

CROSS-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT AMONG IMMIGRANT EXECUTIVES

by

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## ABSTRACT

Moving to a new country and having to adjust to its culture is often traumatic for immigrants, as they experience intense emotional and physical stresses stemming from new roles and rules in their familial and workplace relationships. This study examined sociocultural and psychological factors that were part of immigrant executive's cross-cultural adjustment experiences.

Specifically, this dissertation sought to: 1) elucidate the decisions that prompted elite professionals to move to Canada, 2) examine participants' stories associated with their pre- and post-moving experiences and relocation challenges, 3) identify coping strategies immigrant executives used to manage their personal and professional lives successfully, and 4) pinpoint suggestions and recommendations these executives had for other elite professionals thinking of moving to Canada, and for counsellors working with such clients.

To best achieve my purpose, the following dissertation explores the rationale for using qualitative research approaches with particular reference to narrative as a method and theoretical frame work to better understand the feelings, experiences, expectations, and yearnings of six male immigrant executives/CEOs/managers, and to explore the complexities and difficulties embedded in their life and work in their new country.

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## **DEDICATION**

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **Overview**

A high proportion of individuals and families from many nations, cultures, and language groups come to live and work in the United States and Canada. As shown by the 2000 United States census data, close to 20% of the population speak a language at home other than English (United States Census Bureau, 2007). Similar rates of multiculturalism may be found in Canada and findings from the 2001 Canadian census data suggest that around 40% of Canadians are not monolingual native-English speakers (Statistics Canada, 2007). Due to Canada's and the United States' multiculturalism rates, devising ways in which to support immigrants involves issues that are at the forefront of Canadian and American economic and societal well-being. For example, Parliamentary Secretary Ed Komarnicki (2008) comments on the Canadian government-funded organizations that deliver help to immigrants to successfully integrate and learn language skills, as well as prepare them for a successful transition to their new work places. With services like language training, help finding a job, and counselling services, newcomers have access to the tools they need for adjusting to their new surroundings. Further, the Honorable Minister Diane Finley (2008) confirms the support provided by the Government of Canada to help immigrants overcome the formidable challenges of immigration and succeed in the process of adjustment.

Canada and the United States benefit tremendously from having immigrants come to their countries, as immigrants are often willing to do jobs native-born citizens are not, can fill positions for which there is a shortage of skilled workers (Alcoba, 2005; Nixon, 2006, as cited in Scotton, 2006), and on average are willing to have more children than native-born citizens (Corbett, 2002; Waldinger, 2001). Immigrants moving to Canada and the United States do so for a variety of reasons, including: seeking better living conditions for themselves and their families (Pupin,

2005) providing better opportunities for their children (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001); moving away from war-torn political climates; and seeking more stable financial and political conditions (Bahrapour, 1999; Steinglass & Gerrity, 1990). Due to the high numbers of “skilled immigrants” living and working in North America and the benefits associated with immigration, researching and documenting how “immigrant professionals” and families may cope and integrate into their new society are important issues to consider (Alarcón, 2000; Fernandez, 1998).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Immigrants moving to Canada and the United States from abroad face multiple challenges, such as issues of loss and grief, language and communication barriers, exclusion, and adaptation to the new environment. Moving to a new country, facing transition, and adjusting to a different culture is very challenging and can be a traumatic experience. Previous research points to these challenges for families who have emigrated to a Western country (Mak, 2001; Pedersen, 1997; Sue & Sue, 1999). For example, people from collectivistic cultures who have deeper attachments to their cultural values and strong bonds with their families may experience loss of identity (Akhtar, 1999) and need more time to adjust to the new country’s norms. In contrast, people from individualistic cultures may easily move “in and out” of social groups, their extended families, and their jobs, or migrate to a new place (Myers, 2004).

Many immigrants coming to the United States and Canada are elite professionals. This research focuses on the transition and cross-cultural adjustment experience among male immigrant elite professionals, primarily executive/CEO/ and manager level immigrants who cross national and cultural boundaries to strive for an enhanced lifestyle in Canada. They held recognized qualifications in their home countries (Mak, Westwood, & Ishiyama, 1994) and continue to hold the same position in their host country (some enter the work place right away,

others after having to re-qualify).

### **Significance and Rationale of the Study**

Experiences faced by immigrants appear to be exacerbated among immigrant elite professionals because they are leaving influential positions in their countries, where they had comfortable financial situations that they often lose or sacrifice when moving to a new country; their professional experience is not acknowledged in the same way, their professional titles are often not transferable, and they need to redo some of their studies, accept lower-paying positions (at least temporarily), or receive less recognition for previous efforts made in their country of origin (Alarcón, 2000; Beauchesne, 2008). Currently, there is a paucity of studies on transition and adjustment among immigrant elite professionals, the many factors affecting their adjustment processes, and the identification of successful coping strategies (Alcoba, 2005; Cayo, 2007; Hicks & Peterson, 1999; Jay, 2008).

A literature review of this area of research reveals a central issue that forms the framework for this study. Most research on immigrants' cross-cultural adjustment does not examine how being executive impacts the process of adjustment, at home and at work; immigrant elite professionals, with their distinct status, have been understudied (Haour-Knipe, 2001). What limited literature exists on immigrant executives tends to address them as career professionals, emphasizing their identity and cultural values at work, yet their changed roles as parents and spouses have not been explored (Arnold et al., 2005). In this way, although some immigrants' experiences have been amply documented, others' have been neglected, making research in this area long overdue. Thus, this research study seeks to add to this body of literature by examining immigrant elite professionals not only in their working lives but also in their personal lives, including in their roles as parents and spouses (Ackoff, 1994, Haour-Knipe, 2001).

Moreover, the need to create supportive federal, provincial, and local government systems for immigrants is evidenced in a statement made by Canada's Governor General, Mrs. Michaëlle Jean, as she questioned the policy ramifications of multiculturalism, at a colloquium conference in Montreal in April of 2004:

Citizenship means living together. But does "multiculturalism" really propose us living together? We are even given money so that we will each stay in our own separate enclosure. There's a kind of proposition of ghettoization that is there, and that is finance. Yet "multiculturalism" is proposed as a founding model of Canada.

Jean went on to criticize the leaders of organizations who make their living off multiculturalism and indicated that:

It's terrible, when you think about it. My dream is that we reflect much more deeply on citizenship, on belonging, which is not a negation of where we come from or our heritage, whether we are from Abitibi or Haiti or somewhere else. It's not that. But what are we doing together? Right now, we are living through all kinds of absurdities surrounding this separate development. There are even values that we would profoundly like to adhere to, here in Quebec, and also in the rest of Canada, that are undermined in the name of this separate development and "multiculturalism."

In her comments, Jean illustrates some of the limitations of the efforts that have been put forth to integrate immigrant populations in Canada, leading to an undesirable "ghettoization" of immigrants. One means of moving away from this "ghettoization" is to develop professionals – for example, those in the areas of psychology and counselling –

who better understand and can help them overcome challenges, including their sense of alienation. Culturally sensitive counsellors would ideally be competent at understanding these issues.

This study examined and reflected upon immigrant executives' work and life adjustment processes, and their coping experiences. Attention was given to exploring what hindered their ability to undergo change, as well as what helped them manage the challenges of acculturation and adjustment.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study seeks to: 1) examine the constituent elements of cross-cultural adjustment among immigrant executives, 2) study the complexities and difficulties embedded in their life and work in their new country by exploring their life stories, and 3) better understand immigrant executives' feelings, experiences, expectations, and yearnings (Haour-Knipe, 2001; Satir, Banmen, Gerber, & Gomori, 1991).

More precisely, my research seeks to examine the process of cross-cultural adjustment by immigrant executives to gain further knowledge about the factors that affect such people's lives and professional development, and to identify coping strategies that these individuals use to adjust to their new environment. For example, while there may be some similarities at the surface level between personal and professional trajectories of immigrant and native-born elite professionals, there also may be some underlying differences that are important to highlight. As the experience of immigrant executives is further shaped by their cultural values, linguistic background, and immigrant status, their life tracks often differ significantly from those of executives who were born and raised in North America (Ackoff, 1994; Arnold et al., 2005; Cheney & Barnett, 2005). Thus, identifying ways in which these trajectories differ is an important area for research.

Further, among any group of immigrant elite professionals, it is apparent that some are already comfortable with the new environment's social norms and their new lifestyle, while others seem quite uncomfortable and resistant to learning the new language, norms, and customs. Identifying some of the differences may reveal meaningful findings as to whether these differences are due to internal factors (such as personality-related factors), or to perceived actual differences in how the host community reacts towards them. For example, some host communities may believe (either explicitly or implicitly) that all other cultural groups are inferior and may tend to reject immigrants who have not adjusted well (Blanchfield, 2007; Rolfsen, 2007). Identifying the host community to which immigrants are moving is relevant, as this may influence their ability to successfully integrate into their new environment. Beauchesne (2008) and Sciarra and Gushue (2003) indicated that because of conflicting belief and value systems, some host community members may have a negative "mindset," or even rebel against newcomers and subject them to a variety of "dehumanizing forces," yet welcome those who show a willingness to change.

### **Research Questions**

In this dissertation, the following questions were examined in order to investigate immigrant elite professionals' experiences during the cross-cultural adjustment process:

1. What led you to decide to move to Canada (pre-move experiences)?
2. What kinds of experiences did you have upon moving to Canada?
3. What suggestions do you have for other immigrant elite professionals thinking of moving to Canada, or for counsellors working with such clients?

The immigrant elite professionals in this study were all born and raised in countries outside of North America. They have been living in Canada at least two years before the

beginning of the study (Table 1). Materials were collected through structured interviews.

### **Research Method**

In the present study, narrative inquiry was used as a method in order to examine these research questions, as it yields an optimal fit with the research philosophy and proposed questions.

According to Richardson (1995), researching “narratively” refers to a series of interesting moments of interactions in a non-threatening environment. In this study, narrative inquiry has been used because the objectives are to research, interpret, and understand the stories, transitional experiences, and challenges, as well as the coping and adjustment approaches of six male immigrant executives/CEOs/managers. This study focuses on the unique stories of each immigrant elite professional to then establish commonalities between participants’ stories and thereby generate core concepts and themes related to the cross-cultural adjustment process. My participants’ stories are representative of the way they interpret their experiences, and how they have constructed and maintained their identities (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Leggo, 2008; Polkinghorne, 1988).

Narrative analysis, as illustrated in the literature, is appropriate for understanding phenomena such as the cross-cultural adjustment experiences of immigrant elite professionals because the narrative method allows participants to account for their own voices and consequently demonstrate how their subjective experiences are embedded within larger social forces (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Yet the stories in narrative inquiry are not analyzed for content only, but also for understanding and meaning-making through these lived and told experiences. According to Polkinghorne (1988), the construction of stories told by people that has occurred over time is a dynamic process guiding us to a greater understanding of the way people lead their lives. This



research has interpreted how, why, and in what way these immigrant executives give meaning to the new social world around them, from their points of view.

### **Personal Interest**

According to Fulford (1999), “Most of us feel the need to describe how we came to be what we are. We want to make our stories known, and we want to believe those stories carry value” (p. 14). As most of the literature on immigrants’ adjustment trends is written by members of the majority culture, potential biases may be introduced or important points may be overlooked by researchers who have not encountered similar experiences. Hence, it may be argued that a minority-culture researcher who has experienced the cross-cultural adjustment process herself brings more insight to the issue.

I was born and raised in Tehran, Iran, in a close-knit, loving, affectionate family. I emigrated to the West in 1985 to enable my children to obtain a better education and lifestyle, yet I also sought a psychologically, spiritually, and politically safer and better life for myself.

As an immigrant researcher, I became interested in exploring and examining this phenomenon in the existing literature. Through my searching and researching, the lack of information on immigrant elite professionals’ adjustment processes became evident. I was drawn towards interpreting how the immigrant executives translated their knowledge and experiences into action. Since I worked as a volunteer settlement counsellor at the Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia, helping immigrant elite professionals from different countries outside of North America to overcome their cross-cultural adjustment difficulties, my motivation and interest was also related to the experiences and information I have had with respect to these immigrants’ transition and adjustment processes.

## **Summary**

The greater hope behind this study is to bridge some of the aforementioned gaps in the literature regarding immigrant populations, and contribute to the general literature on cross-cultural adjustment among immigrant elite professionals in personal and career contexts by identifying ways to make the immigration process more successful for these populations. In addition, this study provides researchers interested in the cross-cultural adjustment processes of immigrants with useful information on a particular group (executives/CEOs/managers), and can serve as a catalyst to help native-born counsellors approach their crucial support role from a new angle. These professionals may in this way give their immigrant clients visibility, a voice, and a sense of personal, familial, professional, and societal efficacy.

To pursue the research questions it is essential to focus on the immigrant executives' feelings, thoughts, experiences, and yearnings and to derive meaning from these. However, it is also crucial to explain individuals' expressed emotions. In that sense, this study seeks to open a new research domain within the field of cross-cultural adjustment among immigrant executives contributing unique and unprecedented material derived from the lived experiences of individuals making the transition. This inquiry involves myself (an immigrant researcher) and the participants (immigrant elite professionals) working as a team to demystify cross-cultural adjustment processes, as well as to carefully investigate their stories. This teamwork approach offers a useful framework which other researchers/counsellors might decide to use in interpreting and understanding the stories of immigrant elite professionals in a new country

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

In this chapter, a literature review is conducted and emphasis is given to defining the process of immigration, transition, and cross-cultural adjustment. The different psychological facets associated with this process are also discussed, ranging from the more traumatic experiences and feelings associated with immigration – e.g., feelings of loss and grief, feeling unimportant (feeling of personal insignificance), threats to identity and sense of self, culture shock – to feelings of integration, and a renewed sense of agency, motivation, and well-being, as immigrants begin to settle into their new environment. As this study focuses on immigrant elite professionals (executives/CEOs/managers), particular attention and reference is given to this group of immigrants' cross-cultural adjustment by examining the following questions:

1. What led you to decide to move to Canada (pre-move experiences)?
2. What kinds of experiences did you have upon moving to Canada?
3. What suggestions do you have for other immigrant elite professionals thinking of moving to Canada, or for counsellors working with similar clients?

The next section will examine different definitions of the term “transition.” Prior to examining the feelings associated with immigrating, it is important to consider different definitions of the term “transition.” However, I will not provide a historical overview of this concept.

### **The Transition Process: From There to Here with Hope**

The word “transition” has many denotations. For example, a standard definition, as pointed out by Gary and Herr (1998), is “a passage from one state, stage, subject, or place to another; change” (p. 192). Another definition, offered by Schlossberg (1981), refers to transition as “any event or non-event” that results in change to relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles.

She pointed out that there is no direct relationship between chronological age and a person's development, experience, or ability to cope with transition. In her view, individuals go through phases of life and cope with them in different ways, and the definition of transition is dependent on the experience of the individual in question. More specifically and recently, Schlossberg (1997) explained the transition process in terms of "moving in," "moving through," and "moving out." When a person is going through a "moving in" process he or she will need to become familiar with the rules, regulations, norms, and expectations of the new system. In a "moving through" process one will need to be patient and tolerate the challenges of the transition, and when in a "moving out" process one might experience feelings of sorrow and grief, even if one perceives the transition to be positive. Moreover, Hudson (1991) stated that transition in essence leads an individual to new discoveries about self, others, and the environment. Hudson also identified transition as an era of instability and of new discoveries related to our roles and our story lines: a time to re-orient oneself and understand that an ending is also a new start, part of a gradual psychological and physical process. Farley and Werkman (1990) categorized the structure of moving in four phases: "(1) leaving or separation, (2) the phase of transition, (3) entering, and (4) reengagement" (pp. 419-421). They pointed out that most of the physical and psychological health issues occur during phases (1) and (2), yet remain unrecognized. These researchers indicated that individuals who undertake transition may feel an unfamiliar emptiness at first and find the new beginning difficult. They noted that in order to combat emotional upheavals related to transition and "geographic change," to settle down into the new situation, and to display a healthy identity, individuals need reliable guidance from a resourceful mentor/helper. Further, Farley and Werkman posited that people's actual move to another country is not as important as the meaning they give to it. In a related vein, Marlin (1997) declared that "leaving to go far away

to another country can provide an illusory sense of both separation and independence” (p. 244), depending on the meaning the immigrants attached to it. In essence, the “magnitude of cultural differences (along a wide range of dimension)” has a great impact on the immigrant’s well-being, regardless of the real intention assigned by the individual to the move (Akhtar, 1999).

Bridges (1994) offered a theoretical approach applicable to transition. Based on his observation, people need to differentiate between their plans for transition and their plans for change. He believed change is situational, but transition, on the other hand, is a psychological process of reorienting and “letting go of what no longer fits or is adequate to the life stage you are in” (Bridges, 2004, p. 128). He pointed out:

Change occurs when something new starts or something old stops, and it takes place at a particular point in time. But transition cannot be localized in time that way, since it is a gradual psychological process through which individuals and groups reorient themselves so that they can function and find meaning in changed situations. Change often starts with a new beginning, but transition must start with an ending – with people letting go of old attitudes and behaviors. (p. 17)

Bridges (2001) indicated two different kinds of transition, 1) reactive transition and 2) developmental transition. In his opinion, “reactive” transition is triggered by a specific “external change,” such as the death of a loved one, or after one’s career-change. In this case, the transition is a reaction to the change. On the other hand, “developmental” transition is not triggered by any external changes, yet is “produced by a natural, inner unfolding of those aspects of ourselves that are built right into who we are and how we are made”, and “such awaking can occur at any point in life – whenever one comes to a gradual or a sudden realization that one’s career or marriage or life style is no longer satisfying” (p. 5). Bridges also

believed that “a developmental transition led to a change, and that the change led to a reactive transition” (p. 13). He postulated that the two different kinds of transitions are characterized by three overlapping processes and pointed out that they do not happen separately, but actually often go on simultaneously. These three-phases are:

1. An Ending, Losing, and Letting Go: During this phase, people “disengage” themselves from the old rules, roles, and old identities in the past. It is essential to understand that “an ending” phase can also be extremely traumatic because it winds up an important chapter of a person’s life. People experience sadness, fear, and resentment, which are very normal, fairly expected, and should not be labeled as negative or discouraging. This is the time people need help to deal with their losses and sad emotions, acknowledge the past, leave the old situation behind, and pay attention to what comes after the “letting go” phase (Bridges, 1992, 1994, 2004).
2. The Neutral Zone: Bridges (2003) stated that “the neutral zone is thus both a dangerous and an opportune place, and it is the very core of the transition process” (p. 8). He indicated that this is the time of “psychological realignments and repatterning”. For an individual in transition, this is a difficult phase because it is an “in-between” phase. An individual has lost what was meaningful in the past, but is not fully prepared for the new beginning. People often resist the “neutral zone” phase, since it can be chaotic, intolerable, and confusing. At the same time that they are experiencing the transition’s dilemma, they may feel in limbo and go through various psychological and emotional phases. The “in-between time and no-man’s land situation” often make people feel excluded,

unenthusiastic, and impatient. Because energy level and productivity are also compromised, people are more likely to try “to rush through or even by-pass” the neutral zone, or to be unenthusiastic when they find that doesn’t work. They even feel discouraged and conclude that there is something wrong with them. Since they have a hard time terminating their past, which gave them their identities and feelings of competence, and because of this painful “emotional wilderness” people may find themselves resisting this phase of transition. Bridges confirmed that by escaping the “neutral zone” phase prematurely, people lose new opportunities, their chance to be creative, as well as the likelihood of renewing their lives.

3. The New Beginning: This phase is a time of renewal when it is crucial for individuals to be aware of their resistance to trying anything new. As grueling as the transition process may be, it can result in opportunities for growth. With hard work people can revitalize their lives, feel at home, and become productive. They feel more energetic, celebrate their newly developed identities, and become committed to life’s changes. In the “new beginning” phase, the sense of purpose encourages individuals to accomplish their goals and make the change begin to work.

Bridges (2003) has indicated that transition is completed when these three phases have taken place. It is important to understand that these phases overlap each other in such a way that each starts before the other preceding one is totally completed.

In brief, a variety of definitions of transition have been provided by different researchers and authors. All indicate that the transition processes involve a period of change that includes a

time of emotional problems, including feelings of alienation, pain, and confusion, yet that also provides opportunities for growth and new beginnings. The following sections offer a description of the different experiences associated with the transition process for immigrants in general, and immigrant executives in particular.

### **Diversity of Feelings and Experiences Associated with the Transition Process**

Regarding stresses related to relocation, Steinglass and Gerrity (1990) pointed out that people leave their countries for many reasons. Depending on their circumstances, their feelings vary. Both forced and voluntary displacements have an impact on the physical and psychological health of immigrant executives. Unfortunately, avoiding the issues leads to withdrawal and can increase feelings of depression and helplessness. Nolen-Hoeksema and Larson (1999) proposed that individuals who are stressed out, resistant, confused, or experience feelings of hopelessness undergo more isolation, and find change more painful, than do their sanguine counterparts. According to Sue and Sue (1999), as a result of traditional beliefs and adjustment difficulties associated with relocation and moving to a new country, immigrants can become vulnerable to depression, anxiety, somatic problems, feelings of alienation, and exclusiveness. Some of the major problems of transition may come from immigrants' biases and ambivalence toward social customs and cultural values in the host culture. These non-adaptive attitudes and behaviours not only upset the immigrants themselves (Zapf, 1991), but also strain their relationships with family and with members of the host community (Haour-Knipe, 2001).

### **Loss and Grief**

According to Worden (1991), when people go through loss they show some specific reactions. He also believed that the intensity of these reactions depended on the intensity of the



loss. Bridges (2003) argued although “overreaction” against loss is normal, people need to accept the reality of the subjective loss and try to acknowledge it “sympathetically” and openly. He took his point further and said that it is helpful when people, 1) understand the underlying issues behind the loss, 2) expect and accept the signs of grieving, and 3) bring their feelings of loss out into the open and share their concerns with the “affected” people.

Waxler-Morrison, Anderson, and Richardson (1990) indicated that what may fluctuate during the time of loss is the individual’s progress through stages of transition, and various factors influencing his or her feelings. In all likelihood, those who are willing to share their loss with members of the host community will find talking openly comforting and helpful. In contrast, more reserved immigrants may find social support distressing because it may force them to unwillingly disclose and discuss painful feelings that they are trying to overcome or suppress with the help of others from their own same cultural background. Furthermore, people who are (1) shy, ashamed (Berry, Poortiga, Segall, & Dasen, 2002), and less resilient, or (2) are unable or unwilling to express their true feelings of loss, or (3) are attached strongly to their cultural beliefs and values thereby inadvertently isolate themselves amidst constant reminders of misfortune and loss (Harvey, 2000; Nolen-Hoeksema, & Larson, 1999).

Upon moving to a new country, each member of the family may process loss and grief differently. One member might need to openly express grief while others, in order to move forward, need to suppress their grief. Some immigrant families recover from loss without grieving and achieve new levels of communication as they work together – in a collectivist mode – to cope with the loss (Berry, Poortinga, & Pandey, 1997; Berry et al., 2002). Research by Byrne (2002) has indicated it is common for immigrants to think “counterfactual thoughts,” i.e., “if only,” when traumatic events occur, particularly if the event is one that they believe could

have been prevented if they had stayed in their home country. Therefore, on arriving in their host country, immigrants' experience of uncertainty about the future impairs their emotions and capabilities. Further, immigrants may become highly distressed, irrational, and socially dysfunctional. Not surprisingly, as mentioned previously, too much stress and trauma can also disrupt relationships. Even families who are prepared for the potentially chaotic events of transition and adjustment, and who approach them responsibly, can experience significant strain in their relationships (Sircar, 2000; Srinivasan & Ivey, 1999).

Immigrant elite professionals may experience feelings of loss and grief as they are suddenly reduced to being strangers in a new land. They have lost their customary work and lifestyles. They have become members of minority groups who speak English as a second language, regardless of their elite status (Chan, 2007; Mak, Westwood, Ishiyama, & Barker, 1999). They become aware of their social status as "visible minorities," and vulnerable to physical and emotional pain. Haour-Knipe (2001) indicated that immigrants who were not able to cope with their feelings of loss and grief felt useless, and became depressed, over-sensitive, and vulnerable toward unpredictable events. Further, in order to feel safe and secure, they tried to remain physically and emotionally detached from the new community and developed even stronger attachments to their significant others, old habits, and traditional values. I believe people's emotional attachments to their past familiar belongings, customs, and traditions, and their "affectional" bonds with the new community and the new environment depend on their readiness to change, and on their cognitive ability to appraise their life events and create opportunities to make contact and fit in.

Moreover, with more positive attitudes and willingness to adjust, immigrants' marginal status improves as they become more assimilated into the new culture. Particularly in countries

like Canada, with a multicultural background that welcomes all nations to live together in peace, a phrase such as “dominant culture” becomes a meaningless term.

### **Culture Shock and Issues around Acculturation**

The term “culture shock” was introduced in the 1950s by Dr. Kalervo Oberg, an anthropologist. Oberg (1954) stated that “culture shock is a malady which afflicts most people to some degree. We might almost call culture shock an occupational disease of many people who have been suddenly transplanted abroad” (para.1). Furthermore, he argued that culture shock is the unsettled sense brought on by transition: the physical and emotional reaction towards people’s experiences in an unfamiliar situation. Akhtar (1999) and Zapf (1991) asserted that no matter how prepared an immigrant is, he or she will encounter some degree of culture shock because there are some uncertain and unavoidable stresses related to new setting that are suddenly replaced with familiar cues from home. Collen, Bochner, and Furnham (2001) examined the psychological and social processes involved in culture shock. Their findings indicated that crossing cultures, making intercultural contact, learning new culture-specific skills and languages (Mak et al., 1999), coping with an unfamiliar environment, and changing identity can be a stimulating and rewarding learning adventure, yet it can also be a stressful and bewildering experience for immigrants. Regarding occupational adjustment in a new country, Mak (forthcoming, n.d.) has indicated unfamiliarity with the host culture and interpersonal communication in the new workplace to be major obstacles in migrants’ transfer of skills.

Overall, people prefer to live in familiar environments where norms and circumstances are known and expectations are more predictable. As mentioned above, even the most prepared and acculturated immigrant will encounter some degree of culture shock and may not be ready to take on all the values of the host culture. Hanassab (1991) pointed out that the younger an

emigrant at departure, and the longer one has been exposed to Western culture, the higher the score of acculturation. My anecdotal experience confirms that young immigrant elite professionals, irrespective of gender, hold fewer traditional values, and are therefore more inclined to acculturate and to be willing to redesign their lives and work. Cultural studies by Baptiste (1993) concluded that those who are less acculturated tend to be more traditional.

Discussing culture shock, Amundson (1998, 2003) has indicated that not being heard and acknowledged is distressing for immigrants, as it is for most of us. They may ask themselves whether they fit into the new society, and whether they can accept the new social rules. They wonder if they still matter to their family members and whether these members will acknowledge and accept their values, thoughts, and feelings. Immigrant parents may blame each other for their children's behavior, and couples may blame each other for the discomfort of everyday life, while children may blame parents for their own loss and also for new factors related to their adjustment challenges. Unmet expectations or a sense that they must live up to other people's expectations (Satir et al., 1991) decreases immigrants' well-being, enthusiasm and motivation, and increase their physical and psychological pain (Haour-Knipe, 2001; Sue & Sue, 1999).

Studies by Shankar and Srikanth (1998) described some of the East Indian social customs and cultural values that differ significantly from Western ways. They pointed out that traditional Indian culture does not allow for empowerment of women, and in fact, it is often difficult for them to find a voice even in a Western country. Young family members can be seduced by many aspects of a host culture, and this phenomenon poses further challenges to immigrant parents. During adolescence, youth carve out an identity, a separate self from parents, and define themselves in relation to the youth in the host community (Bhadha, 1999). Baptiste (1993) pointed out that many immigrant adolescents, especially those who were brought up in the host

communities; find their family's adherence to their culture of origin stifling. They do not understand or appreciate the culture with which their parents grew up and identify. These adolescents are culturally westernized due to interaction with their host community peers at school and elsewhere. Some immigrant teenagers feel that they belong neither to the host community nor to their parents' country of origin. Unable to identify with either culture, they feel isolated, confused, and rejected (Cryderman, 2008).

Amundson (2003) pointed out that "for many new immigrants, there is nothing more disheartening than viewing the shift in young people away from the collective to a more individualistic perspective" (p. 51). Unfortunately, however caring the intention of the parents, adolescents misunderstand and misinterpret their parents' concern. Young adults naturally seek greater intimacy with their peers and independence from parents. On the other hand, Hanassab (1991) pointed out that immigrant parents are often reluctant or unable to acknowledge their children as sexual beings. Tung (2000) reported that some immigrant parents disowned their children for marrying into another race. In some traditional cultures, parents fear their children will marry interracially and that they and their children will be shunned as a result. Therefore, youngsters have a particularly large gap to bridge between old and new cultural values, and many rebel against their parents (Cryderman, 2008; Leonard, 1999). This youthful resistance throws the parent-child relationship into conflict during the adjustment process (Baptiste, 1993). Kumar (1995) stressed in his studies that in Indian families, youths' emotional needs are acknowledged within the cultural framework.

More precisely, a tension-filled atmosphere at home, characterized by alienated spousal and parent-child relations, limits the process of adjustment, and makes it even more difficult for the immigrant executives to cope with challenges at work. Immigrant executives, in their roles as

both breadwinner and household head, need to strive to understand, accept, and adapt to a new country's norms, rules, values, and customs. If they can acclimatize themselves to their new surroundings, the shock will be eased and family relations will be less strained (Alarcón, 2000).

### **Threats to Identity and Sense of Self**

Moving to a new country can also threaten the immigrant's underlying identity and sense of self, which has been formed in part by a specific set of social norms and behaviours. Identity, as a source of conflict amid pressure to assimilate to a host culture, evokes fear of abandonment, and meaninglessness (Cochran, 1997; Vaziri, 1993). Akhtar (1999) pointed out that people seek to establish similar routines in their new country by safeguarding their traditional values, as well as their social customs and language, in order to decrease uncertainty and reassert control. In many cases, as a result of linguistic disability and lack of adaptation, self-doubt, anxiety, low self-esteem, frustration, and depression seize the immigrant (Westwood & Ishiyama, 1991). Therefore, immigrants feel incompetent, discriminated against, ineffective, and unable to interact with the host community (Bochner 1982, as cited in Ishiyama, 1994). Furthermore, due to language barriers (what Ishiyama and Westwood [1992] called "second language anxiety"), immigrants may become less expressive, and emotional turmoil and inner conflicts may put their physical and psychological health in jeopardy. Agar (1993) and Mak (forthcoming, n.d.) revealed that linguistic fluency plays a key role in successful adjustment to a new culture because it can increase job search confidence and self-confidence as well as a sense of "intercultural social self-efficacy," and decrease the stresses related to relocation.

Family traditions, social customs, as well as cultural, spiritual, and religious beliefs (Todd, 2008) have significant value to immigrants attempting to reorganize and reorient their lives in a new country (Wihak & Merali, 2005). Immigrants often prefer to live in homogeneous

communities, because the support they receive from their compatriots helps them stave off identity loss and questions of “Am I competent?” and “Can I adjust?” (Amundson, 2003; Hannasab, 1991; Hannasab & Tidwell, 1996; Tata & Leong, 1994).

Immigrants with culturally traditional families find themselves exposed to a contrasting host culture and home culture. These two sets of values and standards can generate many difficulties in these families (Akhtar, 1999). On the one hand, as is often the case, in order to avoid psychological and sociocultural strain, they isolate themselves from the host society and avoid contact with it (Bochner, 2003; Esses, Dovidio, & Dion, 2001). On the other hand, many immigrants believe that family integrity, with its nurturing and productive quality, can remain unchanged despite contact with the new culture. At the same time, shunning the new culture and remaining attached to the home culture can actually create more stress and conflict among family members (Baptiste, 1993; Leonard, 1999).

In my own experience, moving to Canada provided many opportunities for Iranian women and youngsters, yet was a shocking, harrowing experience for men. For them, adjusting to a host country was a difficult and overwhelming experience because they had led successful personal and professional lives in their home countries. Therefore, they not only had to struggle with new cultural imperatives that changed the roles played by their children and spouses (Sue & Sue, 1999); they also had to face challenges of transition and adjustment as well as new practices as elite professionals at work. In other words, as immigrant executives/CEOs/managers, husbands, and head of family they struggled with formidable feelings of frustration and anxiety and found it difficult to modify their traditional values to better fit in with their new settings. Their work and family relationships were not balanced, healthy, or successful, and their traditional thinking disempowered them in the new world. As a result of confusion and resistance to anything new

(Bridges, 2003), many felt isolated and depressed and finally lost their status, both at home and in the work place.

Immigrant elite professionals' coping abilities and methods of handling uncertainty suffer if they do not make a conscious effort to embrace changes and to decrease the trauma as much as possible. Seeking internal stability and advocating change, rather than being a victim or martyr, unleashes immigrants' creativity and helps them to accurately perceive the world around them (Haour-Knipe, 2001; Selmer, 1999).

From this review of the literature and based on my own observations, it is apparent that the impacts of displacement and cultural differences will be less shocking for immigrant elite professionals who are able to balance their strong traditional values with new social norms and make a fresh start, both at home and at work.

### **Stresses Related to Relocation and Adjustment**

Stress, or stressor, is any environmental, social, or internal demand which requires the individual to readjust his/her usual behaviour patterns. (Holmes & Rahe, 1967)

Moving to a new country and having to adjust to a new culture can be stressful for immigrants. Cut off from their traditional heritage, immigrants experience intense stress and pressure stemming from new roles and rules in their familial and workplace relationships. The mental, emotional, and physical health of new immigrants determines their quality of life in their host country. According to an Ipsos Reid survey (2007), "for immigrants, a strong feeling of being Canadian can take a while to develop – more than a generation in fact" (Scott, 2007, p. A3).

According to Bochner (2003), immigrants can, as a result of traditional beliefs and adjustment difficulties associated with relocation and moving to a new country, become vulnerable to depression, anxiety, and feelings of alienation. One can infer from the current study



as well as wider observations that immigrants' major stressors may come from their bias and ambivalence toward social customs and cultural values in the host culture. These non-adaptive attitudes and behaviours not only upset the immigrants themselves, but also put a strain on their relationships with their families, coworkers, and with members of the host community (Bochner, 2003; Haour-Knipe, 2001).

Danto (1990) asserted that moving and adjusting to a new country are characterized by prolonged and intense types of anxiety, stresses, and crises. Selmer (1999) indicated that although personal reactions to transition, change, and adjustment vary, one of the most stressful shifts is the forced or voluntary move of an executive to a new country. Haour-Knipe (2001) has also given impetus to the debate over stresses related to relocation and stated that:

Language was judged to be the major source of stress, or bother, followed by housing and shopping for everyday necessities. A second group of sources of unease in moving abroad concerned contacts with other people: difficulties getting to know the local population; being far away from family and close friends, and loneliness. (p. 51)

Myers (2004) argued that "stress is not just a stimulus or a response but it is the process by which we appraise and cope with environmental threats and challenges" (p. 532). He indicated that stressors could also threaten our resources, such as job security, health, values, and "self-image." In his view, the events that tend "to provoke stress responses" are those that we perceive as negative, painful, and uncomfortable. On the other hand, when perceived as opportunity, stressors can be positive and encouraging, create growth, and motivate us to surmount tremendous difficulties. Further, Myers pointed out that one person might regard a significant life change as a "welcome challenge," whereas someone else would appraise it as "risking failure." My poem (2002) "The Subtle Stress" encapsulates some of the possible anxieties and stresses during

transition and cross-cultural adjustment process.

### **The Subtle Stress**

I can feel the anxiety of the subtle stress

My emotions are down, and I feel the anxiety of the hidden stress

My eyes are worried, and I feel the anxiety of the hidden stress

My heart is beating fast, and I feel the anxiety of the hidden stress

My stomach is upset, and I feel the anxiety of the hidden stress

My body is in pain, and I feel the anxiety of the hidden stress

I want to share my emotions and leave the anxiety of the hidden stress behind

I want my worried eyes to see the light and leave the anxiety of the hidden stress behind

I want my heart to beat in harmony and leave the anxiety of the hidden stress behind

I want my body, my mind, and my soul to leave the anxiety of the hidden stress behind

I want to settle down and feel the joy of subtle peace.

### **Transition from In-group to Out-group: Collectivism versus Individualism**

As described, diverse feelings may be felt by immigrants coming from different cultures to the host country; some of these emotions may be experienced differently, depending on whether immigrants come from a collectivistic or individualistic culture (Amundson, 2003; Myers, 2004). Understanding and processing loss and grief issues, overcoming language barriers and exclusion, and adapting to a new environment are among the key requirements for successful integration and adjustment. Ishiyama (1989) stated that the larger the gap between cultures in terms of collectivism versus individualism, the more difficult the transition and adjustment for immigrants. In the following section the effects of coming from these contrasting types of cultures

will be discussed by making reference to how these dissimilar cultures contribute to differences in the transition process.

In his detailed review, Triandis (1995) perceived leaving a collectivistic culture and settling in an individualist one as a daunting process. He argued:

Perhaps the most important dimension of cultural difference in social behavior, across the diverse cultures of the world, is the relative emphasis on individualism vs. collectivism. In individualist culture, most people's social behavior is largely determined by personal goals, attitude, and values of collectivities (families, co-workers, fellow countrymen). In collectivist culture, most people's social behavior is largely determined by goals, attitudes, and values that are shared with some collectivity (group or person). (p. 60)

Although Canadian society, with its diverse population, is neither entirely individualistic nor entirely collectivistic, the contrast between Canada's relatively individualistic orientation and the more collectivistic basis of certain immigrants' home countries is likely to influence their adjustment process. Triandis (1995) pointed out that "culture is to society what memory is to the individual" (p. 5). According to Triandis, people intend to "cognitively convert" their given situation into their desired setting. Yet so many subjective elements in a culture, such as language, religion, and shared beliefs and attitudes, are difficult to change because they have been passed from generation to generation (Wihak & Merali, 2005). Differences in cultural values may often confound immigrants and subject them to shame (Amundson, 2003) and self-blame, or cause them to blame people of the host country. In this respect, Mak et al. (1994) stated that people from Asian cultures cannot easily identify with Westerners who put their individual needs and interests before those of the group to which they belong.

In a workplace where the managers and employees are from collectivistic cultures, the relationship between co-workers is different than that between co-workers who hail from other cultures. Being outspoken and assertive, pushing one's point of view, and disregarding others' expectations are some of the individualistic characteristics commonly seen among employees of Western organizations. In contrast, being modest, non-assertive, and concerned with others' needs and expectations are traits typical of a collectivistic cultural value system (Mak et al., 1994; Sankey, 2008).

An executive migrating from a collectivistic culture to an individualist one cannot continue to define him- or herself according to "in-groups." Although this term usually refers to people with a common fate, facing in close proximity a common external threat (Myers, 2004), it can also be defined on the basis of demographic attributes (Wihak & Merali, 2005), preferences for similar activities, membership in similar institutions, or shared personal experiences and social situations (Triandis, 1995). Immigrant elite professionals from a collectivist culture, as suggested by much of the literature, try to maintain the integrity of the "in-group," even if doing so becomes costly. This notion is especially noticeable in diverse workplaces, where interaction between groups with different cultural backgrounds requires extra social behavioral and communication skills. When immigrant executives are biased toward their traditional cultural values and ignore employees' cultural norms, this creates an unpleasant atmosphere among co-workers/employees from the individualistic culture, and results in power imbalances and discrimination (Mak et al., 1994; Sankey, 2008).

Since cultural context is an extension of one's personal being and the way one communicates with the outer world, differences between collectivistic and individualistic countries are also apparent in these cultures' communication patterns. For example, in "high-

context” communication, much of the interaction is non-verbal because of the shared context that characterizes certain types of societies. On the other hand, a “low-context” communication system is based on direct and straightforward exchange of thoughts and feelings with no hidden agenda (Zaharna, 2000).

Cultural patterns that once appeared constructive in a home country become constraining patterns beyond the tolerance of members of the host country. For the immigrant him- or herself the behavioral and communication shift from familiar collectivist interaction patterns to more individualistic patterns suitable to the host country has “profound effects on their internal mourning” and prolongs the duration of grief over identity loss and other negative feelings associated with the transition process (Akhtar, 1999).

To illustrate the difference between collectivistic and individualistic culture, I would like to describe my personal experience, since I was born and raised in Iran. The Iranian’s cultural perspective is an example of a collectivistic culture, where the strong links among family members and the importance of family ties are enormously valued. For an Iranian, reevaluating old habits, values, and beliefs in the adjustment process can be a totally joyous journey, but at the same time a painful and traumatic one. Losing highly supportive relatives and friends, and leaving familiar surroundings can become a devastating experience not only in relation to family but also in relation to culture at work.

### **Moving Along the Process of Adjustment, Coping, and Adaptation**

Moving to a new country and adjusting to a different culture is very challenging and can be a traumatic experience. The transition is especially grueling for families with a collectivistic cultural perspective, that is to say an “other-regarding” (group- or society-minded) cultural

inheritance, who emigrate to a Western country with an individualistic cultural perspective, one that is “self-interested” (Pedersen, 1997; Sue & Sue, 1999; Triandis & Suh, 2002).

Ward and Kennedy (1993a) indicated the importance of the sociocultural and psychological aspects of the adjustment process among managers in a new country. They stressed that in general, adjusting to work necessitates (1) being able to interact with the host community and (2) taking responsibility for personal well-being. Once they define and understand their situation, immigrants have the choice to manage their work and personal life accordingly. Besides the aforementioned positive attitude and flexibility, I believe patience, resilience, and belief in one’s goal, however remote it may seem, can have a significant positive impact on the adjustment process.

An optimistic attitude enables people to draw on their existing skills and abilities to rise to the challenges of cultural transition when they move to a new country. They are able to focus on bringing themselves into harmony internally with others, and with their environment. For these individuals, relocation per se does not appear to be consistently associated with negative health outcomes. In this sense, Farley and Werkman (1990) indicated that “where a move is effective, the burdens of old obligations, entanglements, and identities can be shed, and the person may then be able to develop more adaptive ways” (p. 419). People acknowledge and deal with their feelings of loss brought on by emigrating can successfully adapt to the change by learning the dominant language and approximate cultural values of their new home country (Nurs, 2006).

Noorani (2008) stated that “it’s sometimes difficult to carry on and keep believing when you’re faced with barrier after barrier” (p.3). I believe that during the transitional period, possibilities of self-interpretation and self-evaluation can be used as tools to enhance one’s unique decision-making process as well as one’s ability to embrace new values as a new phase of life

begins. Moreover, a flexible, positive, and resilient attitude toward new people and situations during the adaptation process increases the likelihood that the immigrant will assimilate smoothly.

### **Successful Movements through the Transition Process**

This research topic combines a number of issues related to transition and adjustment in a new country, to explore immigrant executives' sense of independence and autonomy in a new life, and how they cope with stresses related to career specifically and acculturation in general. In this section of the literature review, some behaviours associated with successful movements through the transition process will be outlined, including:

1. Developing a Sense of Agency
2. Creating Sources of Motivation
3. Coping Strategies

#### **Developing a Sense of Agency**

Previous studies have shown that some behaviours, such as a sense of agency, lead to forward movement in the process of transition. Extensive research by Amundson (1998), Collin (2000), Cochran (1997), and Young and Vallach (2000) have shown that a "sense of agency" challenges adults to redesign, redirect, or discard heroic personal dreams. A sense of agency enables immigrants to separate from the past, leave it behind, and move forward into a new beginning.

Perceiving oneself as an agent aids an individual in seeking opportunities in a host country. The plethora of opportunities that confronts new immigrants brings awareness of the freedom and responsibility to make choices. In turn, these immigrants can begin to envision the transition as a journey, and to find a healthy sense of self and its relation to their life and work. Guignon (1993) reflects on Heidegger's philosophy: "The authentic stance toward life makes us face up to the fact

that to the extent that we are building our own lives in all we do, we are ‘answerable’ for the choices we make, and the authentic person chooses to choose” (pp. 232–233).

### **Creating Sources of Motivation**

Ormrod (1999) reviewed the numerous advantages of intrinsic motivation, holding that the source of decision-making motivation lies within each person and arguing that these intrinsic motives explain and validate planned action. Because intrinsic motivation is often associated with intrinsic rewards, the natural tasks have the additional effect of bringing about desirable consequences. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation relates to the need to interact with others and be part of a social group (Waldron & Moore, 1991), and promotes successful learning, productive behaviours, and self-awareness.

Therefore, in moving to a new country, immigrant executives gain external satisfaction and rewards as well as experience the intrinsic feeling of “doing well” and “making a difference.”

These returns encourage them to seek out and master challenges. Moreover, in my view, immigrant executives can create a more fulfilling environment by trying to identify how much of their transitional dissatisfaction and difficulty in adjusting is external and how much of it is related to lack of intrinsic motives, specific goals, and “generating a situation for choice.”

Cochran (1997) indicated that “anticipated enjoyment or involvement” (in practice, the skill level and the task’s demands) and “anticipated meaning and worth” (i.e., learned experiences, strength, and demonstrating the sense of agency) are the main criteria for choosing ownership and control.

On the other hand, money and status constitute external rewards, and can be even more satisfying and motivating than internal rewards. From my point of view, high status in a new workplace can be an ego booster for the immigrant executive. It is an external reward that motivates and enables him to face challenging tasks and to make major adjustments. In other



words, by willingly learning about new cultural values, having highly developed interpersonal communication skills (Mak et al., 1994), and performing well in a new and diverse work setting, immigrant executives reap external rewards at the expense of the internal rewards that could lead to a more satisfying new lifestyle. Further, the above researchers found that to achieve and maximize internal rewards, immigrant executives need to preserve their original cultural identities while respecting the cultural identities of individuals in the host country.

### **Coping Strategies**

Much of the immigrant experience is exciting and rewarding. However, faced with different cultural values, customs, and attitudes, immigrants also experience personal crises, negative emotions, and serious challenges during their adjustment process. Sadness, anxiety, disappointment, shame, fear, and confusion are normal reactions to such life changes (Albarracin, Johnson & Zanna, 2005). In order to feel better adjusted, many immigrant elite professionals find themselves constantly modifying their thoughts, feelings and behaviours to fulfill the new demands and expectations of the culturally different people with whom they interact. In other words, in order to understand their new surroundings, immigrant executives cope with a variety of challenges in their everyday lives (Davidson & Fielden, 2003). However, ineffective coping mechanisms or responses to change and challenges often exacerbate their frustration and disappointment (Haour-Knipe, 2001; Roysircar, Sandhu, & Bibbins, 2003). To use a sailing metaphor, like courageous sailors who must struggle against overwhelming odds to navigate on the unfamiliar sea until they bring their boat to shore, immigrant executives are confronted with much turmoil in their unfamiliar lifestyles. But they need to find the courage to face the fear and navigate their lives toward desired outcomes, by adopting behaviours and attitudes that will help them brave their own stormy seas.

One of the most important issues for immigrant executives in the Western world is developing a coping mechanism for managing the adjustment process. According to Selmer (1999), language barriers, accompanied by difficult spousal, parental, and managerial roles, a foreign work environment, and a lack of coping strategies, delay the adjustment process and postpone immigrants' attaining a sense of well-being. Therefore, for many immigrants, problem-focused coping mechanisms (positively associated with sociocultural and psychological adjustment issues) can help them take productive action in order to bring about positive change and normalize stressful situations. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and Monat and Lazarus (1991) believed that by attending to psychological and physiological disturbances, an individual may fall back on symptom-focused strategies (negatively associated with sociocultural and psychological adjustment issues) to cope with and to decrease emotional distress. Furthermore, studies by Brett, Feldman, and Weingart (1990) showed that for people who face a change of job, including immigrants who want to work abroad, problem-focused rather than symptom-focused coping strategies can be more helpful.

Hopkins and Hopkins (1998) claimed that people's mind-set (worldview), problem-solving methods, and ability to shift their paradigm play a major role in how they cope with, adjust to, and experience the world. Some people appreciate the cultural differences and work effectively with others in the new environment. Others feel threatened or unable to cope in the same environment. From my point of view, well-adjusted executives who manage the sociocultural aspects of adjustment by using problem-focused coping mechanisms are better able to cope and more capable of providing effective new work and home environments. Exercising problem-solving, and shifting paradigms by defining the old and new roles and rules, help immigrant executives to successfully escape the boundaries of the past and embrace the future. Hicks and Peterson (1999)

commented on the value of being able to cope with problems and recognize one's own responsibility to take on life's challenges. The Greek philosopher, Epictetus (cited in Eimer & Torem, 2002, p. 7) famously stated, "Men are disturbed not by things but by the views which they take of them."

Additionally, regarding coping skills for managing transitions, Brammer and Abrego (1981, as cited in Zunker, 2002) suggested that "people often feel powerless to respond to change. Coping skills help adults in transition react more rationally when responding to changing conditions over the life span" (p. 557). These researchers have developed five sets of basic coping skills interventions to help adults in transitions:

1. Coping skills in perceiving and responding to transitions: This set of coping skills relates to people who consider challenging life situations as normal and believe that they have the ability to cope effectively. They are also capable of accurately defining and assessing problematic situations and are aware of their emotional upheavals as limitations in evaluating their transitions. Therefore, their "self-control" skill inhibits them from impulsive actions in tough situations because they are aware of the damaging consequences.
2. Coping skills for assessing, developing, and utilizing external support systems: These skills help people to identify their emotional and physical needs during times of transition and give them the ability to build reliable support networks, "groups, organizations, and locales" that can provide help.
3. Coping skills for assessing, developing, and utilizing internal support systems: The third set of skills helps people to interpret life transitions as personal growth and opportunities. People use their personal strength, capabilities, and "self-regard" as internal supports with

which to affirm their coping skills, and then identify and further adjust negative “self-descriptive” statements/assumptions into positive “self-descriptive” ones.

4. Coping skills for reducing emotional and physiological distress: By practicing “self-relaxation” responses and the ability to verbalize feelings related to his or her experiences of transition, the individual reduces distress.
5. Coping skills for planning and implementing change: The last set of coping skills involves people not only identifying and evaluating their existing situation and exercising positive planning according to new conditions, but also confirming their capabilities to implement their plans. Since planning and implementing the choice-making process might be overwhelming, self-relaxation methods can help to ease their stress, anxiety, and shyness.

Brammer and Abergo (1981, as cited in Zunker, 2002) stated that the above sets of coping skills help adults in transitional crisis – who often feel helpless and ineffective to respond to change – react more efficiently to their new situations. While styles of coping and people’s reactions to their changed sociocultural environments may vary in different cultures, one example of an individual applying these sets of coping skills is an immigrant executive who has terminated his job in his home country and moved to a new country. To make future plans and in order to avoid financial and cross-cultural adjustment issues, an immigrant executive needs to clearly perceive his new situation and use his “self-control” coping skills. Furthermore, making contact with his network circle or social communities for emotional support in unknown situations enables him to obtain appropriate advice on how to execute his new work and life. He can also employ his previous professional expertise, his inner strengths, and his leadership skills to assess the current situation and make constructive plans for the future. More specifically, immigrant elite professionals’ coping skills can act as buffers against an ineffective work/life climate or

strengthen the impact of an effective climate. In sum, these sets of coping skills are helpful in enabling immigrant executives to enjoy rich and meaningful personal and professional lives in a new country. Mak (2001) referred to these groups of immigrant elite professionals as “Warriors, and Contented Settlers” who would willingly meet challenges so as to regain their elite status.

### **Transition through the Eyes of Immigrant Executives**

If man is to survive, he will have learned to take a delight in the essential differences between men and between cultures. He will learn that differences in ideas and attitudes are a delight, part of life's existing variety, not something to fear. (Roddenberry, 1991)

The purpose of this section is to take a critical look at the literature on the immigrant executive's transition and adjustment process, for those who cross borders and choose a new country as their permanent residence. Some may intend to return to their countries of origin; others are unable to do so. Some may have already dwelled in different countries before they and their families reach their final destination. Some can enter the work place right away, others after having to re-qualify. Establishing a home and a career and seeking permanent residency in a new country, they inevitably encounter unaccustomed situations, face crises, and interact with culturally different people. This is especially the case in a country like Canada, which welcomes people from different cultures.

Research by Ward and Kennedy (1990) and Triandis and Suh (2002) enumerated many factors that affect the psychological and physiological well-being of immigrant executives. Some of these factors stem from general cultural differences, and adjustment and coping issues such as language barriers, acculturation, cultural identity, collectivism, social customs, and lack of sociocultural competency (Mak et al., 1994; Mak et al., 1999; Vaziri, 1993; Westwood & Ishiyama, 1991). Other influences are more personal, such as job shift (Zunker, 1998), gender

issues (Sue & Sue, 1999), family rules, age, stress level, attitude towards the host community, and paradigm shift (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2002).

Santiago (2004) in her article “An overview of Nancy K. Schlosberg’s Transition Theory” has illustrated Sargent and Schlosberg’s (1988) concept of self, situation, support, and strategies as four crucial coping factors that determine an adult’s readiness for change and their effectiveness in coping with transition:

1. Self: Relates to personal response to change. Coming from a strong career background as an executive in one’s country of origin to work in the same capacity in a host country requires extra courage and problem-solving abilities. Immigrant executives may need to develop their managerial expertise and leadership skills to fit the host countries’ organizational standards.
2. Situation: Relates to changes in roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions. Role reversal on the home front, changing patterns of interaction with family members, and a new workplace culture all pose challenges. Rules and roles adhered to by the immigrant executive in the home culture may not benefit him or her in the host culture. As a result, the individual needs to develop interpersonal communicational skills (Mak et al., 1994; Mak et al., 1999), as well as new personal leadership and managerial skills (Anna, Chesley, & Davis, 2001; Shepard, 1997).
3. Support: Sargent and Schlosberg (1988) described a range of existing sources that were disrupted by transition. Factors such as family mobility, change, and related stresses put a strain on familial support networks. Children and spouses may want to break the old habits of being submissive or in control, respectively. In any case, women in the home see Westerners as role models, and take up the challenges of

seeking their identities. No longer finding their home culture identities satisfying, they move out of their former roles and become individuals who voices needs and desires previously unexpressed. In the workplace, immigrant executives unable to communicate effectively (Mak et al., 1994; Mak et al., 1999) or to understand and manage diverse groups of employees find their on-the-job effectiveness limited. Lacking a supportive audience both at home and at work, such an individual consequently feels disoriented, confused, and buffeted about by unsupportive home and work environments (Hicks & Peterson, 1999; Katz & Miller, 1996).

4. Strategies: These include action taken to change the situation (at home or at work); conscious change in attitude so as to ease adjustment; and lack of flexibility in immigrant executives who maintain the traditional linear structures both at home and in the workplace, causing stagnation with the result that relationships with family and employees continue to deteriorate. The belief that one is not capable of adjusting or making changes predetermines a negative attitude toward self, others, and the environment (Anna, Chesley, & Davis, 2001; Shepard, 1997).

In my view, and as detailed in Westwood, Mak, Barker, and Ishiyama (2000), by adopting a positive, flexible attitude toward change and by developing social competencies and constructive coping skills immigrant elite professionals can conquer self-doubt and reorient his or her life in a more effective direction.

### **Managing Cross-Cultural Adjustment: Use of Counselling and Support Services**

Throughout the period of cultural adaptation, in order to help themselves get through this period, immigrant may choose to use counselling and support services. Yet it is often assumed that one of the most important challenges for immigrants is to seek emotional help outside their

families (Zunker, 2002). The purpose of this section is to identify immigrant executives' help-seeking attitudes toward managing their cross-cultural adjustments, as well as to illustrate the importance of infusing multiculturally sensitive counselling and support services. However, it is important to point out that I (the researcher) have tried to get as close as possible to the relevant data based on immigrant executives, and thus most of the accounts I have gathered from published sources contain a good deal of retrospective generalization inherent in immigrants, regardless of their work settings and/or their professional backgrounds; therefore not much evidence was found to specifically support patterns of immigrant executives' help-seeking attitudes.

Sue and Sue (1999) indicated that cultural orientation plays a major role in self-disclosure among immigrants. From a collectivistic cultural perspective, sharing one's personal concerns with a mental health professional might be judged as weakness. Therefore, a majority of immigrants from a collectivistic culture, among them Iranian and Arab Americans (Savaya, 1997; Timimi, 1995), are reluctant to address private issues with a therapist from the host country. Correlation studies among such populations as Asian Americans (Sue, 1994; Tata & Leong, 1994; Zunker, 2002), Hispanic Americans (Fouad, 1995), and American Indians (Deane & Chamberlain, 1994) have suggested that factors related to traditional heritage, language, religion, gender, shame, and previous experiences affect psychological help-seeking attitudes among immigrants. Hong Kong immigrant professionals in Australia (Mak, 2001) have a number suggestions regarding seeking assistance in a new country. These immigrants expressed their willingness to participate in intercultural communication courses for job searching and indicated the need for career guidance and counselling programmes for highly professional immigrants.

Sue (1994) identified under-utilization of mental health services, typical of immigrant communities, to be a major influence on the process of transition, adjustment, and adaptation.



Immigrants must resolve a number of concerns, including their relationship with the new society's social norms, the continuance of their cultural values, the resultant stress, and their emotional and physical well-being upon resettlement in North America (Roysircar, 2003). Therefore, as more culturally different individuals are admitted to Canada and gain access to the work force, or encounter new lifestyles, additional competent counsellors and multiculturally sensitive support services will need to help them (Stewart, 2003). Sue and Sue (1999) and Zunker (2002) commented on the North American counsellors who work with immigrants from collectivistic cultures, and who find these immigrants shy, passive, unexpressive, and repressed. I would like to take further the idea of immigrants' help-seeking attitudes (be it help from mental health professionals or from individuals in a host community), and point out that although "shyness," "passivity," and "repression" are labels that reflect the presumptions of an individualistic cultural perspective, there are some elements of truth about these generalized labels that could make counselling immigrants challenging. Building on work by Westwood et al. (2000), counsellors are being advised to become culturally competent and perceive other people's views and beliefs as equally as valid as their own. Therefore, the universal standard for a mentally healthy immigrant is articulated by "culturally encapsulated" helpers from the host communities, who embody dominant social values, have their own cultural biases, and may be ignorant of minorities' differing cultural values. There is no doubt that a multicultural awareness on the part of counsellors and support services is crucial to assist immigrants with managing their cross-cultural adjustment. Akhtar (1999) submitted that helping professionals and support services must be open and responsive to culturally different populations and to their life and work values, and exercise "creative uncertainty" (Leong, 1993) when not certain about their clients' cultural backgrounds. Kealy and Protheroe (1996) defined cross-cultural training as any planned

intervention designed to increase the knowledge and skills of immigrants. Not surprisingly, counsellors and mental health professionals, due to a lack of training in multicultural counselling, may offer facilitation that for immigrants is often inadequate and inappropriate. Consequently, not only are the counselling approaches offered by these counsellors unproductive, but their therapeutic process could often be damaging. Mak et al. (1999), Mak (forthcoming, n. d), and Westwood et al. (2000) posited lack of facilitating/coaching and intercultural practice opportunities as two of the major psychological barriers to developing social competence – relevant cultural information, and the requisite behavioural skills – in a different culture. They proposed “Group Procedures for Teaching a Sociocultural Competency” training model for developing such competencies to motivate migrants and sojourners to do their best in their new social and work worlds.

Precisely because a counsellor’s work and mental health support services entails helping people connect with their passions, core values, and highest motivation, I also questioned whether counsellors and mental health professionals without multicultural knowledge and competence, no matter how nurturing, can make a difference in the life of an immigrant elite professional. As stated earlier, only a counsellor well-versed in effective multicultural awareness will be able to positively influence immigrants’ in managing their adjustment process (Mak, forthcoming, n. d.; Westwood et al., 2000). This positive effect, paving the way for the immigrant executives’ success at work and in the personal realm, constitutes true cross-cultural counselling. Lastly, stemming from Stewart’s (2003) research “counsellors need to assess recent immigrants’ world views to determine the extent to which their beliefs, values, and behaviours are similar to and suitable for Canadian work sites” (par. 9).

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that research affords the opportunity to gain a deeper, more inclusive understanding of two concepts: the investigation of immigrant executives' help-seeking attitudes toward managing their cross-cultural adjustment, as well as multicultural awareness on the part of helping professionals (Gomez, 2007).

### **Summary**

This survey was motivated by my wish to position this research study in the current literature. In light of this, the lack of literature on this topic was striking. Nonetheless, the reviewed literature revealed useful information about the experiences of immigrant executives in life and in work, as well as the process and outcome of adjustment, and emphasized that sociocultural and psychological factors played key roles in their adjustment to new cultural values as opposed to those of their culture of origin (Akhtar, 1999; Haour-Knipe, 2001).

With an accurate inventory of the problems immigrant executives encounter in the course of adjustment, it is possible for me to explore what hinder their ability to undergo change, as well as to understand which coping strategies help them to successfully overcome a variety of challenges associated with relocation to a new country. Another key implication of this research is that immigrant executives' cross-cultural adjustment challenges can be more easily identified and addressed in the context of peoples' relationships to their larger social systems (Triandis & Suh, 2002). It is likely that such experiences would substantially affect an immigrant executive's patterned interactions and introduce a variety of non-routine changes.

This literature review completes the initial phase of my research and has resulted in valuable insights into factors influencing cross-cultural adjustment among immigrant elite professionals. However, it is far from definitive. Further research needs to be conducted to better understand cross-cultural adjustment among such individuals.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **Narrative as a Method of Inquiry for Researching Cross-Cultural Adjustment among Immigrant Executives: Integrating Strategies and Narrative Concepts**

As illustrated in the literature review in Chapter 2, my research design takes a qualitative approach, using narrative inquiry in researching select immigrant executives to interpret and understand their life stories, transitional experiences, and adjustment issues, in the context of their families, professions, culture, and host society. Specifically, the purpose of my study is to develop an account of the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive experiences of immigrant executives during their adjustment to a new country. In doing so, I have used the narrative method, which incorporates their stories. This narrative inquiry not only drew upon stories told by my participants, but also included working with them to understand their experiences.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stated that “as researchers, we come to each new inquiry field living our stories. Our participants also enter the inquiry field in the midst of living their stories. Their lives do not begin the day we arrive nor do they end as we leave. Their lives continue” (p. 63). Furthermore, they indicated that our participants’ lives are not static and that where they live and work, their communities, and “their landscape in a broader sense” are all in play when we researchers arrive. Bechar (2000) indicated that “the perspective that the narrator brings, coupled with the researcher’s perspective, supports the view that knowledge stems from and grows from multiple perspectives rather than in a linear fashion” (p. 55). Yet as Riessman (1993) stated, we need to acknowledge that researchers’ specific cultural and historical contexts limit the extent to which their research can describe the “truth.” As I entered each interview, these concepts guided my interviewing approach as from a narrative standpoint, “story” telling makes life’s events and experiences meaningful and creates a framework for understanding our past,

seeing our present, and foreseeing our future.

### **Research Questions**

At the heart of this study are findings from six immigrant executives related to their cross-cultural adjustment experiences. The core of the study focuses on their coping strategies, capabilities, and leadership abilities when adjusting to their new lives and work in their new country. In order to form a cohesive conclusion, three specific research questions are chosen:

1. What led you to decide to come to Canada (pre-move experiences)?
2. What were your experiences upon moving to Canada?
3. What suggestions do you have for those immigrant executives thinking of moving to Canada, or for counsellors working with such clients?

These questions are aimed at encouraging long stretches of dialogue from my participants.

### **Participant Criteria and the Interview Process**

To reveal the landscape of immigrant executives' experiences, a contextual narrative method was used. Specifically, structured interviews (consisting of the three research questions) were conducted in English with six male immigrant executives/CEOs/managers (I excluded female immigrant executives/CEOs/managers, since this research focused on the male executive experiences because for the most part this is the current reality) in order to gain access to the culture of each participant and to their cross-cultural adjustment process. As a way of ensuring consistency in the interview, similar questions were asked of each interviewee. In the first part of the interview, I explained to participants the procedure of the interview process. During the interview, I took the role of facilitator to put the interviewee at ease so that he might disclose personal information relevant to the research questions asked, such as the development of his

personal and professional identities, his socialization experiences, and the transformations he experienced after his move.

The unit of analysis was the adjustment process in Canada (for example, the events and patterns around cross-cultural adjustment and settling down) in which the targeted six male immigrant executives/CEOs/managers were the central participants. They had been born and raised in countries outside North America, and they spoke English within their work contexts. They had resided in Canada for at least two years before beginning the study. Table 1 provides information about participants, including pseudonym and pseudo-background. To ensure their privacy, I altered participants' name. Data obtained from these interviews were shared only with the principal investigator, Dr. Norman Amundson (Appendix A). Although some informal conversations proffered rich data and led me to explore the deeper contexts of the participants' life and work, one consideration providing a possible bias is that I was a female researcher/counsellor working with male elite professionals.

Table 1

## Participants' Backgrounds

Name, Cultural Background	Years in Canada	Profession	Education	Marital Status
Mr. Samuel, Middle East	Over 20 years	<u>Home country:</u> Executive vice president of a trading company  <u>Host country:</u> CEO of a Canadian trading company	Graduate level	Married, three adult children
Mr. Alex, Middle East	Over 20 years	<u>Home country:</u> CEO of a trading company  <u>Host country:</u> CEO of a marketing company, and a senior position in a Canadian corporation	Masters	Married, two adult children
Mr. Mandi, Latin America	Over 3 years	<u>Home country:</u> CEO of two different companies  <u>Host country:</u> General manager of a Canadian construction and consulting company	Masters	Divorced, small children outside Canada
Mr. Rahim, Middle East	Over 15 years	<u>Home country:</u> CEO of an Import/export company  <u>Host country</u> President of two consulting organizations	Masters	Married, three teen-aged children

Name, Cultural Background	Years in Canada	Profession	Education	Marital Status
Mr. Parham, Southeast Asia	Over 40 years	<u>Home country:</u> Engineering/top manager  <u>Host country:</u> President of a consulting organization	Masters	Married, two adult children
Mr. Rafael, Central America	Over 15 years	<u>Home country:</u> CEO of a building company  <u>Host country:</u> CEO of a building company	Masters	Married, four adult children

### Process of Contacting and Finding Participants

Gaining access to six male immigrant elite professionals through organizations, societies, and associations posed a significant problem. During that time, I came to understand that the process of convincing suitable participants to do the interview was very complex. Ideally, my thought was to find six participants from six different cultures/countries. Yet following the interview process, I realized that even if participants came from the same cultural background, or the same country, individuals adjusted in different ways to residing in a new country. Hence, some of my participants came from similar cultures.

All participants were first contacted via a letter of initial contact (Appendix B) to introduce and explain the research purpose and propose an interview schedule. During the first interview, I invited participants to read and sign the consent form (Appendix C) regarding their rights and treatment of confidentiality. As well, I explained the potential benefits and risks of



participating in the research, the ability to review and give feedback, and the right to withdraw. These interviews constituted the primary sources of data collection. They took place in formal and semi-formal settings: three out of six interviews took place in my private counselling office, and three in the participants' residences. Each interview lasted from two to two-and-a-half hours. As part of my commitment to each participant, I completed and provided them with transcriptions of their audiotapes. The interviews were followed up with thank-you letters and a copy of the participant's signed consent forms. Further, I scheduled a follow-up session to seek clarification or additional information about salient aspects of their life and work adjustment processes that may have emerged from their interviews. Three participants took that opportunity to add, delete, and/or change materials in their transcripts. Two participants were satisfied with the results, and one participant did not respond to the suggestion of a follow-up session.

For me as a researcher, it was a great privilege and honour to interview the participants, who risked sharing their cross-cultural adjustments with me. While listening to the interview tapes, I realized that my participants' invaluable input regarding their adjustment experiences has not only provided me with immense learning for the purposes of my research but has enhanced my personal life as well.

### **Use of the Narrative Approach in My Role as Researcher and Facilitator**

The use of the narrative inquiry method (Leggo, 1994, 1995, 2003, 2008; Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 1993) enabled me to identify the cross-cultural adjustment domains and facts that were central to the cross-cultural adjustment ecology of the immigrant professionals (Ishiyama & Westwood, 1992; Lee & Westwood, 1996; Mak, 1991; Westwood & Ishiyama, 1991). According to D. Currie (1998) and M. Currie (1998), taking a narrative stance shows interest in the stories that shape people's lives. Riessman (1993) stated that researchers do not

have direct access to participants' experiences. Therefore, in my research, storytelling (the stories participants told about themselves) via oral communication enabled me to interpret and determine the impact of change on participants' identities and their internal issues. With each story told, "the dynamic and energy of language fills the gap and fills the world, and the world opens up to endless possibilities to listen, to understand, and to interpret" (Leggo, 2003, in-class lecture).

According to Riessman (1993), a narrative is constructed in a process of interaction between the teller and the listener. Silverman (1993) stated that in sharing an experience, the narrator also wants to create a self by which he or she wishes to be represented to the listener in the particular moment and setting. Therefore, to develop a narrative, a researcher needs to act as an encourager and curious facilitator by asking questions, listening, and building a conversation. Moreover, researching "narratively" invokes a series of interesting moments of interaction in a non-threatening environment (Richardson, 1995). Narrative inquiry is both "phenomenon and method;" it provides a structure for the narrative experience which enables us to understand the meaning and the repercussions of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The narrative method provides opportunities for the participants to account for their own situations from their own perspectives.

Polkinghorne (1988) stated that "cultural traditions offer a store of plot lines which can be used to configure event into stories" (p. 20). The stories the participants told about themselves characterized their lives. Therefore, as a researcher I paid particular attention to the words and phrasing choices in which their stories were told, and how their lives unfolded in those stories. This research inquiry was a particular sort of conversation and relationship-building, one that invited and enabled participants to take up various positions in relation to themselves, others, and the new culture. As Hollis (1993) stated, "real relationship, then, springs from a conscious desire

to share the journey with another, to grow nearer the mystery of life through the bridges of conversation” (p. 49).

### **Story Construction**

As Eron and Lund (1996) postulated, the stories that produce our lives are those available to us in the varied cultural worlds that we inhabit: in the ideas, beliefs, social structures, and norms that people live by. Fulford (1999) pointed out that

[a] master narrative always speaks with the confidence of unalterable and unassailable truth and yet paradoxically, it is always in the process of being altered. A master narrative that we find convincing and persuasive differs from other stories in an important way: it swallows us. It is not a play we can see performed, or a painting we can view, or a city we can visit. A master narrative is a dwelling place. We are intended to live in it. (p. 32)

Leggo (2008) has described how story, interpretation, and discourse are three principle dynamics involved in narrative inquiry. He explained that “story is what happened. Therefore, story can be researched by asking the journalist’s questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? Then, interpretation addresses the basic question of So What? In other words, what is the significance of the story? Finally, discourse is all about how we tell the story” (p. 1).

Polkinghorne (1988) observed:

Narrative recognizes the meaningfulness of individual experiences by noting how they function as parts in a whole. Its particular subject matter is human actions and events that affect human being, which it configures into wholes according to the roles these actions and events play in bringing about a conclusion. Because narrative is particularly sensitive to the temporal dimension of human existence, it pays special attention to the sequence in which actions and event occur. (p. 36)

Moreover, Polkinghorne (1988) proposed that “culturally different people experience each other’s stories with casual assumptions about human actions that display similar understanding” (p. 110). Examples of creative writing by the author show how helpful it is to construe participants’ adjustment processes as heroic journeys (McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006). It becomes evident that for both parties’ optimum enlightenment, the narrator/participant must take on the role of teacher, and the researcher that of student (Coles, 1989). A willingness to hear out the participant in this way is the key to the success of the narrative method.

Consistent with Riessman’s views (1993), narrative may be followed by questions such as those that I asked in this study: “What led you to move to Canada (pre-move experiences)? Describe this experience. What has been your experience since coming here? Do you have any suggestion for others (immigrant elite professionals) thinking of moving, or for counsellors working with immigrants?”

### **Metaphor: A Creative Instrument for Analysis and Interpretation**

The metaphor is probably the most fertile power possessed by man. (Gasset, 1948)

The word metaphor comes from the Greek word metapherein. In Greek, meta means “to cross,” and phor “to carry or bear.” Thus, “metaphor” means “to transfer or carry over” (Crisp, Heywood, & Steen, 2002). Metaphor is an imaginative way of describing or referring to one thing in relation to something else, to highlight a particular quality possessed by both. Weinrauch (2005) stated that “metaphors involve the transfer of images or ideas from one domain of reality to another” (p. 109). Combs and Freedman (1990) explained metaphors as elements building connections between flexibility and creativity. They indicated that

any single metaphor is a particular version of a particular part of the world. When people have only one metaphor for a situation, their creativity is limited. The more metaphors

they have to choose from for a given situation, the more choice and flexibility they have how to handle it. Finding multiple metaphors expands the realm of creativity. (p. 32)

Taking this point of view further, I believe if a participant can come up with a metaphor for his/her situation, this experience often engenders further metaphors that clarify the experience even more. Weinrauch (2005) suggests that “metaphors” foster insight and awareness, and can be catalysts for thinking about and creating new life and work opportunities. On the other hand, a study by Lakoff (1993) indicates that people’s experiences and the ways in which they organize them are more complex than can be represented by cognitive categories. In other words, in research, metaphor allows the researchers to experience their participants’ subjective worlds. Metaphor highlights participants’ sense of meaning, helps them understand issues related to their experiences, and can be a linguistic tool to facilitate change.

In this study, I used narrative as a device to collaborate in the discovery and creation of the “I.” Using the metaphor of the (i) and the “I” was key to constructing my research participants’ personal transformations. I like to draw on metaphors in my academic writing because they allow me to convey ideas with subtlety (Lakoff, 1993). I also believe that metaphors provide instructional experiences as possible teaching tools to understand participants’ cross-cultural adjustment processes.

Furthermore, Sfard (1998) noted that when metaphors are used, participants do not show much resistance, and when as a result they reach a realization, they see it as having come through their effort rather than having been directed by the researcher. Satir (1991, as cited in Satir et al., 1991) regarded metaphors as powerful tools for promoting change. She pointed out,

there are so many things that have to do with meanings in terms of human beings, and often language is a limiting factor. So when I want to get some special meaning across, I

will bring in a metaphor. By using a metaphor, I can make space between whatever is and what I am trying to get across. In that way, a metaphor is an adjunct therapist. (p. 259)

Satir et al. (1991) used metaphors in countries where English is not the first language. She observed that English has relatively limited words to elaborate feelings; therefore, “metaphors make it possible to get a new sound, a new sight, a new touch, a new feel, and new thought about something” (p. 270), and thereby bring about change. In her experience, metaphors helped her find ways to convey meaning. She believed “metaphors from the biological world of nature are the most effective ways of carrying meaning” (p. 260), that “they are ways of introducing phenomenological thinking” (p. 263).

In my view – and this is shared by other researchers (Burns, 2001; Inkson & Amundson, 2002) – if we as researchers can draw on metaphors, either of our own creation or those used by culturally different participants, we will access new ways of envisioning ourselves and our participants, and new approaches to issues we face. Amundson (2003), reflecting on metaphor, describes it as an influential tool for touching the deepest levels of experience, cognition, and feeling, which draw from intuition and creativity to nurture the soul.

As a researcher, I must be aware that a metaphor carries “serious intent” and purposeful meanings (Inkson & Amundson, 2002). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) pointed out that in the creation of narrative form, some narrative inquirers hold firmly to selective metaphors. Their doing so introduces an element of artificiality into the communication process; as a result, meaning is compromised.

### **The Creation of “I” from (i): A Qualitative Research Approach Using Narrative Inquiry**

The psychological and physical health of immigrant executives determines their quality of life in their host country, so the more research can elucidate these factors the more effectively

their cross-cultural adjustment will be understood (Johnson, 2007). In this study, the transformation of the hesitant, overwhelmed, pre-transitional (i) into the empowered, post-transitional “I” illustrates how narrative inquiry can be applied to help researchers understand and interpret immigrants’ adjustment processes in a new country.

My research participants’ explorations start with small (i), indicating a new immigrant and a new soul in a new soil. The story of (i)’s struggles to fit into a new, culturally different community is, in effect, the story of (i)’s transformation into the “I,” the successfully integrated immigrant/husband/father/executive/manager. My strategy in this search uses a writing of life stories (Maguire, 1998), enriched by fluidity and determination that positions the (i) to enact and explore the interconnectedness of “we” in a new country. Leggo (2003, in-class lecture) pointed out that “there is a world behind I.”

The journey begins with (i). (i) learned to leave, to explore, to survive, to live, to love, to heal, to expand, to create a new vision, to change, and to fulfill all the possible what(s). His heroic journey revolves around the questions: “What if,” “What matter,” and “So what?” (Fels & Meyer, 1997, p. 77). These questions are central to his explorations to reach and get settled in the Promised Land (new country). Is the Promised Land as promising as he dreamed? What if it is not? What matters if it is not? So what if it is not?

The stories I include to illustrate my participants’ experiences are uplifting, but this study makes exceptional emotional demands on the reader, as windows open onto an unexpected but profound underlying melancholy, involving struggles, suffering, survival, and hope. Hence, in the journey of searching and re/searching “narratively,” the narrator – he who has changed from (i) to the “I” – seeks “empathic understanding” (Barone & Eisner, 1997; Maguire, 1998), in his personal words and his perceived worlds, “as a way of knowing and be/com/ing” (Leggo, 1995, p. 5).

This section explores the heroic journey and the creation of the “I” from (i) in a new land. The “I” represents bold, outspoken immigrant elite professionals who, although torn between new family rules, work rules, and roles, prevail. The “I” is he who strives to fulfill dreams, and who disregards the boundaries and dares to reach out to achieve his goals.

In this heroic journey, the present moved to the past; the promised future shifted to become a fulfilling present; and the past remained in the background to decorate the foreground. The background reminded the “I” of his hard work and endeavours, his capabilities, aptitudes, and bravery. Contrary to Holmes’s claim that “what seems so important today will dissolve into yesterday and be forgotten” (1984, p. 18), Bridges (2001) stated that “the future also contains the past, for in the past there were foreshadowing of what would be, and the future will carry them as echoes” (p. 212). In the course of his search for meaning and his process of becoming (Arvey, 2001; Yalom, 1998), his heuristic transformations and “self-transcendence” always constituted an unaccomplished mission. The struggle to survive his transition and cross-cultural adjustment difficulties profoundly affected his mind, body, and soul.

Who “I” is today and who (i) was in the past will not be forgotten. Memories of his past homes and the efforts to establish his present home melded to provide him with a feeling of rootedness. Having achieved this sense of home, (i) could more readily adapt to, and even embrace, change and transition. For (i), each day of adjusting and settling down in a new country confronted him with moments that demanded he fight for survival. Each barrier that held (i) back, and at first seemed impossible to surmount, became a vehicle of possibilities to move him forward. In fact, it was precisely this shift, from a paradigm of barriers to one of possibilities, which enabled (i) to cope with a diverse country, workforce, and home front.



### **A Tale of Two Countries: The Cross-Cultural Adjustment Process of (i)**

The participant's narrative is also about the dislocation and oppression of (i), who has evolved into the "I" through seemingly endless periods of isolation as well as physical and emotional pain in two vastly different countries. In his new life in the new country, having to learn a new language played a major role in his adjustment process. Leggo (in-class lecture, 2003) pointed out that "we use language to fill the gap." The new language became a new instrument to communicate his sense of knowing "what was" (already has been experienced), his sense of unknowing "what is" in the process of experiencing, and his entering the passage of "what might be" (might yet be possible to experience). The new language became his new tongue to speak with, new eyes to see with, and new ears to hear with – in short, a new way of understanding himself, others, and the new country's norms. He allowed himself to visualize a "field of possibilities" in a land of opportunities.

(i) never lost hope or ceased explorations, because (i) believed that to become meant to begin and to begin meant to become. Each participant's adjustment story is about the evolution from (i) to the "I." At the beginning of each journey, (i) moved from one place to another, escaping chaotic situations and yearning for identity and for a safe location to become the "I" compatible with the host community members. (i) left his old status quo, entered the circle of chaos, and learned to choose, knowing that "every choice involves loss" (Satir et. al., 1991; Banmen & Maki-Banmen, 2001). Over time, (i) would forge a new status quo, and would again allow different "foreign elements" to enter his life, another circle of chaos, another choice to make, another context, another other, another self; and finally, the creation of the multiple, contextual, and ambiguous "I" was discovered.

For (i), the beginning of becoming was unfamiliar, complicated, and risky. The slippery path to the future, the rocky road to success, and the rollercoaster ride to reach higher seemed impossible challenges. Yet the great effort enhanced (i)'s ability to see, to choose, to move, to discover, to reflect, and to change into a content and confident person. (i) began to spin his heroic tale of two countries with two different cultures.

Throughout the story, (i) who became the "I" moved sometimes violently and sometimes smoothly, from one person/place to another person/place. It seemed (i) was dancing with the rhythm of the adventures, the rhythm of choices, and the rhythm of decision-making. (i) was well aware of the dangers to his own physical and emotional health. He was well aware that he might lose his previous status quo. Yet (i) who became the "I" continued to dance, did not look at the past, and kept his face forward. (i) forsook his miseries for new opportunities.

The "I" is the hero with endless connections and disconnections, attachments and detachments. Indeed, the hero breaks the silence and parti(party)/ci(see)/pates in life's performance to see the unseen, engage rather than exist, ruin the ruins, fight uncertainties, and finally find a location to locate. To situate in the lands of what if and so what, (i) took the "what matters?" as an entry into the world of inquiry, acknowledging and accepting the risk-taking performances (Fels, 1999). (i) became the positively-oriented, responsibility-focused "I" to make the transformational changes happen.

In this dissertation, participants' stories highlight the performance of body-mind unification and interaction, the conscious decisions and resiliencies, the rational and irrational behaviours, and finally the abilities and vulner/abilities around adapting and adjusting to the strangeness of the new world (McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006). Fels and Stothers (as

cited in Fels, 1999, p. 29) stated that “here there is no longer a felt distinction between the mind/subject and body/object” (p. 29).

### **Situation/Narrative: In Transition from (i) to the “I”, a Change in Worldview**

According to Cochran (1991), appropriate decisions can be voluntary or involuntary. (i)’s decision to change and to become the “I” first occurred to (i) at a particular moment as a possibility, and he decided to act/enact upon this course of action voluntarily and heroically. (i) considered (i)’s intentions and beliefs, (i)’s commitment to learning about the new lifestyle and above all to learning how to cope and adjust, as a reasonable motivation for doing what (i) chose to do. Creation of the “I” out of (i) was not an instantaneous decision; it was rather the logical result of the freedom to follow (i)’s dream, something that evolved over a life time. The decision to become something is not always ours. Sometimes we already are what we consciously decide to become, and the becoming is simply fulfilling our innate purpose.

The move to a new country, and life in a diverse environment, brought to the forefront (i)’s new emotional and physical demands. (i) found the prospect of meeting these demands somewhat intimidating, but at the same time he wanted to prove that he could overcome them. (i) felt ready to demonstrate his communication skills, interpersonal relationship skills, self-awareness, and integrity in the new society. (i) was able to preserve core aspects of his former identities and develop new ones. I compare these chosen activities of changing (i) to the “I” to yin and yang.<sup>1</sup> Though seemingly different, each complements the other, and works in harmony to bring about creation.

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<sup>1</sup> The two halves of the Tai-Chi symbol in Chinese (more specifically, Taoist) philosophy. The two cosmic forces of creative energies, yin (moon/feminine/negative), and yang (sun/masculine/positive). Everything originates from and depends on the interaction of the opposite and complementary principles (Webster’s New Millennium Dictionary of English, Preview Edition [v 0.96]).

### **(i) as an Active Agent<sup>2</sup>**

Cochran (1997) pointed out that “action is an exercise of human agency, a person’s power to act” (p. 28). In action, as (i)’s skills, insight, judgments, and self-confidence increased, his capability, work ethic, and determination to cope effectively were also enhanced. In order to feel included, (i) decided to actively engage in different group activities and to value and respect the cultural backgrounds of others.

(i)’s life story as an active agent can be divided into the four phases indicated by Cochran (1990): incompleteness, positioning, positing, and completion. These phases provide a thematic framework for (i)’s decision to move to a new country. Something is posited, bringing to a culmination the positioning that preceded it. (i) acted from his position to realize his goals. Positing involves an actualization or bringing into existence. Further, Cochran stated that “if the hero is passive in this phase, something is realized from the actions of others, while the hero undergoes change” (p. 28). Cochran and Laub (1994) stated that any change can be an opportunity to enhance a sense of agency, and indeed, (i) enhanced his sense of agency by bringing change to his life from the position of an active agent. During passive phases, (i) read, reflected, and pondered what would make life meaningful for him. Although (i) did not know it at the time, (i) was searching for a lifestyle which would enable him to wrap up the script of his life to date, and initiate a fresh beginning.

Emigrating from other countries to Canada, (i) had a new calling to pursue a safer life for himself and his family. (i)’s decisions were an expression of (i)’s interests, principles, and values. Finding his new project worthwhile, (i) decided to widen his horizons by dedicating even more time and energy to his new motivations and desires. To avoid loneliness, (i) adjusted and re-

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<sup>2</sup> “an agent takes action and overcomes obstacles in order to achieve a value end” (Cochran, 1997, p. 30)

adjusted, visualized and revisualized, shaped and reshaped his personal needs, dreams, and expectations. Undergoing great emotional pain and frustration in the process, (i) was drawn into a pool of chaos. Despite finding it overwhelming to encounter and be encountered by so many different “I”s in a new country, (i) was adamant: (i) would survive to create the “I” out of (i). (i)’s hardship simply reinforced his decision to persist in search of becoming the “I.” (i) knew that his fulfillment depended on being able to make difficult choices. Satir (1991, as cited in Satir et al. (1991) claimed that “every choice involves loss” (p. 112-119). Drawing on (i)’s beliefs as he moved through stages of decision-making, (i) reached a new insight, the (Aha) moment in (i)’s life.

It is important to mention that (i)’s decision and his resulting actions made him a target for the unsupportive comments and suggestions of some significant and “insignificant” others. Confronted with the criticism expressed by others, (i) was forced to realize that (i) must put (i)’s own needs, desires, and choices ahead of those others’ expectations and dreams.

### **The Solo Enactment of (i)’s Life Story: Becoming the “I”**

As narrative inquirers we work within the space not only with our participants but also with ourselves. Working in this space means that we become visible with our own lived and told stories. Sometimes, this means that our own unnamed, perhaps secret, stories come to light as much as do those of our participants. This confronting of ourselves in our narrative past makes us vulnerable as inquirers because it makes secret stories public. In narrative inquiry, “it is impossible (or if not impossible, then deliberately self-deceptive) as a researcher to stay silent or to present a kind of perfect, idealized, inquiring, moralizing self” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 61). Seeing my research participants as heroes and their fairy tales (personal narratives) as transforming agents compels me to understand that they have had noble quests.

A sense of mattering and being included were paramount in the participants' heroic quests; without this sense, they could not have connected to the mainstream. As previous studies have suggested, "when people feel that they do not matter in a situation, their interpersonal connection is weakened and usually there is also some form of withdrawal" (Amundson, 1998, p. 32). The awareness that they mattered enabled them to move past negative events instead of brooding over them – to shield themselves from dragons (influential/significant as well as insignificant people in their lives who tried to sabotage their progress), to abandon doubt, and to progress into growth and change as they never had before. A spiritual awe for their capabilities dawned. It felt like metaphysical doors were being opened, secrets revealed, and their beliefs vindicated. During the process of change, they felt as if they were hanging on the weakest branch, which could easily be broken, yet they learned how to nourish the process, to grow and become strong.

### **The "I": Reflections and Rationalization: Becoming a Member**

According to Cochran (1991), people in their decision-making period are able to be true to themselves. Interestingly, in this crucial period of decision-making, (i) was able to be truthful to himself and do what (i) really loved, without realizing that this aspect of the self could lead to a future career in a new country. The quality of a decision made in this way is excellent, because it incorporates (i)'s interests, principles, and values, and above all, who (i) is. Spending years of searching, re/searching, self/searching, directing, re/directing, and self/directing situated (i) "as a process of becoming a member of a new community," which involved "the ability to communicate in the language of this community and act according to its particular norm" (Sfard, 1998, p. 6).

## **When Two Worlds Align**

I believe it takes a major break in events, a fresh start, to really impel an individual to make a life-transforming decision. I also believe the decision to adjust in a new country involves a persistent and remarkable sense of agency (Amundson, 1998), fundamentally stemming from an internal locus of causality that actively produces desirable action and change. It takes great courage to pursue a new lifestyle and to start a career – no matter how expert a person is – in a new context, and with new people in a new country, “like suddenly swimming upstream like a salmon returning home from the ocean to give new birth” (Fels, 2003, in-course paper comment).

Further, (i) redirected and changed his worldview in a new country by enhancing his capabilities in order to reach desired goals. To (i), his decision bridged the gap between “what is” and “what ought to be,” on a cognitive level. I believe decisions that were made by (i) have been both the golden and the rusty gates of his life. This movement of decision making was from being a self-directed person in his past toward being a new self-directed human being in the present.

Moreover, what matters (Fels, 1999, p. 139) constituted the main portion of (i)’s journey to become a hero. The journey was to discover the heroic part of (i) and to see (i)’s life story as a series of heroic events. What matters was about participating and valuing oneself more at a higher level of be/coming: leaving the role of (i) as victim in order to become a pro-active “I.”

## **Narrator as Teacher: Conclusion**

On the one hand, narrative inquiry allowed me to create a research text that not only illuminates the experiences of the immigrant executives I interviewed but also highlights how social and theoretical discourse shaped the participants’ relationships with themselves (self), the new community (others), and the new environment (context) (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Satir et al., 1991). On the other hand, the narrative method encouraged me to understand the meaning

of action for the participants (immigrant elite professionals), to focus on what was most important to them, to take action in direct alignment with their values (Arvay, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), and to generate knowledge that would be useful to other researchers. It was very important to tell the participants that in the end it would be from the interpretations of their stories as I understood them that I could learn the most. Learning occurs when a narrator takes on the role of the teacher who unveils the lived life, and when a researcher is a willing student, eager to be taught.

In this study, narrative method will enhance researchers' understanding of the adjustment difficulties inherent in the lives of immigrant executives who live between two cultures. Maxwell (2005) argued that there is no "prescribed procedure" to guarantee the validity of the result in a study, since "it depends on the relationship of your conclusions to reality, and there are no methods that can completely assure that you have captured this" (p. 105). For this reason, I strove to be the student to my participants' teachers, to pay keen attention to the meaning their narratives hold for them and the contexts in which these stories took place. That attentiveness on my part is the key factor enabling me to understand my participants' adjustment process.



## CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

This qualitative narrative inquiry focuses on the experiences of six immigrant elite professionals throughout the process of moving and adjusting to Canada. The findings in this chapter are derived from interviews with these six participants and are organized according to the following three central research questions: a) What led immigrant executives (elite professionals) to decide to move to Canada (pre-move experiences)? b) What were immigrant executives' experiences upon moving to Canada? c) What suggestions did immigrant executives have for those thinking of moving to Canada, or for counsellors working with similar clients?

At the start of each interview, I explored the emotional and cognitive themes related to moving to a new country. As the interview developed and the participants became more comfortable with and engaged in the interview process, they described their emotional and cognitive states during pre- and post-move experiences, their adjustment process, and their unmet expectations in the new country. The specific emotions described by them were anger, frustration, anxiety, and depression, while the cognitive themes were self-evaluation, determination, and awareness. At the cognition level, participants evaluated their own behaviours, characteristics, and capabilities. The research participants devoted some portions of their narratives to discussing the factors – causes, consequences, benefits, and drawbacks – related to their professional status and lifestyle in their home countries. They also talked about their desire to achieve a similar quality of life and work in Canada as they had had in their hometowns.

In portions of the narratives when participants overtly referred to emotional states, their emotional demeanours were often negative. This was to be expected as participants were describing adjustment issues and their difficulties in settling down to a new life and career in Canada. Negative emotions and their causes included: frustration towards a non-supportive

system/community; anxiety related to using English as a second language; depression and disappointments around not knowing how to adjust to a new life and work situation; and confusion over how to start working in a new country.

As some of the participants engaged in more in-depth explorations of their narratives (Riessman, 1993), social and governmental support systems were described as key factors in the participants' immigration experience. Some participants devoted portions of their narratives to critiquing available federal, provincial, and local governmental support services, especially the lack of adequate information on how to adjust to living and working in a new country. Participants repeatedly addressed whether they felt supported by others, or whether their social relations were combative and unsupportive. Some participants devoted more narrative space to discussing unsupportive rather than supportive networks.

### **Getting Close and Personal: Themes**

The following section offers an overview of narrative themes identified through interviews with immigrant elite professionals, and is followed by a more detailed exploration of narrative content. Interviews were organized using two methods: first, by examining participants' transcripts to create profiles of participants' experiences, metaphors, and meanings; and second, by cross-referencing participants' experiences and meanings. As a curious agent/researcher, I investigated who the participants were, where they came from, what had been the purpose of their move to Canada, and how well they had prospered in their new country (Leggo, in-class lecture, 2003; Leggo, 2008).

In total, there are six narratives, related in the first person: those of Mr. Samuel, Mr. Alex, Mr. Mandi, Mr. Rahim, Mr. Parham, and Mr. Rafael. Excerpts from interviews are included to

support my interpretations of the results. For some quotes, additional textual material has been inserted to provide further contexts for their narratives.

Three common themes emerged from the participants' stories of their moves and cross-cultural adjustments to a new country, illustrating elements related to the first two research questions.

**Theme 1: Departure from There to Here with Hope – When the Comfort Zone Became Uncomfortable**

- This theme was captured by answers to the first question: What led elite professionals to decide to move to Canada (pre-move experiences)?

**Theme 2: Arrival: Superman in Crisis**

**Theme 3: Superman Resides: The Champion**

- The second and the third themes were captured through the second question: What kind of experiences did immigrant elite professionals have upon moving to Canada?

Support for these three themes came as participants answered the third question: What suggestions did immigrant elite professionals have for those thinking of moving to Canada, or for counsellors working with similar clients? Evidence of participants' answers to these three questions constitutes the backbone of this research study.

## **So Today, So Yesterday: Their Stories, Their Ways**

### **Mr. Samuel's Narrative Profile**

#### **Theme 1: Departure from There to Here with Hope: When the Comfort Zone Became Uncomfortable**

Mr. Samuel had been an executive vice-president of a very well-known and profitable trading company in a Middle Eastern country. Unfortunately, a monumental political change in his home country left him with no choice but to resign. While the country's situation was worsening and slipping into anarchy, his background experience as a manager helped him to establish his own trading company. In the early 1980s, when his country had pulled through the worst of the political situation, he and his wife with their teenaged children decided to leave permanently. Mr. Samuel said, "I really got fed up and really didn't want to stay over there." During these chaotic times, almost nobody was permitted to leave the country. Fortunately, he had some influential friends abroad. These friends were also able to connect him with people who had smuggled out other elite professionals and those individuals arranged for Mr. Samuel's family to escape illegally. Finally, the Samuels sold all their assets and fled to a neighbouring country; the Samuels had made their decision and were ready to pay the consequences. Mr. Samuel escaped from his home country because he believed there would be no future and no opportunities for his children to grow and learn. Mr. Samuel talked about the family's long and truly adventurous journey:

OK, we walked through the border and, that was the early 80s, with my family (my wife and my teenaged children), and there [the border] was very dangerous because in the neighbouring country they could get us and send us to prison. Lot of people had been arrested that way, and usually they were given back again to the countries they escaped from. But, I had a feeling, I can go through all and nothing is going to happen to us.

## **Theme 2: Arrival: Superman in Crisis**

After two weeks of an unpleasant stay in the neighbouring country, Mr. Samuel and his family flew to a European country. While residing there, they were able to obtain visas for the United States. Subsequently, during their six-month stay in the United States, they applied for Canadian immigration, and thus, months later, arrived in Canada as landed immigrants. It had not been Mr. Samuel's first trip to the United States; however, his English was unfortunately not sufficient to express himself or to face the daily life challenges in a new country:

At that time, my English was very poor. I could understand a little bit of English. My understanding of English was very poor, my reading was not bad and my writing was poor. Still today my writing is not good.

Mr. Samuel continued:

At the end of my stay in the United States, I became depressed. I think the reasons of depression were: I was not working (in my hometown I used to work an average [of] 12 hours and 6 days a week). After we moved, due to the very high inflation in my home country the value of our assets diminished, therefore, our purchasing power was reducing. Due to my poor English language, I was not able to communicate with outside people. The future was not clear for me. When I came to Canada, I still had that depression.

Mr. Samuel was picked up from the airport by the past CEO/owner of the trading company he had previously worked for in his home country. He took Mr. Samuel directly to his office, where Mr. Samuel would begin to work as a president and CEO.

Mr. Samuel was very excited and happy about his job and enthusiastically described his office:

The office was one of the best buildings in downtown. We went to 21st floor of the building and he showed me my office.

Mr. Samuel's friend had two different small trading companies. One was selling traditional goods and the other one was selling modern goods:

When he was driving to the office he asked me which trading company I would like to run. I said, “OK, I will think about it.” Although, I knew that both trading companies were not making money at that time.

Mr. Samuel made the decision to pick the modern goods trading company to manage but in a couple of months he was offered the opportunity to run the traditional goods trading company as well:

The company I started to work for was very small with total employee of 15 people and overhead was very high and the product mix was wrong and not profitable and management was very weak. We didn't know the market and we didn't have any vision for what kind of company we were going to build. The company was losing \$600,000 on \$2,500,000 revenue. We didn't have the support of majority of our suppliers. The market (the competitors and the majority of suppliers) were thinking we would be out of business very soon. Based on the company's situation, I was very uncomfortable having a very expensive office on the 21<sup>st</sup> floor of a famous downtown building. Additional to all those problems, my English was poor and I didn't have product knowledge and I was not familiar with the culture of North America for doing business. I was already depressed and that situation made me even more depressed.

Mr. Samuel decided to share his feelings and his opinion with his wife and his friend:

I didn't know that I was going to stay there to run that kind of company; therefore, I told my wife my situation and I added that we shouldn't buy anything. We rented whatever we needed like beds and furniture. I also told my friend (whom I was going to run his business) about my feeling. I was not seeing the light at the end of tunnel.

Yet Mr. Samuel's wife was against going back to their home country. They had already sold all their belongings, which constituted a significant loss, and it was difficult to replace them. Additionally, after the anguished ordeal of leaving their home country, it was very dangerous to go back, because they had left illegally.

Mr. Samuel remembered:

But I was thinking if really I couldn't stay in Canada for the financial reason and I had to go back to my hometown, I could convince her to go back. We made decision to stay and I gave myself time to see what is going to happen.

Within the context of work, Mr. Samuel's disappointment was mostly due to his unfamiliarity with the Canadian business system. Furthermore, because of his poor English skills,

he felt anxious and uncomfortable in communicating with his employees. He recalled:

As I said before, my understanding of English was poor; therefore it was very difficult for me to communicate with employees; because one of the most important skills of a manager is his or her communication. Additionally to this, the most people (employees and suppliers) were not recognizing my achievement in my home country and they were not giving me any credit for that.

Mr. Samuel continued:

I had 20 years of business experiences in one of the largest manufacturing and trading companies. When I started to work for the company, I was 22 years old, the company sales were \$5 million US and I grew with the company. When I left the company its sales were US \$350 million with profit of US \$50 million and we had more than US \$20 million that was exported worldwide. There were more than 1000 employees in the division that I was running. Total employees of the company were more than 6000. Therefore, I realized I had to prove myself and I had to start again from zero in Canada.

It was during that time that Mr. Samuel felt isolated. He thought what was needed was a change of attitude and approach among the employees:

I gradually learned English on the job to be able to communicate to the employees and suppliers. As I said before, when I started to work for the company as the president and CEO the company was a very small sales organization and losing money. The first thing I started to do was to know and evaluate employees and the structure of the organization to find out what were our strengths and weaknesses. I made the list of weaknesses for removing them through training and direction and motivation. For example, sales people were not professional and while they were selling to the customer, they were smoking and drinking coffee and their appearance and their sales techniques were not professional at all.

### **Theme 3: Superman Resides: The Champion**

At the same time, Mr. Samuel learned about their competitors' strengths and weaknesses, and became familiar with the products. He was interested in learning about the customers' demographics. As he explained it,

I studied a lot about the companies in the United States similar to us to find out who could be our role model. I got to know our suppliers and their products market share and to find out if our company is carrying the top four brand names that have the most market share.

Mr. Samuel was curious to know how other companies similar to them would advertise their products and how much they would spend on doing so:

Our head office was located in a prestigious building in downtown with very expensive and fine furniture. Quickly I learned if our trading company was going to be profitable we had to reduce our overhead expenses. Therefore, when we opened our second sales branch in one of the suburbs of the city, I moved the head office of the trading company to the small mezzanine of the branch with five employees and I left all expensive furniture at the downtown office and I bought very inexpensive and second-hand furniture for the new head office. I told the employees in the new office we were not going to have janitors, we were going to clean our office ourselves, like we did in our houses. I told them we were losing money. I was very straightforward with them. I told them (the employees who mainly were Canadian) that we were going to grow and we were going to be number one in Canada. My employees believed me, but the suppliers did not.

Mr. Samuel was confident because he deeply believed in his own strengths, capabilities, and past achievements as a manager. He was convinced he could prove to the employees that he could build a winning business. Once again, he mentioned:

When I was leaving my country and going all the way that strange route and I believed that nothing is going to happen to us. The same belief I had here. I was telling them that we were going to be the number one in Canada. I believed one of the most important assets of a company is its people; based on this concept I started to teach and to be a role model of our employees. I taught them how to dress for success and we made a dress code rule for the company. I taught them to have good qualities of a good employee, such as not [being] limited, to have a positive mental attitude, to be a company person (think the company is your own company), to be goal-oriented, to be a hard worker, to be an honest person, to be a team player, to be an ambitious person, to have a merchant mentality (for anything you are spending, time or money). You have to answer two questions: 1) is the return greater than your spending? 2) Is there any alternative to give you greater returns? I taught them to have leadership skills, to be assertive, and to be a humble student.

Mr. Samuel added:

When I was teaching other people [the employees] to become positive, when I was teaching them that they should change their behaviour, those were the best lessons for me too. The teaching made me positive as well. I had to be myself a role model; I had to be, myself, whatever I was telling them.

Thus, Mr. Samuel decided to take action, and to teach and develop those qualities among his employees:

Therefore, I decided to interview the new staff (at any level). At the time of hiring, I looked for the people to have the ability and willingness to learn those qualities. I continued to interview any level of staff till we had about 17 branches with more than 400 employees. Then I delegate the job to other executives. At the same time, we were teaching our employees qualities. We were teaching them how to do their job, such as not



[being] limited to how to sell, and how to answer the phone and how to do the office work.

Mr. Samuel continued:

Our hiring concept was to hire inexperienced people who just finished their college or university [studies] with very good quality for learning. After their hiring, we would send them to the training courses (for any job we created a course how to teach and what to teach to the new employee for that job). The duration of each course was depending on the job. For example, for sales there were four weeks trainings and for other jobs there were between two to four weeks trainings. For the fast track management, it was more than one year trainings. For example, for sales, employees were going for two weeks to the classes [to learn] the qualities that the company is expecting of them. After the class, we [would] teach the new employees how to sell in the field. We had a designated trainer who had been trained by us how to teach.

Mr. Samuel was very pleased with the results of his leadership approach. He taught the employees how to run a successful business; he cared for them, and spent time with them like “a big brother.” He was confident that they felt his care for and concern about them. Due to his efforts, his emotional state improved. He could see positive results from his tremendous hard work to reach that stage of success. Furthermore, the good feelings he obtained from his success in the workplace sustained him, and he felt less depressed about other personal issues:

My situation at home became a little bit better because I was very engaged in the work and I was paying less attention at home. Because I was paying less attention at home, and because when I was very depressed my wife was very supportive, she realized that I didn’t need her support anymore; then she became depressed.

While Mr. Samuel was busy working, his wife strived to manage the household “as best as possible”: “She was helping the children, she was putting all her time and effort with children, and I was supporting her.” About his relationship with his wife and children Mr. Samuel reported:

I didn’t feel any burden on my shoulders; no I didn’t feel that way. I didn’t go home and feel that everybody is against me. Fortunately, I didn’t have that. I didn’t feel that I was torn between my workplace and home.

Nevertheless, during the interview, I noticed that Mr. Samuel was more enthusiastic when talking about his achievements at work than those in the home. He was “very ambitious” about

his leadership skills and knew that he was managing the company successfully:

I would like to add here based on market studies and the study of the companies similar to us we developed a new concept and new product mix. We changed completely the company's style and design. Changing of design and the concept of the company was an ongoing business.

Under Mr. Samuel's successful management and supervision, the company expanded. After two years, the company broke even and after ten years, the company was number one by volume in Canada: "Some of the suppliers were telling me they didn't believe what I was telling them, that soon this company would become number one in Canada."

Meanwhile, as mentioned by Mr. Samuel, his busy schedule prevented him from spending more time with his family. He wanted to visit many interesting places in his new country ("after five/six years being here, it was the first time I went to a countryside resort. I did not have time to think about it because I was very busy.") He had devoted himself to work, and the company's growth had provided him with much satisfaction. Yet he recalled that the busy schedule at work caused "a little bit" of conflict at home. According to Mr. Samuel:

[M]y wife was complaining and she was telling me I should put more time over there for children and she was telling children "your dad is not available" [laughs] and they don't have dad [laugh out loud], don't have dad. I didn't get upset because I knew she was right. [But] I knew if I am not going to do that I cannot function myself. I am doing that, because I am going to function. I am not doing that, I am going again back to depression and it was not going to help our family.

During the interview, occasionally, Mr. Samuel empathized with his families' needs and wants. He thought these were "natural," but he believed that what he was doing was ultimately for his family's benefit, that as a responsible provider, he needed to be strong and work as hard as he could. He indicated that his hard work paid off and the company went public. The company was able to open branches in the United States.

Mr. Samuel had no problem working with employees of diverse backgrounds: “It was very easy for me. It was easy for me because I am very interested in different cultures.” The relationships with and collaboration among the culturally diverse employees was friendly:

They were excited about the company’s multicultural policy. At all, we didn’t have cultural clashes in our branches. One of our expectations from our people [employees] was, they had to be open-minded.

Mr. Samuel held to the tenet that if his employees were not open-minded, they could not remain working for him. He had created an environment of respect and understanding. There were no cultural issues amongst the employees – “not at all, we didn’t have that.” Mr. Samuel’s outlook on the company’s framework and structure was:

Who is the company, really? The company is people. With ordinary people you can get extraordinary results. And that extraordinary result makes an extraordinary company. Therefore, one of the most important elements of any good company is its people [employees].

Mr. Samuel revealed that outsiders and/or suppliers viewed the company as a “cult, because of its attitude. Because they ‘brain-washed’ each other toward the success of the company.”

Mr. Samuel did not sell his stock because he believed in the company’s growth and wanted to show people “as a role model” that the company still had the capacity to grow. However, he admitted that this might not have been the right thing to do: “I put all [my] eggs in one basket for the sake of the benefit for my family. I should have sold some. [But not] all of them.”

Four years after the company went public; Mr. Samuel resigned because he felt pressured. The company had expanded enormously and he recalled that the company’s chairman, who had not been very involved in its progress and expansion, decided to become more actively engaged. The chairman’s decision was not very appealing to Mr. Samuel; he felt sad about it but told him, “If you want to manage the company you are most welcome.”

As a result, Mr. Samuel excused himself from managing the company. Four years later, he left the company. The chairman then sold the company for more than US \$550 million.

That situation had a huge impact on Mr. Samuel's family:

My family also became very upset with the behaviour [decision] of the chairman. I was not that much upset, but they [my family] were more upset than me. They were disappointed, very frustrated, and I was telling them they should calm down.

Furthermore, Mr. Samuel explained how the move and transition to a new country had provided him with a transformative experience:

As I said clearly, when I came here [Canada], I was depressed. I didn't think I was a kind of person that cannot do anything. As I said, I didn't know English and I didn't know the job market, and my feeling about myself was very low. I almost started from zero.

In discussing his financial circumstances following his move to Canada, Mr. Samuel recalled his low salary at the beginning of his management position. After earning a great deal of money in his home country, he had to restrict himself in Canada to avoid incurring extra expenses. During the time the company was not profitable, he refused to take advantage of benefits he could have derived from his managerial position. He was extremely concerned about how he and his employees should spend the company's money, and devoted himself completely to the company:

At the beginning, even the company was going to buy for me a car. I said no, I don't want a car. I took a bus going to the office. Because I didn't want – I felt it is my company. If I am going to be here, I have to act like that [be it concern]. That was my attitude.

Mr. Samuel talked about his own strong identity and knew he would not lose his "previous self," regardless of his weak English or of not being familiar with the new rules and roles in his new country. He was inspired to bring his work discipline to the new workplace and keenly wanted to use his ocean of knowledge and experience, no matter how hard this might be at the beginning. Mr. Samuel brought his leadership expertise to the new workplace, and those skills were part of his identity; he never considered his identity as separate from his work. Mr. Samuel

also did not believe that his work knowledge and proficiency in management could change him as a person. He remained who he was because:

Put it this way: the majority of my time was at work. Whatever I am going to tell you again, I don't have any example to let you know about my personality. Because whatever you are seeing it was work. Nothing has been transformed. At home, transition brought difficulty, but I just accepted that. And I realized that they are right [about] things and they have a point. I tried to help them but as long as my work was not being damaged or affected.

Mr. Samuel admitted that irrespective of his “language anxiety” and depressive feelings, he succeeded in his managerial missions. He knew he would survive each chaotic situation with patience, persistence, and a high degree of tolerance.

Mr. Samuel continued to describe his transition by recalling his children's lives after they had fled from their country of origin. He said:

To begin, my children had some difficulties when they were in the United States. They could speak some English, but at school, they had difficulties with the various terminologies. My older child went to college when we came here and very quickly my younger children adapted themselves to the school and gradually their English became better.

Mr. Samuel used himself as an example. He encouraged each of his children to pursue higher education and “become a professional.” He wanted to ensure that they would not leave academia for the sake of getting married; instead, he believed their profession would be their asset and the key to their “independence.” Mr. Samuel [in a strong voice] said: “And I was telling them [my children] that they have to become professionals and independent.” He continued: “And right now both of them are professionals.”

Mr. Samuel shared some of the coping strategies that he had used to overcome the cross-cultural adjustment issues he faced when he first arrived in Canada. He believed these strategies helped him to recover from his life's upheavals, to support his family, and to surmount struggles and challenges during the time of adjustment. Nonetheless, his life stresses and emotional

problems unfortunately caused him some life-threatening health issues. His thoughts returned to twenty years past:

[With a softer voice] I forgot to let you know this. Three years after I came to Canada, suddenly, I had pain in my chest. And I was going to one of the provinces to look at the location to open our branch over there. And [clearing his throat], my wife told me, “Don’t go to your trip and go and see a doctor.” I just didn’t believe what she was saying, but reluctantly I went to doctor and he examined me and sent me to a cardiologist and the cardiologist sent me to the hospital, and [laughs] they tested me and I had angina. That happened and two weeks later after I had four bypass surgery. [Moments of silence]

During that period, Mr. Samuel recalled, the company’s chairman told Mrs. Samuel that he would sell the company if her husband was not able to return to manage it. This implied that Mr. Samuel was viewed as a major asset for the company, and she believed the chairman’s comments were a compliment. Nevertheless, the chairman’s words did not match his subsequent actions.

Following the surgery, Mr. Samuel was not able to return to work for three months. He changed his eating habits, lost weight, and started to exercise, no matter where he was. He was choosing not to use any “excuses.” For over twenty years, he has continued engaging in the healthy rituals of exercising and eating healthily. According to Mr. Samuel, that was a “transformation”:

I became more aware of myself, about my strength and weaknesses. I became aware how I can train my brain. I was a smoker. I started smoking when I was 12 years old, and I quit smoking before my surgery. I conditioned myself how to quit. For example, I conditioned myself [by thinking that] all low-class people smoke. Therefore, I am not that person and I really dislike smoking. After two months, I stopped smoking. I didn’t like the smell of smoking. Up to today, I didn’t go back to smoking. And that was my new self. This new self impacted my work and my private life a lot. I was teaching other people my experience about smoking and how a person can condition his or her brain to change a bad habit. For a while, I was meditating. That helped me a lot, because that gave me a lot of relaxation. Whatever good things I was doing for myself, I was ready to teach other people, to motivate other people to do the same thing.

His helpful attitude was a priceless quality. He not only taught his employees how to grow at work, but he was also a responsible husband and a caring father/mentor to his children. Mr.

Samuel seemed to have considerable knowledge of how to expand a business, how to be a successful manager, and how to be a considerate family man. After his surgery, he realized that he needed to add new behaviours and habits to his daily routine to help himself become a healthier person. As much as he would help others, he started mentoring himself to improve his lifestyle. His self-awareness and self-guiding strategies were directly related to his management skills. He learned to manage his personal life in the same way he managed his work:

Healthy living became my habit. It became one of my personality [traits]. It became part of me. The environment here [in Canada] is very healthy. That is true that I conditioned myself, but the environment helped me too.

Mr. Samuel concluded that his ceaseless energy, belief in his capabilities, and considerable previous experience allowed him to make his dreams a reality in Canada.

### **Mr. Alex's Narrative Profile**

#### **Theme 1: Departure from There to Here with Hope: When the Comfort Zone Became Uncomfortable**

A middle-aged man from a country in the Middle East, Mr. Alex was born and raised in a bicultural/bilingual family. "I am hybrid," he offered by way of explanation. He had received his MBA degree from one of the most prestigious universities in his country in order to become a manager. He had held a top management position requiring bilingual communication, mostly in English, within a European company, after which he became the chief financial officer of an international marketing company. For Mr. Alex, language was not a cross-cultural barrier and he credited this to his bilingualism: "So, language was no issue, because being bilingual was very helpful. It was not needed in my country on that time, but it was a benefit."

Mr. Alex decided to leave his country, with his wife and small children, mainly because he became convinced that it was steadily heading towards some unpleasant and perhaps even

politically horrific changes. In his words:

It clicked to me that something might happen to my country. At that time, I started looking at living outside my hometown more seriously. The options to me were European countries, since I was born in one of them. My older brother lived in Vancouver, so Vancouver was another option. My younger brother lived in the US, so that was an option too. We had a lot of options [clearing his voice] but not to want to leave my country as a refugee. So we were set on that one. I did not want to leave my country as a refugee, because I did not want to sink that low.

Mr. Alex explained that his life in his country of origin was not in danger; therefore, he did not want to flee as an escapee. Because he did not hold “any political position or any political affiliation,” leaving officially and legally was possible for him. His goal, therefore, was to enter a new country as an immigrant. One of his strongest assets in moving to a North American country was his fluency in English. Having studied for part of his education in England and having grown up in a “multilingual environment,” he had the opportunity to adapt to living in Canada with no language issues:

In our household, we were speaking my mother’s language [she was from one of the non-English-speaking European countries]. My father was born in my home country and spoke many different European languages. At home, my parents and my aunt would speak in European language. So it was very natural for us to switch from one language to another language.

Mr. Alex obtained Canadian immigration approval easily due to his education and economic status; however, the whole process of acquiring the visa took over a year. He was enthusiastic, though, knowing that moving to Canada would not be a problem for his children, since they had been attending an international school where they had learned English and French. Mr. Alex’s wife was not as keen as her husband to move to a new country, and leave family and friends behind. He explained:

I was the force, the instigator to move. At that time, all my family lived outside my home country. I was the last one there. She [my wife] had her family – her father, her siblings –



and connections were difficult for her to sever. Because we didn't know [whether] there was a way to come back or not.

Although Mrs. Alex was considering their immigration with "reservation," Mr. Alex's major concern was to secure his children's future in a country that was not heading toward drastic political instability and anarchy:

The media and TV, I saw the impact of media on my children. I told my wife that I didn't want my children to be raised here.

Due to the tension escalating around them, as soon as Mr. Alex's family received their Canadian visas they flew to Vancouver, departing hastily with their suitcases and nothing else. Fortunately, Vancouver turned out to be exactly as Mr. Alex's brother had described to him:

"A sunny resort in Middle East with the forest covered mountains sloping into the sea, very much like the North Shore," and "combine that one with San Francisco and Hamburg and Stockholm, it can be Vancouver." He was very precise with the association of Vancouver with those cities.

## **Theme 2: Arrival: Superman in Crisis**

Further into the interview, Mr. Alex expressed his feelings about moving to Canada:

So we landed in here. I saw, I experienced a unique thing in this move that has stayed with me forever. And that is when we left our home country, on that time. I still can do that [i.e., return], but I've never been in my country again out of my own decision. Not that I am forced. In my country, there was a search through your baggage so that you cannot take anything of value out of your country, at the airport. When we arrived in Vancouver, and when we went to immigration, the first thing was a very warm pleasant reception. I said, "What a difference."

When his brother picked up Mr. Alex and his family from the airport, he drove them on a tour to scenic areas around downtown and in a beautiful park, and then proceeded to the north part of the city. Mr. Alex remembered that he instantly loved the scenery and the surrounding environment so much that he told his wife:

"I am not going back." The city was so peaceful, although the weather was a bit cloudy. My wife told me that "we have two-week vacation and you have to go back." She said we left our household over there. I said I don't care anymore.

At that time, Mr. Alex was unsure as to whether he would be able to find a suitable job:

But I said I would take my chances. I had self-confidence and said I would take my chances. I had done my research about here. I knew it would have been difficult but I had to go through the process. So, we stayed in a hotel and I got local newspapers and looked at those and found an ad about a professional organization which would help executives to find job. I contacted them, it took me a while. One issue at that time was having Canadian experience. Now, I can understand why [mild laugh]. They would say that part of this was because of Canadian culture. Canadian is sort of conservative, very conservative. So they didn't want to take a chance of hiring somebody. They don't want to take chances [laugh].

Mr. Alex truly believed that not being hired by a Canadian company was not due to negative bias about his cultural background:

No, no, no [in a serious tone], I've never, never ever felt discrimination in this country. Never I had heard remarks, but [was] never treated that way. Probably people from my home country are more biased or discriminatory than Canadian citizens. I had felt more at home in here than in my home country.

Because of his bilingualism, he had a "trace of accent," therefore Mr. Alex remembers being called a foreigner in his home country. He believed that in Canada everybody was "like him."

Gradually, he began the process of "adjustment and assimilation, and understanding the Canadian culture and adjusting to it."

I was making the changes that were necessary. It was transition. But I wanted to stay. For that I had to change myself, I had to adapt myself to a new society. It didn't mean that I had to give up my sort of identity or my culture fully, only I had to sort of adjust my living, my vision, my values to the new land.

Mr. Alex went through the process of change willingly. His children attended their new Canadian school and made many friends. According to him, they did not feel as though they were strangers in a new country, mainly because they did not have any language problem. His daughter was very active in school and made many friends, with some of whom she has maintained friendships even "after almost thirty years." Consequently, his children did not cause any stress or pressure for their parents, as their adjustment process was minor:

They never raised issues that they were different, because first of all they didn't have language issues. And, because of the higher standards of the private school in our home

country, they performed better than the local students. They both started the elementary school in Canada. Adjustment came very natural for them. Because they were not born here, they had to work twice as hard as the sort of Canadian-born. But the results came out that they became more successful than their Canadian friends, because they worked harder.

According to Mr. Alex, his wife's transition and adjustment was not as easy or accomplished as willingly as the rest of the family's, even though she had completed some education in England. Finally, her frequent visits to their home country helped her to adjust, and "her family issues resolved in their own way." Eventually, some of her family and close relatives moved to California, making it easier for her to visit them. This increased her comfort level about being in Canada:

Yes, there was some pressure at home regarding my wife's adjustment. She had been reminding me of the opportunities that I had in my home country if we had stayed there, and compared [us] with friends who stayed there. We could have been financially at least equally successful.

In his country of origin, after the political changes, Mr. Alex was not willing to seek higher levels of professional positions, mainly because he did not have the same religious affiliation and/or beliefs. It would have been impossible for him to change his religious beliefs for the sake of obtaining a more esteemed position, because he had the utmost respect for his religion:

But things were changing. One of the requirements of any leader in my country, not just managers, one of the requirements for managers in my country, I mean, unless you owned your own company, is that the person should be able to lead the company. This naturally eliminated those who could not do that, either by choice or by religion.

Mr. Alex indicated that although his wife attempted to convince him to return and obtain one of the more highly sophisticated jobs, his deeply held convictions prevented that decision:

I told her that monetary issues are not my primary objective, they come with the success. If you pursue and you just want to have financial success you have to pursue it. But you also have to pay the price for it. And, one of the reasons I did not pursue financial or economic gain in here like I was probably looking at my home country, because when I came here I realized that I could spend lot of time with my children [short silence]. In my country, as a professional, I would sort of not be so vigilant to spend time with my children except for holidays. Here I grew with my children and they grew with me,

especially in sport areas. And I am not sure if I would have been able to do that in my home country.

Mr. Alex enjoyed spending time with his children and did not want to give up that time to pursue the same financial and economic gains as he would have had in his home country. Further to this revelation, Mr. Alex shared more reasons for his desire to remain in Canada:

So I have been looking a lot to quality. In a country like Canada, you look for the quality of life. You don't come to Canada for financial gains, you come for that quality and that quality comes in a balanced set of needs, and financial is one of them, it is not the main one.

Furthermore, he recalled other events. Although being pressured by his wife about living in a new country, Mr. Alex did not feel his wife's complaining was any kind of burden. He did not feel depressed or anxious about sharing such conversations with her:

No, no I was not feeling depressed or anxious. The persistence/pressure had been there. Marital life is sharing a lot of things. It is partnership. A lot of things are in partnership and partnership means partners can have different views over the way their business can run. Or their affairs can run. Marriage is the same thing. Two people can be friends with each other and they can be spouses but we can view life somehow differently. And that sort of complements each other, makes my life more meaningful and more exciting.

Mr. Alex shared that he never "dismissed" his wife's views. He willingly listened to her; however, since his goal was to remain in Canada permanently, he chose to help her understand his feelings about his decision by telling her:

"I made a decision to stay in here and I am going to stay here. And, I like you to be part of it, but also help you to understand your issues and help you to deal with them. But our home is here. I don't have home anymore in my home country, and I don't want a hometown over there."

Mr. Alex stated that his wife continued to have a difficult time adjusting until she finally started working.

During the family's adjustment period, he admitted that he had to deal with serious pressures and burdens, most importantly, periods of "uncertainty." He disclosed that starting a new life in a new environment was not that easy:

Financially, I was not so independent that I could rely on my resources. I had to work, so I had to find a job. But I was not prepared to step down into kind of work which would not satisfy me. I tried to stay with my profession. I was good at what I used to do in my home country.

After six months, Mr. Alex had gone to many interviews and received numerous job offers.

However, he had decided to work only in his area of expertise and eventually got hired as a project manager in a prominent Canadian company. Although his position was not as highly placed as it had been in his home country, it did help the Alex family to become “financially independent.” During that time, they built their social network to establish new friends.

Unfortunately, after two years Mr. Alex lost his job due to an economic recession:

I got laid off. This was very hard to me, for me, because, I had read in all texts about lay off, but never had such experience myself. Being rejected, in any[thing], for any person is a difficult thing. So, it took me a while to sort of learn that this is the way of life. Well, I went through the period of uncertainty and financial instability. And also I realized that there was unemployment insurance policy that the society had the safety net.

Mr. Alex said that at home “it was difficult” for the family members to handle that situation. In order to proceed in their daily lives, they had to develop a “tight budget.” Nevertheless, he did not want to settle for a “less challenging” job. He was prepared to make sacrifices while waiting for the right position: “[With a strong voice] I don’t see anything wrong with working in a less challenging job. If it would have been necessary, I would have done it.”

### **Theme 3: Superman Resides: The Champion**

Finally, Mr. Alex found a managerial position in a Canadian private company. He began to do some volunteer consulting with other immigrants to help them with their adjustment issues.

In addition, within his workplace he was involved with culturally diverse employees:

I had people from Eastern Europe, I had people from Western Europe, and I had Chinese people. And the relationship was good and we used to go out at least once a month for lunch together. I never felt unwelcome, look at it this way. You are positive, and you are outgoing and you move to people, then people move to you. You have to connect, say it. If I have to connect, I have to take the first step. Of course, the whole idea of life is to enjoy it. It is not to fight it.

Maintaining such an optimistic attitude made the workplace and Mr. Alex's relationships more pleasant with his colleagues and co-workers. In addition to his positive beliefs, attending a workshop further transformed his outlook about new life in a new country. According to Mr. Alex, the workshop, related to job-finding for professionals, had an enormous impact on his future career:

I went to a workshop and it changed my attitude towards the world. Before that workshop, I had a part-time job. Changing my attitude, might not be just being positive. One of the first things in the workshop was to get a piece of paper and write down what are your problems. Write down fifteen, hundred, two hundred of them. I don't remember what I wrote. Maybe my list was about ten to fifteen. It was difficult to identify your problems. Then the guys said, look at those and identify which are your real problems and those which you think are your problems. And, by doing that, shorten that to one, two, three real problems; the rest are self-created problems. He said leave these self-created problems out of your life. You are looking for a job; the whole idea for you is to find a job. At that time, I had part-time job and was still looking for full-time work. The workshop presenter said the second thing was when you have problems; with problems come depression, negative attitude. You have to change that. You need to put yourself in a position of control, so when you want a job interview and control the interview, not let the people who interview you control you. But the key was to be positive. You go to an interview with negative attitude you lose it [the job] immediately. People do not want negative people in work environment.

For Mr. Alex, the whole workshop was an "eye opener" experience. He believed that whatever his problems were, he had to keep them out of his thoughts whenever he attended a job interview. He said, "I have to leave my problems in an outside elevator." He also now maintains that this attitude has become his "second nature." Attending that workshop helped him to earn a full-time position in his job, as he used "techniques and tactics" he had learned at the workshop. He also recalled that a number of people attending the same workshop found suitable jobs.

Later, the company went through restructuring and, once again, he lost his job. However, he was no longer the same person as before: "The feeling was very different from before. It was different because I knew I could deal with the situation." His positive attitude helped Mr. Alex find a more prestigious job, which was even better suited to his knowledge and skills. Now he

held a position that he was not only good at but that he liked to do, as well. He remembered that following his interview for that job, he received very encouraging feedback:

They told me, “Alex, as soon as you sat down, you stole the whole interview. You took the control and you told us what to do” [loud laugh]. And we decided to hire you, and it would be bad to lose the opportunity, not to hire you. At one point of time, within two/three weeks, I had two job offers, two full jobs in two different companies. Then I had to make a choice and investigate [whether] to work at both places or choose one. This happened [finding a stable job] almost ten years after we moved to Canada.

With regards to working with people from different cultural backgrounds, Mr. Alex recalled an incident with an East Asian co-worker that had a great impact on his views. According to Mr. Alex, this constituted another “eye opener” experience for him. He described his co-worker as a very educated and professional woman who had seen “the worst part of society.” She shared some of her experiences and observations with him about “the difficulty of people in having an honest life,” and people who had survived extremely challenging stages in their lives. Mr. Alex realized that his personal struggle with his new life and/or unemployment was not as problematic as the struggles of those who had to deal with yet bigger challenges:

She shared that with me and also she shared her vision of Canada and the Canadians. She was of Asian origin from a well-educated family background. As an East Asian, she experienced a lot of discrimination. The main message I got from her was that discrimination comes from lack of knowledge, out of insecurity and also out of unwillingness to understand the other side. Those who discriminate [against] others are comfortable in their own environment and they don’t want to explore other possibilities.

Mr. Alex revealed that unfortunately, in his country of origin people reacted very judgmentally towards those of culturally different backgrounds. Such individuals were never welcomed and were labeled “bad.” He pointed out that “his original country’s society is very focused on class, social and economic status, and there are great biases against culturally and religiously diverse people.” He disclosed that after the country’s regime collapsed, much re-structuring had taken place. Those who held lower socioeconomic professional and occupational positions rose to power and had higher financial status, whereas the opposite took place for wealthier and elite

professionals. This situation led some top professionals and wealthy people to live in fear; some fled the country. Regarding his experiences with his Asian colleague, he said: “The East Asian colleague sent the message that if you want to pass the barrier of discrimination and bias, try to understand other side. Learn about the other side.”

Following the life-altering conversation with his East Asian colleague, Mr. Alex decided to learn about her culture; as a result, he no longer wondered why East Asians were so successful in many different ways in their lives. Subsequently, he discovered he had great admiration for East Asian culture. He further expanded his desire to learn about other cultures.

During the time Mr. Alex was busy working and exploring diverse cultures, his children attended school and eventually began their post-secondary education. He recollected that there had been discussions between himself and his daughter about where to complete her higher education, as well as about her way of living and personal life:

My wife is more traditional than me. For instance, girls can't go out until they mature, and this is cultural. For me, it was not an issue. I always thought that there is no difference between girls and boys. This was the way I was brought up in our household. Men and women were not different. My wife grew up in a more traditional environment.

Mr. Alex knew that he would have no issue if his daughter were to become involved in a friendship with a boy. He considered that his son was entitled to have a relationship and therefore his daughter was too. But he stated that his wife was more “protective of her” than of their son. The problem was that their daughter was already involved in a relationship while attending college, while she pretended that she was not. Interestingly, despite the fact that Mr. Alex and his wife were not in agreement about this aspect of their daughter's social life, he strongly respected his wife's way of thinking and her traditional values:

My children were mature [enough] to understand the discussion. I told them that I am going to live with my wife for the rest of my life and she comes first. So, just know your limit. If I did not agree with her we wouldn't have discussion in front of our children. I waited and later talked to her and expressed my disagreement and the reason I was



disagreeing. Nowadays, my children are professionals and when I disagree with my wife in front of them I will tell her in front of them because I don't treat them as children. . . . When we got into an argument, my wife was sparkling and I always referred to that as the spice of our marriage, otherwise it could have been very boring [laughs]. It is exciting; it makes energy [laughs]. One of the things I learned from that workshop was that whatever energy is boiling out in you, negative or positive, find something positive about it and make it a positive energy and you can have a very pleasant ride on it.

Regarding his current job, Mr. Alex described his relationships with co-workers and colleagues at work as very positive. He recalled that there had only been one incident with one of the employees:

I don't remember that I have complained with anybody. There was one incident with an employee. I told my employees that I am very compassionate, I make a lot of compromises, but I am very unforgiving when it comes to plagiarizing and cheating. I said that I would penalize the person who cheats and is dishonest. There were groups of two in each project. One of group gave me the project paper, which was very identical and similar to other group. So I sort of, I sanctioned them and I gave them bad review on that work. One of the guys swears at me and left the workplace. That was a type of macho guy.

Mr. Alex continued that he never disregarded the "boundaries of culture" with his employees. He believed that he was the "observer" and did not include culture or any "judgment" in the "treatment" of an individual. He admitted that he quickly learned about being not only "politically right," but behaving accordingly: "So people are the same when they sit in front of me. They are all the same. The language skill could be different but does not mean that [they] are different."

Although in his home country Mr. Alex used to work with people from the same cultural background, his passion for learning about other cultures never ceased. He realized that there was a difference between managing people from his cultural background and people from different cultures:

Of course, of course, you have to be very observant of people's cultural background. You have to be [with a strong voice], otherwise you might say something or do something which might offend that person very easily. Like traveling to another country and behaving accordingly. You have to be observant of that culture. As part of being Canadian or assimilation to this society is that you have to learn about other cultures, unless you want to live in isolation.

Mr. Alex's definition of being observant was to "see people." He believed that his East Asian colleague had a major influence on how he learned to behave and think like a Canadian. He revealed an interesting point of view:

Canadian-born does not think that way. They have the respect, they have the observation, but unless they sort of express it, and most of them do at school in a multicultural environment, so it becomes a second nature for them. But those who live in communities where this opportunity does not exist, they become structured and close-minded. I have become so multinational now. I have become a true Canadian. It took a long time, but it happened.

During over 20 years of residing in Canada, Mr. Alex's adjustment process (at home and at work) flourished. Meanwhile, Mr. Alex was very busy with his career and Mrs. Alex became involved in some volunteer work. She could speak English and had no language issues, but she experienced some difficulty adjusting to a different work system. Gradually, through some acquaintances, she applied for a paid job in an academic setting. In their country, she had been employed, so this was a familiar experience. His wife's final adjustment to living in Canada completed their family's integration into a new country.

I feel I am complete now. But being considered Canadian probably was completed fifteen/twenty years ago. The important thing for new person who comes to this country is that willingness to assimilate to a new culture and new society. That willingness must be strong and must be there. And extra effort must [be] put for the adjustment to happen.

In his current job, Mr. Alex works with highly educated people, and he believes they are all happy. He instigated many changes in the department at the organizational level to make the workplace more pleasant for everybody. He received feedback about this:

I heard this from outside that I am running the department like a watch and with lots of dedication. The nice thing, the beautiful thing about having colleagues that are highly educated is that you don't have to teach anything, you only have to show them. And they'll do it.

Although Mr. Alex's cross-cultural transition had some gusts of wind in its sails, he adjusted successfully.

## **Mr. Mandi's Narrative Profile**

### **Theme 1: Departure from There to Here with Hope: When the Comfort Zone Became Uncomfortable**

Mr. Mandi was an educated entrepreneur from a Latin American country, divorced and living alone in Vancouver. Mr. Mandi began his story:

I did have two successful businesses that I was running parallel before I move in here. Mr. Mandi moved to Canada from a largely populated capital city in South America because the society in his country was unsafe. There was much violence, crime, and kidnapping as well as corruption within the private business sector:

Why I decided to come to Canada? Well, the main reason I would say was the matter of security. That was almost seven years ago. I decided to immigrate basically. The other one was, in construction business, there was too much corruption. So just to get any project, you have to bribe, you had to do this, to do that. And I didn't want that, I was uncomfortable with that. I went into couple of deep troubles. Even working with the government was worse than working with private industry. So I decided to close my business. The sports club business is still stable and is not much of a challenge.

Mr. Mandi became convinced that he needed to leave his country of origin, so he started to research possible places to go and the various opportunities in each:

Then I think a little bit of the States, a little bit of Canada. And I didn't know too much about Canada, to be very honest, at the beginning. But I knew that my cousin and her parents immigrated here and I decided to come during the winter just to study English, and I stayed three months here in Canada. I was two months in Vancouver and one month in Toronto. During the winter [laughs] very different from my country's climate. The coldest you can get in my home country is +13, +14. It is very humid over there, but not compared to here.

He related that although he was not fond of cooler weather, he thought he could adapt to living in Canada.

## **Theme 2: Arrival: Superman in Crisis**

As soon as Mr. Mandi returned to his home country from exploring Vancouver, he and his wife decided to move to Canada with their small children. At first, his wife did not object to moving to a new country. However, before completing their move to Canada they faced a marital crisis, leading to separation and finally, divorce.

Unfortunately, at the middle of the process the immigration law changed and I had to apply again. That caused some delay on our move to Canada. I sold my business. In the middle of the immigration process, unfortunately we got divorced. OK, we got separated and after that we got divorced. So, and after that I got the visa for all of us but she didn't want to come, she was with the kids, I gave her the custody. I was not sure to go or not. That actually was a pretty difficult decision.

Eventually, Mr. Mandi made the final decision and moved to Canada, thinking about his children and wanting to provide better and safer living conditions for them. For his children, he dreamed of a life that was built upon a solid foundation. He knew that if he stayed in his home country, it might have been fine for a short period of time, but in the long term, it would have been disastrous. Mr. Mandi knew if he immigrated at first to Canada alone, it would be easier for him to adjust and thus, pave the road for his children's future:

In a way it could be easier to come by myself because I can do whatever I have to do and I didn't have that much responsibility here. So I can live anywhere and so be more adaptable.

Even in the face of separation from his children and knowing his English was poor, he was determined to move to Canada and start a new life.

Well, I took English courses at school in my home country. But to be very honest my level of English was very, very bad. So I could hardly have a conversation. I could hardly understand movies or the radio.

Mr. Mandi spent the first three months attending English classes for eight hours a day. Classes became his "full-time job." His English was not very fluent, but he could communicate with people. However, since his professional area was engineering, he did not need to write in English

extensively. Nonetheless, he believed that his written composition in English was not as poor as his speaking skills: “And also my English is better if I can write than speak. I can actually read English books, engineering books, business books. My problem is normally talking.”

With regard to adjusting to a new life and to working in Canada, Mr. Mandi called himself “very lucky”. He said,

When I arrived in Canada, I met a childhood friend that we also did university together and we have the same university degree. Then he invited me for dinner as soon as I arrived – the next day, probably. So while having dinner, he said, in the company I am working there is an opening. I said, Why not?

He agreed, even though at that point in time being employed in a serious job was not Mr. Mandi’s plan. His plans were to study English and to find a job that would pay the rent. He was receiving some income from the entertainment business he operated in his hometown, which made his living expenses affordable. In his mind, finding work related to his profession had already been postponed. At the same time, he decided to try and attended one job interview related to his profession. He knew that working in a company would give him an opportunity to practice English, yet he was not sure if the company would hire him. It was a huge company that conducted many projects in the range of hundreds of millions of dollars. He lacked self-esteem due to his poor English, but he took a risk that led to positive results.

I took the first interview, then they asked me to come tomorrow for the second interview and then after third interview they said I could begin the work. Less than eight days after arriving, I was working in something pretty basic but something related to engineering and my experience as project manager.

### **Theme 3: Superman Resides: The Champion**

Mr. Mandi signed a three-month contract with that company. He remained “open minded” about the companies’ demands. After three months, they extended his position, and gradually, he became an instructor and part of the management team of a monitoring group leading an eight-

hundred-million-dollar project. Eventually, he was assigned the position of project control lead and was responsible for projects taking place outside Canada, although he did not need to travel to those countries. The work was directly related to his profession, and in due time, he was able to obtain higher positions. However, he occasionally experienced some anxiety regarding the work.

Mr. Mandi described his feelings during that time:

Well, at the beginning it was kind of hard. Mostly because even though it was area of my expertise, the company was doing some other projects which were not in my area. So I didn't know anything. I not only had to do with the language but also the unfamiliar projects. I was kind of anxious. There were lots of anxieties at the beginning. I would say not only the work was tense but all the learning was very tense. I also took courses in BCIT.

Mr. Mandi's anxiety greatly "diminished" with improvement in his English and a greater comfort level in his professional life. He began to feel more relaxed and to enjoy Canadian culture:

I was personally very comfortable with the culture here, the way that things run. So everything is pretty in order. If somebody tells you that you have this in 30 days you have that in 30 days. And that is something that matches my personality very well. That I used to hate in my home country.

Mr. Mandi pointed out that he had been displeased by personal or professional promises left undone in his home country. He remembered that in his country of origin, promises were verbal and people needed to be reminded many times about promised agreements: "Keeping promises is something that I feel very comfortable here [in Canada] both in my social life and at work. Although I liked so many things here, being lonely was tough for me."

It was crucial for Mr. Mandi to talk about his feelings of isolation and his struggles with loneliness. According to him, personal relationships with Canadians [both Canadian-born and immigrants] were very reserved:

Not having my family and relatives, even though I had my cousin and my aunt here. But my aunt is my aunt [laugh]. Despite my family I made some friends but still was very difficult. Something that I was pretty conscious about [was] I am not going to my culture [to establish relationships]. I am not going to them. Is not that I am running away from them but I do not want to make circle of same people from my nationality. And I am in

Canada, and I am not in Canada to make friends with people from my home country and for me, immigration is [becoming] adapted to a new culture. So for me, I have to do what I have to do to be a Canadian. And to me being Canadian is not hanging out with the friends from my country of origin, talking the same language. That was not my mission of immigration. That just did not make sense to me.

Mr. Mandi's social life used to revolve around his family and his friends. He remembered that during a recent trip to his home country, a relative held a celebration just for him. People there did things collectively rather than in isolation. Families invited numerous friends to visit and held big parties. He remembered that social gatherings had always been his culture's focal point, and people would socialize for a variety of reasons. Yet that kind of social life was not what he missed when living in Canada; what he missed was having close contacts with people and intimate friendships:

That was something that I was not much involved with. I was kind of isolated. I was kind of shy, I would say. I am the only child, so I used to be very alone but because of that it was easier there for me to make friends because it was so open and you have so many opportunities that you don't have here. So here people are like, you and your girlfriend and that's it, or you and your family and that's it. OK, you meet a lot of people at work but it is about work and nothing else. That is the cultural differences that I have seen.

Mr. Mandi mentioned that eventually support from his close relatives and networking with people from his same cultural background helped him to cope with depressive moods and anxieties related to loneliness. Yet those kinds of contacts were not satisfactory because he wanted deeper, more emotional connections, such as having his children and an intimate partner by his side:

Probably my family, my cousin has been supportive and my aunt, my friends from my home country that I met here through work. I would say that is the way I coped. It has been difficult to have my kids so far away.

Mr. Mandi knew that he was the sole financial provider for his children and was wholeheartedly willing to contribute. He never lost contact with his children and was fortunate that he could travel regularly to his country of origin to see them. However, there were days when he wished he had an intimate partner. He believed that having a close relationship with a woman

could prevent overwhelming feelings of loneliness:

For sure missing my children makes me feel down sometimes. And also the fact that I am alone and have no girlfriend here, still don't meet anybody, makes things more difficult. It is more difficult to cope with the new situation with the lack of the other supportive companion. If I had a girlfriend, I could go to the movies or do something in the weekend. It could be easier. Sometimes, I feel sad about being in the weekend and doing nothing. I can do whatever, but sometimes alone is not the same thing [sad laugh]. So that makes you feel in a more intense way the lack of the other supportive structure you have in your home country, because my family and my friends are there [in my home country]. If something like this happen, I take the phone and say let's go out, or whatever. You have lots of options to cope with that. Here, you don't have it, so that's why it is difficult.

At work, Mr. Mandi implemented relationship strategies different from those in his home country. He learned to be straightforward with his co-workers, instead of avoiding being direct.

He felt that kind of interaction was more professional and more appealing to all:

Here [in Canada] it is just about the work, so they don't go to personal relations. They go right to the point. It is more professional and more impersonal here. In my home country, it is different. Apparently, there is more personal, it is the way we interact. If I ask you about this, I am going to first ask you about your wife, your kids [laughs], what are you going to do in the weekend and then after half an hour conversation I am going to the point. It is part of the business culture. I would say it is easier here for the work environment. For me, at least it is easier. I am pretty comfortable with this way of working.

For Mr. Mandi, living up to the new country's expectations was fulfilling, even though he experienced some hardships in coping with new standards. The majority of his thoughts, dreams, and expectations about living in Canada were realized:

For sure, it is very true. When I came here first to study English, I realized how different was Canada from the States. That in my previous stage of mind Canada was the same as the States but colder weather [laugh]. I was in the States but not in Canada, so the image I had in my mind was exactly the same but colder. It is different in lot of way. And I like it. The community is more socialist and liberal than the States. People are more equal, you see less violence than the States. I said, "This is much, much safer than there and people are nicer here." So for me that was what I was looking for.

Mr. Mandi articulated that when he first lived in Canada he still had "defensive" behaviours derived from living in his hometown, as he had experienced very unsafe living conditions. After a couple of months, Mr. Mandi changed his behaviors and the habits that had



caused him to be guarded. He had been very concerned because, in his country, financially secure men could be kidnapped for ransom. Fortunately, the security of his children was not so much a concern for him, as women and young children were not kidnapped. He recalled:

Before going out of the bus [here in Canada], I was checking who was in the bus station. Because in the normal way of living, I was walking on the street, I was always looking back to see who was following me, who was seeing me. It took me couple of months to realize that I was doing that in an automatic way. And was lot of stress and always being concern being attacked at every corner. I was always prepared, because that was the way of living over there, and because I know myself [loud laugh]. The other thing is that despite of the lot of benefit of being here, you are going to lose lot of thing over there. Not the family that is structured but simple things, like losing maids.

Mr. Mandi disclosed that in his home country, he employed many maids in his household. He said, “That was a norm over there.” In his country of origin, he never cooked or cleaned the house because that was maids’ work. However, in Canada, he learned to do all his own household chores, and this pleased him: “For me, was not a big deal, because, because of me. But in that macho culture that kind of stuff could be depressing.”

Mr. Mandi believed that cross-cultural adjustment is like being in a “solid marriage.” In his view, firmly believing in oneself and having supportive relationships may be key factors in successfully coping with and adjusting to a new country. He also believed that immigrating is a “tough test” for couples and relocation may jeopardize the relationship:

Something I comment to my friend that moving to a new country is like marriage. The marriage is something that is going to be under lot of stress. I think I have had that stress just before coming. Just the idea of immigration and all that conversation about how we are going to live there and how we are going to cope with that stuff. Most of the friends that I had and have [who] immigrated got split just after six months or a year and are not together anymore. I always used to say what are you going to lose and what are you going to gain and what are your values and put that in the scale and see if the immigration is for you – because it is not for everybody. Depending on who asks me about immigration? I say are you willing to do this, willing to do that, willing to lose this, willing to lose that in order to get financial stability, which is not very easy, because work here is very demanding. In my case, I value what I gained and not value what I have lost. I have never ever appreciated the comfort I had in my home country.

## **Mr. Rahim's Narrative Profile**

### **Theme 1: Departure from There to Here with Hope: When the Comfort Zone Became Uncomfortable**

In his Middle Eastern home country, Mr. Rahim was a middle-aged chief executive of an international import-export company. He used to travel to many different countries, where he was exposed to a variety of cultures, communities, languages, and systems. Sometimes his wife and three children would accompany him on his business trips. In the early 1990s, in spite of his sophisticated job, and in spite of the fact that his company was doing very well, he and his family decided to immigrate to Canada. He had no strong desire to leave his job and country, but he was hoping to provide a better education for his children in Canada. He was aware of his capabilities and knew that he could be successful in a new country, mainly because he was quite sure that he would be continuing to work at the same professional level. That was a convincing promise from the Canadian side, when Canadian officers proudly handed him his immigration papers. He had no doubt that the new country would be a safe place to raise his children, and a home in which his wife would be as comfortable as she used to be in her hometown. The future looked bright and sunny. There was no place for worry or concern:

I had no intention of moving to any other country, so it just happened that we had a common friend, a family friend who was living in Canada and he came over to my hometown to visit us and he got us inspired. That was in 1996 [moments of silence.] So he got us inspired and motivated that Canada is a beautiful country and has lots of prospects for a better life, even though I had been in Canada before, on a business trip, but I never thought of coming in here and living in here for the rest of my life, bringing up family in here. I liked it, it is a wonderful beautiful place but that was a time and that person a friend of us he said we should apply for it and we should go for it and all sorts of things and all sorts of dreams and many things. Basically, my friend got us so much convinced and motivated us that we [my wife and I] said fine, we should go there, we should apply for it. We sold our house. We also sold our properties and whatever we could. But we had not much information about living in here.

Their move to a new country came as shocking news to their family and friends. But Mr. Rahim and his wife had already made their decision and it seemed that no matter how hard it would be for their family, they were determined to move.

It was a bigger shock for them [the family]. For us maybe was an initial excitement that going to a different place, we got an immigration and that maybe was the biggest thing in the whole world what we had in our hands, but for rest of the family, brothers, sisters, my parents, my mother, my friends, they were, they were shocked. They were not, they are not aware of the whole process; they saw that we had decided to dispose of our things and we are going. So the question was that what is the thing you are going to gain in Canada which you can't gain there? You have the great job, you have the best earnings, lots of respect, so many family members, other relatives, you have been helping them, you have been very co-operative with them, and they are proud that you are in here. Aha, as far as achievement, what is there? So, honestly, honestly, it was a big loss for them, it was a big surprise, surprise as well. But honestly, to be very honest I was not being able to give them any answer. Because the question was that – what is there that you gain there that you don't have here?

Mr. Rahim explained that he, his wife, and all their close family members took their move as a huge loss and behaved as if someone had died, like a “jenazah procession [the cultural mourning ceremony in that middle eastern country] that we might not be able to see each other anymore.” He mentioned that he was glad that I [the researcher] was aware of and understood that part of the Middle East's culture related to moving away from home and family members: “family members took our move as a farewell.” Yet he and his wife were not culturally conditioned to suppress their future goals for the sake of their relatives' devastated emotions. It was a quest for the future, almost visible and unexpectedly wholesome. He identified a variety of motivations to move to a new country but the majority had to do with wanting a chance to provide better opportunities for their children's future.

That was the only thing, mainly for children. It was the same kind of situation for my wife's family. But we got [my wife and my children] tunnel vision there and we would look at bigger picture at that time. We were so excited so basically it was [our] decision and they [our families] were not in a position of stopping us.

## **Theme 2: Arrival: Superman in Crisis**

Yet their plans did not work exactly as he and his family had expected. Regardless of the many supportive promises from the Canadian side, they entered a new land, and felt very lonely and left out. On the psychological/emotional level, what they encountered had not been what they had dreamed of. It was not just the inability to cope, it was the reality of being ignored by the Canadian system, which slapped them on the face and discouraged them from their goals. Although it might have been more challenging for them to go back (because they had already given up all their belongings), doing so, might also in the short run, have seemed more appealing. He complained that the lack of support from the immigration system was a major complication in their move. There had been numerous unmet expectations.

I didn't know anybody in Vancouver; I had to talk to some community people, just by myself. I had to move around, go to mosque, maybe other places, and the community was not very nice at that time, our community, to provide information. So it was a struggle, and I must say that the first week we were just about to go back. Maybe the first two weeks was so bad, so bad that you had nobody to talk to, there is no information. You can't move your normal system in here. It was so very hard. Imagining, I have been travelling all across the world, I know English very well, I can read through and I can gather information, as same as with my family and all these things. But had it been somebody who has difficulty in language, who has first time away from his family and his country, what would have happen to that person? I said, "Ok, I know a little bit, maybe I can find some way, "but it was so depressing, uh, away from the family, coming in here and there is nobody to talk to, or to support or provide some information, or give us some kind of encouragement.

He realized that he was on his own, so to examine his own capabilities he tried to find a way to receive help with adjustment issues. He visited different organizations to gather information to find a job that would be compatible with his education and the field of his previous profession. Finally, he came to the conclusion that in "real life" an elite immigrant had to make an effort to establish his own network and/or find a suitable job. This came as an ugly truth because during that time, as a newcomer, he did not know anybody with whom to network, and the chances of moving forward were "almost zero."

During that chaotic period, his wife and children had also been affected:

My family has been affected all the time. We [my wife and I] had quite a bit of fights, to be very honest, because we were frustrated, uh, and uh, far away from your culture and what we have been doing. So we had a little bit of arguments and sometimes fight, sometimes we not even talking to each other. So I am blaming her.

He talked about the way he and his wife used to blame each other.

You were the one to push me, I never wanted to come here, and now you are saying that we should be going back. This is not a joke; this is not a small thing. Kids were affected, they have been in the school, they have no company, and all these things. Mostly it was ourselves being together and supporting each other.

Mr. Rahim revealed that in order to bring peace to his family he had to take his family back to the comfortable life they had had in their own country. Yet for one last time he expressed to his family that he was willing to finish his research about living in this new country and test his capabilities. He and his wife set a two-month period to compromise and find out if they could stay, otherwise they would go back. Mr. Rahim did not want to give up too soon because he believed in his education, his previous achievements, his qualifications, and his ambitions. But more importantly, his religious background helped him to manage complicated situations; for example, his religious beliefs interwove respect, understanding, and care for each family member's needs. He believed that he should make the effort to find a way to cope with the difficult times they were encountering. Why was this important? Because he believed:

Maybe we made mistake to coming here, because of the things happening to us, but let us not to make another mistake so quick. I still had money to buy ticket and go back. The other thing that helped me to cope was my own capabilities, my family, and my experiences, so I have been used in many different situations. Ok, stressful situations but who is to manage it, nobody but myself. So I also leave it to my creator and that was the religion part of it. And other thing was a little bit of communication between ourselves, yes we had high talks, fights but we never broke down our communications. Yes, we had hard times but if we fight we make it even more difficult, so who was going to make benefit – nobody. So, yes, these were concerns these were issues we didn't break communication because if you broke communication you would be more stressed.

Even though Mr. Rahim was highly educated and experienced, he decided to go with Canadian rules, to start over and go to different institutions, not only to keep himself busy, but to gain Canadian certifications. Gradually, he obtained his master's degree from a Canadian institution. He called himself very fortunate because he applied for two highly ranked jobs and got them both. These two work settings were multicultural. Due to his past work experiences he had no difficulty working in a multicultural environment.

Meanwhile, his family started to meet some people from their own culture. One way they had been successful at finding people and asking for help had been to look in the phonebook and call people who had similar names to their own. Mr. Rahim and his family were hoping that the time of agony and dwelling upon intensive decision-making was coming to an end. Yet they had not overcome their feelings of loneliness and isolation. These negative emotions had been the centerpiece of their life. They still needed to find friends who could help them cope with difficult times. Sometimes, Mr. Rahim felt torn about issues regarding his family, but having a "reasonably good job" brought a little bit of comfort and satisfaction, and gave him a reason to stay in Canada.

That gap of being away from the family, that was still there. Of course, you are far away from your family, but future plans were giving us a reason to stay in here and [I] fought for my family.

During that time, his wife also got involved in doing some community work, finished some courses, and started working part-time. "So it wasn't that bad, but it took at least, at least I should say a year and a half, a year and a half before we can say, 'Ok, we can spend more years here'."

At school, his children encountered some culture shock. But the schooling system "had a little bit of understanding." Most of the teachers were dealing with immigrant students, and teachers helped their children get involved in studying and sports. Despite the fact that their

children missed their hometown friends and relatives, they adjusted well and were not “much [of a] burden” on their parents’ shoulders.

In terms of bringing up his children in a new country, Mr. Rahim preferred to stick to his own cultural values rather than modeling the Canadian culture, which condones more revealing clothing for women and freedom from an early age to have relationships with the opposite sex. He said that he was coming from a culture which is very protective about family matters:

As parents and custodians of our values we need to look on these things in our children as well. There are many, many positive things from our perspective there, certain things which can be negative and which are not good for our children and for our family as a whole, for example, nudity; we care for our bodies. I am not saying this as a Muslim but as a human being. Ok, so over here, I don’t want to see my daughter or somebody like my daughter moving around showing his or her own body and, so these are the things we have lots of respect for that. Yes, having girlfriend, boyfriend, having relationships [not] unless they are mature enough to decide what is good for them. This is our concern and we have to watch for these because we are guardians and responsible. So, well again there are some cultural shock and adjusted and we needed to adjust.

Mr. Rahim pointed out that in his culture there are a number of factors considered helpful for children during their development. These factors are having a close relationship with family members and living in a society that adheres to the same values. Additionally, since he and his wife had strong religious beliefs, they were concerned to make sure that their children would receive the same upbringing as they used to have in their home country:

But, there were certainly few times when we [my wife and I] had arguments, we were depressed, and/or we were not so comfortable in this environment. They [their children] were also being affected. We used to keep them away from those things. We used to talk between ourselves [my wife and I] but when it comes to kind of depression we wanted to keep them away and let them go with their studies and all these things. Of course, we had a plan that any time we had a chance we make a phone call or visit our homeland and keep them contacted, partially connected with that kind of environment.

### **Theme 3: Superman Resides: The Champion**

All those survival efforts had been made to keep his and his families’ dreams and goals alive. The whole process of adjustment was a combination of logic and emotions, freedom and

responsibility, conflict, resolution, and consequences. He went through the whole process of searching and researching without getting help from any institutions or society. In fact, it has been his individual attempts and his investment of significant time and money to experiment in the unknown that has helped him through the adjustment process. The process of adjustment was at the same time both a bitter truth and a liberating experience. He mentioned:

Lack of help from society and institutions would cause discomfort, depression, and loneliness. They [immigrants] may be deprived or may go back; they may decide not to do anything. In some cases, they may go into wrong directions many things may happen. I am not sure this was the case but my wife started having some rashes and itches and some allergies. The doctor advised her that she was taking on too much, so relax yourself. So this is a very, very important issue that we are talking about that. So it is not just the pressure one person has.

In his opinion, immigrants in order to adjust and cope with stresses successfully must at all times receive good guidance and support from a social system, to teach them how to earn their livelihoods in a new country.

I think now the things has slightly changing because, uh, the community realized or are realizing at least that immigrants when they are coming here, no matter how much information they could gather from different ways, still they need to have first-hand information, correct information, and different ways to get it. Good guidance. The most important part is their adjustment for earning their bread and butter So I know there is not to stop immigrants to come over here, but at least if we provided the right information by the Canadian Government there that is a professions for immigrant elite professionals and say this is how you were selected to come here [Canada]. You do have some, find some job information, but this is the real story. Don't just think that you [immigrant elite professionals] are going there and you are going to get everything. That will slow down their thinking in terms of expectations that they have to work hard. Then we need to have some systems here. I should say that systems are the people in here, are the industries that really have to follow support of this country, which unfortunately I didn't find, because it was all about networking. Society in terms of industries wherever people are going to work. So if you ask me how much experience you have before they give you a job in here, how much experience I have when I am just arriving in Canada, I would say that don't have any. So what are you expecting from me, are you telling me that I am not qualified, not a suitable person for this job because no matter how much qualification I have I don't have Canadian experience? Then give me the experience, or accept my experience wherever I am working. So possibly, our political system has to work on. So whatever the way – but asking a person who was just arriving here that you need to have Canadian experience. Where do I get that experience? Even if I have to drive a taxi and I have to



work in a different industry . . . that is not my experience. So where that experience is coming from? That is where the big problem lies. There is a big gap in here. So you should not be taking immigrants as second- or third-rate citizens. We are as good as or sometimes maybe more qualified than your people. So let's work on that one.

His personal recollections of his individual effort only reminded him of the pain he had gone through. In what he shared with me, he placed the greatest emphasis on the value of assisting new comers. Mr. Rahim was very concerned with the way the Canadian system applies their insight related to understanding and helping “highly-ranked immigrants” to create their desired life in their new country. Applying some general principles may lead to easing struggles and resolving adjustment issues as quickly as possible. The individual truths of his experience were most apparent in his story. He was fortunate to have a secure financial background, to survive the stormy days and “navigate” his way through the system. Yet he believed that it had been wrong to gather all this information on his own without receiving any help from society or the immigration services. In his opinion, it was a waste of time and energy that could have been spent more productively. He indicated that the resources exist but one needs to put in effort to access them. However, nobody showed them how to find the fast track to getting settled, nor did anyone inquire whether they needed assistance.

In some respects, Mr. Rahim believed that the government needs to categorize immigrants with different professions and qualifications, and as much as possible, keep the guidance systems open. This would give immigrants an opportunity to have access to the right resources, instead of wandering around aimlessly.

So we basically need to bring in a very effective system, because, immigrants in Canada are not coming on a temporary basis or in small numbers. There is a kind of permanent thing going on. So, why don't we have a proper and effective system that every person coming has some kind of guidance, counselling, financing, or whatever was needed? So right away they go on the track to think less about past professions and missing families and losing groups from their own countries.

He ended his story on how he adjusted in a new country by making some suggestions for other elite professional immigrants who want to come to Canada:

Well, I would tell them the true story and I have been telling my friends and everybody that this is the true story so don't think there is cake for you and you are eating it, it is difficult here, not only emotional side, on your physical and family life. Still is hard, no matter how much information you provide and how quickly you can provide, still hard. But it makes it harder that you do your own searching, your own networking; you are talking to tons and tons of people. Everybody giving his or her way of telling information, so that is true story I would tell everybody. Be ready for that. As far as the economic settlement is concerned, in terms of finding jobs, in terms of right assessment, I don't see any big change in there. That is what we need to work. Government agencies, private agencies, public services need to work in different ways. So, all are working together.

Lastly, Mr. Rahim concluded that it is the public and private sectors that need to work hand in hand to educate newcomers on how to live in a new country. Mr. Rahim was of the belief that the Canadian government supported labour work more than high-ranked professions. He strongly believed that obtaining support from the social and labour government systems would be a key instrument for highly-ranked professional immigrants to fast-forward their settlement and adjustment process. As it would be difficult for "foreign qualified" elite professionals to engage in lower-ranked professions, the resources, guidance, networking, and "bonding" need to be readily accessible and available to meet their expectations, if they are admitted into Canada.

### **Mr. Parham's Narrative Profile**

#### **Theme 1: Departure from There to Here with Hope: When the Comfort Zone Became Uncomfortable**

Mr. Parham was born and raised in Southeast Asia. Currently, Mr. Parham is the president of a consulting company in Vancouver. Part of his higher education was completed in his home country and the remaining portion in Europe. Almost forty years ago, while he was still in Europe, one of his Canadian-born colleagues motivated him to move to Canada. Fortunately, soon after applying for immigration he arrived in Canada. During that time, Mr. Parham was single.

## **Theme 2: Arrival: Superman in Crisis**

Mr. Parham's intention when first coming to Canada was "to return to home country after gaining some practical experiences. Instead, I stayed in this country and became Canadian citizen." One of his concerns for new immigrants coming to Canada is finding a suitable job, as most Canadian industries are looking for people with Canadian experience. This requirement causes major disappointment for new immigrants on their arrival. Mr. Parham articulated:

Getting a job or assimilating with Canadian society was not much of a problem for me, as I have already lived and studied in England. Language was not an issue for me either. I think knowing languages is an asset. But you always find some racial discrimination. I do not know if this discrimination is for colour of skin or religion or something else.

Within a month Mr. Parham found an engineering job at a Canadian telecommunications company. During the course of his work, he did not feel any discrimination from his co-workers:

In those days, 1960s, there were not lot of support for people from my ethnic background, but I had few friends. I had to make my own support group. Initially, my friends were mostly Caucasian Canadian. Gradually, I discovered that there are a few East Indian, who like me came to Canada around the time I arrived here. So we became a family away from home.

Mr. Parham recalled that in the 1970s he experienced some racial issues within general society.

At times, he was insulted by strangers, regarding his race. He recalled an incident that he cannot forget:

It was at the department store. There were two young kids coming down with me in the escalator. They deliberately stopped at the bottom of the escalator so that I could not go through. So, I pushed them off. They said something about my race in French. I realized that they did not know the difference between different races. They must have heard it at home. This is the only one worth mentioning in this context.

He remembered another racial remark, about black people, being made at work while he was in Europe. In return, he remarked to the man who had made that comment:

Do you know Sir Isaac Newton? The guy said, oh yes he was a scientist. I asked him about the composition of colour. The man said, "What about it?" White is the presence of

all colours, but black is the absence of all colours. So remember black people are not coloured people; white people should be called coloured people.

In a calm voice Mr. Parham continued:

Personally, I did not encounter that much racial issues, but some of my friends had. I am proud of my background and religion. And I am not that much sensitive about other people's comments.

Mr. Parham believed that because of his positive attitude, he did not get hurt by other people's racial comments. Although some people passed judgment on him, he did not pay any attention to their unjust commentaries. He knows "some people" who would take the racial comments to be "insulting." In spite of the opposition of certain people, he was steadfast in his work and in his personal life.

If some people say I am stupid, I know that I am not stupid. Why do I care? So it depends on how you take it. I didn't feel that I have been persecuted for my nationality or my ethnic background. I worked in two different companies and had no problem with my associates or colleagues. Professionally, I have been treated as a normal human being at all times. I am what I am and I cannot change [my ethnic background.] So, if somebody doesn't like me, it is his problem and not mine. I am not going to intrude into his life, and so it doesn't matter to me. This is kind of my coping mechanism and it makes my dealings congenial with different people who have different attitudes.

Mr. Parham used this metaphor to clarify his attitude toward culturally different people: "See, five fingers they are not the same, so people are different as well."

Racial issues were not something that caused Mr. Parham to feel disappointed, depressed, or sad. He also mentioned that he did not feel homesick living away from his home country and/or his family. He stated,

When I came to England, first year, I was homesick. Then I realized that I came for a reason and I had to pursue that goal. I felt homesick when I used to go and visit my parents (they were alive on those days) and I felt sad when I was coming back. But now it is not that much as I feel homesick, but I feel that I miss my brothers and sisters.

### **Theme 3: Superman Resides: The Champion**

In the early 1970s, Mr. Parham got married to an educated woman from the same country and with the same cultural and religious background. He never felt that his wife had any problem

living in Canada because:

She could get some social support group and social activities and something like that. So she didn't feel homesick and she could go easily to visit her family and also language was not a problem for her. But you know everybody gets homesick, I am sure you get homesick from time to time . . . .

Mr. Parham commented on his wife's cultural clashes and identity issues this way:

I don't know if she wanted to have her identity or not. She was working and I was not against her working. Because when she said, no I don't want to work after our child birth, I said that is fine. Because when you have a child his or her welfare is more important. I think that was one thing she felt about it and I never talked about it. My parents were not very strict. I was black sheep of my family and I always do something controversial. My parents were very liberal people and she could do what most other married women could not do in our country. The only things I think my mother was very against her daughter-in-law go to work. So my sister-in-law in India had to quit her job, once she got married to my brother.

Mr. Parham now has children who study in one of British Columbia's universities. As a father, he did not experience problems with his children's behaviours. Mr. Parham's open-minded view about culturally different people has helped his children to be culturally open-minded, as well: "It didn't matter for me whom my children interacted with. In the school, they have friends from other cultures and they have no problem with it."

At this point of our interview, Mr. Parham was curious to know about my nationality, my religious affiliation, how long I have been in Canada, and when I had immigrated to Canada. He was interested in knowing if I thought about going back to my country of origin. He asked, "Can I ask you some questions?" I smiled and asked, "Are they for your research?" We both laughed. I answered his question about my background. Then he said, "You know the reason I asked you where you come from because my boy is going out with someone from your country of origin."

We both laughed again. From my point of view, his comment was simply confirmation of his unbiased beliefs about culturally different people.

In Mr. Parham's opinion, people's way of thinking has a lot to do with their "outlook":

I never followed or accepted anything my parents said unless I was convinced. My entire life one thing I had: never to harm anybody. Unknowingly is acceptable, but knowingly to do harm to others never was my philosophy. If I can help somebody I help; if I cannot that's fine too with me; but knowingly I would never harm others.

I brought Mr. Parham's attention back to the beginning of our interview, when he had mentioned that his credentials had not been recognized in Canada. He corrected me this way:

No, see. No, I may be an exception because my degree was from England. So I did not have any problem. I got the registration with the association immediately because of my British degree. See, the thing is that this country does not have the qualified people i.e., doctors, engineers, etc. Canada needs people from outside and brings them from various countries but does not recognize their qualifications. If you do not recognize the qualifications then do not bring them here. If they need one or two courses, fine give them those courses to qualify. If you bring foreign educated people as immigrants, treat them as equal to the Canadian counterparts. Why do you give them immigration when their qualification is not recognized here? That is wrong with our immigration system. This has to be corrected if we want to progress in 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Mr. Rafael's Narrative Profile**

#### **Theme 1: Departure from There to Here with Hope: When the Comfort Zone Became Uncomfortable**

Mr. Rafael was born and raised in a Central American country, and in his country of origin he was a top builder/designer. When I asked him about what led him to move to Canada, and to share some of his experiences before coming here, he said:

What a good question, because that decision was made by the whole family. In that moment, in my country we had what is happening right now in Iraq. There were terrorists and they were killing people on the streets. We were at the middle. The army was fighting against terrorists and normal people like us were at the middle of it. Easily we could be killed. It was around mid-80s and we had a very bad president. Anyway, it was catastrophic for everybody. Then as family we decided to move.

Mr. Rafael explained that by the time of the move out of his country of origin, he was a middle-aged man with five children. Four of his children were professionals and the younger child was in high school. Unfortunately, because of the move, the Rafaels lost many assets. The family also left all their close relatives behind:

We decided to move, we lose a lot of money, possessions, and my position was very high and good profession. I served as a professional and had good, good jobs. We moved here and my wife was fine with that. All family agreed we had to move, because the situation was not safe. They said you can compare what more or less is happening in Baghdad now. They put car bombs, they killed twenty, they killed seventy, and then they put all street car bomb and then five high-rise buildings demolished, only in one car bomb. Anyway, you can understand what I say. This is scary. But the decision we made to move. Our whole family is living there, my brother, sister, we are the only ones moved here. But I was able to travel back and forth to my country of origin (because of my business), which helped me to visit my family. My wife also traveled to visit her family.

## **Theme 2: Arrival: Superman in Crisis**

Although the Rafaels were decisive about moving to a new country, their adjustment period was not as easy as they had envisioned:

At that time, my English language was very low. It does not mean that my English now is high, no. In compare, was a little bit lower as it is now. I had a friend who helped me to do some business together.

Mr. Rafael and one of his friends who were in the construction business started to build high-rise buildings in Canada. But unfortunately, because of the global economic situation in 1990,

[t]he price went to the ditch. We had terrible loss. Anyway, at time we decided to split, because apparently he couldn't understand what was happening. Then I decided to split. I think my friend was a little bit picky, and perhaps he wanted to take advantage of me. I don't know, perhaps I am wrong. I don't know.

During that time, Mr. Rafael was under a great deal of stress. He and his wife wanted to keep the family together, and did their best to support their children financially and emotionally. In order for his family to live in peace, Mr. Rafael decided to bring some money from his home country:

I told them you have a roof, and you have food here. Whatever study, you have to pay for that. And that was what they have done. Everybody is now in a success situation. It was an

effort made by my wife and myself. We were the two people that sacrificed. And I believe, and I deeply believe that it was an effort of my wife and myself to support the family.

Eventually, the Rafaels' hard work in a new country paid off. When the family had arrived in Canada, they did not know anybody except Mr. Rafael's business partner. He and his family made an effort to create relationships with the others. He admired his family's teamwork. He believed they worked as one unit.

Because we started to diminish our friends, we had lack of relation with our relatives. The point is that they [my wife and children] are fine now. The point is that my wife is happy, the health is working fine. We were not in a bad situation, I think because we have income coming from a rental property.

Mr. Rafael's opinion of the school system in Canada was based on what he had seen in his two daughters' academic work, and the way the teachers made them use their brains and respected their knowledge:

I think that Canada as a country is open, fair, is good and they allow immigrant people to bring their knowledge, the culture in order to improve the whole society, and I believe that is good. It is something that I can see from my two daughters. Here they teach how to think and that is the key point: how to use your brain to think. In our country is vertical way and I think perhaps in some middle eastern countries it is so vertical, and they don't allow you to think and you have to follow the rules. If you don't follow that rule they will cut [off] your head.

For his business to flourish, Mr. Rafael joined a group of Chinese investors:

We bought a piece of land and that was a very good investment. I was the project general manager there, and we made good money. We developed a nice piece of land. And the business was so good that the Hong Kong's people want to buy the, one group was from Hong Kong and the other group was from Taiwan. At the end, happily ending for me, because I was in charge and I had to travel and I had to be in charge of a very nice project. But after that I decided to go back to my country, because at that moment we [my family] saw that something was changing in our country.

After a while, Mr. Rafael returned to his country of origin to pursue his previous position while his family stayed here. He worked for eight to ten years in his home country and in Canada.



Mr. Rafael admitted that travelling back and forth between his country and Canada had helped him to overcome some ordeals related to transition and adjustment.

My asking about Canadian values and belief systems proved a thought-provoking question for Mr. Rafael, who responded:

That was a good question. [Moments of silence] What I like here, most of the time is respect the law. Law is something important. By-law is important. The police I think is the people you can trust, although now a bit changing [laughs]. But the point is that you can trust. That is important, because, if you lie then there is something wrong. If we lie in my country is fine. Almost doesn't matter if you lie. Here lying is something very bad.

Mr. Rafael believed that the Canadian system is working "nicely." This system taught them to understand and respect everything and everybody, which was converse to what they experienced in their country of origin: "In my country, the police are corrupt. Legal system almost does not exist, and nobody trusts anybody else."

When I asked how they adapted to the new culture, he answered:

That is a very, very good question. Because I think that in the social level we used to live, most of our relative and friends were highly connected to the North American way of life. So, our culture is more or less following them. And then for us, for boys and girls like the music, the artists, and that, everything was like in the States. That was something that I didn't realize, that States is one thing and Canada is another thing and Britain is another thing. I couldn't understand the difference; now I understand. The language for us is very important for me and my wife because we read a lot. We were very well connected with the Spanish literature and we know what is happening, we know the novels, we know the artists, we know what culture is, a rich culture. Our children starting to see what we left and they are coming back to enjoy the history of our country.

### **Theme 3: Superman Resides: The Champion**

Mr. Rafael shared that he had come across an article in a magazine, which had invited "Professionals in Transition" to take two-week classes:

I was looking at this learning facility's magazine. I don't remember the name of the magazine or booklet. And I found that there was something for people after 40 years [middle-aged.] They said "Professionals in Transition." Then I went and talked to them and had meeting. There was a lady who told me that I was qualified to go to that program.

Mr. Rafael explained that the program had been supported by the government, and professionals from different countries would go to that centre to learn how to handle their knowledge within the new environment. Thus, the program could help professionals in transition. It also encouraged them to find out about themselves as persons:

I started to work for them and it was kind of resurrection for me, because they gave us lots of tools. Then I started to introduce myself as a design consultant. As soon as I showed them my Power Point, they were amazed.

The centre opened a new door in Mr. Rafael's world, because he met several other professionals who wanted to invest and learn from his work experience:

As a design consultant and general manager of my company, I was trained to talk to the people in what is happening in design. So many people in my field don't know how to sell their ideas. It is like having driving license to practice, but many of them [professionals] they don't know how to drive. Most of the time in my profession, we fall in love with our profession and perhaps we are wrong. I have 50 years experience in my profession, and I can see easily who is right and who is wrong in the way of thinking. The point is this, that this is my new business to sell my experience, not to be creative for them but we can work together. As an artist you can make some creation and then you have the structure and you can match it with the knowledge.

He also mentioned that he was thankful to the Canadian government for supporting such a program, although they had to close down the centre last year:

Pity, it is a pity. Anyway, it is something that it happened. But I found myself a good support group. I have a lot of friends and found that the knowledge they gave us was the top and they were very, very good for all of us [professionals]. The point is this, that the creativity in our country is open. They encourage you to be a creative person. And this is good for people who have to do creative works. Now, here is different. Everything is by law, following this and that. Then the architectural resource here is so rigid. You have issues with creativity and the security of by-laws. Then here comes what I was talking at the beginning. Here mainly is to teach you how to think. In my culture, in architectural environment we are open to think but too much freedom. You don't know what is exactly happening but they encourage us to do and have a freedom to think, but we need a frame.

Mr. Rafael called himself a very professional and career-oriented person. He believed part of the work ethic and principles people have to learn in Canada is to "go to the point," instead of being scattered. He continued to describe his feeling in a more philosophical way:

Let me tell you something. The people who read more according to some survey; first they are physicians and then are architects. It means we [architects] read a lot. It means we do not read just about colour or so but it is cultural background. Also us [artists], we must to understand that an architect is a mixture of civil engineer and an artist. And an artist is a mirror of what is happening outside and you must know what is happening outside in order to be an answer. It means you have to be very much in touch with the cultural level that you are developing your ideas. Because the current knowledge of philosophy is that you have a philosophical idea and then it goes to the poets, to the philosophers, and then painters, and then architects. That is the reflection of thoughts. The point is, everything is related with your feeling. Is how you feel. I am fighting with my family mainly about how you have to feel something. And what is in your mind, and what is in your thought and what is conscious, what is your soul, and what is God. And I have time now and I can think about all these. Critical thinking is important. Nowadays, they say you have to be present and you have to forget about your past. Put the future is on top of your past. This is the importance of the power of now. Here and now.

Mr. Rafael emphasized that whatever starts in your heart means that you are talking about your feelings. He talked about the importance of peoples' emotions and feelings in connection with their minds, and indicated that understanding how those two (feeling and mind) work together can create a "perfect result." He continued this way:

I always ask my youngest daughter, "What is in your mind?" Then I have to hand her a book telling that what is in her mind. You have to go to heart of that person to see what is in their minds. I don't think the universities teach you how to go to the heart.

In his opinion, a new professional immigrant needs to be in touch with his heart and his mind in order to be successful in his social life and career. He believed that a person can thrive anywhere, because happiness is within the person and is not superficial.

Mr. Rafael's concluding point was about his present life situation in Canada. He admitted that he is at a point where he enjoys his life very much. He supervises and gives advice to other immigrant professionals who need help to adjust in a new country. This way, he not only keeps himself busy but he also earns some money as well. In his opinion, "It is very important to be engaged and be active. It is very important, very important."

### **Question 3: Suggestions for Elite Professionals Thinking of Moving to Canada, or for Counsellors Working with Similar Clients?**

The narratives to this point served to answer the first two questions asked of participants: What led you to decide to move to Canada (pre-move experiences)? What kinds of experiences did you have upon moving to Canada? These stories provided powerful narratives and insights related to immigrant elite professionals' experiences. The next section will focus on these immigrants' suggestions for how to help other elite professionals adjust when immigrating to Canada.

#### **Mr. Samuel:**

With regard to question three, Mr. Samuel made some suggestions for elite professionals:

Start your career in the new country in the area of your expertise and know-how. Before applying for immigration you should research and find out if there is demand for your type of work/expertise in the country you are migrating to. Mentally prepare yourself for starting at an entry-level/low-status position and have no regrets and move forward without complaining. Be very flexible and adjust yourself to new circumstances and environment. Don't think that you are a victim of uncontrollable circumstances. Believe in yourself and your abilities/knowledge with an open mind.

#### **Mr. Alex:**

Mr. Alex made a determined effort to move to Canada. He knew as an elite professional that he had the willingness and strength to assimilate to a new culture and a new society. That hard work was needed to cope and adjust to his new life was no surprise to him. He never let frustrations and disappointments arising from cross-cultural transition intrude upon his goal to adjust. His motivation to understand the new environment and his instinctive survival mechanism helped him to move forward. He came to Canada to stay, and he was aware of and prepared to face the physical, economic, and emotional challenges:

We need to remember that we talk at executive level. At executive level, everything is not by choice one; has to see what the reason has to be. [Moments of silence] My recommendation for that people is that kind of people have to sort of evolve into executive

position. They should have foresight and ability to analyze things, because part of the expectation of a manager is to be able to identify the issues. Be observant of a lot of details. Just the way he or she deals with the situation accordingly. So a lot of spontaneous movement happens there. So a person has evolved to that level of confidence in a line that is working. That ability should exist in the individual to make that kind of analysis.

Additionally, he expressed his belief that immigrant executives have to bring their expertise into their new lives as well:

Those who I perceive as professionals, there are a lot of people who claim they are professionals or executives, but during the discussion we realize they are very superficial. Those I perceive to be professional; my first advice is to stay on your course. It will be initially difficult, depending on profession you are in. It might take some time but don't divert from it if you want to stay on it; but it will happen. It will happen to you and you will go back to where you were. If you give up and sort of divert then you might get used to the new way of life and regret why you did not make the sacrifice initially to go through the process of adjustment. This is one of my recommendations: Stay with the course. Go through the difficult times and adjust yourself. But you will be happy, happier at the end.

Mr. Alex's suggestion on how a counsellor/therapist might assist an elite professional to adjust to the new home and work environment was as follows:

So this is a part as a counsellor; the individual has to become to be aware that the capability is there, use it. Use it first on yourself and along with you, your family would change too. I don't think there is short cut. Being an immigrant would give anybody the opportunity of reassessing his/her life and deciding what the individual wants to do with the rest of life. So we must have a plan or objective for what we are going to do. If we don't or we cannot do that, we should not call ourselves executives, because, an executive must be resourceful and plan well.

In his opinion, counsellors need to be aware of their clients' professional expertise when working with elite immigrants. "The counsellors need to work on negative feelings and depression. Self-pity, get rid of this first. They are obstacles. It is a new life, like a new child. Start it. This time you have a choice to enjoy it."

**Mr. Mandi:**

Mr. Mandi's suggestions for new elite professional immigrants were as follows:

I have told all my friends and all that asked a lot about that. "Should I go there, or shouldn't I go?" What I have told my friends or people who asked me that, I said the main thing is that how decisive they are about immigrating. It is not an easy thing. It is, it could

be imagined as an easy thing that you come and are OK and sold your things and everything will be fine. But it is not the way, and they have to be prepared. In my case, I didn't go through driving a taxi or doing all those work not related to my career. I was prepared mentally to do that. I was mentally prepared, I was not sure if I was going to cope with that one. I think I would. In my case, I value what I gained, not value what I have lost. I never ever appreciated the comfort I had in my country.

Although Mr. Mandi did not see a therapist during the course of his adjustment, he suggested the following would be helpful for those who work with immigrants of his cultural background:

Well, for sure the therapist should not have a prejudice. At least for Latino people I would say that in a personal relationship to make a bond is very important. And gain trust. So you go to a therapist, you need to make a personal relationship in order to be yourself. I hadn't been in a therapy here, but if I make like an analogy from people at my work, I don't see myself going to a therapist and have a professional relationship with him. No, you [counsellors] have to make some kind of connection and some kind of personal relationship in order for you to open up [the client].

According to Mr. Mandi, therapists/counsellors need to build rapport with immigrant clients. It is crucial for counsellors to be caring, and show this not only verbally but through their body language.

Other thing which is important, I would say, that have previous conversation before going to the point. Tell me about your problems is not the way should be said [laugh], kind of preparation, what are you doing, how was your day. Doesn't need to be straightforward and go to the point. Because if you want to be straightforward, it could be seen as kind of aggressive and you become defensive and it is not a good therapy. For Latino, coming to the point too fast is kind of aggressive.

In closing, Mr. Mandi preferred a more straightforward method of interaction rather than an indirect counselling approach. He believed that if he needed to see a therapist, he personally would work with a person who was more familiar with his/her clients' cultural backgrounds.

#### **Mr. Rahim:**

Mr. Rahim believed that in order to cope with adjustment issues it would be helpful for immigrants to see counsellors. Yet the government system and immigration services have to educate immigrants and the community about the benefits of counselling:

I think counsellors, being counsellor is a very specialized kind of work or position or job and responsibility. They need to be professionally trained dealing with certain issues. They know the culture, and they know people belong to certain cultures. Languages, cultures, and people's values are important. For example, if I ask my wife to go to a therapist or I am asked to go to see a female [therapist], yes I am comfortable now [laughs] because I have spent so many years here, but still is not comfortable sharing my story and my weaknesses and my problems with a female therapist.

And most is confidence that a person who is being counselled has enough confidence in the counsellor. This person is honest to myself, this is honest, sincere to me. So don't go through one person to an unknown counsellor or therapist. So, you need to have [counsellor] and if you can, find somebody from the same culture. Confidentiality is very important and it could help families who are not happy and have issues feel comfortable to bring their issues to counsellors. In our culture counselling means that you have an issue that you can't resolve by yourself. Going to the third person you take as an insult. This is insult to ourselves if we can't resolve our issues even though that person needed. So, if I don't have water supply in my house, I give them a call and say I don't have water, say if I have an issue in my family, I should be comfortable calling a counsellor and same as I say I don't have water in here. I don't have way dealing with my issues so please come and help me. So as long as we don't have that understanding I don't think counselling or therapy will help too much.

**Mr. Parham:**

Mr. Parham firmly believed that it is too risky to leave a steady job and life for the sake of living in a new country. As an example, Mr. Parham talked about a man [from the same cultural background] with a post-graduate degree who used to teach in his home country. The individual had quit his job, sold his belonging, and immigrated to Canada with his family, hoping that he could acquire a teaching position in Canada. He was very optimistic about his future in a new country. But he could not find any teaching job, even though he had a post-graduate degree:

If I were this guy, I would not quit my job in my hometown. I would take some months off, because you could get a sabbatical and come and see what the possibilities are here. In my country, teaching is a very well paid job. So if this is the case why would you quit a job and come to this country? And the government and the immigration should have told him that if you go there you would not get a job, unless you have done such and such things.

Mr. Parham's suggestions for people from his country of origin who are professionals considering a move to Canada are as follows:

I would say to them, come first before ruining the background, absolutely. And the other thing is to immigration people. Look, when you give immigration to any person you wanted them to be part of this community and Canadian family. Please tell them openly the job situation in Canada. What are the pros and cons of getting an equivalent job in Canada? Be honest. Don't just give immigration because you get money. So that's it. This is a must to take. This is what politicians must do. Who would get benefited? You will make them happy. But on the other hand, if I say to my people all these, they might think that I do not want them to come here. It might be cultural. I don't know.

Mr. Parham also provided me with the example of his brother, who wanted to quit his highly respected job and move to Canada. He explained to his brother truthfully the realities of immigrating to Canada. Mr. Parham was happy that his brother accepted his advice and did not leave his comfortable life in order to move to a new country and get involved in the difficulties of cross-cultural adjustment.

If companies bring people to Canada that is OK, you know. But still the problem is that they [immigrants] do not have power here. As a president of my country's society, I would say that same thing to strangers that I said to my brother. And the other thing is that if you have immigration, make sure that you are doing right for your family. Come and visit first, because immigration's application costs lot of money. So to charge so much money from people who want to move to Canada or to bring their relatives here is a shameful thing, because immigration costs lot of money, and this is unbelievable.

Mr. Parham shared a story about one of his close family members. She came to Canada and discovered that she needed to take some courses in order to become certified in her field before finding a suitable job in her area of expertise: "At first, she was very sad. She said, 'I spent so much time and I don't get honored.'" Mr. Parham said that in the case of his relative, finding jobs might not be as difficult, but professionals with no connections might not be able to get the same jobs they had in their countries of origin. This is mostly because they have to qualify with the relevant associations, in terms of the education they acquired in their countries:

The first thing is that the Canadian immigration should be honest and not just issue immigration, should tell them that this is the situation. If you want to bring qualified people here you have to make sure that associations recognize people's qualifications. If this is not the case they have to tell an immigrant at the first place that look, your certification or diploma is not recognized. Government has to be honest and responsible in



its dealings with the immigrants. Have the global vision. There are other people who are as intelligent as Canadians.

At this point, Mr. Parham became emotional because he believed that so many educated and professional people have come to Canada and have not been treated appropriately by the Canadian government or immigration services. He also compared Canada's school system with that of his home country and pointed out that the education system here is not as rich as in many developed or underdeveloped countries:

In the school, majority of the students have very little general knowledge. Even can you imagine that American schools have teachers from my country of origin? Can you believe that? So this is the case, that there is always someone smarter than you. Don't undermine the immigrants.

Mr. Parham's view on counsellors/therapists who want to work with people from his cultural background was: "Yeah, this is a new concept. If counselling men from my cultural background, first you have to gain their trust." Furthermore, he mentioned that "a lot of women, not most" from his cultural background have been treated very badly by men and "this is almost everywhere in the world," but did not report such abuse to the outside world because:

They are afraid that husband or somebody in the society finds out and it could bring shame on her family. If she tells you something and opens up, you will be the only person to know and no one else. That trust in counselling is huge. That would be the most important thing.

In conclusion, Mr. Parham believed that the adjustment process may be far more difficult when a person does not have a global vision and has been raised in a society that is trapped in biased traditions and/or strong cultural values. People raised in this Canadian culture would be more adaptable to the society's norms. Yet from his point of view, almost everybody has some racial biases. He believed that people from this host country have chosen to perceive newcomers differently. He said we live in a "global village" and that the important factor is for people to learn to become open-minded globally. Mr. Parham attributed his open-minded attitudes to his

world travels, which taught him to appreciate others, and understand different cultures and people with diverse backgrounds.

**Mr. Rafael:**

Mr. Rafael's suggestion for professionals who come from his cultural background was:

Well, it is happening that there is an interior designer in Vancouver Island who used to work with me and I told him first-hand what he had to do and he is very happy. Because I taught him some design. I can show this guy how to position himself in a new environment. I was telling him that he has to study a lot, he has to read, and he has to be prepared to have his license as an interior designer. Here [in Canada] there are some opportunities that could be special for designers. I said to that architect that he has to be honest with himself and he must have this mindset that he never has to cheat in his job. He has all the time to be clear, open-minded, and have good values. On the other hand, he has to use his creativity in order to have a better position here, because so many architects do not have the creativity he has.

His comment regarding immigrant elite professionals from his cultural background who might seek counselling in order to improve their life and working conditions, and overcome cross-cultural adjustment issues in a new country was:

I do not think that I am a right person to give an answer because I believe in myself, in my heart [laugh], but if you ask me to go to see a counsellor, I would tell them as a counsellor that you [client] have to stop your thoughts, and you have to stop your mind, because the sources of all your problems are in your mind. And then I will tell you are very special person.

At this point, he shared a story about one of his children who is mentally challenged. In his experience, whenever he or his wife tried to divert and stop their son's mind from racing, everything would go smoothly and easily:

But everybody has his own thoughts. And everybody has his own problems and problems are in your mind and created by yourself. All assumptions are created by yourself and your thoughts. And then you are a therapist, how can you tell this guy or that guy is so and so? They have to clear their mind first.

He mentioned that what made the book "The Secret" so successful was mainly that it told people how to think positively; in his opinion being positive is relative and means people have to stop negative thoughts:

How can you tell a person that you are a therapist, you have to stop negative thoughts? For example I have a relative who is so, so negative and has black clouds above his head. You talk to him for one hour, [after] two hours he is the same way.

Mr. Rafael's view on how a counsellor could help a person from his country of origin to manage cross-cultural ordeals was:

The point is that a counsellor who wants to do therapy with people from my cultural background has to ask that person that what his religion is. Some have special religion. For example, Roman Catholic religion will teach you that you have to suffer in order to reach the paradise. If you don't suffer you go to hell. That is crazy. I think it is crazy.

Mr. Rafael meant that a counsellor should have a deep understanding and respect for the person's religious affiliation because:

Oh, it is difficult because we trick other person. Because you ask a person what is your religion, they would not answer truly and say I don't believe in that, but they have deep belief in their heart. They have the knowledge that has been created by their parents and ancestors. What is happening in South American and Latin American countries is this, that we have the priests together with the military. And, this is difficult to change because the regime is smart. Then religion is [also] a good starting point to see how they understand life. And, most Catholic people believe that we have to suffer. Muslims are more or less the same: you have to suffer.

The topic of religion was very appealing to Mr. Rafael; he then compared Catholic and Protestant:

On the other hand, you have the Protestant. Because I like to read a lot and you are touching my very sensitive point. My wife has a PhD in sociology in our country. She and a friend did many deep criticisms about what is Roman Catholic and Protestant.

Obviously, Mr. Rafael was a well-read person and had comprehensive knowledge about these two different branches of religion. He explained that the Protestant religion believes that "God is inside you," but the Roman Catholic religion believes that "God exists through a priest, a middle man, and you have to pay."

From my understanding, you as a therapist, you are going to ask what do you think about life. So for me this is key issue. What they understand for life and we have our own culture. Protestants believe that God wants you to be happy and succeed. And as soon as you are in a succeed process and you are happy then you have whatever you need. Religion is another way to understand life.

However, he cautioned that therapists should work on openness “slowly by slowly,” that this is crucial when working with South or Latin American people. Counsellors need to change their linear thinking. Mr. Rafael used his son’s rowing skills as a metaphor to explain his thoughts.

I am telling my son that you have to behave like a Samurai or a rower (because he was an excellent rower). And, if you are rowing and you have to go to high speed (and he was one of the best, best in my country). You have to take care of everything. How to move the row, how to move, how to reach in order not to stop the boat, and the balance has to be perfect and your mind has to be in that [with an excited voice]. Your mind has to be that way, you are rowing and a little pause, you lose it. You have to start to be in that level to keep one thought at a time. Seeing what is happening and in one moment you can transcend and you can be with everything around you in a happy way.

By offering this example, Mr. Rafael wanted to confirm that therapy is nothing except being in touch with one’s thoughts and being focused, in order to help people who need help.

### **Conclusion: Common Threads of Immigrant Executives’ Experiences**

....each new choice has consequences;  
and depending on what we choose,  
we can find ourselves in quite different places....

(Amundson, 2003, p. 67)

The findings of this study answered the two central research questions, “What led elite professionals to decide to move to Canada, and what were their experiences upon moving to Canada?” According to the literature review in Chapter 2, (Bridges, 2001, 2003, 2004; Farely & Werkman, 1990; Schlossberg 1997), participants’ stories included the decision-making phase (moving in, leaving and separation, an ending, and letting go), adjustment phase (moving through, entering, the phase of transition, the neutral zone), and finally, settling down (moving out, reengagement, a new beginning). These questions highlighted and echoed the complexities included in the tone of the narratives, the obstacles, and the impacts of cross-cultural adjustment. The findings also supported how these individuals’ problem-solving abilities, strong motivations,

desires to succeed, and constructive coping strategies had impacted on their capacities to live and work in their new country.

Additionally noteworthy was the finding that the participants' use of leadership skills seemed to buffer against the inherent stresses of adjustment. Each participant reported experiencing some opportunities for growth, the freedom to make choices, and the ability to set goals, and expressed that having the ability to work towards achieving those goals was a powerful motivation. They each learned how to overcome obstacles by demonstrating courage and by becoming an active agent. Furthermore, they exercised various forms of decision-making skills and learned that they had ultimate responsibility for the outcomes of their decisions.

A common thread in most of the stories was the complaint that immigrant elite professionals' credentials/qualifications were not recognized in Canada. They expressed regret at having been challenged in that area. Most of them encountered serious frustration and disappointment with respect to governmental support (federal, provincial, and local) as well as limited access to counselling and mental health support services, and believed these had had significant consequences for the adjustment process.

The narratives of the participants also stressed the importance of family relations. Although each family member dealt with the challenges of transition differently, it is important to state that the married participants (Mr. Samuel, Mr. Alex, Mr. Rahim, Mr. Parham, and Mr. Rafael) reported the immense emotional and physical support they received from their spouses during the time of adjustment. In this sense, although Mr. Mandi was single, he reported that his family members in Canada were supportive and helpful at difficult times in his new life.

Without a doubt, participants' sharing of their stories was painful and represented hearts that were once fragile, minds that were once overwhelmed, and souls that were once vulnerable,

anxious, and insecure. Nevertheless, the key message of “I am capable,” repeated within each narrative, represented a “superman” who believed in himself and had self-determination to beat the odds against transition and settling down in a new country. Finally, the development of their leadership skills was a powerful link connecting the positive outcomes of their efforts to start anew.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

### **Through the Eyes of an Immigrant/Counsellor/Researcher**

This study investigated the lives of six immigrant executives/CEOs/managers who had chosen to “cross borders” and reside permanently in Canada. The complexities and difficulties embedded in the lives and occupations of these immigrant elite professionals in their new country were examined by exploring their stories. Secondly, as a researcher, I attempted to understand the feelings, expectations, and yearnings these individuals experienced through their cross-cultural adjustment processes and coping strategies.

This chapter discusses the summary of my findings while relating them to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, the counselling implications, and the limitations of the study. It concludes with recommendations for future research to further understand and identify cross-cultural adjustments among immigrant executives.

### **Theoretical Implications**

The mental, emotional, and physical health of immigrant executives determines their quality of life in their host country. Cut off from their traditional heritage, immigrant executives experience intense stress and pressure stemming from new roles and rules in their familial and work place relationships. To paraphrase Leggo: “I see the shadow of chaos fill the blue sky, and I almost despair”<sup>3</sup> (1998, p. 179). Because they are unable to adjust successfully or make important decisions, their emotional, physical, and professional well-being is compromised.

Throughout my study, I sought to: 1) elucidate the decisions that prompted my research participants to move to Canada, 2) examine their stories associated with their pre- and post-moving experiences and relocation, 3) identify coping strategies these immigrant elite

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<sup>3</sup> From my perspective, these words can refer to immigrant executives’ situation in a new country.

professional used to manage their cross-cultural adjustment processes. The study further drew on a number of suggestions and recommendations immigrant executives had for other elite professionals thinking of moving to Canada, and for counsellors working with such clients.

The results of my study attempted to broaden readers' perspectives and widen their vision, to facilitate greater understanding of the cross-cultural adjustment process as narrated from immigrant elite professionals' viewpoints. The findings from participants' stories revealed their negative and positive emotional and cognitive experiences, their expectations of themselves, their expectations of others, and the expectations placed upon them by others (Satir, et al., 1991). In addition, the findings showed how having self-determination and a positive self-evaluation influenced their decision-making processes, as well as facilitated their adjustment and ability to create a home and livelihood in a new country.

In his detailed review of narrative, Fulford (1999, p. x) asserted:

Of all the ways we communicate with one another, the story has established itself as the most comfortable, the most versatile – and perhaps also the most dangerous. Stories touch all of us, reaching across cultures and generations, accompanying humanity down the centuries. Assembling facts for incidents into tales is the only form of expression and entertainment that most of us enjoy equally at age three and age seventy-three.

I was enlightened by the experiences these gentlemen shared pertaining to my research and how through narration they made sense of those experiences. My research allowed the voices of these immigrant elite professionals to be heard, and by choosing narrative inquiry I was able to focus on the themes that emerged from their stories and their metaphors (Cresswell, 1998; Leggo, 2008; Riessman, 1993). My role as a researcher was to listen eagerly to their pre- and post-move experiences. I learned invaluable lessons about their winding but ultimately successful journeys.



As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stated, “Our narrative inquiry intention is to capture as much as possible this openness of experience” (p. 89). In so doing, I also recognized my narrative within their stories. Overlapping the life/work experiences of immigrant executives in this study has made it possible to discern patterns that have in turn led me towards a narrative understanding of their cross-cultural adjustment experiences.

I agree with Clandinin and Connelly (2000), who asserted: “Writing narrative inquiry research texts follows quite a different process. In our attempt to describe the process, we say it has a kind of ‘back and forth’ quality” (p. 167). In writing this chapter, I noticed that in order to identify and discuss plot points that resonated across the participants’ narratives and to further understand emotions and interpretations, I needed to return, once again, to some of the participants’ narratives in Chapter 4.

I have organized these narratives according to the literature review in Chapter 2, (Bridges, 2001, 2003, 2004; Farley & Werkman, 1990; Schlosberg, 1997) in three categories of transition and adjustment and these are as follows:

1. Leaving or Separation: Moving In, Ending, Losing, and Letting Go
2. Entering: The Phase of Transition, Moving Through, The Neutral Zone
3. Reengagement: Moving Out, The New Beginning

Through these lenses, a number of discourses came to the forefront.

### **Leaving and Separation: Moving In, Ending, Losing, and Letting Go**

According to the literature review in Chapter 2, Hudson (1991) indicated that transition in essence leads an individual to new discoveries about self, others, and the environment. He also identifies transition as an era of unsteadiness and of new changes related to our roles and story lines: a time to re-orient oneself and understand that an ending is also a new start, part of a

gradual psychological-physical process and new possibilities. In this study, immigrant executives portrayed transition as a process of departing from familiar places, thoughts, and feelings to arrive at new ones that evoked emotional chaos. In undertaking their journeys, they first felt an unfamiliar loneliness and emptiness, discovering that new beginnings were “easier said than done.” They moved to Canada with positive attitudes, hoping that relocation could alter, re-define, and refine their lives. Mr. Samuel, Mr. Alex, Mr. Mandi, and Mr. Rafael were determined to leave their countries of origin and move to a new country because they were unhappy and their comfort zones had ceased by being comfortable. They explained that their moves were experienced as a relief from political and governmental injustices in their home countries. Of the six, there were two exceptions: (1) Mr. Parham had moved to a European country at a young age to pursue his higher education before he emigrated to Canada; (2) Mr. Rahim had migrated because he wanted to re-establish himself in a more promising country that could offer a better lifestyle for his family.

Bridges (2004) illustrated the likelihood of emotional fluctuation during the first phase of transition – “ending, losing, and letting go.” He indicated that being aware of the emotional turmoil and not labeling this as negative could have a positive impact on an individual’s transition process. In my study, no matter how the participants fluctuated emotionally, they remained decisive about choosing to leave their home countries and move abroad. Each hoped his move to a new country would be of benefit to himself, his spouse, and above all, his children. Moreover, Bridges (2003) stated that “because transition is process by which people unplug from an old world and plug into a new world, we can say that transition starts with an ending and finishes with a beginning” (p. 5).

Within their narratives, the research participants remembered anticipating difficulties when leaving their close family members behind. They recollected that their relatives had also experienced hard times processing such losses. Mr. Rahim recalled that his family viewed their move as a “jenazah procession,” like the death of a dear member of one’s family, whose loss they mourned deeply. He said, “Our family members took our move as ‘farewell.’” However, the findings demonstrated that all immigrant executives appeared to use their motivations for moving abroad as the inspiration to remain focused during this difficult time of separation and loss. As indicated by Sargent and Schlosberg (1988), these men showed extra courage and used their problem-solving abilities to overcome ordeals related to transition and adjustment.

### **Entering: The Phase of Transition, Moving Through, The Neutral Zone**

In this study, this theme was expanded into two sub-themes. The first was associated with loss, grief, and facing separation, while the second was related to communication barriers and anxieties associated with life and work in a new country.

#### **Loss and Grief: Do I Fit? Do I Matter?**

Entering a new country and becoming accustomed to a new environment, culture, and social context can be a time-consuming and painful process. A common narrative theme across all the conversations was the severity of the loss. All participants and their families needed time to settle down physically before processing their grief, unsettled emotions, and feelings of frustration and anxieties related to their transition (Bridges, 2001, 2003; Sue & Sue, 1999). As indicated in Chapter 2, and pointed out by Farely and Werkman (1990) and Haour-Knipe (2001) most of the physical and psychological health issues related to immigration occur during phases of leaving and separation, or, according to Bridges (1994, 2004), the “in-between time and no-man’s land situation” phase of inserting oneself in a new country without a support system.

Schlosberg (1997) explained that in the “moving out” phase many people struggle with their losses and might experience feelings of grief and sadness, yet these issues continue to go unrecognized. Furthermore, as stated by Haour-Knipe (2001), immigrants who are not able to cope with their feelings of loss and grief feel useless, become depressed, over-sensitive, and vulnerable about unpredictable events, and may experience somatic, psychological, or life-threatening health issues. Bridges (2003) has found that during the second phase of transition, “the neutral zone,” psychological issues related to transition could be disturbing and even become intolerable. That was the case for Mr. Samuel’s, Mr. Alex’s, and Mr. Rahim’s wives, as stated in Chapter 4.

Ishiyama (1989) pointed out that immigrants need extra time to experience their loss and to grieve over what they have left behind. That includes familiar lifestyles, people, and work. Bridges (2003) stated that “people need to recognize that it is natural to feel somewhat frightened and confused at such a time” (p. 43). Further he concluded that overcoming feelings of loss, developing a sense of physical safety, and feeling settled will, in fact, result in people being more willing to get through the change, and allow a transition to take place.

Ainsworth and Bowlby (1991) believed that attachment is derived from the need to feel safe and secure, and that it develops over time. In order to build new “safe and secure nests,” each of the men in my study faced a variety of challenges that often intensified their frustrations and disappointments. However, they did not detach themselves from their new community, their significant others, their old habits, and their longstanding traditional and religious values. Regarding their spouses’ attachment issues, in fact, except for Mr. Mandi, who was divorced, the other participants’ wives were able to reconcile with their families and fill the gap of exacerbated loss.

Bridges (2003) offered the following general comment about the “neutral zone:” “neutral zone creativity is the key to turning transition from a time of breakdown into a time of breakthrough” (p. 53). Nevertheless, the full realization of loss on many levels and layers, in conjunction with the day-to-day stressors of living in a new country, resulted for each in a brief but intense emotional decline. However, despite strong emotional attachments to past customs, with their readiness to change and take risks, their new sense of purpose, and their cognitive abilities to appraise life events, each created opportunities to make contact and ultimately work out the “neutral zone.”

### **Communication Barriers**

Westwood and Ishiyama (1991) pointed out that

[i]mmigrant minority groups often possess handicaps in the areas of language, racial prejudice, and lack of knowledge of the world of work, limited contacts or network, lack of cultural knowledge of job finding and interviewing techniques, plus the additional stress due to the cultural adjustment to a new society. (p. 130)

The topic of communication barriers also resonated throughout the narratives of the men in my study. Researchers, among others, frequently assume that reasonable, well-meaning people can communicate accurately with each other (Bridges, 2003; Egan, 2006). The increasing rate of multicultural contact, it is reasoned, must be reducing the incidence of misperceptions and suspect stereotyping. Some data, however, calls into question these presumptions (Abrahams & Trusty, 2004; Kohatsu et al., 2000). According to Locke (1998) and Van Beek (1996), some barriers to communication are rooted in culture, and these may impede effective communication between even the most rational and well-intentioned people. These researchers asserted that commonly identified communication barriers include both verbal and nonverbal language problems. They

pointed out that language problems occur when another person uses words we do not understand, or vice versa.

Language also forges common bonds among members of a group, contributing to their sense of belonging (Mak, 2001). Because ethnically significant symbols of the group are manifested most clearly through language, and because many immigrants do not possess vocabulary equivalent to “standard” English, when forced to communicate in English they may appear “flat,” “nonverbal,” or “lacking in insight.” They often experience “self-doubt, and [are] self-conscious when they interact with others due to what is called “second language anxiety” by Westwood and Ishiyama (1991, p. 131). In fact, “English dysfluency” was a serious setback for Mr. Samuel, Mr. Mandi, and Mr. Rafael. Problems stemming from non-verbal communication, on the other hand, may arise from intentional or unintentional behaviour, which is accurately or inaccurately interpreted by others (Gudykunst & Young, 2002; Mak, 2001). In many ways, such experiences intensified a period of self-consciousness and exhaustion arising from the difficulty of communicating and being attentive.

Satir (1988) indicated that “discrepancies between verbal and nonverbal communication produce double messages. [Y]our words are saying one thing, and the rest of you is saying something else” (p. 81). Further, Satir et al (1991) proposed that “any communication contains two messages: the verbal and the affective, or nonverbal. Someone who makes a verbal statement also automatically expresses some message with facial changes, gestures, skin tone fluctuations, tone of voice, and rate of breathing. These nonverbal expressions reflect people’s internal states” (p. 32). The power of nonverbal communication is that it tends to be least under conscious control. Its signals are often spontaneous and difficult to suppress, yet carry more weight than

words. This is equally true for immigrants. Body language can reveal one's true feelings and convey biases of which he or she is unaware (Ibrahim & Ohnishi, 1997; Williams, 2003).

In Chapter 4, Mr. Samuel, Mr. Mandi, and Mr. Rafael discussed the impact of not knowing their host country's language skills, in terms of how this deficit affected their ability to function successfully in the host society and caused difficulty in their professional adjustments. According to Schlossberg (1997) this issue was of utmost importance, second only to separation from their close-knit families in terms of the stress it created.

Bridges (2003, 2004) commented on the importance of ongoing interactive communication during the "neutral zone" phase. He believed that in the "in-between time and no-man's land situation" people need to get extra help from others to deal with their emotions and the critical times related to transition. However, not being able to communicate in the host country's language as well as not being accustomed to the social and cultural norms may cause isolation, and as a result can delay productivity and the adjustment process.

Leggo (1998) stated that "we are born into relations with others, and we are defined by those relations, even as we seek to define ourselves as other, as different, as unique" (p. 177). Unfortunately, on the one hand, shyness, language barriers, traditional cultural values, and a general sense of "otherness" prevent some immigrants from making mutual connections with the people in the host community. Conversely, immigrants' lack of self-assertiveness may enable culturally insensitive people to take advantage of their goodwill, capitalize on their shortcomings, and trespass upon their culturally-based values (Callahan, 2002; Grant, 2001; Schlossberg, 1997).

For all participants, it was apparent that they needed to make an effort to build relationships with their new community members. Mr. Rahim indicated that he had to move

around, go to the mosque, and be in other places in order to meet people and gather information about the services available to immigrants.

Another communication challenge some of the participants in this study faced during the adjustment period was related to their children's new identities, and the impact of their new schools systems and society. For example, parents continued in their allegiances to the cultures of their countries of origin, while their children adapted to the new, dominant culture more rapidly. Mr. Rahim's bias and ambivalence toward his children's integration into some of the local cultural values was clearly stated. He expected that his children needed not only to continue to perform in the framework of their religion, but also to remain committed to the values, religious beliefs, and lifestyle of their home culture. Mr. Alex indicated that his wife was "more traditional and protective" of their daughter than of their son. She was against the idea that their daughter could have a boyfriend when she was in college. Mr. Alex mentioned that although he was not in agreement about this aspect of their daughter's social life, he never "dismissed" his wife's traditional views. In terms of parenting, none of the participants reported that their children resisted the parents' cultural values. Their parenting routines did not shift into new patterns, and they described their situations as challenging rather than critical. Their major observation was that they maintained a close relationship with their children by being open-minded coaches. They believed that their children were accepting of their parents' cultural values.

As to the challenges to their spousal relationships, most of the participants felt responsible for the well-being of their wives. In some cases, the move brought the couples closer and they felt more intimate. For others, moving to a new country created disagreements, communication barriers, and in one case, separation. Mr. Mandi indicated that his decision to move to Canada was the main reason for his divorce. All participants admitted that leaving their home countries



had had huge impacts on their wives, which created some undesirable circumstances. In summary, these men were appreciative of their wives' loyalties, personal strengths, and supportive conduct during times of distress and a "tension-filled atmosphere at home." They all acknowledged the energy their spouses had maintained to keep the family together and overcome the challenges of transition.

The most important cross-cultural and communication dilemma occurring among these research participants was related to their work, their professional identities, and to establishing their careers in the host country. Except for Mr. Parham, all experienced a sense of failure in professional efficiency. Lee and Westwood (1996) indicated that approximately 22 percent of the total number of immigrants who arrived in Canada from January 1, 1991 to October 31, 1993 were professional and technical workers; they further pointed out that these professional immigrants confront adjustment difficulties faced by all immigrants, as well as some distinct challenges related to workplace adjustment in the host country. They were looking for a profession compatible with the work they were doing in their home countries "to regain their elite status". Mak et al. (1994), Mak et al. (1999), and Mak (2001) concluded that maintaining a high-status career is fundamental to the well-being of immigrant executives and their families.

### **Reengagement: Moving Out, The New Beginning**

These immigrant elite professionals came to terms with all of their many losses and started the "new beginning" phase (Bridges, 2003) by realizing that no matter how grueling their adjustment process, the situation could result in opportunities for growth and new discoveries (Bridges, 2004; Schlosberg, 1997). As Mr. Alex noted, he tended to "leave my problems in an outside elevator."

Bridges (1994, 2003, 2004) illustrated the “new beginning” phase as a time of renewal and a willingness to explore and embrace new opportunities. He explained that during this process, people become committed to life’s changes and novel opportunities, and acknowledge their sense of purpose. The findings in this study showed that by completing the three phases of transition indicated by Bridges (2003, 2004) and Schlosberg (1997) described in Chapter 2, the participants welcomed their newly discovered identities and successfully adjusted to their situations.

The literature review in Chapter 2, confirmed the importance of self-determination, positive self-evaluation, and resilient attitudes as tools for immigrant executives to enhance their ability to prevail in issues related to transition and cross-cultural adjustments (Billing & Moos, 1981; Mak et al., 1994). The participants in this study found that developing problem-focused coping mechanisms to manage life-and-work related stresses during the transition period was more effective than symptom-focused strategies, which were based on reacting to emotional pain (Brett, Feldman, & Weingart, 1990). Moreover, problem-solving methods helped them to shift their paradigms and define their new roles and rules to successfully break away from the challenges of transition.

Additionally, the current findings indicated that for immigrant executives to be successful in their country of arrival, they also needed to be more flexible about their new surroundings and had to employ a set of coping skills to help them manage their transition and adjustment processes. It should be recognized that as part of their coping skills all participants in this study appreciated their “internal supports.” For instance, present results reported that although none of the participants knew exactly what moving required of them, their coping skills such as “their positive self-descriptive attitudes,” their personal strength (Brammer & Abergo, 1981, as cited in Zunker, 2002), as well as their social and leadership skills helped them to confront cross-cultural

adjustment issues and respond to life and work challenges in a constructive way. As part of their coping skills, they construed adjustment crises as personal growth opportunities. Their appreciation of and satisfaction with their “external support” systems (their caring family, friends, and coworkers) acknowledged these interactions as fulfilling experiences. Likewise, they were dissatisfied with the level of access to (governmental, organizations’, local) support systems. This meant that many of their experiences with the immigration system were not encouraging. However, they used their full range of coping skills as strategies to successfully adjust and implement plans to reach their goals.

Ultimately, becoming productive and experiencing feelings of competence in the workplace were central issues for each of these men. Mak (2001) found that managers and employees from different cultural backgrounds enter an organization with certain culturally-defined attitudes, values, and expectations. Their personal perspectives influence their behaviour within the organization and the way they will respond to various stimuli in the organizational environment. In multicultural organizations this observation applies to the employees as well. An immigrant executive who in his home country has worked only with employees from the same culture will find it challenging to understand the behaviour of employees who come from another cultural background. This dynamic exists in North American organizations where immigrants and non-immigrants work together.

In my opinion, navigating among several cultures within a given organization enabled the research participants not only to alter their behaviours to fit their new lifestyle and organizational contexts, but also to experience a sense of belonging in a different culture and thus no longer feel overwhelmed. Anita Mak (2001), in her book *Relocating Careers: Hong Kong Professionals and Managers in Australia*, argues that “immigrants who had been unable to derive satisfaction from

either work or non-work aspects of their life would probably have difficulties feeling settled in Australia and could have a greater likelihood of retuning to Hong Kong” (p. 128).

### **Recommendations for Social Support and (Federal, Provincial, and Local) Governmental Support**

As presented in Chapter 4, the importance of social and government-funded supports emerged as a theme in the participants’ narratives. Salient discussions on that topic are explored and summarized in this section.

Mr. Rahim and Mr. Parham offered recommendations for governmental systems, communities, and institutions in charge of the settling down and well-being of immigrants. The most important advice offered was for people responsible in these sectors to increase governments’ accountability towards immigrants and to put immigrants’ experiences, frustrations, and yearnings in perspective – that is, to attempt as much as possible to understand and resolve immigrants’ cross-cultural difficulties alongside them. Additionally, they felt that it would be useful for the host community to recognize the special stresses and difficulties related to cross-cultural adjustment. As Mr. Rahim indicated, “the lack of help from society and institutions would cause discomfort, depression, and loneliness.” As the literature suggests, to be viewed as failures in their new home evokes great frustration, anxiety and anger in immigrants, which in turn heightens their sense of alienation and results in a deeper split between them and the host country (McLaren & Rodolfo, 1999; Vickerman, 1999). Identifying and using social support and resources specific to immigrants’ cross-cultural adjustments, and arranging sessions with other immigrants who have already passed through the process of cross-cultural adjustment, were suggested as helpful strategies. For example, the study course Mr. Rafael attended was to give information and help to other immigrant professionals adjusting to their new lives and work.

Indispensable to the host society and to institutions working with immigrants is an appreciation of cultural differences, as well as each individual's learned patterns of behaviour and characteristics in different settings (Pogrebin, 1995). Familiarity with social psychological literature on stereotype threats can also be a powerful tool to neutralize such negative experiences for immigrants.

Another important recommendation made to government was to allocate more resources and thorough guidance for immigrant executives before they enter Canada. More specifically, the participants suggested that government institutions should revise their immigration recruitment approaches to be truthful and realistic, and coach elite professionals about the pros and cons of immigration.

Mr. Rahim posited that it is the government systems' responsibility to effectively "navigate" immigrants through their adjustment difficulties and "facilitate" jobs suitable to their professions. Moreover, Mr. Parham recommended that the Canadian immigration system needs to recognize the credentials immigrant elite professionals obtained outside of Canada. Bestowing equivalent credentials would assist an immigrant elite professional in the speed of his or her process of cross-cultural adjustment. Mr. Parham observed: "Government has to be honest and responsible in its dealing with the immigrants. Have the global vision. There are other people [immigrants] who are as intelligent as Canadians."

### **Counselling Implications**

After taking into account the various complex factors of race and ethnic heritage, in addition to age, gender, religion, and health issues, the many layers of cultural adjustment become apparent. According to Van Der Elst (2003), culture controls our lives. We may consciously acknowledge our culturally learned assumptions or we may ignore them. However, in either case,

these assumptions will continue to shape our decisions. Culture does not exist outside ourselves but rather is an internalized perspective that combines the teachings of every significant person or group we have experienced, read about, or heard about, or from whom we have learned (Lechner, 2005; Ross, 2003).

Knowledge of core factors that impact counsellors' awareness of cross-cultural adjustment issues is crucial for those counsellors whose aim is to build supportive and collaborative relationships with their immigrant elite professional clients. One important implication of this research is related to the second part of the third question: What suggestions do you have for counsellors working with the similar clients?

The recommendations I unearthed were numerous and covered a wide variety of areas, ranging from instilling multicultural counselling competencies to increasing governmental and societal accountability towards immigrants, and improving their lives and working conditions. As indicated in the literature review in Chapter 2, for those who counsel immigrant executives, if we ignore the influence of culturally imbued values, we will perceive simply a relinquishing of personal and professional freedom, power, and intentionality in our clients' lives. Attending to culturally-imposed assumptions and values, on the other hand, provides a basis for more accurate analyses and a more complete comprehension of our own and our immigrant clients' behaviours. We learn to match both our own and others' behaviours with the culturally transmitted expectations behind those behaviours (Callahan, 2002; Sen, 2005; Zunker, 2002).

The ability of counsellors to be vividly aware that some immigrants face problems of loneliness, shyness, lack of assertiveness, and low self-esteem (Amundson, 1998, 2003; Myers, 2004), as well as language and/or psychological barriers, is an important issue. This awareness

heightens counsellors' empathy, with the result that they can then clarify meanings and resolve these clients' problems (Amundson, 1995, 2002; Ridley & Lingle, 1996).

The most significant implication arising from the findings of this study is a deeper understanding of male immigrant executives' emotional and cognitive states within their personal and social contexts during their cross-cultural adjustment process. This study made important contributions to the counselling of immigrant executives by elucidating unique and unprecedented narratives of immigrant executives' lived experiences. The findings in this study will inform researchers and counsellors of significant aspects of cross-cultural adjustment issues as well as common themes among immigrant executives.

The following section will focus on how immigrant elite professionals relate to their new environment, and how a counsellor may become multiculturally competent by helping these individuals develop coping strategies in order to perform and adjust in their new settings (Mak et al., 1994; Mak et al., 2000; Westwood et al., 1999).

For counsellors to address the needs of culturally diverse elite professionals, they must be trained to recognize and interpret cultural and societal cues that may be very different from their own. They also need to lessen their own cultural encapsulation (Adam, 1995; Akhtar, 1999; Triandis, 1994) and thereby reduce biases as well as increase empathy in the counselling relationship. Without cross-cultural sensitivity and multicultural training, even the most skilled counsellor may be of little help to immigrant executives, and their efforts may even exacerbate clients' adjustment difficulties. More specifically, pro-active components of successful coping strategies may include enhancing immigrants' enthusiasm, minimizing their sense of "cross-cultural interpersonal anxiety," shame, and inadequacy, increasing their power to achieve their

goals, acknowledging their possibilities, and reinforcing their ability to adjust (Bochner, 2000, 2003; Mak et al., 1999).

### **Cross-Cultural Communication**

Because we each define “normal” ways of communication and “normal” behaviour according to our own culturally learned criteria, we also define “normal” ways of interaction differently. To become competent counsellors in multicultural settings, we need to be aware of our own cultural biases (Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue & Sue, 1999). Pope (2003) identified the culturally encapsulated person as someone who substitutes stereotypes for the real world and disregards cultural variations among other people. For example, in collectivistic cultures people are less frank (Myers, 2004; Westwood & Ishiyama, 1990). They do not talk directly about their concerns and instead use indirect “face-saving” communication tactics. When communicating, they may use “we” instead of “I” (Arredondo & Toporek, 2004; Triandis & Suh, 2002).

Although there may be differences between cultures’ patterns of communication, some counsellors believe that the techniques of genuineness, warmth, and empathy work in the same way across all cultures. If this is the case, choosing the relevant techniques may be of more importance for addressing the cultural difference within the person to whom the techniques are applied (Akhtar, 1999; Chung & Bemak, 2002). In this respect, Mr. Alex, Mr. Mandi, and Mr. Parham offered some advice:

Mr. Alex: “So this is a part as a counsellor; the individual has to become to be aware that the capability is there, use it. Get rid of self-pity.”

Mr. Mandi: “Therapist should have no prejudice, at least for Latino people. So you go to therapist, you need to make a personal relationship in order to be yourself. In therapy, tell me about your problem is not the way should be said, kind of preparation, what are you



doing, how was your day? Therapist does not need to be straightforward and go to the point. Because if you want to be straightforward, it could be seen as kind of aggressive and you become defensive and it is not good therapy. For Latino, coming to the point too fast is kind of aggressive.”

Mr. Parham: “If counselling men from my cultural background [Southeast Asia], first you have to gain their trust. In my culture counselling is a new concept.”

Many others believe that their purpose of therapy is to make their immigrant clients happier, to enable them to experience more pleasure and less pain and anxiety (Myers, 2004), rather than help them find a meaningful balance between the inevitability of culture shock (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001) and the pleasures of living in a new country. A key finding stemming from this study is that engaging in clients’ narratives of their experiences and understanding how immigrant executives cope with changes in the status of their work and well-being, their cultural values, and the process of cross-cultural adjustment may be very helpful for these individuals.

In addition, understanding cultural and psychological barriers, and acknowledging the significance of traditional and religious beliefs for immigrant executives will assist counsellors in avoiding the stereotypes and biases that can undermine their efforts. When counsellors are aware of these issues, they may focus on the positive characteristics of minority groups and may thereby be able to fully appreciate cultural differences. Approaches and models that build on respecting the values, strengths, and abilities of immigrant executives result in interventions that enable immigrants to develop healthy practices, openness, and a sense of purpose (Chung & Bemak, 2002; Ishiyama, 1995). The findings of this study highlighted that as counsellors we should be required to undergo intercultural training that will help us effect this type of positive intervention in our work with immigrant clients (Mak et al., 1994; Mak et al., 1999; Westwood et al., 2000). In

short, if counsellors fail to appreciate the uniqueness of their culturally different clients and of their cultural environments, particularly as manifested in their families of origin, even the most well-intentioned counselling efforts are likely to fail.

The key concern for counsellors who work with immigrant executives is an appreciation of the effect that moving has on their clients' intimate relationships, since their new homes may evoke anxieties, anger, and frustrations, which in turn heighten alienation and result in deeper divides between family members (Haour-Knipe, 2001). Building on such concerns, questions may be raised about the dynamics of poor marital relationships among immigrants, which include spouses' changes in attitudes and behaviours towards one another. Additionally, such frustrating experiences disrupt the traditional lines in their families, and the males' roles may be compromised by the loss of their "bread winning" capacities. Cultural standards of family discipline and control become relaxed, allowing women to gain a degree of independence perhaps unheard of in traditional families (Hannasab, 1991; Hannasab & Tidwell, 1996; Selmer 1999).

Another significant implication for counselling culturally diverse elite professionals is the explicit attention paid to their roles as parents. A keen understanding of the stresses placed upon culturally diverse families during the acculturation process is crucial for counsellors. Efforts to maintain balance between two different cultures can often be challenging for immigrant parents as well as for their children (Bellett, 2007; Cryderman, 2008; Smith, 2007; Tung, 2000). Multiculturally competent counsellors are able to offer family members coping strategies to deal with adjustment issues their children are likely to encounter, and to bolster their self-esteem so that the experience of being culturally different becomes positive (Van Beet, 1996).

For example, parents of recently immigrated families often maintain their commitment to the culture of their country of origin, while offspring are liable to adapt to the new culture more

rapidly (Alarcón, 2000). It is important for counsellors to understand the dimensions of such an adjustment process. Familial tension may not be so much due to intergenerational conflict as to the clash between cultures. Counsellors need to encourage more intergenerational collaboration and alliance against the potentially divisive influence of the “value difference” culture (Bahrapour, 1999; Myers, 2004).

### **Enhancing Cross-Cultural Competence in Life and Work: Managing the Threat**

In this section I attempt to better understand my research participants and their adjustment experiences by outlining areas of sociocultural competency that posed specific hurdles for each of them.

Despite the high levels of education and training possessed by immigrant executives, the literature suggests that in sociocultural experiences, rules and values often pose obstacles to successful adjustment in a new environment. This is especially evident among immigrants with a very different cultural background from their host community (Mak et al., 1991; Westwood et al., 2000). On the one hand, because of the wide variety of cultures in a workplace, immigrant executives often may not be able to accommodate themselves to all the different cultural rules in play, or to that specific employee’s traditional values and expectations (Haour-Knipe, 2001; Mak, 2001). On the other hand, no matter how professionally successful immigrants may be, their psychological barriers, and limited social networks may dictate that they are not fully informed about the choices and opportunities available to them. Therefore, as pointed out by Mak et al. (1999), in many cases it is not so much an immigrant occupational skills that yield success, but rather their intercultural competence and the ways in which they communicate and build interpersonal rapport.

Due to cultural barriers, even an immigrant elite professional with a high level of proficiency in the official language of the host country can be reluctant to change their interpersonal communication style in order to generate social contacts (Haour-Knipe, 2001; Goa, 1991). Mak (2001) referred to them as “Prisoners”. This is especially the case for those who come from a collectivistic, high-context cultural background, as indicated in Chapter 2. With a narrower focus, other researchers including McInnis and James (1995) place great emphasis on the benefits of immigrants establishing interpersonal relations with mainstream colleagues and coworkers in order to become familiar with the cultural context of their workplace and their new country. In my opinion, developing sociocultural competence provides immigrant executives with valuable communication abilities that yield successful outcomes without challenging their traditional values or risking the “cultural self.” My research participants’ personal and professional experiences with other immigrants and/or people from the host country highlight this point.

In the following section, I will discuss the rationale for using some invaluable training theories and principles developed by historical figures such as Skinner, Pavlov, and Bandura to understand how my research participants enhanced their cross-cultural competence to manage their adjustment process.

Skinner (1953, 1972), who was deeply influenced by the radical behaviorists Thorndike (1898) and Watson (1925), posited “operant conditioning” principles whereby people in a given environment behave a certain way, thereby operating to obtain rewards (Baum, 2005; Goethals, Worchel, & Heatherington, 1999). Studies by Masters, Burish, Hollon, and Rimm (1994) showed that in therapeutic settings people adopt new behaviours and/or change old ones if: (1) desired goals will be achieved when they are rewarded with praise after the correct response to “specific social cues;” or (2) during social interactions, their anxiety and embarrassment will be reduced by

appropriate social behaviours. In Mr. Samuel's and Mr. Mandi's experiences, many of their social and professional successes were due to encouraging feedback they received at their workplaces, which also decreased their anxieties about unfamiliar settings or social encounters.

Studies have also identified Pavlov's "classical conditioning" principles (1927) as useful for analyzing interactions in anxiety-provoking situations within the host community. An important component of these principles is the procedure by which "the individual will need to be exposed to the anxiety-provoking cues, either in imagination or in real life situations, and in increasing amounts of exposure, instead of being allowed to avoid them" (Mak et al., 1999, p. 82). Such an approach can give newcomers a chance to interact with supportive host community members. By introducing themselves in an encouraging and relaxed atmosphere, immigrants not only find their anxieties reduced, but also enjoy socially rewarding outcomes. My research participants' efforts to put classical conditioning to use in their adjustment process enhanced their social lives enormously (Baum, 1995); getting involved socially and academically with, rather than avoiding, host society members; interacting with the host community members in their language no matter how difficult some of them may find it. According to their narratives, this fusion of Eastern and Western cultures was a rewarding and thrilling experience.

Bandura's cognitive social theory (1965, 1986) explored "how reinforcement gets people to perform certain actions" (Goethals et al., 1999, p. 34). According to Wilson (1995), people are agents of transformation and have the capacity to create change through "self-directed" behavior. Through observations (vicarious learning) people familiarize themselves with socially acceptable behaviours, even if they have no intention of performing these behaviours. Both direct and vicarious reinforcement – based on modeling – play an important role in how well an immigrant performs in a new country, especially when that reinforcement comes from successful social

performances by others similar to him- or herself (Mak, 2001). For example, Mr. Samuel disclosed that he became his own role model by teaching his employees how to become successful. Mr. Alex learned from his East Asian colleague to be observant of other cultures and respect them all.

Yet cognitive social learning is not limited to observing role models or seeking rewarding consequences. Bandura (1997) emphasized that perceiving, remembering, thinking, and undergoing certain experiences have a great impact on individuals' behaviours. These activities were recognized as useful to ensure the validation of the immigrant's experience of "self-efficacy," and to counteract feelings of inadequacy, shame, helplessness, and incompetence. According to Bandura, Freeman, and Lightsey (1999), "self-efficacy" refers to the will to perform certain actions and reward oneself for doing them. Akhtar (1999) in his book chapter *Experience of Efficacy in the New Country*, talked about efficacy as "maintaining one's professional identity, especially when other aspects of oneself are challenged." And indicated that "to feel efficacious is to live, and to feel vocationally impotent is to psychically wither away" (p. 25). People who are less fearful in threatening situations, who do not respond passively, and who believe they can master tasks and set appropriate goals have a high degree of self-efficacy. Goethals et al. (1999) corroborated this analysis: people with a sense of self-efficacy take an active approach in their lives, which helps them adjust successfully.

My research findings in the area of self-efficacy are consistent with results reported by Mak (forthcoming, n. d.), in the area of job search confidence among Asian professionals who immigrated to Australia. She concluded that "intercultural social self-efficacy and social interaction skills were the only two significant predictors of job search confidence" (para. 36). Individual uniqueness is another key tenet of cognitive social learning theory; each individual's

characteristics and learned patterns of behaviours are different (Mak, 2001). Yet over time, through the self-actualization process, we can initiate major behavioral changes in ourselves, becoming active agents and choosing how to act and react in different settings (Bandura, 1992, cited in Mak et al., 1999), which was the case for all the participants in this study.

After an immigrant enters a new country, becoming accustomed to an overwhelming environmental and social context can be a time-consuming process (Mak, 2001). Immigrants need time to settle down physically before asking for help with their unsettled emotions and anxieties related to the move. Developing a sense of physical security and settledness will, in fact, result in immigrants being more willing to seek sociocultural competence training. Consistent with the cross-cultural emotional-physical-strain framework, Ishiyama (1995) and Mak et al. (1999) found that success at climbing the ladder of sociocultural competency and practicing interpersonal communication depends upon immigrants' levels of physical and psychological readiness to cope with the overwhelming challenges of adjustment.

Training programs such as role-based learning in groups to observe others' behaviours in a non-threatening environment "enhances their feelings of personal competence, and break negative stereotypes frequently held by employers and co-workers" (Westwood et al., 2000, p. 29). The international EXCELL program (Excellence in Cultural Experiential Learning and Leadership) (Mak et al., 1999) can enrich immigrants' behavioral competencies and build their self-esteem, thereby favoring their success in the host country. Mak (forthcoming, n. d.) asserted that "cultural competency training focused on strategic skills development, such as the EXCELL Program, could contribute to both the sociocultural and psychological dimensions of global talent management, at individual as well as institutional levels" (para. 4). Westwood et al. concluded that outcomes will be particularly beneficial when such programs are taught by a multiculturally

competent facilitator (preferably from the host culture) and a skilled co-facilitator from a different cultural background.

### **Culture and Values in Counselling**

Although theories and models of counselling flourish, and each one posits a unique approach to cross-cultural adjustment and the role of therapy therein, during the course of my research I found that many models of counselling and coaching for immigrant executives are inadequate because they fail to take into account certain dimensions of life-work problems in a new country. It is my opinion that multicultural sensitive models can help counsellors to better understand the cross-cultural adjustment process among immigrant executives.

From my counselling stance, if I want to remain skillful and competent in counselling people from other races and cultures, I need to use my nonjudgmental counselling skills, and remain neutral and value-free as I get to know my culturally diverse clients. Although this neutral approach is still controversial in some counselling circles, there are many other counsellors who believe in its value and applicability (Akhtar, 1999; Myers, 2004). Replacing an automatic-processing style with a more cautious information-processing style enables me to consider the unique cultural makeup of my immigrant clients (McLaren, 1998). I need to unclog my perceptual filters of their cultural bias, and find a way to make these filters correspond to my understanding of the clients' experiences in a new country. To do so, I must use a language that is meaningful to them. There are numerous cultural expressions, idioms, and nonverbal cues that may be unfamiliar to me. I am not expected to discern the significance of every word or phrase; however, I should not hesitate to seek clarification when I do not understand.

Also, as a multiculturally competent counsellor, I need to be creative and actively engaged in the development of appropriate interventions and techniques when working with immigrants



(Amundson, 1998; Arredondo & Arciniega, 2001). For example, with Asians (Ibrahim & Ohnishi, 1997; Suyemoto, 2004), or with people of Middle Eastern descent (Hannasab, 1991; Hannasab & Tidwell, 1996), subtlety and indirectness may work better than direct confrontation. As endorsed by participants of this study, in the initial encounter with immigrant executives from some traditional cultures, a multicultural approach whereby values of racial/ethnic minority groups are identified and understood may work better than an instrumental one, in which the counsellor begins with task- or goal-oriented interactions.

In sum, because approaches are often determined by cultural, racial, and systemic factors, the more I understand these factors, the more effective a counsellor I will become. When counsellors strive to be multiculturally competent, tolerant, respectful, and unbiased, we can only enhance our practice. As counsellors, we need to free ourselves from the cultural conditioning of what we believe to be the “correct” therapeutic practice (Amundson, 2002). We need to devise appropriate and culturally sensitive intervention strategies to maximize success and minimize cultural oppression (Atkinson, Thompson, & Grant, 1993). Increasing our awareness and use of such strategies will help us become multiculturally sensitive role models for future generations of counsellors helping immigrant elite professionals with cross-cultural adjustment difficulties.

### **Empathy and Its Challenges: Research Limitations**

According to Riessman (1993), “Narrativization tells not only about past actions but how individuals understand those actions, that is, meaning” (p. 19). The narrative method allowed me to deconstruct my own background as an immigrant counsellor/researcher to better understand the role I played in the host countries in which I lived. My role was to understand the world of my participants, to formulate adjustment issues, and to see things through my participants’ eyes both objectively and subjectively. I listened empathically (Smythe & Murray, 2000) to how my

participants attributed meaning to their lives. However, at the beginning of each interview, I questioned my competency as a researcher, since I am an immigrant who has dealt with my own adjustment difficulties. For example, I might become uninterested in or unenthusiastic about what they were saying because it was too painfully familiar to me. Or, I might compare their story to mine and only remember details that were relevant to my story. In these ways, my focus may shift away from my client and onto my own reminiscent adjustment processes, and I might not inspire their confidence or trust in my abilities to assist them in elaborating upon their stories.

A further limitation, as suggested by Mak (2001), is that language ability can be instrumental to integrating immigrants' experiences between two cultures. Even though the participants' English skills were sufficient for them to function in the interview session, the subtle aspects of language might still have held them back from being themselves, as well as impeded their ability to share their adjustment experiences when using English. Hence, in order to help the participants explore their life stories, my goal was to act as an encourager and interpreter rather than a counsellor or teacher. Participants were encouraged to include non-English materials such as their native language and metaphors when they felt these could enhance the ability to capture and explain experiences, and thereby allow them to more easily explain their cultural frameworks within the adjustment process.

Another goal for me was to become actively engaged (Amundson, 1998) and use my own cross-cultural competence to identify the area of my interest (cross-cultural adjustment) without imposing my personal and professional value judgments, and subsequently maintain my role as a researcher. Therefore, the manner of non-counselling interpretation and clarification was important (Marecek, 2003). This theoretical awareness was nonetheless challenging when applying non-counselling interpretation in practice.

Another limitation of this study was the extent to which participants gave truthful answers rather than answers that may have seemed pleasing for me, particularly as there had been little time for some of the participants and myself to establish contact prior to conducting this study. Since cultural values and beliefs might have constituted established barriers for participants, it was hoped that they would give honest answers rather than merely attempting to please the researcher.

Although the participants I contacted were very supportive of my study because the research topic seemed to be an important theme in their lives, and thus they were enthusiastic about sharing their experiences with me, this research could nonetheless be influenced by issues of culture, gender, and sexism. Being male, some participants could have found it challenging to work with a female researcher, since they might balk at disclosing their stories to me.

It was also crucial to envision my research and interviews through a cultural lens that incorporates attention to multiple and interacting variables of gender and sexual orientation (McLaren, 1998). Another limitation was that only males participated in my study and hence the opinions of male participants may not be applicable to the experiences of female immigrant elite professionals, who may, for example, be torn between fulfilling duties at home and at work. Therefore, female immigrant elite professionals' cross-cultural adjustment experiences may also yield interesting and useful results.

Finally, the design of this study resulted in a limitation with respect to sampling, which was the relatively small sample size. Time and resource limitations made it impossible to seek a larger sample. However, it is believed that even with the relatively small group of participants, valuable information was obtained, including ideas for more effective and fruitful directions in future research.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This study explored the rationale for using qualitative research methods, with particular reference to narrative as a method and theoretical framework for understanding immigrant executives' experiences of cultural transition and adjustment. Six male immigrant elite professionals, primarily executive, CEO, and manager level immigrants were interviewed about their cross-cultural adjustment experiences. The findings from this study, which were derived from three structured questions, underscored the importance of both career and personal life to the participants, and the ways in which they have experienced transition and adjustment in the new country.

Furthermore, this study's findings which were derived from the second part of the third question highlighted that the multicultural counselling can be an effective mode of intervention when it is properly approached and carried out. I advocate for a multicultural competency, based upon awareness of and insight into the adjustment issues that immigrant executives face. To achieve this ideal, we must seek to question existing values in counselling practice and articulate new ones. Cross-cultural adjustment information must be made a focus for counsellors who aim to work with immigrants (and more specifically, elite professionals). In relation to counselling immigrant executives, the findings of this study do not support the belief that a culturally diverse client may be best served by arranging for him or her to work with a culturally similar counsellor. It can be beneficial for both counsellor and client to work closely with someone who has a different cultural background. Yet regardless of which culture we as counsellors hail from, we must display a high level of sensitivity to the cultural factors influencing a particular immigrant's adjustment process. Counsellors, especially those without firsthand knowledge of the immigrant experience, must recognize that in order to create a caring and supportive atmosphere for

interactions we will have to question our ingrained beliefs and approaches. This type of self-assessment is a key component for counsellors to reconstruct their clients' cross-cultural adjustment experiences (Bochner, 1994; Mak et al., 1999).

In closing, I wish to recall Leggo's characterization, cited earlier in this chapter, as a symbol of the overwhelming unfamiliarity that confronts immigrant executives: "I see the shadow of chaos fill the blue sky, and I almost despair" (1998, p. 179). Leggo goes on to observe that this flux in which one finds oneself "apparently chaotic and undecipherable, is in fact an experience rich with possibilities." Without a culturally sensitive system that values and understands diversity and takes initiatives to create caring communities, these immigrants will remain trapped in a chaotic circle of cultural transition and adjustment. Yet when issues of cross-cultural adjustment are addressed and understood, we will see vastly more successful settlements for culturally diverse elite professionals. A supportive, and culturally sensitive local, provincial, and federal government will recognize that, with appropriate guidance, immigrant elite professionals can plumb this chaos to work through cross-cultural adjustment problems and explore the prospects and possibilities that await them in their new homes.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Very little literature focuses on cross-cultural adjustment among immigrant executives by examining the multidimensional complexities and difficulties embedded in their lives and work in their new country, so this study was meant as an exploration of the topic. While there remains much room for development, the findings of this study shed light on some promising directions for further research. For example, of particular interest was the finding that all participants in this study have extremely high expectations for themselves in the realm of their profession because of their extensive work experience as executives. The participants reported that they placed undue

pressure on themselves to be perfect executives/managers because they consider that, as leaders, they should have all the answers to common concerns in their workplaces. As a result, they described experiencing depression, anxiety, and tremendous stress about the outcome of their decisions for their workplaces as well as for their families' well-being. Future research should further investigate this phenomenon to determine whether this trait is common to all immigrant executives, or whether it is unique to the participants in this study.

Moreover, of particular significance was the finding that, because they were elite professionals, the participants expected perfection out of themselves. Additional research should also examine self-care as a potential protective factor against the negative mental and physical health outcomes that have been linked to multiple roles and work/family conflicts in a new country. A review of the work/family conflict literature indicated that the use of self-care as a buffer against the implicit stresses of multiple roles has not been thoroughly examined (Frone et al., 1991). Therefore, future research should examine its use among many more immigrant executives to determine its effectiveness as a coping mechanism during the time of transition and adjustment.

The body of literature pertaining to cross-cultural adjustment in general would benefit from exploring critical factors such as stereotyping, prejudice, racism, multicultural empathy and positive regard, and cultural biases when researching cross-cultural adjustment among immigrant executives. Although this study has identified some of these factors, some variables were not specifically examined, in part because the majority of the participants had positive experiences in their social interactions. Further exploration of such factors might add substantially to theory development in cross-cultural adjustment among immigrant executives. Identifying these frameworks could also help to create a more comprehensive or in-depth picture of how such

individuals adjust to their new countries (Abrahams & Trusty, 2004; Arredondo et al., 1996).

Future research might also reveal the use of Validationgram (Ishiyama, 1995), storytelling, journaling, poetry, and photographs to interpret and determine the impact of transition on participants' identities and on their internal issues during cross-cultural adjustment.

Most importantly, outcomes of future research on cross-cultural adjustment among immigrant executives will be of particular benefit when such studies involve more participants, particularly with the addition of female immigrant executives/CEOs/managers. This would allow researchers to survey further narratives of immigrant executives from both genders to investigate how they processed their cross-cultural adjustments. Future research thus could specifically analyze differences arising from age, gender, geographic location, education, and specific cultural traditions.

All of the participants in this study maintained their positions as elite professionals in the new country. Other future research should include immigrant executives who work in different settings/professions rather than their pre-move professions. Since this research aimed to examine immigrant executives' cross-cultural adjustment issues in Canada, I highly recommend that future research compare and contrast immigrants executives' experiences with the experiences of North American-born executives/CEOs/managers who work and live outside North America. Such research would be most relevant to the topic if the North Americans lived and worked in countries with traditional values and cultural customs completely different from their own.

Methodologically, I would encourage future researchers to use the narrative method (Leggo, 2008, Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 1993), since it is a powerful and appropriate research tool for investigating the experiences of immigrant executives' cross-cultural adjustment. Their life stories offer a wealth of information and vivid illustrations of complex issues they have

faced. The voices of these individuals correspond to a valid description of their life and work situations, and play a critical role in coming to a better understanding of how larger societal forces have influenced their lives.



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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A**

Research Advertisement for Participant Recruitment

# THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



**Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology,  
and Special Education**  
Faculty of Education  
2125 Main Mall  
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4  
Tel: (604) 822-8229 Fax: (604) 822-3302  
[www.ecps.educ.ubc.ca](http://www.ecps.educ.ubc.ca)

## **Recruiting Participants for Research Study**

### **Cross-Cultural Adjustment Among Immigrant Executives Research Study**

## **Please Volunteer to Participate**

Farideh Farzamian, is seeking **immigrant executives/CEOs/managers** as volunteer to participate in a University of British Columbia research study.

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This research is being conducted as one of the requirements for Farideh Farzamian to complete a doctor of philosophy in curriculum and instruction at the University of the British Columbia.

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**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to research complexities and difficulties embedded in the life and work of immigrant executives in their new country by exploring their life stories. Secondly, the study aims to understand feelings, experiences, expectations, and yearnings of immigrant executives' cross-cultural adjustment processes and coping strategies.

**Study Procedures:** Participants will be males who held qualification as an executive/CEO/manager in their home countries and who continue to hold the same position in the host country. They were born and raised in countries outside of North America. They have been living in Canada at least two years before the beginning of the study.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be interviewed by Farideh Farzamian. You will be invited to discuss events that have happened throughout your cross-cultural adjustment processes. You will be asked about what meaning these experiences hold for you in terms of your life and your work in a new country.

**The research will involve a 90-minute interview at a place and time of your convenience.** The interview will be audiotaped, transcribed, and analyzed for patterns. You may then be asked to provide feedback on the analysis.

**Confidentiality:** Any information you provide, including audiocassette and interview transcripts, will be kept strictly confidential. All documents will be identified only by code number, pseudonyms chosen in collaboration with the participants to be used in place of their real names. While the transcribed interview data is on computer, they will be password protected by a "firewall" program, designed to prevent unauthorized access. Only the research investigators named above will have access to the information. **No one will have any access whatsoever to any of the recorded or transcribed information you may provide.** The data will be kept in a lockbox filing cabinet in my supervisor's office at UBC, and will be destroyed after 5 years.

Moreover, at the beginning of the first interview, I will invite you to read and sign the consent form regarding your rights and confidentiality, as well as the potential and risks of participating in the research.

**Contact Information:** If you wish to participate in this study, or if you would like more information, please contact **Farideh Farzadian** at .

This study is being supervised by Dr. Norman Amundson, in the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education. He may be contacted at (604) 822-6757.

**Appendix B**

## Letter of Initial Contact

# THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology,  
and Special Education  
Faculty of Education  
2125 Main Mall  
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4  
Tel: (604) 822-8229 Fax: (604) 822-3302  
www.ccps.educ.ubc.ca

## LETTER OF INITIAL CONTACT

Farideh Farzaman  
Center for Cross Faculty Inquiry in Education  
Faculty of Education  
2125 Main Mall  
Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1Z4

I am a doctoral candidate in the Centre of Cross Faculty Inquiry in Education, the University of British Columbia. I am currently conducting a research project entitled “**Cross-Cultural Adjustment Among Immigrant Executives.**” This study is part of the requirements for my doctoral dissertation under the supervisor of Dr. Norman Amundson, in the Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology and Special Education at the University of British Columbia. The purpose of this study is to research the complexities and difficulties embedded in the life and work of immigrant executives in their new country by exploring their life stories. Secondly, the study aims to understand feelings, experiences, expectations, and yearnings of immigrant executives’ cross-cultural adjustment processes and coping strategies.

As part of the research requirements, I am hoping to interview immigrant executives/CEOs/manager liked yourself. I would like to interview you about your cross-cultural adjustment experiences in Canada. **The purpose of this letter is to inform you about such a research project, and to invite you to be my informant in the interview should you feel interested.** In order to be eligible to participate in this study, you need to meet the following requirements: (a) you held qualification as an executive/CEO/manager in your home country and continue to hold the same position in the host country. (b) you were born and raised in a country outside of North America. You have been living in Canada at least two years before the beginning of the study.

**The research will involve a 90-minute interview at a place and time of your convenience.** The interview will be audiotaped, transcribed, and analyzed for patterns. You may then be asked to provide feedback on the analysis.

Involvement in the study will provide you with an opportunity to reflect upon your experiences, and to examine them in detail. We hope that being involved in the study will be an interesting and useful experience.

All identifying information will be kept strictly confidential in order to ensure confidentiality and to protect participants' privacy. All documents will be identified only by code number, pseudonyms chosen in collaboration with the participants to be used in place of their real names. While the transcribed interview data is on computer, they will be password protected by a "firewall" program, designed to prevent unauthorized access. Only the research investigators named above will have access to the information. **No one will have any access whatsoever to any of the recorded or transcribed information you may provide.** The data will be destroyed after 5 years.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary and participants are free to ask questions at any time, and to withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy of any kind.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to call me at \_\_\_\_\_ or my supervisor, Dr. Norman Amundson at (604) 822-6757. If you have any concern about your treatment or rights as research participant, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the University of British Columbia office of Research Services at (604) 822-8598.

If you are willing to participate in this interview, please, call me at \_\_\_\_\_ or leave a message for me. I will then contact you, and send you a Consent Form to obtain your signature on the form, before the interview can be arranged.

Thank you very much for your interest.

Sincerely,

Farideh Farzaman  
Ph.D Candidate

**Appendix C**

## Consent Form

# THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology,  
and Special Education  
Faculty of Education  
2125 Main Mall  
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z4  
Tel: (604) 822-8229 Fax: (604) 822-3302  
www.ecps.educ.ubc.ca

## CONSENT FORM

### Cross-Cultural Adjustment Among Immigrant Executives

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Norman Amundson, Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education, Faculty of Education  
Telephone: (604) 822-6757

**Co-Investigator:** Farideh Farzamian, Centre for Cross Faculty Inquiry in Education, Faculty of Education  
Telephone:

---

This research is being conducted as one of the requirements for Farideh Farzamian to complete a doctor of philosophy degree in curriculum and instruction at the University of British Columbia.

---

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to research complexities and difficulties embedded in the life and work of immigrant executives in their new country by exploring their life stories. Secondly, the study aims to understand feelings, experiences, expectations, and yearnings of immigrant executives' cross-cultural adjustment processes and coping strategies.

**Study Procedures:** I am extending an invitation to males who held qualification as an executive/CEO/manager in their home countries and who continue to hold the same position in the host country. They were born and raised in countries outside of North America. They have been living in Canada at least two years prior to participating in this study. If you choose to participate in this study, the co-investigator, Farideh Farzamian, will interview you. You will be invited to discuss your cross-cultural adjustment processes. You will be asked about what meaning these experiences hold for you in terms of your life and your work in a new country.

Version: August 19, 2006

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**The research will involve a 90-minute interview at a place and time of your convenience.** The interview will be audiotaped, transcribed, and analyzed for patterns. You may then be asked to provide feedback on the analysis.

**Confidentiality:** Any information you provide, including audiocassette and interview transcripts, will be kept strictly confidential. All documents will be identified only by code number, pseudonyms chosen in collaboration with the participants to be used in place of their real names. While the transcribed interview data is on computer, they will be password protected by a "firewall" program, designed to prevent unauthorized access. Only the research investigators named above will have access to the information. **No one will have any access whatsoever to any of the recorded or transcribed information you may provide.** The data will be destroyed after 5 years.

**Contact Information:** If you have any question or desire further information with respect to this study you may contact Farideh Farzamian at / , or Dr. Norman Amundson at (604) 822-6757. If you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research participant, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the University of British Columbia office of Research Services at (604) 822-8598.

**Consent:** Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. By signing below you consent to participate in this study. By signing below you also acknowledge you have read and understood this consent form, and been provided a copy of this consent form.

---

Participant Signature

Date

---

Printed Name of the Participant

**Appendix D****UBC Research Ethics Board Certificate of Approval**



## ***Certificate of Approval***

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR  Amundson, N.E.	DEPARTMENT  Educ & Couns Psych & Spec Educ	NUMBER  <b>B06-0385</b>
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT  UBC Campus ,		
CO-INVESTIGATORS:  Farzamian, Farideh, Educ & Couns Psych & Spec Educ		
SPONSORING AGENCIES  		
TITLE:  Cross-Cultural Adjustment among Immigrant Executives		
APPROVAL DATE  <b>JUN 12 2006</b>	TERM (YEARS)  1	DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL  May 3, 2006, Advertisement / Contact letter / Consent form
CERTIFICATION  <p>The application for ethical review of the above-named project has been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.</p> <p><i>Approved on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board</i> <i>by one of the following:</i> Dr. Peter Suedfeld, Chair, Dr. Susan Rowley, Associate Chair Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair Dr. Arminee Kazanjian, Associate Chair</p> <p>This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the experimental procedures</p>		



## ***Certificate of Approval***

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR Amundson, N.E.		DEPARTMENT Educ & Couns Psych & Spec Educ	NUMBER <b>B06-0385</b>
INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT UBC Campus			
CO-INVESTIGATORS Farzamian, Farideh, Educ & Couns Psych & Spec Educ			
SPONSORING AGENCIES			
TITLE: Cross-Cultural Adjustment among Immigrant Executives			
APPROVAL DATE 06-06-12 (yr/mo/day)	TERM (YEARS) 1	AMENDMENT: Aug. 19, 2006, Study location / Time /Recruitment letter / Consent form / Letter of initial contact	AMENDMENT APPROVED: <b>SEP 20 2006</b>
CERTIFICATION <p>The request for continuing review of an amendment to the above-named project has been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.</p> <p><i>Approved on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board</i> by one of the following: Dr. Peter Suedfeld, Chair, Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair Dr. Arminee Kazanjian, Associate Chair Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Associate Chair</p> <p>This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the experimental procedures</p>			