however Nakhaie and Kazemipur (2013) did not analyze the relationship between the credential and employment so effect on career competence is unclear.

In their own analysis of the LSIC data, Sweetman and Warman (2013) looked at immigrants’ incomes controlling for immigration category. They found that individuals who had come as provincial nominees were earning more at 6 months after arrival than immigrants who arrived via other programs, and economic immigrants, including those who had arrived via the points-based skilled worker program and had caught up in terms of earnings by the 2-year mark. The wages of economic immigrants remained among the highest. The provincial nominees and skilled workers were selected on the basis of a particular skill or area of expertise, which speaks to career competence. Additionally, there seems to be a real relationship between the points earned by skilled worker program applicants, their earnings, and their probability of being employed: the cut-off for acceptance to Canada at the time was 67 points, and a sharp increase in positive outcomes in terms of earnings and employment status was found as the
number of points increased (Sweetman & Warman, 2013). For immigrants who had earned fewer than 67 points, typically the spouses of the primary applicants, a shallower decline in outcomes between approximately 67 and 55 points, and a sharper decline below that was found. This provides additional support for the utility of the career competence aspect of the CSDT. The investigation conducted in this study further explores the explanatory power of CSDT.

**Research objectives and method**

The present study examines work search strategies of recent immigrant professionals and their perceptions about the value of Canadian retraining by looking at the work search and retraining experiences of immigrants themselves. In addition, the study connects these experiences with the career self-determination theory (Chen, 2017) for the purpose of assessing its explanatory utility. This study does so through the perspectives of recent immigrant professionals to Canada, thereby also investigating the theory’s applicability to a diverse population. Moreover, this study strives to identify theory- and evidence-based career advising practices for use by career advisors in private practice and in the many government-funded career development programs to which Canadian newcomers have access.

The study used a grounded theory qualitative approach to analyze the interview transcripts of several dozen recent immigrant professionals who brought education and experience from their countries of origin and retrained and worked in Canada as well. A qualitative approach permits a deep examination of aspects of human experience. More on the reasons for using this method follow. Definitions of key concepts such as recent immigrant professional are provided in Appendix H.
Overview of Present Analysis

The present study has two research objectives. The first is to develop a deep understanding of the work search strategies, including retraining, that have been most successful for recent immigrants. The second purpose of this study is to assess the applicability of a recent career development theory, career self-determination theory (Chen 2017), in order to evaluate the theory's explanatory power, and to build on it.

Statement of Research Questions and Goals

Overall, the present study's goal was to add to the very small body of literature on the lived experiences of immigrant professionals, and the even smaller body of literature on their experiences in retraining. This study examined the work search and employment experiences of recent immigrant professionals in Canada in order to determine the factors that newcomers believe helped and hindered their work lives so far. In particular, the role of retraining in the re-establishment of their careers in Canada was explored. Specific questions include:

1. How is the work search in Canada similar and/or different to what they experienced in their countries of origin?

2. How is moving through the labour market in Canada similar and/or different to what they experienced in their countries of origin?

Additionally, the study assessed the applicability of Chen’s (2017) proposed career psychology metatheory, career self-determination theory. Specifically, the study explored whether the lived work and retraining experiences of immigrant professionals can be framed by the motivational needs career autonomy, career competence, and career relatedness. Specific questions include:
1. What has been the role of career autonomy in recent immigrant professionals' work lives?

2. What has been the role of career competence?

3. What has been the role of career relatedness?

4. Are the motivational needs expressed by recent immigrant professionals encompassed in Chen’s (2017) metatheory, or are there other needs?

At its conclusion, this study makes recommendations for theory- and evidence-based career development practices for use by recent immigrant professionals and by service providers in the many government-funded work search programs to which Canadian newcomers have access. The study also makes recommendations for institutions that offer retraining for immigrant professionals in Canada. The goal of both sets of recommendations is to improve both by career advice and retraining by providing all those involved with insight into each other’s expectations and perceptions.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to ground the present study in the context of a multicultural society, this chapter provides an account of the existing literature about immigrant professionals and their career-related experiences after immigrating, primarily to Canada, although research from Australia is considered as well because of the similarities between the two countries’ immigration programs and histories. Next, the chapter provides a review of the literature looking at the employment challenges immigrants experience during the settlement process, including discrimination, credential recognition, and job security. It also provides a review of literature on immigrants’ career reintegration strategies, including retraining. The chapter continues with a description of the CSDT, which emphasizes three basic human needs in relation to career development: career autonomy, career competence, and career relatedness.

Employment-Related Challenges

Very large numbers of well-educated immigrant professionals from less-traditional source countries, countries where participation in post-secondary education is lower than in Canada, have been welcomed to Canada in recent years. The top source countries in the early 2000s were China, India, the Philippines, Iran, and Pakistan (Chui et al., 2007). Yet there is currently very little valid research on how successful they are in developing their careers once arriving in Canada.

Even though Canada is officially a multicultural society, as stated in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (Government of Canada, 1985) immigrants still need to adapt to a
new culture and ways of working when they immigrate to Canada. Adaptation can be conceptualized as a learning experience because it involves experience and observation (Krumboltz & Nichols, 1990). Given the large numbers of people the Government of Canada invites to live here each year, and the likelihood that many of those people will experience challenges adapting to Canadian culture, perhaps Canadians and Canadian employers should be expected to adjust as well. The concept of acculturation assumes that both immigrant and host society will change to facilitate integration (Berry, 1997). For an individual, occupational integration is an essential part of a successful cultural transition (Yost & Lucas, 2002). Key issues that interfere with successful occupational integration include (a) lack of recognition of skills and education; (b) lack of recognition of previous work experience; and (c) lack of integration into the community (Sinacore, Mikhail, Kassan, & Lerner, 2009). When these issues interfere with an immigrant’s integration into the workforce, individual acculturation is prevented, and they are markers that the host society is not acculturating to the new workers. More on adaptation follows.

**Discrimination**

Even when a recent immigrant believes that acculturation is not an important issue, or that she is acculturated enough, employers may still need to be convinced that immigrants possess the skills to perform effectively in new workplaces. Australia, like Canada, admits large numbers of skilled immigrants every year. Their top source countries in 2013–2014 were also India, China, and the Philippines (Department of Immigration and Border Protection, n.d.). Pietsch and Marotta (2009) examined data from an Australian national survey that pertained to public acceptance of immigration.
They found that, from 1996 to 2004, there was a steady decline in the belief that the government should reduce immigration, and a steady increase in the belief that the government should increase immigration. This finding suggests that Australians were becoming ever more comfortable with the large numbers of immigrants that country welcomes every year. After 2 years of higher-than-usual immigration, 2005 and 2006, however, attitudes shifted; more Australians expressed the belief that the government should reduce immigration. Like Australia, Canada is a country that relies on immigration for growth, however 60%+ of Canadians have expressed the belief that immigration levels are not too high (as discussed in Perreaux, 2018). However, openness to immigration is not necessarily openness to hiring immigrants.

Krings and Olivares (2007) examined prejudice in hiring practices in Europe. Their study participants were hiring decision-makers, and the researchers looked at their process of reviewing resumes and subsequent hiring decisions. The job candidates being reviewed, second-generation immigrants and individuals whose families had long histories in the area, were equal in education and training. Surprisingly given the finding that follows, participants rated the candidates’ credentials equally, meaning that candidates from each group were equally likely to be invited for an interview based on their qualifications. At the end of the hiring process, however, the researchers found evidence of discrimination based on ethnicity when participants were hiring for jobs requiring high interpersonal skills, but not for jobs requiring high technical skills. The researchers hypothesized that this may have been due to the subjective nature of assessing interpersonal skills in combination with negative stereotypes about members of different ethnic groups. The minority candidates for jobs requiring high
interpersonal skills had their personal dimensions devalued by hirers who were subsequently rated by the researchers as possessing a high level of symbolic (subtle) prejudice. Subtle (symbolic) prejudice is more likely to be demonstrated in the so-called grey areas of hiring decision-making. Prejudice of this sort may be one of the employment-related challenges faced by recent immigrants to Canada, many of whom represent a visible minority. Recent statistical data showing that immigrant IT professionals – who are most likely visible minorities because of Canadian’s recent trends in immigrant source countries – earn around 7% less than their Canadian-born peers (Hall & Khan, 2008), and that immigrants overall earn only 50–70% what non-immigrant peers earn (Frenette et al., 2009b) demonstrate that this kind of prejudice seems to be taking place in Canada.

In a similar study of the practices of recruiting agencies, Ward and Masgoret (2007) sent applications to New Zealand recruiting firms from imaginary candidates whose education and experience had been crafted to be perfectly equivalent, native New Zealanders and Chinese immigrants. They found that the native New Zealander candidates received significantly more, and more positive, responses from recruiting agencies than the Chinese immigrant candidates did. These researchers did not consider the possibility that this was the result of racial or ethnic prejudice, but rather hypothesized that overseas education – which may be difficult to evaluate in a different country – may have been a key disadvantage for the Chinese candidates. Because the level of English in all the applications was equivalent, it was assumed that facility with English was not a factor. The researchers also expressed surprise that work experience in multinational companies did not engender more interest from recruiting agencies,
since, they reasoned, such experience may indicate that the candidates were adaptable (Ward & Masgoret, 2007).

Premji and Lewchuk (2014) surveyed Toronto-area workers and found that formal educational credentials of all origins do not benefit Chinese immigrants as much as they do Whites, including White immigrants. In Canada, this subtle prejudice against immigrants, or in favour of Canadians of European heritage, may be occurring when recent immigrants are told they lack recognizable credentials or Canadian experience (Bauder, 2003; Brouwer, 1999).

Recent research has identified two possible sources of this discriminatory behaviour by hiring decision-makers. Esses, Dietz, and Bhardwaj (2004) and Esses et al. (2006) found that immigrants’ skills, work experience, and education are frequently devalued or discounted, or their skills are properly valued but are perceived as a threat to local interest groups. Both of these phenomena result in un- and underemployment for immigrant professionals in Canada. Dietz et al. (2015) found that more education does not lead to higher rates of employment for immigrants, which they called the skills discounting paradox, and they hypothesized that the more complex a set of skills, the more difficult it is for a local institution (licensing body or potential employer) to recognize and assess the skills effectively. With regard to the perceived threat posed by immigrants’ skills, the excuses provided by research participants for rejecting particular kinds of candidates typically fell into skills discounting or skills devaluing (Esses et al., 2006; Salaff, Greve, & Ping, 2002), which demonstrates how the skills discounting paradox occurs.
This phenomenon of discounting or devaluing skills, which looks like ethnocentrism, protectionism, or prejudice, seems to be systemic, and is enforced by the regulatory bodies that oversee the highest-status professions in Canada. Professions such as teaching and engineering, and most health sciences, such as medicine and nursing, are thoroughly regulated in Canada. Bauder (2003) observed that the non-recognition or delayed recognition of international credentials benefits Canadian-educated professionals to the disadvantage of those who are internationally trained. Many professional associations do not have a formal process for the evaluation of foreign credentials, or at least not a streamlined process, so immigrants may not be able to have their backgrounds assessed before arriving in Canada due to weak processes (Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials, 2010). Compounding the problem, in some professions verifiable experience obtained in Canada is required for registration, credentialing or licensure, which puts recent immigrant professionals in a bind: they require Canadian experience to have their credentials recognized, but cannot gain employment experience without the recognized credential in hand.

But other challenges can arise. In Australia, even when immigrant professionals, do gain employment opportunities, they are often left out of the informal information sharing networks in the workplace. Indian professionals in Australia told Gowan and Teal (2016) that the reasons for their exclusion included communication difficulties arising from differences between Indian and Australian English and the common preference of White Australians for spending time with culturally similar colleagues.
The subtle discrimination faced by newcomers seeking and maintaining employment is particularly concerning given the skills shortages identified in countries like Canada and Australia. An Australian study of 3,124 principal applicants near arrival and 18 months later found that Asian immigrants are disadvantaged significantly in employment, all other factors being equal (Kostenko, Harris, & Zhao, 2012). Having Australian experience was key for Asians to move into managerial and professional roles. Overall, non-Westerners were at a much higher risk of being relegated to labourer roles and becoming stuck there, despite the professional-leaning labour market needs of Australia at the time the data was collected.

**Recognition of credentials**

Degrees, diplomas, certificates and licenses are typically door-openers when it comes to employment. A study of the experiences of 35 economic immigrants from India, all of whom had earned university degrees in India, found that a great frustration for them was the disconnection between their expectations of how they would be received, and the lack of recognition of their credentials and experience (Somerville & Walsworth, 2010). These newcomers, from fields such as business, engineering, and information technology, believed that the recognition they earned through the points system because of their education and credentials would be reflected in recognition in the labour market. This was not the case for a majority of them.

Many professions are not overseen by regulatory bodies: managers in many industries, accounting below the certified levels and IT professionals, for example, are not. Without a regulatory body to affirm their credentials, individuals with foreign training and experience in these fields might elect to take on an entry-level role in order to get
Canadian experience to reassure potential employers of their value; however, research on professional immigrant women has found that employers frequently still do not recognize previous foreign experience, and promotions from entry-level jobs are not forthcoming (McCoy & Masuch, 2007). An entry-level job in some fields means a downgrade to work that someone with only a high school education could do, and pay commensurate with the low skill level required. Additionally, the broad nature of job titles and diversity of responsibilities in the business world may actually create barriers for recent immigrants who are unfamiliar with Canadian workplaces; for example, in some parts of South Asia, a supervisor or assistant manager might be called the in-charge, which is not a term used in Canada. McCoy and Masuch (2007) argued that employment programs should teach immigrants job search strategies specific to the cultural and linguistic differences between their countries of origin and Canada.

Finding a job can be even more challenging in fields in which certification or membership in a regulatory body is required. To encourage regulatory bodies that oversee professions such as medicine and engineering to affirm the credentials of immigrant professionals, in 2007 the province of Ontario passed Bill 124, Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, which requires the certifying bodies of 35 regulated professions to assess the credentials of internationally trained professionals “fairly and transparently” (Sakamoto et al., 2008, p. 350). The Ontario College of Teachers, the Ontario College of Nurses, and the Professional Engineers of Ontario have responded with clear assessment processes; however, these processes may still lack fairness. Certifying bodies like these and those that offer PLAR (Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition) as a mechanism for certification might still exclude individuals who bring
international experience simply because it is international (Andersson & Guo, 2009) and thus difficult to assess.

Even when a regulated profession provides a fair mechanism by which foreign-trained professionals can become certified or registered, there are still barriers including a lack of awareness of licensing requirements. Of more than 600 foreign-trained professionals surveyed in the early 2000s, only 46% reported being aware that they needed a licence to practice in their field in Canada, and only 20% had knowledge of the specific requirements for licensure (Ministry of Training, Colleges, & Universities, 2002). Meeting licensing requirements is also a confusing process for many. One immigrant teacher from China explained that her bachelor’s and master’s degrees had been assessed as equivalent to Canadian degrees, and yet she was having to re-do her initial teacher qualifications in order to register with the British Columbia College of Teachers (Beynon, Ilieva, & Dichupa, 2004). Foreign-educated physicians must pass a written exam for the Medical Council of Canada, and usually face two to six years of additional training before they can practice (Bauder, 2003). Internationally educated pharmacists face 1 1/2 to more than 2 years of exam preparation and internship before they can practice in Canada, and their impression is that, although they are needed, foreign-trained pharmacists are not truly welcomed by the regulatory agency (Austin, 2007). This represents a clear waste of human capital in Canada, and for the countries of origin of these nurses, which do not benefit from their nursing training either.

In fact, the credentialing process essentially requires that the newcomer adopt Canadian values and cultural norms (Girard & Bauder, 2007), which may chase well-qualified professionals away from working in their original fields. Foreign-educated
teachers taking part in a bridging program in Ontario school boards described finding it difficult to adopt the child-centred philosophy of teaching in Ontario because of its differences from the knowledge-focused philosophy in their home countries (Myles, Cheng, & Wang, 2006). Internationally trained pharmacists described having a great deal more diagnostic responsibility in their countries of origin and were frustrated by the tight regulations governing the profession in Ontario because it limits their opportunities to provide care for their patients (Austin, 2007). New values may be uncomfortable for professionals trained elsewhere, and had they been aware that they would be required to adopt a new set of values in order to work in their professions in Canada, they may have made different decisions around emigrating.

The results of credentialing problems are anger, frustration, resentment, stress, disappointment, and discouragement (Grant & Nadin, 2007). A survey of well-educated immigrant professionals, most of whom had arrived in Canada with the previous 4 years, found that they experienced a great deal of negative emotion as a result of the challenges posed by finding employment and establishing their careers in Canada. Fully 30.1% of the 180 survey respondents indicated that they had never had a job in Canada that made use of their previous education or experience. In addition, 74.4% of respondents said they planned to pursue Canadian education or training in the future, and over half (54%) had already taken a training program since arriving in Canada. Three-quarters of survey respondents were somewhat to very surprised by how difficult it was to find a suitable job in Canada, and half of respondents had had a negative experience with an employer. One-third of respondents felt they had been treated unfairly by employers (Grant & Nadin, 2007).
These respondents may in fact have been treated unfairly. At a recent focus group of human resources professionals in Ontario, participants reported that the additional research into educational equivalencies and international employers required make the applications of recent immigrant professionals less attractive than those of Canadian-educated candidates with experience that is easier to understand and to verify (Albert, Takouda, Robichaud, & Haq, 2013). This is similar to the discriminatory hiring practices summarized at the beginning of this chapter.

Adaptation and Resilience

Organizations occasionally show signs of adaptation to new pools of potential employees. Sakamoto, Wei, and Truong (2008) found that among the most significant acculturation efforts made by non-profit organizations, such as settlement services, employment services, and language training services, was the hiring of Chinese-born staff who may not have had credentials in social service, but who clearly demonstrated potential. These Chinese-speaking staff and the services they provided were used by many agencies as a last resort rather than as a positive primary service for Chinese immigrants accessing their services; clients were only referred to them when it became apparent that the English language services were inaccessible to them. The non-English services, in essence, were a second-class service, suggesting that despite the apparent effort to accommodate non-English speakers, there is still a value being expressed that non-English speakers should learn English if they want to receive first-class service.

Common sense suggests that newcomers who adapt best to the dominant culture in their new countries will probably experience the best employment outcomes.
Conversely, newcomers who fail to adapt should experience the worst employment outcomes. Research bears this out. A Canadian study (Islam & Raschky, 2015) took genetic family history, majority ethnic identity in the current country of residence, and a self-rating of ethnic identity, and analyzed these in relation to employment and income. They found that immigrants with a strong home-country ethnic identity were 24% more likely to be unemployed than those with a weak ethnic identity. In the same vein, immigrants who strongly identified as Canadian were 26% less likely to be unemployed. Adaptation to the dominant culture in the form of reduced attachment to one’s ethno-cultural origins seems to improve the odds of gaining employment.

Language and connections outside one’s ethno-cultural group seem to matter as well. Using data from the 2005 Workplace and Employee Survey, Fang et al. (2013) found that recent immigrants who had found jobs through family and friends or through staffing agencies received lower wages and experienced less job satisfaction than Canadian-born individuals. Those who found employment using the Internet or newspaper ads experienced only less job satisfaction, not reduced wages. The authors noted that immigrants who successfully found jobs using the Internet likely have stronger English skills. Other researchers found that, among a group of 231 engineers who had immigrated to Canada, responding to ads in newspapers was the least effective work search strategy ($p < 0.05$) while referrals from other employers, who they met through employment and through non-profit and educational placement programs, were most effective ($p < 0.05$) (George, Chaze, Brennenstuhl, & Fuller-Thomson, 2012). Engineers are trained in trigonometry and calculus, so their language skills are probably
on average not as strong as business professionals, for example; as a result, they have a greater need for a network to help them to secure employment.

The skills that immigrant professionals have identified as important to their re-establishment in their professions in Canada are predictable: patience, determination, courage, adaptability, and strength (Ngo & Este, 2006). Immigrants who have lived in Canada for many years have noted anecdotally that it seems to have become harder in recent years to convince employers and regulatory bodies of the value of their foreign credentials, regardless of the strength of the Canadian economy (Ngo & Este, 2006). Because breaking into employment or establishing themselves with an accrediting body may be more difficult than they anticipated, many recent immigrant professionals choose to pursue further education and training in Canada.

**Retraining and Canadian education**

Post-secondary institutions in Canada are a common stop on the road to integration into Canadian society for recent immigrants. Fang et al. (2009) used 2003 Canadian Workplace and Employee Survey (WES) to show that there is an employment advantage for immigrants who pursue education and training in Canada. Grant and Nadin (2007) reported that nearly three-quarters of recent immigrant professionals they surveyed felt they would have to pursue a Canadian training program in the near future, and over half of their survey respondents had already taken a training program in Canada. Of these, 51% had taken graduate studies, 23.5% certificate training, and 8.2% language training. A majority (72.8%) of the immigrants who had taken Canadian training programs did so to obtain qualifications in the same or a similar field as they had worked in in their country of origin, and 33.7% of them said they had felt forced into
Canadian retraining because their previously acquired qualifications were not being recognized by employers.

Analysis of the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC) conducted in three rounds over the period 2000–2004 found that 54% of immigrant professionals chose not to pursue additional retraining or education (Adamuti-Trache, Anisef, & Sweet, 2013). Twenty-nine percent of those surveyed had pursued job-related training at a college or trade school. The remaining 17% attended university to continue their studies in the same field (8%) or pursue studies in a new field (9%). Across the three surveys, the employment rate and wages for those who had not pursued any further education and those who had taken additional college or trade school training were found to be similar. Employment and wages were naturally lower at the time of the first survey for those who were pursuing a university credential, but by the time of the third survey, their wages surpassed those of the immigrant professionals who had not pursued additional education or who had pursued college or trade school training. The rate of employment of those who pursued university education, however, remained lower. This might be because undergraduate degrees take around four years to complete, and the survey was carried out across four years, so many of this group would still have been attending university at the time of the third survey. Regrettably, none of the immigrant professional groups had achieved the occupational prestige and associated wages they had expected upon arrival after 4 years in the country. Those who had pursued a university credential were earning 9–13% more and had achieved a level of prestige closer to their goals. An estimate of the immigrants’ social capital showed that developing a diverse professional and social network had a positive, but
not statistically significant, effect on the prestige and wages they earned (Adamuti-Trache, Anisef, & Sweet, 2013).

Using the same data, Frank (2013) found that the length of time it took immigrant professionals to secure a job that provided the prestige they expected was longer proportional to the prestige of the job sought. Of those who found a match within the 4 years covered by the LSIC, the median number of days leading up to a match was 98 days, and those who found a match did so within the first roughly 200 days. These relatively short work search trends suggest that many well-matched professionals may have arranged for work before their arrival (Frank, 2013). It could also suggest that those whose qualifications and communication skills are easily understood by Canadian employers find the kind of work they desire quickly, as would be expected, and the rest struggle to gain recognition for their internationally earned education and work experience (Frank, 2013). Predictably, business-class immigrants followed by skilled-worker class immigrants found suitable jobs more quickly than others (Frank, 2013). Country of origin made no difference in this study, however immigrants who lived outside of census metropolitan areas like Toronto and Vancouver found jobs matching their skills and experience more quickly than their metropolis-dwelling counterparts.

Additional or new post-secondary education does not always seem to benefit recent immigrants. A Vancouver-based study on the experiences of English-speaking sub-Saharan African immigrants found that, although two-thirds of the women and one-third of the men had pursued additional education and training in Canada, 55% of women and 79% of men were either working in manual labour and low-skill white collar jobs or unemployed (Creese & Wiebe, 2009). In stark contrast, in their countries of
origin, 51% of these women and 60% of the men had been working in semi-professional, professional, and managerial jobs.

**Skills for success**

Succeeding in a new workplace is challenging, and it may be even more challenging in the context of a different culture. An Australian study of immigrant engineers and IT professionals proposed a model to take account of the mismatch in English proficiency, qualifications, and culture that leads to workplace integration challenges, which in turn often lead to people quitting or being fired. Mahmud, Alam, and Härtel (2014) interviewed immigrants and their employment supervisors and found that immigrants’ perceptions of their communication and technical skills and their fit into the workplace culture were actually fairly similar to those of their supervisors. The immigrant professionals, for example, knew there were gaps between their supervisors’ expectations and their performances. How can immigrant professionals, employed or seeking employment, handle these gaps?

Cervatiuc (2009) interviewed 20 professional immigrants, and identified three common strategies that contributed to career success: generating a self-motivating internal dialogue to counter the marginalization that recent immigrants often face; finding ways to access mainstream Canadian social networks both to find employment and opportunities to practice English; and membership in a community of successful bicultural adult immigrants. It is interesting to note that all three of these strategies recognize culture in some way, yet none of the 6 participants in Ngo and Este’s (2006) interview-based study of immigrant professionals identified culture as a potential problem when they arrived. It is possible that new immigrants are not aware of the
cultural challenges associated with finding employment and establishing a career in Canada. Failure to take differences in workplace cultures into account is not unique to immigrants; many Canadians struggle similarly when they are not aware of important cultural information, such as the prohibition on perfume and colognes in many workplaces. Facilitating familiarity with Canadian work culture may be an unrecognized task for career development professionals who work with recent immigrants.

At a very practical level, gaining appropriate employment seems to depend on several related factors: Guerrero and Rothstein (2012) found that language fluency and cultural knowledge were positively related to job search clarity, a clear sense of what kinds of jobs they were seeking. In turn, job search clarity could be related to job search intensity, which was positively related to the number of interviews Canadian immigrants obtained and the number of job offers they received. The number of job offers received is related negatively to underemployment, therefore, the key to avoiding the underemployment trap seems to be found in language fluency and cultural knowledge as they relate to clarity around the type of job desired and how the search for that job is likely to unfold.

A qualitative study examining the successful integration experiences of 20 Chinese immigrants to the Greater Vancouver Area identified four success categories (Amundson et al., 2011). The most prominent category was having a positive attitude, which included having confidence, being flexible, showing commitment to their jobs, and having an open personality. The second category included resource development, such as building networks, and skills development, especially communication and job search skills. The third category focused around having skills and work experience from China
that were in demand in Canada, and the fourth focused on support from family and community (Amundson et al., 2011).

**Settlement issues**

An analysis of Canadians’ labour market outcomes from 2009 makes evident what happens to newcomers to Canada in recent years. Lightman and Gingrich (2012) used data from the 2009 Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics, a Canadian longitudinal database, and explore how immigrants were doing in the labour market. In that survey, over 50% of immigrants also reported being visible minorities, while only 5% of Canadian-born individuals did so, highlighting the potential for discrimination in hiring practices before any other data analysis was done. Half of the immigrants fell into the prime working age group (30–49 years old) and 70% of them had lived in Canada for 11 years or more, meaning they were no longer new entrants to the labour market. The researchers focused on low household income, unemployment of 6 months or more, non-permanent jobs, and jobs without pensions as well as a number of factors known to affect employability, such as sex, race, age, education, and length of time in Canada. Predictably, households in which the major earner was a woman were 2.6 times more likely to be categorized as low-income. Individuals who identified as a visible minority were 1.6 times more likely to be categorized as low-income. Immigrants who had lived in Canada for 11–12 years were 1.8 times more likely to have experienced unemployment of 6 months or more during that time (Lightman & Gingrich, 2012). The researchers did uncover some factors that made success in the workforce more likely. Each additional year of education reduced the odds of long-term unemployment by roughly 10%. Another positive finding was that immigrants who were employed were not
less likely than Canadian-born workers to have permanent jobs, and immigrants who had lived in Canada for 20 years or more were more likely than Canadian-born individuals to have a permanent job with a pension (Lightman & Gingrich, 2012). A major recession began in 2008, just before the survey data was collected, however the data were also retrospective, and respondents were asked about their entire work history in Canada, so the findings are relevant. Recent immigrants are clearly at a systemic disadvantage in Canada’s labour market.

Career development research and theory developed prior to the major immigration policy changes of the 1980s and 1990s may not be valid because of the vastly different demographic characteristics that immigrants since then possess. The largest shift since the 1980s has been that immigrants now come largely from Asia whereas Europe was the greater source in earlier periods. In addition, immigrants since the late 1990s also differ widely from previous cohorts of immigrants in that they tend to be better educated. As a result, their overall employability also should be high, given the shifts in the Canadian labour market away from low-skill manufacturing jobs and toward high-skill science and technology jobs. As data already described have shown, however, immigrants frequently do not succeed in obtaining employment commensurate with their backgrounds.

Application of Career Self-Determination Theory

As outlined previously, Ryan and Deci’s (2000) self-determination theory is a theory of motivation that has been demonstrated to have cross-cultural validity. Researchers have recently tested SDT’s applicability to the realm of career development. With regard to career decision-making, a recent study found that Quebec
college students’ ability to make decisions about their careers was affected by their level of career decision-making autonomy, which was most highly affected by peer controlling behaviour, so-called peer pressure (i.e., autonomy non-support). Their decision-making ability was even more highly affected by their perceived career decision-making self-efficacy, which was most affected by how well supported they were by peers and parents to exercise their autonomy (Guay, Senécal, Gauthier, & Fernet, 2003). A Japanese study found that how motivated university students were to explore career options was predicted by their career decision-making self-efficacy and how free they felt to pursue important goals (i.e., socially recommended goals; Satoko & Kyoichi, 2015). Career decisions can be influenced by experience as well, as demonstrated by Rosenkrantz, Wang, and Hu (2015). They found that medical students who had clerkship experience (related to competence) and team-based research experience (related to relatedness) were more likely to see future research activities in a positive light than those who did not have those experiences.

Regarding immigrants’ needs for competence and relatedness specifically, career success for new immigrants may lie in their ability to become socially effective in the host society (Mak, Westwood, Ishiyama, & Barker, 1999). It can be very difficult to transfer one’s skills into a new workplace if one cannot establish relationships with colleagues and clients. In fact, in a 1996 study by Mak, discussed by Mak et al. (1999), recent immigrants to Australia from Hong Kong who had worked in management in their country of origin reported that a lack of familiarity with Australian culture was their greatest barrier to transferring their skills as managers effectively into Australian workplaces. Mak et al. (1999) recommended that future immigrants receive training in
intercultural communication to help them to function effectively in the host society.

Ishiyama's (1994) model of self-validation for immigrants describes five crucial factors that can be related to the needs described by SDT: (a) security and comfort (which can derive from relatedness); (b) self-worth and self-acceptance (which can derive from competence); (c) competence and autonomy (clear connection to SDT); (d) identity and belonging (which can derive from relatedness); and (e) fulfillment and meaning in life.

The three basic motivational needs outlined by Deci and Ryan (2000), autonomy, competence, and relatedness, have obvious applications to the realm of career development. Chen (2017) has outlined how these three needs can also serve as a metatheoretical framework in which many of the major career psychology theories – those of Super (1990), Holland (1997), Krumbolz (1994, 1996, 2009), and Valach and Young (2004) particularly – work together synergistically.

Since the needs for career autonomy, career competence, and career relatedness are theorized to be universal, and cross-cultural research conducted on the original broad motivational needs suggests that they are, it is reasonable to use Chen's (2017) career self-determination theory (CSDT) in research focused on a culturally diverse population. In addition, the population of recent immigrant professionals in Canada brings education and work experience, meaning they have already established or begun to establish formal work lives, so the several career development theories incorporated into the CSDT metatheory have direct relevance to their situation.

**Summary**

This chapter discussed immigration and the settlement process, especially in regard to employment-related challenges such as discrimination, recognition of
credentials, and employment fairness. Evidence shows that even economic immigrants who have been selected to immigrate based on factors that seem like they should lead to employment commensurate with their experience and qualifications struggle to secure appropriate work. It also discussed work search and employment issues including language, and reasons for retraining. Evidence shows that retraining of all varieties does not necessarily lead to improved employment prospects for recent immigrant professionals. The chapter then outlined the reasons for the decision to use the particular theory being explored in the present study, Chen’s career self-determination theory (2017).
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted as part of a larger 2009–2010 research study, *How retraining affects re-entry: Immigrants' vocational well-being*, conducted by Dr. Charles Chen (principal investigator) and a team of graduate student researchers at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto. The present study uses the interview data most relevant to work search and retraining experiences and to career self-determination theory (Chen, 2017).

This chapter provides discussion of grounded theory methodology and a justification for its use in the present study. First qualitative methodology in general is defined, key concepts explained, and the rationale for its use described and defended. Next, the specific qualitative approach used, grounded theory method, is outlined, and the rationale for its selection over others is explained. Advantages and disadvantages of the methodological choices are discussed. Finally, a profile of the participants is provided, and participant recruitment, the interview procedure, and data analysis are described.

Rationale for a Qualitative Design

Unlike a quantitative or positivist research design, which seeks to prove or disprove a hypothesis about an objective truth, a qualitative approach to research permits the researcher to analyze a set of data without first establishing a hypothesis to confirm or falsify. Because a qualitative study's conclusions are permitted to arise from the data themselves, rather than from a predetermined framework biased by the
researcher’s expectations, the research is more likely to come to conclusions derived from the participants’ experiences themselves (Heppner, Kivlighan Jr., & Wampold, 1999, Chapter 10; Loonam, 2014). Qualitative research is therefore an ideal research method for developing or expanding upon theory, rather than for testing hypotheses.

While statistics have been collected on the career development experiences of immigrant professionals, little has been done to attempt to understand their experiences in their unique context (Ponterotto, 2005). Such research adds a humanizing element to the statistical data and might possibly elucidate, contrast, or contradict some of the purely numerical information that has been collected about the outcomes for immigrants in Canada. Through the development of an understanding of the human, subjective experiences underlying immigration and labour market integration, researchers, service providers, and policy-makers may hear the voices of the people who are directly affected by their decisions and work, and may as a result attempt to ensure that the decisions they make are meaningful for the people they are attempting to serve.

A key theorist in the field of qualitative research, Creswell (1998), identified eight key goals involved in conducting this kind of research. First the researcher should focus on (a) finding out how something is happening; (b) exploring and elaborating on the topic; (c) developing a detailed view of a phenomenon; (d) studying a phenomenon in its natural setting (i.e., context); and (e) producing results written in a literary, rather than a scientific, style. In order to produce high-quality research, the researcher needs to keep in mind that (f) sufficient time and resources are required. There must also be (g) an audience receptive to this kind of research, otherwise it will not be read. The researcher conducting a qualitative research study must also be (h) an active learner who can
suspend her judgment and situate the research findings in each participant’s context, not her own. In the present study, accomplishing these goals will help scholars and service providers better understand the work search and retraining experiences of recent immigrant professionals beyond the statistics.

Because the present study is interested in the experiences of recent immigrant professionals seeking work, a research design that facilitates understanding of a social construction is appropriate. The work search process is a social construction that is co-created by individuals (job seekers) who would like to become members of an organization (an employer) and the employer, the individuals (employees) who decide on the tasks of the organization, and the people (job seekers or current employees) who perform those tasks (Harding, 2007). The tasks are typically performed in order to earn a wage and to further the organization’s goals (Loonam, 2014; Vallas & Prener, 2012).

This study used a qualitative approach, because this is the approach that is most useful for understanding social constructions from the perspectives of those who are participating in the construction (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Heppner et al., 1999; Holton, 2008).

**Definition of qualitative methodology**

One way to define qualitative research methodology is in opposition to quantitative methodology. Quantitative research methods require the reduction of a phenomenon to a numerical value so that statistical analyses may be performed (Smith, 2003). For example, a grading scheme of Below Average – Average – Above Average could be coded as 0 – 1 – 2 in order to determine median, mean, and whether there are statistical differences between two groups. This kind of research generally requires
large numbers of participants in order to increase the probability that the statistical results can be generalized to the population from which came the study participants.

In contrast, qualitative research methods are “textual” (Smith, 2003, p. 2) rather than statistical. Analysis relies on transcripts and other written reports and takes the form of narrative reports rather than mathematical relationships. This approach values how we understand the world and the tool we use – language – to do it. Qualitative research generally focuses on a small number of participants, and attempts to develop a very thorough understanding of their realities. The advantage to using this approach in psychological research is that it provides a fuller picture, context and participants, of the matter being researched.

In a qualitative framework, data are typically gathered in one of three ways: (a) in-depth, open-ended interviews; (b) direct observation; or (c) written documents (Patton, 2002), all of which are rich sources. These methods of data collection make the most sense since, in a qualitative framework, the researcher is exploring topics that are not yet well-defined. Data gathering via interview is the fundamental method for uncovering and understanding meaning (Ponterotto, 2005), therefore the present study used interview data to develop an understanding of the meanings recent immigrant professionals make from their experiences of career development in Canada.

**Grounded Theory Methodology**

Grounded theory methodology was first outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967). It was first proposed as a positivist approach to qualitative research (Holton, 2008), argued to be no less objective than quantitative research methodologies. The purpose of grounded theory is: “to develop a well integrated set of concepts that provide a
thorough theoretical explanation of social phenomena under study. A grounded theory should explain as well as describe” (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 5). The grounded theory methodology for developing theory enables a researcher to understand a condition or conditions that affect human responses, and to understand those responses (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Theories are developed using the strategies outlined by the grounded theory methodology based on textual analysis of the subjective experiences of the research participants, and this makes it the most appropriate method for the present study. The focus of the present study is developing a deep understanding of the strategies that have been most useful for recent immigrants for securing all varieties of employment, including retraining. This required an examination of their unique experiences. The present study assessed the value of the formal learning and training opportunities in which recent immigrants to Canada participate using immigrants’ self-reported work search and employment experiences. For understanding both of these phenomena – work and training, and the results of various strategies for career development – grounded theory methodology seemed most appropriate.

A traditional grounded theory approach is intended develop hypotheses, grounded in data, which makes it appropriate for an examination of this topic about which there are few established hypotheses. An abundance of interview transcripts was available, and through the textual analysis process, the research focus was on identifying categories or themes for individual research participants and across participants. Grounded theory is intended to permit themes and order to emerge naturally from all manner of texts. In the interviews available to the researcher, participants were not asked to directly connect their retraining experiences to their work
search experiences, so a grounded theory approach makes sense for discovering what connections may or may not be there, and to develop a thorough understanding of each of these experiences separately. It is therefore a very appropriate method to use for the present study, the goal of which, in addition to developing understanding of the lived work search and retraining experiences of recent immigrant professionals in Canada, was to assess the utility of an emerging theory, the career self-determination theory (Chen, 2017).

A theoretical principle developed using the grounded theory method is based on the common themes that emerge naturally from the narratives of the study participants (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The present study was conducted after the interviews had been completed, and therefore participants were not available to respond to additional questions in order to verify a hypothesis, as recommended by Corbin and Strauss (1990), so the traditional grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which does not require such a step, seemed reasonable.

In addition, I had some knowledge of the experiences of recent immigrant professionals prior to conducting the study from having worked in the career counselling industry and having read a range of published research on the topic of immigrant professionals settling in Canada in advance of beginning the data analysis. In other words, I was not naïve in this area. Thus it seemed appropriate to select an analytical strategy that provides a measure of objectivity. The qualitative method that claims to offer the most objectivity is that of Glaser and Strauss (1967), which was recently updated by Glaser and Holton (2004).
Glaser and Holton (2004) outlined a set of principles for traditional grounded theory methodology, in a review of the original discussion by Glaser and Strauss (1967), including the following: The researcher should begin the research with as few preconceived notions about the phenomenon being investigated as possible, and implement strategies to check existing notions to ensure that they do not unduly affect the ongoing analysis. The process begins with line-by-line open coding of a text, often an interview transcript, until categories and themes that seem to have explanatory power emerge. These can be processes, conditions, consequences, or anything else that seems central to the phenomenon under investigation. Data analysis continues with a more selective coding process, assessing how new data fit into the emerging categories. Categories and themes are sorted and re-sorted to develop a multivariate understanding of the phenomenon. Researchers are encouraged to write memos throughout this process to encourage reasoning and the development of theory. This method requires that researchers check their assumptions at the beginning and throughout the analytical process, and write process and theoretical memos throughout the process to keep themselves focused on the data at hand. As part of the analytical process, Glaser and Holton (2004) recommend that researchers record memos and analytic notes on themes and categories as they emerge, and on personal responses to the data, in order to acknowledge and manage the inherent biases that they bring to the analysis. This process is described in the Data Analysis section of this chapter.

The researcher

In the tradition of qualitative inquiry, this researcher acknowledged before beginning this research that I have biases. In the following section, I outline my lived
experiences, beliefs, and attitudes that may have influenced this research in an effort to be transparent, and to maintain a reflective and open-minded approach (Glaser & Holton, 2004; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Holton, 2008).

I identify as a Canadian woman of British, French Canadian, and Ukrainian ethnic origins. At the time of writing I am 39 years old and completing a part-time doctoral degree in counselling psychology at the University of Toronto/OISE, with Dr. Charles P. Chen as my supervisor. I have worked as a career advisor in various capacities in colleges and universities since 2007. It was while working in a college that I encountered a large number of recent immigrant professionals pursuing Canadian education that seemed unnecessary to me given their internationally earned credentials. They told me that they had been seeking employment commensurate with their experience in their fields of work, but had been unable to secure any. Their stories spurred me to pursue this doctoral research. I also managed and coordinated two Citizenship and Immigration Canada-funded work search training programs, Enhanced Language Training and the Job Search Workshop, for 2 years at the beginning of my doctoral studies. At that time, I completed a qualifying research project that involved exploring all the available research on the career and employment experiences of recent immigrant professionals in Canada. There was very little published at the time, but what was available was consistent with the personal stories of the immigrant students and clients I was supporting: their employment outcomes were poor in Canada, for no obvious reason.

From my work experience and previous academic research, I came to the belief that immigrant professionals have to adapt to fit into Canadian workplaces and to meet
the expectations of employers and many employers are not patient enough to give immigrant professionals the opportunity to do so. There is discrimination against immigrant professionals based on their cultural origins, and a devaluation of their internationally earned credentials. While I have worked and continue to work in post-secondary education career advising services, I do not believe that simply earning a Canadian credential is the solution to the challenges immigrant professionals face in attempting to gain employment commensurate with their experience and education. From personal experiences seeking employment, and from experiences working with fellow Canadians and recent immigrants, I have also observed the power of relationships and connections and of being lucky enough to speak to the right person at the right time, and the frustration of submitting online and paper applications without assurance that they are even being read. While engaged in this research, however, I have attempted to read about the experiences described by the participants with an open mind.

**Participants and Selection Criteria**

Interviewees must have arrived in Canada as economic immigrants, rather than as family-sponsored immigrants or refugees, between 1999 and 2006. Participants were required to have completed a university degree or diploma, which was typically a major component of their selection for immigration to Canada. This time period (1999–2006) was selected in part due to the consistency of immigration policy for economic immigrants during this period, and because this left enough time between arrival and when the interviews were conducted (primarily 2011–2012) for the participants to have
had time to pursue both retraining and employment here in Canada. These were the key qualifiers for the study.

In addition to their status as economic immigrants, all participants had completed some retraining or education after their arrival in Canada. English language training was excluded as retraining for these purposes because it is not necessarily vocational. The retraining could have been as simple as a single course recommended by a professional association or licensing body, or as extensive as the completion of a diploma or degree program. Each participant was asked to provide evidence of the retraining where possible. Participants were not asked to provide additional evidence that they met the study's other inclusion criteria.

In addition, participants had to have worked in their countries of origin, in their chosen fields of work, for a minimum of 3 years before immigrating, and in Canada for 3 years as well. This was to ensure that the participants were well qualified to have secured employment commensurate with their original education and work experience. Participants were their own observers and reporters; they were asked to describe their own experiences and behaviours. All participants who met the selection criteria for the study and completed an interview were included in the present data analysis until the data saturation point for the present study was reached.

**Participant characteristics**

There were 52 participants (26 male, 26 female), all immigrants who arrived in Canada between 1999 and 2006. Participants were either the primary applicant in the immigration process, or if married/partnered they had qualified for the same number of points in the application process as their partner, so it did not matter who of the pair was
the primary applicant. All had come to Canada in the Economic Immigrants category of the Citizenship and Immigration Canada recruiting categories at the time. In other words, people who immigrated in the family class or came as refugees were not included in the study. And all participants arrived with professional-level education gained in their country of origin. Participants came from 21 countries: China (15), India (11), nations in eastern Europe (Russia 3, Ukraine 3, former Yugoslavia 2, Romania 1, Albania 1), and nations in Central and South America (Argentina 1, Colombia 2, El Salvador 1). A majority of participants had completed a college diploma in Canada, while a few completed master's degrees and other courses related to professional certification or licensure. See Appendix G for a summary of the participants’ origins and education and employment backgrounds.

**Procedures**

All procedures described here were part of Professor Charles P. Chen’s (2009–2010) original research study on new immigrant professionals’ career and retraining experiences in Canada and were undertaken with approval from the ethical review board at the University of Toronto. The present study is an extension of Dr. Chen’s study, so it was granted approval by the research ethics board at the University of Toronto under the same protocol; no separate ethical review was required.

Participants who were eligible for inclusion in the study were 80+ participants who had been interviewed between 2011 and 2014 as part of Dr. Charles P. Chen’s (2009–2010) OISE/University of Toronto research exploring the career development and retraining experiences of immigrant professionals. The recruitment process for these interviews ensured that all interviewees had studied and worked in their countries of
origin and in Canada, and there was some effort to see that interviewees from a variety of immigrant source countries were included. A purposive sampling approach based on a specific criteria (Patton, 2002) was used to select interview transcripts from Professor Chen’s study: in particular, a total population sample of a collection of 80+ transcribed interviews was used. This was useful for reducing the effects of researcher bias because this researcher was not the only interviewer, and the interviewers were not aware of which questions were to be explored in this study (Patton, 2002). As is typical for grounded theory methodology, the researcher developed questions as the analysis proceeded, and incorporated additional interview transcripts in order to answer the new questions as they emerged (Foley & Timonen, 2015). Transcripts were selected and analyzed until data saturation had clearly occurred, that is, until new themes and concepts ceased to emerge from the additional data (Loonam, 2014). Creswell (1998) suggested that 20–30 participants should be sufficient for a grounded theory study. This study’s goals related to managing participant cultural bias by ensuring a broad range of source countries were represented, as well as the goal of achieving data saturation, resulted in the inclusion of 52 transcripts. The present study used transcripts from more than the recommended 30 participants in order to ensure representation from a variety of immigrant source countries to reflect the great diversity among newcomers to Canada during this time period.

**Recruitment**

Recruitment took place primarily from late 2011 to the middle of 2012, a period of 6 to 9 months. Recruitment posters (see Appendix A) were posted in subway trains and community organizations were, with their consent, provided with digital and paper
copies of the posters. These organizations continued to post and to distribute the recruitment poster after the main recruitment period was over, which enabled the addition of further interviewees to the research. Ads were also placed on free classified websites through 2014, which also produced small numbers of additional recruits.

**Data collection**

Potential participants were asked to leave their contact information in the form of a voicemail for follow-up by the researchers. Dr. Chen’s research team members were trained to screen and assess potential participants for suitability for the study, and used telephone and email scripts as guides to ensure that the research, the measures to safeguard confidentiality for the participants, and benefits of the research were described consistently to all potential participants (see Appendix B). Team members then invited suitable and willing participants to attend an interview.

At the interview, participants received an orientation to the interview process (see Appendices C and D) and a basic description of the research. They were informed that the interviews would be audiotaped. They were also warned that they might feel distress as a consequence of discussing their immigration experiences, work life adjustment, and career development experiences, and they were offered referrals to counselling services in support of their well-being. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the research at any time without repercussions (see Appendix C). Then they were asked to provide informed consent if they were still willing to proceed with the interview (see Appendix C). Each participant was provided with the opportunity to read and to discuss the consent form, to ask questions, and to decline proceeding with the interview. No one withdrew from the study at this point. The interviews were conducted
at OISE/University of Toronto, in private interview rooms. Meetings ranged from 45 minutes to 2 hours in length, and each interviewee was given $35 as compensation for their travel and interview time, for which they signed receipts (see Appendix F).

Participants were identified by a code on all records and transcripts in order to maintain their anonymity. All research materials were stored on a password-locked laptop and in a locked drawer in a locked office, to which only members of Dr. Chen’s research team had access.

**Instruments**

**Demographic information form**

After participants consented to participate in the research, they were asked to complete a demographic information form (see Appendix D).

**Interview protocol**

Members of Dr. Chen’s research team conducted semi-structured interviews using a list of open-ended questions laid out in a standard protocol (see Appendix E). The interview protocol was designed to encourage participants to talk about their career development and retraining experiences. In particular, the interview questions probed (a) overall coping, (b) vocational transition from country of origin to Canada, (c) pre-Canada education and retraining in Canada, and (d) work life adjustment. Interviewers sought to elicit detailed accounts of the participants’ experiences.

**Data recording**

For the original study, all interviews were digitally audio recorded. They were transferred to CD-ROM and later transcribed. Transcripts were stored in a password-
protected database. For the present study, data points were coded by the researcher and organized using Microsoft Word.

**Data Analysis**

Each transcript was analyzed in two phases. During the first phase, the researcher coded participants’ experiences at a fine-grained level using an open coding strategy under which any word or phrase that might have been related to the topics of interest (work search and retraining) received a code. At this point, themes began to emerge and were gathered in a word processing file, and the researcher spent time sorting and re-sorting them so that her analysis would not settle on a single viewpoint on the phenomenon too quickly. Her primary sorting method was paper cards on a tabletop, with versions captured by photograph and eventually in a word processor again. The themes and categories that emerged were compared to each new transcript as it was analyzed, a practice called constant comparison. Constant comparison allows the researcher to confirm or reject categories and themes as they emerge based on new data (Glaser & Holton, 2004, 2007). This process was repeated until saturation occurred, that is, no new themes emerged as data were added. Data analysis is an ongoing process in the grounded theory approach that continues until data saturation occurs (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Holton, 2004; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

During the second phase of transcript analysis, the experiences were sorted into broader categories and themes, and these were organized into a framework. The generality and specificity of the emergent categories and themes were determined and relationships between categories and themes were discovered as the data was
analyzed. Additional categories and themes were generated, revised, and sometimes removed as the core variables were identified in the process of selective coding.

As recommended by Creswell (1998) and Glaser and Holton (2004), and modelled by researchers such as Charmaz (2003, 2006), the researcher ensured that her own previous knowledge and biases were clear and remained so throughout the analytical process using notes and memos. According to Glaser and Holton (2007), the researcher's pre-existing knowledge can have an undue influence on the research, so the researcher left a gap in time of several semesters between writing the literature review contained in the previous chapter and beginning data analysis.

**Presentation of the Research Findings**

Table 1 outlines the categories and the associated themes and subthemes.

**Table 1**

*Themes of Work Search and Retraining Experiences*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Main Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work Search Themes</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy and Expectations</td>
<td>Available opportunities do not match level of education/experience, or expectations (n=37, inclusive of</td>
<td>Differing economies and labour markets (n=15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>main theme and subthemes)</td>
<td>Starting in lower-level jobs (n=11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Survival jobs (n=23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Search Difficulties</td>
<td>Overqualification/underutilization (n=19)</td>
<td>Seeking work in the same field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seeking work in the same field (n=39 inclusive of main theme and subthemes)</td>
<td>Canadian Experience (n=16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Volunteering (n=6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What I brought from home (n=25)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Work Search Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Main Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job search strategy</td>
<td>Needs more than job ads (n=35)</td>
<td>Networking is cultural (n=18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Job search is different in Canada (n=20 inclusive of subthemes)</td>
<td>Job search is different in Canada (n=16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interviewing is different (n=8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chance and Opportunity</td>
<td>There is chance and there are opportunities (n=22, inclusive of subthemes)</td>
<td>Chance plays a role (n=19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Take advantage of opportunities (n=4)</td>
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### Retraining Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Main Themes</th>
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<td>Retraining and Results</td>
<td>Retraining planning requires consideration of many factors for some, few for others (n=35 inclusive of main theme and subthemes)</td>
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<td>Needing a whole new credential (n=23)</td>
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<td>Retraining is challenging (financially, other) (n=10)</td>
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Many additional themes were discovered during the analysis, however only the most frequently occurring themes are presented. The most significant category discovered was *economy and expectations*, which centred around the many ways that participants' work lives were affected by tangible economic factors, and how their expectations for the Canadian labour market were affected by the economies and labour markets in their countries of origin. The other very significant theme was *retraining and results*, which centred around the very complicated process of finding and selecting retraining programs, and managing life and family around them.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS:
ECONOMY AND EXPECTATIONS

This chapter presents the themes that emerged from the participants’ descriptions of their experiences finding work. The theme of economy and expectations for the labour market centred around the mismatch between recent immigrant professionals’ credentials, which they had understood would be valued in the Canadian labour market as they were valued in their home countries’ labour markets, and their experiences having to take low-skill work and survival jobs. Study participants had also understood their experience would be valued in the Canadian labour market as it was valued in their home countries’ labour markets because of how the Government of Canada had evaluated their backgrounds, but discovered this was not so. A few participants acknowledged that differences between national economies might have a role to play in the discrepancies. They also discussed their experiences taking low-skill work and survival jobs.

Canadian Labour Market Does Not Match Level of Education / Expertise or Expectations

A few participants realized in the course of their struggle to find suitable work that their expectations had been shaped by the large, labour-driven economies and labour markets in their countries of origin, which are markedly different than the Canadian counterparts (n=37). Their education and skills might have been unique or highly sought after in their countries of origin, however in Canada their expertise did not seem to be
valued in the same way. This flew in the face of their expectations that they would find employment in Canada comparable to their previous employment.

Participants’ work searches were also shaped by economic events over which they had no control. Participant P4 explained succinctly how his expectations and an economic downturn affected his job search: the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center caused a significant downturn in economies around the world which lasted quite some time, and in addition Canada has a relatively small labour force relative to the size of the economy. He said he met a large number of professionals born and educated in Canada who were also struggling to regain employment. The length of time one can expect to search for work in Canada surprised him, since his experience in India was very different:

You normally will land some job at a reasonable pay within a month’s time. That’s pushing it. Within 2 weeks, you’ve got something in hand. Here, it’s like 6 to 9 months is an accepted norm for you to land a job, I’m not looking at people like me who are new to the country, but people who have been here 15, 20 years of professional work, looking. To me that was shocking, and these are competent, educated people. It’s the size of the economy.

Other participants also noted that the timing of their immigration contributed to some of the difficulties they experienced. One participant immigrated in April 2001 and was seeking work in the financial services sector. Then after September 11, 2001, the whole sector came to a crashing halt. Not only were no jobs created in that industry for quite some time, many individuals lost their jobs due to the global economic impact of the terrorist attack on Wall Street. While such newcomers might have found work if the attack
had not occurred, they had little chance at finding work in the finance industry when they were competing with experienced local candidates under those circumstances. Note that the participant had been seeking work for 5 months before the attack without success.

**Differing Economies and Labour Markets**

A number of participants noted that there were differences between the economic structures of Canada and their countries of origin that affected the labour market (n=15). As was common among the participants, P46 had come to Canada believing that his engineering education would land him a job in some area of the business world, especially since Canadian companies invest so much in technology, and he spoke French. He also had additional education in business management. He realized later, he admitted, that he was overconfident because his perspective on his value to the Canadian labour market had been shaped by his experiences in the tiny Romanian economy in which he was quite sought after. In Canada, he was not a rare commodity, and he had chosen to land in English-speaking Toronto rather than in French-speaking Montreal. He had very limited skill in English, and in Toronto’s labour market his French was not as valuable without fluency in English as well.

Participant P36 described having become a manager only 6 months after having completed university in her country of origin, and expected that with her 3+ years of experience doing that she would be able to find a similar job in Canada. In the end, she had to retrain to land even entry-level employment in her field.

Medical doctors ought to be valuable in the Canadian labour market, since countless small communities across the country are lacking family physicians and specialists. One participant, an American actor who worked for a time as a trainer of
immigrant physicians, shared a unique perspective in this research because she was an immigrant who had also had experience training immigrants. She observed that prejudice in the Canadian physician licensing system seemed to be one cause of the internationally trained physicians’ inability to earn their licenses. She had observed that some of the doctors she worked with seemed to have all the technical and language skills required to serve as effective physicians and yet they had difficult becoming licensed in Canada. She also described working with other doctors who demonstrated a genuine lack of one or both sets of the necessary skills to earn their licenses, and she said she felt sorry for them.

Medical doctors who participated in the study concurred with her observations that sometimes prejudice in the Canadian physician licensing and hospital systems was making it difficult for foreign-trained doctors to obtain Canadian credentials. One physician, P16, experienced disbelief when he was told by hospitals that he would have to earn his medical license here in order to serve in hospital administration (versus patient care). He was well into midlife when he immigrated with his family and discovered only after arriving that he could not break into the hospital system as an administrator. He was told he should re-do his medical education, which is expensive and would not let him earn enough to take care of his family, so he was forced to change his working plans.

Participants described looking for work in Canada as very different from what they expected. Some participants arrived expecting that their job applications would garner positive responses, and others seemed to have acquired some false expectations from local employment resource centres about the likelihood of positive
responses to their applications. Participants said they expected to receive more responses to their job applications, especially when they believed they were fully qualified for the positions they had applied for. According to participant P25, a bank manager once explained to him that the volume of applications meant that they could not respond to every applicant:

What they teach you is, at the job centre, if you see you qualify about 80%, then you send your resume. I saw many positions where I qualified more than 80%, even with Russian language…this gives me an advantage, and you never hear back from them, that was also unexpected and you don’t understand why. …[Later] the [bank] manager said, for 3 hours the job posting was open to people, and during 3 hours she got 200 or 300 resumes….They can’t just reply everyone.

Regional and local labour markets affect the job search success of all job seekers. Acknowledging this, one participant described his reasons for planning to move northward, maybe as far as the Northwest Territories, or westward to Alberta. He believed there would be less competition for work outside of Toronto because fewer immigrants and fewer Canadian-born workers are willing to go there. He also noted that shifts in Canada’s economy, such as the shrinkage in manufacturing and the slow and steady growth of the natural resources sector, are factors that would create employment opportunities in the smaller urban centres in rural areas. Another participant described how he had assessed the entire Canadian labour market in his area of expertise and landed in the Toronto area because there was a concentration of suitable companies there. He explained, “I expected to find a job in the same kind of company, and… I think that there were five or more glass companies in the same area, near Toronto, but
unfortunately it’s very difficult to get in….There was no job opening within several years” (P29).

Economic downturns affect everyone, including immigrants, however because immigrant professionals lack easily recognizable credentials and experience they seem to struggle more. One participant described taking two and three part-time survival jobs during an economic recession. He explained that he “started working at McDonald’s, in my simple mind, at least I’d get a meal at 50%, at Subway, I’d be able to eat a sub sandwich when I’m working, cover those costs, so it went from there. And then I kept applying, and just kept applying” (P14). P30 described learning that these survival jobs were likely to be necessary from immigrants who had landed in Canada in the years before she did, including her husband, which helped her to adjust her expectations about how long it would take to re-enter her field. She accepted the need to work in low-skill jobs temporarily as an opportunity to gain experience and learn about Canadian culture. However, not all immigrants were able to flex their expectations like this. Unaccustomed to winter or to living in a basement to reduce living costs, the challenges of finding work and simply living were greater than P31, a computer programmer, expected. When the job search went beyond just a few months, he felt frustrated with everything in his environment and his mental health suffered.

Some immigrant professionals turned to retraining as a solution to unemployment. They described using an assessment of the labour market to choose their educational and vocational direction. One participant described leaving manufacturing and entering the service industry, because “I don’t want to continue to work in the manufacturing jobs, any kind of, because it has potential that the industry’s
in despair after several years” (P29). The participant was aware that the Canadian economy had been shifting away from manufacturing and toward the service and knowledge economies for the last two or three decades. Newcomers to Canada during this period had been emigrating largely from countries that have been taking over the manufacturing sector from North America (for example, China and India).

Participant P39 explained that the Government of Canada indicated that given his profession, finance, his prospects for employment in Canada were good, which was why he applied to immigrate. But upon arrival he found that the wages are unstable in finance because they are typically commission-based:

The problem was that in finance, a lot of job openings, even for new immigrants, they are strictly on commissions….From a social point of view you are most like established. You go to some office, you work with people, professional, language, and so and so. But, from some points of view, it’s not necessarily that you could make enough money in order to reward yourself [appropriately] in that position, in that company, in that profession.

Working on commission created a great deal of discomfort for him. He also pointed out that a lack of a regular paycheque prevents one from planning anything more than how to make more money. Regularity in pay, he noted, permits one to plan for education, to save, and so on.

When able to plan for it, some study participants chose to retrain out of passion for a subject. Participant P38 appreciated the opportunity to advance her skills in a related but new field. She had always wanted to study law, and because of Canada’s affordable part-time college programs, she was finally able to pursue a paralegal credential. This was only possible because she could keep her “day job” and take
classes in the evening. She also noted that in Canada, unlike in her home country, all
the luxuries that she could imagine were available through hard work, that is, they were
accessible to anyone regardless of family connections or social status. She found this
extremely motivating.

Some people turned to retraining as a solution to unemployment, but failed to
assess the local labour market before pursuing additional education in their areas of
interest. One participant, who holds a PhD and taught at the university level in her
country of origin, returned to school in her country of origin to complete a Bachelor of
Education to become a school teacher on the advice of a friend who also immigrated
and was able to find work the school system in Ontario. But given the poor prospects for
new teacher graduates in Ontario, she was only able to find work as a supply teacher.
As she explained, “[gaining employment is] why I went home and did my BEd, that
didn’t help me. That’s unsettling. … Now I am a BEd. and I don’t have anything” (P23).
She knew that additional qualifications might help her land a full-time teaching job, but
without a regular income she could not afford to take any more courses. She had taken
student loans to complete a diploma in clinical research at a small private college as
well, also in an industry with poor prospects, which also did not lead to employment.

Education was not a magic bullet for these immigrant professionals because they
were still competing with other new entrants to the labour market with degrees. P44,
who completed an MBA in Canada, had not thought ahead about how he would do in
competition with students from other MBA programs when he graduated. He had also
expected a higher initial salary than he ended up earning. P46 retrained three times but
was unable to secure steady work in any of the fields in which he trained. His inability to
land long-term employment led to him questioning himself each time he returned to school:

I was actually, you know, having to convince myself that it was something, it would work this time. Technology, was that a total misstep? Was it the circumstance, or was it me that I did not see that it was not going to work? Right? So, is this the next one that's going to work?

Since all immigrant professionals who participated in this study had earned a university degree or diploma in their countries of origin before they immigrated to Canada in addition to completing some additional training here, there is evidently more to gaining employment than simply having an education.

**Starting in Lower-Level Jobs**

Some of the immigrant professionals reported that they never imagined they would find themselves doing the kind of low-level job they found themselves in after landing in Canada (n=11). Sometimes their jobs were so embarrassingly unskilled that they lied to their families back home about what work they were doing. For example, a former bank manager began working as a “bag boy” at a local grocery store after several retraining attempts did not lead to work in accounting or banking. His wife, a former human resources manager, worked as a cook. He said: “My mom asked me, ‘How long are you going to go to school? How old are you now?’...But I couldn’t explain how it’s a different country, and I never could tell her what kind of job I’m doing here. She would be shocked. So, I never tell the truth to her” (P43). He also said he had given up on finding better employment.
P20, who had been forced to shift her career from managing a board of education and affecting thousands of families to accounting and administration on a much smaller scale, found restarting her career so uncomfortable that she advised others thinking about immigrating to Canada not to come. She said:

I would tell them, if they do have good work back home, don’t come. I know a lot of people, they’re working, they have a good job over there, why come here to start from beginning? Back home, they do have networking, that’s very valuable. It’s not only for one generation, it’s maybe two generations, three generations could be set up, built up. Why lose that?

Some of the immigrant professionals deliberately sought much lower-status and lower-pay positions in order to break into the labour market more quickly. They were imitating the path of fresh graduates from colleges and universities. For example, a former bank vice president completed a basic Canadian finance credential, removed his PhD in economics from his resume, found entry-level work in the banking industry and began to work his way up. He noted that he had discovered that in the banking sector in Canada, unlike his home country of Bangladesh: “Nobody will give you mid-level positions here from beginning. You have to go through everything; from beginning, you have to go through. Otherwise, it’s very difficult to get a mid-level job” (P47).

Similarly, P26, an engineer, had concluded, based on research he did before he arrived in Canada, that he would have to start in entry-level jobs, even though he had a family to take care of, in order to learn the expectations for professional engineers in Canada and to develop his English skills before pursuing his license. He pursued this
path and did eventually succeed in earning his license. He explained how the network he developed in lower-level jobs supported him through this process:

I just think about finding entry-level work. That is a real work; I can take that advantage to get used to the technical codes and work environment. So, that is the first step....So, at the beginning, I just watch...how they are working....The first job provided help. And then, got license, and then I need to find my higher-level jobs. After I got license, I find [consulting] engineer job....But later, I changed to OPG...when I work in the consulting companies and I handled them, and then they remembered me.

Likewise, P17, an architect, noted that he had needed an entry-level job in order to break into his profession in Canada, even if it was low-paying, because he required supervised hours of experience and it would enable him to maintain his sense of professional self. He described his strategy:

I took the first job which pays me less than a call centre but allows me to get my foot into the profession. So that probably was a good decision, I think. Looking back, I think I did a good decision of getting into the profession first without bothering to what I get paid.

He also succeeded in completing the master’s degree and hours of experience he needed to obtain his license.

Immigrant professionals’ expectations seem to come from a variety of places, not the least from conversations they have with others they perceive as knowledgeable. A former head of human resources for a large corporation in India reported that his peers had estimated he would be able to find a fairly senior job in Canada. He said:
I was made to understand you’ve got to start a couple of levels below what you were, and I was willing to do that. I thought the expectation was that I would come in and land a job fairly quickly, maybe not be as head of human resources for a group of companies, but probably the second or third in command at least. (P4)

He had not landed such a job as of the date of the interview, so the people he had considered experts were actually incorrect.

Based on several dozen conversations with other immigrant professionals who had also not been able to find work with the same status and income they had enjoyed prior to emigrating, P21, an engineer, decided to retrain completely in another field. Starting at the bottom had meant that his career went nowhere for more than a year, and he was learning through networking why he was passed over for promotion to managerial roles:

My first job was the warehouse job for 15 months….Basically, the basic skill I learned there was teamwork… And then I also kept on trying to apply for senior managerial positions there. But, never got into that. Again, they always thought I don’t have the necessary skills to lead the team….I wouldn’t say I was surprised because, basically I was networking well and connecting with people, trying to understand what they went through.

These experiences, and the research he conducted through his network, led him to pursue a Master of Business Administration (MBA).

Restarting a career in a lower-status job can challenge one’s sense of self. P3 described how she had seen prideful others fail to succeed, while she believed her
success had come through humility as she learned how to fit into her new field.

Similarly, P51 described how a positive attitude and hard work led to her success:

I avoid other immigrants because there is a lot of resentment and anger. They want things done immediately. I don’t believe in that. If you want something, you have to work hard to get it….I’ve found, if you’re super negative, because I was there, I was negative at one point, it only makes things difficult, it only works against you. So, I’m very happy. It’s been a good experience. If I had to do it again, yes, I would still do the same, starting from the bottom, the job clubs, the MBA.

Post-retraining, like younger college and university graduates, immigrant professionals still usually have to take low-skill jobs to get their new career moving. A physician, P49, who retrained in health and safety, attempted to create her own entry point into a desirable company. She applied for one position, then when she was called for an interview, told the company that she intended to work her way into another role. Up to that point she had been applying for and attempting to network her way into hospital-type health and safety positions with no success:

So I went to the The Bay on Queen Street…and I applied there, and I got a call and they asked, and I said, “You know, I wanna tell you right now I’m lookin’ for a job to stay with the company in a different level. I wanna do health and safety there.” They say, “Okay, come to the interview.”… When they call me, I said ‘I wanna do health and safety in The Bay and wanna do it right. And I wan’ you become the best company in health and safety in the retail, and that you teach other companies and you will get reim-bursed from WSIB because you are a leader in this area.’”
They hired her for a retail position because of her retail sales experience and, although after a year working there, she was still working in retail, her plan to break into health and safety had not changed.

**Survival Jobs**

When immigrant professionals land in Canada, they are expected to have enough money to last around 3 months, several participants explained. However, due to the cost of living in Toronto and the cost of setting up a new household, that money was often used up within 6 weeks. The average job search for a professional is much longer than that, so newcomers who participated in this study said they were forced to take whatever work they could find. Many study participants said finding employment quickly was a priority (n=23). As P35 remarked:

> [Work] makes me feel confident, and also will sponsor my wife to be here. I don't want to put her in a dilemma situation. I want to provide her a good environment, instead of a poor status. So that’s very important.

Participant P28 refused to take a low-skill job; she was offended by the recommendation of job search consultants at a government-funded centre that she take a survival job. Instead she spent her time learning about Canadian society and attempting to find a professional-level job through staffing agencies, which did not lead to employment. Her inability to find professional work saddened her and, in the end, she retrained in a related field.

Several study participants described holding several part-time and contingent jobs to make ends meet. For example, P27 worked as a “background actor, still doing my delivery on foot, and my waiter stuff….What’s the point to sit on Saturday night when
I can do something like working as a server, for instance. Three or four sources of income.” He went on to explain that:

I knew some stories of professional experts that it takes some time, maybe a year, maybe 6 months at least to find a first job....That’s why I can start from doing very simple working in construction sites or delivering pizza.

P3 juggled shifts as a cleaner at a hotel with on-call work doing packing at a factory. P14 worked three fast-food service jobs, which had the advantage of providing low-cost and quick food, and when he was not making sandwiches, he spent time learning about the financial services industry in Canada at the public library.

For most participants, finding these low-skill jobs through agencies and acquaintances was fairly easy, but there were exceptions. P46 described how he had bragged about his skills at an agency, and then failed their test for one administrative placement because his English proficiency was too low to permit him to pick up voicemails and complete order forms. That experience took a toll on his confidence and pushed him to seek out survival jobs requiring even less skill than call centre work.

Some kinds of survival jobs are worse than others. But perspective mattered too; for example, P48 found a job at a factory where she could sit, which made it not so bad. Another study participant, P49, described how she became a very effective retail clothing salesperson and also found a social network:

Another manager saw, she says, “No, look at her. She’s such a lady. She’s not gonna sell anything.” In 3 months, I become shark; they call me shark…because I sold a lot. If I sold, I never sell one piece; I sell like whole sample outfit….When people visit the store, they allow me to take
an extra break, go out for coffee for customers because even the days I wasn't in the stores, I did sales. People came, and they purchase under my name. So, I loved it, and I got many, many friends from there.

For most participants, working in low-skill jobs was both disheartening and not directly applicable to furthering their career goals. Jobs in factories and warehouses tended, on average, to be very unpleasant experiences for the immigrant professionals. P21, a mechanical engineer, carried heavy boxes all day in a warehouse for more than a year. P29 reported:

I took a survival job for almost 1 year, and that makes me very sick. I don’t know why this company doing things like that. It’s a small company. We just going there, work as a general labourer, and they suppose us to do something that we don’t know how to do that, and we ask our supervisor, who say, “I don’t know either. Do whatever you can.”…And when things screwed up in that company, everybody said, “Just forget it, pretend that did not happen.” I can’t ask that, how come to survive in this country?

Occasionally these low-skill jobs turned into opportunities for the immigrant professionals to use their skills once the companies understood what they could offer. P3 discovered a passion for social services by volunteering, and: "meanwhile, I went to the factory to work for the money. Then, really, I was thinking, 'I won't end up like this'."

P41 said:

I was lucky to get a job in a factory which was a sort of engineering environment; however, the job opening was for effective assembler. I had to accept a very low hourly wage, hoping that one day they will see my qualification. And, in fact, they have, within a few weeks, recognized my qualification, and they allowed me to be in charge of their testing laboratory.
Unfortunately, and ironically for this immigrant, the operation was relocated to China soon after, and he was laid off. Another engineer, P1, found a job as a machine operator and labourer until the company noticed his skill and trained him to do industrial electrician work.

There is little to learn in a low-skill job. P21 noted that at the survival job he held for over a year, he learned teamwork, and had also begun to gain insight into the cultural aspects of team leadership. This was exceptional: most participants, even individuals with very positive attitudes, could not identify new skills they learned from their survival jobs. A few participants were able to describe their progress in terms of learned professionalism in their roles and increases in salaries they received as they made career moves. For instance, P42, who was retraining in accounting:

started using experience to get more money, I wasn’t concerned about building….Then I got another job, the next job after a year, I applied to get more money. Each job was about a $7,000 increase in annual salary, so, I went from 24, to 30, to 37 [thousand].

Like the many Canadians who survive on the provincial minimum wage, which was lower at the time of the interviews, immigrant professionals struggled to pay for necessities and felt sad when they could not afford luxuries such as giving Christmas gifts. P49, a cardiologist by training, “couldn’t go out. I feel very, very bad. For example, Christmas was coming; I can’t give gifts my friends.” American immigrant P15 said that being a cleaner in a hotel was like being a slave, especially in very expensive Vancouver. For P33, who realized he would have to retrain, there was frustration because:
The minimum pay rate is so low here, you’re not able to have any sort of savings. For example, if I compare it with Australian standard, the minimum pay rate is $15 in Australia, so no matter what kind of job you do, your minimum pay rate itself is higher, so you are able to live a better living standard. Here, the standard of life itself is low because you are getting a low pay scale.

As a result, he and many other newcomers could not save for their educations and were forced to borrow to pay for school when they decided to retrain.

One study participant who had a doctorate in biology and taught at a university became trapped in survival jobs. She described how she was encouraged to pursue a high school teaching career by fellow immigrants in Canada. She decided to do her teacher training in India, apparently without consulting anyone in Canada about the value of doing so, and was unable to find full-time work as a teacher when she returned to Ontario. By the time of the interview she had ceased to network or apply for jobs because, she said, she could not afford to miss a day of work at her shelf-stocking job at a retail store to go for an interview. Her work history in Canada is typical of the highly skilled individual unable to break into one of the professions for which she had trained. Her description is provided in full to show the power of the vicious circle of contingent employment from which she was unable to break out:

First, I did Subway. Then I got that city community job, and that woman was really bad. … I left the job and started doing the security job at the airport.…After the security job, and then also before security I did at a factory. It was hard on the factory and they paint the car parts and stuff. I couldn’t do that. I worked for 3 or 4 days, but it was temperature and I couldn’t – you have to run all the time. It was line work and I couldn’t do it.
Then I got a security job and then I volunteer in the school. Then at the airport, I got another job, it was helping the people with disabilities, so I did that wheelchair job, transporting the people from one place to another or to the plane. Make them sit. I did that wheelchair job. I got into teaching for this thing was also not permanent. Part time. Sometimes they call or not, so I’m doing another job which is like I’m work for the stores where they put the stuff….I am not so settled. Right now, I am also doing odd jobs also. So, even if I am a citizen, I didn’t get any job till now….Even if I apply every day, I apply so if at the end of the year I apply to 365 jobs, if you don’t get anything, if they call me for interview, they call just to fill their five people because they need five people and I don’t go to my school, I lose my money from the school. If I have to go for interview, I lose my job, my 1 day because I am paid by day. I am not applying because if I go to apply, then I am one of those five, but I am not one who is being hired. I know that because those people they hired, they already know that. That’s how it works….So, I don’t want to, [but] I gave up. (P23)

P43, who used to manage a retail bank, described how he struggled to keep working in his original field after networking his way into a contract that did not lead to additional professional work. Now he takes any work that his health permits after having taken several positions that he discovered he could not do. His account is also provided in full to demonstrate the difficult decisions faced by professionals whose credentials are not recognized:

When I came here, I used to believe that because of my experience, I’ll get a job for sure. But now I know that’s not going to happen. So, any job which I can do, which the level of my health and physical capacity allows me to, that is good….The first job, that was through a friend, the secretary to a printing place. I got the night job; it didn’t suit my health. I did for 2–3 days, I was sick….Then I was sent to a factory that makes coffee cups,
just like that. I went there for about a month, but I got sick because the noise and level of pollution in the factory, it didn’t suit my health. I felt so sick, I didn’t think it was good for me to go to a factory again. And I did a security guard job for some time but again, that was overnight job, and I had to work on all the night, and I had to go down the stairs in multi-storey buildings, like 15th–17th floor. So, after some time, with knee pain, I stopped doing that. Then I did a finance job, which necessitated dealing with customers as a financial analysis consultant. And sometimes I believe that is the right job I can do if I can find customers….I’ve worked in Wal-Mart as customer service rep, but was a physical kind of job. … And I worked at Tim Horton’s. That was again making coffee, serving the customers for some time, but I had to quit because the date of examination was scheduled; I requested a leave, they refused, so I had to quit. [Now my work,] it is a grocery store.

But not all immigrant professionals become trapped in survival jobs. Several participants found that short-term contracts and entry-level but related work led eventually to longer-term and better-paying work in their intended fields. P47, for example, was originally an economist. He worked for a few months as a technician in an electronics manufacturing company while he completed a certification in the finance industry in Canada. He also sought out a mentor in the banking industry, and together these things led to a 1-year contract in banking that led to additional professional work.

**Summary**

The immigrant professionals were surprised by the challenges they faced integrating into the labour market in Canada. Their expectations had been shaped by the Government of Canada’s determination that they were likely to succeed to here because of their backgrounds, and by their experiences in their countries of origin in
which their post-secondary education was more highly valued and economic growth had been more vigorous. Some had expected to take a lower-level job in their fields temporarily, but not to work in retail or as a labourer.
CHAPTER 5

RESULTS:

JOB SEARCH DIFFICULTIES

The theme of job search difficulties emphasizes the fact that many of the participants preferred to pursue careers in the same field that they had qualified for in their country of origin, even though they were forced in most cases to relaunch those careers in entry-level jobs for which they perceived themselves to be overqualified and in which they believed they were underutilized. They described their development of a job search strategy as a highly cultural activity that involved learning to adapt to Canada and Canadian workplaces. Some participants reported that they had not had to search for work at all in their countries of origin, that they had been recruited directly out of university, so this was a very new experience for them.

Overqualification / Underutilization

Many study participants, such as P4, arrived expecting to change career directions but to work in a similar kind of role, and instead found themselves working in jobs for which they were overqualified and/or or underutilized (n=19). P21, who earned an MBA in Canada, explained that:

None of the immigrants I met, and I must have met over 100. None of them were successful in their career life after immigrating here. None of these were at the level that they were in their own country. So, that’s the message I learned very fast. And one of the reasons I went for the MBA.

P16, a physician and former head of a hospital, was told that he would have to earn his medical license in Ontario, perhaps even re-do his medical education, if he
wanted to return to a role in hospital administration, which he found “preposterous”
given his age and experience. Another physician described applying for entry-level jobs
in hospitals and health care which she would not mind doing, and finding that employers
struggled to understand why she would be interested in such roles, which led to them
declining to hire her:

Tell you the truth, 3 years I’m applyin’ for St. Michael Hospital. Three
years. I’m not applyin’ for senior, I’m not applyin’ for decision-makin’ roles.
I’m applyin’ for basic ward clerk; research assistant; file clerk….People
didn’t trust. They couldn’t understand when I applied for entry-level
job….They thought I was either irrelevant or I did something bad back
home. It very, very strange to explain. (P49)

Participants P49 and P43 both expressed the belief that perhaps their skills were threat-
ening to the existing managers, and that was why they were not given the opportunity to
enter the organization even in an entry-level job. Their credentials might have been con-
fusing, rather than threatening, for hiring managers to decipher, since education sys-
tems differ around the world.

Canadian co-workers might judge immigrant co-workers negatively. P28
remarked:

At least I got a professional job, a so-called professional job…and when I
just started this job, I didn’t feel much respect from the co-workers, even
the general labourers, they judged me. I had a feeling that they judge me
by my appearance, and after working with them for a while, I sort things
out, I point the things they can’t see, or they don’t understand at all. Then I
sense some respect from their tone.
Another study participant, P33, believed his work in medical market research was “not something that you need to be highly qualified to get.” He did not believe that his retraining in regulatory affairs was related at all to landing or succeeding in that job. However, more participants than not described having to take non-professional work as a labourer before successfully landing office work, so his retraining may have improved his job prospects despite his belief they did not.

Many immigrant professionals arrive with the minimum amount of money required by the federal government, however that money is used up quickly and earning an income often takes precedence over career development. P17, an architect, described how he had been working in a string of call centres, each one paying him a little more per hour than the last, when he finally received an offer to work in a junior role in an architectural firm for a pittance of a salary. Another study participant, P44, described trying to negotiate with his manager for more responsibility and more money, and, after 2 years in a low-level job, feeling frustrated with his lack of career progress. For both of these professionals, however, these low-paying jobs served as the entry points into their fields in Canada. Other study participants felt that they should have been able to progress faster in their careers than they had if they had not been pushed into lower-level work by the need for an income.

The participants often received mixed messages from employers about the value of their credentials, so it was difficult for them to determine their worth in the labour market. A former professor of economics, P8, noted that he could not land work as an instructor, and yet because of his master’s degree he was often told he was overqualified for other work. Likewise, P14 noted that he had removed his MBA from the
resume he used to get the job he had at the time of the study. The participant remarked that he had begun to receive more responses to his applications when he removed his master’s degree:

This job I got, like I said, by downgrading my qualifications, and by personal influence in the company, because I knew somebody who took my resume in….You don’t get those jobs, even though you’re qualified, unless you know somebody….I found that when I removed my MBA in finance, I got more calls. Like my current job. I removed my MBA….When I mentioned it to my supervisor after getting permanent, he said “I would have never hired you if I saw that.”

Study participants expressed a wide range of views on the value of international and Canadian educational credentials. One study participant wanted to tell potential immigrant professionals not to come to Canada if they had advanced degrees because she had seen so many highly educated people fail to restart their careers. She also wanted to let them know that even if they retrained in Canada, they might not succeed here:

I don’t advise any educated people to come here because all they do is work at Tim Horton’s or McDonalds or they drive taxis or airports. That’s it. But, overqualified people this is called overqualified, you don’t have any jobs for people who are master’s or PhDs, so they just want people these people so that they can use that at Tim Horton’s, what you call those staff at the cash register….Retraining is nothing, just making money. (P23)

Conversely, P35 shared that, in his experience, Canadian education had been valuable preparation for work, and he hoped to engage in additional training and move up in the
organization. He believed that, “in order to get this pretty performance, you have to prepare extra…. That’s why I want to think about another [training] program, like inventory control, to take full advantage our current fund.” The belief that further education would help them to progress on their career paths sometimes provided the motivation they needed to persist when their first jobs in Canada were entry level.

Many of the study participants, such P37, a mechanical engineer who was restarting his career as a mechanic, who had jobs said they were not using all their skills, and they would have to move up in their organization, maybe with the help of a professional network, to be more fully utilized. P39 noted:

I have not realized, at least so far, my potential. The question is: maybe nobody needs that potential. That’s another story. If I would have more support, more help, maybe networking, maybe somebody would be helping me or whatever, I could make for this country considerably more than I have made.

One study participant, P3, who entered a new field of work through retraining, noted that she had to learn to be humble when younger people had more work experience and more responsible jobs than she did. Another study participant explained that she is proud of the way that she restarted her career at the bottom and has achieved significant gains:

I’m not ashamed, and I’m not angry that I had to go through the immigrant experience of starting at the bottom, because I climbed up, and I elevated myself through my own bootstraps…. If I had to do it again, yes, I would still do the same, starting from the bottom, the job clubs, the MBA. (P51)
A third participant, P26, talked about giving himself space to learn the language and
learn about his field here in Canada by taking entry-level jobs rather than seeking posi-
tions equivalent to his last one in his country of origin. P26 explained that:

[Entry-level work] is a real work; I can take that advantage to get used to
the technical codes and work environment. So, that is the first step, and
then I will try to get license. So, at the beginning, I just watch the other
girls, how they are working, and then I just think about what is my experi-
ence and how can I work in the future when I get a license.

**Seeking Work in the Same Field**

Participants in this study were invited to Canada on the basis of their educational
credentials and work experience, in other words, their human capital. A number of
participants believed that, even though they had retrained and ended up working in a
new field, their previous education had also helped them to re-establish themselves in
Canada (n=39). Electrical technician P1 said that his original engineering training had
broad applicability because of the skills he had gained, and, “because we have such a
basis, we just can adapt to the job here and talk through the same section [issues] here.”
Professor, now immigration counsellor, P30 described her exploration into training to get
into public education:

After gathering all the information, I didn’t think I was really kind of in it. I
like to work with adults. That’s my strength….The first lesson I learned
from my retraining is your previous experience and education are going to
be a kind of benefit for you to continue your career life here. Not like many
immigrants said that “whatever I had before, not help here.” No, they are
related….But without the retraining, I never would have realized how im-
portant, how they’re related.
Even P38, a secretary who retrained as a law clerk but ended up working as an executive assistant, found that her new skills still supported her original field.

Several participants retrained in the same field they had worked in before immigrating. P45, a nurse, completed a bridging program – a structured, career-specific curriculum – and found long-term work in nursing. Human resources executive P4 remarked:

I’m good, I’m competent, I’m capable, and it’s just a matter of time, success will come my way….There is no reason why I shouldn’t be successful here, what’s different? Because my interaction with everyone was indicated that I was not competing against something that was extremely high standard….To me it was just a matter of time.

He completed a college certificate in human resource management in order to earn a credential and wound up teaching in the program at the same college and others.

One participant, P11, an immigrant from Uganda, found work with the largest employer in his field (the regional school board), but ended up quitting because of unfounded accusations about poor performance, which he suspected were racially motivated. P11 explained:

I resigned because it was too much….They say, “you were sleeping in class.”…They said that you ignored a disabled person. Those are the cases they were bringing up. Then there was no particular case that you see. You did this to a student here, you did not do this….This area is predominantly Italian, and [I had been told] you cannot teach in this board [because you are Black].

He was still struggling to secure full-time teaching work at the time of the interview.
Some fields are more difficult to break into than others, especially licensed fields. One participant, an architect, described the series of stepping-stone jobs he worked through in order to accumulate the hours he needed to gain his license while also trying to provide for his family:

This office...paid me less than the call centre but which allowed me entering into the profession. I worked for a year; at the end of the year, I still recall my wife had some issues for her teeth....So, then I kind of requested the principals....“I don’t have benefits, and here, the dentist is quite costly. I cannot afford. I have to run the family; I have two kids and stuff like that.” And they said, “Okay, we’ll increase by a dollar an hour.” So, they do that, and I’m not really happy with that. So, then I kind of look around for jobs outside, and I landed into my second job, which was in Oakville....They gave me a rational pay which any intern over here would earn – not looking into my immigrant factor – and they paid me well. (P17)

P26, an engineer who had also earned his license in Canada, described taking the opportunity presented by entry-level and lower-skill work to observe. He said:

The first job provides help. And then, got the license, and then I need to find my higher-level jobs....Later, I find them. I didn’t really find the engineer job. After I got license, I find senior engineer job, directing in a consulting company....I need the first job to get used to the work environment because Canada is different from China, so I needed the first job. And because the job is entry level, I don’t have too much pressure, and the job for me is easier. But although is easier, I just take the advantage to watch the others.

One study participant, an engineer-turned-project manager, described eloquently why searching for work outside one’s original field of work is a poor idea: “you don’t
have a story.” Now responsible for hiring, he understands the challenge employers face sifting through candidates:

I tried changing my field in the first 2 years, and I think that was the biggest mistake I made. Like, there were too many variables when you are trying to change your field. You are changing your current trade. Now, your degree, qualifications, skills are not recognized. Your employment history is not given credit. On top of it, you are also trying to change your field would confuse your employers more than anything else. So, you don’t have a story. Think about employers. I don’t blame employers because there are 100,000 immigrants coming every year from different schools with different degrees with different qualifications from 50–60 countries. And, varied backgrounds, varied job experiences. There is no benchmark and it is not possible in real life to have a benchmark for all of these immigrants to give confidence to the employer that they are on par. So, now when I am an employer, when I try to hire, I face the same problem. When we advertise, we get thousands of resumes, and we don’t have time to go through the resumes. The best selection criteria for us is a candidate who we know through some reference. And that is the shortest, easiest way of hiring. That’s why networking is so very important. (P21)

Another engineer who never earned a license in Canada found very related work to support himself through retraining, since he had experience drafting. P29 “started to work for a professor, because I had a working experience in our country, and have an engineering background, so even I didn’t finish our program [yet], I still can work for him to do some designing working.”

Some kinds of positions can have the effect of pigeonholing a worker. A physician, P49, described being offered a job supervising a clinic that provided cosmetic medical procedures, however she believed accepting a role in such a niche market
would prevent her from working in mainstream health care in the future. As she explained, the offer was from a hair transfer clinic: “This was very interesting; it could give me a start. But still, I can’t go in different directions at the same time….If I apply, they will not consider me in health care again ’cause they would say, ‘Oh, you did cosmetic procedures.’” So she declined the offer. Ironically, she was unable to find work in a health care setting thereafter. P33, a pharmacist who retrained in regulatory affairs, found work in medical market research. With regard to planning his retraining, he said:

Obviously I can’t go into engineering or something like that. Or I cannot go into IT, which is entirely different. There are certain industries that once you start your thing, you got to stay there. It’s not like you can just leave that and you can go start working in an entirely different industry….It’s based on your experience and your knowledge that you get these positions, right?

P31, a computer programmer who retrained in that field in Canada, noted that it still felt new because he re-learned all the principles in English, and this improved his confidence. He was not concerned about being pigeonholed by any particular position:

Because they most likely focus on your skills set, and then they don’t look at your experience of financial, whatever, at least I can get into it. It’s totally different. Even I didn’t change much, even myself didn’t change much, I’m still in the IT field, still working on software development.

Remaining in the same field of work is not always possible for an immigrant professional. For example, P23 arrived in Canada with a doctoral degree and lecturing experience in plant biology but discovered that there are very few available positions in
post-secondary institutions in Canada, especially if one limits oneself to the Greater Toronto Area. As she explained:

I applied at various places. I got a call… and I was interviewed… but then I was not hired. Then I applied to various other universities and I went to [another institution]… and I couldn’t get the job. I applied to various colleges and went volunteer in the schools…. After doing my BEd. I started looking for school jobs because I never thought I would get a job in my own field in universities.

She retrained to teach high school, to continue in a related field, despite the very limited opportunities for teachers at the time. She explained:

First of all, if you are in your same field, then you know this thing and you have strong points. You know what you are doing, and when you are switching from another field then you have to start from zero or from scratch, at least I know the basic principles, and that was my field, so teaching is teaching whether you teach a small kid or 20-year-old or 60. I was confident in this so I thought, I’ll get a job.

Unfortunately, at the time of the interview she had only been able to find on-call work as a supply teacher.

Family needs sometimes forced a change in career direction. P42, a chemist and former teacher, knew that he and his spouse would be living on the opposite side of Toronto from the manufacturing centre, so rather than looking for a job that would involve a long commute he elected to retrain. He chose accounting for the stability and work opportunities, and later teaching for the job satisfaction. He was able to find contract employment teaching high school business and accounting. P42 knew the teaching path would be a challenging one, but:
I guess after the 3 years, I realized that I didn’t really want to work in accounting. I’d been a teacher in the States….That’s when I started thinking it was a little bit more than money, I guess, I wanted to be happy in what I did.

For another teacher, P30, any job that paid for her child’s daycare would suffice because she had learned that teaching was extremely difficult to break into.

P48, a botanist and teacher, retrained as an registered practical nurse (RPN) instead of trying to find work in her original field. She was able to find work as an RPN, which provided the resources she needed to provide better housing for her and her family, she planned to return eventually to her original field of botany. She remarked, “if I can go for the research, like I told you, collecting material, do some kind of job in which I use some microscope, do some data… I will be even far, far more happier than teaching [or nursing].”

For P27, remaining in his field was possible but undesirable because he wanted to take the opportunity provided by immigration to leave engineering, and he also felt the need to take care of his extended family. However, his plan to enter finance was interrupted when he failed a standardized exam to earn a certification. He remarked:

It was pretty stressful. I didn’t know about my problems because when I tried to talk to some working people in the banks and I realized the tellers in the banks have all different backgrounds, like educational background, I tried to make the connections how the system works but I couldn’t find it. That’s why I was pretty frustrated in the end.
He admitted that he might not have given enough effort to this plan because matters in his extended family seemed more significant at the time. He ended up taking a string of contract and casual jobs in the service industry. He wondered:

Maybe I could be successful if I just focused on something. For instance, my brother is an accountant, he’s got a better job, he’s settled….Work and family, that’s it. He does not need anything else. I was, I am mostly keeping an eye on what’s going on with my siblings and relatives and as an eldest son, if I need to be with my parents, I need to be….That’s why I said I can wait, but family is first.

Some immigrant professionals changed fields because they were simply unable to break into their original fields of work. P43, a former bank manager, said that he did not believe he could start a new profession at his age because, “Even here, I haven’t wanted to do something else….I’m still committed to my own profession, if not exactly doing the consulting as manager, a banking job or something still related to that.” Likewise, a former entrepreneur, P44, who was not yet ready to launch a business in Canada, struggled to find a fit as an employee. He said:

I thought I could get something in sales or I could get something in operations; so those were the two areas. Sales I realized was challenging because you have to meet targets, and that has pressure; and I don’t know the people so well. It’s a different cultural thing; sales go down to people. I could do it in India, but here, it’s a different way to do it, so I thought it was a challenge and everyone gets stressed out. So, operations was the next thing.

The decision to retrain in a new field can be based on as few or as many factors as an individual would like to consider. For one engineer, P29, the volume of job
postings in one field of work or another was the primary factor. As he explained, when “You move to a new country, and everything is changed, your experience and education background is not recognized, you have to do something about that. Just abandon all those things and start at the beginning.” Transferable skills can help. Another engineer, P37, transitioned into a new career as a mechanic. Networking helped chemist P42 to find work in accounting. Persistence matters as well, as one engineer, P27, discovered when his plan to enter the finance industry failed. P27 was told:

People came and they are bombarding some places for 2 months before they get hired. I said, you know what? Maybe I wasn’t persistent enough because first of all I needed, I felt deep inside that I needed some flexibility and responsibility for my family, and that’s why last fall I needed to fly back home again, even though if for instance if I were hired, nobody would give me the vacation. And also, as I mentioned, I had to finish my hours and to get some certifications in different places, so maybe [the job search] was [not] my 100% focus.

Immigration provides an opportunity for someone to retrain and change fields in a new work environment, and to apply their original skillset in a different way. By chance, engineer P46 had computer programming skills and found a job in that field in the early days of e-commerce. He came seeking a new career direction:

So I just looked for a job in business, basically….I landed a job with Bell Canada. Again, they were just starting their website, and they needed someone who…had performance indicator skills and then technology skills, to be able to monitor the activity on the website. So, e-commerce activity. So, they had a lot of developers, but they needed someone in the back office to make sense of all the data. So that was basically the first step of going into business.
An engineer from the Middle East, P41, realized he had a passion for environmentalism and policy development, two things he had not studied for his first career. The problem-solving skills he developed as an engineer were useful in his new field, “because engineering is something that teaches you logical thinking, how to think in logical steps. And I found that very useful in my Canadian education experience because with that background of logical things, I could analyze any problem.” He was still completing his master’s degree in political science and environmental policy at the time of his interview, however he was hopeful about his employment prospects.

**Seeking work in the same field: Volunteering**

Many immigrant professionals are advised to volunteer. Volunteering, or interning without pay, in order to get noticed by a potential employer or to gain experience to add to one’s resume may be a distinctly North American phenomenon since the idea had been unfamiliar to most interviewees in this study before they arrived in Canada. A few of the participants were told to volunteer without being told what they might gain in terms of skill development (n=6). P46 explained why the notion of volunteering was difficult for him to understand:

In Europe, and especially in Romania, there’s no – probably there is now, but at the time there was not really very much a focus on voluntary work. A lot of the voluntary work had a special political connotation, if you know what I mean, because all the voluntary work in the socialist political environment was not really voluntary. It was because, you know, someone would ask you to go and you had to, and otherwise – you know, it would be really bad if you didn't.
Contacts in a desired field will often recommend volunteering, however the administrative hurdles to be overcome before bringing a volunteer on board can be so challenging that willing supervisors give up. P49, a physician, was specifically told by someone who worked for what she called “the Office of Foreign-Trained Professionals” to try to find a volunteer opportunity at a hospital. She was pursuing retraining in occupational health and safety, so she approached a large Toronto research hospital. Although she was met with enthusiasm by the department manager, volumes of paperwork involved in bringing her in prevented her from being able to gain experience there. As she explained:

I went to Health and Safety Department. The guy say, “Oh, that’s perfect. I have so many things to do for you. Let’s start next week.” Next week he’s not callin’ me. I call him again, he doesn’t call. Three weeks after he’s tellin’ me, “I went to HR. We need to do a volunteer clearance for your, like, medical exams, your vaccination list, your previous history,” whatever. So, he told me, “I’m so sorry we’re not able to give you volunteerin’ position at this time.”

Perhaps P49 was better off not landing that volunteer role because some organizations take advantage of immigrant professionals’ and recent graduates’ willingness to work for free by keeping them on as volunteers for extended periods of time even though doing so skirts the boundaries of provincial employment law. Another physician, P22, retrained in clinical research and worked for no pay for 2 years at a large research hospital. She had been told she should volunteer, although it seems no one advised her about a reasonable timeframe for a volunteer position or about the applicable labour law. Her voluntary work may have run contrary to the Ontario Employment Standards Act (Mandryk,
2015), because, as she explained, “I got experience in consenting the patient, on interviewing the patient, on making the questionnaire, on everyday approvals, everything related for the job [I got].” In other words, she was doing work for no pay that the hospital would usually pay staff to do, which may have been illegal.

Occasionally employers also skirt the law by bringing newcomers into their organization as volunteers. This is not illegal so long as no job is promised (i.e., unpaid work trials are illegal), however this practice may run contrary to the spirit of the law, which requires the employer to provide a learning experience and gain little or nothing from the volunteer’s work (Mandryk, 2015). Non-profit agencies have developed government-funded integration programs that incorporate language training – often industry-specific – and job search skills training as well as an opportunity for immigrant professionals to complete an unpaid internship. In other words, agencies are paid by the government to create these frequently law-skirting volunteer opportunities. While these programs may create opportunities for newcomers to be noticed by employers as potential hires, and it may improve their confidence and cultural understanding, these internships also fail to teach immigrant professions about their employment rights. For P26, an engineer, a government-funded agency called a number of consulting companies in which he expressed interest and secured him a volunteer opportunity that led to paid employment and helped him to eventually earn his license. However, his experience was unusual among the research participants in the present study.

Some fields of work are so competitive that volunteering as a means of networking and demonstrating one’s skills is necessary. P23, the botanist who returned to her country of origin to complete a BEd after immigrating to Canada in order to
access the teaching profession in Canada, missed out on networking opportunities because of her decision about where to complete this credential. After returning to Canada, she spent a year volunteering on and off at a nearby school. The principal there helped her secure a spot on the supply teacher list for the region and calls her to offer supply teaching opportunities. That principal was also an immigrant to Canada, and P23 believes that her understanding of the challenges of being an immigrant led her to help. The need to volunteer in schools in order to network and prove oneself is embedded in the teaching profession, and thus affects the career paths of all teachers regardless of their affecting immigration status.

Newcomers lose their networks of fellow professionals, and often their references as well, when they emigrate. Volunteer work can help them to develop a new network of colleagues and generate new references. P22, who volunteered in a hospital after her retraining in clinical research, explained that she believed she had needed both her Canadian education and the references from colleagues in the department in which she was volunteering to land her paid job in a related department.

Beyond simply helping them to get noticed by an employer, volunteer work may help immigrant professionals to understand Canadian work culture and develop the confidence that they needed to be competitive in the hiring process (P2, P23). However, taking unpaid work is a luxury that many newcomers, many people in general, cannot afford. Some immigrant professionals juggle two or three part-time or casual jobs to make ends meet; working for no pay means risking not making rent. For example, when full-time work as a teacher proved to be unobtainable, P23 pursued a diploma in clinical research. But she could not volunteer to gain experience in that field because her
spouse fell ill, and she was the sole source of income for the family. She remarked that her lack of experience in clinical research was why she had not, at the time of the interview, been able to find full-time work in that field. P24, a midwife, volunteered in a hospital maternity ward to support women up to and during delivery, but the licensing process was out of reach for her, so she could not be employed in that role, and she had to stop volunteering to spend her time searching for other work.

**Seeking work in the same field: “Canadian Experience”**

Several study participants struggled both with the notion of Canadian experience in general, and how in particular they would acquire any if no organization would hire them (n=16). P14, a financial services professional, wondered: “They’d ask you, ‘Do you have any Canadian experience?’…Do you read numbers any different here from what we do over there?” As an accountant, P19 was frustrated because she could not gain experience doing accounting in Canada unless someone would give her a chance, but: “people wouldn’t even bother to respond [to applications]. There was only one who told me, ‘Well, you are not qualified since you don’t have Canadian experience.’ But other than that, it was completely dead.”

A former bank manager, P43, experienced confusion over the concept:

I don’t understand what is meant by “Canadian experience” because I have worked in several places in Canada, and officially, I did gain Canadian experience. But it didn’t help me to find any better job….My first job – the banking was the same way, in Asia and America, and most exams were exact with a little bit [of] differences. Mostly was the same. So, when they say, “‘Canadian experience,” it really doesn’t mean anything to me.
Many study participants reported working as volunteers in a variety of organizations and businesses when their job searches did not result in employment because they were told they needed Canadian experience. Some of these volunteer experiences were organized formally through retraining programs and government-funded integration programs. For P2, a scientist who retrained in career advising, volunteer work and a school internship improved her confidence and increased her understanding of Canadian workplace culture. She also secured her first paid job through her internship, which was an unusual experience for the study participants. Likewise, P50, an accountant, realized that the lack of Canadian experience was preventing her from gaining employment. It was “like a circle,” she remarked. So she participated in computer and accounting courses through the local school board and was then able to secure both an unpaid internship and then a paid internship through a non-profit organization called Career Edge, which led to long-term employment.

Other participants found volunteer experiences independently. I would like to note that many of these volunteer opportunities did not seem to meet the Ontario Employment Standards Act criteria for legitimate unpaid work, however the legality of different working situations goes beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, many of these volunteer experiences added to the participants’ understandings of Canadian workplace culture, improved their language skills, and provided them with local references that helped them to land paid work. For instance, P13, an accountant, was advised by an immigrant settlement agency to find volunteer work in her field. She found such an opportunity in a large IT company. Her several months there “really helped me a lot improve my language, also I put that in my resume, it really works.”
There are people and organizations that take advantage of immigrant professionals’ perceived need to gain Canadian experience. One study participant, a physician, completed a diploma in clinical research, and volunteered at a hospital for 2 years before she landed a paid role. P22, as noted above, credited the experience she gained while volunteering as well as the retraining she did with providing the skills she needed to gain paid employment. But it took 2 years. She reported that she landed her first paid position just as her family began packing their belongings and preparing to return to their country of origin because they had lost all hope that they would be able to settle in Canada successfully.

Gaining Canadian volunteer experience to break out of the cannot-get-experience-without-experience cycle is fine if one can afford not to work, but paying for the privilege is out of the question for most. P10 reported that someone offered to retrain him and arrange a volunteer opportunity in accounting for a large fee, which he declined. Another study participant, P23, pointed out that she had to work to support her family and repay her student loans, so she could not volunteer, and therefore could not break into her field despite her Canadian retraining:

First, I did the BEd. Then I did [several additional qualifications in teaching]. I did some counselling course. I did a business leadership and this management course [program]. Then I did a clinical research associate course [program]….I don’t have time to volunteer now. That I did just to switch my field so I go to hospitals and do research so I can be a clinical research associate. I don’t have time for that because I cannot volunteer, I don’t have any Canadian experience for that.
When study participants were offered a wage for their first forays into their field in Canada, that wage was sometimes very low even when their previous experience should have been recognizable to potential employers. P51, formerly a consultant in his country of origin with a prestigious transnational finance company, was repeatedly offered a very low wage, probably the minimum wage at the time, despite having obviously relevant work experience and Canadian volunteer experience as well:

I did the job information interviews. I would contact companies and ask to speak to, insert title….Just to get an idea of what was required to do the job, what entailed, what skills, what they looked for, what’s the Canadian experience….It was pretty much the focus of those job clubs. “Oh, you don’t have Canadian experience, you need to get it and one way of getting it is volunteering.” So, I was volunteering. In some of my interviews, that came up. “Oh, you have no Canadian experience, I’m afraid that I’m only going to pay you $6 an hour.” I told someone, “I’m afraid I cannot accept that, that is not sufficient to live on.” “Oh, okay, nope, we’re not hiring you.” It is what it is, right? Eventually I did get a job [with a livable wage].

Gaining experience by taking low-wage Canadian work turned out to be a good strategy for some study participants. P26, an engineer, described how he elected to take a step-by-step approach to career development by taking entry-level work rather than immediately seeking out his engineering license and a job comparable to the one he had in his country of origin, in part due to his weak language skills, and in part because he required Canadian experience to earn his license. He used entry-level work as training grounds for developing his English and developing references for his license application later on. Watching his colleagues work let him see that he had strong technical skills relative to many of them even if his language skills needed improvement.
What does having Canadian experience provide an immigrant professional? One study participant described it as “reading between the lines and…teamwork” (P21). But having Canadian work experience does not guarantee employment either, as noted by another participant who had only managed to secure one contract job in his original field within the first few years of landing in Canada; he spent the rest of a decade working in low-skill survival jobs (P43).

P30, who later retrained as an immigration advisor, explained that she believed gaining Canadian work experience is a necessary part of adapting to life in Canada, like learning to swim, and understands why employers seek it. Even though immigrant professionals who had integrated into the workforce in their fields question the perception that one needs to have Canadian experience, they could not deny that having or lacking Canadian workplace experience affects employers’ perceptions of them. Employers did not acknowledge P44’s Bachelor of Commerce even though it was assessed by an appropriate agency as equivalent to a Canadian degree of the same kind. P45, a nurse, had a similar experience: “I was an ICU nurse back home. I know here they need a critical care nurse. So, that’s why Sunnybrook accept me. But they still send me for the critical care nursing program.” The impact of the demand that immigrant professionals have Canadian workplace experience is very real.

Seeking work in the same field: What I brought from home (qualifications and licensing)

Many of the immigrant professionals expressed frustration with the lack of recognition of their credentials (n=25). When it comes to licensed professions, the hurdles created by licensing bodies, apparently designed to manage the supply of
professionals, discourages many newcomers from pursuing their licenses. One engineer described trying to arrange to write the exams he believed he needed and receiving no guidance from the licensing body:

I kept writing to them: “Please give me an appointment at a time when I can come to Toronto and sit the exams.” I didn’t have much response. I asked my friends why is that. “Well,” they say, “there is a logical explanation to it. They cannot allow anybody who is foreign trained to become PEng. Otherwise, there would be too many engineers, and maybe the salaries of engineers will go down because of the supply.” (P41)

P21, an engineer, reported that a friend, also an engineer, landed a job in Alberta with no difficulty and without a license due to the demand for engineers there, which suggests that finding work in a licensed profession, even without a license, is affected by supply and demand.

The value of a license depends on the context. In Ontario, having an engineering license seems to be necessary for securing work in the field, and is therefore valuable. P26, who eventually earned his engineering license, said that he was now pursued by employers. Upon arrival and without a license, he struggled for 6 months to land his first paid job. P48 did not pursue her teaching license in Ontario because she had learned that the labour market for teachers was terrible for new entrants, and there were few jobs, so she pursued retraining and licensing in the health care field.

A few participants expressed frustration over medical licensing exams in particular: they reported that the exams were both expensive and difficult. P22 reported that she failed one of her exams by only two points, and she received no feedback on her performance to help her prepare for a second attempt. Her family had also, by that
point, exhausted their savings and were surviving on welfare benefits, so there was no money for a second attempt anyway. She began to explore careers beyond physician. In his 50s, P16 thought it was “preposterous” when he was told to re-do his medical training from the beginning in Canada in order to find work in hospital administration. Both of these former physicians recommended a hands-on approach for assessing and integrating immigrant professionals, especially health care workers, into the workforce in Canada.

An economist, P8, agreed with these physicians, recommending that the government should pay for specific career integration programs for health care and other professionals whose skills are in demand and facilitate their entry into the workforce more directly by paying for specific career development and retraining instead of making them exhaust their savings preparing for and paying for exams and then providing them with welfare support:

Why are [foreign-trained doctors] better trained? You know how many people are shot or stabbed on the streets of Bogota? Many. Many medical students go to those hospitals to do their internship, and they learn many, many things and they learn how to do things. The system should allow them to perform, or it should facilitate the testing....Another [suggestion]....Immigration looks like it works separately from the Ministry of Education, and other governmental entities. If they had a common goal, they would say, “Let’s try to help these people.” They should co-ordinate better. It’s much better than giving them money to settle down and spend the budget on welfare, helping them to pay the rent.

Misinformation about licensing also caused grief and frustration for a number of study participants. P48 did not pursue her teaching license because she had learned
that the labour market for teachers was terrible. Because she received incorrect information when she arrived, she never had her credentials assessed, and she wondered still whether it had been a mistake not to attempt to earn her license despite the scarcity of teaching positions. A nurse, P45, described how she initially thought she would have to re-do her education because Google searches did not find bridging programs with the keywords she was using before arriving in Canada. Fortunately, she was directed to a bridging program by a service provider she connected with after she arrived and eventually re-entered the nursing field. P24, a midwife who never re-entered the health care field after receiving inaccurate information about the route to being licensed as a midwife in Canada, changed careers unwillingly. Because of additional misinformation about how to pursue the new career direction she ended up in yet a third field:

When I went to get information [from the school board], how can I get my credentials recognized here, you know what they say to me? They say, “You should go back to high school.”…I did biology, I did math, high school at the level of Canada....When I went to do my registration [for practical nursing]…I need more credits. After, I said, “How long am I going to be high school student?” and then I switched to social services.

Even in non-licensed but highly credentialed fields such as financial services and banking, participants expressed frustration that even though officially their credentials were recognized as comparable to Canadian ones, this did not help when it came to securing employment. P44 noted that employers seemed only to be interested in Canadian experience, not the equivalency of credentials. P5 and P50 each realized after long periods of unemployment that they would have to earn a recognized
Canadian designation in accounting or finance in order to find work. In desperation, P14 removed the MBA he earned in another country off his resume. He said that it felt like removing a limb, but it did get him more call backs. His hiring manager later told him that he never would have hired him had he known that he had an MBA.

Career changers also experienced difficulties. One participant realized after the fact that, in changing his field, he created a confusing career story, which made his job search that much more challenging:

I tried changing my field in the first 2 years, and I think that was the biggest mistake I made. Like, there were too many variables when you are trying to change your field. You are changing your current trade. Now, your degree, qualifications, skills are not recognized. Your employment history is not given credit. On top of it, you are also trying to change your field would confuse your employers more than anything else. So, you don’t have a story. (P21)

Those who were not pursuing employment in regulated professionals struggled to explain their technical and other skills to potential employers. As an engineer who developed space satellites, P3 was quite aware that, due to the narrowness of her field of work, she was unlikely to find employment in Canada – or anywhere else – in her original field, and knew she would have to find ways of applying her transferable skills to new kinds of work. Her plan was to use her problem-solving and creativity to “[grab] whatever job I can grab, I just get one to survive” until she had figured out her retraining plan. The vast majority of participants, conversely, arrived intending to apply their existing skill sets and credentials to work in their field of expertise, and struggled.
Several study participants who arrived in Canada confident that their education and skills would be enough for them to find suitable work discovered that factors in addition to skills and education, such as participation in a professional network, contribute to career success, in part because skills acquired in other countries can be challenging to assess. P21 was eventually able to find a managerial position, and once there he realized the value of networking now that he was responsible for hiring. He explained:

> When I try to hire, I face the same problem. When we advertise, we get thousands of resumes, and we don’t have time to go through the resumes. The best selection criteria for us is a candidate who we know through some reference. And, that is the shortest, easiest way of hiring. That’s why networking is so very important.

Many of the participants discovered that one’s soft skills play a significant role in obtaining employment, although some of the concerns about soft skills raised by employers were either insulting or confusing to them. For example, P4, a former executive in human resources, was offended when anyone questioned his English communication skills. Coming from India, which he described as an English-speaking nation, he seemed to believe that his communication skills should be assumed. P14, an accountant, expressed confusion at the idea that he needed Canadian experience in accounting in order to land work here since numbers and accounting principles are the same in Canada as in his country of origin. P29 struggled to understand how one’s soft skills and networking could apparently trump technical skills. He said:

> We think we got better education in China, especially in the science, mathematics, but right now, it seems that doesn’t matter in Canada. People
cannot count, they still get a very high pay. So, I don’t understand this social society.

Likewise, P33 noted, “One thing I noticed here, is they don’t give any value for your studies or your knowledge or your skills. As far as you know somebody in the company is more a referral that they go based on.” On the other hand, P20, a former educational administrator who retrained in accounting, was grateful for the recognition of her soft skills, including her communication skills, because she believed they helped her secure work in her new field.

Others discovered that jobs that did not typically require a professional license in their home countries did require a license in Canada. P22, a physician who had had to abandon the licensing process when her financial resources were exhausted, explained that in her country of origin she only required the correct education; there was no physician licensing process there. P36, who had managed people as the head of an accounting department, discovered she would have to earn a designation in order to find comparable work, which would require retraining and an exam. However, she did find that she could use her soft skills and positive attitude to land other kinds of work. P4 earned a human resources diploma taking courses in the day program at a local college while teaching the same courses in the evening because he needed to earn the related designation to attract the attention of potential employers.

Assessment of skills seems to vary greatly from employer to employer. P26 benefited from a patient engineering hiring manager who performed a practical assessment of his technical skills during a formal interview, which reduced his need to speak English while allowing him to demonstrate that he could understand instructions
and carry out tasks efficiently. P4 had a similar experience in the human resources field, outlining a process in only a few minutes what his interviewer said her department hires a consultant to do. He also expressed frustration with the hiring processes in which he had participated, because, he said, there were more effective systems for assessing candidates than the ones he had experienced thus far in Canada. Other participants also expressed frustration that their skill sets were never appropriately assessed.

Some of the immigrant professionals understood that, even though they were changing career directions, they possessed skills that could be transferred to their new fields of work. In some cases, those transferable skill sets gave an advantage in the hiring process. For example, physician P52 had worked for some time in cancer care and research, and that experience helped him to obtain a research-focused position after his retraining. Teacher P30 became a public servant after obtaining a community service worker diploma, but she said she continued to “use my presentation skills; I still use my interviewing skills, and the interpersonal skills, right?” P3, an engineer who retrained in accounting, said that her new industrial employer valued her “logical” background over that of candidates who had only ever worked in accounting. Former professor P2 noted that:

The transferrable skills which I got from my previous [home country] job really help. For example, the interpersonal skills and the way you present yourself and the way you adapt yourself in the new environment, and …how you related to the people: that’s really help. I believe if you really wanna be employed, 80% depend on your EQ; 15% depend on the IQ.

The perspective gained from having worked in a different field can also be valuable. P4 explained that:
[A colleague] from my competitor bank constantly meets me and talks to me because we sit on an advisory, and she’s realizing that more and more she interacts with me, that here’s someone who’s actually giving you very different perspectives compared to the rest of the group.

Those who continued in their fields after coming to Canada benefited from their existing technical skill sets as well. P38, an executive assistant, was confident about her potential for retraining as a law clerk even though she had not studied in many years, because:

My skills were already built up. I was using typewriter, so my speed was good; I was using computers; and all the administrative duties – like customer service on the phone, in person – all those were developed, and I applied all my knowledge here.

Former banking executive P47 brought his analytical skills to an operations role. P45, a nurse, noted that:

Here they focus on theory plus the physiology skills, critical thinking skills and back home they more focus on the nursing part, they more pay attention your charting writing is clear….In Canada, so it’s more like things you need to or not, which one you take first? What’s your priority? Those things, so, it’s more challenging. But it’s good.

Several participants noted that they lacked technical skills, especially computer skills, and that this made their job search more difficult. P3 noted that computers took up two or three small rooms and ran on punch cards when she completed her first engineering degree, so learning basic software like Microsoft Excel and Access when she retrained was valuable. P22 had not used computers much as a physician, but as a
clinical research professional she needed fluency in databases. P15, who worked as a trainer of immigrant doctors, observed that: “some [doctors] are not working because of some of the prejudices. But others are not working because their training actually doesn’t give them the necessary tools to work here.”

Some study participants noted the difference between the generalist training favoured in their countries of origin and the Canadian labour market preference for specialists. P4, a human resources executive, told this story:

I was talking to the VP of HR, and she was talking about [compensation schemes], and I said, “Can you give me a piece of paper and a laptop? and I’ll draw everything and map it for you in 5 minutes,” and she was shocked. She said, “How do you know this?” I said, “I’ve written all of these things, I’ve designed it over years, this is Mickey Mouse.” She said, “Oh my God, we hire a consultant to do this.” I said, “What for?” Most HR professionals here are very limited in knowledge, they’ve got what is called very specialist knowledge, they don’t have the width and depth of experience, and what I found was that they know very little if not nothing. You should be able to connect all the dots, and they wouldn’t be able to do that because they don’t have that kind of expertise.

Similarly, accounting professional P50 observed that in his country of origin, the same staff persons handled accounts payable and receivable, for example, whereas in larger organizations in Canada the roles are separate.

**Job Search Strategy Needs More Than Job Ads**

Most study participants discovered that simply applying for jobs found in advertisements was not a particularly effective way to find positions that used their skills (n=35). For one thing, sometimes there are no relevant positions being advertised. P1
also researched companies that could use his skill set and sent them applications, “but I think that time, I cannot really find – there’s not much position for this job.”

Sending resumes in response to job postings often created frustration because there were so few responses. This was the case for P40, a microfinance professional. Her entire account is provided because it so clearly describes the experience:

I applied to random job postings that I saw…and I tried talking to a temp company….Nothing came out of it. I contacted some of the non-governmental organizations, very much in my field, that did microfinance, didn’t quite work. I tried Aga Khan Foundation had this internship program that was very much below my skill level, but it was in microfinance and I thought it would recognize me and give me a toehold into this entire arena in Canada. It didn’t quite work. I never got any feedback, and that I found incredibly frustrating, because nobody would even get back to me and talk, so it was like throwing my emails and my resumes into an empty black box, and they just disappeared.

P26, an engineer, estimated that he sent 1,000 resumes and did not earn a single response. This description of silence from employers, and feeling frustrated and stressed, was echoed by many interviewees. Immigrant professionals such as P31, who had a background in information technology:

Had the expectation to look for the job, very easy, or maybe spend a few months, I can get it, and then that’s why, after I landed, I’m pretty, actually to prepare those resumes, those kind of things to post online, or ask some friends to some referral, those kind of things, but it seems like all the resume, all those kind of things, almost didn’t get any response back from the employer.
It was surprising to most study participants that they received no or few responses from potential employers. Occasionally an employer would respond to tell a candidate that they were not qualified because they did not have Canadian work experience, as happened to P19, an accountant.

A handful of study participants experienced little difficulty with their professional job searches. A nurse who requalified (P45) quickly found work as a nurse using job postings on hospital websites and more general job boards. Low-skill jobs seemed to be easier to secure. A veterinarian, P9, who was seeking very low-level work related to her qualifications secured a position through job advertisements fairly quickly. Another struggled to break out of the hospitality industry and eventually secured a new position through an advertisement that required a broad skill set: as an actor by training, P15 used her communication skills and persistence to secure both the interview and the job of trainer of internationally-trained physicians, a new role for her. Several other participants also secured their first jobs through online advertisements by targeting positions that required very low-level skills such as labourer or call centre agent.

One participant described the labour market research he had conducted, both through the Internet and in person, before choosing where in Canada to settle:

I know Toronto has a lot of manufacturers, this is a central point of the economic area, even in this country, not only Ontario. And when I landed in Canada, initially I stayed maybe 1 week, 2005, the second time I landed in Canada, I spent 1 week in Vancouver. Over there, not too much factories or industrial area. A lot of sites related to tourism field, industry: shopping centre, airline company….But here, if you go around, you will see a lot of manufacturer, industrial zone here, so I did some research and I think maybe here is a good place. (P35)
In the end, this planning did not make his job search any easier, and this participant found he had to pursue training in a different but related field.

When an employer invited P5 to come in for an interview, she struggled with how to respond to the screening interview questions even though this engineer had retrained in human resources. The right answer for one employer was the wrong answer for another:

Let’s say...I’ve got a call... and they asked me, “Okay. Position we have actually match your skills and experience, but do you want proceed with your CHRP designation, so certified human resources professional?” I told, “Yes, I want to proceed with my designation.” But you know what? If you answer “yes,” unfortunately they can’t offer you this position because 90% of this position is administrative tasks... [This] experience will be not [help you become] qualified for HRP designation. So they say, “Unfortunately, no, thank you so much.” So, this is how the screening process works. It’s very tough.

Job search and interviewing strategies vary significantly from field to field and nation to nation. One study participant, P30, explained that she had never needed to engage in a job search when she finished her education in English Literature in her home country because recruiters came to hire the top students from the school to be professors at her institution and others. She simply had to pass the interview process, which was primarily a demonstration lesson. Another participant, P33, explained that his school had coordinated the hiring process for students so he had also never conducted a job search:

I didn’t have that kind of a job search over there. When I was doing my degree, I got a placement, so even before I could get my degree in hand, I already had a job in place. It was through the university placements. I had
a full-time job and everything. I did not even know how I should apply or anything like that. Everything that I learned was after I left my home country.

A number of study participants realized that networking could be an effective job search strategy. P27 described the reasoning behind networking very succinctly:

You can bombard some companies with faxes or sending out your resumes by hundreds, and...some HR department of some companies choose to take the fax and throw it in the garbage bin right away because several hundreds a day, they don’t have much time to read it from A–Z. I saw some stories like when networking is maybe there, getting some referral is better.

Another participant, P30, reported that a mentor of hers, a Canadian, explained that employers usually have a candidate in mind when they post a position, and that is why relationship building and referrals matter.

An IT professional, P31, described wishing to network and having to start from nothing. He had friends and family in Canada with whom he was staying, but they worked in low-skill labour jobs. Staff at government-funded employment agencies were not able to help him network either, which he found disappointing. P39 volunteered for a time with a mortgage broker in order to develop a network and also a source for references, which he had discovered he would need to be hired in the financial services sector. P43, a former bank manager whose experience with job search in his country of origin had been primarily exam-based due to the volume of applicants in the banking industry there, struggled with the idea of networking, both because he knew nobody in Canada in the banking sector, and because he believed hiring through networking was,
“bad group policy...working there not because of my own qualification and admirable background.” He explained that his career in Canada had been severely limited by his continued reluctance to network owing to his belief that hiring based on networking was poor strategy.

Another participant, originally from China, explained that the way Canadians talk about themselves and their work when they are networking is quite different from the way that Chinese people do, and she had to learn the new way:

I help people, friends or relatives, immigrants, to settle here, [and tell them], "It is not what you know, it is whom you know."...Here, you have to sell yourself. Back home, we can’t talk too much about ourselves, even in the interview, we are not trained, that was not the culture. Here, you have to talk too much about yourself to sell yourself, so that’s a different culture....So many years brought up being an introvert, that was really making it very difficult to go and sell ourselves. (P36)

She learned it well, however, and landed all of the various jobs she had held in Canada through networking. P38 also networked her way into a job at the international company she had worked for in her country of origin, aided by people she had known there both for the referral to the organization and for direction to a local employment centre where they helped her to adapt her resume to meet Canadian expectations.

Explaining previous experience in terms that Canadian companies understand can be challenging. P28 remarked, “I used to work as a business analyst, but in the Chinese, my title is not exactly the same, but actually, the thing I did, I find it out, is a business analyst.” P29, an engineer, said:
It’s quite different the way people describe their job here and in our country. Sometimes we find that there’s nothing match… I submitted my resume in a co-op school, they have some mock interviews, and my description of my job in China is Senior Engineer’s job, but consultant said, “Oh, that’s an entry-level job.” “What?” So that’s different. The way we describe our skills is quite different.

A participant who came from a consulting background described the struggle he experienced as a generalist, not an expert in any one recognizable area as well as his struggle with the language because his French was stronger than his English:

[Toronto engineering firms] were looking for Canadian experience, and consistent experience in a certain field…[but] my experience was in management consulting, which is this esoteric field where you work 2 months on a performance indicator project, then you go on strategy, then for 4 months you work on, you know, cost centres or whatever….It’s not really something you can really sell and say, for 2 years I did this thing, and I know really well how to do it. (P46)

Resumes are often the first communication between a job seeker and a potential employer, and several participants described how the industry certifications they earned in combination with their experience improved their potential for employment. For an investment banker, P39, there was a “psychological” or confidence boost each time he added a course to his resume, because he was sure that employers would recognize these Canadian credentials and would therefore feel more inclined to interview him. P46, whose education was in engineering but whose experience was in consulting, realized he needed credentials to prove his himself to a potential employer. Likewise,
P42’s wife’s accounting network confirmed that he had to complete a certain number of courses toward his accounting credential before he would be attractive to employers.

Staffing agencies were useful job search partners for several study participants. A former banking executive (P47) leveraged a little experience he had gained with a Canadian bank to land a job with more permanence at an American bank operating in Canada through a recruiter. He reported that the interview was merely a formality, and the job was already his. P48, a former teacher, had no luck finding work in retail sales or customer service until she sought the help of a staffing agency.

**Networking Is Cultural**

Finding work through a network of family, friends and acquaintances is viewed very differently by different people; many participants argued that willingness to engage in networking may be cultural (n=18). According to several study participants from India, one’s education and the reputation of one’s school tends to be what lands the job, which is not always true in Canada, and the belief that one should be hired on the basis of one’s skills, not on the basis of one’s relationships, is a difficult belief for some immigrant professionals to change. As P21 explained:

> [My wife] kept on pursuing trainings, re-trainings, so she went to [well-known college], she CHRP, she thought that when she got CHRP on her resume, she would start getting called. Nothing happened. Nobody cares about the qualification. That’s the big message. Retraining just for the training is a waste of time and money.

A relationship and a referral into an organization seemed even more valuable than his actual skills to P33, a pharmacist who had retrained in regulatory affairs. Former bank
manager P43’s belief that networking is a poor hiring strategy prevented him from building relationships for the purpose of learning about his industry and finding opportunities, and except for a single contract he never worked in banking after arriving in Canada. In India, he had obtained his first job by writing a recruitment board exam for his region; he was hired from a list on the basis of his exam performance and an interview. He did not acknowledge that the network he developed after he was hired may have aided in his career advancement thereafter.

It was not only Indian immigrant professionals who found the need to network confusing. An American study participant, P15, also found it strange that the attitude of Canadian hiring managers seemed to be, “Like, ‘if I know this person, then I’m more comfortable having that person in. This [other] person might be qualified, but I don’t know that person.’ So, it was very kooky.” A Ukrainian, who was not at all shy to reach out to organizations to find opportunities to speak with people about her skill set, noted a big difference in willingness to connect between Canadians and Americans when she called companies directly. She found that American companies were more willing to talk to with her. She was unsure whether the Canadian hiring managers were demonstrating “skepticism, or laziness” (P49).

Shared cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds helped one immigrant professional, P19, to land her first professional job in Canada. An accountant, she had landed in Canada in January and expected to find work immediately because there are so many fiscal year-ends in business at that time of year. Instead she was unemployed until April when a relative connected her with an accountant, who connected her with a business owner who shared ethnicity and language with her. Another participant, P17,
described how friends he had met who had also emigrated from his country of origin passed his name along to a hiring manager in his very small industry, which landed him his first job. Other study participants shared similar experiences, although there were also exceptions. An Indian participant, P33, noted that the level of helpfulness among Indians sometimes depends on state origin, language, and even caste. Sometimes the opportunity came through new friends and acquaintances who were from different backgrounds. P10 was receiving help with his resume and responding to job postings as well, but this had not led to a job. Then he was referred by an acquaintance to a businessperson who had need of a “cheap accountant,” which turned into several years’ worth of work.

Professional associations and professional development events are often good places to network. Some forums are better than others for finding opportunities to meet people in a particular industry, and P21 found that his local Toastmasters branch was not helpful. P4 had no luck connecting with people at local HRPA events – people came, listened to the speaker, and left – but some luck when he approached colleges about earning a professional credential. He was invited to teach as well as to study. As his network grew over a few years, a corporate officer he had known for some time invited him to apply to an opportunity at his organization and ensured his application was noticed.

A few participants had success in capitalizing on networks to which they had access in an entry-level position to create opportunities for themselves later on. One participant, P51, had worked as a receptionist at a government agency, and used her contacts there to secure a unique, well-paid internship as part of her retraining. She also
engaged in informational interviews in other organizations and in her own organization once she landed a long-term job to expand her network of contacts in her new field and to find a better job.

P50 asked friends to keep their ears open for an opportunity to volunteer to gain experience in Canada because she had been told during her job search that she needed it. Another participant noted that he probably would not even have been interviewed for his first professional job in Canada if he had not known someone in the organization who delivered his resume to the hiring manager. Both P1 and P27 explained that their first jobs were irrelevant to their career goals, but they knew they had to “start from anything” (P27). He asked a new friend to introduce him to his boss, which landed him his start.

One benefit of the retraining experience is the opportunity it provides to develop a professional network in Canada. Sometimes fellow students already know people in the industry, and fellow graduates can support each other as their careers progress. Instructors also often bring job opportunities into their classrooms through their networks, thereby aiding students to become part of their network. P30’s retraining experience provided her with a best friend and mentor who wanted help her find a position now that she was well integrated in her new field.

Another study participant, who decided to earn a Canadian MBA to replace his international MBA, had been developing relationships with his fellow students and, at a point of desperation, reached out to ask if a fellow student, a working professional, had any leads on part-time work. At the end of the chain of referrals that began there, he was offered a full-time salaried position. All of his work since has been through referral,
which was also true of other study participants. He and his wife both earned new credentials around the same time, however she refused to engage in networking activities and she still had not found professional work at the time of his interview. Other participants also described a series of jobs they had held, all gained through their network of professional relationships.

Industry professionals and business owners talk: P16 landed a long-term teaching role because an administrator of the private college where he was teaching part-time told an administrator at another college who also needed a part-time instructor in the same course about him. He did well in that second part-time position, so they offered him full-time work. P26, while working in consulting, and was recruited by one of the clients he had served. P36 was referred by a former co-worker to a new company and landed a job there that had not yet been posted publicly. P47 remarked that networking and referrals are convenient shortcuts for hiring managers. He also described how having a mentor in a large corporation was valuable for landing work later on, but it was not clear from the interview whether he understood that it is very likely his mentor left a description of her interactions with him in the company database.

**Job Search is Different in Canada**

The immigrant professionals invited to Canada brought with them education and work experience. In fact, they were invited to come to Canada on the basis of their skills and experience, so quite reasonably, one participant, P43, thought that: “because of my work experience and background, some job was waiting for me. Maybe at an entry level, but a job.” Many participants discovered that being unable to find work commensurate with their skills was not related to their skill levels, so something about
the job search process in Canada must be different from what they were accustomed to (n=20).

Several study participants expressed confusion and frustration over the lack of skill they perceived among Canadians they encountered in various workplaces while they themselves could not find employment. Engineer P5 remarked:

I always performed very well; I always had the highest marks when I started. And now, you are not accepted for any position. At the same time, here, you are facing so unqualified people everywhere. Everywhere. You’re in the bank, you’re talking to the teller. The teller doesn’t know how to do very simple things. So, it’s very strange for me.

Likewise, P16, a medical doctor, was critical of the instructor he was to replace at a college because he who ought to have been familiar with medical transcription but was not. Participants expressed frustration that less skilled individuals found work, but somehow, they could not.

A former human resources executive, P4, described offering workshops at employment resource centres, providing training for the people “who were supposed to train me,” which he claimed the staff said were better than they had ever seen or done before. Based on conversations with fellow human resources professionals, he felt that the knowledge and abilities of his peers was low compared to his breadth of knowledge in these areas, and thus it was “contradictory” to him that he had to struggle to find employment. He noted that Canadian education focuses on training workers to be specialists, and he believed this was to their detriment. He recounted that a human resources executive in Toronto with whom he had an informational interview, was
stunned that he could so quickly outline a compensation scheme when compensation had not been a specific area of focus in his previous work. One must wonder what role these inaccurate assumptions being made by potential employers played in his difficulty finding work.

**Job search process**

The job search process varied in a number of ways (n=16). At the basic level, access to places of employment matters to a job search. One participant described the difficulties he had in finding and maintaining employment because of employers seeking workers who had access to vehicles (P14). P49 found work in a call centre on the opposite side of the city on the midnight shift, which meant a commute on public transportation of up to more than 3 hours per day. Vehicle insurance for an adult with no insurance history in Ontario is prohibitively expensive, and P49’s salary was insufficient to cover it.

Access to opportunities is limited by the economy of a city, and for many years Toronto was the most popular landing site for all categories of immigrants because of its growing economy. A retrained employment counsellor, P2, believed that the supply of opportunities for skilled workers seemed to be smaller than the demand for those opportunities because of the volume of newcomers and Canadians moving to the area.

P4, an immigrant professional originally from India, which has had a fast-growing economy, noted that there were fewer employment opportunities than he was accustomed to seeing in the labour market due to the slower economic growth and the overall different economy in Canada compared to India. As a result of this and a lack of Canadian experience, he believed he would always be the runner-up in a competition.
Regional and global economic issues also affected immigrant professionals significantly, and P4 had landed in Canada in 2003 while there was still economic disruption from the World Trade Centre attack in 2001. P39, an investment banker who arrived in Canada just before September 2001, likewise struggled to find work in his field.

Not only did the economy and labour market in Canada seem limited to many of the participants, professional employment opportunities were also difficult to access without connections. Many opportunities are never broadly advertised, but are instead filled via referrals. This was a difficult notion for P43 to accept because his job search experience had been quite different: in India, he had known nobody at his first workplace on his first day there, he was hired based on an exam and interview, no networking required. P39 understood that the “so-called hidden market” for jobs represented an opportunity for finding work with less competition, however, he knew nobody who could help him to access these jobs. He and others described feeling overqualified for the entry-level roles that were advertised publicly and sometimes removed credentials from their applications to make themselves more attractive to employers hiring at this level. A microfinance consultant, P40, expressed the view shared by others that she expected to be “valued for who I am, as is,” and the need to develop a network to vouch for her was frustrating.

Many immigrant professionals found initial work in low-skill jobs paying low wages thus becoming part of the working poor. P39 explained: “Was I registered as unemployed? I would tell you no. But if you ask me from a financial point of view, ‘Have you been struggling?’ I would tell you yes.” He struggled to find professional-level paid work, although he found many opportunities to work for free in order to gain a reference
and Canadian experience. Low wages and employers seeking volunteers both contributed to making participants members of the working poor.

The need to have Canadian experience in order to land professional work affected even English-speaking American immigrants, whose education and experience would seem on the surface to be most comparable to that of Canadians. P42, a chemist who immigrated from the United States, “couldn’t get work for about a year and a half. I mean, nothing serious, it was all like temporary jobs....I couldn’t get a real permanent job, because I didn’t have any Canadian education or Canadian work experience.” P42 also demonstrated a lack of understanding of the hiring process in his new field. After he retrained as a teacher, he failed to dress or act formally enough at his first job interview and as a result was not offered a position.

The hiring process may be different in Canada in other ways as well, based on the reports of the immigrant professionals in this study. According to some of them, Canadian employers seem to have a tendency to look for specialists, and therefore for candidates with a specific kind of experience, whereas employers may be more interested in generalist experience in other places. For example, P44 earned an MBA in Canada and had an interview with an investment bank, but lost the job to another candidate who had experience specifically in investment banking. However, the bank kept in touch and he landed a different job later on. Fellow MBA-earner P46 also found that consulting firms to which he was applying also wanted expertise in very narrow fields.

Without a network to alert one to unadvertised job opportunities, and without Canadian work experience, having a staffing agency on one’s side proved valuable to
several study participants. P47 and P14, an accountant and a finance professional, credited staffing agencies with launching their professional careers here. P48 had not been even able to find a survival job until she started working with a staffing agency.

**Interviewing**

A job interview is a very cultural phenomenon (n=8). A good example of this is provided by the challenges with which an immigrant professional from India was able to aid an Egyptian mentee. P21, who earned an MBA in Canada, analyzed a series of unsuccessful interviews his mentee had attended and discovered:

He used to walk in front of the lady [interviewers] instead of opening the door for the lady, and this is culture....The whole interview would go very bad. Probably he would not get a call....If somebody had told him [that was rude], he would have done it....There are no such program that tells you these minor things, right? That’s where I would love to invest time in telling people or telling immigrants. It’s not a question of retraining, it’s a question of these minor things you will never get retraining on.

As a teacher from Uganda, P11 had also found that his professionalism and enthusiasm in interviews often helped employers see past his colour and his accent. P9, a nurse, described how she got an interview at a desirable hospital via a referral from someone with whom she had worked previously and believed she would be a good fit there. A man with a highly varied career, P27, described how interviews that came about through referrals seemed easier than interviews in which he felt he had to “sell” himself. Informational interviews were useful for truly understanding a role in order to perform better in interviews, and interviewees such as P47 explained they were useful for learning “how to get yourself ready to get those positions.” P5, an engineer, was
transitioning into the human resources field, and described how she struggled with screening interviews, never knowing whether to admit she was pursuing a professional credential in her field or not. She had been rejected during the screening process both for saying that she was doing so and for omitting this fact!

There are skills that are valued Canadian culture more than others. A business professional, P44, explained that coming from an educational system and a field of work in which presentations and interviews were much less common than they are in Canada, he struggled with interviewing. For him, having to conduct a presentation as part of an interview felt “overwhelming.” Talking about oneself is also a Canadian or perhaps Western skill, and P48 – an Indian scientist who retrained in nursing – felt the need to prepare stories about her previous experience to facilitate human connections in interviews and with patients.

**Summary**

The job search process turned out to be very different from what many of the recent immigrant professionals had experienced in their countries of origin. The lack of interest from potential employers in their formal applications took many by surprise, and networking to find unadvertised opportunities seemed like a foreign notion to many. Many heard that they needed “Canadian experience” or were told that they were overqualified, and either way struggled to relaunch their careers in their fields. Some who attempted a change of field came to believe that immigrants ought to remain in their original fields to make it easier for potential employers understand their backgrounds, which already seemed to be difficult without the complications of retraining and a career change.
Chance, in the sense of accidents, was acknowledged to have played a role in varying degrees in the lives of the participants. Most participants felt strongly that their experiences re-launching their careers in Canada had been primarily influenced by the decisions they made. Several understood chance to mean opportunities and remarked on the importance of keeping an open mind and taking advantage of opportunities as they arose (n=22).

**Chance Plays a Role**

When asked about the role of chance or happenstance (i.e., random events) in their job search, many had thoughts on it (n=19). Some, like P2, added the concept of choice to their response. P2 said she believed her career trajectory had been influenced by chance and choice in roughly equal measure, and she had made it a point to take advantage of opportunities as they arose. Likewise, P49, a physician, said of the ups and downs of her career path, “It’s life, it’s like a casino. Today it’s boom, boom, boom, you get on, and then 5 minutes, you get done in.” She found a job related to her medical training, conducting insurance interviews in her native Russian language, through a classmate.

A few participants described themselves as “lucky.” For architect P17, being in the right place at the right time led to an opportunity to fly to Alberta for a day of interviews, which resulted in a job offer. For P48, immigrating to Canada and retraining
as a nurse were both chance events: emigrating was an idea planted by people she knew who predicted that young people were going to have poorer employment prospects given economic trends in India, and nursing was an idea planted by her parents when she was a youth. P22 and her family struggled in Canada for several years and had just decided to return to their country of origin when she received a job offer from a workplace where she had volunteered extensively.

Often the luck stemmed from relationships. P3, a satellite engineer who retrained in accounting, was appreciative of the people she chanced to meet who gave her thoughtful advice and supported her as she retrained. She worked as a cleaner at a hotel, and the hotel manager created an opportunity for her to practice accounting. Without the people who helped her along her way, she wondered if she might have ended up in a low-paying job that offered little challenge. P52, a physician, happened to apply for a job in research in a department headed by an internationally trained doctor who: “has soft spots for international medical doctors. She respects us, that we really had to go through very difficult training the same as here.” Retrained immigration specialist P30 found her first job in Canada at a local government-funded agency where she had gone for job search training. She was offered a job because of a recommendation and because of her language skills.

Luck also came in the form of connecting with the right person and having the right skills at the right moment, no prior relationship required. P10, an accountant, was referred by an acquaintance to a business owner who needed “a cheap accountant” and quickly. P10 worked for that business owner for 5 years. P29 landed his first well-paying job in Canada through a classmate whose wife’s company was looking for people with
his background. MBA-graduate P21 noted that his new qualification was not sufficient in itself to land professional work – he also needed people connections in the right place at the right time, or in other words, he needed the MBA plus luck. P42, a teacher, had applied for one position unsuccessfully, however the accounting background in his application earned some attention and a referral to a different position from a school board administrator whom he had never met.

Finally, luck was sometimes represented in positive outcomes. For example, P30 would never have pursued work with the government of her country of origin because of her perception that there is extensive corruption there. Her unplanned job offer in settlement services, then retraining in immigration policy led to unexpected work for the Canadian government, which she has found rewarding even though she would never have guessed she would end up there when she immigrated.

Other participants felt that their decisions and planning played more of a role than chance in the results of their job search, even the negative outcomes. Retrained as a purchaser, P28 experienced some very negative career events, yet still believed what happened to her was the result of her choices. P24, a midwife, stated that she does not believe in luck, but rather believes in effort and perseverance. Similarly, engineer P26 and human resources executive P4 believed that results have more to do with choices and persistence, for example, in networking. P22, a physician retrained in research, networked extensively to gather information and advice about careers and finding work, and she believed the advice she collected contributed and would continue to contribute to her career success. P27, whose career had taken many different directions, claimed
that “nothing comes by accident,” and it was his flexibility that led to some of the jobs he held.

P46, an engineer who retrained in business, had this to say about chance and goals:

I think a lot of the chance is circumstantial, in the sense that I was focused on what I wanted to do. I told everybody, I talked to people. What I see is when people see someone that's really focused on something, they tend to want to help that person achieve their goal....They're like, oh, I know someone that you might want to talk to. And it might lead you to something else. So, you could see it under chance. I see it more under, I don't know, maybe purpose, determination.

Take Advantage of Opportunities

A few participants understood chance to mean opportunity and responded in that vein (n=4). They encouraged new immigrant professionals to take advantage of opportunities as they presented themselves. P26, who eventually earned his engineering license, said that he did not worry because: “the chances always coming. Never worry about it. Doesn’t mean my current maybe is good. If I didn’t catch this chance, don’t worry; I have another chance.” He emphasized that opportunities might pass quickly, so one must watch for them and be ready to take advantage of them. P36, an accountant, had never worked with investments before, but when the opportunity to move in this direction arose through her network, she chose to take the chance and was pleased with the outcome.

Some participants expressed uncertainty about their choices. P28 questioned a decision she had made to turn down a professional job offer before she started her
retraining because it was outside of her original field of work. She had not returned to her original field post-retraining, and at the time of her interview she was still unsure whether her choice had been a good one. P39, who had not yet found satisfaction in his career in Canada at the time of the interview, expressed the belief that as long as his children were able to succeed in Canada, his decision to immigrate and the decisions he made in Canada would be a success for his family.

Most participants felt that they had a great deal of choice in their career directions and retraining opportunities. A Yemeni participant, P41, described feeling like he had a great deal of choice in Canada, including a choice of educational institutions. An Indian participant, P48, had to take a place at a distant school requiring a long commute in order to start her retraining program when she wanted to start it because all the closer schools were full, and afterward discovered that program had one of the better reputations. One notable exception was P42, an American immigrant, who described feeling that there were not as many educational choices as he was accustomed to because of Canada’s much smaller population and therefore smaller number of institutions.

Two participants talked about the impact of faith on their career development in Canada. P42, a Catholic, described feeling as though his career-related experiences had been part of a plan, although not a plan of his design. He believed that if he were not doing the work that he should be doing, he would be made to feel unhappy, which would prompt him to make a change. P43, who did not identify his religion, also described turning to his faith to make sense of the very negative experiences he had
had since immigrating. He explained that he felt like he had no control and simply had to accept whatever happened.

Summary

A number of participants, when asked about the role of chance or happenstance in their experiences after immigrating took the question to be about opportunity. Others responded by talking about the luck they had had. Either way, immigrant professionals acknowledged the role of chance, and emphasized the importance of taking advantage of opportunities as they arose during their job search and/or retraining. There was, however, a strong sense of ownership of the immigration, job search, and retraining results overall among the participants.
CHAPTER 7
RESULTS:
LEARNING EXPERIENCES FOR CAREER SUCCESS

This chapter presents the themes that emerged from the participants' descriptions of their experiences of retraining. Retraining decisions and their effects on the newcomers’ employment situations are discussed. Significant topics include planning for retraining, challenges with pursuing retraining at this point in their work lives, and lessons learned (n=35).

Planning for Retraining

When appropriate employment does not materialize, many newcomers choose to pursue education in Canada, sometimes in the same field and sometimes in a new one. Retraining in Canada is intended to help an immigrant professional to find new or improved employment. And as every adult learner has experienced, retraining requires planning (n=24). One study participant described the ideal step-by-step process, which he experienced, by which his retraining led to work:

The first few courses at Seneca basically led to my job at Nestle’s, in part. Well let's say that first course at BMO, I was – the 2-week preparation for the job that led to the job itself, and then that job led to the job at Nestle’s. I took a few more courses in web development and things like that, and that led to the job at Compaq. So, every training led to a better job, and it's always been like that, right? (P46)
He explained that employers require proof of experience or credentials, or a combination of the two, that they recognize for a potential employee to qualify for work. Managers and other people above him in the hierarchy in his workplaces had explained this to him when he asked what he needed to do to advance his career. Other participants did not describe receiving such clear advice about retraining.

There are a great many college and universities in the Greater Toronto Area, and the reputation of a school according to friends who had already lived in Canada for some time influenced several study participants in their choice of institutions. Participants P35 and P29 described selecting the institutions at which they studied entirely on recommendations from friends. Reviews on immigrant-run websites were also influential for some (P31). Other participants preferred to make their own decisions based on information gathered directly from the schools whether they were planning to complete a short college program (like P33 and P38) or a longer and costlier program such as an MBA (P40 and P44).

Factors such as available start dates for programs of study and convenience of access to an institution also affected the retraining planning process for P33 and P38. For the high-demand field of nursing, P48 could only apply to Humber College because all the other college nursing programs within commuting distance were full. She discovered later that Humber’s program had a strong positive reputation among employers of nurses. P46, who completed an MBA in Canada, had a choice between a 1-year Executive MBA or a 2-year regular MBA for the same tuition, and he selected the 2-year program because of the superior career services that seemed to accompany it.
Most study participants had a sense that balancing work and school would be challenging, but that in Canadian institutions it was possible to do so. For study participants P40 and P27, retraining in Canada was intended to improve their work-life balance and their English language skills. P30 had found work fairly quickly in Canada, however her career would have been limited without a Canadian credential, so when a relevant program came to her attention, her spouse and manager were both very supportive about her pursuing it. She was able to continue working while going to school because her spouse took on more parenting responsibilities.

Some study participants had been thinking about retraining opportunities since before they arrived; even if they had to work at survival jobs for some time first, their retraining plans remained intact. In her country of origin, P30 had been a teacher of English, but she knew before she emigrated that it was unlikely she would be able to find work of this kind in Canada. She was prepared to retrain, but what field she would choose had not been planned in advance, as it had not been for chemist-turned-teacher P42. P27 strategically worked on his English writing and conversation skills from the day he began his survival job in Canada knowing that he would return to school to improve his career choices.

When an immigrant professional has a particular field of work in mind from the time s/he receives the offer to come to Canada, the locations of educational institutions that offer appropriate training are salient for other decisions, such as where to land. P32 had to pursue a master’s degree in Canada order to re-enter the field of architecture, as that is the requirement here, and his spouse wished to continue her education in
engineering, so their choice of where to land was based on the availability of both kinds of training.

Like P30, a few participants decided to retrain in entirely different fields, for example, an engineer retrained in addictions counselling (P27). For P37, the decision to study to become a mechanic was as simple as: “Canadians have to drive due to the distances within and between cities, and so I should learn how to diagnose my car’s mechanical issues.” A biology teacher originally, P48 became a practical nurse because the program was short and the labour market seemed strong.

However, many study participants had not expected to retrain, but decided, sometimes reluctantly, to do so after they arrived in Canada. P28 was an engineer by training but had worked in international business as a financial analyst, so she had not expected any difficulty finding work given the Greater Toronto Area’s huge financial sector. She had to retrain to land any kind of professional work. Pharmacy graduate P33 did not see his work as a medical market researcher as related to his original training, and because he believed he would feel more comfortable working in health care, he returned to school to study regulatory affairs.

When retraining was not desired by a participant but seemed necessary, the nature of labour market and the salary expectations for graduates of the program were often primary motivators. Participant P29 correctly assessed that it would be wise for him to leave the manufacturing sector and pursue a career more in demand in the Greater Toronto Area, so he selected fire safety inspection. P28 started in one business program and shortly transferred to another because of better reported employment
outcomes for graduates. The availability of co-op in a program was also a consideration, as it was for P31 who knew that banks were frequent co-op employers.

A few immigrant professionals pursuing retraining described how the level of education played a role in their planning. P30 elected to pay for her own master’s degree rather than take the diploma that her employer would have paid for on her behalf, in order to reap the long-term benefits of higher education. Similarly, P42 could have found teaching work on the basis of his American teacher certification, but delayed working until he had earned his Bachelor of Education and license to teach in Ontario to qualify for better work. P46 pursued an MBA after finding that his brief retraining at a college was insufficient to propel his career forward in the way he envisioned for himself.

No participant in the study expressed concern about their ability to handle the educational environment in a Canadian institution. One study participant, P41, who had completed an engineering degree in a British-style university before immigrating and a humanities degree in Canada, believed the approaches to education in the two contexts were simply different. P44, who had been an entrepreneur before immigrating, was confident he would succeed at any retraining program he chose to pursue. Likewise, P47, who had already earned a doctoral degree, found that retraining and certification in Canada came easily and also led to work. The work was not intellectually satisfying; however, it provided the income he needed.

Several study participants were already engaged in planning the next stages of their retraining at the time of the interview. P47 was contemplating an additional post-graduate degree. Having earned a master’s degree in Canada, P30 aspired to earn a
doctorate. Both participants suggested that they might end up attending university alongside their children. P39, a financial advisor, intended to pursue additional training in accounting in order to leave the realm of sales and begin a career in business analysis, which offered steadier paycheques.

Not every immigrant professional who seeks retraining is able to attend the school or program of their first choice for a variety of reasons. P3, an engineer who had considered a shift to nursing, self-selected out of nursing training because she did not want to retake the basic sciences. She pursued accounting instead, but then had to overload her course schedule while juggling family responsibilities and a part-time job in order to finish her diploma on-time because the college she attended initially assessed her English to be less fluent than it was and held her back. A senior human resources professional, P4, could not convince any college to let him challenge as many exams as he thought he was capable of passing. One positive noted by P4, however, was that continuing education programs have fewer entrance limitations in Canada than they do in his country of origin, India, so only the cost is a barrier.

Health care professionals seemed to encounter more barriers than professionals from other fields. A medical doctor who hoped to continue to work as a physician in Canada, P16 could not imagine spending 4 years re-doing his medical training due to his age and his need to provide financial support to his wife and children. Another medical doctor, P49, once received a job offer from a clinic providing cosmetic procedures, but she was afraid of being “pigeonholed” by accepting a position in cosmetic surgery and she would have had to quit the college program in the new field she had chosen she was taking, so she declined the offer. P24, a midwife, had been
told by an advisor at the local school board to take high school courses in order to qualify for a nursing program (which she later learned was not necessary), so instead she decided to retrain in social services.

**Needing a Whole New Credential**

The immigrant professionals who participated in this study were invited to Canada on the basis of their human capital, that is, their education, work experience, and fluency in English or French. This points-based system implied to many of them that if their points total was high, their employability potential in Canada would be high, and yet some of them realized upon arrival that they required new or different credentials in order to be employable (n=23). An engineer who retrained in a completely different field, P41, explained:

> My friend who was in Canada was telling me, “You have a good chance as a professional and qualified person.” And really, I just had a quick look at self – you know, you have to put points for yourself, and they tell you frankly, “If you don’t score 70 points, forget about applying.” And my calculation was coming to over 85…. It was quite an investment: $2,400 that I had to put forward for both applying and assessing my application and landing and the tickets. I thought that was the best investment I ever did in my life.

When they struggled to find suitable work and ended up retraining despite the education that the immigration system had valued, they sometimes experienced resentment. Botanist P23 said that she and her researcher spouse expected to struggle at first, but not for 11 years. Neither of them had landed professional work, despite retraining in her case, at the time of her participation in this study. P5, an engineer who
had also earned an MBA before arriving in Canada, felt resentful that this wasn’t enough to get established in Canada; after 6 months of unemployment P5 resorted to retraining to earn a Canadian credential.

A few participants, including P1 and P14, an engineer and accountant respectively, said that they understood that when economic conditions are weak, opportunities might be few so retraining is necessary to be competitive. P5 recognized the power in credentials even in her country of origin, and she selected retraining that would earn her one. Satellite engineer P3 had expected to retrain, and Canadians she met here in whom she had developed trust recommended accounting to her; in fact, her survival job manager created an opportunity for her to gain accounting experience to improve her competitiveness, even knowing they thereby eventually would lose her to a better job. P22, a physician, realized her medical training was not well-recognized in Canada, so she completed a clinical research training program and volunteered for 2 years at a Toronto area research hospital before she landed paid work in her new field. She credited the job offer to both experience and a referral. She contrasted this experience to having been offered work as a physician in her country of origin only 50 days after she finished medical school.

Some participants noted that they needed to learn Canadian workplace culture and communication skills, and they could have learned that through participation. One of these participants, P50, remarked:

If you don’t get that through work experience or a place where you can work or volunteer...you have to go to training and see what it’s like, so you can apply it when you either for interviews, or starting work, or working in a new environment.
This observation aligns with the WES survey data analysis by Fang et al. (2009), who found that working on a team had a positive effect on three career success indicators – salary, promotion, and job satisfaction – for non-immigrants but only on salary for immigrant professionals. They hypothesized that perhaps many immigrant professionals are not accustomed to working on teams because their home countries’ educational practices and work cultures are not team-based. The kinds of retraining that would have value for recent immigrant professionals, then, would focus on how to work effectively in teams.

Other participants, such as P4, who retrained in his original field after arriving in Canada, did not believe he had learned much from his college experience although he did acknowledge that it might have been necessary because his last educational credential was 10 years old at the time he immigrated to Canada, and because it gave him a professional designation. Conversely, P51 completed a Master of Business Administration, but noted that she did it for “the wrong reasons,” because she did not “really love business and money” and the MBA program environment had been emotionally and personally challenging. She recommended the college certificate route instead.

Retraining opportunities are not all created equal. P23 had completed teacher training in India, instead of in Canada, and then earned a couple of additional teacher qualifications in Ontario, and she had found only on-call work as a supply teacher at schools where she had volunteered (i.e., where they knew her). She noted that an old friend of hers had encouraged her to become a school teacher because this friend had integrated well into the school system in Ontario, and she was “unsettled” because she had not experienced the same success. This participant had also earned a diploma in
clinical research at a private college, which did not lead to steady employment either. P43, formerly a bank manager, had retrained in accounting, his original field, but except for a contract he was offered through someone he met during his retraining, he had had no other professional work since arriving in Canada roughly ten years before the interview.

Retraining is expensive; paying for it on top of paying for housing and taking care of dependent family members can be difficult. One study participant discovered that there are scholarships and employer sponsorships available in Canada, and she made it her mission to retrain but not pay for it herself. Her entire description is provided because she describes her planning so clearly:

When there was an opportunity to take a scholarship from one of the Filipino associations, we took that scholarship from the Association of Filipino Canadian Accountants. I wound up in first place to have a scholarship of $1,000 and then I knew that pursuing the CMA would mean spending $10,000 for the 3-year program. When I looked for a job, I made it a point that the employers are supporting the education of the employees. That’s a basic factor, because I was thinking, “I have this $1,000 to start with, but how will I continue if the employer will not be giving educational assistance?” It so happened that when I decided that, I was given $1,000 from the scholarship, and although I was a part-time employee of Scarborough hospital, my first job, I was given educational assistance of $500. So, $1,500 was good for the first year of the program. In the back of my mind I was thinking, “On my first year, I can put pursuing education already, somebody will hire me, and then I can continue the 3 years without spending a penny on my education.” I make it a point that those employers should be paying for my education.
Retraining Is Challenging

Going back to school as an adult is challenging (n=10) in no small part due to the larger number of roles adults play, including full-time worker, spouse, and parent (P43, P35, P39, P42, P47). P27 noted that his life experience drove him to finish his Canadian program of study despite the difficulties he experienced. Another participant, P30, talked about how much of her family life she had sacrificed to study part-time while working full-time. She shared an emotional story about one of her daughter’s school assignments in which the daughter explained that she felt that she had too little time with her mother and wished for more. P39’s careful budgets designed to allow him to live and pay for retraining were ruined at least once because he had to go to arrange for the care of his sick, elderly mother in his country of origin. Globetrotter P46 had to delay some personal goals: earning his MBA in France, in addition to completing insurance licensing in Canada, represented an opportunity cost for other travel and recreation that he might have enjoyed otherwise.

Even participants who were not juggling full-time work and part-time school often faced other challenges, such as a long commute to and from school when the program they wanted was not available nearby. P48 described dedicating 4 hours of travel on public transit every day to studying nursing because the only college with space available when she was ready to begin her studies was on the opposite side of the city from her home.

Several study participants talked about language testing acting as a barrier due to cost, a perceived lack of need for it, and timing. P30 convinced the master’s program she intended to pursue to accept her even though her last language test scores had
expired on the basis that the program focused on the needs of newcomers and she was a newcomer to Canada herself. She had been a teacher of English in China, which was evidence that her language skills were satisfactory. Participants’ attitudes also served as barriers. For example, believing that one is too old to return to academic studies, and that their existing educational credentials ought to be sufficient to land a job was a barrier for some participants. P28 found it difficult to understand before she retrained that her degree would not get her a job, but a college diploma would. In the end, however, she was satisfied with the results of what had felt like a strange thing for a mother and wife to do, returning to school.

Some study participants, such as nurse P45, noted that community college in Canada was significantly easier in terms of the number of hours per week it demanded compared to what they had had to dedicate to their original studies. On the other hand, P29, for example, learned more than he had expected to despite the smaller time commitment. P47 described how, due to family and work commitments, he learned only what he needed to know to pass his exams, which meant that retraining was not as satisfying a learning experience as it could have been had he had more time to dedicate to it.

Paying for their retraining was a great challenge for many participants. Government-sponsored student loans for full-time programs were not available to immigrants to Ontario until they had lived there for a full year. Participants who had received student loans struggled to repay them when full-time work did not materialize. P43, for example, completed two retraining programs with the assistance of such loans, however neither one led to professional work so he was working in a low-wage job to
make ends meet and repay the loans. Programs such as a Master of Business Administration cost more than government-sponsored loans would cover, so some of the participants (for example, P44) took out bank loans in order to pay their tuition. P42, a teacher, could make his payments, however the need to pay off both student and other loans prevented him from pursuing teaching opportunities that might suit him better because he could not risk leaving his stable job.

When loans are not available, an immigrant professional seeking full-time retraining can access Employment Insurance (EI) programs such as Second Career, but only if they had been fired or laid off from a job. P33 said that this had been explained to him when he approached a resource centre to ask about funding options for retraining. P37 was eligible for funding under the Second Career program, but only for a specific kind of retraining. When he learned that he was not going to be supported for the program he wanted, he successfully negotiated with the program manager so that he could pursue his preferred program and gain the financial aid he needed. Unfortunately, P24 had to leave her full-time job when her manager would not allow her to switch to part-time work to accommodate school. She had thought she would be able to collect EI, however that was not the case because of the way that her employer recorded the end of the employment relationship. While it had seemed to her to be a case of a mutual firing/quit, the employer reported that she had quit, so she was ineligible for EI.

Educational practices in Canada are different from those in many other parts of the world. Many study participants noted the differences in the amount of team work and group work (there is a lot more in Canada), which for the most part they enjoyed. P29 enjoyed the challenge of negotiating with his much younger group members for
their cooperation and effort. P31 found the group work also served as a powerful training ground for his English communication skills. The often-international student body in classrooms in combination with the discussion-oriented nature of many Canadian educational programs, especially P41’s program in Political Science and P44’s MBA, represented an opportunity for hearing diverse and varying perspectives. Multiple choice testing was also a new kind of examination for some immigrant professionals (P44, from India), but familiar for others (China’s P45).

Returning to school had also provided the opportunity to make friends for social support and for motivation to perform in school for some of the participants. Studying computer programming, P31 felt challenged by his classmates to excel. P42, on the other hand, expected to find friends and motivation, but instead found the courses impractical compared to teacher training he had done in the United States. He also found his fellow students competitive rather than social to the point where: “I felt like people were just trying to one up everybody. It’s just ridiculous.” Sometimes schools also served as employers: some study participants were hired as tutors, teaching assistants, or research assistants.

The industry connections often offered by colleges, in the form of instructors who are also working professionals, were appreciated by immigrant professionals who were or had been engaged in retraining. P33, who retrained in regulatory affairs, found this a refreshing change from his original education in India. He also expressed the belief that schools, even private ones like the one he attended, should also be recruiting employers to hire graduates on campus. Many college programs also offer co-op work term opportunities, which provide immigrant professionals with the opportunity to
network and develop Canadian references and experience for their resumes. Study participants generally liked their co-op work terms, even when they continued to take part-time classes at night to complete their retraining more quickly as P31 did.

For many participants, returning to school was a pleasant reminder of their skills and intelligence demonstrated by their strong academic performances. P31, an IT project manager, was chosen valedictorian and delivered a speech at his department’s graduation ceremony. Career-changer P41 gained a great deal of pride from earning an A average in his new field of study. During her MBA, P40 made long-lasting friends in part because of the intensity of some of the experiences they shared while P48 struggled to get to know her much younger classmates until she was able to impress them by impressing their instructors.

The participants shared the goal of improving their careers. P35, a purchasing agent, had half the cost of her retraining covered by her employers when they discovered she was returning to school part-time to pursue studies relevant to the work she was doing for them. Another study participant, P36, was required and sponsored by her employer to complete a college program that would help her fulfill her managerial role more effectively. Some of the participants had studied English at government-sponsored schools upon their arrival. P31 had felt well supported by his English teacher, so he returned to his English language school as a volunteer to coach others on the value and process of retraining.

Results Vary

The results of retraining varied by participant. Former bank manager P43 took out loans to complete two programs of study and yet, he said, he honestly could not
explain why he had had to retrain. His retraining was related to his original field of work, and none of it led to sustained professional employment. P27, formerly an engineer, retrained in Canada in an entirely different field, addiction counsellor, but also failed to land employment. Many of the newcomers pursued retraining when their job search did not lead to the kind of work they expected or needed to support their families. P25 was not sure which of the several certificates and diplomas he had completed landed him his first job at a bank. P39 noted that employers in his field of financial advising and insurance only began to respond to his applications after he had completed the necessary courses.

Most participants had a clear purpose for their retraining. P37, an engineer, retrained as an auto mechanic, which probably helped him get his job repairing subway cars for the Toronto Transit Commission. Likewise, P30’s master’s degree focused on immigration helped her to land a role with what was then called Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

However, not all participants were satisfied with the results of their retraining: P33 wanted to return to the health care industry, so he completed a diploma in regulatory affairs hoping to pursue his interest in working on the production side of the pharmaceutical industry; at the time of the interview he had not yet found work in that field. Study participants who arrived with advanced degrees from their countries of origin and then retrained for lower-level work in Canada because of the timing and financial constraints they were under described feeling unsatisfied in their new fields. P47 had been a banking executive. When he came to Canada he earned a finance credential because he was “very much flexible and not very much ambitious,” but then
was not pleased with the kinds of jobs he could secure in banking because they were not in upper management. P48, a teacher, regretted her decision to pursue nursing at the college level because she: “didn’t ask anyone what the nurses do because the impression of nurses for me was the nurses of back home. They don’t [change adult diapers].” At the time of the interview she had begun to work on a plan to pursue a bridging program to a Bachelor of Nursing (RN) because, she said, as a registered practical nurse (RPN) she received little respect at work.

Sometimes the retraining institution and the instructors were able to help an immigrant professional break into the workforce, but sometimes they could not. P28, who had retrained as a business analyst, had thought that employers would come to the college looking for diploma graduates like herself, but they did not. IT professional P31 believed that the job search strategy and practice interviews offered by the instructors and staff at his college helped him to gain employment. P43 attended a college-sponsored job fair and provided resumes to employers there, and P27 submitted applications with help from college staff, but neither of them received any job offers as a result. One reason P44 elected to pursue an MBA in Canada was that employers recruit on campus for graduates of such programs, and while P40 had not known to expect this, she was pleasantly surprised by it and appreciated that she simply had to follow a well-established process.

Economic conditions affected the immigrant professionals post-retraining the same way they affect younger, less experienced people: competition becomes fiercer and employers apply higher standards to their selection practices. P27, formerly in finance, earned a diploma in counselling, however he completed his training during a
period when it seemed as if even counsellors with bachelor’s and master’s degrees were struggling to find work. Fire protection graduate P29 discovered:

The job market changed when we graduated. The students just before, 1 year before us, the teacher said at least everybody got two job offers when they graduated. But when we get graduated, only 70 people get one job offers out of 100 students. More than 80% of our classmates don’t get anything.

Some of the benefits of retraining extended beyond employment, and included developing discipline, open-mindedness, and cross-cultural understanding. P27 appreciated this additional “enrichment” and P41, an engineer who obtained a political science degree, valued that he had become “open to other views.” An IT professional, P31 saw the time he spent retraining as an opportunity to adapt to the communication style and job search strategy in Canada. P28 did not believe that retraining in itself was necessary for her to work in Canada, however she admitted that she improved her English and learned about, “Western [culture]…how they get things done, their way, their style.”

Unsurprisingly, many of the first jobs obtained by immigrant professionals who retrained in undergraduate programs were appropriate for younger graduates. For several study participants, these entry-level jobs served as stepping stones to the better jobs they held at the time of the interviews. P24, who transitioned from midwifery to social services, at first held two compatible part-time jobs which was typical in her industry. MBA-graduate P44 started his career in Canada in a major bank’s management rotational program, which is typical for a younger graduate, but chose not to finish it to pursue an opportunity in another industry. Teacher P42 had begun his
accounting certification program and was working in entry-level jobs in the field before deciding instead to pursue his passion for teaching; he found himself teaching high school accounting courses for adults. P29 expressed the belief that employers deliberately hire experienced professionals at entry-level wages from college programs rather than hire at a wage more appropriate for the experience level of a mature professional.

Internships and co-op positions were very helpful as stepping stones to longer-term jobs. Import/export graduate P28 secured a paid internship after graduating that led to a better-paying long-term role fairly quickly. P50 discovered a paid internship program and landed a contract with the Ontario government, which led to long-term employment as a financial analyst there. P2 was hired by the organization where she completed her practicum placement. Computer programming graduate P31 was hired by his co-op employer before he had even graduated, then finished his diploma part-time – this was not unusual and he had selected his retraining program because it provided this possibility. Conversely, nursing graduate P48 noted that the technical skills she had learned in school were insufficient, and it was only through her first jobs that she was able to develop the skills she needed to succeed at work.

Several study participants noted that the interpersonal skills, in particular teamwork and communication skills, they learned during longer retraining programs served them well at the interview stage of their job search, and have been useful in their jobs. Formerly a department head with no formal training in management, P36’s program in leadership and management taught her: “how to manage people, how to
cope with different skills, especially here, it’s a different set of people, different culture of people….Before and after, I felt a change [in my behaviour].” Similarly, P28 had thought:

I can get anything done simply by working hard, but things can be different, so I began to change. …Present [ideas to others] as well to let other people know you did the work. And teamwork as well, so deal with other people, co-operate with people also.”

For P41, who had left engineering for studies in political science, the retraining experience led to a whole new identity for himself, both as a Canadian and as a member of his new field. He explained:

As an electrical engineer before, I must admit I wasn’t quite aware of environmental problems. Now I’m more aware of them, and I can do my part as a citizen. I always attend public meetings whenever there is a chance….And I would say that every newcomer must do these volunteering jobs because it helps the newcomer merge with the new society. You have to merge with community and do some community service. This is the only way to become fully Canadian, because I’m very proud of my Canadian citizenship.

Earning his teaching credentials in Ontario was self-actualizing, to use Maslow’s term, for P42 (Maslow, 1943). P45, a nurse who requalified in nursing after coming to Canada, found enjoyment in learning and studying, and noted that she reads in her field and attends educational events of her own volition now, which was inspired by her retraining experience.

Training is more valuable when it is used in a timely manner. P43 discovered through conversation with potential employers during the hiring process that education has an expiry date in the eyes of employers. Human resources executive P4 had an
MBA that was more than a decade old when he immigrated to Canada, so in many ways he saw his retraining in human resources as a refresher and evidence that he had basic knowledge in his field. P23, who struggled to find any professional employment, noted that it was the connections she made volunteering that helped her to get work, not the training itself, which felt like a waste of money to her. One study participant who had been a bank manager, P43, and had made several attempts at retraining and was working as a bag boy at a local grocery store at the time of the interview. He used a very interesting expression to describe his situation. He said he had earned a “certificate for Canadian job,” as if earning the certificate would entitle him to a job. He also experienced the perception of employers that training grows stale after some time has passed. The attitude that education ought to equal employment permeated his interview, and the attitudes expressed seem similar to P23’s attitude toward training.

For some participants, it was the people they met at their retraining institutions that led helped them to find employment. P4 had approached a local college about challenging exams in their human resources program, and in addition to letting him know which exams he could challenge, the program director offered him a job teaching in the part-time version of the program. P49, a physician, decided to retrain in insurance, and was referred by a classmate to a call centre that conducted medical interviews for insurance purposes in many languages including her native language. As his fellow MBA students began to trust him, P21 was referred to one entry-level position, which led to a chain of interviews that landed him a managerial position. As he explained:
It takes time. Networking is not easy. People need to have confidence. Just knowing people is not enough. They need to have confidence in you to know that who they are referring is the right person for the job. Then there has to be an opportunity at that time, and then only with a good job.

**Summary**

This chapter presented the themes that emerged from the participants’ descriptions of their experiences with retraining. A majority of the study participants had immigrated with spouses and children, and as a result were juggling a range of financial, housing, and time management issues during their retraining. Many participants selected a retraining course or program because of its perceived value to the labour market, and for some the investment led to the kind of employment they were looking for; for others it led to employment options that did not meet their expectations or to no employment at all.
CHAPTER 8
DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I address the research questions about how the work search and labour market integration experiences of recent immigrant professionals in Canada compare to those in their countries of origin. I also discuss the application of Chen’s (2017) career self-determination theory’s three basic motivational needs: career autonomy, career competence, and career relatedness. Chen hypothesized that without meeting the need for career competence, one would not be able to meet one’s need for career autonomy, however this was not the case for a majority of the study participants. A fourth basic motivational career need is proposed, career consistency, which when met seems to mediate the impact of unmet needs for career competence and career autonomy.

With regard to the work search and integration experiences of recent immigrant professionals, the research questions were:

1. How is the work search in Canada similar and/or different to what they experienced in their countries of origin?

2. How is moving through the labour market in Canada similar and/or different to what they experienced in their countries of origin?

With regard to Chen’s (2017) career self-determination theory, the research questions were:

1. What has been the role of career autonomy in recent immigrant professionals' work lives thus far?
2. What has been the role of career competence?

3. What has been the role of career relatedness?

4. Are the motivational needs expressed by recent immigrant professionals encompassed in Chen’s (2017) metatheory, or are there other needs?

**Similarities and Differences: Economy and Expectations**

The Canadian labour market did not meet the expectations of the immigrant professionals in the study, who arrived under the human capital immigration model from the end of the 1990s through to the early 2010s. Study participants ended up in lower-wage jobs that did not match their level of education or experience, and they noted this was not unusual among their peers. This phenomenon, that otherwise well-qualified workers struggle to secure employment commensurate with their education and experience, can be difficult to understand. Participants sought to understand their experiences by comparing the Canadian economy and labour market to that of their countries of origin; they re-launched their careers by taking lower-skill jobs; and, when necessary, they took on low-skill survival jobs in order to support themselves and their families. These immigrant professionals arrived under the economic immigration system in force in Canada from the 1990s to 2010, which welcomed all applicants and determined eligibility using a human capital model. The new model favours immediate labour market integration by inviting candidates deemed desirable for the economy (Campbell, 2016; Government of Canada, 2016). It would be interesting to repeat this study with immigrant professionals who arrived under the new system to determine the similarities and differences between them and immigrants like the participants in this study who arrived under the old policy.
Differing economies and labour markets

Participants noted that their expectations for the Canadian labour market – particularly, the Toronto market – had been shaped by the economies of their countries of origin where comparatively fewer individuals were able to pursue post-secondary education (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, n.d.a., n.d.b.) and economic growth had reached double digits (The World Bank: China, n.d.). Many of the participants found it strange that they had to struggle to gain any attention from potential employers in Canada since in their countries of origin they would have found work in their fields fairly quickly. Participants were also highly affected by economic downturns, such as the one caused by the attack on the World Trade Center in September 2001. Location mattered, and a few participants realized that since the Greater Toronto Area seemed to be saturated with available, qualified workers, their skills might be valued more highly in other parts of Canada. Because most research into the settlement experiences of immigrants is conducted in major cities such as Toronto and Vancouver, it would be interesting to repeat this study in a smaller city such as Kitchener-Waterloo or Edmonton.

In many countries outside of North America basic education is highly valued, as shown by enrolments, but higher education is less widely available. In general, major countries in the Asia Pacific region have invested in education, and large countries such as South Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia all have nearly 100% elementary school enrolment (Mustapha, 2004). China at the time of the study was also providing the first 9 years of education to 85% of its citizens (Wang, 2004). All but South Korea, however, had low secondary school enrolment at the time, and even lower post-
secondary enrolment. As previously noted in this study, this means that Canada was recruiting from among a small sub-group of highly educated individuals in many of the top source countries from which Canada received applications. When they arrived, these people struggled to gain suitable employment in the large urban centres where they typically chose to settle. Because they were often unable to find work commensurate with their education and skills, they were not contributing to society or to the global economy to their full capacity. Therefore, this phenomenon represented both a national and a global loss of human capital. Any nation is free to establish its own goals for immigration, however one wonders about the social justice of inviting physicians to Canada and then failing to integrate them systematically into the health care system, for example.

**Starting in entry-level jobs**

In a study on Chinese immigrants in Canada, 84% of participants, including medical doctors and computer specialists, were found to have dropped one or more professional status ranks since emigrating (Salaff & Greve, 2003). A similar study found that only 10% of immigrant men felt that they had good jobs that were appropriate for their education and skill level (Bhandari, Horvath, & To, 2006). A few participants in the present study experienced such significant drops in responsibility and salary as they restarted their careers here that they felt the need to hide their circumstances from family members in their countries of origin. They also advised well-established potential immigrants not to come to Canada. In other words, they did not want their families or other potential immigrants to experience the loss of status and identity that they had. Other participants re-launched their careers in Canada in a step-wise manner,
deliberately starting at the bottom of an organization in order to work their way up, the same way that recent graduate labour market entrants do. There seemed to be a great many similarities between the experiences of recent immigrant professionals and “fresh” college and university graduates. Studies comparing their experiences entering the labour market to those of recent immigrants would be valuable given the frequency with which immigrants choose to pursue Canadian educational credentials in their efforts to establish themselves.

**Survival jobs**

Immigrants who arrived in Canada under the human capital points-based system were required to bring several months’ worth of living expenses, about $10,000 according to one participant. Since approximately half of the study participants and their families had landed in the Greater Toronto Area, these living expenses estimates provided by the Government of Canada were far too low, and study participants reported running out of money within 6 weeks in a labour market where a professional job search generally took 6 months. Most participants described taking low-skill, low-wage survival jobs in order to provide a basic income for their families. Some of these jobs were perceived as better than others; for example, working in fast food meant a cheap meal once a day. Immigrant professionals who saw these jobs as stepping stones strove to learn more about Canadian culture, practice their language skills, and re-establish networks of friends and acquaintances while they held them. A few participants were never able to escape these survival jobs despite retraining, and their attitude about their career futures could only be described as resigned.
Of immigrants who arrived in 2008, 54.7% intended to work in a professional field, 14.6% in a managerial field, and 25.0% in a technical or skilled field (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2008, p. 46). Incongruously given the middle-class salaries traditionally associated with these fields, the median income for a recent immigrant in an urban area in 2006 was $16,800 (Statistics Canada, 2009a), which was at or below the low-income cut-off, or so-called poverty line, of between $16,603 and $21,199 for a single employable person living in an urban setting in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2009c). These figures tell us that professional immigrants were not finding the kinds of employment they sought. They also tell us that the provincial minimum wage at the time was not a living wage, and that the current welfare system, a resource for those unable to find employment, did not provide adequate income either to keep newcomers out of poverty. A fuller discussion of this issue is a matter for studies of both economics and labour policy; however, it is worth noting that such policies have real costs in wasted human capital.

**Similarities and Differences: Job Search Difficulties**

Researchers have identified three important barriers to employment for professionally trained immigrants who arrived under the Skilled Worker Program: lack of recognition of foreign credentials; long delays in the assessment of credentials by provincial professional regulatory bodies; and having little or no Canadian employment experience (Bauder, 2003; Brouwer, 1999). There seems to have been a disconnect between the government’s intent to facilitate the immigration of highly skilled individuals in order to manage Canadian labour market skills shortages and the many Canadian regulatory bodies and employers that seem unwilling to engage new immigrants in
appropriate roles. One possible reason for this trend may be a problem with language: a 2003 literacy and numeracy survey found that immigrants who completed their education outside of Canada possess less skill in literacy and problem-solving in English or French than Canadian-educated individuals (McMullen, 2009). These key issues – lack of or delayed recognition of foreign credentials, lack of Canadian employment experience (or lack of recognition of foreign experience), and literacy issues – may discourage employers from hiring recent immigrants and create barriers that are difficult for even well-educated immigrants to overcome. This is compounded by the fact that the files of recent immigrant professionals have been found to be less attractive when there is an abundance of Canadian-educated candidates with easily recognizable experience available (Albert, Takouda, Robichaud, & Haq, 2013), as is the case in a city such as Toronto where the present study was conducted.

It is possible, even likely, that the educational backgrounds of recent immigrant professionals to Canada are not being evaluated by the right bodies, and are therefore difficult for employers to understand. George and Chaze (2012) found that only half of 309 engineers who immigrated to Canada were familiar with the licensing process in Canadian provinces. Understandably, these engineers approached a wide variety of bodies for evaluation of their credentials. When their credentials were assessed by a professional engineering licensing body, they were met with the highest level of acceptance by employers, professional bodies, universities, and immigration officers; however, credentials assessed by an educational institution were much less widely accepted by employers and others (George & Chaze, 2012). Employers seem to trust credentials recognized by professional licensing bodies much more easily. Because she
was misdirected by an education provider about the meaning and value of her credentials, one participant in the present study missed the opportunity to re-enter her field in health care. Another reported receiving misinformation from an education provider as well, suggesting that there is likely significant inconsistency in how knowledgeable individual staff are at the many kinds of service providers available to newcomers. Programs such as the Canadian Immigrant Integration Program (CIIP; Government of Canada, 2018; Planning for Canada, n.d.), which offers online workshops on general topics such as working in Canada for all and individual advice for some economic immigrants, seems like a helpful resource to help immigrants avoid being misled by less knowledgeable service providers. Because the program seems to lack the capacity to provide individual support to all immigrants to Canada, perhaps it could be a source of information about the services offered by the hundreds of government-funded immigrant support agencies in Canada.

**Overqualification / Underutilization**

Most of the study participants arrived expecting to find a job similar to their last one while acknowledging that they had also expected to have to adapt somewhat to meet Canadian expectations as well. As one professional discovered, “none of the immigrants I met, and I must have met over 100, none of them were successful in their career life after immigrating here. None of these were at the level that they were in their own country.” The stories of other immigrants led him to pursue retraining fairly quickly.

A Statistics Canada survey, the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC), reported that 53% of new immigrants aged 24–44 were still seeking appropriate employment 2 to 4 years after their arrival (Schellenberg & Maheux, 2007). In a survey
of immigrants conducted by the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC), 60% of respondents who had found employment indicated that they were overqualified for the jobs in which they were employed (TRIEC, 2003, as reported in Asanin Dean & Wilson, 2009). This finding has been supported by data from the LSIC (Chen et al., 2010). Further, according to the 2006 Census, almost 30% of recent immigrant men with university degrees (vs 11% of Canadian-born men with degrees) worked in jobs that only required a high school education (Frenette et al., 2009a). This held true even when field of study in university and age were accounted for. This seems to suggest bias in the hiring process at a societal level.

Participants’ personal hypotheses about why employers would not hire immigrant professionals for jobs like those they had previously held or jobs on track to reach that level varied. A couple of participants expressed the idea that perhaps they were perceived as a competitive threat because of their qualifications, so managers would not even place them in entry-level jobs in their field. Other participants could not develop hypotheses because they received mixed messages: they were overqualified for the entry-level jobs they were interviewed for and could not get interviews for jobs for which they believed they were fully qualified. Only a few study participants mentioned that they suspected discrimination in the hiring process, even though researchers such as Krings and Olivares (2007), Esses, Dietz and Bhardwaj (2004), Esses et al. (2006), and Salaff et al. (2002) found that hiring decision-makers were devaluing foreign-earned credentials and skills on resumes that were otherwise equivalent in education and experience to resumes with credentials and experience gained closer to home.
**Seeking work in the same field**

Many participants saw clear connections between their original education and previous experience and their success when they finally landed professional work in Canada even when they had retrained in a new field. Remaining in the same or a very similar field of work made the most sense to a great many of the study participants because it made their career history consistent and gave them confidence.

Volunteering played a significant role in restarting many of the immigrant professionals' careers. To work for no pay in order to gain experience and develop a professional network was a strange idea to many of the participants. But it was also clear from the accounts of several study participants that the organizations where they volunteered may have skirted provincial labour law by having them do work that would otherwise have been done by a paid employee. This suggests that newcomers and the business community alike require clearer communication about the conditions under which volunteering to gain experience is legal.

Professionals who had worked in fields with clear-cut skill sets, such as accountants, struggled with the notion of “Canadian experience.” As one study participant asked, “Do you read numbers any different here?” Having experience written large was also not sufficient, as several participants discovered after they had volunteered or held survival jobs in fields unrelated to their preferred fields of work – experience doing similar work as employers needed done was preferred.

Credentialing processes typically require the adoption of Canadian values and cultural norms, for example for pharmacists (Girard & Bauder, 2007) and teachers (Myles, Cheng, & Wang, 2006), which may be difficult for someone to adjust if reasons
are not provided and experience in Canadian settings cannot be obtained. Study participants who had volunteered, completed an unpaid or paid internship, or had worked in entry-level jobs related to their desired work reported improved confidence and communication skills, and overall seem to have been more successful at securing employment at higher levels of skill and responsibility than those who had not. Their experiences probably also helped them to adjust to the norms of their new workplaces.

Several immigrant professionals were unpleasantly surprised by the value placed by Canadian employers on soft skills and professional networks; in their countries of origin their careers had been built on the development of exceptional technical skills. Those who learned to adapt their soft skills reported transferring them with success to their jobs. The technical skills that had led to success for some study participants were not valued in the same way in Canada so they had to learn new skills to land work in their fields. Some professionals were dismayed to discover that Canadian employers preferred a credential in their fields, which had not required a credential in their countries of origin, and earning the Canadian credential required Canadian experience, which they could only obtain with difficulty (Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials, 2010).

This set of findings – that remaining in the same field of work makes sense at a fundamental level; that related experience (even unpaid) is helpful for adapting to the necessary Canadian cultural norms and professional values; and that some credentials require experience in Canada – suggests that the government ought to do more to ensure that recent immigrant professionals know what experiences and training they need to re-establish themselves in their chosen field. Perhaps the current immigration
system, which favours immigrant professionals who have offers of employment and/or seem to have specific skills that meet immediate labour market needs, has improved the situation of recent immigrants. Perhaps it has not. In any case, the government ought to be taking reasonable steps to ensure that the individuals they are inviting to Canada are in fact securing employment. The first of the individuals invited under the new system should be eligible for citizenship very soon, at which point perhaps some data on their salaries and occupational achievements will be made available.

Educational credentials from abroad were often met with little interest or understanding by employers and Ontario licensing bodies acted more often as barriers than as guides or mentors in the eyes of study participants. Several physicians who had been unable to earn their medical licenses in Canada for a variety of reasons participated in the study and all of them recommended that the licensing process be made less expensive, that feedback be provided after examinations (exam questions are confidential so one never knows which answers were incorrect), and that hands-on assessment either replace or supplement the examinations. Currently, foreign-educated physicians must pass a written exam, which takes preparation time, and then usually face 2–6 years of additional training before they can practice (Bauder, 2003). Internationally educated pharmacists face 1 1/2 to more than 2 years of exam preparation and internship before they can be licensed in Canada (Austin, 2007). Although various levels of government have mandated that there be paths for internationally trained professionals to gain access to licensed fields, there is no requirement that obtaining a license be realistically achievable. This issue showed itself clearly in this study as it has in many other studies.
Job search is cultural

Most of the immigrant professionals who participated in the study found that responding to job advertisements was an ineffective work search strategy in Canada even if it had been effective for them in their countries of origin. They expressed surprise that potential employers rarely responded to their applications, and when they did it was usually to tell them they were not qualified because they lacked Canadian experience.

The value of personal and professional networks, which most study participants initially lacked, for finding survival jobs and landing professional work later on became apparent as they slowly developed. Networks also contributed to language fluency and cultural knowledge, which are positively related to job search clarity (or goals), which is related to job search intensity, which was related to the number of interviews a Canadian immigrant was likely to have and the number of job offers they received in a study by Guerrero and Rothstein (2012). Amundson et al. (2011) also found that resource development, such as building networks and improving skills, especially communication and job search skills, is the second most prominent category of behaviour related to success. The old adage, it’s not what you know, it’s who you know, appears to have some truth in it. It is possible that networks played little or no role in their prior job searches, however it is also possible that the participants simply failed to notice how much influence networks had in their country of origin because they were so much a part of the natural order of the world of work as they are here.

The newcomer professionals who participated in this study were qualified by the Government of Canada to immigrate, and not unreasonably, as one participant said, “I
thought that because of my work experience and background, some job was waiting for me." They believe they are highly skilled, according to the downward comparisons against their Canadian counterparts made by several study participants. It was, therefore, confusing for them that gaining professional employment was such a struggle compared to their work search experiences in their countries of origin. Getting through interviews successfully was particularly challenging for many participants because of their difficulty meeting the Canadian expectation that they would promote themselves. In some of the top source countries for immigrants to Canada self-promotion is frowned upon.

**Similarities and Differences: Chance and Opportunity**

An analysis of Canadian data provided by the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC) and an analysis of recent immigrants’ intended jobs as categorized by the National Occupational Classification codes, shows that the risk or likelihood of finding employment in one’s intended occupation is higher in the first year after arriving in Canada (Grenier & Xue, 2011). After the first year the hazards or chances of finding desired employment are drastically reduced, meaning that a newcomer seeking work is most likely to find their desired employment in the first year living in Canada or not at all. Newcomers seeking work in paraprofessional fields, such as sales, services, transportation, and manufacturing, tended to find desired employment more quickly than their peers seeking professional and managerial work in Canada (Grenier & Xue, 2011). Those who did not secure their preferred employment must have changed their original career goals, based on this analysis, which aligns with the findings of the present study.
Research from outside of Canada may help to explain these phenomena: Finnish researchers concluded that immigrants to Finland, who experience similar difficulty gaining employment, are victims of social closure (reported in Frank, 2013). Social closure is a term describing a situation in which one social group excludes another from access to a particular resource. In this case, Finns – and based on her LSIC analysis, researcher Frank (2013) would argue, Canadians – are excluding recent immigrants from accessing employment at levels above blue-collar labour. The practice of social exclusion by controlling professional credentials and institutions serves to maintain a dominant group’s privilege over a minority group (Frank, 2013). Whether happening intentionally or unconsciously, this barrier to opportunities contributes to the unemployment and underemployment of recent immigrant professionals in Canada (Grenier & Xue, 2011).

A diverse social network improves one’s chances of employment. Nakhaie and Kazemipur (2013) also used 2001–2005 data from the LSIC, which include a wide range of factors from involvement in professional associations through pre- and post-immigration friends from the same and from other ethnic groups, to analyze the social and human capital of recent immigrants to Canada. They found that all social capital measures except homogeneity of friendship networks had a greater effect on the odds of a newcomer being employed four years after immigration than human capital (e.g., education) did. In addition, higher social capital tends to lead to higher socioeconomic status (SES). The lesson from this study for newcomers to Canada is clear: meeting new and diverse people – especially Canadian-born and well-established immigrants –
is one of the most important things they can do to improve their chances of finding employment.

**Chance plays a role**

Many study participants identified luck as having played a role in their career and retraining experiences in Canada. The luck they identified often took the form of meeting the right people at the right times. A few participants felt that their personal choices played a greater role than luck in their experiences in Canada so far. They explained that perseverance and flexibility mattered most. One participant described making his own luck by choosing – with purpose – to talk with people. Overall the immigrant professionals who participated in this study felt that they had a lot of choice in where they completed their retraining, and few attributed their retraining decisions to chance or luck.

**Take advantage of opportunities**

When asked about chance, some study participants understood this to be a question about opportunity, and talked about how opportunities can arise very quickly and it was up to them to be ready to take advantage of them. A few participants expressed some regret about missed or rejected opportunities. That one take advantage of the opportunities presented rather than hoping or planning for some other opportunity in the future is a recommendation they would make to new immigrant professionals arriving in Canada.
Similarities and Differences: Retraining and Results

When employment does not materialize, many newcomers seek further education in a Canadian institution. An analysis of the data from the LSIC showed that newcomers’ participation in post-secondary education increased from 10% at 6 months after arrival to 33% and 44% at 2 years and 4 years respectively. Factors that made it more likely that a newcomer would participate in further education include being male, being younger, and having tried and failed to secure full-time employment (Adamuti-Trache, Anisef, Sweet, & Walters, 2013). Having a diverse network of friends and acquaintances outside of one’s ethnic group also increased the likelihood a newcomer would engage in post-secondary education in Canada. Fang et al. (2009) used WES survey data to show that immigrants who pursue education and training in Canada are more likely to be able to find employment commensurate with their skills and education, so pursuing retraining is a reasonable strategy for improving employability.

Planning for retraining

Immigrant professionals who participated in this study had not generally planned to pursue retraining in Canada, with the exception of a few who knew that their field of work was so narrow that the chances of finding employment in it were slim (e.g., satellite engineer). When they decided that retraining might be the solution to their unemployment struggles, many participants asked their networks to recommend institutions and even programs of study. Perceptions of the labour market and outcomes for previous graduates were taken into consideration. The Greater Toronto Area has many colleges and universities, so factors such as location and length of program were variables in the decision. Grant and Nadin (2007) found that 51% of recent immigrants
surveyed had taken graduate studies, and 23.5% a certificate. A majority (72.8%) of the immigrants who had taken Canadian training programs did so in order to obtain qualifications in the same or a similar field as they had worked in before coming to Canada. In addition, 33.7% of survey respondents said they had felt forced into Canadian retraining because their previous qualifications were not being recognized by employers. Returning to college or university to complete a whole new credential was challenging but manageable, according to most participants, even though in their countries of origin it would have been impossible for a mid-career adult to go back to school. It just was not something people did so none of the necessary support systems existed.

Pursuing a long-term program of study, whether full-time or part-time, required significant sacrifices from the immigrant professionals in the study, most of whom had a spouse and one or more children. The commuting to and from classes, the readings, and the homework all took time away from their families. Paying for training was also a challenge because government-sponsored student loans in Ontario were not available until someone had lived there for a full year. And of course, loans have to be paid back, adding to their cost of living.

The approaches to education in Canada were, however, refreshing to many participants because of the stronger emphasis on student–teacher and student–student interactions than they had experienced in their countries of origin. Overall, most study participants would not have chosen to return to school, but they were usually pleased to have had the opportunity and pleased with the experience.
All the study participants had come to Canada with a diploma or a degree, which was a key part of their application to immigrate to Canada. Because of this, most of the professionals were surprised to find that they needed to retrain, especially, as was the case for many, to find they needed to complete an entire diploma or degree. A few participants noted that the material they studied might not have seemed new, but the workplace culture and communication skills they developed during their studies had proven useful in their work search – however they could have learned these things at work, if they have been given the chance. This is especially significant given the opportunity cost of studying full-time, as many participants did, and that completing a diploma or degree is still no guarantee of employment, as many participants discovered. According to the findings of Adamuti-Trache, Anisef, and Sweet (2013), learning on the job might be preferable. They found that, across 4 years, the employment rate and wages for those who had not pursued any education and those who had college or trade school were similar. However, those who had pursued a university credential were earning 9–13% more and had achieved prestige closer to their goal. Overall this finding that university studies offer clearer benefits than college or other courses was echoed in the self-reports of the participants in the present study.

Results vary

Training is not a panacea, although a few professionals who participated in the study who had not found employment on the basis of their retraining expressed the belief that their retraining should have meant there was a job waiting or them. Several study participants completed entire college diplomas in Canada and were still unable to secure steady employment in either their original fields or their new ones. A number of
the immigrant professionals who did land work on the basis of their retraining were displeased with the kind of work they were doing. Although the work may have been appropriate for recent graduates with no prior experience, they felt that it was below their actual skill level. However, the learning opportunities offered by college and university programs extend beyond the specific field of study into workplace culture and communication skills, which was identified as helpful for the interview process as well as for fitting into the workplace. Instructors and fellow students were very helpful overall in helping study participants find both part-time employment during school and full-time when the program was finished. Retraining overall offered significant learning in culture and communication – but a few participants who were aware of this noted that they would have rather learned these skills at work. If the most significant learning for a recent immigrant professional taking a diploma or degree program is cultural, then it would be reasonable for the government to support the creation of experiential learning programs to facilitate labour market integration. Practice firms, which operated in Ontario from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, are one kind of experiential learning program that could be resurrected (Canadian Practice Firms Network, n.d.).

**Applicability of Career Self-Determination Theory to the Experiences of Recent Immigrant Professionals**

Recent findings (Asanin Dean & Wilson, 2009; Chen, Smith, & Mustard, 2010; Schellenberg & Maheux, 2007) have suggested that 50–60% of recent immigrants, many of whom arrived as economic immigrants under the points-based human capital system used in Canada in the 1990s and 2000s, were not meeting some of their career self-determination needs (Chen, 2017). The feeling that one is “overqualified,” identified
by many participants, seems most likely to be related to an unmet need for career competence, which was frequently characterized as having underused skills. The need to continue searching for better options from which to select could relate to a lack of career autonomy, and the ongoing search for a community of fellow professionals to a lack of career relatedness. The present study explored whether the lived work and retraining experiences of immigrant professionals can be understood in terms of the career motivational needs career autonomy, career competence, and career relatedness. And if so, what were the roles of the three career motivational needs in their experiences and are there any additional needs apparent in their experiences not encompassed by Chen’s (2017) career self-determination theory (CSDT). All three needs were present, in addition to a fourth need that this study proposes as an addition to the CSDT model, career consistency, which can be seen to act as a mediating variable for the needs for career autonomy and career competence.

**Career autonomy**

The experiences of recent immigrant professionals in Canada have clear connections to the principles of Chen's (2017) career self-determination theory (CDST) with the addition of career consistency (see Figure 1).
Figure 1. Career Self-Determination Theory model, with the proposed additional need Career Consistency.
With regard to Career Autonomy, some participants in the present study acknowledged that chance played a role in their experiences, however most believed that everything from the decision to emigrate to their jobs and retraining was the result of their choices. In other words, they had practised autonomy throughout the journey. Even the need to take survival jobs when the economy in their new Canadian homeland failed to provide them with work equivalent to the work they had left behind was perceived simply as part of the journey. Choosing to pursue further education likely helps to meet the need for career autonomy when employment does not materialize. The decision to retrain in particular seems to bear a significant relation to autonomy because of the many decisions involved. As any adult who has engaged in further studies knows, being a student is more complicated when one has a family to take care of and rent or mortgage to pay, and yet many participants – the vast majority of whom had not planned to retrain – earned an entire diploma or degree while juggling responsibilities atypical for full-time college or university students. These professionals seemed to have gone to great lengths to put themselves back into positions of greater autonomy.

On the topic of credential evaluation and recognition, the struggle to find accurate information challenged immigrant professionals’ need for career autonomy because it made them reliant on others whom they did not trust. That employers frequently did not recognize their foreign-earned credentials and experience, even though these were the factors that gained them admission to Canada, probably also challenged their career autonomy because it meant that the decision they made to immigrate was based on misinformation or a misunderstanding of their actual options.
The licensing process for internationally trained physicians did not meet their need for career autonomy: the emphasis on language skills made the process seem rigged against them, and the assessment process lacked transparency. Participants described how they could not make well-informed decisions about the process until they were fully engaged in it. Finding accurate information about licensing in many fields had been a challenge for these professionals, probably because the Internet was not as valuable a resource at the time. No doubt this interfered with the participants’ need for career autonomy through feeling in charge of their decisions.

Most study participants did not perceive much true chance occurring except for accidental meetings with helpful persons. This suggests that either their need for career autonomy (Chen, 2017) and a sense that they were in control of their circumstances coloured their memories of their work search experiences so that they remember feeling that they had choice, or that they were truly driven to make most of the few choices they identified they had.

Despite the low skill required for some of the first jobs in Canada that they were forced by circumstances to take, many study participants said that they still felt in control of their work lives. These experiences of feeling in control even though they were not able to secure the kinds of employment they preferred suggest that there may be a mediating factor or an additional need that even low-level work met for these professionals. A possible additional piece for the CSDT model, career consistency, will be proposed as a mediating need. Perhaps when this need is met, an unmet need for career autonomy is not as keenly felt.
Career competence

Chen's (2017) notion of career competence is useful for thinking about the experiences of immigrant professionals in the labour market because competence is contextual. One's competence may be felt personally and perceived by others, however, if there are no opportunities to exercise one's competence, one is likely to experience frustration of this need on both fronts. Upon landing in Canada, most immigrant professionals in the study were quite surprised that their job applications garnered almost no response at all. In the event they were offered an interview, many described difficulty promoting themselves in that context because self-promotion was frowned upon in the culture from which they had come. This challenged their need for career competence, because the work search skills that had served them before were no longer serving them.

Participants expressed dismay that the experience and credentials that gained them entry to Canada were not necessarily desirable to employers unless they came with a personal introduction via a network. What both harmed and benefited many participants greatly was a lack of Chen's (2017) career relatedness. Those who had pursued and met that need possessed networks that helped them to find work, while those who delayed meeting that need in anticipation of a future network of people in their fields may have missed opportunities to demonstrate their competence. Some study participants received training in writing formal job applications, which is related to career competence. This is a useful skill in theory, however most participants described the frustration of applying for posted jobs and rarely receiving a response. This would thwart their need for career competence no matter how strong their writing skills. These
unmet needs would also thwart the need for career autonomy, according to Chen (2017), because the need for career autonomy cannot be satisfied if one's skills are not recognized and one lacks professional relationships.

Starting in lower-level jobs created frustration and disappointment for many of the study participants. They felt overqualified or underutilized depending on the situation. All participants believed they had brought strong qualifications and experience from their countries of origin – after all, they were invited to Canada on the basis of those things. Taking lower-level jobs failed to meet their need to feel competent. For some, the Canadian experience demanded by employers made sense when it came to adapting to Canadian work culture, and they felt more competent at work after they had learned to fit in. Pursuing retraining and regaining competence by earning a Canadian credential – in many cases an entire diploma or degree – makes a great deal of sense when the experiences of recent immigrant professionals are understood in the context of the basic need for career competence.

Some of the lessons of the study's participants around the theme of seeking work in the same field connect directly to Chen's (2017) needs for career competence and career relatedness. Having Canadian experience – even if it was gained through volunteer work rather than paid – made a positive difference to many participants' work searches. The credentials and experience – skills and competencies – that they brought from home were often not useful in their first jobs, and in some cases were not used at all in the work they did. In addition, lacking colleagues with whom to have field-related conversations created loneliness. Again, it is no wonder that these unmet needs caused frustration for so many of the participants.
The general notion of finding a fit in the labour market dovetails with Chen’s (2017) CSDT notion of the basic need for career competence because that need is contextual: one feels competent in particular settings, and this is assisted when others recognize one’s competence. However, a number of participants felt that despite the low skill required for some of their first jobs in Canada, these were rewarding experiences. In combination with the sense of control and autonomy many participants felt working in lower-skill jobs, it seems there may be an additional need that these immigrant professionals met through this work.

**Career relatedness**

Career relatedness, according to Chen, is a necessary social condition that connects career autonomy and career competence because autonomy and competence are exercised in social environments. Only a few participants talked about their need for professional relationships, however the need for career relatedness, including the need for a professional network to find employment commensurate with their qualifications and experience, appeared in most participants’ interviews. Their need for career relatedness was poorly met until they found professional networks. Participants who had integrated successfully into the field they had been in before emigrating or their new, post-retraining field explained that responding to job advertisements was insufficient for moving their careers forward. They found that it was connections with people that led to advancement. Networking and building relationships came naturally to some, but caused distress for others. Some of the latter expressed the belief that networking for employment may be a Canadian cultural phenomenon. At least, it was not part of their previous work culture. Retraining may have strained family
relationships, but it also created new networks of relationships that met participants’ needs for career relatedness in ways that their lower-level and survival jobs typically did not.

As previously discussed, some study participants expressed dismay that their technical skills and credentials – earned both in their countries of origin and in Canada – were frequently insufficient for landing professional work, and dismay that they also needed a network of people to support their work searches. But others reported that cultural and ethnic networks were often helpful. The networks that professionals developed through some of the longer retraining programs, such as diploma and degree programs, were also frequently helpful for referring study participants to employment opportunities, supporting the need for career relatedness and also career autonomy in the long-run. It is possible that networks played little or no role in their work searches in their countries of origin, however it is also possible that they simply failed to notice how much influence they had because they were so much a part of the natural order of the world of work there as they are here.

An additional, mediating need: Career consistency

An additional need was expressed by study participants that does not fit neatly into the CSDT as described by Chen (2017). This may be characterized as the need for career consistency. Chen proposed that an unmet need for career competence is associated with a lack in career autonomy, however a number of participants found that despite the low skill (i.e., low level of demonstrated competence) required for some of their first jobs in Canada, they still felt in control of their work lives. Study participants expressed the need for continuity in terms of the kinds of work they wanted and also in
terms of the role work played in their lives, such as maintaining their identity as a breadwinner. This suggest that there is a mediating need which, when met, permits an unmet need for career competence to exist while the need for career autonomy is met. The experiences that contributed to the proposal of the need for career consistency include unmet expectations of finding a fit in the economy and having to restart their careers in lower-level jobs while still feeling positive about the situation; finding differences in Canadian work search strategies and hiring processes from their past experiences yet still feeling that they were in control of the situation; and surprise that retraining (especially when this involved entire diplomas or degrees) did not lead directly to employment as it did in their countries of origin, yet finding value in having pursued it anyway. This additional need seems to serve as a mediating need between the need for career competence and the need for career autonomy.

Recent immigrant professionals frequently restarted their careers “at the bottom” and felt positive about doing so. They did not pursue this course because they lacked competence, but because they sought to regain or retain life roles – to meet a need for career consistency. Sometimes starting at the bottom meant working without pay or volunteering. Study participants who had volunteered, completed an unpaid or paid internship, or worked in entry-level positions related to their desired field reported improved confidence and communication skills, and overall seemed to have found greater success at securing employment at higher levels of skill and responsibility than those who had not. They had probably also adjusted to the norms of their new workplaces. In meeting this need for career consistency, their needs for career
competence and career relatedness had also been met. In addition, they felt that they had chosen their path, so it also met their need for career autonomy.

Retraining, whether in the same field or a new field one, led participants to pursue lower-level jobs than they had held in their countries of origin as well, and yet even those in lower-level jobs expressed satisfaction at having their skills valued, which seems to be related to the need for career competence. According to survey data collected by Grant and Nadin (2007), a majority (72.8%) of immigrants in Canadian training programs were there to obtain qualifications in the field they had worked in in their country of origin or something similar, which would meet their need for career competence and their need for career consistency. In addition, only 33.7% of the survey respondents said they had felt forced into Canadian retraining because their previous qualifications were not being recognized by employers, so the need for career autonomy was being met for two-thirds of the immigrant professionals pursuing retraining. Returning to college or university to complete a whole new credential was challenging, especially since in many of their countries of origin it would be impossible for a mid-career adult to go back to school, but it was manageable, according to most of this study’s participants. With this wealth of choice there was a great deal of opportunity to meet the need for career autonomy. Overall, the participants would have preferred to meet their need for career competence through employment rather than further education, but it was not a terrible option. Participants described feeling motivated and validated for their intelligence in their retraining experiences, which is a clear description of meeting Chen’s (2017) career competence need. Pursuing retraining may thereby
meet the basic career motivational needs for career competence, career autonomy and career relatedness, as well as the proposed need, career consistency.

While taking a lower-level job may be perceived as a stepping stone toward a future job more consistent with an immigrant professional’s identity and meeting the need for career consistency, it would also meet some of an individual’s need for career autonomy because they elected to pursue that path. At the same time, taking lower-level jobs might frustrate the need for career competence due to the low level of skills required by those jobs.

Overall, the retraining experience seems to play a very significant role in meeting the career self-determination needs of recent immigrant professionals (see Figure 1, p. 181). The need for career autonomy drove most study participants to complete an entire diploma or degree in Canada in order to reclaim the higher-level positions in their original field of work or to find better opportunities in new fields. Concluding that employers wanted a Canadian credential represented a challenge to the participants’ career competence, and the need to feel competent drove them to retraining. The retraining process created stress in their relationships and at the same time allowed them to participate in or create networks of professional relationships that met their need for career relatedness. Pursuing retraining also allowed immigrant professionals to maintain a sense of control over their work lives (and meet the need for career autonomy) and to work toward regaining or retaining some of their other life roles (meeting the need for career consistency). Other participants appreciated the opportunity to hold jobs where they used a few of their working skills so they could develop their communication and interpersonal skills. In this way, they met some of their
need for career competence while they developed the new skills they needed to find jobs equivalent to their previous ones and met their need for career consistency.

When professionals pursued work in the same field as they had been in before emigrating, they were attempting to meet their needs for career competence, career autonomy, and career relatedness. Others elected to pursue retraining and work in completely different fields for a better work–life balance and in response to the needs of the local labour market. They still found satisfaction because their need for career consistency was being met, either because of the perceived connection to their original background or because it allowed them to maintain or regain other identities, for example, that of breadwinner.

There were a few participants for whom the proposed need for career consistency did not serve as a mediating need, where they never saw their survival jobs as part of their career journeys. Interestingly, these were individuals who had been trapped in survival jobs for most of their time in Canada at the time of the interview. Being trapped in a survival job for a long period may represent a challenge to career competence because these professionals know they are capable of higher-skill and higher-responsibility work and their connection to their career development is fading from view. For some individuals this also represents a challenge to their career relatedness because they cannot relate to their low-skill co-workers, and they feel compelled to lie to family members in their countries of origin about their work lives in Canada, which may have a negative effect on those relationships. For individuals who cannot embrace the choice to work in survival jobs for a time to support themselves and their families, this may also represent a challenge to their career autonomy because
they do not feel like they had a choice at all. Many survival jobs do not have potential to lead the professional immigrant to work like they had before or support an identity such as breadwinner, thus they would not meet the proposed need for career consistency either. It is not unreasonable to suppose that immigrant professionals who find themselves stuck in survival jobs for extended periods of time, as did several of this study’s participants, may not be meeting their basic career motivational needs (Chen, 2017) at all, which must be an extremely frustrating experience.

**Career Self-Determination Theory: Additional Motivational Need**

Recent immigrant professionals indirectly described making decisions informed by the career motivational needs proposed in Chen’s (2017) CSDT in the stories they told about the decisions they made about work and retraining. They also implied an additional need, which is called here the need for career consistency. Decisions that did not seem capable of meeting the needs for career autonomy or career competence were still satisfying to many participants as long as they provided a consistent sense of self and continuity from past self and situation to current self and situation. For example, the role of “breadwinner” still provided satisfaction even if the job supporting that role was a low-skill one that did not meet the need for career competence. This finding suggests that CSDT has practical value for counselling interventions with immigrant professionals, however their life experience and past work experience have provided them with an additional need that when met provides satisfaction even if the other needs are not met.
In this chapter, implications for immigration policy, immigrant support programs, and counselling practices are discussed; study strengths and weaknesses are identified; and future directions for research are recommended.

**Implications for Policy and Program Funding**

Programs such as the Canadian Immigrant Integration Program (CIIP; Government of Canada, 2018; Planning for Canada, n.d.) strive to orient economic immigrants to resources that will provide them with accurate information and help them to explore likely challenges before they depart their countries of origin. The program was launched as a pilot project in 2007 and became a fully supported part of the national immigrant support system in 2010. The Government of Canada has partnered with the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) to offer the program, which is unsurprising given the frequency with which newcomers who had received no such orientation access retraining in community colleges. The findings of the present study and the apparent applicability of the CSDT to the situations of immigrant professionals suggest that programs of this kind are worthy of government support.

The Government of Canada's website (Planning for Canada, n.d.) promises quarterly reports and statistics on the performance of the CIIP. There were no such reports on the program website at the time of writing, although there was a single statistic claiming that 86% of program participants found a job in Canada within 6 months of arriving. Because the savings that immigrant professionals were required to
have with them upon arrival were often used up very quickly, especially if they landed in a major urban centre where costs are higher, it is likely that this figure includes immigrants who were forced to take survival jobs.

The content of the program, which is offered in person in major cities in today’s more significant source countries, makes sense given the experiences described by the present study’s interviewees. The program begins with a one-day orientation that covers industry sectors by geography; likely challenges in the work search and at work; and work search strategies and tools, which includes an orientation to educational institutions. Participants then receive an individual planning session and ongoing advice and resources from immigrant support services in Canada and from important partners such as regulatory bodies and credential assessment agencies (Government of Canada, 2018).

In terms of the CSDT, the program supports the professionals' need for career autonomy by providing them with the information they need to make their own decisions about their future. They are prepared to brace themselves for challenges to their career competence or, at least, to anticipate how they will meet their need for career consistency. Supportive, respectful relationships offered by the program staff would meet some of their need for career relatedness. Superior programs would also connect immigrants-to-be with professional networks relevant to their fields of work to further meet the need for career relatedness. This could be done via mentoring programs or experiential learning programs, which would further meet the need for career competence and improve immigrants’ cultural competence.
Implications for Service Providers

Resettling in a new country is difficult, however there are many reasons for doing so. Among the most important motivations for immigrating to Canada reported by recent immigrants were “the quality of life (32%), the desire to be close to family and friends (20%), the future prospects for their family in Canada (18%) and the peaceful nature of the country (9%)” (Statistics Canada, 2009a, pp. 160–161).

Counsellors working with immigrant professionals should be aware that they are often coming from very different economies where there may have been more employment opportunities overall for professionals or more opportunities for someone with their unique skillsets and experiences. Canada’s labour market may seem confusing and the recruiting practices may seem strange to newcomers. One of these strange-seeming practices may be the use of networking and referrals for finding some of the higher quality jobs in their fields of work. Counsellors ought to be prepared to coach immigrant professionals on the value of building relationships with individuals who work in their fields and/or industries.

Another strange-seeming condition of employment may be requirement for “Canadian experience.” In the case of professions that require licensing, this may be a condition of obtaining a license. In other situations, this might be a symptom of unconscious bias on the part of individual human resources departments and hiring managers. Newcomers may be advised to take volunteer positions in their field to develop networks and gain Canadian experience and references, however provincial employment law forbids employers from taking on volunteers in some situations or for some kinds of work in both for-profit and non-profit organizations. Counsellors ought to
know the employment law in their province so they can educate their clients on their rights and responsibilities.

With limited savings in the bank, immigrant professionals struggle to decide whether to focus on finding employment commensurate with their qualifications or entry-level or low-skill work to make ends meet. Counsellors ought to be prepared to encourage their clients to value this work for the meaning it brings to a longer-term work-life plan. Retraining may play a role earlier in the work-life plan than the need for a survival job, or it may enter the plan at this point, as it did for many participants in the present study.

**CSDT and career counselling practice**

Ryan and Deci (2008) reminded practitioners that the motivation to continue treatment plays a significant role in a client's progress. They outlined a model of psychotherapy based on the principles of self-determination theory. Briefly, research has found that clients with higher autonomous motivation have more positive therapeutic outcomes, probably because autonomy is related to goal attainment and sustained effort (see Ryan & Deci, 2008). It has long been established in psychotherapy research that one of the most significant factors in therapeutic success is a positive relationship between counsellor and client, partly, it has been argued, because it meets the client's need for relatedness. Clients also have their need for competence met by the feedback on their ongoing process of change they receive. Ryan and Deci (2008) argued that therapists ought to be making clients aware of the three basic motivational needs as a way to create further opportunities for meeting those needs deliberately.
Career counsellors also ought to explain the career self-determination theory (Chen, 2017) to clients in order to help them to facilitate opportunities to meet their needs for career autonomy, career competence, and career relatedness. Chen and Hong (2019) recommended that counsellors ensure the following five steps are taken when working with a client from a CSDT perspective: (a) use interventions that enhance career autonomy; (b) clarify client interests; (c) clarify and construct meaning; (d) help to build life–career management skills; and (e) ensure relatedness is incorporated into career plans. Assisting clients to understand the value of striving for career consistency, the additional need proposed as a result of this study, will help clients to pursue partial plans or partial goals while still gaining satisfaction from their work lives.

**Study Strengths**

The present study used the accounts given by recent immigrant professionals who had studied and worked in both their countries of origin and Canada to understand their career and retraining experiences of these professionals whose energy and effort keep Canada’s economy afloat despite the low birthrate. Older North American career development theories were typically developed using less diverse populations because the population was culturally less diverse when they were developed. Currently emerging career development theories must ensure that they are developed with representation from the large population of immigrants who land in Canada and the United States annually from a wider variety of source nations and a wider variety of economies and cultures than ever before.

The present study’s participants represented gender and ethnicities typical of immigrants in Canada in the targeted period. The data they provided, therefore, provide
a convenient snapshot of the outcomes of a particular set of government immigration policies that were intended to improve the nation’s labour market and economy, but seem to have caused a significant amount of hardship for immigrant professionals who had expected to integrate in the workforce more efficiently than turned out to be the case for most of them.

**Study Limitations**

Both a strength and a limitation, the present study’s sample size (52) was large for a study using the grounded theory approach to textual analysis; using that approach, researchers stop data collection when data saturation is reached. I also continued to find related data points in the some of the last transcripts to be analyzed even though one could argue that data saturation been reached earlier in the analytical process (a limitation). A related limitation is, because the data used here was historical in nature, there was no opportunity to ask for clarification or elaboration from study participants. Still, due to the large sample size, the results remain interesting. As stated, however, the purpose of the present was to generate theory about the career development of immigrant professionals, and grounded theory methods are best for this purpose, so that is the approach I used. In addition, immigrant professionals in Canada are a very diverse group, so I elected to use more rather than fewer transcripts to ensure that participants from a wide range of countries of origin were included (a strength).

An additional limitation of this study is that the interviewees were all recent immigrant professionals. It is not known whether a need for career consistency would be identified among groups of Canadian-born adults, or among recent college/university graduates, and so on.
Suggestions for Future Research

Several study participants suggested that the notion of networking for employment is cultural, and not practiced in their countries of origin. As recommended by examiner Dr. Jelena Zikic, further research into this assertion may provide insight into some of the work search struggles experienced by immigrant professionals from particularly countries of origin, should networking for employment prove to be a cultural phenomenon.

In a study on job search outcomes for already-employed workers in Australia, workers who were forced to search for new work due contractual employment coming to an end and/or accept part-time employment were found to be less likely to find better work than workers who were searching for new work for autonomous reasons (Welters, Mitchell, & Muysken, 2014). Future research on counselling interventions based on the CSDT should continue to explore why this is and whether career autonomy or another motivational need was the primary driving force behind decisions involved in the work search behaviour and outcomes for immigrant workers.

The concept of career consistency bears some relation to Ishiyama's (1994) model of self-validation for immigrants, which includes factors such as (a) self-worth and self-acceptance; (b) identity and belonging; and (c) fulfillment and meaning in life. As proposed here, the need for career consistency seems like it may connect to the notion of identity. It is not the same as identity, however, because it includes internalized expectations of the social environment as well as the self. Future research in career development theory should explore the similarities and differences to either add to the description of the need for career consistency or fill the gap identified by this study in
Chen’s (2017) CSDT model with some other mediating factor. Particular issues that require analysis include whether career consistency is entirely separate from identity, or whether there is a model of identity that could be used as part of the CSDT metatheory. An introductory discussion of identity theory might begin with the work of Stets and Burke (2000), who began a conversation on integrating psychological models of identity.

As recommended by Dr. Zikic, future research could also investigate whether professionals from regulated professions like medicine experience the need for career consistency, or any of the original CSDT motivational needs, similarly or differently from individuals in unregulated professions. Her recent research has demonstrated that professional identity is impacted significantly by the labour market integration processes these professionals experience (Zikic & Richardson, 2016).

Career consistency has been proposed as the mediating factor that makes it possible for unmet needs for career competence to exist while one has the sense that the need for career autonomy has been met contra Chen (2017). Further examination of the experiences of recent immigrant professionals, as well as those of other groups of people, such as Canadian-born adults, recent college/university graduates, and others, is also necessary to determine whether this proposed additional career self-determination need truly exists.


Asanin Dean, J., & Wilson, K. (2009). 'Education? It is irrelevant to my job now. It makes me very depressed...': Exploring the health impacts of under/unemployment among highly skilled recent immigrants in Canada. *Ethnicity and Health, 14*(2), 185-204.


Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials. (2010). *Learn about qualifications recognition*. Retrieved from https://www.cicic.ca/928/find_out_if_your_occupation_is_regulated_or_not.canada


Grant, P. R., & Nadin, S. (2007). The credentialing problems of foreign trained personnel from Asia and Africa intending to make their home in Canada: A social psychological perspective. *International Migration and Integration, 8*, 141–162.


Appendix A
Recruitment Poster

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS
WANTED
for a study of the
CAREER RETRAINING EXPERIENCES OF
IMMIGRANT PROFESSIONALS IN CANADA

• You came to Canada as an immigrant within the timeframe of January 1, 2001 to December 30, 2006
• You have a university degree that was earned outside of Canada
• You worked full-time in a professional occupation in your country of origin for at least three years before coming to Canada
• You engaged in retraining in Canada and earned a university, college or professionally certified and formal diploma, certificate, certification or accreditation (records/proud of retraining/program completion required)
• You have held employment in Canada, full-time or part-time, for a minimum of 3 years after completing Canadian retraining
• You are at least 55 years of age and older

If all of the above applies, please contact:
416.978.0725
careerstudy.oise@utoronto.ca

Interviews conducted in English - Fluency is required
FINANCIALLY COMPENSATED $35

The interviews are part of a research project led by Dr. Charles Oiler in the Social Policy Program at the Ontarian Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. You must not have previously participated in any of Dr. Charles Oiler’s research project in the past in order to be eligible to participate.
Appendix B
Telephone and Email Scripts for Initial Contact

**TELEPHONE SCRIPT OF INITIAL CONTACT**

*If we reach their voicemail:*
Hello sir/madam,
This is *(state name)* from the immigrant re-training study returning your call. Thank you so much for your interest in our study. I would like to speak with you about our study for 5 to 10 minutes to evaluate whether you are eligible to participate in our study and to schedule an appointment. Since our telephone system is automated, we will have to call you back once you have left us another message, so if you could please call us back and leave a detailed message with your name, the phone number we can reach you at, and the days and times when you will be available to take our call. Thank you again for your interest in our study and I look forward to speaking with you!

*Please call us back at 416-978-0725.*

*If they pick up:*
Hello sir/madam,
This is *(state name)* from the immigrant re-training study returning your call. Is this a good time to speak with you about the study?

*Answer: No say the following...*
Alright, would you like to speak with me at some other time about the study? The telephone screening should take approximately 5-10 minutes of your time. *Arrange a time.*

*Answer: Yes (proceed...)*
Great, thank you so much for your interest in our research project. To start off with, could you please tell me your full name and country of origin? And what was your profession when you lived there? *(Record that information into the “Participants” Excel spreadsheet.)*

*If they are from a country that we have already maxed out our quota on, say the following:*
Thanks so much for your interest. I’m going to write your name and contact information down on our waiting list, because in order to be comprehensive with our research, we have to interview individuals from a number of different countries. It turns out we’ve already spoken with a number of people from your home country and for the time-being, we will have to limit our numbers to a particular quota. If it’s ok with you, may we potentially contact you in the coming months as our research progresses?

Great, thank you very much again for your interest in participating. All the best. Goodbye.

*If they are from a country that we need say the following:*
Great, I’d like to tell you a bit about the study so you can consider whether you’d like to participate. If you have questions, please feel free to ask me at any time.

This research project is being conducted by Dr. Charles Chen, a Professor of Counselling Psychology at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT), and his research assistants. It’s a study that is looking to better understand the career training
experiences and needs, barriers and opportunities present for immigrant professionals in their
career transition in Canada. We are looking to conduct interviews with a total of 90 to 120 recent
immigrant professionals who have completed re-training in Canada. During the interview, we
will be asking questions about your recent re-training experiences, your current life career goals,
possibilities for career planning and development, relevant demographic information, and about
the people and events in your life that affect your effort in rebuilding your vocational life in
Canada. Does that sound of interest to you?

Answer: No, say the following...
I understand, thank you very much for your initial interest and for contacting us.
All the best. Goodbye.

Answer: Yes (proceed)
Great, well let me tell you a bit more about the interviews.

All of our participants must meet the criteria of the term “new immigrant professionals who have
completed re-training in Canada” in order to participate in our study. I’d like to go through the
requirements with you now if that’s alright? Thanks,

(1) Are you are at least 25 years of age or older?
(2) Did you come to Canada as an immigrant within January 1, 1999 to December 30, 2006?
(3) Do you have a university degree that was earned outside of Canada?
(4) Did you work full-time in a professional occupation in your country of origin for at
least three-years before coming to Canada?
(5) Did you engage in re-training in Canada and earn a university, college or
professionally certified and formal diploma, certificate, certification or accreditation? Do
you have records/proof of re-training/educational program completion? (this is required
for participation)
(6) Have you held employment in Canada, either on a full-time or part-time basis, for a
minimum of 1 year after completing your Canadian re-training?
(7) Are you fluent in English (interviews are conducted in English)?
(8) Have you previously participated in any of Dr. Charles P. Chen’s research projects to
date? *if needed, clarify whether they came as an International Student on a student visa.
If yes, they are not eligible. They need to have come as immigrants.

If they do not meet criteria say:
Thank you again for answering my questions. Unfortunately, it seems that, as you don’t
have...(repeat whatever criteria)..., I regret that you are not eligible to participate in the study.
Sorry about that but thank you very much for your interest in participating, we really appreciate
your taking the time. All the best. Goodbye.

If they are upset that they don’t meet criteria and want an explanation, say:
I’m sorry, let me explain, for research and ethical purposes, we must strictly adhere to our
inclusion criteria. We greatly appreciate your taking the time to answer our questions though and
wish you all the best. Thanks for understanding. Goodbye.
If they meet criteria say: 
Great, you meet our criteria. (and proceed..) Let me tell you a bit more about the study. The interview will be audiotaped and it will take place in a meeting room at OISE/University of Toronto and it will last for about 2 hours.

There are no foreseeable risks in completing this interview. It is our hope that you will benefit from the interview process by gaining an increased self-awareness on issues related to career re-training, career exploration, and planning, and find the exploring nature of the study interesting. We also hope that it will assist us in developing career counselling programs that will be beneficial to many other new immigrant professional workers.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to refuse to answer any questions and you may also refuse to participate or withdraw from the study, at any time, without any negative consequences. Your employer(s) will NOT be informed of your involvement in the study or of any aspects of the interview discussion.

Your responses to this interview will be kept completely anonymous and confidential. Your contact information and data will be labeled with a code and kept in separate locked cabinets, which only Dr. Chen and his research assistants have access. The data will be kept for 5 years starting from the completion date of the research project, after which all the data will be destroyed. The results of this study may be used again in another study by Dr. Chen and his assistants. These research results may be presented in conferences or published in academic and/or professional journals. Your identity will still remain strictly confidential.

If you agree to participate and complete the interview process, we would like to offer you an honorarium of $35 for your time and effort.

Do you have any questions? Would you like to participate? 

Answer, Yes: 
When will you be the best time for you to come in for your research interview? (Record their availabilities on excel sheet) Thank you, a research assistant who is available on one of those days will contact you to schedule an interview with you. 

If booked: 
*Remind them to bring a record/proof of re-training and that we will not be able to conduct the interview if they don’t bring it. *Let them know that you will meet them at the lobby on the main level in the OISE building. Give the OISE address and closest subway station: 
I will be waiting for you at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE)/University of Toronto lobby, which is on the main level in the OISE building located at 252 Bloor Street West (at the corner of Bloor and Bedford) near the St. George Subway Station. Please remember to bring with you a record/proof of your re-training. 

Answer, No: 
Well thank you again for taking the time to answer my questions. Please feel free to contact us again if you would like to participate at a later date. All the best. Goodbye.
If they are not sure:
If you need more time to think about your options, please feel free to do so. You may contact me at a later time if you are interested in arranging an interview schedule with me.

Thank you very much for your time and interest in our research project! If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Dr. Chen or his research team at this phone number, 416 978 0725 or via email at: careerstudy.oise@utoronto.ca All the best. Goodbye.

**EMAIL SCRIPT OF INITIAL CONTACT**

Thank you so much for your interest in our research project! This research project is being conducted by Dr. Charles Chen, a Professor of Counselling Psychology at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) of the University of Toronto, and his research assistants. It’s a study that is looking to better understand the career training experiences and needs, barriers and opportunities that are present for immigrant professionals in their career transition in Canada. We are looking to conduct interviews with a total of 90 to 120 recent immigrant professionals who have completed re-training in Canada. During the interview, we will be asking questions about your recent re-training experiences, your current life career goals, possibilities for career planning and development, relevant demographic information, and about the people and events in your life that affect your effort in rebuilding your vocational life in Canada. There are no foreseeable risks in completing this interview. It is our hope that you will benefit from the interview process by gaining an increased self-awareness on issues related to career re-training, career exploration, and planning, and find the exploring nature of the study interesting. We also hope that it will assist us in developing career counselling programs that will be beneficial to many other new immigrant professional workers.

The interview will be audiotaped and it will take place in a meeting room at OISE/University of Toronto and it will last for approximately 2 hours.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to refuse to answer any questions and you may also refuse to participate or withdraw from the study, at any time, without any negative consequences. Your employer(s) will NOT be informed of your involvement in the study or of any aspects of the interview discussion.

Your responses to this interview will be kept completely anonymous and confidential. Your contact information and data will be labeled with a code and kept in separate locked cabinets, to which only Dr. Chen and his research assistants have access. The data will be kept for 5 years starting from the completion date of the research project, after which all the data will be destroyed. The results of this study may be used again in another study by Dr. Chen and his assistants. These research results may be presented in conferences or published in academic and/or professional journals. Your identity will still remain strictly confidential.

If you agree to participate and complete the interview process, we would like to offer you an honorarium of $35 for your time and effort.
All of our participants must meet the criteria of the term “new immigrant professionals who have completed re-training in Canada” in order to participate in our study.

(1) You are at least 25 years of age and older.
(2) You came to Canada as an immigrant within the time frame of January 1, 1999 to December 30, 2006.
(3) You have a university degree that was earned outside of Canada.
(4) You worked full-time in a professional occupation in your country of origin for at least three-years before coming to Canada.
(5) You engaged in re-training in Canada and earned a university, college or professionally certified and formal diploma, certificate, certification or accreditation (records/proof of re-training/educational program completion required).
(6) You have held employment in Canada, either on a full-time or part-time basis, for a minimum of 1 year after completing your Canadian re-training.
(7) You are fluent in English (interviews are conducted in English).
(8) You must not have previously participated in any of Dr. Charles P. Chen’s research projects to date.

If you don’t meet any one of the above criteria, you are unfortunately not eligible to participate in this study. If you meet all the requirements and are interested in participating in this research study, please respond to this email providing the following information:
- your full name,
- your country of origin,
- your profession when you lived in your country of origin.

Also, please indicate the days of the week and times that you are available to come in for your research interview (e.g., Mondays and Thursdays from 2-4pm). We will contact you to schedule an appointment should you be eligible for our study and should our quota of participants from your country of origin not yet be fulfilled.

We thank you very much for your time and interest in our research project! If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Dr. Chen and his research team via telephone at 416 978 0725 or via email again at careerstudy.oise@utoronto.ca

All the best,
Your name
CRC research team OISE/University of Toronto

If they reply and say that they don’t fulfill the requirements:
Hello Sir/Madam,

Thank you again for your interest in our research project and for answering our questions. Unfortunately, as you don’t have...(repeat whatever criteria)..., we regret that you are not
eligible to participate in the study. For research purposes, we must strictly adhere to our inclusion criteria. We greatly appreciate your taking the time to answer our questions and we thank you again for your interest in participating in the study.

Wishing you all the best,
Your name
CRC research team OISE/University of Toronto

If they are from a country that we have already maxed out our quota on, reply with the following:
Hello Sir/Madam,

Thank you very much for your interest in participating in our study. In order to be comprehensive with our research, we have to interview individuals from a number of different countries. It turns out that we’ve already spoken with a number of people from your home country and for the time-being, we must limit that number of people to a particular quota. I will write your name and contact information down on our waiting list. If it’s ok with you, we may potentially contact you in the coming months as our research progresses. Thank you very much again for taking the time to answer our questions and for your interest in participating in our study.

Wishing you all the best,
Your name
CRC research team OISE/University of Toronto

If they are interested and give us their availabilities for the interview:
Hello Sir/Madam,

Thank you again for your interest in our research project and for answering my questions. I have scheduled your appointment for (indicate date, day and time). Please respond to this email to confirm your availability to meet at that date/time.

I will be waiting for you at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE)/University of Toronto lobby, which is on the main level in the OISE building located at 252 Bloor Street West (at the corner of Bloor and Bedford) near the St. George Subway Station. Please remember to bring with you a record/proof of your re-training.

I look forward to meeting with you!

All the best,
Your name
CRC research team OISE/University of Toronto

If they reply and say that they are not interested:
Hello Sir/Madam,
Thank you again for taking an interest in our research study. Please feel free to contact us again if you would like to participate at a later date.

All the best,

Your name

CRC research team OISE/University of Toronto
Appendix C
Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

RE: How re-training affects re-entry: Immigrants' vocational well-being

You are cordially invited to attend this interview. The interview is part of a research project being conducted by Dr. Charles Chen, a Professor of Counselling Psychology at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE, UT), and his research assistants. The interview questions are designed to examine the career re-training and worklife adjustment experiences of new immigrant professionals. It is expected that the results from this study will lead to a better understanding of immigrant professionals' career re-training experiences and needs, and of the specific barriers and opportunities present for immigrant professionals in their vocational life transition in Canada. The interview questions will cover information about your recent re-training experiences, your current life career goals, possibilities for career planning and development, relevant demographic information, and about the people and events in your life that affect your effort in rebuilding your vocational life in Canada.

There are no foreseeable risks in completing this interview. We hope that you will benefit from the interview process with an increased self-awareness on issues related to career re-training, career exploration, and planning. We also hope that you will find the exploring nature of the study an interesting process from which you might learn something. However, even if the study does not benefit you directly, we hope that it will assist us in developing career counselling programs that will be beneficial to many other new immigrant professional workers arriving in this country every year. We really appreciate your interest, and we are very grateful to you for your participation.

To follow the nature and purpose of the study stated above, research participants in this study will include a total of 90 to 120 recent immigrant professionals who have completed re-training in Canada. All participants selected will be 25 years of age and older. Each participant is invited to complete an audiotaped interview that will last for approximately 2 hours. The interview will take place in a meeting room at OISE/University of Toronto. As part of the interview, you will be asked to complete and return a 2-page Participant Information Form that contains your contact information and basic demographic information relevant to this research project.

The term "new immigrant professionals who have completed re-training in Canada" in this study refers to a person who meets the following criteria:
(1) You are at least 25 years of age and older.
(2) You came to Canada as an immigrant within the timeframe of January 1, 2001 to December 30, 2006.

(3) You have a university degree that was earned outside of Canada.

(4) You worked full-time in a professional occupation in your country of origin for at least three years before coming to Canada.

(5) You engaged in re-training in Canada and earned a university, college or professionally certified and formal diploma, certificate, certification or accreditation (records/proof of re-training/educational program completion required).

(6) You have held employment in Canada, either on a full-time or part-time basis, for a minimum of 3 years after completing your Canadian re-training.

(7) You are fluent in English (interviews are conducted in English).

(8) You must not have previously participated in any of Dr. Charles P. Chen’s research projects to date.

As one of the participants, your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are under no obligation to complete the study, even if you finish a portion of it and then decide that you do not wish to continue. You may choose to refuse to answer any particular question or questions posed to you and still complete the interview. You may also refuse to participate or withdraw from the study, at any time, without any negative consequences to your personal life, academic standing, and other career prospects later.

Your employer(s) will NOT be informed either of your involvement in the study or of any aspects of the interview discussion.

In recognition of the time and effort you have given to participate in this research project, we would like to offer you an honorarium of $35 if you agree to participate and complete the interview process.

While we will be making an audiotape of this interview, your responses to this interview will be kept completely anonymous. Your results will be assigned a code number to protect your identity. Any information that could lead to identifying you (e.g., name) will be removed from the data while the interviews are transcribed into written data, i.e., written transcripts of the interview session. You will be assigned a pseudonym throughout the entire research process, including in the data analysis, final research report(s), and other related presentations and publications. Any possible identifying information about you will be replaced by a code during the research process. Your contact information, such as your name, phone numbers and email address, will be coded and kept separately from other files. All written and audiotaped data will be kept in secured files and in a locked cabinet to which only the researcher and his research assistants have access. The data will be kept for 5 years starting from the completion date of the research project. After this 5-year time period, all the data including the audiotapes will be destroyed and/or erased. In the event that, during the interview, you express an intention to harm yourself or to harm others, it is our duty to break confidentiality and report this content to the
authorities.

The results of this study may be used again in another study. However, they will only be used by Dr. Chen and his assistants for research related to immigrant professionals' vocational and career development and re-training issues. These research results may be presented in public settings such as professional and/or academic conferences, and other public forums. Reports and articles based on the research may also be published in academic and/or professional journals. Under such circumstances, your identity will remain strictly confidential, and only your pseudonym and coded information will be utilized.

We will be very glad to provide you with a summary of the current study’s results if you wish to receive such a summary report when this research project is completed.

If you have any questions, please feel free to ask either Dr. Chen, or his research assistant(s) (name of the prospective research assistants). Signing the bottom of this form will constitute your consent to this interview, as well as your consent to participate in this research project. Thank you very much for your time and valuable cooperation.

Charles Chen, Ph.D.
Professor
Canada Research Chair
Counselling Psychology Program
Department of Adult Education
and Counselling Psychology
OISE, University of Toronto
Tel.: (416) 978-0718
Email: cp.chen@utoronto.ca

I understand the above information and voluntarily consent to participate in the research project described above. I have been offered a copy of this consent form for my own reference.

(Please print: First and Last Names of Research Participant)

_________________________________ Date

(Signature of Research Participant)
Appendix D
Participant Information Sheet

**RE: How re-training affects re-entry: Immigrants' vocational well-being**

Demographic Information

(Gender: ________
(Age (in years) ________
(Month and Year arriving in Canada: From – home country ____________________________ Immigrated with: Spouse ___ Family ___

Close contact in Canada prior to immigrating? (state relationship: e.g., friend, cousin, etc.) ____________________________

. Level of Education obtained before coming to Canada (e.g., college education, bachelor's degree, professional certificate, etc.): ___________________________________ Please specify the Major/Discipline of your education from your home country (i.e., arts, science, engineering, commerce, etc):

. Degree or type of re-training completed after coming to Canada: -Institution ___________________________________ -Program length ________________ -Type of qualification/credential ___________________________________ -Type of document ____________________________

(Diploma/certificate/degree) ___________________________________ Please indicate your professional and/or vocational title before coming to Canada (e.g., teacher, nurse, engineer, accountant, etc.): __________________________

. Please indicate your industry: ____________________________ Please specify your workplace setting in your home country (i.e., school, hospital, factory, accounting firm, etc): ____________________________

. Please indicate the job title and/or the employment you are currently holding in Canada: __________________________________________

Please specify how long you have been working in this employment: _________________ Date of interview: _________________
Appendix E
Interview Protocol

**RE: How re-training affects re-entry: Immigrants' vocational well-being**

Demographic Information

1. Gender:

2. Age (in years)

3. Month and Year arriving in Canada:

From – home country ____________________________________________

Immigrated with: Spouse ___ Family ___

Close contact in Canada prior to immigrating? (state relationship: e.g., friend, cousin, etc.) ________________________________

Level of Education obtained before coming to Canada (e.g., college education, bachelor's degree, professional certificate, etc.): __________________________

Please specify the Major/Discipline of your education from your home country (i.e., arts, science, engineering, commerce, etc): __________________________

Degree or type of re-training completed after coming to Canada:
- Institution ________________________________
- Program length ________________________________
- Type of qualification/credential ________________________________
- Type of document (Diploma/certificate/degree) ________________________________

6. Please indicate your professional and/or vocational title before coming to Canada (e.g., teacher, nurse, engineer, accountant, etc.): ________________________________

7. Please indicate your industry: ________________________________

Please specify your workplace setting in your home country (i.e., school, hospital, factory, accounting firm, etc): ________________________________

7. Please indicate the job title and/or the employment you are currently holding in Canada: ________________________________

Please specify how long you have been working in this employment: ________________________________
Date of interview: _______________________________________

Questions:

I. Before Coming to Canada

(1) I’d like to ask you about your education experience.
   a) What was the name of your degree?
   b) How many years was your degree?
   c) Was there a practical component to your degree?
   d) Was there a registration component to your profession?

(2) I’m going to ask you some questions about your life and work experiences before coming to Canada.

   a) What was your job like before you came to Canada?
   b) How satisfied were you with your career prior to coming to Canada?
   c) Things you liked and didn’t like?
   d) How central was your career to your sense of self?
   *NEW* e) Did you find your job/career meaningful? Did you find your work fulfilling?

(3) Why did you want to come to Canada, and how did you make this decision to come?
   --Reason(s), and main purpose.
   --Events and experiences and information that triggered your decision

(4) (If not answered already) Was employment and worklife involved in your decision of immigration? (and how) What were your expectations for employment in Canada? (if not already answered) How confident did you feel about finding work in your profession? Did you do any preparation for your qualifications to be transferable to Canada before coming to Canada? – (If not already answered) Can you tell me about your preparation and planning for employment in Canada?

(5) How much control did you feel you would have in Canada over employment decisions?

(6) Did you anticipate or plan on having to do re-training once you arrived in Canada?

(7) If yes, did you do any planning for your re-training prior to coming to Canada? What planning did you do?

(8) What were your expectations of the re-training process? What did you think the experience would be like?

II. After Coming to Canada: Initial General Experience

(9) How did you feel when you initially came to Canada? (Were things different than your
expectations/what you expected?)

(10) What were the most significant changes and difficulties you experienced when you first came to Canada?
    a) How did you cope with the changes and difficulties in life?
    b) What was most helpful, least helpful for coping with these changes?
    c) How did these experiences impact your well-being? (mental and physical health), and the well-being of your family?

(11) How did your ability to cope with these changes impact your self-esteem and confidence levels?

(12) Did you search for help or resources? If so, what were they?

(13) Having faced these difficulties/changes, did you develop a plan of action for your career development? Did that include plans for re-training? **

III. Ongoing Vocational Adjustment and Transition in Canada

(14) How important was it for you to find a job when you first came to Canada? Which kind of jobs did you intend to find to get your worklife restarted in Canada?

(15) (If not already answered, Cover all of these points) What were the major factors you had to consider when you were trying to find employment in Canada?
    --Concerns for financial survival.
    --Gain Canadian experience.
    --Some relevancy to previous educational and professional background experience.

(16) What did you do to try to get a job that is related to your previous vocational and/or professional background experience from your home country? (Use discretion). -if applicable.

(17) Could you tell me briefly in sequential order the main jobs you have held since coming to this country, and your experiences with these jobs?

(18) Was there a period of time during which you were unemployed after coming to Canada? For how long? How did this affect you?

(19) How difficult or easy was your original job search? What factors made the search easier and/or more difficult?

(20) What were some of the expected and unexpected events that influenced your job-seeking and vocational development experiences in Canada? And how did you respond to such events?
    --Opportunities/people that led you to a vocational choice
    --Anticipated or unanticipated barriers.
    a) What was most helpful, least helpful to you?
(21) What were some of the supports you found in your job search in Canada? Could you give me some specific examples?

(22) In your job-search in Canada, how useful was your work experience from your home country?

(23) Were your qualifications and training from your home country useful in getting work?

(24) How long after you came to Canada did you decide to pursue re-training/ further education? What led to that decision? What factors influenced this decision? Did anyone influence your decision?

(25) What had you hoped your re-training or education in Canada would lead to?

(26) How did you plan for your re-training? Did you encounter any barriers in this process?

(27) What actions did you take to make your re-training experience possible?
   --What resources did you seek out? Did anyone help you?

(28) (If not already answered) How did you find out about available re-training opportunities? (career centre, internet, social network, job etc...)

(29) What form of re-training or professional training did you do once you arrived in Canada?
   -- Did you try to regain your pre-Canada professional qualification/designation?

(30) In what field was your re-training? How did you choose the program/field?
   --Why did you stay in the same field? OR Why did you change fields?
   -- If you changed fields, how did you come to the decision to change?

(31) How did you find this new "learning" experience in Canada? Did you have to change your "learning style"? In what ways?

(32) Could you describe your general impression and feeling about this training experience?
   --Things you enjoyed the most.
   --Things you enjoyed the least.

(33) How did the re-training compare to your original training back home?

(34) Did the re-training experience differ from what you expected it would be like?

(35) If different how did it affect you? How did you cope?

(36) (If not already touched on) Were there any unexpected or chance events that occurred prior to, during, and after your re-training?
   -- Any unexpected events that occurred that led you to take the training program?
Any unexpected learning experiences?

Any unexpected benefits or costs from re-training?

(37) How much control (or lack of control) did you feel you had in terms of your re-training experience? (ref for interviewer e.g. choice of institute, choice of certificate, ability to reaccredit in your old field vs. being forced to re-train for something completely new, limitations of funding sources or finances for training, etc...).
   a) What led to this feeling and what did you do in response to it?

(38) Thinking about your pre-Canada skills and abilities, how did you think you would perform in the re-training? (interviewer: thinking about self-efficacy)

(39) How did you feel about having to take this re-training? (e.g., resentment for the necessity of re-training vs. framing it as a new opportunity, positive chance for growth vs. feeling lucky that re-training was a possibility...)-interviewer give both sides of possibility.

(40) What were some sources of support for you during your re-training experience? (e.g. family, classmates, mentors, friends, etc...)

(41) What was the role of your interests or hobbies in coping with your re-training experience? How do these activities help you cope? (e.g. losing yourself, engaging)

(42) Were you employed during your re-training experience? Which role? What was it like having to balance both? Do you feel it impacted your re-training?

IV. Results of Post-Re-training

(43) How important and useful was your Canadian re-training experience to your employment opportunities in this country?
   --Leading to employment that was similar or close to your background experience.
   --Leading to new vocational choice and opportunity.
   --Leading to no beneficial outcome for employment.

(44) What is your understanding of why it became necessary for you to pursue re-training in Canada?

(45) (For those of you who re-trained in your original career), do you agree that the re-training was necessary for you to be competent in your profession after arriving here in Canada?

(46) How did you feel about your skills and abilities after the training program? (Did you feel better or discouraged about yourself, the same?)

(47) How did the process of re-training affect (or not affect) your sense of "career identity"? (Sense of yourself or experience of yourself as ___profession)
   a) Did your sense of identity evolve during your re-training experience (identity at the beginning vs. middle vs. end)?
b) What impact does this experience have on your perception of self-worthiness as a new Canadian?

*NEW* c) Did you find the re-training process meaningful and/or fulfilling?

**Come back to it after the first few interviews**

(48) Has your career taken on a different role in your life as a result of your re-training experience?
   – Has your career identity changed as a result of your re-training experience?

(49) During the re-training, what did you discover about yourself? (Prompt: Self-discovery and meaning on a personal career-related level)

(50) Did your re-training lead you to be more encouraged or discouraged to pursue your desired career? How come?

(51) How did the re-training program impact the factors that motivate you within your career? Did your career-related values change? (e.g. enjoyment of work and interest in professional activities vs. importance of prestige, salary, promotion) If so, how so?

(52) Is there anything else that you feel you gained or lost through re-training?

(53) What were some of the main lessons you learned from your re-training experience in Canada?

(54) Was the re-training what you expected it to be? If not, how did it differ? What issues did this raise? How did you feel about those issues? What did you do about those issues?

(55) How did any difference in expectations versus the reality of your re-training affect your sense of identity or value as a person, your confidence levels, and feelings in terms of your career?

(56) What were the major compromises you made when approaching re-training opportunities in Canada? How did you decide what to do when you had to make a compromise in your re-training? (Joint action - family, mentor, community)

(57) How did you feel when you had to make a compromise for your re-training choice?

(58) In general, how has your re-training impacted your experience as a new worker in Canada?

(59) How important were your own actions in setting up and completing your re-training?

(60) After your re-training, what did you do to build your career in Canada? (Steps toward current employment… see next section)

V. Current Employment
(61) Could you tell me about the circumstances that led you to your present work life?  
--The nature of your employment.

(62) How do you feel about your current job? Could you tell me the things you like and/or dislike about your current employment?

(63) How does the employment you hold now compare to the employment you held prior to moving to Canada?

(64) How important is your vocational life in your total new life in Canada? How does your work life affect your personal and family life here?

(65) Do you feel a sense of vocational and career identity from your current employment experience in Canada? Why or why not?
   a) *NEW* Do you find your work meaningful and/or fulfilling

(66) Do you feel that some of your qualifications (e.g., hard and soft skills) or strengths are not being used in your work-life? For example, do you have skills that are not used in your job? What needs to change for your skills to be better utilized? (e.g. actions you can take, actions your employer or the system can take)

(67) Overall, what factors have been the most influential in helping you to succeed in your career development within Canada? What factors have made your career life difficult?

(68) Have any factors challenged your beliefs that you could succeed in your career/work-life?

(69) How satisfied do you feel about your career/work-life experience in Canada?

(70) Consider your life as it has turned out until now, how much of an element of choice has there been? For example, is the job you do a chosen vocation or more or less the result of a series of chance events? Are there any aspects of your life that are the result of a considered choice?

(71) What has the role of chance been in your life and career in Canada? What did you do in response to chance events?
   a) How do you feel about the chance events in your life?

(72) What are some of your main concerns and needs about your future worklife in Canada? How do you feel about your future vocational development prospects in Canada, and why do you feel this way?

(73) Do you intend or expect to pursue any additional re-training in the future? Why or why not? What type?
(74) What will you intend to do to improve the quality of your work-life and to enhance your career development in Canada?

(75) Anticipate your vocational direction 5 years from now.
   a) How have your career priorities changed?

(76) What are some of the most important career-related lessons you learned and looking back, is there anything that you would have done differently?
Appendix F
Receipt for Compensation

Receipt of Compensation for Participating in Research Project

(Please PRINT all the information below except the signature section – Thank You!)

Research Project Title:
*How re-training affects re-entry: Immigrants' vocational well-being*

Principal Investigator:
*Prof Charles P. Chen, OISE, University of Toronto*

The participant confirms that he/she has received the amount of $35 for participating in the research project as specified above.

Name of Participant and Recipient (Print Please): ________________________________

Signature of Participant and Recipient: ________________________________

Date (Print Please): ________________________________

Mailing Address:

Street ________________________________________________________________

City ___________________________ Province ___________________________

Postal Code ____________________

235
Tel.: (Home) ______________________ (Work)___________________________

(Cell) ______________________

Email: ______________________________________________________________

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Name of GA and Receiver (Print Please): ________________________________
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<th>Canadian Re-training</th>
<th>Canadian Employment</th>
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Appendix H
Definitions

Acculturation, adaptation, and cultural gap
The topic of acculturation is huge and extends beyond the bounds of this study, which refers to the cross-cultural psychology work of Berry (1997) that describes the process of re-establishing a life in a new host society. This study uses the term adaptation in the colloquial sense, meaning shifts of belief or behaviour. Used once (and to be removed for clarity since it is not a focus of this study), culture gap describes a difference of culture expressible in belief or behaviour.

Integration
This study generally refers to “labour market integration” which is exactly as it sounds: finding an appropriate role in the workforce. Sinacore, Mikhail, Kassan, and Lerner (2009) used the term “occupational integration;” they described integration broadly as “the process, by which, an immigrant becomes part of a community in the new society” (p. 160).

Metatheory
Metatheory may be described as “the reflexive study of the field” (Ritzer, 1989). A metatheory attempts to incorporate multiple theoretical understandings in related domains of a discipline (e.g., career development). Comparisons and integrations of existing theories may help both scientists and practitioners to gain a more complete
understanding of the modern notion of career development (Young & Valach, 2000). In the present study, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and career self-determination theory (Chen, 2017) are explored. These are metatheoretical understandings of human motivation, in the sense that they attempt to incorporate multiple theoretical understandings from their respective fields (general human motivation, and career motivation respectively).

**Recent immigrant professionals, immigrant, newcomer**

These descriptors are used interchangeably, and unless otherwise stated, these terms refer to recently arrived immigrant professionals who selected Canada as their new home. Participants had lived and worked in Canada no more than about 10 years. Statistics Canada defines a recent immigrant professional as having lived in Canada for no more than 5 years (Statistics Canada, 2013), probably because the census occurs every 5 years. In their reports, many of the interviewees described feeling unsettled still in their careers at 5 years in Canada, which also suggests that the Statistics Canada definition is not based on factors related to actual labour market integration or career development. The present study asked newcomers to share perspective that only comes with additional experience.

**Retraining experiences, learning experiences**

This refers to the taking of a class or a course with a structured curriculum. Learning experiences may include formal as well as informal experiences, such as receiving a piece of advice or feedback from a trusted other.
Successful outcome

This study uses a subjective rather than objective definition of a successful career outcome, unique to each immigrant professional participant. Success is “something that is at the heart of lives as they are lived” (Gunz & Heslin, 2005, p. 109).

Work search and job search

These terms are used interchangeably in the study, except where used as a term specifically used in a cited study. I have a preference for the term “work search” because it implies a broader employment goal; job search is used more often in the literature, and I like it less because implies that the job seeker has a very specific target role in mind, which a job seeker does not always have (see Guerrero & Rothstein, 2012).