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# Making Sense of Immigrant Work Integration

## An Organizing Framework

Luciara Nardon · Amrita Hari

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# Acknowledgments

While writing *Making Sense of Immigrant Integration,* we were engaged in our own process of sensemaking. Our ideas were heavily influenced by many interactions in our personal and professional lives, the organizations in which we are embedded, and our lived experiences in multiple countries, including Canada. We wrote during an ongoing pandemic and reflected on the importance of movement in the lives of mobile individuals and families, which were halted by the many public health measures implemented to stop the spread of infections. As a result, this book was only possible because of the support and input of many individuals throughout our lives and career that supported us during unusual and uncertain times. This book emerged from our work with immigrants and their communities, settlement organizations, graduate students at Carleton University, and research collaborations over more than a decade. We are deeply grateful to everyone who helped us learn and think through the wicked problem of immigrant integration. We are particularly indebted to the many immigrants who shared and trusted their stories with us.

We are thankful for the research assistance provided by Dunja Palic and Romeo Joe Quintero. A special thanks also to the two anonymous reviewers who provided incredibly insightful and detailed comments and to the editorial team at Palgrave. Writing this book during the pandemic would not be possible without the immense and unconditional support from our families. Finally, we are thankful for each other and the rich

collaboration that resulted in this book. Many sensemaking conversations went into creating this project, which supported us in learning more about immigrant integration and provided opportunities for us to learn about our own lives as immigrants and scholars.

# Contents

# Immigrant Work Integration: A Wicked Problem

Immigrant integration is a wicked problem (Brunner, 2022; King, 2021), ridden with conflicts, linked to other problems, and most importantly, without an easy solution. Decades of personal stories, academic scholarship, and fervent activism have revealed that integrating newcomers is an ongoing process shaped by contradictory forces and changing circumstances. In the last few years, we have witnessed the latest of these effects with dramatic changes to global mobility and immobility. On the one hand, the COVID-19 pandemic halted movement in the form of public health measures to curb the spread of infection and demonstrated just how dependent we are on cross-border movements. On the other hand, we witnessed record levels of forced mobility due to climate change, political upheaval, and war. At this time, the UNHCR estimates that close to 7 million Ukrainians have fled Ukraine (UNHCR, 2022), which is only one current example of such large-scale displacement.

Wicked problems constitute a 'system of problems' (Ackoff, 1974, p. 21) that are inseparable from other challenges, making them complex, 'elusive and logically endless' (King, 2021, p. 26), and resistant to analysis and resolution (Horn & Weber, 2007, p. 6). This framework, initially introduced in the domain of planning by Rittel and Webber (1973), has been adopted by scholars studying various migratory movements and immigrant populations (Brunner, 2022; King, 2021) to understand the interconnected, contested, and enduring nature of these transnational processes and actors (Head, 2019).

When it comes to immigrant integration, barriers and opportunities are present at multiple levels, varying based on specific situations facing individuals, organizational realities, societal perceptions, and multijurisdictional policies and structures (Syed, 2008). Wicked problems are known to have many stakeholders with radically different ways of understanding the problem (King, 2021, p. 26). In the case of immigrant integration, stakeholders include governments, immigrants, and employers. Moreover, 'solutions to wicked problems are not 'right' or 'wrong,' nor 'true' or 'false'…they require a great number of people to change their mindset' (King, 2021, p. 27).

We can look at the example of labor shortages reported in traditionally immigrant-receiving countries to understand how these different and sometimes contradictory understandings of the same problem emerge, requiring a multilevel and multi-pronged response. A recent report from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Pizzinelli & Shibata, 2022) shows that in the United States and the United Kingdom, the enduring nature of national labor shortages is not caused by a mismatch between workers' skills and labor market needs. Rather, labor shortages result from workers being increasingly reluctant to take up jobs with poor work conditions. These workers would prefer to exit the workforce; this phenomenon has been dubbed the 'great resignation.' Cook (2021) shows that this trend is common to all levels of skills and sectors and is often attributed to higher workloads and burnout.

The long-standing and popular solution to address labor shortages relies on immigration as a key policy strategy. Countries design immigration policies to attract talented individuals, and organizations spend significant resources to attract, recruit, and retain talent consistently in short supply. Despite these efforts by countries and organizations to prioritize the immigration strategy, immigrants continue to struggle to integrate upon arrival and even after. In terms of work integration, it is well documented that immigrants face a persistent challenge when entering the labor market of receiving countries. In particular, they experience unemployment, underemployment, and downward career mobility (Al Ariss et al., 2012; Hari, 2013) attributed to the non-recognition of education and work experience acquired abroad (Banerjee et al., 2021; Damelang et al., 2020), perceived linguistic abilities, loss of previous social memberships and networks, and racial and gender prejudices (Ellermann, 2020; Esses, 2021; Man & Chou, 2020). Therefore, the complexity of immigrant work immigration requires a multilevel approach to get all relevant

stakeholders on board. This is the area in which we aspire to make our contribution.

Our purpose with this book is twofold. First, we aim to make sense of the wicked problem of immigrant work integration, motivated by our long-established research interest in the topic and professional, personal, and community networks. We explore this problem at multiple levels of analysis (individual, interactional, organizational, and institutional). Second, we aim to contribute to scholarship and policymaking on immigrant integration by explicating and exploring the utility of the sensemaking perspective as a theoretical framework to motivate further research.

This introductory chapter starts by specifying qualified immigrants (QIs) as the focus of our analysis and provides a brief background on the significance of QIs' work integration. This is followed by an introduction to sensemaking as a theoretical lens to begin to unravel the 'mess' of immigrant work integration.

## 1.1   Immigrants

There are many different types of immigrants. Multiple and varied circumstances motivate people to move within and across international borders. We focus on the experiences of people who have moved with the intention of permanent settlement to immigrant-receiving countries that admit these newcomers through different entry streams, such as economic, family reunification, and refugee. In this book, we are primarily concerned with their work integration regardless of the entry stream they used. Work integration is the process by which immigrants engage in employment or self-employment activities commensurate with their professional goals, qualifications, and experience, with adequate economic security and career prospects (Lee et al., 2020).

Immigrants arriving under different migratory streams have unique characteristics, rights, and entitlements and, as a result, might face unique challenges. For example, highly skilled refugees face more challenges than economic migrants due to heightened hurdles of accessing identity documentation,[1] increased hardships due to the circumstances that led to migration, and decreased opportunities to plan and prepare for integration before migrating. Lee and colleagues (2020) refer to these systemic, multilevel barriers to workforce integration facing refugees as the *canvas ceiling*.

Recognizing that different groups of immigrants face different challenges, we follow other researchers (e.g., Farashah & Blomquist, 2021) and use the term *Qualified Immigrant* (QI) to refer to immigrants with foreign post-secondary education who have relocated to another country permanently to live and work (Cerdin et al., 2014; Farashah & Blomquist, 2021). QIs form a diverse group with varying human and social capital levels, different reasons for migration, and various demographic characteristics in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, class, and ability.

As discussed, QIs' integration is a wicked problem, which despite its resistance to resolution has an immense impact on their material conditions and lived realities. Commensurate employment is critical to supporting the integration of QIs in a new society. Employment grants newcomers a sense of belonging, recognition, and acceptance (Dietz et al., 2015; Frank, 2013; Hansen, 2012; Reitz et al., 2014). In addition, research has shown that employed individuals have significantly higher levels of physical and psychological health than unemployed individuals (Korpi, 2001; Paul & Moser, 2009; Wanberg, 2012).

Many studies, such as the ones cited above, describe the barriers, challenges, and poor employment outcomes of immigrants. These studies assume implicitly that such contextual barriers are objective and uniformly perceived (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013; Ramboarison-Lalao et al., 2012). A few studies have disputed these claims of uniformity and recognize that even though barriers are prevalent, employment outcomes can differ across different groups of immigrants, organizations, and individuals. These scholars call for a more nuanced understanding of immigrant integration.

The few scholars responding to this call have highlighted the different reactions of QIs to similar contextual barriers and shown how individuals may take different actions toward variable outcomes. For example, Pearson and colleagues (2012) found that some Polish immigrants in Ireland perceived their stay in Ireland as temporary, influencing how they used their qualifications and skills to find work in the new country. Similarly, Aten and colleagues (2016) found that Filipino engineers with similar educational and work backgrounds experienced different career outcomes because they thought differently about their migration and career prospects in Canada. They identified these differences in approaches as mobility frames that influenced the Filipino immigrants in

the study to seek employment and rationalize their decision and motivation to stay in Canada. In a related study, Al Ariss (2010) referred to the differential outcomes of immigrants as modes of engagement. He found that immigrants dealt with barriers to work integration in four ways: maintenance (worked within contextual barriers), transformation (tried to alter barriers), entrepreneurship (started their own business), and opting out (gave up their career goals).

However, most of these studies cited above focus on individual understandings and outcomes. As a wicked problem, QI work integration necessitates a perspective that can view its operation at various levels to accommodate its social complexity (Conklin, 2007, p. 19). By adopting a sensemaking perspective, we provide a multilevel framework to understand the whole process of immigrant work integration at the individual, interactional, organizational, and institutional levels.

## 1.2   Theoretical Approach

In a recent review of theoretical approaches to studying QIs' work experiences, Farashah and Blomquist (2021) found that many studies are atheoretical or only loosely specify theoretical concepts when discussing their findings. Studies with a clear theoretical foundation employed mostly *content theories*, focusing on variables that explain antecedents of migration and the consequences of migration in terms of employment and career outcomes. These content theories include human capital theory, career capital theory, social identity theory, intersectionality, and cultural identity transition. According to their categorization, few studies employed *process theories*, which is surprising given an academic consensus on viewing immigrant integration as a process.

Of the studies employing process theories, Farashah and Blomquist (2021) found the majority drew on Pierre Bourdieu's *Theory of Practice* (1977, 1986) as a starting point to look at capital, agency, and the field to explain QI's work experiences. The remaining studies employed sensemaking theories (Helms Mills et al., 2010; Weick, 1995) to explore the cognitive processes involved in QI work integration. Based on our assessment of QI work integration as a multilevel, multi-scalar, and multi-actor wicked problem, we believe that the potential of the sensemaking perspective has not yet been fully realized. The few studies identified by Farashah and Blomquist that use sensemaking as a theoretical framework to understand QI work experiences focus primarily on the individual immigrants
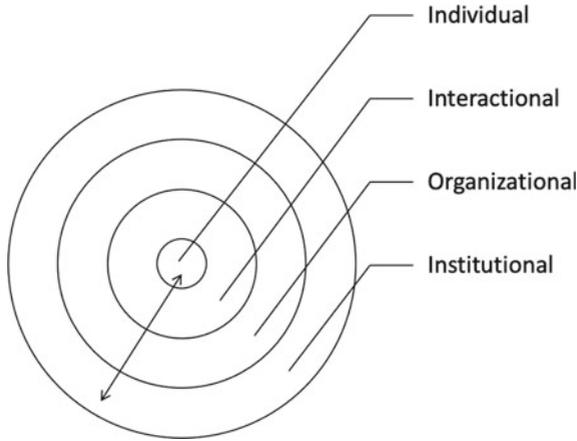
Fig. 1.1   Levels of sensemaking

and their sensemaking process. To support our multilevel analysis, we extend the sensemaking perspective beyond the individual toward the interactional, organizational, and institutional (see Fig. 1.1).

Each chapter of this book focuses on a level of sensemaking while drawing the connections among the different levels, beginning with the individual immigrant (Chapter 3), individuals with whom immigrants interact (Chapter 4), organizations (Chapter 5), and the macroenvironment in which QIs operate (Chapter 6). We acknowledge that a shared understanding to arrive at an accepted solution goes against the very nature of wicked problems. Instead, we present different but connected subjective understandings and strategies of QIs and related actors in relevant environments toward work integration in a new country. We hope this perspective will motivate novel research approaches, offer ideas for future research, and invite practitioners to engage in the process of work integration more mindfully, thereby encouraging more informed practice.

### 1.2.1    Sensemaking and Immigrant Work Integration

Karl Weick and colleagues (2005) define sensemaking as 'the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing' (p. 409). The sensemaking perspective provides insights into

the process of organizing—in particular, how individuals and organizations give meaning to events and make sense of their environment. Following Weick's tradition, we understand work integration as a process of organizing that requires establishing structures, roles, and activities to achieve the goals of an individual and/or organization. People organize to resolve equivocality—the existence of multiple equally-possible meanings—and make the world more orderly (Weick et al., 2005). Consequently, we see the word 'organization' as an all-encompassing label to refer to a stream of activities performed by a group of people. These activities result from individual and collective processes of organizing and sensemaking.

Karl Weick (1995) based his original theorizations on organizational shocks, events, or disasters that instigate system breakdowns and interruptions in routine. Following such an event, people seek to return to familiar or habitual scripts or responses based on what is plausible to them. Their past experiences influence the subsequent construction of their identity. Sensemaking is focused on the social-psychological processes (meaning-making) rather than the outcomes themselves. Therefore, the sensemaking perspective highlights how different meanings are assigned to the same event and seeks to understand how individuals and organizations resolve ambiguity and uncertainty by finding new meanings. Individuals and organizations make sense of what is occurring now and what should be done next.

At an individual level, we treat the decision to migrate as the event from which our investigation of sensemaking starts. The process of migrating leads to interruptions and breakdowns in professional identities, and immigrants contend with multifaceted barriers to work integration, as has already been explained in this introduction. We seek to uncover how QIs make sense of these interruptions and disruptions to their professional identities, assign meanings to their various interactions with local actors involved in the process of work integration, and take actions based on new meanings that emerge. We also explore how local actors and organizations interacting with QIs make sense of immigrants and their talents and influence QIs' processes of sensemaking and integration. Finally, we explore how the macro-environment, through narratives of multiculturalism and professional attainment, informs QIs and local citizens' sensemaking of immigration and influences immigrants' work integration.

From academic and anecdotal evidence, we know that some immigrants can cope with the significant barriers to work integration while

others cannot. Similarly, despite the popularity of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives, some organizations are more successful in recruiting and integrating QIs in their workforce than others. Adopting a sensemaking perspective allows for exploring processes that happen at the individual, interactional, organizational, and institutional levels that influence QIs' work integration. This perspective is explained in more detail in Chapter 2.

## 1.3    OUR APPROACH

We adopt a multidisciplinary approach as a management scholar (Luciara) and a geographer and gender studies scholar (Amrita) to bring novel insights to our shared interest in professionally trained and qualified immigrants who consistently face a complex disadvantage when entering and integrating into the Canadian labor market. In recognizing the lag between academic research and frontline issues faced by practitioners working on immigration challenges, we heed the growing call for scholars to conduct socially useful research. Our latest work takes a transformative approach (Nardon et al., 2021a) to understand the wicked problem of immigrant work integration while supporting the persons sharing their stories. A transformative approach rejects the notion that participant interactions are neutral activities and instead assumes that the researcher influences the participants' sensemaking process and aims to intervene with intention. These interventions seek to create opportunities for self-reflection in which new understandings are made possible.

This book is a culmination of over a decade of our combined research on immigrant issues and our lived experiences as immigrants to Canada and temporary residents of other countries. Born in Brazil and India, educated in the United States and the United Kingdom, we have life experiences in Belgium, Kenya, and Uganda. These journeys and our identities have made our approach to our research contextual, relational, intersectional, embodied, and politicized. Kusow (2003), in their analysis of immigrants studying their own and other immigrant communities, cautioned that researchers are simultaneously insiders bearing community expectations and outsiders whose identities can be implicated in unpredictable ways. We sought to be self-reflexive and politically aware when developing our various research projects and maintained a responsibility toward ourselves, our participants, and the research outcomes. In addition to undertaking a transformative approach in our research interactions, we

view them as culturally embedded contexts. We are conscientious about how we represent our participants' stories, voices, and 'truths.'

Together we bring an interdisciplinary, intercultural, and intersectional perspective to the study of immigrant work integration. We complement each other's perspectives by bringing an organizational and a gender and policy perspective into conversation, drawing on different literatures and methodologies to bear on the topic, which we believe results in a more robust and sophisticated understanding of this wicked problem. Moreover, we bring our own stories and those of our families and communities to emphasize the lived realities of immigrant communities and the multidimensional challenges they face as newcomers.

The various participant narratives shared in the book are drawn from qualitative data collected during multiple research projects on immigrants to Canada. We have been following immigrants' experiences based on their shared narratives online (e.g., Moffitt et al., 2020; Nardon et al., 2015) and interviews using multiple methodological paradigms for over a decade (e.g., Aten et al., 2016; Hari, 2013, 2017, 2018; Nardon et al., 2021b). We are also immersed and actively engaged in the immigrant community through personal and professional connections.

The stories we share here draw from multiple past (Aten et al., 2016; Hari, 2013, 2017, 2018; Moffitt et al., 2020; Nardon et al., 2021b) and ongoing projects (Nardon et al., 2022; Palic et al., 2022) exploring immigrant experiences of settling in Canada and integrating into the labor market. Although the realities of the labor market have changed, and continue to do so, our observation over time suggests many similarities in the ways individual immigrants experience and make sense of their transitions to the workforce. Specific details of each project are provided in the notes at the end of the respective chapters in which the stories appear.

## 1.4   The Road Ahead

This chapter began by describing the wicked problem of immigrant integration and later qualified immigrants' (QIs') work integration. We provided some key definitions and briefly introduced the theoretical lens adopted throughout the book, sensemaking, and its utility in making sense of this wicked problem. The next chapter provides a fuller discussion of the sensemaking perspective and its potential to better understand QIs'

work integration. To do this, we discuss properties and levels of sense-making and outline how these ideas will be weaved through the remaining chapters in the book.

## 1.5    KEY POINTS

- Immigrant integration is a wicked problem. Barriers and opportunities are present at multiple levels and vary based on specific situations facing individuals, organizational realities, societal perceptions, and multi-jurisdictional policies and structures. In addition, it includes many stakeholders with radically different ways of understanding the problem.
- Immigrant-receiving countries admit immigrants to fill labor shortages and work in tandem with organizations that seek to find and place global talent. Yet many qualified immigrants are unemployed or underemployed.
- Work integration is the process of engaging in employment or self-employment activities commensurate with immigrants' professional goals, qualifications, and experience, and with adequate economic security and career prospects.
- Sensemaking is the process of giving meaning to situations and rationalizing action. It is a fruitful lens to fully explore QIs' work integration and the role of various actors and institutions with whom they interact in the journey toward commensurate employment.

## NOTE

1. We use the term 'identity documentation' to include various forms of documents and registration required to access employment, education, and services in a new country, which can include birth certificate, driver's license, passport, transcripts, diplomas/degrees, etc.

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# The Sensemaking Perspective

Sensemaking is the process through which individuals and organizations give meaning to events or situations. The sensemaking perspective became prominent in organizational studies since its introduction by Karl Weick in 1995. It has since been expanded and applied to multiple contexts, including immigrant work integration. The process of sensemaking allows people to develop a plausible explanation for their situations and use this understanding to motivate action. According to Weick (1995), sensemaking is like 'a good story that holds disparate elements together long enough to energize and guide action plausibly enough to allow people to make retrospective sense of whatever happens' (p. 61). To explore the role of sensemaking in QIs' work integration, let us look at Olga's story.

Olga[12] is a recent Canadian immigrant originally from Ukraine. She has a Ph.D., international work experience, and lived in multiple countries before immigrating to Canada. Olga has impressive academic credentials, a substantial work record, and can speak multiple languages. Yet, it took her more than a year to find commensurate work in Canada that recognizes her educational caliber and extensive work experience. Based on her previous work for an international organization, she hoped to find a position in their Canadian subsidiary. When that did not work, she was unsure which opportunities she should pursue. She explains:

> I didn't know which positions I should apply to. First of all, I started to look for job opportunities in universities...But then people started to explain that I would need to get [another] Ph.D. here… When I went

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to [university], [a professor] said to me... you don't want to spend five years, because even if you spend five years in Ph.D., the employment opportunities will not be open to you. There is no guarantee.

Olga decided to give up on building a career in a Canadian university and instead began volunteering for an emotional support organization. She also joined an employment program for immigrant newcomers, which provided training and networking opportunities. While she valued learning about the process of applying for jobs and practicing for job interviews, she was struggling to find job opportunities that were commensurate with her qualifications and skills. She explains:

In the beginning, they [staff in the employment program] didn't know in which area I would fit... I was just no, no, no. My level and [finding] the right fit [were] challenging for them as well. I must admit that I was a really hard client in these terms.

Olga went through numerous selection processes within governmental bodies but was unsuccessful. She reflected on her journey:

It is challenging to go through all these stages. Because at some points, when I was not successful with [one employer], I was a bit, not a bit, but very disappointed because I invested a lot of time. And there was a three-month process of selection, and I really hoped I would get the job. But then, eventually, I failed, but it was a good learning experience for me.

Eventually, Olga managed to find a job through the connections she established while in the employment program. After all these efforts, Olga was offered a higher position than the one she had interviewed for.

[The program] organized an info session with their representative, he is my colleague now, and he explained what the job was about. Because it was not a clear description of the job position, and even the title was different. There was no [job] description, and I think the way they approached the selection process was really humane because they were selecting people, they were not looking for[positions]...
   My manager said that she heard about [the employment program], and she wanted to help other people to give this opportunity, and so that's why they considered [the employment program] as a pool of candidates. Because there was no description, I didn't try to fit into the job description. [...] They were open and flexible, so I just showed all the skills I have

during the interview, and they also were looking for my language test results and my writing skills. It turned out that they looked for an analyst, but I ended up getting the higher position, Senior Advisor.

Olga expressed that the support she received from the employment program and her mentor were critical in helping her find a job that would utilize the full range of her educational and work experiences acquired before moving to Canada.

I was coupled with a mentor. She explained to me the techniques they apply, how to answer the interview; she reviewed all my answers... And also, the [program] recruitment specialists were providing a lot of support... It's just taking some time and a long journey to find a job, and it's not easy because when you come here, you just don't realize it... It took me one year and a half, almost, to get the job.

During our last conversation, Olga talked about being happy with her position as she felt she could apply all her skills, and the job was a good fit for her. She added that she felt supported by her manager and colleagues. Olga's eventual employment outcome is a success story in immigrant work integration, but her journey to attaining commensurate employment was not easy. When she wanted to give up and settle for what felt to her like lower-level work, the support from her husband helped her stay positive.

When you're in transition, you don't know what will happen... I'm happy about where I am now. And I'm happy about the achievements. And I'm happy about my performance, so it sounds like a success story, but it was quite a chore for me. At some point in time, I decided that okay, I would not go for a high position because there was no point. I need to start from the beginning...I had support from my husband, who said, you don't want to do the same that you did before. You want to be recognized... this kind of support also is really helpful.

Olga's situation is like that of many other QIs who immigrate after acquiring education and work experience in other countries. She had to cope with disappointments, make sense of her options, and decide on actions to find a way forward. She did not go through this process alone; her sensemaking was informed and influenced by others from whom she sought support and advice. She relied on her husband for emotional

support to persevere, professional employment support to prepare for job applications and interviews, as well as mentors and professionals in her new city to understand her options. She volunteered at different organizations to meet people, learn local socio-cultural norms and values in the workplace and beyond, and enhance her range of skills to fit with the local labor market. In addition, she tried to make sense of the oftentimes variable assessments of her skills made by others, including support and employment organizations, as well as employers—all the while navigating a new cultural and regulatory environment.

While there are many ways to understand Olga's situation, circumstances, and journey, we argue that sensemaking is a useful lens to explore the overall process and actors involved at multiple levels of the work integration complex of QIs. The sensemaking perspective allows us to uncover the social-psychological processes that contribute to individual and organizational decision-making and outcomes, rather than focusing exclusively on the outcomes themselves. Sensemaking, therefore, allows us to understand Olga's success story in tandem with her complicated and long journey toward her Canadian job. It recognizes her interpretations and actions, as well as those of other relevant stakeholders, that led to her successful outcome.

## 2.1   Properties of Sensemaking

As a concept, sensemaking is distinct from interpretation because it goes beyond how text or information is read and understood to include how it is constructed (Weick, 1995). As such, Weick identifies seven properties of sensemaking that distinguishes it from other processes such as understanding or interpretation. Sensemaking is grounded in identity construction, retrospective, enactive of sensible environments, social, ongoing, focused on and by extracted cues, and driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. We explore these properties in detail below.

### 2.1.1   Grounded in Identity Construction

Sensemaking starts with the sensemaker. Making sense of what is 'out there' is closely related to the sensemaker's identity or understanding of 'who I am.' Our identity is in flux, continuously being reworked to accommodate our individual experiences as well as our experiences with others. How we see ourselves in a particular situation influences how we

make sense of these situations and the information we learn in connection with our interactions with others. Olga's perception of herself as a highly qualified professional informed her decision to refuse some of the jobs suggested by the employment support organization and be 'a really hard client.' The interview for her current job reinforced this perception while she worked with others to define a job description that utilizes her full potential. As a result, her current narrative of success further reinforces her identity as a competent professional.

### 2.1.2    Retrospective

Sensemaking is about giving meaning to action, but people can only give meaning to an action after it is completed. Weick uses the image of a 'stream of experience.' While we are embedded in it, it is experienced as a flow; however, as we try to make sense of it, it is labeled and bracketed into distinct events. This process of labeling and bracketing is only possible retrospectively, as one reflects upon an experience. For example, Olga recounts her journey to her current job with coherence, identifying key events (a meeting with a university professor, a failed job application, the support of a mentor, and the encouragement of her husband). However, as she acknowledged, '[w]hen you're in transition, you don't know what will happen.' The sensemaker can only look back and make sense of the experience after the key events have occurred.

### 2.1.3    Enactive of Sensible Environments

The word 'enact,' in this third property of sensemaking proposed by Weick, signifies that people produce part of the environment they face. As a sensemaker reacts to an environmental cue, they contribute to the environment they have to respond to. The environment presents sensemakers with situations or stimuli out of their control. Still, sensemakers have the agency to respond to these cues in ways that reinforce or resist environmental pressures, and in turn, contribute to or produce the environment they face. Employment counselors presented Olga with job opportunities that she chose to decline or pursue. By applying or not applying to these jobs, she influenced her subsequent experiences and the job opportunities that became available to her, including her current position that she molded during the interview process.

### 2.1.4    Social

Sensemaking processes are influenced by others, whether present or imagined. As we interpret the world around us, we consider what others have told us and what we believe they think or expect of us. In the case of immigrants, the social aspect of sensemaking is very prominent as immigrants' social relations in the country of origin and the receiving country can significantly influence how they make sense of themselves and their work opportunities. Olga identified the important role of mentors and local advisors in guiding her career choices, as well as the emotional support provided by her husband, all of which facilitated her waiting for the right opportunity.

### 2.1.5    Ongoing

Sensemaking never stops. We are constantly immersed in a flow of activity and constantly making sense of ourselves and our environments. In this flow of activities, we isolate moments or cues to inform our sensemaking efforts and gain a sense of coherence. Olga was immersed in a flow of actions, including career counseling activities, submitting job applications, conversing with locals and family members, reflecting on her career goals, and so on. Amidst this flow of activity, she identified pieces of discrepant information (e.g., the need to take another Ph.D. to qualify for academic jobs or an unsuccessful job application) to reflect further and organize her experience. The ongoing property of sensemaking also suggests that our sense or story keeps changing as we experience and accommodate new information. Olga's career narrative would likely be very different before she secured her current job or if she were still looking for suitable employment.

### 2.1.6    Focused on and by Extracted Cues

Extracted cues are 'simple, familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring' (Weick, 1995, p. 50). They are the bits of information or experience we use as a starting point to make sense of the whole picture. Weick uses the word seed purposefully as a metaphor to capture the indeterminacy and open-ended nature of the process of sensemaking. These extracted cues can be interpreted in multiple ways, and how they are interpreted depends on the

context of the cue. For example, when the employment support staff offered Olga lower-skilled job opportunities (a cue), she interpreted it as a shortcoming of the staff or process. She took away from these interactions that these jobs would not be appropriate for her because of her high level of qualifications and her course of action was to decline them. A different immigrant may have interpreted the same cue differently, perhaps as an assessment of the only option available to them, and acted accordingly.

### 2.1.7   *Driven by Plausibility Rather Than Accuracy*

Sensemaking is not about accuracy but plausibility. The outcome of sensemaking is a coherent and reasonable sense that serves as a springboard for action. In this process, we may distort or eliminate information to achieve a sense of plausible coherence. The focus on plausibility rather than accuracy explains why people's sense of the same situation is different and leads to different actions. Olga concluded that an academic career was out of reach for her. This conclusion was plausible but not necessarily accurate. Yet, it informed Olga's decision to focus on non-academic jobs.

After revisiting Olga's sensemaking process with these properties in mind, we can say that Olga relied on the support of many individuals (social) to decide which jobs to apply to (enactment). She was successful in finding a good job (cue) and constructed a narrative (retrospective) of her career trajectory (ongoing). This narrative is coherent (plausible) and preserves her identity as a competent professional (identity construction). Chapter 3 will explore how this sensemaking process varies for immigrants and, in turn, has implications for work integration.

## 2.2   Levels of Sensemaking

When we encounter a situation that is different from what we expect—a discrepancy—the process of sensemaking becomes explicit. A discrepancy presents a break in the flow of experience; we need to make sense of what is going on so we can resume our activities. Immigration is a major disruption in the flow of experience, and many circumstances are likely to be different than expected and require explicit sensemaking efforts. This is true not only for immigrants but also for the organizations that receive them as part of the work integration process (e.g., employers, support organizations, educational institutions, and professional organizations). These organizations need to make sense of different career trajectories,

skillsets, cultural styles, and work cultures and practices to assess, recruit, and manage international talent.

Canadian scholars Helms Mills et al. (2010) propose a critical sensemaking perspective as an extension of Weick's (1995) original theorizing. An overarching and implicit assumption of Weick's conceptualization of sensemaking, including the properties discussed above, is that sensemaking is a democratic process whereby all voices are relatively equal and important. Helms Mills et al. (2010), in their use of 'critical' as a qualifier of sensemaking, aim to highlight the role of power, knowledge, structures, and past relationships in influencing the sensemaking process. They focus their discussion of critical sensemaking on the role of organizations, which they argue privilege some identities over others and marginalize those that do not fit preferred identities. The critical sensemaking perspective positions sensemaking within a broader economic, political, societal, and cultural context. To make sense of discrepancies, we look for reasons that will allow us to understand what is going on and act. These 'reasons' are found in institutional frameworks, organizational premises, plans, acceptable justifications, and cultural traditions (Weick et al., 2005).

Sensemaking informs individual and collective understandings of truth and reality, and it simultaneously informs and is informed by perceptions, experiences, expectations, understandings, and beliefs. Thus, sensemaking happens at multiple levels of subjectivity (Weick, 1995; Wiley, 1988), with important implications for immigrant work integration, as summarized in Table 2.1 and explained below.

### 2.2.1   *Individual Level*

When individuals are confronted with surprises or discrepancies and need to construct new meanings and assemble new responses, they engage in intra-subjective sensemaking. In the context of immigrant work integration, individual sensemaking is particularly important as we consider individual immigrants' attempts to make sense of the labor market and how they are perceived by potential employers during their efforts to find employment. For example, Olga's discovery that her doctoral education would not be valued in the local market posed a discrepancy, which she needed to make sense of to assess and decide upon appropriate career actions. Olga decided to forego an academic career and focus on governmental and industry positions.

**Table 2.1**  Levels of sensemaking and QI's work integration

| Level | Sensemaking | Description | Implications for QI's work integration | Salient challenge for QIs |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Individual | Intra-subjective | The cognitive process of constructing meaning when confronted with situations | Immigrants need to make sense of a foreign work environment and themselves to deal with discrepancies associated with the need for talent and barriers to integration | Identifying viable career actions |
| Interactional | Intersubjective | The meaning that emerges in the process of communication between individuals | Immigrants interact with multiple local actors as they attempt to enter the workforce, including career counselors, recruiters, employers, other immigrants, professional associations, and community members | Communicate skills and experience and develop supportive relationships |
| Organizational (social structure) | Generic subjective | A collection of intersubjective meanings is crystallized into roles, rules, rituals, and practices. In times of stability, a generic and abstracted self follows the rules and occupies preordained roles | Organizational practices that affect immigrants (e.g., immigrant support, recruitment, education, credential assessment) become crystalized, influencing immigrants' abilities to integrate | Overcome organizational barriers |

**Table 2.1**  (continued)

| Level | Sensemaking | Description | Implications for QI's work integration | Salient challenge for QIs |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Institutional | Extra-subjective | Abstract and idealized frameworks that inform the way things should be. De-personified and taken for granted | Institutional frameworks inform who is worthy of integration and what are the markers of inclusion | Overcome institutional barriers |

Individual sensemaking is also happening with non-immigrants as they engage with the issue of immigrant work integration. For example, counselors need to make sense of their client's skills and potential, and recruiters need to decide if an applicant is qualified and able to perform a job. A full examination of the sensemaking processes of the many actors involved in the immigrant integration complex is beyond the scope of this book. We do, however, discuss immigrants' sensemaking in Chapter 3.

### 2.2.2    Interactional Level

Individuals create new meaning through communication and interaction with others. To resolve the discrepancies associated with employment barriers and make sense of their surroundings, immigrants must access local interpretation schemas (Glanz et al., 2001; Nardon et al., 2015), making them highly susceptible to being influenced by others. Immigrants interact with many individuals in the receiving country in their process of work integration: career counselors, recruiters, mentors, other immigrants, professionals, and members of the community.

Many of these interactions happen as QIs go about their lives in the new country. However, some of these interactions are particularly meaningful due to these individuals' positions and power to influence QIs' professional situations. Individuals in positions to provide career advice, such as mentors, coaches, trainers, representatives of hiring organizations, and career counselors, are imbued with power and legitimacy (Hallett,

2003) and may significantly impact immigrants' sensemaking and consequent career actions. The process of sensemaking that happens within an interaction can be thought of as intersubjective. Olga's sensemaking of her career options was influenced by her interactions with mentors and advisors. Her decision to abandon an academic career was influenced by a conversation with a local university professor. The interactional level is explored in more detail in Chapter 4.

### 2.2.3    *Organizational Level*

Sensemaking also happens at the level of social structures (generic subjective), which includes organizations, as well as other organized activities. At this level, roles and rules construct an abstract generic self that replaces individuality. Individuals are imperfectly interchangeable as they fill roles and follow rules. In times of stability, organizations function by relying on social structures and individuals following scripts and rules. In standard situations, different individuals filling that role would arrive at similar conclusions. For example, when a recruiter follows an organizationally mandated recruitment process with a standard interview protocol to fill a job description, the process of deciding who is a good candidate is abstracted and generalized to minimize individual biases and preferences. However, in times of change and discrepancy, individuals interact to construct meaning intersubjectively. For example, when recruiters work with immigrant talent, the same scripts and rules might exclude them from opportunities. Recruiters, employers, and immigrants would need to construct different scripts and rules intersubjectively to understand the transferrable skills that constitute global talent. Thus, Weick (1995) argues that sensemaking at the level of organizations is a mixture of inter- and generic subjectivities.

Olga had faced many rejections and learned that her degree would not be accepted for an academic career. These assessments were often based on generalized rules, such as the preference of many business schools for PhDs from accredited institutions. Olga's current employer, however, deviated from generic recruitment practices and abstract assessments of a good candidate for a job. As she explained, the hiring manager was open to exploring her skills and potential and then deciding on a suitable position for her rather than following the standard job description matching protocol. The organizational level is explored in more detail

in Chapter 5; we discuss the role of organizations in QIs' work integration and how generic subjective sensemaking is represented in crystallized organizational practices that directly impact immigrants' ability to engage in the workforce.

### 2.2.4    Institutional Level

The institutional level (extra-subjective) is expressed as abstract or idealized frameworks that guide behavior. The institutional context is constituted of the macro-environment in which organizations and immigrants operate, including laws, rules, and norms that impose constraints, representations, and logic principles on individuals (DiMaggio, 1997) and may influence the availability and attractiveness of different courses of action (Elsbach et al., 2005). At this level, societal narratives and cultural knowledge are de-personified, normative (the way things should be), and taken for granted. This level also includes master narratives around immigrants and integration. Master narratives can be understood as shared cultural scripts, which reinforce norms and guide individuals on how to be good members of a given culture (McLean & Syed, 2015). Master narratives are essential in guiding who belongs in society and who is worthy of integration. We introduce and engage with a few master narratives informing immigrant work integration in Chapter 6.

### 2.2.5    Interdependence of Levels of Sensemaking

While we address these levels of sensemaking independently, they are closely connected—each level of sensemaking influences all other levels. For instance, immigrant sensemaking informs and is informed by interactions with local agents. Local agents, in turn, are informed by the organizations they represent, whether they are in a supportive or employing role, and the respective rules, policies, guidelines, procedures, and behavioral norms they abide by. At the same time, their engagement with immigrants can alter organizational processes, for example, through the hiring of immigrants or learning about their specific challenges and providing new opportunities. As seen in Olga's case, her hiring manager deviated from the general rules of hiring and purposefully engaged with immigrant support organizations to identify international talent; the organization and some of its practices are likely to be changed as a result. Organizations are embedded in a macro-cultural and institutional context and,

as such, are influenced by taken-for-granted assumptions and narratives, as well as rules and resources. As more immigrants join a society and make themselves heard, we can anticipate changes in master narratives about immigrants and integration, influencing rules and assumptions at the institutional level.

## 2.3    The Road Ahead

This chapter discussed the potential of a sensemaking perspective to understand QIs' work integration. Using Olga's story, we discussed how the properties of sensemaking (grounded in identity construction, retrospective, enactive, social, ongoing, focused on and by extracted cues, and driven by plausibility) allow us to understand the process by which immigrants make sense of their situations and engage in career actions. We also discussed how different levels of subjectivity (individual, interactional, organizational, and institutional) are implicated in the process of sensemaking and immigrant work integration.

Looking at immigrant work integration through a sensemaking lens allows for an exploration of the ways multiple independent actors (including immigrants themselves), through an ongoing process of sensemaking and sensegiving, produce and reinforce structures that are implicated in immigrants' various employment-related activities. While sensemaking refers to creating meaning, sensegiving refers to the process of 'attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others' (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, p. 442). As immigrants attempt to enter the local labor market, they are exposed to multiple agents, such as career counselors, event speakers, trainers, mentors, recruiters, and others within their social and professional networks, who attempt to influence immigrants' understanding of the labor market, which in turn impacts their behaviors, actions, and outcomes. It is important to note that some actors hold more power than others and will have a more significant influence on immigrants' sensemaking (see Chapter 4).

A sensemaking perspective highlights the complexity of QIs' work integration. Several processes happening at individual, interactional, organizational, and institutional levels are implicated in the process of work integration. Small changes may have large effects due to the interconnectedness of multiple levels of sensemaking and the various actors involved. Moreover, a critical sensemaking perspective builds on Weick's (2005)

original conceptualization to highlight the role of agency—the capacity for individualized choice and action.

In the context of immigrant work integration, agency is exercised by immigrants, as well as individuals in the community and within an organization who play a more active role in QIs' overall journey toward finding commensurate employment that uses the full potential of their education, previous work experience, and skills. As we will see in the rest of this book, this perspective calls for a questioning of crystallized social structures, rules, and policies that are taken for granted. Critical sensemaking opens possibilities to move away from the way things are supposed to be and instead calls for individuals in various levels and positions across organizations in the government, not-for-profit, and for-profit sectors to take a more active role in shaping the structures and master narratives that shape integration to create more success stories like Olga's in a reasonable time frame.

In the next chapter, we employ a sensemaking perspective to explain how QIs of similar backgrounds can have widely different outcomes based on how they make sense of their identities and situations to determine actions.

## 2.4    Key Points

- Sensemaking is the process through which individuals give meaning to situations and is a useful theoretical lens to understand QI work integration.
- Sensemaking has seven properties: grounded in identity construction, retrospective, enactive of sensible environments, social, ongoing, focused on and by extracted cues, and driven by plausibility rather than accuracy.
- A critical sensemaking perspective positions sensemaking within a broader economic, political, societal, and cultural context and highlights the role of power, knowledge, structures, and past relationships in influencing the sensemaking process.
- Sensemaking happens at multiple levels of subjectivity: institutional (extra-subjective), social structure (generic subjective), interactional (intersubjective), and individual (intra-subjective). Each of these levels has implications for QI's integration.
- The various levels (individual, interactional, organizational, and institutional) are interconnected and influence each other.

## Notes

1. Olga is a pseudonym. For anonymity purposes, we assigned pseudonyms to refer to all our research participants. We have also altered identifying details such as city and employer and made small grammatical adjustments when quoting participants for ease of read.
2. Olga's story is derived from an ongoing project investigating the experiences of immigrants with doctoral education as they adjust to the realities of high barriers to secure academic positions and explore career alternatives. In this project we have conducted interviews ranging from 60 to 90 minutes with 9 immigrant women. Findings from this study are in preparation for publication.

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# The Immigrant Sensemaker

## 3.1 SENSEMAKERS AND SENSEMAKING

When immigrants are confronted with a new environment, full of surprises and discrepancies, they engage in a process of *intra-subjective sensemaking* to construct meanings and engage in action. As we argued in Chapter 2, sensemaking starts with the sensemaker. In this chapter, we focus on the identity processes implicated in QIs' work integration. We start with the self-narratives of Aldo and Ulan to understand their individual processes of identity construction and sensemaking.

Aldo and Ulan[1] came from the Philippines five years before we spoke with them, making them recent immigrants at the time of our conversations. They were proficient in English and were trained in and worked as engineers in the Philippines. Aldo was a mechanical engineer, and Ulan was a chemical engineer. Before arriving in Canada, they participated in the same government-sponsored pre-arrival immigrant training program, during which they received information about living and working in Canada. Despite their similar educational background, professional attainments, and comparable language skills, their career trajectories developed quite differently (Aten et al., 2016).

Aldo had to submit a complete record of his professional credentials as part of his application to become a Canadian permanent resident. Yet, once he arrived in Canada, he was very frustrated and confused when he realized he had to do it 'all over again,' undergo a separate accreditation process, and provide further evidence of his training and skills to enter the

local workforce. He was under the impression that his successful immigration application was sufficient acknowledgment and evidence that his status as a skilled worker positioned him well to meet the reported labor shortages in Canada. Instead, he felt pressure from immigrant support personnel to take on menial jobs that did not correspond to his education and previous experience. Faced with this dilemma, Aldo decided against pursuing professional accreditation because of the many costs involved (financial and emotional). Instead, he applied for and secured a job that he was overqualified for. He works as a machine operator in a warehouse, which is removed from his original specialization and qualification (engineering) and requires lower skills than he possesses (underemployment). He explained:

> I have not started my examination program because I'm tied up with other things, providing with my job, providing food for the family… It takes you time and money to prepare for the examination, and I didn't have the luxury and time to prepare… I'm working, and I'm supporting my family. I guess I just shut this off.

However, he still sees his immigration project as successful because he can focus on other aspects of his life. He reflects:

> I'm a musician: I'm a pianist and a singer. I sing, and I play the piano at church… I have a lot of good friends here, maybe that helped me to develop my skills in relating…After five years, when we bought a house, I felt that I was with it. I'm seeing my children, my oldest son is now in university, and my daughter, my second kid, she is in college. Yeah, I'm so happy. Because that's one of my purposes, not only my career here in Canada, but it's for my children, and that they would have the best education that Canada can offer. Once you have graduated here in Canada, there will be a lot of jobs, a lot of choices, but back home, you have no choice. So, I'm happy with it, and I feel successful.

Like Aldo, Ulan also reported feeling confused about the expectations to position himself in the local workforce despite arriving as a skilled immigrant. He explains:

> Back home, when we were approved for Canada, I was hearing stories that maybe 80 or 90 percent of immigrants in Canada would end in an odd job. Odd job? Is that so… When I arrived in Canada, they were not

allowing you to work in your education; you have to upgrade yourself. And I thought, maybe I can make a difference, I was telling myself. And then, once I received the letter from the Canadian Embassy, I was invited to attend the [training program]. And one of the speakers said, you are all professionals, and I strongly believe that you can land in your field. He really told us that…. Odd job is not for you… and that boosted my self-confidence.

Ulan defied the odds and landed a job in his field, but it was not easy.

…. We arrived in Canada knowing nobody… not a single friend. We met people there, [and they would ask] do you need a job? I have an odd job in the kitchen or something like that… it is too early, thank you. I was so determined. Even when I looked at the ads, I only chose those ads that were related to my field. That's why it took me seven months … I really picked the jobs that were in my field and that I thought I would excel in. I came looking for better opportunities for myself and my son… I knew it was not going to be easy, it would be hard, but I had confidence that I could make it…but for seven months, I didn't have a job. I was really looking for a job that was related to my degree, to my work experience. I was so determined that I was going to get a job related to what I was doing back home. And it never crossed my mind that I would be doing an odd job. I guess that self-confidence that I can make it… The [training program] helped; they introduced me to [immigrant support program, and they] helped me to get my entry-level for the same company that I work for now.

Aldo and Ulan had many things in common. They arrived in Canada about the same time with similar educational and professional back-grounds. They needed to make sense of the disconnect between their successful admission to Canada as skilled immigrants based on their education and experience and their inability to secure work in their profes-sional fields without further training and accreditation. They attended the same support program but extracted different cues. Aldo understood that it would be difficult to find work as an engineer, and he would have to accept working a low-skilled job as his immigration reality. On the other hand, Ulan inculcated a comment made by a trainer during a pre-arrival program to further reinforce his professional identity and find the confidence to persevere to find work in the occupation in which he had qualifications and experience. Not accepting underemployment as an immigration reality, Ulan stood firm and reforged his professional identity

by looking for cues that supported his image as a competent professional. Just as Ulan saw his immigration project as successful, Aldo also emphasized his multifaceted contribution to the Canadian economy and society by discussing his various roles and personal identities. He is a professional but also a pianist, singer, and family man.

Ulan and Aldo identify as successful immigrants and, in retrospect, construct their professional identities in different ways. Aldo talks about himself as a successful immigrant and takes pride in making people happy and in playing a small part in his children's success in entering tertiary education. Ulan also feels successful because he beat the odds to become a QI who could continue his professional career in a new country. In this chapter, we explore the central role of identity, specifically the process of identity work, in sensemaking and immigrant work integration.

## 3.2    Identity Work

Identity work is the process of 'forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening, or revising [one's] identities' (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010, p. 137). Identity refers to the ways in which individuals develop a sense of self by categorizing themselves as members of groups (e.g., I am a woman, a teacher, a scuba diver) and in relation to others (e.g., I am not a man, a soccer player, or an engineer) (Tajfel, 1974). Therefore, identity is a construct built from a self-view; individuals align who they are with their external environments, using forms of social classification. As such, identity is an intra-subjective process requiring continuous external validation. This process is relational; the social environment provides individuals with available identification categories that, in turn, reflect whether their identity claims are accepted (Randrianasolo, 2021).

Categories for social identification are endless, but some are more prominent than others, including gender, race, ethnicity, profession, and nationality. Immigrants contend with many challenges to their identity work in different societal contexts. For instance, different social environments may have different race categorizations. A South American of European descent may be considered 'White' in their country of origin but a 'person of color' in their country of immigration. These differences create challenges with respect to identity work.

Immigrants must also negotiate their national identity or identification with their country of origin and the country in which they intend to reside. Komisarof and Leong (2020) argue that the degree to which

immigrants achieve a sense of belonging in a receiving community is closely tied to national identity. They add that a community is imagined and symbolic, in which individuals rely on a set of assumed shared characteristics or markers to decide who 'is one of us' and who is not. Interestingly, professional attainment has been recognized as a key marker of inclusion in a new country (discussed in Chapter 6) and, as such, a foundation for national identification (Leong, 2014; Moffitt et al., 2020).

### 3.2.1  Professional Identity and Work Integration

Professional integration in the new social environment of the receiving country requires QIs to revise their understanding of who they are in ways that bring a sense of coherence and distinctiveness (Brown, 2015) and maintain continuity between their past identity and who they are becoming (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Identity work upon arrival in a new country needs to happen regardless of whether immigrants change occupations or remain in the same occupation they had before immigrating. When integrating as professionals in another country, immigrants need to restructure their identities to become somebody else (e.g., I used to be an engineer, now I sing and play the piano at the church) or to learn how to become a member of their original profession in the new social environment, a process Ulan referred to as the need to 'upgrade yourself.' Either process is challenging and lengthy, which explains why immigrant transition takes time.

Neiterman and Bourgeault (2015a) looked at the professional resocialization of internationally educated health professionals in Canada and found that integrating into a profession as newcomers requires understanding its universal and culturally specific aspects of practice. Professional identities are embedded within a cultural and ideological environment. When an individual engages in a profession for the first time, they need to acquire the knowledge and skills required to practice in their occupation, complemented by an understanding of the professional culture to develop an identity as a professional. Typically, this process happens through professional education. When an immigrant attempts to practice their profession in a new country, however, they must learn the local societal and professional cultures and unlearn assumptions, behaviors, and practices acquired in other professional environments that no longer resonate with the new cultural, social, and ideological environment.

QIs with several years of experience in an occupation might have to contend with significant differences in the new country's professional culture and occupational practices, and adjust to different local practices, cultural norms, and role statuses. Neiterman and Bourgeault (2015b), in their study of nurses and physicians in Canada, observed that nurses trained in Canada are viewed as equal members of the healthcare team but have more subordinate status in other countries. The ways in which occupations are structured and how roles are defined can vary widely across different social environments, causing confusion and requiring a realignment of newcomers' expectations and expectations of them in new workplaces. In addition, the cultural demands in the new social environment might require different communication styles and tools to perform the same role. These discrepancies in role definitions and expectations, Neiterman and Bourgeault (2015a) argue, mean that the process of professional integration should be seen as a transition that requires 'new ways of practicing and learning a new set of skills, responsibilities, and professional relations' (p. 80). Work integration is, therefore, a transition necessitating adjustment and adaptation. Old skills need to be combined with new skills, and older patterns of communication might need to be unlearned to accommodate new patterns.

The degree of challenge associated with resocialization varies across occupations. Some occupations are highly regulated and contextual (such as health care), while others have a strong international culture with a shared language across many nations (such as software programming). As a result, the process of identity work required of immigrants to present themselves as desirable workers (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010) or employable (Smith, 2010) is likely to vary across occupational sectors and professions.

When individuals are being socialized into a new profession as entry-level or first-time workers, they acquire knowledge and skills while simultaneously constructing an identity. Immigrants, however, already have a professional identity, and at times, this identity holds great personal value and would have likely awarded them status in their previous social environments. Changing professional identities requires letting go of previous identifications, or as Ibarra (2004) says, becoming an 'ex.' Ibarra (2004) argues that the process of developing a new working identity is iterative and proceeds in several steps. Individuals ask themselves, 'Who might I become?', and then test possible selves, both old and new, in the new social environment. Next, they engage in external change by

changing careers and internal change by achieving greater congruence between who they are and what they do. Finally, they update priorities, assumptions, and self-conceptions. She argues that such changes take much longer than we expect because one must 'get rid of some of the old selves we are still dragging around and, unconsciously, still invested in becoming' (p. 13). This is particularly true for immigrants who may engage in a new working identity, not by choice, but because they could not integrate into their preferred profession.

Ibarra (2004) further argues that a working identity is composed of three aspects: what we do, the company we keep (our working relationships), and the story that links who we have been and who we will become. Crafting a new identity, therefore, requires trying on different identities through experiments and forging new connections. This process can take several years; to become somebody else takes time, trial and error, and external and internal change. More importantly, this process is fraught with identity threats and is particularly challenging for immigrants who previously enjoyed high social status due to their professional identities and, after the disruption of immigration, must grieve what has been lost before making space for something new.

### 3.2.2    Coping with Identity Threats

Identity threats are challenges to one's preferred identity narrative (Brown & Coupland, 2015). As QIs learn about barriers to employment and seek to maintain their preferred professional identities (e.g., as an engineer), these barriers can be perceived as threats to their deeply held identities; they need to find ways to cope and manage how others perceive them. When faced with such identity threats, individuals attempt to balance the need to present themselves as competent while also adjusting the presentation of their professional selves to align with a new work environment. In Neiterman and Bourgeault's (2015a) study of foreign-trained healthcare professionals' resocialization, they found that these professionals used two primary strategies to deal with identity threats. First, they minimized differences by emphasizing the similarities between professional practices in Canada and their home countries. Second, they asserted the superiority of their approach compared to the local system.

In our exploration of highly skilled refugees' integration (Nardon et al., 2021), we found that when faced with barriers to professional integration that were perceived as threats to their professional identities, they were

encouraged by career counselors to form a more 'realistic' understanding of their opportunities. Some refugees engaged in the process of recrafting a new identity, finding an alternative career, and focusing on other aspects of their selves (like Aldo). Others bracketed their situation as a temporary condition and expected to return to their careers in the future. A third group, however, refused to accept career counselors' 'reality' that their career plans were not viable. These individuals were considering relocating to other countries if they were unable to integrate professionally.

Similar studies have been done in other national contexts, including the work of Zikic and colleagues (2010), who explored and compared the responses of QIs to employment barriers in Canada, France, and Spain. In this comparative study, they identified three main strategies employed by QIs to manage their careers. One group adopted an embracing strategy and saw contextual barriers as challenges to be overcome. This group framed their experiences as positive and emphasized their subjective evaluation of success. A second group took an adaptive strategy, focusing on ways to adapt to local labor market requirements. A third group took a resisting approach and remained attached to their old professional identity. This third group also saw the barriers in the new professional environment as insurmountable and felt discouraged. Altogether, these studies show that individuals vary in how they cope with barriers to integration and challenges to their professional identity. While some recreate themselves in the new environment and re-socialize in their professions or change professions, others maintain an attachment to their previous professional identity and find it difficult to integrate.

## 3.3    Intersecting Identities

Our discussion of identity threats has focused on professional identities; however, these identities do not exist in isolation but intersect with other identities. Intersectionality recognizes that people have simultaneous membership in multiple social categories (e.g., gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, etc.), which are intertwined in such a way that the experience of one social category is linked to their membership in other categories (Bendl et al., 2015). The concept was introduced into academic scholarship by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) to present the experiences of Black women. She believed Black women's racial and gender identities inform each other to constitute their experiences. Patricia Hill Collins (1990) further popularized the concept of

intersectionality with her discussion of the 'matrix of domination,' and the concept ultimately became an analytical and practical tool in scholarship, social justice activism, and is now a buzzword (Davis, 2008).

An intersectional perspective helps us see how the experiences of different groups of immigrants may vary based on the degrees of oppression and privilege associated with their specific social location, which can influence their identity formation. In his memoir, Randrianasolo (2021) explains how, as a Malagasy immigrant in the United States, his identity claims as an American and a Malagasy were not verified. While Americans saw him as a foreigner, people in Madagascar saw him as an American. These failures of self-verification contributed to his experiences of his identity being challenged.

In our previous work with Filipino engineers in Canada (Aten et al., 2016), we found that immigrants' self-identifications varied; sometimes, they identified as immigrants, as mobile professionals, or, somewhere in the middle, as immigrant professionals. These different mobility frames influenced their willingness to take low-skilled jobs (underemployment) and their overall approach toward work integration. Immigrants who prioritized their professional identity focused on finding commensurate professional opportunities and even sought to move to another country if they could not realize their professional ambitions (like Ulan). Those who adopted a migrant identity focused on adapting to Canada and were consequently willing to adjust to their perceived reality of limited opportunities as foreign professionals (like Aldo). Those using a migrant professional frame attempted to find a compromise, reconstructing their careers in ways that balanced their social and professional needs.

The 'immigrant' identity is even more pertinent for those QIs whose immigration was not professionally motivated, like refugees. For instance, Mozetič (2018) explored the identity narratives of highly skilled refugees trained in the medical profession who were settling in Sweden. In this study, Mozetič (2018) found that the 'refugee' label was perceived negatively in the host society. This negative perception of their refugee identity overtook any perceptions of their professional identity as doctors and placed them at a professional disadvantage vis-à-vis local physicians and even other immigrants. However, compared to refugees in other fields of work, they gained a competitive edge because of their professional identities as doctors.

Not only are individual identities shaped by dimensions of difference, but so are professional and workplace cultures. These differences

become normalized through images, rules, and values that may be both implicit and explicit. Dorothy E. Smith, in her influential book *The Everyday World as a Problematic* (1987), referred to these as relations of ruling, which may be abstract, rational, impersonal, objective, and neutral. Still, in practice, they conceal important and persistent social divisions (including gender, racial/ethnic, class, age, disability, and so on). These substructures are maintained through various practices, including structural arrangements, allocation of personnel, identity construction of workers, and organizational culture (Acker, 1990; Benschop & Doorewaard, 1998). Moreover, these practices draw on a larger cultural context where dominant identities (masculine, White, upper-class, younger, able-bodied, etc.) are materially and ideologically privileged. This privilege is maintained by the dual mechanisms of organizational practices and individual workers' performances.

In their study of internationally educated nurses and medical graduates in Canada, Neiterman and Bourgeault (2015b) found that instances of discrimination varied among physicians and nurses. The gendered and racialized status of the profession can 'serve as a shield of protection from experiences of discrimination'; as a result, nurses encountered more instances of and more complex discriminatory experiences than physicians. Alternatively, in our previous study of information technology (IT) workers of Indian origin in Canada (Hari, 2013), we found that India's global reputation as a leader in trade-in software services and the stereotypical association of Indian nationals with technology work provided Indian QIs entering the Canadian IT sector a competitive edge in circumventing the Canadian work experience barrier to work integration. The influence of intersectional identities on both workers and professions is an important reminder that identity work is a social process that is continuously in flux and dependent on context.

### 3.3.1    *Identity Processes Are Social and Ongoing*

Identity is relational—it is constituted of what we see in ourselves and what we want others to see in us. We project our identity onto an environment through our language, behaviors, gestures, attire, and associations. The environment reflects our identity back to us, and in this way, we see which elements of our identity are most salient. Organizations and individuals in a position of power and dominance privilege some identities over others and dictate what is meaningful in different social situations

(Helms Mills et al., 2010). Thus, identity is a social process subject to power discrepancies.

While immigrants may see themselves as professionals, their identity claims need to be validated by others. As we will see in later chapters, individuals in a position to guide, advise, or hire immigrants will respond to their identity claims positively or negatively and, in effect, reinforce their self-image as professionals (as Ulan reported) or encourage them to accept deskilling and/or underemployment (like Aldo) (see Chapter 4). Organizations also play an important role in the social process of constructing professional identities by deciding who is accredited or hired (see Chapter 5). Furthermore, sensemaking and identity constructions are also influenced by societal narratives that dictate who is a 'good immigrant' and who gets to become a member of society (Moffitt et al., 2020) (see Chapter 6).

## 3.4  Practical Insights

As discussed above, the company we keep is an important component of identity. To adopt a specific professional identity, our qualifications, skills, and social and cultural capital must be recognized as legitimate for the professional field we are seeking to enter in a new context. A QI needs to become a part of the 'right' group and be recognized as a legitimate group member. Thus, professional connections are critical to identity reconstruction, which can be acquired and enhanced through support programs. QIs must immerse themselves in their chosen occupation right after immigrating. This allows them to gain exposure to their new professional environment and acquire the appropriate social and cultural capital in addition to the skills and qualifications they already possess. This early and immediate exposure to their chosen occupation is critical to 'becoming a professional.' Programs focused on short-term employment regardless of the occupational environment likely compromise QIs' work integration efforts and decrease their opportunities to develop relevant social and professional networks, experience, and exposure to the ways of being and working in the desired profession.

Even if focused on the short term, immigrants' career decisions are likely to have a long-term impact on their work integration, as they influence their ability to build the social and cultural capital required for their preferred career (Smith, 2010). Like Aldo and Ulan, QIs make sense of their career choices and make decisions that influence their future

career options. Despite the structures that impede their work integration, QIs are agentic actors. QIs exercise agency as they work out processes for entering labor markets and making and unmaking their professional identities in the context of different workplace cultures, practices, and expectations. Aldo created alternative narratives of success as a family man and member of the community. Ulan resisted notions of immigrants' disadvantage in the Canadian labor market and used it to motivate him to reconstruct his professional identity and successfully find commensurate employment.

## 3.5    The Road Ahead

In this chapter, we argued that immigrant work integration is a process of sensemaking deeply grounded in identity work. Making sense of the external environment occurs in the context of individuals' efforts at identity construction (Brown et al., 2008); this process is influenced by the complex and intersectional identities of individuals, as well as the practices and expectations of specific professions. The identity work involved in sensemaking has important implications for QIs and those who interact with them. When we acknowledge that the processes of sensemaking and identity construction are intertwined, we gain a deeper appreciation for the time it takes to adjust and integrate into a new social environment after immigrating. Identity work is complex, social, and ongoing; however, immigrant support programs are often oriented toward short-term gains (finding immediate work opportunities) at the expense of the longer-term project of reforging professional identities in the receiving country. This short-term orientation includes expectations imposed on QIs to 'hit the ground running' and be fully integrated as quickly as possible. This undue pressure can be deceiving and damaging for QIs, as it corrodes individuals' self-confidence and pushes them to engage in work to survive rather than advancing their career goals.

Every interaction can influence what immigrants think of themselves, the career opportunities they believe are available to them, and the actions they take. Individual sensemaking and identity work are interactive and informed by trial and error. Immigrants try out different selves and explore these varied options with others. They use others' responses to engage in further sensemaking and identity construction. In the next chapter, we explore the important role of interactions with individuals in the local environment in facilitating sensemaking and work integration.

## 3.6    Key Points

- Sensemaking starts with the sensemaker. QIs' process of sense-making of the new professional environment influences and is influenced by their understanding of themselves.
- Identity refers to how individuals categorize themselves in relation to others. The environment provides the categories available for identification and validates (or not) individuals' identity claims.
- To integrate professionally, QIs need to engage in identity work—a process of revising their identities to incorporate a new professional identity or revise their identity based on local professional expectations.
- Professional identities intersect and intertwine with other identities such as gender, race, nationality, class, and ability. As such, identity work is constantly in flux and is dependent on context.
- Identity construction is a social process and is influenced by other individuals, organizations, and society.

## Note

1. We spoke with Aldo and Ulan as part of a project exploring the experiences of Filipino engineers who migrated to Canada (Aten et al., 2016). These interviews reveal their individual process of making sense of themselves. Their discussion of career options is illustrative of individual processes of sensemaking regardless of contextual changes over time.

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# Powerful Interactions for Integration

In the previous chapter, we discussed how immigrants make sense of their career options and their professional selves (identity work) and how these processes are intertwined to shape their work integration in a new country. To make sense of their surroundings and identify opportunities, immigrants must access local interpretation schemas (Glanz et al., 2001; Nardon et al., 2015). Schemas are 'knowledge structures that represent objects or events and provide default assumptions about their characteristics, relationships, and entailments under conditions of incomplete information' (DiMaggio, 1997, p. 269). In other words, schemas organize categories of information and their relationship.

The need for local interpretation schemes makes QIs highly susceptible to influence by local agents in a new social environment. In this chapter, we focus on the role of interactions in supporting QIs to make sense of their employability options and, as a result, their plausible career actions. We focus on a few powerful interactions that are particularly influential because of their legitimacy or symbolic power (Hallett, 2003), namely career counselors, mentors, coaches, and professional networks.

Jessica[1] is a manager in an immigrant service provider organization (SPO) in Canada. In Canada, SPOs receive government funds to deliver a wide array of settlement and integration services to immigrants, including employment services, language assessment and training, information and orientation, mentoring, and community connections (IRCC, 2021) (see more information about these organizations in Chapter 5). She explains

the important role of career counselors in bridging the expectations of employers and QIs:

> The most common reasons employers don't hire newcomers are: one, is that at the interview, their interpersonal skills are not as refined as the employer would like, that's the biggest barrier, and the second one it's that the clients are not prepared enough for the interview, sometimes. One of the barriers I think for newcomers is that, especially for those who are highly qualified and highly trained, is that they live in their heads about their experience and how much they have done and what they have done, whereas the employer, on the other hand, is looking for the person to be able to say to the employer, 'this is how I can work with your organization.' For the newcomer, their understanding of how to transfer the experience to this environment is sometimes not very clear to the employer. And the employer, him or herself depending on how well they understand the people who are internationally trained, are not able to bridge the gap either. So, for that reason, a person who is competing and who has, for example, Canadian experience who can articulate the experience better is at an advantage, compared to the newcomer who is still in their head-…And if service providers and people like us are not aware that someone's breakdown in confidence can become the reason that they are not securing employment. If we don't get that, that becomes a problem.
>
> We see many newcomers expect the success to happen as soon as they land in Canada. Like one guy, he said to me, 'I thought employers would be waiting for me at the airport when I came' because he believed that he had something that everybody wanted, and then three years later, he couldn't find a job. And part of the reason is that they don't understand all the rules of engagement in this new society, so the job application process is different, the interview process is different, and the networking is something that [is challenging]. Whereas in their home countries, they probably had the networking as a natural part. It was organic for them. Here, you have to build the network and also understand the protocol, the processes, and the way things work within organizations. It's very difficult for you to move from senior-level management in your home country to senior-level management here without understanding all the layers that are between them.

As Jessica highlights, the process of communication between QIs and potential employers is fraught with challenges. The communications QIs have with employment counselors, mentors, and other community members are critical to helping QIs make sense of their opportunities

and translate what they have to offer to employers. Through communication, employers and immigrants co-create meaning and identify—or not—employment opportunities. Recall the case of Olga (Chapter 2), whose employer engaged in a non-standard recruitment process that allowed her to showcase her skills. The manager reciprocated by identifying a suitable position at a higher level than the original job posting. Thus, communication is a critical process in immigrant work integration. Communication is a vital mechanism for understanding QIs' qualifications and supporting them in navigating the local labor market; this is the next topic of discussion.

## 4.1    COMMUNICATION AND SENSEMAKING

Sensemaking is interactional; individuals talk and draw on language resources to formulate and exchange representations of circumstances (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, cited in Weick et al., 2005). Thus, communication is the primary process through which individuals co-create meaning. Individuals simultaneously make sense of situations and engage in sensegiving efforts, influencing the meaning construction of others (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Communication is also the main tool QIs use to integrate into new professional environments. Through communication, QIs exchange ideas, learn about others, explain themselves, and find their space within the community. This communication process is inherently dynamic and generates a negotiated—and unpredictable—outcome through the interplay of individuals' backgrounds, behaviors, and situational circumstances (Nardon, 2017; Szkudlarek et al., 2020). Sensemaking through interactions is influenced by power dynamics and contextual constraints as some individuals (career counselors, recruiters), through their sensegiving efforts, can influence QI's sensemaking to a greater extent than others (Nardon et al., 2021). These communication episodes among QIs and influential local actors are intercultural in nature, as discussed below.

### 4.1.1    *Intercultural Communication*

The process of communication is influenced by individuals' cultural backgrounds. A full discussion of the role of culture in communication is beyond the scope of this book (see Szkudlarek et al., 2020 for an overview

of research on intercultural communication). It is important to acknowledge that culture influences what is communicated, as well as how it is communicated (see Steers et al., 2016). One way to understand the role of culture in communication is through the concept of common ground.

Common ground is a set of knowledge, beliefs, and assumptions that are mutually known (Clark, 1996). By mutually known, we mean both parties know about it and know that the other person knows it as well. In other words, we have common ground when we are both aware that we share some knowledge and information. Having common ground makes it easier to interact with others who share our context and culture, not necessarily because we *agree* about the opinions and assumptions shared, but because we *understand* what they mean and where they are coming from. For example, people from the same context and culture will understand typical career trajectories, professional role expectations, and skills likely to be needed or developed in different positions within the same occupational field. People living in the same context will know what being a store manager might entail. In other words, common ground allows people to fill the gaps left by what is unsaid (Shaules, 2015).

These roles and activities, however, vary widely across cultures and contexts, making it challenging for QIs to convey the full potential of their skills and abilities because there may not be enough common ground to understand what is being communicated. Using another example, a degree from a prestigious university, a job title, or a position at a top employer are symbols that communicate a particular social position to potential employers and, in turn, generate an expectation of knowledge and skills. When common ground is lacking, however, it may be difficult to communicate the relevance of these symbols and experiences. For example, a QI possessing a 'first class' degree from a top university in their home country may not easily translate as a summa cum laude degree from a Canadian institution. In productive interactions, common ground can be created through communication. Individuals share details about their experiences and assumptions and ask questions about others' assumptions and understanding. This is a necessary but time-consuming process (Nardon, 2017).

Common ground carries information about the content of our experiences and includes information about communication protocols or the ways we communicate and expect others to communicate. Petra, an immigrant from Serbia, explained her challenge of finding appropriate ways to communicate the depth of her accomplishments:

I come from a culture where you're supposed not to brag. You are not supposed to talk about yourself. Other people do that for you. So, I never did that in that way, and if I say I did something very well, I feel bad. Oh, you're bragging, you're not humble, and that just feels hard. Hey, I grew up in a war zone, and I succeeded … But just understand the effort that was required and focus that was required to succeed in an environment that was in the war, that was in economic hardship. And how to communicate to people that you are passionate about something in a way that doesn't make them feel bad? Because you said, oh, it was war, and I had to work hard. No, I don't want to say that.

Learning new ways of communication and developing common ground in an unfamiliar context take time. It involves more than learning a language and using the right words. We also communicate through nonverbal or visual communication (e.g., facial expressions, gestures, the use of personal space, opulent surroundings, etc.) to convey a message. These symbols may not be understood, creating challenges for newcomers to express their talent, as well as to understand the communication cues that may be sent to them by potential employers or other individuals trying to help. For this reason, QIs rely heavily on cultural brokers; these are individuals that bridge, link, or mediate between individuals and groups from different cultures (Lo, 2010). These individuals need high levels of intercultural competence, as discussed below.

## 4.2   Intercultural Competence

In countries that receive large numbers of immigrants, cross-cultural training is a thriving industry. There are plenty of training programs available to support newcomers to develop *cultural competence*, which is the ability to behave in ways considered to be appropriate to the local culture. These training programs focus on educating foreigners on local ways to increase their cultural fit, facilitate their success in job interviews, and prepare them to eventually integrate successfully and seamlessly into their new workplace. Like common ground, explained above, developing cultural competence takes time, and expecting QIs to be fully competent in the local culture before engaging in meaningful work is counter-productive and unnecessary.

To mitigate this challenge, cross-cultural training is also offered to employers to increase awareness of cultural differences and increase understanding. Such training can still fall short since culture is complex. It

is impossible to prepare QIs for all possible cultural misunderstandings in their everyday work, despite the highly multicultural nature of most professional environments created by the active recruitment and retention of global talent and high levels of immigration to many receiving countries. Today's work environment demands intercultural competence from most of us (see Nardon, 2017).

*Intercultural competence* is the ability to overcome the constraints imposed by our natural cultural tendencies and develop new responses (Friedman & Antal, 2005). This enables us to navigate a situation even when we lack the cultural knowledge or the ability to behave in the ways that are expected. As such, intercultural competence is the ability to behave in ways that facilitate understanding (Nardon, 2017). In a job interview scenario, cultural competence is manifested when the interviewer and candidate share competence in a common culture, and the interview process is not influenced unduly by cultural differences. Intercultural competence, on the other hand, manifests when individuals do not have common ground, or a shared cultural understanding of the process and content of the interview yet can come to an understanding through conversation. The interviewer may ask additional questions to understand the candidate's experience, and the candidate may offer contextual information to help the interviewer appreciate the importance of the information provided. For example, Petra may need to explain how her career achievements are particularly meaningful considering the war and economic situation in Serbia when she lived and worked there. Intercultural competence also presupposes the ability to navigate different communication styles and adjust our listening and speaking methods to accommodate others. That may mean attempting to engage in more direct communication, even if that is not our preferred style, or confirming our understanding when communication from others seems unclear to us.

Overall, communication processes across cultures are more demanding as many assumptions need to be articulated and explained. Messages are often unclear or difficult to interpret, and important information can get lost easily. It may be difficult to establish rapport, find areas of common interest, and develop trust. As Jessica explained in the opening story, QIs need to explain their qualifications in ways that are understandable to potential employers. But employers also bear some responsibility for bridging the gap in recognizing talent. Individuals who work to support QIs integration play a critical role in supporting QIs to communicate their

skills. Therefore, all individuals involved in the project of immigrant work integration must develop intercultural competence to have successful working relationships with individuals of different cultural backgrounds (see Nardon, 2017 for developing intercultural competence).

## 4.3 Selected Powerful Interactions

Immigrants have multiple interactions that hold the potential to influence their career path in a new country. They communicate with family members, other immigrants, and individuals in the community. QIs also seek professional employment support through community organizations, participate in professional activities, pursue advice from mentors, and engage with professional coaches. They attend training programs, participate in networking events, and may strike up a conversation with a stranger in a public place. These interactions in physical and online spaces facilitate QIs seeking support for their general and work integration challenges (Gulanowski, 2018; Nardon et al., 2015).

Each of these interactions provides immigrants with information, emotional support, access to tangible resources, and ways to make sense of their new environments. However, some of these interactions might be more influential than others because they have symbolic power, which is the power to define a situation (Hallett, 2003). These individuals, based on their roles, positions, and perceived expertise, are imbued with legitimacy. As a result, immigrants attempting to understand the labor market may consider these individuals' interpretations and viewpoints more valuable than the views of others. We discuss some of these powerful interactions below.

### 4.3.1 Immigrant Support Staff

Immigrant support personnel are often the first—and sometimes the only—source of employment support immigrants have in a new country. The nature and type of support may vary widely. While some immigrant support staff are trained career counselors, others are not but would still be positioned to provide career-related support. These individuals support immigrants in their career development in the new country. Career development is 'a lifelong process of blending and managing paid and unpaid activities: learning (education), work (employment, entrepreneurship), volunteerism and leisure time' (Shaffer & Wiens, 2020, p. 7). It is also

highly influenced by one's cultural background. What is considered part of one's career and what is not can vary widely and hold different cultural significance.

For instance, in some cultures, volunteerism is considered a professional activity, while in others, it is seen as a form of community engagement separate from professional pursuits. A small number of studies, mostly in social work and sociology, investigate the nature and role of immigrant volunteerism in work integration (George & Chaze, 2009; Handy & Greenspan, 2009; Lee & Pritzker, 2013). These scholars examine the development of different types of networks through volunteerism—in particular 'bonding,' or tight, in-group relationships, vs. 'bridging,' i.e., loose relations to an extensive network outside one's group—and their role in employment outcomes (Couton & Gaudet, 2008; Perez et al., 2010; Sundeen et al., 2007; Witmer Sinha et al., 2011). The key finding of these studies is that individual differences such as legal/migratory status, gender, class, ethnicity/race, and age, among others, influence the nature and quantity of migrants' volunteer work and thus its outcomes and benefits.

In our own research on the role of immigrant support staff in integration (Nardon et al., 2021), we found that they engaged in sensegiving practices to help immigrants calibrate their expectations and form realistic career goals. These sensegiving practices emphasized gaining labor market experience from entry-level jobs (including volunteer opportunities), keeping immigrants motivated by fostering hope for the future, and promoting a long-term vision of workforce integration. Even though they recognized that available jobs might not be ideal, they suggested that they would help individuals gain local work experience and build networks that will ultimately benefit their career development. For instance, Jacob, a worker at SPO, shared the story of an immigrant psychiatrist from Pakistan who was able to succeed despite humble beginnings:

> He worked at the hospital as a cleaner, but he always connected with people in the psychiatry department, understood what they needed. Then he was able to take courses at night and … to actually pass the exams … to go to school, to university, and then he graduated with his degree … through connections that he developed while he was cleaning at the hospital, he was able to get somebody to recommend him to do his residency … and now he's a psychiatrist… (Jacob, manager) (quoted in Nardon et al., 2021, p. 14)

### 4.3.2    *Mentors*

Mentoring is a critical tool to support the adjustment and career development of international talent and has been used widely to assist traditional expatriates (organizational assignees) and immigrants (Månsson & Delander, 2017; Mezias & Scandura, 2005; Rajendran et al., 2017). Mentoring involves a relationship whereby an experienced mentor is paired with a less experienced protégé to support them in their career advancement, as well as psychosocial development (Kram, 1985). Increasingly, employment support programs include mentoring as a tool to facilitate immigrants' work integration. Mentorship programs designed for newcomers match locally based experienced mentors with immigrant protégés of similar professional backgrounds. Mentors provide QIs with personal and professional support and help them navigate the local labor market. Forms of support include educating them about workplace cultures and job search strategies, connecting them with potential employment opportunities, and developing social networks (Lai et al., 2017).

Current understandings of mentoring suggest that individuals need multiple mentors throughout their careers (Higgins & Kram, 2001), and these relationships may take various forms, including peer-mentoring and informal mentoring relationships. At first, mentoring is needed to support learning about the labor market and preparing for job interviews. At later stages, mentorship can ease adjustment into a new workplace and help with advancing professionally.

Our ongoing research on pre-employment immigrant mentorship suggests that establishing deep relationships of trust outside of a work environment is challenging. Protégés are under immense pressure to find employment, and mentors are not always able to support them in building the social and cultural capital required to succeed. Furthermore, matching mentors and mentees is challenging as many QIs may not yet have a clear idea of which career path(s) will work for them. Often, the relationship becomes transactional and focused on the immediate tasks of preparing resumes and job interviews rather than career development. This is unfortunate as it deprives QIs of the opportunity to learn about the local culture and develop a long-term career path. Nonetheless, mentorship is necessary to support QIs in all aspects of integration. It requires a long-term perspective and the sustained and substantive engagement of

multiple individuals who hold strategic positions throughout the process of work integration.

### 4.3.3    *Coaches*

Coaching is a popular method to support individuals to advance professionally. It assists individuals in developing skills such as leadership, increasing performance, engaging in a career change, adjusting to cross-cultural situations, and achieving personal goals. Bachkirova et al. (2018, p. xxix) define coaching as 'a human development process that involves structured, focused interaction and the use of appropriate strategies, tools, and techniques to promote desirable and sustainable change for the benefit of the client and potentially other stakeholders.'

Coaching is often used in addition to training and mentoring to support individuals in identifying a path toward their desired future. Unlike mentors, coaches do not (necessarily) have the knowledge and experience the client requires, such as knowledge of a particular profession. Still, they can support the client to identify and achieve goals and complement the work of mentors. In coaching, the agenda, as well as the breadth and depth of exploration, is set by the coachee. Rather than being an expert on the professional field or topic necessarily, the coach is an expert in the process of guiding the client toward identifying and developing the skills they need to succeed in many areas of life.

Intercultural coaching aims to support clients when cultural issues are salient, as is the case for internationally mobile individuals. Abbott (2018) identifies an interesting paradox with intercultural coaching. On the one hand, he notes that individuals seeking intercultural coaching have reached a level of awareness about the intercultural nature of their challenges that renders a purely intercultural intervention unnecessary. In addition, labeling an intervention intercultural may undermine its effectiveness by detracting attention away from other factors. For instance, an individual who is unclear about their career goals and has conflicting priorities (e.g., advance professionally, spend time with family) may need to clarify their goals and priorities rather than focusing on the cultural variations in the interviewing process. On the other hand, many coaches are not equipped to incorporate intercultural dimensions in their work. Thus, QIs may find it challenging to get the support they need. In an ideal world, all coaches should be cognizant of cultural influences that

shape QI's career and social transition. A productive coaching relationship would address intercultural as well as other factors in support of immigrants' transitions. QIs seeking coaching support need to research coaches' credentials and qualifications to ensure they are equipped to support the challenges of international transitions.

### 4.3.4   *Professional Networks*

The importance of professional networks for integration is well established (Nannestad et al., 2008). In our own research (Nardon et al., 2019), participants reported having difficulty in developing appropriate and useful social and professional networks with locally born and/or educated individuals. While QIs may have been invited to many networking events, they felt unprepared to approach a company representative and did not know what to say about themselves or what questions to ask. In addition, immigrants found it difficult to develop rapport with Canadian-born co-workers during the initial period of employment and felt excluded from informal conversations.

QIs often explained this exclusion as being a result of a lack of understanding of some cultural references and jokes, inadequate skills or culturally specific knowledge to engage in small talk, and an inability to pick up on some of the more subtle rules of Canadian informal communication. Individuals who were able to develop professional networks in support of their work integration attributed their success to their ability to build and leverage connections with other immigrants with similar professional interests. Immigrants in the same profession were instrumental in sharing information about job opportunities, as well in facilitating the adjustment process once employed (Nardon et al., 2019). This is likely due to the common ground shared between immigrants. While they come from different countries and may not share a common culture, they share the experience of being an immigrant and understand the challenges inherent to work integration in a new environment.

## 4.4   Practical Insights

QIs' interactions with a wide variety of local actors can have a significant impact on the ways they learn about the labor market, the options they believe are available to them, and the decisions they make. QIs need multiple types of support, not only from immigrant support staff or

professional coaches but from professionals (including QIs) in their fields and mentors. Positive and successful QI work integration requires the engagement of professionals who need to volunteer their time to inform, connect, and mentor immigrants and assist them in identifying pathways within their field (Nardon et al., 2021).

Everyone has a role to play; not only those of us directly related to the task of supporting immigrants, such as career counselors, mentors, and coaches but many of us who interact with immigrants as members of the community. This means each one of us who interacts with immigrants as we go through our everyday lives must be cognizant of how our communications matter. Thus, intercultural competence, the ability to overcome our culturally based tendencies and assumptions, is critical for an inclusive society. Intercultural competence is something each of us needs to continue to develop.

QIs must be cognizant of how these multiple communications are impacting them and mindful of who they are imbuing with power to shape their perceptions and understandings. QIs, as sensemakers, exercise agency and can decide who to listen to and who to ignore. Hallett (2003, p. 146) argues that '[u]nderstanding symbolic power also empowers those who do not have power. As important as the features of the structural and negotiation contexts are, in the end, it is people who imbue negotiators with legitimacy and symbolic power, and, when facing detrimental situations, people can—and do—stop imbuing negotiators with symbolic power.'

Recall the experiences of Aldo and Ulan (Chapter 3) and how they chose to interpret the information received in the same program they attended differently, ultimately having very different career outcomes. Aldo heard many examples of underemployed QIs and accepted this as his fate. Ulan, on the other hand, ignored those same stories and focused on the words of one trainer who encouraged him to beat the odds, which he did. Despite their powerful position, individuals advising immigrants may be incorrect or incomplete in their assessments, and QIs should feel encouraged to talk to as many people as possible to find their own answers.

## 4.5   The Road Ahead

In this chapter, we discussed the important and powerful role of the interactions that immigrants have in their integration journey. Individuals

representing support organizations and employers, as well as profes-
sionals and members of the general community, provide immigrants
with information and ways of interpreting their environment. These
various communications have important implications for their sense-
making processes and overall integration. Sometimes these interactions
are positive and can support and empower immigrants to find solutions
to their integration challenges. At other times, these interactions can be
discouraging or misleading and push immigrants further away from their
goals and desired career outcomes. It is important to remember that the
individuals interacting with immigrants are not operating in a vacuum.
Sensemaking and sensegiving interactions are embedded in and influenced
by organizational structures, practices, and cultures. In the next chapter,
we explore the role of organizations in shaping QIs' work integration.

## 4.6   Key Points

- QIs are susceptible to being influenced by local actors because they
  need local interpretation schemas.
- Sensemaking happens in and through communication as individuals
  exchange representations of their abilities and circumstances through
  language.
- Common ground—knowledge, beliefs, and assumptions that are
  mutually known—facilitates communication. Lack of common
  ground hinders QIs' efforts to convey their skills and experience.
- Individuals interacting with QIs need to develop intercultural
  competence, which is the ability to overcome the constraints
  imposed by our cultural tendencies and develop new responses.
- Immigrant support staff engage in sensegiving practices to help
  immigrants calibrate their expectations and form realistic career
  goals.
- Mentoring is a critical tool to support adjustment and career
  development. It involves matching QIs with an experienced local
  professional of similar professional background.
- Coaching is a popular method to support individuals to advance
  professionally and a good complement to mentoring and training.
  Coaches support QIs by helping them identify and achieve goals and
  develop the skills required to integrate.
- Professional networks are key for integration. Many immigrants find
  it helpful to connect with other immigrants already established in

their desired professional fields in the receiving country, as they can find common ground based on their lived experiences of integration.

- Everyone has a role to play in QIs' work integration, and QIs can decide who to listen to and who to ignore.

## NOTE

1. We spoke with Jessica as part of a study on the role of newcomer support organizations in the work integration of refugees (Nardon et al., 2021). The organization where Jessica works provides employment support to immigrants regardless of entry stream and her comments are not restricted to refugees.

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# Organizing for Immigrant Workforce Integration

In the previous chapter, we discussed the role of interactions that immigrants have with individuals representing support organizations, employers, professional peers, and members of the general community, all of whom influence QIs' sensemaking and workforce integration. In this chapter, we look more closely at organizations and how various organizational processes and structures come to influence immigrant work integration. We understand the term 'organization' broadly to mean the stream of activities performed by a group of people toward a goal. We start this exploration with a fictional example.[1]

In a university's departmental meeting, some faculty members engage in a conversation about teaching resources and identify the need to hire a new professor. Other members of the department quickly agree. One member suggests it would be nice to increase the team's diversity by hiring an immigrant for the position. A senior member of the team reminds the group of the existing procedure to request budgetary approval and justify the position, offering to prepare the documentation and seek approval from the proper authorities. After a few months, the position is approved, and a hiring committee is established. The chair of the hiring committee and some of the members were not part of the initial meeting but were briefed by the department chair on the hiring procedures. The hiring committee was provided with a job description template and crafted the position announcement, including typically

sought-after qualifications, such as experience teaching in English, peer-reviewed publications, Ph.D. from an accredited school, and some unique teaching and research expertise needed by the department.

The advertisement was distributed through academic channels, and over one hundred applications were received. A small committee was charged with screening candidates and flagging those that met the requirements specified in the job advertisement. Most immigrants did not qualify. Some had extensive teaching experience in other languages, but their ability to teach in English was not clear. Others had many publications but in journals unfamiliar to the hiring committee and on topics that did not match the department's priorities. Others had doctoral degrees from unfamiliar foreign universities, raising questions about their qualifications. After this initial screening that ruled out most immigrants, the process resulted in selecting the three best candidates for a campus visit. Given the screening procedures used for the job applications and the availability of candidates who met the familiar high qualifications, immigrant candidates were deemed uncompetitive and did not make the shortlist for interviews. Committee members lamented this outcome but felt there was nothing that could be done. After all, it was a competitive process, and the university wanted the best candidate possible.

This example illustrates the interplay between collective processes of organizing and sensemaking. *Organizing* is the process of establishing structures, roles, and activities to achieve the goals of an organization. Organizing processes can vary across organizations, depending on organizational resources and individual tendencies. In the example above, organizing refers to the hiring process, which includes convening a hiring committee, appointing a committee chair and other members, writing the job advertisement, and shortlisting and debating potential candidates. The members of the committee organized to resolve equivocality—the existence of multiple possible meanings (Weick et al., 2005)—to make the hiring process more orderly. Thus, organizing is about coordinating action in a situation of multiple realities (Weick, 1995), such as selecting the best possible candidate and the importance of diversity. As demonstrated in our fictional example, organizing allows the employer to select candidates in a process that seems fair and consistent across time and departments.

Sensemaking, therefore, is a foundational process of organizing, as multiple actors work together through ambiguity and uncertainty to comprehend circumstances and use this understanding as a springboard

for action. As discussed in Chapter 2, sensemaking in organizations happen at two levels of subjectivity—intersubjective and generic subjective—negotiated through practices of communication. At the most basic level, communication between organizational members generates intersubjective understandings, which are then picked up and built upon by others that did not participate in the original construction and thus become generic understandings. In the fictional example, the shortlist of candidates was prepared by a different committee from the one that raised the concern about increasing diversity and hiring immigrants.

There is always something lost when intersubjective understandings are translated into generic subjectivities. As a result, there is an ongoing tension between the innovation inherent in intersubjectivity and the control inherent in generic subjectivity. Despite the consensus in the department meeting about hiring an immigrant, the structures of the job approval process, advertisement, and final hiring, removed immigrants from the candidate pool. These tensions are reconciled through interlocking routines and habituated action patterns and maintained through ongoing communication (Weick, 1995).

## 5.1   Communication and Organizing

Organizing occurs in and through communication. In other words, organization and communication are co-constitutive (Dewey, 1944 cited in Taylor & Robichaud, 2004). It is important to remember that communication occurs within a social context. Language, texts, performances, and practices are informed as much by the communication process as the context in which they occur. Consequently, organizing is enacted within material and social conditions. In other words, organizing is 'enacted in the world that we occupy' (Taylor & Robichaud, 2004, p. 410). Communication through language is structured through social relations, positions, and practices.

Taylor and Robichaud (2004) refer to the communicative activities of agents as *conversations*, which are instruments of organizational action. Conversations are discursive texts constructed within a material and social language environment. These discursive texts are retrospective and emerge from reflection and interpretation to 'monitor, rationalize, and engender the action of organizing' (Taylor & Robichaud, 2004, p. 397). The sensemaking process involves members of organizations recollecting

and using knowledge from previous events toward action, invoking both *text* and *agency*.

Texts are shared practices and habits of interpretation formed by a community of practice to make sense of the material/social environment. In our hiring example, texts are the procedures in place, the documentation that needed to be filled out, the templates used, and the job description shared among the individuals involved. Agency reflects the ability of social actors to choose which materials to employ for their purposes. In the hiring example, agency refers to the choice some individuals had to call attention to how procedures rely on previously established templates and suggest new requirements (e.g., diversity and special consideration for immigrant candidates). Sensemaking and organizing occur in conversations and actions on behalf of the organization and are *preserved* in social structure through texts (e.g., job advertisements, emails among different committee members, job offers, etc.), as well as individual and collective choices and actions. In other words, the documents generated through this hiring process are likely to be used in the future hiring initiatives perpetuating discriminatory hiring practices unless agency is utilized to question and change these practices.

Weick et al., (2005, p. 410) argues that 'people organize to make sense of equivocal inputs and enact this sense back into the world to make that world more orderly.' In other words, circumstances are turned into words and salient categories. Taylor and Robichaud (2004) would add that organizations are simultaneously lived, interpreted, and reinterpreted. The boundaries of organizations are continually made and re-made through conversations, and although this process is structured, it is unpredictable. A sensemaking perspective highlights that 'the order in organizational life comes just as much from the subtle, the small, the relational, the oral, the particular, and the momentary as it does from the conspicuous, the large, the substantive, the written, the general, and the sustained. To work with the idea of sensemaking is to appreciate that smallness does not equate with insignificance. Small structures and short moments can have large consequences' (Weick et al., 2005, p. 410). Often, small comments may have important implications. For example, a decision to add 'accredited school' to the job advertisement may not have been discussed at length or taken much consideration. Yet, it eliminates many potentially talented candidates.

Mills and colleagues (Helms Mills et al., 2010; Mills & Helms Mills, 2004) argue that a critical perspective of sensemaking allows for the

understanding of the social processes through which discriminatory practices become acceptable. Three elements play a role in organizing and sensemaking: formative contexts, organizational rules, and discourse. *Formative contexts* (Unger, 1987a, 1987b) are an implicit model of how things should be, leading to the reproduction of practices. Formative contexts are the means through which the macro-level context influences individual sensemaking by making some text and narratives salient and plausible. In the example above, formative contexts are the narratives about what good research is. Individuals refer to an implicit understanding of which journals are considered 'good or reputable journals' and use this knowledge to judge whether a candidate is a good researcher or not.

At the organizational level, the remaining two elements of organizing have a more immediate influence on sensemaking and sensegiving. *Organizational rules* are the ways things get done; they control, constrain, guide, and define behavior in an organization. They may be written or unwritten, formal or informal. The combination of organizational rules configures expectations and prescribes the way things are done or should be done in a particular organization. Rules are emblematic of the generic subjective and guide sensemaking activities by facilitating and constraining behaviors. There are clear rules about how faculty members are hired. There is a process to be followed and approvals to be sought. This process encourages certain decisions over others.

*Discourse* is 'a historically evolved set of interlocking and mutually supporting statements, which are used to define and describe a subject matter' (Butler, 2002, p. 44 cited in Mills & Helms Mills, 2004, p. 117). Through dominant discourses, certain ideas become normalized as a way of thinking and believing, which explains how some rules become accepted. An example of this is the idea that the 'best' candidate should be hired. Here, the definition of 'best' privileges some individuals over others. This critical perspective highlights that sensemaking occurs within enduring structural contexts and implicates that sensemaking is not a democratic process; it is embedded in a system of power discrepancies and inequalities.

In summary, intersubjective meaning is constructed through communication among various actors in organizations. These meanings are then extrapolated into organizational rules, processes, structures, and discourses (generic subjective understandings). This process is recursive and intersubjective. That is, sensemaking happens within a context of

rules, discourses, and power discrepancies that privilege some ideas over others. The generic subjective and intersubjective levels of sensemaking at the organizational level, however, do not preclude individuals from exercising agency to engage in acts of resistance, break the rules, change narratives, or use communicative resources to influence the construction of meaning.

The process of constructing, revising, and reconstructing meanings resolves the tensions of innovation emerging from the intersubjective level of sensemaking (resistance) and the rigidity inherent in the generic subjective level of sensemaking (rules, structures, and discourses). Thereby, it creates room for individuals who constitute organizations to break habits, patterns, and routines. This understanding of organizing acknowledges the paradoxical nature of organizations as simultaneously possessing enduring structures yet being in constant flux and malleable to change.

## 5.2    Prominent Organizational Actors Involved in Immigrant Work Integration

Multiple organizational actors are involved in the process of QIs' work integration, which is a long-term process that may start before migration and continue for many years after settlement. As QIs contemplate migration, they seek information and support to manage their expectations about employment opportunities and challenges, prepare for migration financially and psychologically, and make migration decisions (Gulanowski, 2018). After securing employment, QIs continuously negotiate their place within the new organization and society. Additionally, in the process of seeking employment, QIs engage with many organizations and their policies and procedures, which has implications for their sensemaking and actions. Below we discuss some of the most prominent organizational actors interacting with QIs.

### 5.2.1    Immigrant Service Provider Organization (SPO)

SPOs play a critical role in immigrants' workforce integration (Godin & Renaud, 2002; Lacroix et al., 2015; Steimel, 2016, 2017). They are a primary provider of *professional employment support*, including job counseling, identification of career options, skill assessment, and the acquisition of work-related skills. Several studies have documented the challenges facing SPOs, which are often small and with limited capacity. Funding

structures can limit an SPO's ability to provide individualized assistance (Godin & Renaud, 2002) and, at times, create unhealthy competition within the sector (Mukhtar et al., 2016). In addition, funding rules favor immediate outcomes, such as short-term employment, which can interrupt QIs' career development and limit their future career choices (Steimel, 2017).

Employment support programs provided by SPOs are typically funded by a combination of donors and funders at different levels of government. Funders usually rely on outcome measures to evaluate the efficacy of programs; these evaluations are used to decide whether to continue allocating funds to specific programs or organizations. These outcome measures tend to be based on crude calculations of the number of newcomers served and the actual number of newcomers employed within a funding period. While, on the surface, the focus on outcomes seems reasonable and would appear to create accountability, it places undue pressure on SPOs to design support programs that address the needs of as many immigrants as possible to keep costs low and maintain a steady flow of resources in an already competitive environment. As a result, these programs tend to focus on general requirements and skills and may not provide the customized support needed by newcomers with unique backgrounds or specializations. In addition, these funding structures create pressures to place immigrants in jobs as soon as possible, even if finding commensurate employment may require longer interventions.

These limitations have been the focus of recent critiques of SPOs that demonstrate that despite the commitment to seek the best outcomes for immigrants, the sector's dependence on governmental support results in an emphasis on short-term results that are detrimental to long-term adjustment (Al-Dasouqi, 2016). QIs engaged in jobs below their skills and qualifications and often outside their fields are deprived of the opportunity to build the social and cultural capital required to secure careers commensurate with their education and experience. Additionally, given the overall structure of the employment support system and its focus on short-term goals, the burden of long-term workforce integration becomes the responsibility of individuals and becomes subject to their resilience and resourcefulness (Nardon et al., 2021).

### 5.2.2    *Employers*

Employers play a critical role in integrating immigrants. Employers provide immigrants with meaningful work opportunities, support them in gaining relevant work experience, and build the social and cultural capital needed to achieve their career goals. Management researchers are increasingly recognizing the importance of understanding how organizations can gain long-term competitive advantages by recognizing and utilizing the full spectrum of talents of QIs in their workforce. This discussion usually falls into two overlapping conversations: talent management and equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI).

Talent has been defined as 'the human capital in an organization that is both valuable and unique' (De Vos & Dries, 2013, p. 1818 cited in Crowley-Henry & Al Ariss, 2018, p. 2056). Talent management refers to a set of activities that involves (1) identifying, recruiting, and selecting talented individuals from the external labor market; (2) identifying key internal talent; (3) developing employees; (4) managing talent flow across regions or countries; and (5) retention of talented employees (Vaiman et al., 2015, p. 281). As Vaiman and colleagues argue, talent management is at play within a transnational and global field with an ever-increasing number of variables, complexities, and interdependencies (2015, p. 281), resulting in a need to think of talent management as a global activity, referred to as global talent management (GTM).

GTM practices directly impact an organization's ability to reach its goals (Crowley-Henry & Al Ariss, 2018; Farndale et al., 2014; Vaiman et al., 2015). Yet, the talent (competencies, skills, qualifications, knowledge, and abilities) of QIs is widely overlooked within GTM initiatives (Crowley-Henry & Al Ariss, 2018). Indeed, several studies have documented that QIs are disadvantaged by biases embedded in organizational practices regarding recruitment (Almeida et al., 2015; D'Netto et al., 2014) and training (Mahadevan & Kilian-Yasin, 2017). For example, Almeida and colleagues (2015) found that perception of 'fit' played a crucial role in the evaluation of QI candidates, who were more likely to be seen in an unfavorable light if they exhibited attributes such as heavy accents, non-Western attire, religious affiliations, and non-Anglo names.

Crowley-Henry and Al Ariss (2018) attribute this disregard of QIs' talent to various factors, including language proficiency, the requirement for additional qualifications for certain occupations, inadequate understanding of local customs and legislation, and lack of access to local

networks. They argue that many organizations take a short-term approach to talent management, ignoring the long-term strategic potential of QIs. Furthermore, they demonstrate that current definitions of talent tend to be narrow and prioritize local perceptions while ignoring important talents such as cross-cultural adaptability, flexibility, and resilience. This was exemplified in our opening example when a job description was crafted emphasizing local definitions of an 'accredited school' and metrics used to evaluate candidates' accomplishments. Crowley-Henry and Al Ariss (2018) argue for the use of coaching, mentoring, and organizational role models to make career development pathways more visible to QIs and facilitate their career advancement.

Discourses and practices of EDI play a crucial role in ensuring the potential contributions of QIs are not overlooked due to institutionalized discriminatory practices. Even though QIs may not have acquired their credentials in the receiving country, their knowledge and qualifications obtained abroad may be important assets for employers. Bernstein and colleagues (2020) define the terms equity, diversity, and inclusion in the following way: Equity is 'the absence of systematic disparities… between groups with different levels of underlying social advantage/disadvantage—that is, wealth, power, or prestige' (Chin & Chien, 2006, p. 79). Diversity is 'the representation, in one social system, of people with distinctly different group affiliations of cultural significance' (Cox, 1993, p. 5). Inclusion is 'the degree to which individuals feel a part of critical organizational processes such as access to information and resources, involvement in work groups, and ability to influence the decision-making process' (Mor-Barak & Cherin, 1998, p. 48).

Based on this definition, EDI efforts must go beyond recruiting individuals from different demographic groups. While recruitment is the entry point to an organization, efforts to recruit a 'diverse' workforce without consideration for integration and advancement may lead to superficial compliance with legal requirements rather than tackle longstanding systemic issues, such as deskilling, underemployment, and exploitation. For example, D'Netto and colleagues (2014) found that organizations following a minimum compliance approach in Australia paid limited attention to immigrants' training, performance appraisal, and compensation and did not capitalize on the potential benefits of EDI beyond hiring.

In summary, QIs need to be included in employers' GTM and EDI efforts. Solving the wicked problem of QIs work integration (see Chapter 1) in ways that benefit immigrants, employers, and society

requires that employers reduce barriers that prevent QIs from entering the workforce (equity) and provide QIs with opportunities for global leadership, cross-cultural management, and strategic internationalization of their organizations (inclusion) (Schuler et al., 2011).

### 5.2.3    *Professional Organizations*

Entry into regulated professions (e.g., engineering, medicine, law, etc.) is managed by professional organizations. These organizations are self-governing bodies that assess QIs' educational and work experience to grant licenses. Their evaluation procedures are embedded within existing social relations and practices (Granovetter, 1985). As the sole authority for assessing international credentials and work experience, these organizations reproduce cultural and social norms through licensing procedures that can limit the integration of foreign-trained professionals, thereby reproducing the advantage of locally educated professionals. For example, Girard and Bauder (2007) conducted an in-depth exploration of Professional Engineers Ontario (PEO) in Canada and found that professional labor markets are culturally regulated, often disadvantaging QIs. Like employers discussed above, selection agents often focus on tacit criteria that extend beyond well-defined qualification criteria, such as communication and presentation skills, workplace behaviors, dress code, and professional ethics.

Scholars highlight a discrepancy between an immigration system focusing on employability and public perception that views QIs as vital to addressing economic shortfalls and the realities of work integration for QIs (Guo, 2009; Reitz, 2012). In relation to professional organizations, this discrepancy is referred to as *credentialism* and can include exorbitantly high fees for foreign credential assessments and qualifying exams, the rules, procedures, and practices of licensing and registration in professions and trades, as well as the requirements of educational institutions and employers (Foster, 2006). New admissions are restricted to raise a profession's status in the labor market; this can severely limit QIs' work integration (Aycan & Berry, 1996), as demonstrated in our fictional example.

Credentialism draws on principles of 'social closure' (Weber, 1978) that guards against competitors and safeguards the monopolization of social power. Professional organizations seek to 'maximize rewards by restricting access to rewards and opportunities to a limited circle' (Parkin,

1974, p. 3) to protect their status and role (Abbott, 1988). Credentialism protects locally educated professionals by restricting foreign-educated professionals' access to the sector. The experiences of internationally educated nurses (IEN) provide a startling example of such practices of 'social closure.'

The National Nursing Assessment Service (NNAS) is solely responsible for verifying nursing credentials acquired outside Canada and determining a fair process of equivalency. Little (2007) found that approximately 50 percent of applications for licensure met the educational and language requirements, flagging incomplete documentation, inadequate education, and poor English/French language proficiency (1339–1342). In a separate study, Jeans (2006) found that many applicants were confused by the multiple numbers of regulatory bodies and would sometimes submit documents to the wrong agency. Baylon (2021) noted that even during the heightened demand for nurses during the COVID-19 pandemic, 'many foreign-trained nurses watch from the sidelines, wanting but unable to pitch in' (p. 5).

The behaviors and practices of professional organizations are prime examples of organizational sensemaking that perpetuates discriminatory practices to further disadvantage QIs seeking to enter local labor markets. It is such practices that must be reimagined to improve QIs' work integration. QIs who are unsuccessful in obtaining a license to work in their professions often have no choice but to accept underemployment, low wages, and challenging work conditions (Boyd & Thomas, 2001; Reitz, 2005). In summary, professional organizations' formal and informal assessment practices that regulate who is included or excluded from the professional community have a significant impact on QIs' work integration.

### 5.2.4    Educational Institutions

Educational institutions play a pivotal role in QIs' work integration by providing opportunities for local education/training, which can enhance QIs' attractiveness to local employers. Many QIs need to return to school for additional education to comply with professional accreditation requirements maintained by professional organizations discussed above. Others may decide to pursue a new degree in the hopes of opening new doors and in search of alternative professional selves. In addition, many

QIs arrive in the country as international students, using education as an entry point into society and the job market.

Educational institutions are investing heavily in the internationalization of their academic environments (Harris, 2011; Leask, 2001) and in attracting global talent (Gertler & Vinodrai, 2005). There are some critical challenges to achieving these goals. Despite receiving local education, barriers to work integration remain for international graduates and QIs alike. These include employers' preferences for local work experience, as well as perceived language and cultural adaptability. New international graduates may not have permanent residency status, which can be perceived as an 'administrative burden' to employers (Dauwer, 2018, p. 4). While international student offices and career offices are considered the primary resource for assisting students with integration, a lack of oversight, inadequate inter-institutional communication, and lack of access to funding can result in inconsistent and limited services being offered to help students and QIs with their integration (Dauwer, 2018).

As mentioned before, international graduates and QIs face additional challenges when seeking to build social and professional networks due to limited co-op and work-related opportunities, a lack of confidence in language skills, limited awareness of local cultural norms, and institutional barriers, such as lack of coordinated orientation programming and cultural learning and exchange (CBIE, 2015). Educational institutions' internationalization practices, therefore, must accommodate the specific needs of the increasing numbers of QIs crossing borders.

## 5.3   PRACTICAL INSIGHTS

Organizations play a key role in solving the wicked problem of immigrant work integration by legitimating, supporting, recruiting, and developing talent. This requires a critical rethinking of discriminatory structures that keep QIs excluded. In addition, there is an urgent need to review and revise the funding structures for SPOs to allow them to support QIs' long-term employment goals and design programs to meet the variable needs of QIs with specialized backgrounds. Governments and funding bodies remain focused on short-term gains and often use crude employment numbers to measure the success of programs for newcomers. There is a need for such organizations and institutions to be mindful of the unintended consequences of simplistic measurement practices in evaluating funding and allocation decisions. Instead, funding evaluations should

consider a longitudinal and complex approach to measuring the outcomes of QIs.

Employers need to provide QIs with meaningful opportunities to gain relevant work experience, build social and cultural capital, and craft a realistic path toward their career goals. Employers can also play a critical informational role by participating in training programs and information sessions to help prepare QIs for the local labor market. Employers may also reconsider recruitment practices, focusing on talent identification as opposed to filling positions. Think back to Olga's success (Chapter 2) and the vital role played by the hiring manager who worked with her to identify her talent and redesign the job description to fit with Olga's expertise without compromising the organization's needs. Professional organizations must critically engage with the issue of credentialism and reconsider the impact of monopolizing ideas of professional status to realize the full potential of global talent. In addition, they must reconsider accreditation requirements and look for ways to translate foreign experience in a fair, equitable, and feasible manner.

Educational institutions can play a bigger role in removing barriers and supporting current and prospective QIs' work integration. One way is facilitating the recognition of foreign credentials by providing affordable programs that honor previous knowledge and support QIs to meet local market needs and requirements. These institutions can work alongside professional organizations and SPOs to assist QIs in developing social, cultural, and institutional capital, as well as establishing social and professional networks. The Manitoba Project is a prime example of cross-sectoral collaboration to provide approved internationally educated nurses with $23,000 to cover costs of licensing, including bridging programs, transportation costs, and even childcare (Baylon, 2021).

In summary, QIs' work integration requires multiple stakeholders to coordinate against discriminatory practices and increase organizational competitiveness. Moreover, a long-term perspective of integration is critical and must focus beyond the first job, giving QIs the time and resources necessary to gain the social, cultural, and institutional capital to utilize their full potential.

## 5.4    The Road Ahead

In this chapter, we discussed the role of organizations in QIs' work integration. At the organizational level, sensemaking allows for understanding the social processes through which discriminatory practices become acceptable. As individuals within an organization engage in conversations, intersubjective meaning is constructed. This meaning is then built upon by others and generalized into rules, processes, structures, and discourses. These, in turn, become the backdrop in which new conversations take place, constraining and informing future conversations. This organizational context is fraught with power discrepancies that privilege some ideas over others. While these rules and processes can (and do) change over time, change requires deliberate efforts. It is important to remember that organizations are embedded in an institutional environment with regulatory and symbolic realities that impinge upon organizational realities, which we discuss in the next chapter.

## 5.5    Key Points

- Sensemaking is a foundational process of organizing. As organizational actors attempt to comprehend circumstances and act, they create processes and structures, which can at times be discriminatory and inform future sensemaking efforts.
- Organizing happens in and through communication. Actors recollect and use knowledge from previous events toward action, invoking both text and agency. Texts are practices and habits shared by a community of practice. Agency refers to the ability individuals have to choose which texts to employ in a specific situation.
- Sensemaking is influenced by formative contexts (implicit models of how things should be), organizational rules (the ways things get done), and discourse (statements that have come to describe a subject matter).
- Immigrant Service Provider Organizations (SPOs) play a key role in QIs' work integration by providing professional employment support. These organizations operate under critical constraints, including short-term funding and goals, and are not always able to support the long-term needs of QIs.
- Employers have the critical role of providing QIs with meaningful job opportunities. Yet, QIs' talent is often overlooked due to

narrow definitions of talent and short-term orientation to fill positions quickly. QIs' integration requires the reduction of barriers to employment, as well as increased opportunities for development and leadership.

- Professional organizations regulate who can participate in a profession by granting licenses to individuals that meet certain criteria. These criteria often disadvantage QIs.
- Educational institutions play a key role in QIs' integration by providing education that makes them more competitive. Yet, several barriers remain even after education, including employers' preferences for local work experience, limited administrative support to international students, and challenges in building social and professional networks.
- QIs' work integration requires coordination from multiple stakeholders to counter discriminatory practices and increase organizational competitiveness by recruiting and retaining global talent.

## NOTE

1. We built this example based on reports from immigrants pursuing academic positions in Canada, and our own experiences on hiring committees in universities. We spoke with nine immigrant women as part of a research project exploring the experiences of immigrant scholars attempting to secure academic positions. This study is in preparation for publication.

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# The Macro Context of Immigration

In previous chapters, we discussed how interactions with other individuals and organizations influence QIs' sensemaking of themselves and their environment. This chapter explores the link between individual, interactional, and organizational levels of sensemaking and the broader societal context. We will explore the ways in which the macro-environment, through master narratives, imposes a set of constraints, representations, and logic principles on individuals (DiMaggio, 1997) that may influence the availability and attractiveness of courses of action they may take. Maha's[1] story below demonstrates how her course of action (re-establishing herself as a photographer) after moving to a new country (Canada) was informed by master narratives guiding who gets to belong in society, as well as shared narratives of Toronto as a big city full of opportunities and with a desirable 'art and photography scene.'

> I am half Iraqi, half Syrian, and I was born and raised in the UAE. I've been in Toronto for 2.5 years now. When I first moved to Toronto, it was very difficult because Toronto is a huge city, it was overwhelming…It was really difficult at the beginning, but I started warming up to the city much faster than I thought I would. Toronto has a lot to offer, and I think that's one of the things I love about the city. Opening a new chapter coming to Canada, I seized this opportunity to start a new chapter in my life as well. I worked as an architect for ten years as well as a photographer. But I decided to become a full-time photographer here. So, the art scene and photography scene in Toronto is amazing, and it's the best place to

be right now. To date, I've had three photography shows, two of which are part of the contact photographer festival here in Toronto, which is the biggest in North America. I've also been a TELUS newcomer artist finalist, which is a great milestone for me. I think it's overwhelming to be here because you've left everything behind – life as you know it, and you're starting over. But there's a lot that Toronto can offer you, and I am really excited about this new life and all the opportunities that it has.

Maha, in her story narrated above, made sense of her situation and any discrepancies in her expectations by looking for *reasons* that would allow her to understand what was going on and how she should act. Furthermore, Maha made sense of the challenges of settling in a new country and city by drawing on societal narratives of Toronto as a big city with many opportunities. Maha's *reasons* are extracted from institutional frameworks and cultural traditions, in other words, the macro context of sensemaking (Helms Mills et al., 2010; Weick et al., 2005). These reasons constitute master narratives, as explained below.

## 6.1    Master Narratives and Sensemaking

Master narratives are shared cultural scripts that underpin behavioral norms and shape individuals' narratives (Rogers, 2018). As such, master narratives are society-specific and influence individuals' sensemaking as it guides individuals on how to be good members of a given culture (McLean & Syed, 2015). According to McLean and Syed (2015), master narratives are characterized by five basic principles:

1. *Utility*: master narratives are useful because they structure expectations regarding what is perceived to be socially acceptable and desirable.
2. *Ubiquity*: master narratives are shared across a wide range of individuals.
3. *Invisibility*: master narratives are taken-for-granted social conventions and can be difficult to clearly define and articulate.
4. *Rigidity*: master narratives are slow to change and difficult to dismantle.
5. *Compulsory nature*: master narratives shape collective notions of who is valued and what types of behaviors are normative, thus

marginalizing or excluding those whose personal narratives do not fit.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to identify and discuss all relevant master narratives informing QIs' work integration. Building on previous discussions of culture, we begin by discussing multiculturalism as a master narrative present in several immigrant-receiving countries. We then explore how multiculturalism is practiced in everyday actions to link the institutional to the individual, interactional, and organizational levels of sensemaking. Next, we explore master narratives that inform who is worthy of inclusion in society.

## 6.2    Multiculturalism

There are three dominant conceptualizations of immigrants' socio-cultural incorporation in the receiving country: assimilation, segregation, and integration, all of which are hotly debated and being revised continually. Assimilation and segregation are two extremes on a continuum of participation of newcomers in the receiving society (Alba & Foner, 2014; Drouhot & Nee, 2019). As the word implies, assimilation refers to immigrants and their children becoming *similar* to the receiving society by abandoning their culture, while segregation implies that immigrants remain separate from the receiving society. This paradigm originated in American debates on immigrant cultures; 'successful assimilation' is measured by the degree of economic and social success achieved by newcomers (Schneider & Crul, 2010).

Integration assumes that the 'mainstream,' which different generations of immigrants are assimilating to, is not static—change occurs on both sides—for immigrants and residents of the new country. In Canada, for example, integration of immigrants is defined as a gradual two-way process. It requires newcomers to tap into available supports, connect with their communities, as well as learn about and adhere to Canadian laws. In turn, Canadian society should promote their inclusion by reducing discrimination, alienation, and radicalization (IRCC, 2017). Integration does not occur 'within a fixed time frame' (Kaushik & Drolet, 2018, p. 3). While 'successful integration' is oftentimes measured by the educational attainments of subsequent generations of immigrants and employment figures (Schneider & Crul, 2010), it also includes having 'a

sense of belonging in the community' (Kaushik & Drolet, 2018, p. 3), often emphasizing language as a key to social cohesion.

Multiculturalism is the legal, political, social, and cultural accommodation of different ethnic groups. In its specific local or societal iteration, multiculturalism is used to manage large inflows of racially, ethnically, and culturally distinctive immigrant groups. Multiculturalism can function as a shared cultural script, informing policies, practices, normative behaviors, and individual actions. It draws on the central tenet of 'successful integration,' which is that despite their different cultures, residents, and immigrants can function together to contribute positively to the societal fabric. Multiculturalism, therefore, articulates a social contract that recognizes the integration of new citizens as a two-way street. Immigrant citizens and the receiving society are 'parallel societies.' Just as immigrant citizens are expected to commit to their new country and learn about its language, history, and institutions, so too should the receiving society express a commitment to its immigrant citizens and adapt its institutions to accommodate their identities and practices.

Multiculturalism is often conceived of as a celebration of ethnocultural diversity and acknowledges, encourages, and embraces 'a panoply of customs, traditions, music, and cuisines that exist in a multiethnic society' (Kymlicka, 2012, p. 35). It selects specific cultural markers of ethnic groups—clothing, cuisine, and music—to be taught in schools and reproduced at cultural events. Multiculturalism as a master narrative brings discussions of cultural tolerance and diversity into the mainstream.

Multiculturalism has also been enshrined in the constitution by several immigrant-receiving countries like the UK, Canada, and Australia and adapted in variable ways by others (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2018; Ghosh, 2018). As a policy, multiculturalism is typically a mix of anti-discrimination measures and forms of recognition and accommodation, such as cultural diversity training for police and healthcare professionals, government funding of ethnic cultural festivals, and ethnic studies programs, among others (Kymlicka, 2003, 2021). Most importantly, it is an attempt to establish democratic models of citizenship and human rights ideals to replace historically racist and unjust policies of exclusion. The Multicultural Policy Index is a standardized method to compare multicultural policy measures across different national and regional contexts, which includes constitutional, legislative, and parliamentary affirmations, adoption in education curricula and institutions, representation and sensitivity mandates in the media, exemptions from dress codes as statutes,

dual citizenship, funding and supporting ethnic group organizations and/or cultural education/instruction, and affirmative action policies for immigrant groups (Kymlicka, 2012).

The celebratory understanding of multiculturalism has been criticized extensively for ignoring economic and political inequities, reducing the complexity of cultures to a few palatable practices, neglecting cultural adaptation and mixing, and at times reinforcing power inequalities, stereotypes, and restrictions of specific minority groups (Kymlicka, 2012). According to Chapra and Chatterjee (2009, p. 15), the failings of multiculturalism lie in its design as a 'tool to maintain difference, distance, and dominance while maintaining its language of diversity and inclusion.' Official discourses of multiculturalism are criticized for positioning the state and Whiteness as benevolent saviors (Bakali, 2015, p. 417). Other vehement critics of multiculturalism emphasize its tendency to conceal racist, discriminatory, and exclusionary attitudes/prejudices and sideline acts of racism, thereby limiting opportunities for anti-racist action within the myth of a tolerant nation (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002; Masoumi, 2020; Thobani, 2018).

In the Canadian context, multiculturalism emphasizes differences between Indigenous and immigrant groups rather than their shared rights or identities as Canadian citizens (Fleras, 2021). Nonetheless, multiculturalism is thought to bolster successful integration without asking immigrants to give up their cultural heritage (Banting et al., 2007; Bloemraad & Hamlin, 2020). As a policy, it constitutes the formal management of diversity through initiatives across different levels of government (Bannerji, 2000; Hyman et al., 2011; Pillay, 2015). Multiculturalism, despite its critique for remaining at a symbolic level and not challenging forms of structural racism and discrimination, has endured (Banting et al., 2022; Loh, 2022).

### 6.2.1  Everyday Multiculturalism

'Everyday multiculturalism' was conceived to acknowledge and emphasize the pragmatic aspects of how individuals and organizations, through their relations, navigate difference. It is the 'lived practice of cultural diversity' (Wise & Velayutham, 2009, p. 3). 'Everyday multiculturalism' is a perspective to understand how multiculturalism, as a master narrative, shapes individuals' lives. It is how cultural difference is constructed and contested through different activities and includes how the everyday and

mundane are experienced and mediated by larger economic, political, and social contexts (Colombo, 2010; Hardy, 2017; O'Connor, 2010; Uitermark et al., 2005; Wise, 2014; Wise & Velayutham, 2009). Everyday multiculturalism, therefore, includes a gamut of activities such as individual choices and actions that draw on or contribute to different ethnic cultures (cuisines, clothing, music, and other forms of cultural production) through restaurants, festivals, weddings, and other events, wearing cultural and religious attire in public spaces (e.g., headscarves or caps), cultural education, and targeted media programming, among others.

Everyday multiculturalism complements and enhances the understanding of multiculturalism as a master narrative through a more situated and lived account of the everyday dimensions of multiculturalism. It explores how cultural diversity and intercultural encounters are experienced in neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces. Overall, everyday multiculturalism captures how broader social, cultural, and political processes, institutions, and structures (the macro-environment) are filtered and negotiated through the individual level and the realm of everyday practices, exchanges, and meaning-making (Wise & Velayutham, 2009, p. 3).

## 6.3   GOOD WORKER, GOOD CITIZEN

We have already discussed how educational attainments and employment figures of immigrants across generations are key indicators of successful integration. This is closely tied to viewing immigration as a critical tool and an essential strategy for receiving countries to correct mismatches in the demand and supply of the skills needed to promote and sustain industries and the national economy. Immigration regulations are shaped to construct and maintain an active search for talent. Immigrant-receiving countries compete for a specific mold of an international professional—highly skilled, innovative, adaptable, flexible, and independent.

The central assumption made by governments implementing a talent bias in immigration regulations is that highly educated and qualified foreign professionals can easily and quickly acquire country-specific knowledge at little or no cost to the receiving state, allowing them to adapt to the local labor markets rapidly. Many immigrant-receiving countries hold this assumption, resulting in a global race for talent (Shachar, 2013) that constructs economic immigrants as terms of trade, negotiated to gain comparative advantage in a global economy.

To this end, receiving governments develop a sorting logic to determine individual professional success to select and admit global talent to increase the country's global competitive advantage. Parent and Worswick (2004) review and compare post-World War II immigration strategies in Canada, the United States, and Australia and identify the importance of language skills and education. Similarly, Belot and Hatton (2012) confirm what they call the 'skills premium' by drawing on immigrant stock data for 70 source countries and 21 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) destination countries. To give a specific example of how this sorting logic functions, we draw on the Canadian case.

Canada uses its immigration policies strategically to fill specific labor shortages to support national economic growth by turning the 'immigration tap' on and off. Canada first began to move in this direction with the introduction of the Points System in 1967 to assess immigration applicants' admissibility objectively. Points were awarded to individuals based on their education, age, language proficiency, and targeted characteristics such as pre-arranged employment and whether they intended to enter occupations facing perceived shortages. Generally, the Points System favored highly skilled newcomers and relied on self-selection or existing familial, kinship, and ethnic networks.

### 6.3.1   Why Make a Skilled Distinction?

The preference for skilled immigrants is built on the assumption that a primary indicator of admissibility and employability is human capital—the economic value of a worker's experience and skills, including education, training, intelligence, age, health, etc. QIs are recruited for their talent—their unique and valuable human capital. Skill level and type are often used as proxies for measuring human capital. There is no universal or uniform definition of 'skills.' In most immigrant-receiving countries, 'skills' are defined in terms of educational attainment levels, occupational skills and type, and work experience.

In Canada, the selection of economic immigrants uses skill as one of the most decisive indicators of immigration candidates' long-standing ability of successful economic integration (Boucher, 2020; Chand & Tung, 2019). In 1997, Canadian legislators articulated a blueprint for selecting self-supporting individuals, which became the foundation for the economic class or economic immigration stream (Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 1997). 'Skill' in Canada is

defined and operationalized using the National Occupational Classification (NOC). NOC is a standard taxonomy and framework to categorize occupational information using skill type (type of work performed for education and field of study) and skill level (education and level of training). It establishes standardized language to describe work performed by Canadians and uses it to define and collect statistics, manage information databases, analyze labor market trends, and extrapolate information for career planning.

The basic principle of classification of the NOC is the kind of work performed, which is used to identify and group occupations. NOC defines occupation as a collection of jobs performed in a sufficiently similar manner. A job includes all tasks that a worker carries out to complete their duties. Job titles are grouped based on work performed (i.e., tasks, duties, employment requirements, and responsibilities associated with each occupation). At present, the NOC is comprised of about 30,000 job titles organized into 500-unit groups, categorized according to four skill levels and ten broad occupational categories. Prospective immigration candidates are organized by distinguishing their skill level and type and assigned a NOC category. The NOC also forms the basis of a bifurcated system of immigration whereby skilled workers or QIs have a greater advantage in accessing employment opportunities and pathways to permanent residence and citizenship.

As discussed in earlier chapters, despite being recruited for what governments project as vacancies, skilled immigrants encounter significant and unfair barriers to labor market entry. Governments, employers, professional regulatory bodies, and employment agencies inadvertently perpetuate a hierarchy of eligibility (Cameron et al., 2019; Kaushik & Walsh, 2018; Walton-Roberts, 2021). This hierarchy has been attributed to the non-recognition of education and work experience acquired outside Canada (Banerjee et al., 2021; Damelang et al., 2020), perceived linguistic abilities, loss of previous social memberships and networks, and in some instances, it has also proven to be the result of racial and gender prejudices (Ellermann, 2020; Esses, 2021; Man & Chou, 2020). Yet, the idea that QIs should integrate professionally is ingrained in master narratives.

### 6.3.2 Desirable Immigrants

As discussed already, master narratives function as cultural scripts that influence discourses on who is worthy of integration and thereby mark QIs for inclusion or exclusion. QIs can contribute to the receiving country with their skills and talent if they enter workplaces successfully. Professional attainment, therefore, is a key marker of inclusion in receiving countries and this master narrative shapes QIs' experiences of work integration upon arrival and after, as well as their individual sensemaking and actions.

In a previous study of immigrant narratives (Moffitt et al., 2020), we describe how, in Canada, a master narrative portraying desirable immigrants as productive workers who contribute to the economy was reflected in immigrants' personal narratives. Participants constructed accounts of their experiences in Canada, creating a coherent life story while engaging with societal expectations of professional attainment. Professional attainment, therefore, was a master narrative maintained by immigrants themselves.

Immigrants in this study tended not to push against this expectation, thereby allowing it to remain invisible while simultaneously reinforcing it. For instance, Maha's narrative presented above highlights her accomplishments and success as a photographer. In this study, immigrants aligning with the master narrative, like Maha, were also professionally successful, suggesting they felt positive about their immigration experience. In addition, because they conformed to societal expectations, they were more likely to feel included in society and enjoy better mental and physical health (McLean & Syed, 2015).

When individual narratives misalign with the master narrative, it may prompt the crafting of an alternative narrative. These alternative narratives may strengthen the master narrative through its nature of oppositional referencing (McLean et al., 2017). Peter recounts his settlement experiences and professional challenges on his journey toward integration. Even though he was unsuccessful in attaining satisfactory employment, his narrative suggests that it is still a desirable goal. He highlights other ways in which he contributes to Canadian society by creating self-help groups and discusses his efforts toward integration by networking and gaining experience. His narrative is an alternative to the master narrative of professional attainment, yet it reinforces the notion that professional attainment is a key marker of inclusion.

I've been in Canada for just over three years, but I have had so many nice experiences that it feels like I have been here for many more. The best part about Canada is the people you meet. People from all over the world united together with one mission: to make the country and the world a better place to live. Times have been hard. Job searching has been painstakingly difficult and slow. Rejection is faced over and over again. The recession has not made this any easier. But with hard work, patience, and persistence, I have learned to survive and come out strong. I have started several self-help groups, one for soon-to-be immigrants and one for job seekers in Canada. Over the past few months, each of these groups has grown to over several hundred members. Volunteering has allowed me to meet and intermingle with lots of people and to get Canadian experience. Networking groups for new Canadians are another support system I've found. Canada is a great country, there is so much to see and do. As the months and years pass, I hope to be able to give and to receive back from this country.

Peter and Maha's narratives demonstrate the persistence of the master narrative of professional attainment as a key marker of inclusion and advance the cultural script that good workers make good citizens, which is internalized by QIs.

Multiculturalism and professional attainment are viewed as clear pathways to inclusion and become powerful master narratives that structure QIs' expectations of what is socially acceptable and desirable in the receiving country. Just as the principles of master narratives identified by McLean and Syed (2015) suggest, multiculturalism and the 'good worker, good citizen' narratives are ubiquitous and invisible; they are shared by a wide range of individuals and are often de-personified, abstracted, and taken for granted. These principles also make these master narratives slow to change and difficult to dismantle (rigid). This rigidity is evident in Peter's attempts to find an alternative narrative that still fits within and reinforces the master narrative of professional attainment as key to inclusion in Canadian society. Finally, Maha's perception of Toronto as a city of opportunities and her success in navigating and succeeding in its 'art and photography' scene are shaped by collective notions of QIs' contributions and appropriate and normative behaviors (compulsory).

## 6.4    Immigration and Colonialism

In a chapter on the macro-environment of immigration, it is essential to consider the relationship between immigration and colonialism in settler nations. Again, we focus on the case of Canada, where understandings of nationhood, citizenship, and belonging are marked by Indigenous peoples' experiences of British and French colonization and waves of immigration, initially from Europe and later from the Global South (Abu-Laban, 2014). A prevalent narrative that establishes immigration is a defining feature of Canada as a modern state is built on a foundation of complex social relations of power and reflects Anglo-conformity and British origin as the ideal and norm against which other groups are measured (Abu-Laban & Nath, 2020).

The common element in current debates on the relationship between immigration and settler colonialism is the recognition that rigid categories of immigrant, Indigenous, and settler can miss the constitutive links between struggles against racialized precarity, White supremacist capitalism, and the project of settlement (Chatterjee, 2019; Walia, 2013). Stasiulis (2020) demonstrates how the settler-colonial project distinguishes between 'legitimate' Canadian settler-citizens and undesirable racialized populations residing in Canada, often for a long time. Thus, the Canadian narrative of a nation of immigrants, Perzyna and Bauder (2022) argues, 'denies Canada's colonial roots and expunges the violence of settler colonialism, racist immigration policies and the continuing discriminatory neoliberal bias toward economic migrants and government-approved refugees' (p. 1). They stress how irregular asylum seekers and Indigenous land defenders 'are constructed as threats to Canadian sovereignty, perpetuating and reproducing settler-colonial structures' (p. 2).

In summary, it is important to understand that settler colonialism, discrimination against Indigenous peoples, and immigrant integration are intertwined and influenced by historical and contemporary social and political practices (Chatterjee, 2019). As discussed above, the Canadian narrative of multiculturalism differentiates Indigenous and immigrant groups rather than emphasizing their shared rights or identities as Canadian citizens (Fleras, 2021). Further, some argue (Dhamoon, 2015) that the Canadian state uses immigrants of color to perpetuate a myth of multiculturalism, which ensures the continued 'domination of Indigenous

peoples' (p. 25). These practices and discourses are a fundamental part of the macro-environment surrounding QIs' work integration.

## 6.5    Practical Insights

Supporting QIs to achieve work integration is a societal project that requires not only adjustment to regulatory environments that create the infrastructure for integration but also narratives that provide individuals—Indigenous, immigrant, and settler—with the resources to make sense of their experiences. The construction of a more inclusive society requires the inclusion of multiple voices to challenge and change rigid and compulsory master narratives that may be exclusionary. The inclusion of multiple (even if contradictory) voices and points of view may aid in breaking down barriers of who gets to be 'one of us.' In constructing alternative narratives, we should remain vigilant to not inadvertently reinforce the master narrative, further excluding those unable to meet social requirements for inclusion (seen clearly in Peter's narrative). In the case of QIs, those unable to attain commensurate employment may be perceived as less deserving of inclusion (Moffitt et al., 2020), maintaining the notion that immigrants are economic terms of trade rather than individuals and families with aspirations beyond the value of their labor.

## 6.6    The Road Ahead

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, it is near impossible to capture fully the symbolic reality and institutional frameworks (master narratives) that constitute the macro-environment in which QIs operate. We discussed two vital cultural scripts that inform QIs' work integration in a receiving country: (1) multiculturalism as central to integration; and (2) professional attainment as a key marker of inclusion. As an institutional framework, multiculturalism informs individual, interactional, and organizational levels of sensemaking through everyday multiculturalism, which is the situated and lived reality of cultural difference. QIs understand professional attainment as a marker of inclusion in response to a global race for talent and the importance of skills as a guarantor for successful integration. The brief and targeted discussion of multiculturalism and the 'good worker, good citizen' master narratives provide a glimpse of the macro-environment in which QIs, local agents, and organizations operate to guide who belongs and is worthy. These shared cultural scripts outline

the way things should be and inform salient challenges for immigrants. We also reflected upon colonial narratives that differentiate immigrants and indigenous peoples, reinforcing the settlement project and influencing QIs' integration.

In the next and concluding chapter, we identify two important developments that influence the structuring of the multiple levels of sense-making (individual, interactional, organizational, and institutional): (1) transnationalism as an ontological framework and (2) the COVID-19 pandemic as an ongoing and endemic global issue. We discuss how these developments will inevitably transform individual, interactional, organizational, and institutional logics, culture, and practices.

## 6.7    Key Points

- The macro-environment, through master narratives, provides individuals with important cues for individual, interactional, and organizational sensemaking.
- Master narratives are shared cultural scripts that underpin behavior and shape individuals' narratives.
- Multiculturalism—the legal, political, social, and cultural accommodation of different ethnic groups—is a master narrative shaping individuals' lives in several immigrant-receiving countries, including the UK, Australia, and Canada.
- Migration policies favor skilled immigrants based on the assumption that they are better suited and more desirable for successful integration; however, several barriers remain. Nonetheless, the notion of 'good worker, good citizen' is internalized by QIs and influences how they make sense of their experiences.
- QIs' integration is entangled with settler-colonial practices and positioned within narratives that differentiate immigrants and indigenous peoples, reinforcing the settlement project.
- Master narratives guiding who belongs and is desirable can only change with the systematic and sincere inclusion of multiple voices—Indigenous, immigrant, and settler—to break down barriers of who gets to be 'one of us.'

# NOTE

1. This story was collected from Passages Canada in the fall of 2016. Passages Canada is an initiative of Historica Canada, an organization dedicated to documenting the history and heritage of Canadians. The complete explanation of how we collected and interpreted this data can be found in our original study (Moffitt et al., 2020).

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# Extending Sensemaking of Immigrant Integration

In previous chapters, we discussed the role of identity in sensemaking (Chapter 3), interactions with others (Chapter 4), organizations (Chapter 5), and the overall institutional environment (Chapter 6) in shaping QIs' integration. In this concluding chapter, we explore a final narrative to demonstrate the fluid, dynamic, and interdependent nature of sensemaking. Stella's story is a useful reminder that while we discussed these different levels and aspects of sensemaking separately, sensemaking is interdependent and ongoing.

Stella[1] immigrated to Canada from Venezuela with a Ph.D. in Engineering and more than 25 years of experience as a professor and lecturer in her home country. Despite her extensive experience, after arriving in Canada, she struggled to find an academic position in her field. At the time of our conversation, Stella had been in Canada for four years and had started a new career path as an optician. As Stella explained her sensemaking process, she referred continuously to several aspects of her identity: who she is as a person and her professional identity as a highly qualified intellectual. She explains:

> I am a Ph.D.; I have 3000 citations … I have had a completely different experience [from the people I work with]. My mind is a trained mind. I think that probably a more intellectual job, I will be able to do for a longer period of time.

While reflecting on her identity (individual), Stella relies on others to help her understand the environment and her options (interactional). These interactions were the focus of Chapter 4, in which we discussed how reality is constructed through communication *and how* some exchanges will be particularly influential because of their legitimacy or symbolic power (Hallett, 2003). She reports talking to many people, with some playing a more powerful role than others, such as a recruiter, in helping her find her way. She continues to seek out others to help her make sense of her options, as she explains:

> I think when you arrive in Canada, there are a lot of paths, but not all are the best for you. And it's difficult to know because you don't have the whole information. You receive advice from different persons. All of them have good intentions, but it's difficult to learn…I asked [a recruiter] …how can I know? And then he answered me, 'well, probably you need to speak with a lot of people in order to find your own answer'…This recruiter told me something that is true. He said, 'well, you have a lot of hard skills that are difficult to have because you cannot learn this through YouTube.' And it's true.

The recruiter validated Stella's identity claims of a highly educated professional and provided practical advice on the job search process. This recruiter was not the only powerful interaction to shape Stella's sensemaking. She also drew on many organizations, which had their own rules, processes, and discourses that at times presented barriers but also provided support. When we last spoke, Stella was waiting for her credential assessment to work as an engineer. She participated in an employment program for highly skilled women offered by an immigrant service provider organization (SPOs). In Chapter 5, we discussed the critical role of professional and regulatory bodies, which present unique challenges and barriers for QIs, and the importance of SPOs in supporting QIs' work integration. It was unsurprising that Stella stumbled upon many organizational requirements that she felt powerless to change.

One example that Stella explained in detail was a recruitment process for a job she believed herself to be fully qualified for. However, she was not selected, and the job was re-posted shortly after with an additional requirement for a recent graduation date. She described her disappointment and efforts to make sense of the outcome of her application:

I cannot change the time. I can learn new things, but I cannot change the time. I spoke [with a recruiter] about this situation, and she told me that maybe this was the reason. But she also said that probably to work in this company, you will need a security clearance, and because I am not a Canadian citizen, I am only a permanent resident, this could also be a disadvantage.

Stella also explained having to contend with discriminatory practices in workplaces and work-related institutions, which we discussed become acceptable and maintained over time in Chapter 5. All the while, Stella refers to the overall Canadian cultural and institutional environment as a point of reference.

This is a very polite society, but on the other hand, behind that very polite behavior, they are trying to take advantage. Then it's a little difficult sometimes... Here we don't have status. I am a technician. I do some manager activities, but I am not a Ph.D. It's a different situation. This is also the Canadian society; it's a much more vertical society. If you are a technician who is working at that level... Sometimes, of course, it's painful...because there are some discriminations also. Yeah, if you are a minority, that is my case too. You notice that, well, it's part of the package.

Stella's efforts to make sense of Canada's socio-cultural and institutional environment to explain her employment options and outcomes refer to the last level of sensemaking described in Chapter 6: the institutional environment with regulatory and symbolic realities. Stella's depiction of the polite society is embedded in a master narrative of multiculturalism: a shared cultural script that acknowledges, encourages, embraces, and even celebrates ethnocultural diversity. Her expression of the difficulty and pain associated with her employment outcomes relates to the second master narrative we discussed: professional attainment as a critical marker of inclusion and integration for QIs.

Stella's self-identification as an intellectual, the powerful interactions, and organizations that shape her sensemaking in a specific institutional environment (the polite but discriminatory Canadian society) demonstrate how the different levels of sensemaking are simultaneous, interconnected, and interdependent. Our conversation with Stella included her past experiences, current employment status, and strategies, as well as plans for her professional future, demonstrating that sensemaking is dynamic and ongoing. Each conversation provides a momentary glimpse

of a continuous process. Toward the end of her conversation with us, she continued to have new thoughts and ideas and identified new potential courses of action:

> I don't know too much. I need to do homework. I was thinking that maybe I need to review some options [at college or university] … Yeah, I'll look into [college] in order to apply for positions in the government.

## 7.1   Challenges of Studying the Process of Sensemaking

Stella's story exemplifies the interconnectedness, interdependence, and dynamism of the process of sensemaking and highlights the challenges associated with studying sensemaking. As an ongoing, retrospective, and enacting process, sensemaking is difficult to capture and study. Sensemaking is constantly changing. At every moment, new stimuli may prompt different thoughts and actions, and result in different outcomes. Even at the end of our conversation, Stella decided to explore options at colleges and universities based on the elements of her story that became visible to her while recounting her experiences. Due to the dynamic nature of sensemaking, any conversation will always paint an incomplete and momentary picture; they offer only a snapshot of someone's sensemaking.

Interviews are a co-production, and the questions we asked Stella about her plans likely played a role in shaping her narrative. As researchers, we influence sensemaking by the questions we ask, the ways we react to the answers provided, and the ways in which we interact with participants. Finally, as we discussed in this book, sensemaking is happening and is influenced by multiple levels of subjectivity (individual, interactional, organizational, institutional). Isolating one level for scrutiny may provide valuable insights but, at the same time, may hide important elements that can only be observed when the whole picture is considered. Below we discuss some possible alternatives to minimize these challenges.

### 7.1.1   Longitudinal Mixed-Method Design

One of the strategies to compensate for the ongoing and dynamic nature of sensemaking is longitudinal research designs, which would permit researchers to follow participants' narratives over time. This allows for the

collection of multiple snapshots. While not a comprehensive or perfect representation of sensemaking, it would allow for comparisons among individual strategies, the influence of interactions with multiple actors, and the outcomes of organizational changes or shifts in the institutional environment. Currently, most longitudinal designs of immigrant integration employ quantitative methods and large-scale data sets, such as census and labor surveys (Cheng et al., 2021; Piché et al., 2002). Such studies often miss the social aspect of sensemaking. Triangulation, or mixing quantitative and qualitative methods in one study, can provide multiple and rich snapshots of sensemaking.

### 7.1.2  *Reflective Interviews*

Interviews continue to be a useful research method for collecting rich and nuanced narratives. Multiple interviews may provide insight into the ongoing and social nature of sensemaking. As many qualitative researchers have, we contend that as interviewers, it is impossible to be neutral (Chase, 2003, 2008; Randall et al., 2013). For this reason, we should aim to intervene with the intention of supporting participants to reflect and make sense of their situations. As we have argued elsewhere, researchers can support participants' reflection and sensemaking, which can change the ways individuals think, behave, and perform and potentially increase the impact of research in the process of an interview (Nardon & Hari, 2021; Nardon et al., 2021). Reflection allows research participants the opportunity to learn, revisit assumptions, make sense of their problems, and find new solutions.

Building on a transformative approach, in a recent article, we organized various approaches to a reflective interview and identified four principles that researchers can employ when designing interview-based research to support reflection and sensemaking (Nardon et al., 2021):

1. Give time to think: Providing participants with the opportunity to think before, during, and after the interview creates space for deeper reflection on the topic under study and supports participants in making sense of their situations.
2. Develop a relationship of trust between the researcher and participant, which can take time but is essential to create openness and invite reflection.

3. Invite reflection by using interview techniques designed to facilitate participants' questioning of taken-for-granted assumptions and beliefs. Many tools are available to this end, including metaphor elicitation (Nardon & Hari, 2021), narrative interviews (Birch & Miller, 2000; Cassell et al., 2020; Gemignani, 2014), and photo-elicitation interviews (e.g., Collier & Collier, 1986; Harper, 2002).

4. Support the identification of personal solutions to alleviate their situations by engaging in solution-focused questioning that allows participants to articulate a desired future state and help them develop a plan to achieve it.

## 7.2    EXTENDING SENSEMAKING: TRANSNATIONAL SENSEMAKING

Based on Weick's original conceptualization of sensemaking, we discussed four levels of sensemaking, individual (Chapter 3), interactional (Chapter 4), organizational (Chapter 5), and institutional (Chapter 6). These levels were conceived within an implicit assumption that individuals live in one nation-state. We would be amiss if we did not acknowledge that an increasing number of persons now live transnational lives: speaking two or more languages, having homes in two or more countries, and making a living through continuous regular contact across national borders. The term transnationalism recognizes these networks, activities, and patterns of life and highlights an unexplored facet of sensemaking.

Broadly, transnationalism (often also used in its plural form) consists of historical, economic, political, social, and cultural processes that extend beyond any one nation-state. Historically, it included organizational presence in several countries simultaneously. Nowadays, it broadly encompasses the emergence of social processes in which migrants' social relations, including familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political, cross geographic, cultural, and political borders. The multiple involvements of QIs in both home and receiving societies are emblematic of transnationalism.

QIs are part of a social system with networks based in two or more nation-states and who maintain activities, identities, and statuses in several social locations. Social articulations of transnationalism, therefore, include the simultaneity of daily lives, consciousness, and identity

(Bailey, 2001). Transnational communities are defined by intense cross-border social relations. Trans-migrants participate in daily life activities in two or more nations (Portes, 2001). Overall, transnationalism involves individuals, their networks of social relations, communities, and broader institutionalized structures, such as local and national governments.

What can transnationalism as an ontological framework add to the sensemaking perspective? We offer transnational as an added level of sensemaking that recognizes the daily enactments of transnationalism by individuals and institutions. Sensemaking, as understood in this book, is the organizing of information to understand cause and effect and the sequencing of 'ambiguous, equivocal, or confusing issues or events' (Brown et al., 2015, p. 266). We suggest that transnational sensemaking includes actors, structures, and processes that acknowledge and problematize how borders are crossed, constituted, and superseded. It fits well with the properties of sensemaking by including different levels of analysis and time frames. Furthermore, a transnational level of sensemaking would look at how the local, national, regional, and global are connected to inform sensemaking. Transnational sensemaking, therefore, would reflect the lived realities of QIs and capture how discourses, material flows, and cultural interactions are exchanged across borders and boundaries.

In our recent work, we found transnational sensemaking a valuable perspective for conceptualizing international students' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hari et al., 2021). Our participants organized and compared information on the pandemic from two or more national contexts to understand the cause, effect, and sequencing of an unprecedented situation. Their transnational lives and identities shaped how they made sense of the strict public health measures, closures of borders and travel, as well as the shutdown of institutions and services.

## 7.3   Practical Insights

This section highlights some important implications for practice when considering immigrant work integration from a sensemaking perspective. First, sensemaking highlights that agency (of multiple actors) is embedded in the process of work integration. Agency is best understood as having the ability to act and to be recognized as an actor. Feminist scholars have noted the importance of contextualizing agency to understand how privilege and oppression shape one's capacity to act. Saba Mahmood (2001, p. 203) captures this complexity by defining agency as 'a capacity

for action that historically specific relations of subordination enable and create.'

The inherent tension between structures and individual agency is troubling and complex, captured in our discussions of how individual sensemaking of their professional identities, options, and actions is simultaneously impacted by their interactions with local agents, organizations, and the institutional environment. Yet, it also explains how individuals navigate these constraints differently, based on their own resources and their ability to make choices along the way (exercising their agency). Recall the success stories of Olga and Ulan, who resisted notions of immigrants' disadvantage in the Canadian labor market and persisted in their quest for commensurate employment. They were supported by family members (Olga), motivated by individuals they met in the local labor market, and sustained by their ability to wait for the right opportunity due to their financial situations. Some QIs use their agency to change structures that disadvantage immigrants. The manager who hired Olga, discussed in Chapter 2, chose to give a QI like Olga a first chance at acquiring the coveted 'Canadian Experience' by choosing not to follow traditional recruiting processes for filling positions. Instead, the manager took the time to talk to Olga about her past experiences and knowledge to identify how she could contribute to the organization. This is an example of how individuals can contribute to immigrant integration by resisting discriminatory structures and taking active steps to change.

Second, sensemaking highlights that successful work integration is a process, and it may take time. There is a lot to learn about oneself and the environment, people who need to be connected, and structures that need to be adjusted. This is particularly true for individuals in specialized and/or regulated professions or with unconventional backgrounds. These individuals have unique support needs, and structures must be in place to ensure that their transition to employment is positive for society, hiring organizations, and themselves.

In addition to time, the multiple, interconnected, and interdependent levels of sensemaking reveal that work integration requires a coordinated effort among various actors, including QIs, their families and communities, their social and professional networks, organizations (SPOs, employers, educational institutions, and professional regulatory bodies), and broader societal actors (governments, community, etc.) to recruit, retain, and incorporate their global talent and achieve broader objectives of multiculturalism, as well as equality, diversity, and inclusion. Stella's

complex sensemaking narrative reveals the need for coordinated and integrated reforms to current systems, structures, and processes of work integration.

## 7.4    The Road Ahead

The world is constantly changing. This book captures our own ongoing process of sensemaking regarding the immigration journey. As we contemplate the future ahead, it is vital to acknowledge the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the experiences of QIs. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the lives of many through increased economic uncertainties and lingering health implications. Governments implemented emergency legislation, such as social distancing, lockdowns, travel restrictions, and border closures to mitigate the spread of the virus. These measures will inevitably impact the admission and work integration of QIs. For example, Canada saw a decline of 64% in admissions across all categories during the pandemic (El-Assal, 2020). Much research remains to be done on the impacts of the ongoing pandemic on QI admissions and work integration.

In a study of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on skilled immigrant women's employment during the first wave of infections and public health measures in Canada, we found that 41 out of 50 respondents were negatively impacted due to delayed career starts, reversed career trajectories due to layoffs or decreased availability of short-term opportunities, or had their careers interrupted due to increased family demands, reduced opportunities to perform and advance in a work-from-home environment, and limited social support. Much has happened since, including the availability of vaccines, vaccine mandates by many organizations and nations, the controlled reopening of borders, and alternative ways of working and delivering services. The world we live in today is very different from the world we all knew in 2019; this previous 'normal' has informed most of the research and practice regarding QI integration. We hope to encourage further research to understand how QIs as transnational actors and others engaged in the project of immigrant work integration make sense of QI professional identities and journeys, including the short- and long-term impact of the ongoing pandemic on their actions, outcomes, and futures.

This concluding chapter provided some methodological and practical insights derived from using a sensemaking perspective to understand and engage with QIs' work integration. Although we end on an uncertain

note, leaving more questions open than answered, we hope to encourage researchers and practitioners to continue these vital conversations in their respective areas and collaborate and coordinate to learn from each other.

## 7.5    Concluding Thoughts

We started this book by presenting immigrant work integration as a wicked problem, ridden with complexities and without an easy solution. Countries like Canada design immigration policies to attract talented individuals and to address persistent labor shortages; organizations spend significant resources to attract, recruit, and retain talent, which is consistently in short supply; qualified professionals relocate across the world, leaving behind all that is familiar to find themselves in menial jobs in the countries that welcomed them based on their skills and education.

We attempted to make sense of this problem by looking at how individuals, organizations, and societies make sense of everyday situations related to work integration and create structures that perpetuate discriminatory practices and maintain barriers that prevent QIs from finding commensurate employment that is to the detriment of everyone involved. We hope that our attempt to reveal and unpack this wicked problem, although complex, uncertain, and resistant to analysis and resolution, will increase awareness and invite action from all sectors of society toward supporting QIs' work integration and success.

## 7.6    Key Points

- The different levels of sensemaking are interconnected, fluid, dynamic, and interdependent, which makes studying sensemaking a challenge.
- Longitudinal designs can compensate for the nature of sensemaking by allowing for the collection of multiple snapshots.
- Reflective interviews can be a useful research method to simultaneously understand and support participants' sensemaking processes.
- Transnationalism is a useful ontological framework to better understand QIs' work integration challenges and experiences. QIs live transnational lives, which is bound to influence their sensemaking.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the immigration landscape. More research is needed to understand the short- and long-term

impact of the pandemic on migration flows and QIs' work integration.

## Note

1. Stella's story is derived from an ongoing project investigating the experiences of immigrants with doctoral education as they adjust to the realities of high barriers to secure academic positions and explore career alternatives. In this project, we have conducted interviews ranging from 60 to 90 minutes with 9 immigrant women. Findings from this study are in preparation for publication.

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