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BUILDING A CAREER IN FINLAND
Experiences of International Women in the Business Sector

ABSTRACT

Work is a central element of modern individuals' lives. Beyond being just a means to secure income, work gives meaning to a person's life, it affects how the individual is perceived by the rest of the society, how they perceive who they are and define who they want to be. The continuous evolution of our modern societies affects also how individuals approach and experience their career building. In addition, the topic of internationalization is particularly relevant for Finland, considering the country's needs for a foreign workforce due to the growing economy and ageing domestic workforce. In recent years Finland has experienced an increased influx of skilled migrants, but the research show immigrant women remain particularly vulnerable, including skilled and highly educated female internationals.

Until recently, career development has been focused on the individual, neglecting the importance of the context, societal values, norms and structures in which individuals build and live their careers. Furthermore, despite the number of skilled female migrants has been on a rise, there is limited insight into their subjective career development experiences. This research responds to those two needs and explores how gender, foreignness and professional identity come together and shape the career building experiences of skilled international women in Finland. The main aim is to provide a better understanding of the totality of their experiences, career challenges and opportunities they experience, resources and strategies they use to navigate their career development in Finland.

This research was conducted using a biographical narrative interview method. Twelve international women living and working in Finland were interviewed, coming from diverse backgrounds, countries of origin, professions, and industries. At the beginning of the interview, the interviewee was asked a very broad question: to tell her career story – the past, the present and the future expectations. After the uninterrupted storytelling part, follow-up questions were asked to ensure the clarity and richness of the data collected. Insights about interviewees' careers before moving to Finland, motivations to come and stay in Finland, challenges to kick off their careers and their experience of adjusting to the Finnish working culture were collected.

This study suggests that all three factors – gender, foreignness, and professional identity – are relevant to understand the career building experiences of international women. In addition, the study points out the interplay between those factors and highlights their intertwined nature. Overall findings suggest that building a career in Finland brings both challenges and opportunities for skilled international women. Challenges are mainly associated with the lack of career capital, language skills, and pressure to demonstrate their commitment to staying in Finland. In addition, findings suggest gender equal nature of the Finnish society can create challenges for women coming from less gender equal backgrounds. Career development opportunities are associated with identified features of the Finnish working culture. Those features include low vertical hierarchy, access to top management, high level of trust, freedom and autonomy, knowledge sharing, organizational openness to exploring different career paths within the organization and learning in all phases of a career.

Keywords: Careers, Career Development, Gender, Professional Identity, International Women, Finland

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background and objectives of the research

The wealth of modern nations is to a great extent a result of their citizens' willingness to give central importance in their lives to work, and tirelessly strive to advance, innovate and improve their effectiveness and efficiency (Vondracek et. al, 2016). Already in the early 1980s, Havighurst (as quoted by Narh, 2019, pg. 3) noted that "job in our society exerts an influence which pervades the whole of the adult lifespan". In addition to being a source of income, work gives meaning to one's life, a sense of self-actualization and self-worth. However, how an individual perceives themselves is strongly influenced by what work the society deems as important and valuable, and what not. This dynamic is important since it differently affects various social groups. For instance, emphasizing the position one occupies in the hierarchy or a salary level puts in an unfavourable position those whose life circumstances led them to diverge from the traditional career path (i.e. immigrants). Thus, how a career has been understood over time has shaped the understanding on a societal and individual level of what is important and to be valued.

The anticipated and foreseen future changes make understanding career building experiences even more significant. The fourth industrial revolution, characterized by digitalization and automatization, is about to bring new changes to the experience of a career in the future. It is likely to eliminate jobs based on following standard procedures, change occupations, but also create new occupations and industries, too (Hirschi, 2018, pg. 192). As a result, it is expected that jobs will become polarized and the emergence of nonstandard jobs (Hirschi, 2018, pg. 194). While job polarization is likely to affect jobs that require cognitive and manual input (i.e. administration) which is easier to automate, the demand will increase for people in low-paid positions (i.e. cleaners) which are required to perform multiple small tasks current technology cannot automate easily (Hirschi, 2018, pg. 194). Those jobs requiring creative thinking and problem-solving skills are least likely to be significantly affected (ibid.). On the other side, the emergence of nonstandard work and gig-economy brings, too, unique changes: working for more organizations at the same time, more autonomy to choose assignments, but also an unstable source of income as one is paid per gig (Hirschi, 2018, pg. 195). The new circumstances will require flexibility when it comes to career development, managing careers across the lifespan, as well as new paths towards creating a sense of professional identity, purposeful and meaningful work (ibid.). Those are all essential

factors in shaping career building experiences that warrant the attention of HR professionals, business leaders and policy makers, likewise.

The topic of career building experiences among international women is of particular significance for Finland as a host country. The ageing population and growing economy put pressure on Finland to attract an international workforce and increase the need for work-based immigration. The 2017 Occupational Barometer pointed out the lack of workforce in numerous occupations, especially in social, health and construction sectors (Sisäministeriö Inrikesministeriet, 2018, April 01). There seems to be a consensus among most decision-makers and business representatives on this issue, as well. In early 2020, the Minister of Employment proclaimed "We're no longer able to find enough talent in Finland" (Teivainen, 2020, January 30). The group of ministers from the Green party responded with a proposal of attracting 80.000 internationals to Finland to address knowledge gaps and stimulate the economy, also as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic (Smith, 2020, August 10). On the other side, the National Coalition Party put forward a more moderate solution, working towards a similar goal (Satonen, 2020, November 09). The chief economist at the Finland Chamber of Commerce, a body representing interests of a wide range of businesses, criticized insufficient actions concerning attracting skilled workforce to Finland, noting that "Finland has been a passive bystander on immigration-related questions or, at worst, an inhibitor of employment-based immigration" (Teivainen, 2020, October 15). The most recent target put forward by the Chamber of Commerce is 30.000 internationals coming to Finland in 2022, urging the government to meet this quota, as well as double it in the upcoming decade (Teivainen, 2021, April 20).

The number of immigrants in Finland has been increasing (Tilastokeskus, 2020), but those already in Finland, including skilled individuals, have been reported to experience numerous challenges in finding employment, and in particular employment in their field of expertise. Residents with foreign background face higher unemployment rates, with only 53.9% employment rate among residents with foreign background age 20-64 (Ulkomaalaistaustaiset Helsingissä, 2020, June 12). While the country of origin affects the employment of foreigners, the higher education status does not protect internationals from unemployment as effectively as it protects the highly educated Finnish or Swedish speaking population (ibid.). Residents with foreign background are reported to have been employed mainly in professions such as cleaners, bus and tram drivers, administrative and support services (ibid, see also Wall, 2019, February 02).

Immigrant women are particularly vulnerable. An OECD report on the market integration of immigrants in Finland has found that women are more likely to immigrate for family reasons (OECD, 2018, pg. 164), and to be unemployed, especially considering the high employment rate penalty associated with having children in Finland (ibid, pg. 169). The difference between the unemployment rate of foreign women five years after arriving in Finland and their native-born counterparts is at 40-percentage points, double the difference among the men (ibid, pg. 14). The disparity in employment rates among immigrant women with children and men is even higher, with estimations that it takes 15 years for the employment rate of international women with children in Finland to reach the level of employment rates of men (ibid, pg. 14).

According to the recent data from the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Finland is well behind other Nordic countries when it comes to the employment of international women (Yle, 2020, January 22). The highly educated international women are not an exception. The report from the Ministry notes that 43% of immigrant women age 25-54 have completed advanced degrees, being one of the most highly educated groups of immigrants in Finland, in fact outperforming the immigrant and native-born men in Finland (ibid.). Nevertheless, the report concludes that a stronger education background does not improve their employability prospects, as international women struggle to find work that corresponds to their education level (ibid.).

To conclude, research suggests the increasing importance of work in shaping the meaning of life and self-identity of an individual in modern society. In addition, Finland is in a unique position of requiring an international workforce to support its economic growth. Considering the trends, it is evident Finnish society is becoming increasingly diverse and this is likely to continue in the future. However, as discussed above, internationals in Finland, and international women in particular, including highly educated ones, face significant challenges and barriers in the process of integration and career development. This study will provide valuable insights into what are the subjective perceptions of career building experience among the interviewed international women working in Finland, and what factors contribute to shaping those experiences the most.

Career development research has increasingly focused on migration-related issues. While significant progress has been made in understanding this topic, a lot more remains unexplored. Crowley et. al. (2018, pg. 389) point out the lack of focus on the challenges skilled migrants experience, the motivations behind the decision to migrate and how those motivation factors shape

their later career building experiences in their host country. Furthermore, although the number of skilled female migrants has been on a rise, very little remains known about their career building experiences (Colakoglu et. al, 2018). Colakoglu et. al. (2018, pg. 258) warned that subjective career building experiences of international women have been neglected and emphasized the need for further research in this area, especially in relation to understanding the challenges they face, and the strategies and they use to navigate their careers in the new country. Finally, approaching career development in the context in which careers are being built and lived has been lacking so far, with Gunz et. al. (2011) calling for more career research grounded in the context.

This research aims to contribute to filling the above-identified gaps, as it provides a better understanding of how gender, foreign background, and professional identity shape career building experiences of international women living and working in Finland. The study provides valuable insights into the career building experiences of international women in a highly egalitarian and gender-equal society, their perceived career opportunities, and the challenges, strategies and resources they have utilized in Finland. In addition, the research aims to highlight how migrating to a different country and integrating into the local context impact the sense of professional identity of international women, and how they make sense of their experiences. The research responds to calls for making career development research more grounded in the context and acknowledging that the context from which international women come as well as integrate to, in addition to their individual characteristics, profoundly shape their career building experiences (Gunz et. al, 2011). This research focuses on the experiences of international women in Finland and explores what are the perceptions of interviewees of the Finnish working culture and the environment they are being integrated into, what unique opportunities and challenges this imposes and what strategies and resources they use to kick off and further their career paths.

Following from this, the research question this study aims to answer is:

How gender, foreignness, and professional identity as intertwined elements shape experiences of career building among skilled international women working in Finland?

The study provides value for both research and practice. In the case of the former, the study addresses an important topic of subjective career building experiences of skilled international women. It expands the understanding of how the interplay between their gender, foreign background and a strong sense of professional identity affects their career building experiences.

In terms of value for practitioners and policymakers, the study offers valuable insights for policy makers and organizational leadership on how international women experience integration into the Finnish job market and what kind of tools and resources they need to succeed in their careers in Finland.

1.2 Key concepts and the scope of the research

This section provides an overview of the key concepts used in this research, and explanations of how those concepts are understood and applied.

Career

Definitions of the career concept vary across disciplines. A generally established definition is that career is "the unfolding sequence of a person's work experiences over time" (Fang et. al, 2009, pg. 474). This understanding of the career does not consider the nature of work or different career success indicators (ibid.). Some authors, however, point out the more restrictive or inclusive understanding (see. Arthur & Lawrence, 1984), while others differentiate between an objective and subjective career (see Fang et. al, 2009). In this research, a subjective understanding of the career will be utilized. Defined in this sense, a career reflects "the individual's own sense of his or her career and what it is becoming" (Fang et. al, 2009, 474). This research accepts the social constructionist understanding that career events do not have a meaning in itself, separate from the meaning individuals attach to them (Wiernik & Wille, 2017, pg. 552).

Career building

The concepts of career development and career building are used interchangeably in this study. In this research, I follow the understanding of career development of Brown and Lent (2013, pg. 9) emphasizing that career development encompasses experiences prior, during and after making a career choice, as well as spans across different life phases of an individual. In addition, according to the authors (ibid.), career development includes not only career-related actions and decisions of an individual, but also wider context and factors outside the person's control, non-linear, positive and negative career events in a person's life.

Professional identity

Professional identity is considered as the key concept to understand the career-related experiences of individuals in modern society (Baugh & Sullivan, 2005, pg. 568). In this study, professional identity is understood as "the relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role" (Baugh & Sullivan, 2005, pg. 569). Professional identity starts to evolve during the transition from the teen age to adulthood (Lewis et. al, 2018) but keeps evolving throughout different phases of a career (Baugh & Sullivan, 2005, pg. 568). Finally, integral for this research is an understanding of professional identity as co-created by individuals and the context, i.e., societal structures and processes (Geoffrion et. al, 2016, pg. 275).

Skilled immigrants

In this research, a migrant is defined following the commonly accepted definition of UN and ILO, as foreign-born, or a foreign citizen (Crowley-Henry & Al Ariss, 2018, pg. 2056). However, literature offers different approaches to defining a skilled migrant. A common way to define skilled migrants is as those "having a university degree or extensive/equivalent experience in a given field" (Iredale, 2001, pg. 8). However, as some point out, the definition of equivalent in the case remains highly unspecified (Kõu et. al, 2015, pg. 1645). Some make a difference between professional expertise accumulated through working experiences (skill-based) or through education (qualification-based) (Kõu et. al., 2015, pg. 1646). Some, however, argue that "the category of highly skilled migrants is constantly negotiated and contested and can only be used as a category of practice" (Hercog & Sandoz, 2018, pg. 459). According to Hercog & Sandoz (2018, pg. 453), a definition of who is considered a skilled migrant has less to do with the actual characteristics of the migrants and more with how different interest groups perceive potential migrants, as well as local policies. This research follows Iredale's definition and considered skilled individuals are those with a bachelor's degree in their respective fields.

1.3   Structure of the research

Following the introduction chapter, chapter 2 presents a literature review of prior research relevant to the topic of this study. First, the chapter will start with discussing the concept of career development drawing on the fields of management studies and vocational psychology. Following that, the chapter will discuss socialization into a profession and professional identity in modern

career development. The third part of the chapter will discuss the gender-related challenges women face in their process of career building. The fourth part will discuss the challenges for immigrants, and in particular female immigrants in career building in the host country. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a synthesis of the literature review bringing together the relevant concepts in the context of this research.

Chapter 3 elaborates the methodological approach used in this research. This chapter will cover the research approach and method used, data collection, method of analysis as well as methodological limitations.

Chapter 4 discusses the findings of the study, providing an overview of the stories women shared, their motivations to come and stay in Finland, career trajectories, career drivers as well as the perception of career success. Next, the findings explore how interviewees as women and foreigners have experienced getting a job in Finland and adjusting to the Finnish working culture, how they make sense of their newly encountered situation and adjust their expectations, renegotiating their sense of professional identity in the integration process.

Chapter 5 brings together the literature review and the findings of the study. First, the research findings are discussed in the context of relevant prior research, outlining how findings relate to the existent knowledge, as well as what novel contributions the research has brought. Following that, practical implications of the study for the Finnish national talent attraction policy and organizational leadership are outlined. The chapter ends with suggestions for future research.

2 Literature review

The focus of this research is on how gender, foreignness and professional identity as intertwined elements shape the experiences of career building among skilled international women living and working in Finland. In what follows, I discuss academic research from different fields to develop a thorough understanding of the concepts of career development, professional identity, gender and foreignness. In this chapter, I discuss the concept of career development, starting with defining career development compared to the similar concepts of career management and choice. I will then bring contributions from two disciplines – management studies and vocational psychology – as a framework for understanding career development. Next, the concept of socialization into a profession and the role and importance of professional identity in modern society will be discussed. In the third section, I will discuss the unique challenges working women experience that shape their career-related decisions, motivations, expectations and development process altogether. The fourth section will focus on particular challenges of foreigners, and especially foreign women for their career building experiences. Finally, the last section provides a synthesis of the analytical framework for this research.

2.1   Career development

Historically influenced by Western thought, the career development field has mainly focused on the individual and his/her choice of career based on two factors: the knowledge of the individual about him/herself and about the work. As a result, career development until recently largely neglected the importance of context and the influence of context-specific factors on the career-related decision-making process (McMahon & Watson, 2012, pg. 3-4; see also Gunz et. al, 2011). "There has been a strong bias toward treating careers as an individual phenomenon to be analysed psychologically rather than as a social phenomenon involving economics, political science, anthropology, and sociology" (McMahon & Watson, 2012, pg. 5). This has started changing relatively recently, with a strong emphasis on the context-dependent nature of careers and the fact careers do not happen in a vacuum (Litano & Major, 2016, pg. 52), as well as on the dynamic between careers as a product of social structures which the reinforce and reproduce those social structures, too (Gunz et. al, 2011, pg. 1616).

2.1.1 Defining career development vs. career management and career choice

The term 'career development' has often been used interchangeably, or has been conflated with similar terms, especially career management and career choice. Brown and Lent (2013) differentiate those concepts and point out important differences of relevance for this research, too. According to them, the career management concept refers to a set of conscious career-related decisions made by an individual seen in this case as an active agent striving to advance their career prospects (Brown & Lent, 2013, pg. 10). Career choice on the other side refers to the decisions individuals make to pursue a particular career path or not (ibid, pg. 9). Career development differs from both career choice and career management. In relation to career choice, career development concept includes experiences prior to the decision to select a career path, during the process of making this decision and perhaps most importantly after the decision has been made (ibid.). Compared to career management, career development is understood as going beyond what one does in relation to their career to incorporate also factors outside the individual's control, across different life stages (from childhood to retirement), as well as non-linear and negative career-related events in an individual's life (ibid, pg. 10).

In this research, I will rely on Brown and Lent's understanding of career development as it allows for consideration of external factors that influence an individual from a very early age, as well as those that do not necessarily have a positive impact. Furthermore, the understanding of the career development concept in this research will have an interdisciplinary character, drawing on prior knowledge and research in management and organizational behaviour studies, as well as vocational psychology. This is important to understand the complexity of factors shaping decisions individuals make in relation to their career, and especially immigrant women, as well as to grasp how those individuals make sense of their career experiences and the effect of those on their professional identity.

2.1.2 Modern challenges in career development – contribution from management studies

In management studies, career development has been approached with a focus on studying "individuals' observable patterns of movement between different jobs, roles, and employers and their attitudes toward these transitions" (Wiernik & Wille, 2017, pg. 554). Considering the career development process is context-dependent and strongly influenced by changes in the environment, research in management studies has developed a strong focus on understanding how the changes

in modern society (globalization, internationalization, technical advancements) and economy have impacted career development process (ibid.). This includes the shift from traditional to a modern career, and consequently a drastic shift in the responsibility for career development from the organization to an individual.

In the traditional understanding of a career, the focus was on job stability within one organization over time: an employee would be hired into an entry position and worked their way up. Symbols of career progress were salary raise and higher status in the organization, and the organization has a decisive role in defining this career path, but also invested resources in developing a sense of belonging to the organization (Litano & Major, 2016. pg. 53). Characterized by their linearity, traditional careers used to happen in the context of organizational structures, tailored for predominantly male workforce striving towards greater extrinsic rewards, loyal to their employer and enjoying benefits of job security in return (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009, pg. 1542).

With the societal, economic, and technological changes, the types of modern careers individuals pursue have become increasingly diverse, responding to the changing needs and priorities of a diverse workforce (see Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Workforce diversity brought new issues at the forefront of career development such as changing career attitudes, family structures and longer lifespan (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009, pg. 1543). A growing number of individuals started looking for career opportunities that provide intrinsic rewards, including the need for life-long learning, personal and professional growth and development (ibid.), looking for ways to navigate their career development in the context of rapid changes and high job insecurity. According to Savickas, "instead of making plans, individuals must prepare themselves for possibilities" (Savickas, 2013, pg. 149).

The traditional career common a few decades ago has now evolved into what is in management literature discussed as boundaryless, protean or kaleidoscope career, which are some of the most popular non-linear, discontinuous alternatives to the traditional career in literature (see Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). The concept of a boundaryless career recognizes that individuals have increasingly been moving within an organization and across different organizations in their career development journey. While earlier understanding of the concept was focused on physical mobility (i.e. the actual transitions), Sullivan and Arthur (as discussed in Sullivan & Baruch, 2009, pg. 1553) have introduced also the aspect of psychological mobility (i.e. the individuals' perceived mobility

across organizations). Sullivan and Arthur (as discussed in Sullivan & Baruch, 2009, pg. 1553) also note that while some boundaries are diminishing, discrimination, cultural differences or individual competencies impose different types of barriers, with women being particularly affected. For those with protean career orientation, career development is driven by their values, oriented towards intrinsic rewards and highly self-directed (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009, pg. 1549). A protean careerist has the responsibility for their career development in their own hands and is characterized by the ability to "repackage his or her knowledge, skills, and abilities to fit the changing work environment in order to remain marketable" (ibid, pg. 1544). Kaleidoscope career model illustrates well the shifting motivations and priorities of modern employees, arguing that individuals in modern society make career decisions based on authenticity and their inner values, seeking to balance work and non-work aspects of life and the ability to professionally develop and advance in their careers (ibid, pg. 1548). Boundaryless, protean and kaleidoscope career models all address important aspects of emerging changes in the field of career development in modern society.

The perception and indicators of career success have also evolved. While the traditional understanding of career was characterized by objective career success indicators, such as compensation and status, in modern times the focus has shifted to individual indicators, such as personal satisfaction, fulfilment and self-actualization for instance (Litano & Major, 2016, pg. 54). Moreover, this perception changes over the individual's lifespan, too. With the evolving career needs and priorities, "people's definitions of career success are shaped continuously throughout their lives, changing whenever changes in their personal lives affect their priorities" (Dries, 2011, pg. 376). Moving to a different country to build a career can be seen as one of such changes, with a potential to significantly alter the perception of career success and what those individuals find as the most important career success indicators.

As addressed especially in the discussion on protean career, one of the most important implications of modern careers is a shift in responsibility for career development. In modern societies, individuals are likely to change different organizations, as well as work in different capacities over their lifespan (i.e. full- or part-time employee, freelancer, self-employed, temporary worker), sometimes even at the same time. They are also more likely to be driven by their own values and interests, and thus willing to take a greater role in shaping their own career development and employability (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009, pg. 1543), including investing time in gaining new skills

and knowledge, or obtaining qualifications one perceives contribute to their careers. Consequently, while in the past career development was the responsibility of the organization, nowadays individuals are more likely to take over this role.

In the situation when an individual moves across countries, the importance of self-responsibility for career development increases. According to Fang et. al. (2009. pg. 474), career self-management is used as a tool by immigrants to compensate for the lack of social capital, local networks and other resources one lacks in the new country. The weakening influence of organizations in defining careers and career paths has also led to the increased importance of professional identity in this regard, which is taking over as the driving force of individuals' career development (Baugh & Sullivan 2005, pg. 568).

2.1.3 Subjective career – contribution from vocational psychology

The career development in vocational psychology has long been dominated by Person-Environment (PE) fit theory, work adjustment and social cognitive career theory, as well as developmental theories such as life-span, life-space theory, and theory of circumscription and compromise (for a detailed overview see Weirnik & Wille, 2017; Brown & Lent, 2013). In relation to the PE fit theories, the main aim was to understand how 'right' people in terms of their capabilities and interests can be matched with 'right jobs', where those capabilities will be relevant. Despite the career development field has evolved significantly over time, PE-inspired theories remain to be among the most influential approaches in theory and practice (Wiernik &Wille, 2017, pg. 548). Developmental theories have emerged aiming to complement PE theories, and focus on individual's attitudes, context and behaviours that are relevant for career decisions (ibid, pg. 551). The common for all those theories is the assumption there is an objective career, people and work environments can be grouped according to certain categories (i.e. RIASEC, the 6 dimensions from Holland's theory, one of the most popular PE theory as discussed in Wiernik & Wille, 2017, pg. 549) and that those categories can be used to assess individual fitness for a particular job.

Postmodern constructivist and social constructionism theories in career development reject those notions and make two important arguments. First, Savickas, one of the most influential authors in this field and founder of Career construction theory, notes that there is an objective career, defined as a sequence of positions an individual has across their lifespan and that is observable to outsiders

(Savickas, 2013, pg. 150). However, according to the author, the traditional understanding of career dominating management studies is not valid in modern society. "Super's metanarrative of career stages and tasks dissolves with the loss of the predictable scripts and identifiable paths on which it was based" (ibid.). Instead, career construction theory sees career as "a story that individuals tell about their working life, not progress down a path or up a ladder" (ibid.). According to this view "career events by themselves are meaningless; work positions, transitions, successes, and failures only come to have meaning when individuals incorporate them into a cohesive self-narrative" (Wiernik & Wille, 2017, pg. 552). The meaning individuals attach to their career events is what directs them in their career development journey (Savickas, 2013, pg. 150). Thus, the focus in constructivist is to understand how individuals 'construct' their careers, how they create and narrate their identities and make sense of career events they have experienced (Wiernik & Wille, 2017, pg. 552). According to Savickas et. al. (2009, pg. 246) "today, it is the life story that holds the individual together and provides a biographical bridge with which to cross from one job to the next job".

Second, building on the understanding among constructionists that subjective meanings individuals attach to their career events are essential, social constructionists argue that those meanings are a product of the society, institutions, norms, interactions and relationships with others in that society (ibid, see also Young & Collin, 2004). Savickas (2013, pg. 154), one of the leaders in this field, rejects Holland's RIASEC types of personalities, arguing "they have no reality or truth value outside themselves", as according to the author (Savickas, 2013, pg. 155), "a self is built from the outside in, not from the inside out as personality trait theorists would have it". Savickas (2013, pg. 148) acknowledges the self-making aspect of career constructions, noting that people use language to "construct and constitute social realities". "Individuals compose a self and career by reflecting on the experience, using the uniquely human capacity to be conscious of consciousness" (ibid.). However, Savickas (ibid.) goes a step further arguing that, in fact, self is not constructed by individuals alone – it is 'coconstructed' through the process of reflections upon that individual's experiences in the outside world and in particular interactions with others in society. Thus, how one will perceive their career events, and what meanings will attribute to them is "culturally shaped, socially constituted, and linguistically narrated" (Savickas, 2013, pg. 148).

According to Savickas (2013, 2011), the process of career construction starts in childhood and continues across a lifespan of an individual, evolving through different life phases. In this process,

Savickas (2013, pg. 151-168, see also Savickas, 2011) differentiates three roles an individual has – an actor in childhood, an agent in youth and an author in adulthood. According to the author, when a child is born, it encounters the 'family drama' and the world in his/her proximity. This is the first moment when the career construction starts, as the child relies on parents as role models and, in a rather passive role, picks up cues that serve as a guide in the future as the child internalizes them. As the child starts encountering other parts of the social world (schooling period), he/she starts developing a more active role of an agent, creating their own goals and strategies how to pursue them. For career construction theory, the challenges a child encounters in the period and their response and adaptation process to the transitions one experiences are of immense importance. As the young individual matures, they respond to social pressure to make something out of their lives. According to Savickas (2013, pg. 163), this is the moment when young adults use their experiences as actors and agents to develop their unique identities expressed through a cohesive life story that they have authored. "The identity narrative expresses the uniqueness of an individual in her or his particular context by articulating goals, directing adaptive behaviour, and imposing meaning on activities" (ibid.).

Those identity narratives individual will rely on to assess different career opportunities and respond to challenges along the way, navigating their way through (ibid.). Those experiences of an actor, agent and author of your own story apply to individuals building their careers in the same society they have lived those experiences. However, understanding how living through the experience of an actor and an agent in one society, for example, and authoring your story in another system of norms and values influence one's career development experience can provide valuable insights with practical implications for understanding the career experiences of internationals.

2.2   Professions and professional identity

Nowadays, work has a central place in an individual's life, beyond and above being a source of income. Work can be seen as a way to fulfil basic human needs as discussed by Maslow, to establish a public identity especially important in individualistic Western societies where what one does significantly contributes to how this individual is being perceived in the society (Brown & Lent, 2013, pg. 2-3). In addition, can be a tool for an individual to construct a self, become a person they wanted to be and give meaning to other aspects of their lives, or to establish their group identity (ibid, 3-4).

The expectations, norms and success factors across professions are highly context-specific and vary across societies. As a result, those building a career in a foreign country need to adapt, adjust and re-negotiate their sense of accomplishment and expectations when it comes to career building, as well as navigate through the different societal norms (i.e. gender roles). In addition, the needs and priorities differ across the lifespan, which is also something to reconcile a career building with. This, in turn, affects one's sense of professional identity, subjective perception of success, and self-worth.

2.2.1 Socialization into professions

Socialization into a profession can be understood "as a complex socialisation process by which a person acquires the knowledge, skills and sense of professional identity that are characteristic of a member of that particular profession" (Cornelissen & van Wyk, 2007, pg. 827). It can be characterized by a strong assimilating tendency, too. Abbott (as discussed in Cornelissen & van Wyk, 2007, pg. 827) described socializing into a profession as a "process through which individuals are influenced or moulded to assimilate and reflect the value dimensions of a given profession".

This socialization process has two important components: anticipatory and formal professional socialization. The anticipatory professional socialization refers to the process in which young students bring preconceptions about the respective profession (often determined by the society at large) and have their image about the profession and expectations shaped. In other words, it is a "processes of socialisation in which a person 'rehearses' for future roles, positions and social relationships" (Cornelissen & van Wyk, 2007. pg. 828). Researching the recruitment process of the Big Four (a term referring to the world's biggest four accounting networks PWC, KPMG, EY and Deloitte), Gebreiter (2020) pointed out the importance of anticipatory socialization and activities that occur during studies in developing their professional identity, before the student even files an application with a Big Four company. This early-on interaction between the Big Four and students, as part of wider recruitment during the campus recruitment events, constructs, not only selects recruits (Gebreiter, 2020, pg. 234), transforming aspiring students into "corporate clones who look, sound and behave like audit professionals months or even years before they take up traineeships at Big Four firms" (ibid.). In fact, technical knowledge and expertise come second to "learning how to look, speak and behave like a professional" (Gebreiter, 2020, pg. 235). Similar

tendencies have been confirmed in other professions, too, with research showing law firms, investment banks and consulting firms' recruitment is a process of "cultural matching" (ibid.), thus confirming the socialization into a profession can be crucial for future career prospects in the respective field.

Formal professional socialization is related to the actual training students receive, "formal instruction in the knowledge upon which future professional authority will be based" (Cornelissen & van Wyk, 2007, pg. 829). Thus, knowledge acquisition, development of the role identity, commitment to the profession, and development of professional identity as key elements of socializing into a profession (ibid, pg. 830-831). To complete the process of socializing into a profession, it is crucial that the professional identity becomes internalized, an integral element of personal identity, in harmony with other values and beliefs the individual holds, and not at odds with them (Cornelissen & van Wyk, 2007, pg. 839). At this point "students integrate their previous identities, the professional role demands, and their own personality traits into their self-concept to create a professional role identity" (ibid, pg. 839-840).

2.2.2 The importance of profession for immigrants

When it comes to building a career as an immigrant in the new country, there is little doubt high skilled and low skilled migrants' occupational paths, career pursuits and obstacles they experience in their host country differ greatly (Remennick, 2003). Furthermore, even among skilled migrants, the career path and experience vary, depending on their profession. Remennick (2012) identified two important features that distinguish professions: their culture-dependency and attachment to the institutional framework, consequently creating unique obstacles for skilled internationals in those fields. According to the author, professions like educators, lawyers, journalists, artists and entertainers are strongly dependent on the local culture and context, but they also have room to work outside the institutional framework (i.e. be self-employed). At the same time, Remennick (2012) points out physicians, nurses, social workers, therapists and other 'human services' practitioners are dependent on the local context in terms of the accreditation they need to obtain/have recognized, and the need for understanding local language, laws, social norms, etc. Considering the fact most often the services they offer are provided by public, government institutions (i.e. hospitals), they face the additional challenge of adapting to and navigating through the local institutional framework. Finally, those working in the field of engineering, technical and

scientific occupations are considered least dependent on the local culture, as their skills are often seen as most transferable across borders, and they often work in the private sector which is more flexible and autonomous compared to the public institutions (Remennick, 2012).

2.2.3   Professional Identity

Professional identity has been referred to as the central identity of individuals (Geoffrion et. al, 2016, pg. 275), the key to understanding modern careers and related challenges (Baugh & Sullivan, 2005, pg. 568). Defined as "the relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role" (Baugh & Sullivan, 2005, pg. 569), professional identity is created "by the changing system of interpersonal relationships around which they are constructed" (Geoffrion et. al, 2016, pg. 275). This understanding highlights the interdependency and mutual influence of individuals and the context (structures and processes in a society) on the professional identity (ibid.). Different research streams focused on various aspects related to professional identity, establishing the influence of professional identity on the individuals' willingness to compromise in the process of career development (Creed et. al, 2020), response to work-related stressors, adaptation response, well-being, satisfaction with work and defense against depression and anxiety (Geoffrion et. al, 2016, pg. 275). While earlier studies argued professional identity is formed naturally across different career stages, newer research emphasizes the importance of self-awareness and the ability of people to process feedback about themselves as key drivers of professional identity development (Baugh & Sullivan, 2005, pg. 569).

A sense of professional identity starts to be developed with teenagers 'entering adulthood' and starting to explore their identity in general, looking for meaning and purpose in their lives, and matching career-related activities they feel are most fitting to them (Lewis et. al, 2018). This process starts during the education of a young person, but notions of professional identity formed during the studies also get questioned and re-negotiated once the young professionals find themselves in the workplace, developing their professional careers (Ahuja et. al, 2019, pg. 988). Professional identity also evolves throughout the development of a professional career (Baugh & Sullivan, 2005, pg. 568).

The importance of professional identity is especially manifested in times of big changes, such as migration, when professional identity shapes career decisions and is being shaped by career

choices, too (Zikic et. al, 2010). "As newcomers to a country, immigrants with established professional identities must independently navigate an often complex and unfamiliar labour market, which includes having to understand and interpret local institutional scripts, or local institutional rules of conduct" (Zikic & Richardson, 2016, pg. 140). For immigrants, the context in their host country has a strong effect on their professional identity, which is formed through the interaction between the individual subjective perceptions of their career and the objective career, pertaining to the response of the local society (Zikic et. al, 2010). Moreover, those immigrants with a career in their home country and established professional identity must, upon the arrival to the host country adapt to foreign local markets, local institutions, norms and ways of doing things, which can be significantly different from what they have known until then (Zikic & Richardson, 2016, pg. 140).

In relation to the adaptation process, Cruz and Blancero (2017, pg. 486) point out that while research often focused on the acculturation process, i.e. process of adapting to the new culture, there is a need to incorporate also enculturation process in research, where the accent is on maintaining one's cultural values after migrating in another country. According to the authors, both acculturation and enculturation processes happen in the process of navigating a career in a new country and have a profound effect on one's professional identity, especially in cases where the cultural values immigrants were socialized into are different, or even opposite to the culture of the host country. In the case of Latina/o immigrants building a career in the corporate USA, this includes reconciling values they are socialized into with the new cultural values in the USA. The importance of family, putting group needs ahead of an individual, nurturing relationships with others, conflict avoidance, and strong hierarchy are some of the key cultural values of Latina/o immigrants (Cruz & Blancero, 2017, pg. 486). Those get contrasted to a rather different set of values dominant in the corporate USA, such as "individual achievement, self-agency, self-promotion, competition, and power equality" (ibid.). We know from research that immigrants employ different strategies to navigate through the adaptation and acculturation process (see Zikic & Richardson, 2016), and in this process negotiate and re-negotiate their sense of professional identity, perception of success and self-worth.

2.3   Gender as a factor shaping experiences of women building a career

It has been established in prior research that cultural, social, legal and practical barriers women face differ from those men have to overcome in the process of career building, which, in turn, influences their career paths and experiences, too. For instance, it has been established women are more likely to experience job segregation across different industries and sectors, interrupted careers (due to maternity leave for example) and more radical career changes (Melamed, 1996, pg. 217). Years later, Bimrose (2012, pg. 51-52, see also Marks et. al, 2020) noted pay gap, horizontal and vertical occupational segregation, glass ceiling, access to often only part-time jobs, struggle to balance work and family life, and exposure to abuse and sexual harassment at workplace, for instance, as challenges of women in a workplace. Those also reinforce each other. For example, sex segregation contributes to the pay gap but also reinforces the glass ceiling for women (Reskin & Bielby, 2005, pg. 78). Prior research shows occupational segregation explains gender gaps in wages (Correll, 2001, pg. 1691) with great potential to shape career building of women, especially if we consider that financial compensation is one of the main objective indicators of career success, in addition to the status the professional enjoys (Orser & Leck, 2010). One of the most recent calls is to include the three Ms in working women's lives – menstruation, maternity and menopause – into consideration, too, as factors actively shaping the experiences of working women and their careers (Grandey, et. al, 2020).

The concept of pay-gap is strongly related to the perception of women's self-worth and value, in turn, have a profound effect on their career path and success. Descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes of women in the society lead to stereotype-based performance expectations driving the perception of women's on-job performance, competence and advancement, and in turn, rewards (Heilman & Parks-Stamm, 2007, pg. 53). According to the authors, those stereotypes can lead to biased perceptions that influence not only the evaluation standards used to assess the performance of women but also career-related decisions about them (ibid, pg. 47).

The societal beliefs about gender also affect how women and men perceive their own competencies (Correll, 2001, pg. 1691). When individuals' career decisions are coloured by perceptions based on gender, cultural beliefs in each society about gender can direct careers of men and women to significantly different directions (ibid.), further contributing to occupational segregation and glass-ceiling effect. As a result, the perception of success among men and women

differs, and their ambitions, too (Orser & Leck, 2010, pg. 388). Against the long-held belief that women are less ambitious, recent research shows women tend to be equally ambitious at the start of their careers, but the working experience and multiple challenges they face along their professional journey led them to adjust their ambitions (Harman & Sealy, 2017, pg. 373).

Not only socially accepted norms affect how men and women perceive their competencies, but according to the self-efficacy theory also affect the development of those competencies. The self-efficacy theory argues that socialization experiences can hinder the development of professional skills among women. As a result of their socialization experience, "women lack strong expectations of personal efficacy in relationship to many career-related behaviours and, thus, fail to fully realize their capabilities and talents in career pursuits" (Hackett & Betz, 1981). Research exploring the impact of patriarchy on women in professional settings underlined that societal norms, once accepted in the private sphere tend to 'spill over' to the professional sphere as well, strongly affecting their workplace behaviour and undermining the performance of women (Adisa et. al, 2019).

Balancing family and work is yet another challenge for professional women building a career. The interconnected nature between work and non-work life has been widely researched. Greenhaus and Powell (as discussed by Schooreel et. al, 2016, pg. 124) coined the term 'family-related work decision' to describe career decisions driven by family-related reasons. Shortly after, Greenhaus and Kossek (as discussed by Schooreel et. al, 2016, pg. 125) proposed 'home-to-career' concept focusing on the effects of broader private life on career-related decision making, which in addition to family-related aspects includes also friends, community. Most research on the relationship between family responsibilities and work-life has shown negative correlation, conflict and tensions (Mayrhofer et. al, 2008, pg. 293). At the same time, family responsibilities have shown to affect work centrality, i.e., creating a family may reduce the importance of work for parents, as well as time and energy they have to dedicate to work (Mayrhofer et. al, 2008, pg. 298). This, in turn, can have an influence on the perception of career success, career goals and ambitions. Gordon and Whelan (1998, pg. 8) note that not only needs change with age but maturing and going through different phases in life changes "their[women's] perspective, alters their role definition and performance and modified their job or work environment".

Furthermore, while family structures affect the career advancement of both men and women, the effect on the father's career is positive, while on the mother's is negative (Mayrhofer et. al, 2008, pg. 312). "Whereas successful male managers are often expected to be paterfamilias, ideal type female business professionals do not have family duties" (Mayrhofer et. al, 2008, pg. 312). This phenomenon, also known as 'child penalty' or 'motherhood earnings gap' (Orser & Leck, 2010, pg. 391) is present in Finland, too, despite being considered as a society with a high level of gender equality. A recent study shows women's family-related leaves were 13 times longer than men's, likely partly explaining the 30% gender pay gap researchers found in very early career phases on young Finns with families (Kuitto et. al, 2019, pg. 252). Finally, the work and family spheres are not separate, but interlinked. According to the spillover theory, what happens at home can affect the productivity at work and vice versa with women being disproportionately more affected by those spillover effects (Linehan & Walsh, 2000, pg. S51). Contributing with higher shares of unpaid labour as well, including housework, childcare and elderly care negatively affect women's careers, with "profound effects on their mental, physical, relational, vocational, and economic health" (Jung & O'Brien, 2019, pg. 184).

Socially accepted gender norms are often underpinning the household work division, at the same time fueling the explanations and perceptions of women having to balance their careers and family. Research among Canadian undergraduate female business students shows "women perceive the glass ceiling in stereotype threatening ways, blame their personal limitations and work-family choices for its existence, and sense a range of obstacles to their advancement" (Ezzedeen et. al, 2015, pg. 355). When recalling some of their past working experiences, study participants reported feeling excluded from the predominantly male executive branch at their organization and often could not envision their future in such positions describing executive work as irreconcilable with their female identity (Ezzedeen et. al, 2015, pg. 360). Balancing career and family was not seen as feasible, and respondents often opted for one at the expense of the other (Ezzedeen et. al, 2015, pg. 355).

Another research on the ambition and motivation of women in the workplace encountered similar findings, with the majority of respondents noting achieving work-life balance is not possible without sacrificing career goals (Harman & Sealy, 2017, pg. 381). Experience at work has led the respondents to adjust their career ambitions, questioning their ability to advance professionally and 'remain true to themselves' (Harman & Sealy, 2017, pg. 379-380). Among challenges

associated with career-related ambitions and family life, women noted a need to 'sell their soul' to the employer, stay longer at work, and deal with judgements from colleagues and other parts of society (ibid.) because they have decided to pursue a career over motherhood for example. Diversity and inclusion programs contributed to this frustration, as they never addressed the disparity in parental obligations between male and female employees in the workplace, but expected them to advance at the same pace (ibid.).

2.4   Foreignness

In addition to the usual career challenges a female professional must navigate through, building your career in a foreign country has its unique characteristics. This includes a wide range of challenges, from learning the language to mastering sophisticated aspects of integration such as building a trusted network, understanding local working culture and value system and negotiating the integration process with one's career goals and aspirations. Although limited attention has been paid by researchers to the challenges of female immigrants, some issues hindering their integration and career building prospects have been well established. For example, favouring of male-dominated professions in the process of immigration, women's prior experience in other countries is not accepted as equally valid with obstacles for accreditation and the transfer of the academic credits obtained elsewhere, visa status dependent on the husbands or greater role in sharing the burden in domestic work (Colakoglu et. al, 2018, pg. 259). Authors also note that despite the number of skilled female migrants is on the rise, the evidence shows they face additional challenges compared to their male counterparts when it comes to integration in the labour market in the host countries (Colakoglu et. al, 2018, pg. 261; see also Cooke et. al, 2013).

One of the important factors in career building in the new country is related to the loss of career capital. According to Inkson and Arthur (as referenced in Cooke et. al, 2013, pg. 2630), career capital refers to the knowledge, skills, and experiences individuals gain throughout their lives, including education and professional experiences for instance. This capital can be broken down into three categories – knowing-why, knowing-how and knowing-whom (ibid.). Career capital is at the core of the recruitment process, too. According to Fossland (2013, pg. 200), "recruitment is a multi-levelled and relational process, involving formal and social recognition in relation to different negotiators and negotiations. Therefore, language skills, gendered expectations, networks, local knowledge and personal connections to work-related networks and employers also

seem important to get skilled work". Because it is heavily context-dependent, most of the immigrants' career capital remains in their home countries, and they often must start building their careers from the beginning in the new country, adapting to the new institutions and culture (Cooke et. al, 2013, pg. 2629).

Different groups of immigrant women will experience the loss of career capital and, subsequently the career building process differently, too. Reasons behind migration are one important factor. It has been noted women migrate due to different reasons – to join their partner, in search of better employment or expatriates, transferred by their companies to work abroad (Traavik & Richardsen, 2010, pg. 2798-2799). Research shows women migrating to accompany their partner are particularly vulnerable – they are likely to experience discrimination due to the of lack necessary resources, networks and capital, and are more likely to accept underemployment, to experience an identity crisis, or to be underpaid (Colakoglu et. al, 2018, pg. 261; see also Kang et. al, 2014). Roos (2013) also pointed out the two-sided bias against women migrating to join their partners. On one hand, they are passive, dependent on their husbands, subordinated and sacrificing their careers for the benefit of the family. According to Roos (2013, pg. 148), this has been reflected in the language used to describe this category of female migrants in the literature, referring to them as 'trailers'. On the other hand, if they are considered as an active participant in shaping their career paths, their active role is described either in terms of competition with the local citizens or as a burden consuming societal resources (Roos, 2013, pg. 148).

The institutional and cultural environment in the host country is another important factor affecting career building. "Identity embeddedness, host country culture, openness to foreigners and existing prejudices and stereotypes against women seems magnified for women from outside the host country" (Van den Bergh & Du Plessis, 2012, pg. 142). Cultural and linguistic similarities or differences, geographical proximity, the perception of different immigrant groups in the host community or the nature of historic relations between their home and host country are of great importance. For instance, historic relations between the country of origin and country of destination can be a powerful source of discrimination of immigrants which is evident in the case of the Turkish minority in Germany (Colakoglu et. al, 2018, pg. 261). Evidence from Sweden shows immigrant women are often seen "as a passive and culturally bounded subject", accompanied by other stereotypes such as that they have a lower level of education or fewer years of work experience, and lack of language skills (Aygoren & Wilinska, 2013, pg. 578). Particularly

women of the Muslim religion are seen as oppressed and isolated, representing patriarchal society against which open and tolerant Swedish society is put up (Aygoren & Wilinska, 2013, pg. 578). On the other side, recent research among Russian women in Helsinki shows how their whiteness is perceived that of 'second world' (Krivonos, 2020, pg. 388). Too white to fit the box of 'post-colonial subject', those from Central and Eastern Europe are not good enough to be considered equal to Western Europeans, either, with some research describing them as "contiguous Others" (Krivonos, 2020, pg. 388).

Building their careers in Finland, a highly gender equal and egalitarian society can create opportunities and challenges for international women. The Global Gender Gap report for 2019 has ranked Finland third in the world when it comes to gender equality (World Economic Forum, 2020). A year after, Finland ranked one place higher, just behind the world leader Iceland (World Economic Forum, 2021). Being one of the world's leading countries when it comes to gender equality, Finland as a host country represents a new environment for international women coming from more patriarchal cultures to navigate through. On one side, egalitarian societies like Finnish tend to have a higher level of female participation in the workforce, more favourable attitudes towards women and higher gender equality and openness to diversity which are seen as important factors for immigrant, career-oriented women (Traavik & Richardsen, 2010, pg. 2800). On the other side, research shows career success factors and what is valued in the workplace may differ significantly from what women from less gender equal context are used to. For example, research among female leaders from the private sector in Finland showed most women believed personal factors and attributes were the key for their career success, noting "is crucial to be brave, curious and confident and to accept challenges that are offered" (Mattila & Uusilehto, 2019, pg. 35). This can have significant implications for the career development of international women, as they may lack skills that are essential to succeed in a culture with high gender equality.

In addition to different skills needed for professional success, accepted gender norms and domestic work responsibilities division is another factor differentiating gender-equal from patriarchal cultures. Discussing Finland as a socio-cultural context in their study of female managers' perceptions about spousal support, Heikkinen et. al. (2014, pg. 29) note the absence of strong housewife culture in Finland. According to Heikkinen et. al. (2014, pg. 29), unlike many other European countries, Finland does not have a strong separation between work and family spheres of life. In Matilla and Uusilehto's (2019, pg. 38) study, successful women managers reported

support from spouses, parents and extended family as important, as well as access to services such as day care. Because they knew they could leave their children in safe hands and had support in their closest circles, they could completely focus on work while at work (ibid, pg. 36-37), which is likely to have affected their results and productivity.

On the other side, the experience of an international woman may differ significantly. Their own internalized understanding of gender norms, those of their partner/spouse, or family and community in the home country may impose barriers for her career development and have an impact on how she utilizes the support provided by the state, for example. For example, coming from a tradition where sending children to kindergarten so that both parents can work is considered poor parenting, an immigrant woman may experience challenges in utilizing the widely accessible daycare services offered in Finland. Thus, this dynamic has the potential to significantly affect the career building of internationals and is an important component to consider.

Strategies immigrant women employ to navigate through the complex system of relations and perceptions differ, too. For instance, in the case of Russian women in Helsinki, the unique resource available to contiguous Others (unlike other racial groups) is a possibility to turn this flaw into capital by using tactics to assimilate their language and bodies according to the standards of western whiteness (Krivonos, 2020, pg. 388-389) in their "attempts to gain proximity to the signifier of normative Europeanness" (ibid, pg. 389). Aiming to hide their background, Russians living in Helsinki focus on getting rid of accent and open vowels, thus making it less apparent in their language they are non-Western foreigners (ibid, pg. 395). Changing their names (by, in one instance, googling the most beautiful Swedish surnames) is another such tactic (ibid, pg. 397), as well as changing their clothing style to avoid being perceived as 'vulgar', and fit the Finnish 'modest' dressing style (ibid, pg. 400). Entrepreneurship is another strategy for female immigrants to bypass discriminatory structures in the host country, developing skills and abilities to "negotiate established norms, rules and discursive images" (Aygoren & Wilinska, 2013, pg. 577). Becoming an entrepreneur is used as a "tool to overcome and transform structural obstacles and provide self-esteem, respect and social status" (Aygoren & Wilinska, 2013, pg. 577).

The current situation with the COVID-19 pandemic reminds us of the specific position professionals of immigrant background face in a foreign country. Research on how internalized cultural orientations affect coping with COVID-19 and career-related decision making has shown

culture, value system, thinking processes one has adopted earlier will affect how a person evaluates stressors and responds to them (Guan et. al, 2020, pg. 1). Furthermore, the authors argue that "culture-directed collective actions and norms in response to the COVID-19 pandemic will serve as a top-down influence on individual members' behaviours" (Guan et. al, 2020, pg. 1). Consequently, career decisions and career-building experience of those without in-depth knowledge about certain aspects of a local culture may be affected differently in times of crisis like a global pandemic, compared to those grown and raised in the given system.

2.5   Synthesizing the analytical framework

As demonstrated in the prior sections, the concepts of career development, professional identity, gender and foreignness provide a solid theoretical basis for analyzing the career experiences of skilled international women in the Finnish business sector. Figure 1 depicts this framework and how the interrelations between the concepts of career development, professional identity, gender and foreignness operate together and are understood and utilized in this study.
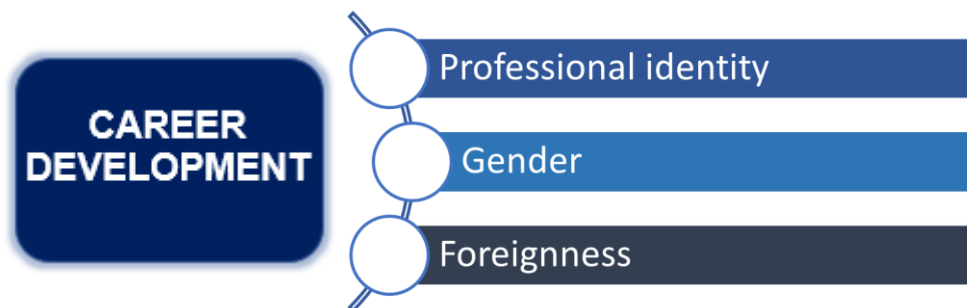
Figure 1 The main concepts of the research

The career development field has been rapidly evolving, with new career paths emerging (see Wiernik & Wille, 2017) and the individuals taking greater responsibility for their career development (as discussed by Sullivan & Baruch, 2009), both of which are important changes relevant for understanding the experiences of career building. Moreover, as this research focuses on understanding the experiences, it is essential to acknowledge that those experiences are subjective. Consequently, those experiences are inseparable from the subjective perceptions, motivations, expectations and meanings individuals give to their career events through narrating a cohesive story about their career building (Wiernik & Wille, 2017; Savickas, 2013). The

diminishing role of organizations in career development brings up also the issue of professional identity. In modern society, professional identity gains greater importance and has a growing role in the steering of career development of individuals (see Brown & Lent, 2013) and thus, strongly shaping their career building decisions and experiences. Finally, drawing from extensive research on the impact of gender on career development, as well as a cross-over between gender and immigrant status – focusing on particular challenges for immigrant women in building a career – provides a good theoretical underpinning for this research, serving as a framework guiding the research as well as the analysis.

3 Methodology

The following chapter will explain the research approach and the reasons why a qualitative approach has been selected for this study, the research method, data collection and method of analysis. The section concludes with reflections upon the limitations related to the methodological choices made in the research.

3.1   Research approach and method

A qualitative research approach has been selected for this research. According to Gupta and Awasthy (2015, pg. 13), qualitative research is concerned with the "subjective world we live in", and authors (ibid.), define this approach as "a form of social science where the focus is on understanding people's world, interpreting their experiences and making sense out of it". The ability to generate insights about how research participants experience certain contexts and their lived-in experiences are considered one of the important strengths of this approach (ibid, pg. 16). The focus of this research is to provide a better understanding of how gender, immigrant background and professional identity shape career building experiences of international women in Finland. In particular, this research is focused on subjective perceptions and understandings, how interviewed women experience different events in their lives and careers themselves and what meaning they give to those events. As outlined in Chapter 2, the research is based on the social constructivist understanding that the subjective experiences and meanings of those women and how they see their career development matter. At the same time, social constructivists acknowledge the essential role of context, as according to them those meanings and perceptions are a result of social structures, institutions and interactions with others. Uncovering those dynamics is a challenging task, and the qualitative approach seems best fitting to gather such insights and data. At the same time, qualitative research has started gaining popularity in career-related research relatively recently. A study of 11 journals publishing articles on career-related topics in the period 1990-2009 has shown only 6.3% of the articles used qualitative research (Stead et. al, 2011, pg. 105). The rest were quantitative methods and theoretical articles (ibid.).

For this study, a biographical narrative interview has been chosen as a method for collecting empirical data. Huber et. al. (2016, pg. 27-28) point out there are multiple benefits of using the biographical interview method including the possibility of the researcher to "reconstruct social

realities from a temporal distance", "reflect the diverse nature and experiences", and "reconstruct the social phenomena in the process of becoming' which enables a better understanding of the complexity of social reality". An additional important contribution of this research method is the possibility to explore the patterns that connect more stories, focus on how interviewees interact with the structures and systems in place, how it influences their behaviour, as well as how they assert their agency to achieve their goals (Merril & West, 2009, pg. 133). Moreover, the data generated this way helps shed a light on how the interviewees negotiate their identity in the process of narrating, deciding what to mention and what to leave out, how they perceive certain situations or policies, for example, make sense of it and how it affects their experience and behaviour. Collin and Young (1986, pg. 847) note that in addition to putting outstanding emphasis on the role of lived experiences, biography and biographical research "attends to dimensions such as change, the transitions and processes that are often glossed over in other methods. Considering the aim of this research, the biographical narrative interview is best fitting to grasp the subjective experiences and career stories of immigrant women coming from one context and integrating into a completely new system of norms, rules and values.

The use of biographical research method in career-related fields has started to gain the attention of researchers only recently. Some of the popular fields where this type of research method has been applied is in truth and reconciliation field, caring, carers, family-related research, in the health sector and the experiences of healthcare workers, including nurses, teachers education, life-long learning (Merrill & West, 2009), among refugees (Lechner, 2017), in senior tourism (Huber et. al, 2017). When it comes to applying biographical research in career-related fields, issues like career commitment in human service professionals (Cherniss, 1991) and more recently work-life balance (Schilling, 2015), career transitions and life-long learning across cultures (Barabasch & Merrill, 2014), or in sport (Nam et. al, 2017), as well as biographical research of the meaning of work (Haratyk, et. al, 2017) emerge as examples. This research contributes to popularizing the use of biographical research method, and in particular biographical narrative interview, in exploring career development experiences of immigrant women, understanding how contextual and personal factors shape those experiences, as well as how those women make sense of different career events.

There are different ways to conduct biographical narrative interviews. The method used in this study is most similar to the model influenced by German biographical-interpretive methods

(Merrill & West, 2009, pg. 119), where the interview starts with asking participants to talk first about their life history and following that focuses on the more specific questions. The main benefit of this approach is allowing interviewees to 'set the discussion table', give them a voice to tell their career story, as they want me as the researcher to know it. This way interviewees have power over the narrative they want to provide, deciding what they want to share and in what context, as well as what they choose not to mention. Interviews start with participants narrating their story uninterrupted, answering a basic question to tell their career story and take me on this career journey with them. After the interviewees finish their storytelling, a series of follow-up and more general questions are discussed, building on what the interviewee has shared before. This is since for some interviewees having to tell their career story may be rather difficult, especially considering this is a new and unknown research method and most participants have never heard of it, or had any storytelling/narration experience in the past. Thus, ready follow-up questions help avoid the risk of getting simple stories without relevant details and data, follow-up questions. A similar approach (storytelling followed by more structured interview part) was successfully used by Schilling (2015) and has proven to be an effective tool to gather insight into and allowed researchers to explore deeper "how an individual construct their own history, uses social discourses in their narrative patterns, seeks their own place in the social context, and interconnects past, present and future" (Schilling, 2015, pg. 481).

3.2   Data collection

To find the interviewees, I relied on LinkedIn and Facebook groups for internationals in Finland, as well as my professional network of contacts in Finland. In the first step, I checked LinkedIn profiles to ensure the person belongs to the target group for this research. Next, I contacted potential interviewees through LinkedIn or via email. Out of 22 potential interviewees identified in the search, 19 were contacted with requests for an interview, and 18 responded. Of the 18 respondents, 12 interviews were conducted. Each participant was interviewed once, in English. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted online. Eleven interviews were recorded, with the consent of the interviewees. The recording was used to generate the interview transcript, which was done using an online platform for transcription. The transcripts were then checked against the recording to ensure the transcripts were accurate and depicted the content of the interview correctly, used for the analysis. In one instance the interviewee asked the interview

not to be recorded. In this case, I have made detailed notes of the conversation, sent them to the interviewee for comments and used for analysis. The interviews were conducted in May 2021.

All interviewed women were born outside Finland, have non-Finnish parents, and had come to Finland as adults. All interviewees except one have completed their Bachelors in their home country or another country than Finland prior to moving to Finland. This interviewee completed most of her Bachelor studies in her country of origin, but had interrupted her studies and did not graduate before coming to Finland. All interviewees have spent most of their working life in Finland in the private sector and are currently employed, working in a wide range of professions and industries. Basic information about the interviewees has been provided in Table 1, below. Considering the confidentiality of the interviews and highly sensitive and personal research topic, the information provided is general, to protect the privacy of the interviewees. For confidentiality purpose, throughout the study interviewees are being referred to as Interviewee 1, 2, 3, etc., including Interviewee 12.

Interviewee	The geographical region of origin	Current profession	Length of the interview in minutes
Interviewee 1	Asia	Engineering	81
Interviewee 2	Asia	Consulting	60
Interviewee 3	Western Europe	Human Resources	56
Interviewee 4	Southern Europe	Business development	65
Interviewee 5	Eastern Europe	Education	92
Interviewee 6	North America	Software Products & Systems Design	82
Interviewee 7	Latin America	Engineering	80
Interviewee 8	Baltic region	Consultant	70
Interviewee 9	Western Europe	Human Resources	73
Interviewee 10	Baltic region	Finance	78
Interviewee 11	Asia	Consulting	62
Interviewee 12	Asia	Consulting	50

Table 1 Key characteristics of the informants

Prior to the interview, interviewees received more information about the research, as well as details about the interview method used. The interviewees were explained that first, they will have the opportunity to narrate the story of their career and set the discussion for the interview, and following that, follow-up and more general questions will be discussed. The interviewees were asked to start by answering a very broad question, to tell, uninterrupted, the story of their career – the past, the present and the future expectations. Following their stories, further questions were asked to ensure the correct understanding of what was shared before, but also to capture the experience of interviewees as extensively as possible. In addition, when the time allowed, interviewees were asked some general questions to share their career experiences. Those questions were kept very broad to allow genuine answers and minimize the influence of the interviewer.

As predicted, some interviewees found narrating their stories to be an easy and comfortable experience. They shared rich and detailed stories of their career experiences and in some cases, storytelling consumed most of the time allocated for the interview, with a limited number of follow-up questions asked. Some interviewees found the storytelling rather challenging, especially since many were not familiar with this method or had practised storytelling in this form before. This challenge has also been recognized in the literature, with Thompson (as discussed by Merril & West, 2009, pg. 120), noting that having to answer such broad question can result in brief and unsatisfactory results, as well as that some interviewees may find it hard to trust the interviewer in such settings. In those cases, after finishing their stories we would go back to the beginning and I would ask a series of follow-up questions, based on what they have brought up in their stories. This allowed interviewees to bring up new insights and examples which were then further follow-up on, resulting in rich and descriptive stories of their career experiences. When asking questions, I paid special attention not to bring issues or topic that have not been raised by the interviewee already or to influence them in giving answers in a certain direction. The aim was to allow interviewees to narrate their career stories as they wanted them told, without suggestions or interference.

3.3   Method of analysis

Merrill and West note that "social science should take seriously its humanistic foundations, derived from the idea of human beings as active creators of their worlds as well as being created by them" (2009, pg. 130). This understanding also informs the analysis of data collected as part of this research. Data analysis, as well as data collection, is centred around giving the participants a voice to tell their career stories and their experiences as they have lived and understood them.

The data analysis will follow the approach suggested by Merrill (in Merrill & West, 2009, pg. 130-135). As explained above, the transcripts were generated through an online platform for transcription. The first step of the analysis is listening to the recording and checking the transcript, to ensure the accuracy of the transcript of each interview. This process is done 1-3 days following the interview. In the second reading, I also add notes and observations made during the interview. The third step in the analysis process includes reading each transcript numerous times, as well as watching the recordings. After gaining strong familiarity with the stories and data gathered, in the fourth step I underlined the key concepts, themes and ideas shared in the interviews that are relevant for my research question. To make the connections visual, I assigned each concept colour and used the same colour to underline parts of transcripts that were related to that concept. That enabled me to visualize the connections and underlying themes in stories and analyse different understanding and perceptions of interviewees considering their context and background. In the fifth step, I read again each transcript to code the stories. In the final step, I reflect on how stories and insight gathered through interviews relate to the research question and the concepts mapped in the literature review, as well as how they related to the theories underpinning my research.

Coding can be defined as "process by which data are broken down, conceptualised and put back together in new ways" (Merrill & West, 2009, pg. 132). This study follows the three stages in coding recommended by Coffey and Atkinson (as discussed in Merrill & West, 2009, pg. 132): "noticing relevant phenomena, collecting examples of those phenomena, and analysing those phenomena in order to find commonalities, differences, patterns and structures". In the process of coding, I read again all transcripts paying special attention to the relevant concepts, experiences and themes, reviewing how data collected relates to those issues, and comparing different perspectives related to the same concept, as discussed in the interviews. I paid special attention to the similarities and differences in issues each interviewee individually raised in their stories and

interview, but also in different experiences and portrayal of the same issues across different stories (i.e. gender equality, low hierarchy). At the end of coding, I made a summary of the key concepts and themes discussed by the respective interviewee, which has proven to be very helpful in the process of analysis and drafting the findings.

3.4   Limitations of the methodology

There are three limitations of the methodology important to mention. The first limitation is related to the unique features of the biographical narrative interview as a method to collect data. This method relies on interviewees to tell their stories as they want them to be told. This is important as it gives interviewees power to communicate to the outside world the experiences and the picture they want the world to have about them and their careers. However, different interviewees have different experiences in storytelling and find it a more or less comfortable approach. As mentioned above, in some cases, interviewees spent most of the time allocated for the interview for the storytelling. In other cases, stories were rather short and required several follow-up questions. In addition, this approach requires more time and effort from the interviewees to think ahead of the interview about what they want to include in their stories and what not. To help them prepare, in the interview confirmation message interviewees received a couple of suggestions on how they could prepare in advance if they found the storytelling approach challenging. This included a suggestion to put together their career path on a piece of paper or in digital form with the timeline, key milestones and events and why those events were important for them. It is unclear how many interviewees made internal notes prior to the interview, but no one volunteered to share their notes during the interview, for example.

Another limitation is related to the fact that only one interview was organized with each interviewee. As explained above the interview methodology was already more demanding than the average interview would require from the participants. In addition, due to the busy schedules of the interviewees and time constraints of the study, a decision was made to conduct only one interview with each interviewee. Furthermore, the length of interviews varied, depending on the availability of the interviewees and the length of their stories. In some cases, interviewees had one hour fixed to dedicate for the interview and the number of follow-up questions varied, as their stories were of different length. At times, interviewees provided insights of potentially high value for the research, but due to the time constraints, it was not possible to follow up on those or explore

them more in-depth their answers. Thus, the study would benefit from follow-up interviews, ideally a week or two after the first interview when the interviewee had the chance to understand better the types of insights and experiences the interviewer was interested in, as well as the overall approach of the interview method. Furthermore, the interviewer would have sufficient time to read the first interview transcript multiple times, analyze the interview and map any additional follow-up questions that surfaced in the analysis phase.

The last important limitation is that all interviews were conducted online, via ZOOM, due to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. This was done to ensure the safety of interviewees and interviewer, as well as make sure each interviewee feel comfortable doing the interview. While the fact everyone spent already over a year in a remote working environment due to the COVID-19 perhaps contributed to making this type of interaction more natural compared to how some interviewees would have experienced it in the pre-COVID world, it also created challenges for the research. First, the quality of interpersonal relationships during the interview could not develop much, as usually, this is easier to achieve during in-person interviews. Second, all but one interviewee used their videos during the interview, which allowed some interaction and enabled the interviewer to observe some non-verbal communication signs. While this was helpful, it was less ideal compared to the in-person interview which allows for a better understanding of the totality of the non-verbal signs, not only the facial expressions and very limited hand gestures that were visible on the camera.

Finally, doing ZOOM interviews meant the interviewer had less control over the setting in which the interview takes place. This was, however, very important, since the research explored highly personal and sensitive topics and the venue in which the conversation happens can influence what insights interviewees feel comfortable sharing. On the side of the interviewer, the interviews were conducted in a quiet and private environment and the interviewer had a headset on, to make sure interviewees know no one else can hear the conversation other than the interviewer. On the side of the interviewees, most of them did interviews in the comfort of their homes. One interviewee was in the office at the time of the interview and two opted to do the interview outdoor. All interviewees seemed comfortable in their interview environment, they made no signs to suggest they are trying to avoid someone hearing their answers (i.e. lowering the voice) nor anyone noted at any point certain question could not be discussed due to the fact they did not have enough privacy. While those indicators suggest research findings were not affected to a significant extent

due to the interview settings of any interviewee, the study would benefit from in-person interviews where the interviewer would have more opportunities to influence the venue in which the conversation takes place.

4 The career building experiences of skilled international women in Finland

This chapter discusses the findings of the empirical data analysis. The chapter starts with an overview of career stories collected during the research, including their motivation to come and stay in Finland, their career trajectories, perceptions of career success and career development drivers. It then proceeds with an analysis of career building experiences starting with the experiences of searching for a job, discussing the challenges of lacking social capital in Finland, a need to adjust expectations on the side of interviewees and demonstrate their commitment to Finland. Next, the discussion focuses on experiences of adjusting to the working environment in Finland, including the features of the Finnish working culture particularly relevant for career building experiences of interviewees. Finally, challenges and pillars of support are discussed.

The quotes in this chapter are used in two ways. In some cases, several interviewees mentioned the same issue, and a quote of one is used to illustrate the point discussed. In other instances, different interviewees mentioned unique aspects of an issue discussed, and their quotes are used to illustrate their individual experiences. I have made an effort to indicate, throughout the chapter, which of the two types of quotes is being used. In addition, for all quotes, it is indicated which interviewee the came from.

4.1 Overview of career stories

This section aims to outline general features of the stories shared and set the context for discussing specific issues that emerged through the stories. The methodology of this researched allowed interviewees to control the information they wanted to share and to set the narrative by detailing their story, as they wanted to tell it. As a result, they were at liberty to include or exclude any topics they wished. While it is reasonable to expect that the perceived relevance of the story elements had a role in shaping the stories' content, research findings suggest it may not be the only factor.

This is well illustrated in the example of the topic of gender impact on career experiences. Several interviewees provided a detailed account of their perceptions of how the fact they are female has influenced their career building experiences before and after arriving in Finland. A few interviewees did not mention any gender-related influences at any point during their interviews.

In one instance, an interviewee replied to the request to participate in the research noting she is not able to say anything on the topic of gender, as she did not perceive it had any influence on her experiences. In another instance, prior to sharing her experiences different expectations from male and female internationals in the recruitment process in Finland, Interviewee 1 noted she is now 'playing the gender stereotype', as if to suggest invoking gender-based differences in treatment is somehow less legitimate or valid. Finally, one interviewee explained after the interview was over that she chose not to bring up gender in her answers as she felt that those are only her assumptions for which she had no proof. However, she then recalled instances from the same workplace in which male colleagues were predominantly being promoted, for example, but noted that she had nothing except her feeling it had to do something with gender, and thus decided not to address it. Those are important insights to suggest that how women perceive the influence of gender or other factors on their career building differs, as well as what experiences they perceive as legitimate and valid or what experiences they do not. Based on this research it is possible to conclude that while what is included in their stories is certainly an important piece of information, what is not included should not be interpreted as insignificant. Thus, the absence of certain topics should not be understood as a lack of importance of those topics. Feeling as those topics were too sensitive, private, painful, embarrassing or unjustified and illegitimate to bring up about could be an alternative explanation.

The majority of stories was told chronologically, with interviewees starting from their bachelor studies and describing their career experiences since, as well as future expectations. Through the stories, interviewees touched upon a series of important topics. First, they discussed their perceptions of career success, their career vision and expectations in the early days during their bachelor studies or shortly after graduation. In some cases, this was explained in the context of the changes they have experiences in this regard and how what they see as success and what they want to achieve in their careers nowadays has evolved. After describing their work experiences prior to coming to Finland (where relevant) special attention was on motivation to come and stay in Finland, their first experiences of getting a job and starting a career in Finland, as well as their career-building experiences since. This included their perceptions of the Finnish working culture and career opportunities, challenges they have experienced, resources and strategies they have used to overcome those challenges, experiences in changing and\or advancing their careers,

discussed in the context of the main career drivers they have described influencing their career-related decision making.

The remaining of this section discusses general features of the stories highly relevant for setting the context to understand the particular experiences they have shared. This includes the motivation of interviewees to come and stay in Finland, their career paths before and after coming to Finland, their perception of career success and main career drivers. Those issues are integral to understand more specific career experiences as they give a lens through which the interviewees have interpreted and filtered their experiences, what factors they considered when making trade-offs, as well as what resources they could rely on and constraints they had to navigate around.

4.1.1 Deciding to migrate

Motivation to move to a foreign country and circumstances surrounding this decision are an important factor in shaping, and consequently, for understanding career building experiences of international women. Furthermore, for those women for whom the main motivation was to pursue their studies in Finland, factors driving a decision to stay in Finland and pursue a career there instead of going back home or to some other country, are of great significance. Such decisions highlight how the international women perceived the host country and their career opportunities, as well as how those factors were considered in the context of other non-work related circumstances (i.e., being in a relationship with the Finnish partner).

The motivations and reasons why the interviewees have decided to come to Finland are diverse, including coming to Finland to study, to unite with their partner or to work, as well as a combination of those factors. While all interviewees except two did study at some point during their life in Finland, only a few came to Finland with the main motivation to pursue studies. Prior to coming to Finland to pursue their master's studies, each of the women had a Bachelor degree from a university in their home country and some years of professional experience. However, they had different prior knowledge about Finland as a country. Interviewee 1, for example, knew very little about Finland. However, as she reached a point in her career back home where she found little room for career growth, she decided to explore master's studies opportunities. As she started looking at different programs in Europe, tuition-free studies and a master's program tailored to her interests and expectations were decisive factors to choose Finland.

The other women who came to Finland to study had knowledge about the Finnish education and system in general. Interviewee 7 came to Finland for the first time during her Bachelor studies as an exchange student and decided to come back because she liked the Finnish education system much more, compared to the system in her home country. She recalled especially enjoying the freedom students get at the Finnish university to choose the courses they take, as well as the fact students, are responsible for their own learning process. "*So in [home country], we had mandatory attendance for every single course. So having class at 7 am, with a teacher that would only read slides, I was like, I could read slides in the comfort of my bed, like I don't need this. And when I came to Finland, it's like, yeah, you attend classes that you want to attend, in most cases, like, you're responsible for your own learning curve. So, just deliver these exercises. And I don't know, that you get the freedom to choose, and the responsibility as well to plan how do you want to learn.. And what do you want to learn, you are responsible for.. So that's what I like the most.*"

For Interviewee 2, Finnish society's commitment to equality and the nature of the education system, as well as a master program tailored to her interests were the main factors in her decision to choose Finland. According to her, tuition-free education and housing support available to students in Finland were one manifestation of the commitment to equality and giving everyone a chance to succeed she appreciated greatly. In addition, the Finnish approach to competition was different from what she experienced in the past. She recalled an example of doing a simulation game in Finland, a learning tool popular in her field. In Finland, she said teachers graded the learning from the simulation games, not the actual performance in the simulation, which was different compared to her past experiences. She explained this approach encourages students to experiment, try new things and learn from mistakes, opposite to just following the script. She concluded that learning during the journey matters and that one learns more through trying new things, which is something she appreciated in the Finnish education system.

Three women came to Finland to take on a job. In one case, the interviewee was working with her Finnish employer from her home country and then got an offer to move to Finland and consult on-site. In another, the interviewee came to Finland to work in a newly established branch of a company from her home country. The third did her traineeship in Finland, went back to her home country and returned to take on a job offered by a Finnish company.

For two women, coming to Finland was partly linked to the desire to end their long-distance relationships with partners based in Finland, but partly a result of dissatisfaction with their careers back home. Coming to Finland, for them, was a fresh start and an opportunity to pursue career paths they did not have available back home, for different reasons. As Interviewee 3 explained: "*I didn't have any opportunities to develop further, I would have been always a secretary. I also didn't earn very much, which was another reason. But I always felt that I would like to do more, I would like to become more. I've always been a thinker and a learner. And that job just didn't do it for me. So for me, there was just this kind of invisible ceiling that I had at that point. And while my partner was here [in Finland], it would have been nice to join him, but I would say at that point that wasn't my main motivation. That was an added security for me at that point.*"

For a group of interviewees, family-related reasons were the main factor. One interviewee had a long-distance relationship with a Finnish partner based in Finland and has decided to move to reunite with him. Another interviewee came to accompany her husband who got a job in Finland and one moved with her Finnish partner to Finland from her home country, as she was looking for a break in her career and wanted to experience living abroad.

The circumstances of coming to Finland and the risks associated with a move are unique to each interviewee. For instance, for Interviewee 1 coming to Finland to study was a low risk, as she had savings to support herself. As she explained "*I knew that if I come into Europe, then Europe as a market opens up. And I always had the safety net that I could, at any time, go back to [home country]. I knew I was certainly going to get back the job I was doing. And I also knew I could go for something better just on account of having an international master's degree. So just getting that degree certificate itself, I knew going back to [home country], I would have better options. And I had a safety net like there was nothing to lose for me, because even financially, I was not pulling out a big loan or something.*"

Interviewee 9 left her successful career in her home country to move to Finland with her partner, and she, too, saw her move as low risk. She noted she had sufficient financial means to support herself in Finland, she wanted to experience living abroad and she knew she could go back to her old job back home if she changed her mind. On the other side, Interviewee 10 has had years of working experience in her home country, working for big companies, in a stable and secure position. Job safety was of great importance until she has decided to take a risk of coming to

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Finland to work in a newly established branch of a company from her home country. Not long after the branch will be forced to close, and she finds herself unemployed with a family to provide for. While for one of the women moving to Finland to unite with her partner was the main motivation, she also managed to secure a job by the time she moved. For others, it will take studies and in some cases extended period of job search to find a job.

As those examples illustrate, the experiences, motivations and circumstances of international women deciding to move are complex. Some moved to study and secure better career options with an international degree, some because of family reasons, some because of a combination of factors. Furthermore, even experiences of women with a common motivation for migration also differ, as research findings show not all women moving for family reasons were in the same position, for example. Some women perceived it as low risk and wanted to experience living in a different country, some had a job secured by the time they moved and some spent years looking for a job. Thus, the findings of this research caution against simplifications and generalizations which tend to group women according to the main motivations for their migration and assume they share similar circumstances, prospects and opportunities. What from the outside may be seen as a high-risk decision (i.e., leaving life and a successful career to move to Finland and start from the beginning) from the perspective of those living this experience may look different, and the other way around.

In addition to understanding the motivations of international women to come to Finland, another important aspect to consider is the decision to stay, especially after their circumstances changed and the main reason why they came was not relevant anymore, i.e., graduation or a break-up with their Finnish partner. "*I can live in Sweden, I can live in Denmark, wherever I want.. Spending so much time and energy in this country, yeah, [...] it's very difficult for me to give up.. [...] But yes, some might think that it's just crazy, because I have opportunities elsewhere. And my current partner is not Finnish. So yeah, so I'm still at the moment thinking what makes me stay in Finland [...]. Finland will never be our strategic market. But still, I'm here. So that's, I'm just wondering if it's related to this sunk cost or this natural stubbornness. And really, yeah, I'm not, I'm not a quitter by nature.*" – Interviewee 9

For many, learning to appreciate what Finland has offered them, including Finnish working culture, safety net, career opportunities and benefits for their family is what has kept them in

Finland. Interviewee 1 explains she knows her working experience in Finland opened her doors anywhere across the globe: "*Finland has an open, more international market. The place where I work, the role that I am in, is sort of a global research position. And so, we do research for new products coming across the globe. And that experience, I know that tomorrow, if required, I can go to a North American office [...] and I still have relevant experience for them. At the same time, I have something relevant for China, for India, for Africa, for Europe.*"

However, focus on doing things right rather than just delivering something on a given time, flexibility to balance work and non-work life is something unique to Finland. Moving to another country for Interviewee 1 would be a cultural shock. "*I've come to appreciate the sort of lifestyle, so if I have to go to the US or Canada, where again, the competition, the market is more driven by competition. I know I'm not prepared for that. And I know it's going to be a huge culture shock. Or even if I just go back to [home country], where I come from, and I've lived most of my life there. I know how things work there. But again, I'm gonna face that culture shock.*" Many other interviewees echoed similar thoughts, including opportunities to develop their careers in different directions, which they do not see as an option back home, flat hierarchy, high level of equality in the workplace, all of which contribute to making Finland an attractive place to continue their lives and careers there.

4.1.2   Diverse and changing career paths of international women in Finland

The interviewees participating in this research were of different age and at different points in their careers. They had different career paths prior to coming to Finland, as well as since. What is common to most, however, is that they pursued careers across different organizations, as well as different professions, in some cases working their way up the ladder and in others opted for what would be considered career deviations, looking for more purposeful and meaningful work compared to what they were doing before. Of the twelve interviewees, ten had professional working experiences in their respective fields prior to coming to Finland. While not all interviewees came to Finland with the main motivation to pursue their studies, all but two have at some point in their careers studied at the university in Finland – some did studies in the period of unemployment, some made a break in their career to study and some studied and worked at the same time.

Four interviewees are still working for the same company where they got their first job since coming to Finland. Most of them have experienced working in different roles in their companies, including taking positions which are considered promotions as well as trying new positions which are not necessarily seen, in a traditional understanding of career progress, as promotions, but which allowed them to try new things, explore and learn new skills. Freelancing at some point in their career after coming to Finland has been a shared experience of a few interviewees. One has been freelancing since coming to Finland, while another quit a promising career path in the Finnish corporate sector to pursue a career in a different organization, as a freelancer. For some freelancing has been a temporary solution to earn income while looking for permanent employment in Finland or while trying to change their career paths.

Three interviewees have been working as entrepreneurs in Finland, developing their own businesses. All three women entrepreneurs have worked for a Finnish employer prior to starting their own businesses. The decision to quit their corporate careers and start their own businesses were motivated by a desire to professionally grow and develop further, as well as, in some instances, a response to their dissatisfaction with their employer's working culture, diversity management or management changes that affected their work. In those cases, entrepreneurship is used as a tool to respond to unmet needs at their old workplace, carve better career opportunities for themselves and bring their unique contributions in the areas that matter to them. Finally, the vast majority of interviewees reported to have worked in a full-time, part-time, permanent and temporary position, or to have combined the two, i.e. doing gigs and freelancing in addition to their full-time job.

The findings of this research suggest career trajectories of international women building a career in a host country, in this case, Finland, are likely to be diverse and complex. Their career paths include working in different types of employment, organizations, fields and professions, including positions that are positively associated with career progress and those that are not seen as such in a traditional understanding of career progress (i.e., progressing up the ladder). They are also characterized by many deviations and turns, all contributing to their efforts to balance different priorities and needs at different points in their lives in Finland, and in their careers.

4.1.3 Subjective understandings of career success as a factor shaping career experiences

How a professional perceives and defines career success defines the career goals and priorities a person will set for themselves, how they will evaluate their career progress, balance work and non-work related aspects of life, what aspects of a given job they will value more or less, and how satisfied they will be with their career and career progress. Thus, understanding subjective perceptions of career success is highly relevant to provide an underlying tone for understanding interviewees experiences and frame guiding their decision-making.

Speaking of how interviewees understand and define career success, a common feature of all definitions given during the interviews was that it is something personal, something that cannot be judged from the outside and is determined by each individual themselves. This is best illustrated by Interviewee 3 defining career success as "*if someone achieves in life what they want to achieve*". In addition to this common feature, different interviewees emphasize different aspects of career success. For instance, the same Interviewee 3 pointed out a successful professional is someone who has growth opportunities available and can fully use their skills, "*potentially in a leadership position where I can work autonomously and use my head that I have*". For Interviewee 1, the quality of relationships with others was essential, as for her having someone who aspires to be you is a sign of success, who is able to create an atmosphere where people work "*with them, not for them*". In addition to being happy with their work, creating impact was another feature of career success identified in this research, as well as the flexibility to balance work and non-work life. As Interviewee 7 explained: "*I wouldn't consider myself to be successful if I need to choose between, like my personal or professional life, because I do care about my career, but I do care about my family. So it's, it's, it's not a choice that I would like to make. So maybe someone that's successful, it's someone that can balance, balance that and not necessarily having a family, you can be your single and like to go to Lapland to ski and have the time to ski.*" This answer also suggests putting non-work, non-family related activities on the same footing as work and awareness that not all people may strive to have a family life, but it does not mean their need for balance between work and non-work activities is less legitimate.

One important finding of this research is that career success definition has the potential to evolve across different life and career stages and that organizational culture, as well as societal norms, have an important role in this process. "*I think it's kind of, like, mostly linked with the society values, because it's kind of like no matter that we all are individuals, we tend to think that and we*

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try to live our lives the way we want to live them, but there are some kind of like certain rules that we follow, and those, kind of like to be included in this society." – Interviewee 10

Three interviewees touched upon the evolution of their understanding of career success in their stories, and in all three cases, the shift was from the focus on the title and factors like salary to personal fulfilment. "*..what I learned is that no matter the name of the position, and no matter the salary, and I didn't really get more happiness, even though, you know, things were like, improving, but, like, inside, I, it was not really fulfilling or anything like that. [...] I just want it to be fulfilling in terms of mission and purpose and goal of the work of the job. And also personally, I need to be challenged. So I want to have fulfilling like a more emotionally or like intellectually fulfilling job and I don't really care in terms of like position.*" – Interviewee 8

Different factors led interviewees to change their view of career success and what they were striving to achieve. In the case of Interviewee 8, taking on an assistant level position in a mission-driven company after having a successful career in a corporation, was a moment when her view has shifted, as she learned to appreciate other benefits of that job, regardless of the title and the pay. "*And through the experience of being stuck in the assistant role after having these nice positions in the other company, it taught me that I can feel fulfilled and happy just working, like, in a very simple, simple role in the company that matters, that does things that matters. I discovered things that are way more fulfilling, and way more meaningful than role description.*" In this case, the company's purpose, values and mission have given the interviewee a purpose, too, regardless of her actual role.

For Interviewee 9, moving to a different country and reaching a certain level of career success in her home country and financial security allowed her to re-think her view of career success and how she wanted to direct her career in Finland, compared to her home country. She started by explaining how the school she attended and the values of the society she was being socialized into created ideals towards which she was supposed to aim: working in an important, prestigious position in a big, listed company, earning high pay. Also, she pointed out an evolution she experienced as she was getting older and more accomplished according to the societal standards at that time. "*I think you're also trying to satisfy the parents' expectations when you are younger, the society what your friends do, and things like that.*" Having had a successful career back home and financial stability, coupled with the fact she moved to another country, she felt freer to let go

of the social pressures. "*..so I reached this, this level, then I really wanted something more different. I want to really reach a higher goal of self-satisfaction, self-fulfilment, making an impact. I wasn't really interested in that in my 20s.*" This insight suggests she has proven herself in one career and now she seems free and able to afford to explore and focus on what matters to her. In the current stage of her life, career success is more determined by the freedom to choose whom she works for and what she does, as well as bigger control over her career. "*I don't want to be bothered with people that don't want to work with, I don't want to be bothered with a boss that I don't want to work for.. Yeah, I have more control about my life, I would say, as a whole.*"

For Interviewee 10, moving to Finland and the work culture at her current workplace has influenced her to shift her view on career success. Moving away from chasing titles and going up the ladder, experience at her workplace taught her to appreciate the work done, not the titles. As she explained, in her company most of employees are coders and software developers. After reaching a position of a senior coder, there is not much room for climbing up in this profession, however. "*How can you call him best coder, senior coder, best software developer, like senior software developer, basically, that's it, there is no place to grow anymore.*" Instead of being focused on the name of their title, her colleagues focus on what they do, aiming to adhere to a higher set of values in their work. "*When they do their work, they are looking to the work as a very powerful weapon that kind of, like, that can be used for the good things, and not so good things. [...] they look to the moral point of every work that they do.*" As an example, she mentioned refusing to do any work for fast credit companies, as they see this as an exploitation of people and targeting them when they are vulnerable and weak. Having the experience of working in such a workplace, where the work done is more valued than the titles, was the main inspiration for her to change her view, and her future career goals and objectives, too.

As those examples illustrate, career success is understood as a highly personal matter, dependent on an individual's preferences, values and needs. In addition, it is not set in stone, and different circumstances in life have influenced interviewees to re-think their understanding of career success. Society and the dominant values are, however, important driver. The change is also driven by ageing, reaching a certain level of success and financial stability which can empower the individual to focus on what matters to them and put aside societal pressures. Moreover, organizational culture and emphasis on a different set of values can also be a powerful vehicle to influence employees' perceptions and, subsequently, their goals and career objectives.

4.1.4 Main motivators and factors driving career development

The last issue to address in this section is the career drivers as identified by the interviewees. Opportunities for career growth, personal and professional development and seeing first-hand the impact of the work they do has surfaced as the main motivators and drivers of career development for interviewees in this research. Career growth opportunities, seen as inseparable from being able to try new things, gain new knowledge and skills, step outside the comfort zone and challenge yourself, have been a leading factor for interviewees to decide to quit careers in their home countries and move to Finland, as well as to quite their stable and secure, well-paid jobs in Finland to pursue other opportunities, including to become entrepreneurs and drive the change they wanted to see happen in the Finnish society.

For the majority of interviewees, career growth and opportunities for professional development were essential. The story shared by Interviewee 1 echoes well several other stories shared by interviewees in explaining the circumstances they encountered back home and what they could see possible in Finland. The main reason for dissatisfaction with her career back home, for Interviewee 1, was her understanding of the industry she worked in and the lack of innovation and growth opportunities there. "*You're stuck realizing you're repeating the same pattern with every new, every new project that comes up, you deal with the same people even if you're dealing with vendors and a different company or something, it's still the same people no matter what, you call them up or you send those emails. It's the same conversation just over and over just the subject name, the project name changes, but everything else under that is the same thing. And I noticed that most, most of my bosses there, have been doing that and are proud of it.* [...] *And it just showed that there is nothing new left there. And that made me feel more and more like, there's nothing for me to contribute. It's like, yeah, I can you, it's almost like I have a script. And I just need to follow the script.*" She contrasted this story to the experience currently in Finland. "*I don't know if it was consciously done or it's coincidental, but till date, that's been happening, every six months, I get something completely new, something I've never heard about something I didn't know existed, into my lap. And I'm like, you're responsible for this, deal with it now.*" The opportunity to work with the latest technology, solve complex problems and see their products implemented around the world while learning along the way is a 'healthy challenge' allowing her to constantly learn and develop, contributing to this being the highlight of her professional career so far.

Interviewee 4 has spent over a decade in her field, making her way up to the highest position she could have. With a feeling she has learned all there is in that role, a desire to grow and learn more motivated her to quit her career and replace job security with an opportunity to "*create impact and bring transformative change*". The main driver for her was to see growth opportunities ahead, regardless of where she has to start, even if that is the lowest position in the company. The prospect of having a path forward is more important.

Doing the work that is in line with personal and professional values, that enables people to achieve their full potential and work according to the standards of their profession, as well as what their professional integrity mandates were another relevant factor driving career building experiences of interviewees. This is best reflected in the story of Interviewee 11 who described the opposite situation. The clash of her personal values and work experiences caused a feeling of demotivation, and disengagement at work, as well as a struggle to maintain her dignity and her image of herself as the professional she aspires to be. "*..in the end, it was just like, just do your job, be a machine, don't react, everything about protocol, it was more important to do things right, than doing the right thing. And, and so for me, integrity was also like, you know, in your work to be just, you know, part of my values is, I want to be just and fair, that was just going against my persona. And so then why would you sell then you're like selling your soul to, you know, to the devil, if you're just selling stuff, which is like, you know, sell shoes that freaking hurt, like, no, it's not, that's not supposed to be like that. And so I felt also my dignity was violated.*"

However, career growth opportunities do not necessarily mean one has to change an organization or even a profession. As Interviewee 7 explained, the main reason she has stayed in her first workplace is the opportunity they have provided her to develop her career in different directions within the organization. In her words, it also allowed her to try new things and learn what she is more interested in doing. Having started from an entry-level position, she moved to work in a more technical field, to having people management tasks, doing a wide range of tasks, each helping her learn new things. "*So, there has always been something different to learn, that I have not done before, that I just need to, to explore and experiment and then, of course, not succeeding every single time and not from the beginning. But that's part of the growth process, I guess.*"

Reaching a certain point in their careers also brought awareness of what they wanted from work and what type of employers they did or did not want to have. As Interviewee 9 explained, she

chose not to apply with Nokia (or similar big companies), as based on her prior experience in the corporate sector, she knew she would not have the freedom to explore beyond the standard role description. While in a corporate setting her work would require repetition of a limited number of tasks, in her current role in a smaller company she can explore different areas relevant even though those may not be completely related to her main duties. "*It's enriched my job and it doesn't make my job, like any other talent acquisition person, because I have this possibility to open up the field and have a very broad vision.. [...] obviously I am using it in my job, but still, it helps in pitching for a candidate, pitching for a client, and it nourishes my intellectual needs, and that's what my boss understood as well.*"

Desire to create a positive impact and keep on learning, pushing her comfort zone was another important driver. Interviewee 12 quit her corporate career in a Finnish company and starts her own business. "*So I really wanted to have that connection, that what is that I am doing? And how is it helping somebody else. And when I am stuck in a roll up for a long time, it just kind of feels that I am in a comfort zone. And I don't do very well in a comfort zone, I just get very, very lazy, and I just can't see what impact I'm/will be creating, on anything and even myself. And it's not a very good place for me to be. And now that I have changed to become an entrepreneur, it's like always that I am a little bit nervous about something or something that I'm going to do or what's going to come next. And that keeps me you know, very active to, to keep doing something to make myself a better person, but also create some kind of impact on the outside world as well.*" This is just one example of the importance of purposeful and meaningful work, as it can be the main driver to quit job security and try new types of employment. In addition, while uncertainty and unpredictability associated with entrepreneurship are often seen as challenges, in this case, they create an environment and opportunities for career growth and continuous learning.

Despite being one of the most important drivers of career development, career growth can be risky and not always an option for internationals in Finland. Because of how difficult it is to get a job as an international when Interviewee 12 decided to quit her secure job and take risk of developing her own business, the reactions of those around her were not all encouraging: "*people told me I am crazy, you're never going to get any other job*". Because of how difficult it is for internationals to get a job in Finland, once someone is working, the incentive to remain in the workplace is very strong and thus can be at times discouraging to give up security and take on risky endeavours.

This is yet another example of how the immigrant background shapes the career experiences of internationals and can act as a deterrent for them to search for better opportunities for example.

4.2   A foot in the door – getting a job as a female and foreigner in Finland

This section provides an overview of the interviewees' experiences in their job search process in Finland. The section details the experiences and perceptions of interviewees as they were trying to 'get a foot in the door' and secure a job in Finland. Finding a job in their respective fields was the first step towards building a career in Finland. For many, this experience has also strongly influenced how they approach their career development, too, and what career paths they have available. Some of the most important challenges in this process were related to the lack of social capital, the need to build their reputations from scratch and having to lower their expectations in terms of potential employers and types of jobs they considered taking. In addition, developing relationships of trust, as well as proving their commitment to staying in Finland and willingness to integrate into the Finnish society were common elements in many stories.

4.2.1   The lack of social capital and networks

The lack of social capital and networks was perceived as one of the biggest obstacles to find a job. However, this was not clear to all interviewees at the start of their job search process. Interviewee 5 recalled her experience of frustration at the lack of feedback from recruiters, as she sent numerous job applications. "*I sent like multiple, numerous emails and kind of like, never got any feedback, or I never got any reply. So basically, I couldn't understand what I was doing wrong. [...] So that would be great, to have some feedback, is something wrong with my with my CV or am I lacking certain skills? Or like, what am I doing wrong, just because when you get feedback, you can improve your performance, right? And you can get things better. So there was like lack of feedback that nobody ever contacted me. So that was kind of like I felt lost. And I didn't really know what to do.*" As she started to be more engaged in the local communities, she started building her network and slowly observing how knowing people in the field enables access to information, opportunities and improves the job search chances. Similar experiences were reflected in other stories, with several interviewees noting they have learned about the importance of networks only later in their job search.

Furthermore, moving to Finland for most interviewees meant that social capital and networks they have been carefully building in their home countries are of no use in Finland. An important tool was removed from their toolbox, no one knew who they are, how capable or competent they are. As a result, they had to start from scratch to build their reputations, develop relationships of trust and prove their worth and competence. The findings of this research suggest this is a highly sensitive aspect of career building experiences for internationals, as it requires them to renegotiate one's sense of professional identity, to accept the necessity of having to go back to zero and start from scratch, as well as reconcile this need with their ambitions and vision they had for their career, where they wanted to be and whom they hoped to become at that time in their lives.

Established professionals who enjoyed their good reputation back home found this process particularly challenging. As Interviewee 5 recalled her experience, she looked for a job only once in her life, back in her hope country. After that, her professionalism and good performance spread through the word of mouth, and she had more than enough work coming through the connections alone. As she explains: "*So when I moved to Finland, I had to face the stressful situation that I'm nobody here, nobody knows me. Nobody knows about me. So to me, that was really stressful. And I was even asking myself: Why do I have to prove to people that like, I'm worth something? [...] Having all the qualifications is one thing, but being able to find the right people and get connected is another thing.. And I didn't have anything like that at that moment.*" As her story shows, for accomplished professionals moving from a position of trust and recognition to their prior experience being devalued, and having to prove their worth raises a lot of identity-related questions, with the person starting to question the system and how things are done in the new place.

Going through this process led also to raising doubts about self-value and one's competencies, bringing up feelings of anger, frustration, and insecurity, affecting the well-being of the interviewee and imposing strains on their relationships with others. Interviewee 5 described the stages of her tormenting experience of facing rejections to her job applications and the struggle to establish a reputation in the new country. "*I do remember that at the beginning, I thought that, like, I didn't understand that, like, you know, something was not going right. So after that, when I realized that, like, it's not good enough, or nobody actually sees any value in that I had anger. So I was angry with the whole system is just like all this. The stages of stress that usually go through right, so first you have rejection, that is a: No, that can't be that bad. And then you have anger,*

like no way seriously, you're angry with a system after that, you get this frustration. And only after that you have this level of acceptance, and you're saying, okay, that's what we have right now." Interviewee 8 described her experience of a similar situation of unsuccessful attempts to find employment in Finland. "*I think I was like, depressed for half a year or so, it felt terrible. I felt so like, kind of useless, you know, to the society. And I was blaming my parents for making me, or encouraging me to apply to [study field] studies. [...] And then I was blaming my husband, for you know, making me move to Finland. He moved because he had a job in Finland. There were nice opportunities for him here. So I was angry with him, you know, like, trying to find any, any reason why, you know, I, I'm not successful in finding a job. And I was angry. And yeah, it was very, very negative experience. I think I would describe this period as worst in my life. I felt quite alone.*" As those examples suggest, self-doubt, anger, frustration were common shared experiences of the two interviewees in their process to make sense of the new culture and context.

The influence of networks in Finland was perceived significantly stronger compared to other countries. Several interviewees noted that networks are important in any country, not just Finland, but that in Finland their significance is amplified. As one example, Interviewee 10 explained that from her experience, "*basically you need that network to get somewhere*", to be considered seriously for the application and get an interview invitation. In her understanding, networks were crucial to getting a fair chance to succeed in the interview, "*that somebody at least invites you to the interview and, kind of like, listens who you are, not only evaluate based on the papers.*" Reflecting about her experience in the current workplace, she recalled numerous discussions in the coffee breaks "*There is so often this discussion that: Oh, that guy I know him I was in the school with him; Oh, yes, that's Gal's mom, she was my teacher; Oh, yes, yes. She was working, with me on my previous work. [...] People here know each other from schools, from friends, from previous works, and so on.*" She explained that in her company, most likely a job will not be published online before each employee was asked if they know someone suitable for the position. This suggests that an extensive network of contacts who learn about the hidden opportunities in their companies and can recommend a person for the job can open many career opportunities.

Small but active and influential communities of practice, and their informal gatherings and networking meet-ups characteristic for Finland contribute to the amplifying effect of networking on job search prospects. Interviewee 4's story illustrates the type of opportunities one may get if part of those circles of professionals. "*There's all these meetups, there's all this networking*

happening that all the professionals from that job, they meet in Finland, there is a lot that culture. For example, I gave the example before on agile. So I started joining those meetings, and all of a sudden, I knew all the Agile coaches in Finland, right through those networks, right? So and there's they have their own chat rooms. So when they have a position in their work, they will tell us first, because there's already this a personal connection with a person, it's much easier at the end of the day, to hire someone that you know, or someone in your network knows, because it decreases the risk that the work, employment doesn't work, right, because you have someone to vouch for you. Right?" Those with access to such communities get also access to connections, potential reference points, and learn among the firsts about the available jobs in the field. On the other side, those on the outside get only a small piece of information available to well-networked professionals. This widens the gap in the opportunities to learn about the job, as well as be fairly considered, making the networks essential for a successful job search.

While being internally recommended for the job can be a significant advantage in the recruitment process, earning the trust of Finnish contacts to reach the point where they are comfortable offering a job to an international or making a referral is a significant challenge for internationals. In her comment, Interviewee 9 pointed out different levels of trust internationals develop with Finns. "*So that's the big challenge, to get the trust of people. I think people some can trust you, but maybe not, doesn't give you enough trust to make you work with them or for them. They can trust you in, in your point of view about your ideas. But getting to the level of make you work as an employee or as a business partner.. It takes some take some time. And now I understood that it takes some time. It won't do I won't make it like in a year or two will probably take two or three years or more.*" In her perceptions, establishing a close, trusted relationship with Finns is, in her experience, a multi-year, highly demanding effort an international has to undertake.

However, sometimes there are obstacles for establishing relationships with the local population, including potential employers, business partners and customers that are outside the control of an international, closely dependent on the features of the local culture, habits and perceptions of different groups of internationals. As Interviewee 9 continued to elaborate on difficulties in developing relationships of trust, she noted that sometimes just being Finn will suffice. "*And I also understand that maybe I need to have a Finn in my team, like a real Finn probably, to make things happen. And but yes, yeah, I'm a bit philosophical here, because it's not, it shouldn't be like that. I think if you're competent if you know the market, if you somehow speak the language, you*

shouldn't be a problem. [...] And that's, I haven't overcome the challenge. And I'm, I'm not ready to accept that. So if a Finn wants to have he wants to speak to a Finn, and deal with a Finn that what can I do? Nothing." This comment provides a couple of valuable insights. The reference to 'real Finn' shows the perception that despite the international invests significant effort in learning the market and the language, they do not reach the level of 'real Finns'. According to her, this is a problem as it creates a situation where the standard required of her is impossible to meet – to be Finnish – while at the same time the different treatment compared to her Finnish counterparts leaves her completely powerless. "*So if a Finn wants to have he wants to speak to a Finn, and deal with a Finn that what can I do? Nothing.*" In addition, her comment noting she is not ready to accept this situation suggests a feeling of injustice, as perceiving the differentiation between internationals and 'real Finns' despite the efforts the former group invested to integrate as unfair and wrong.

Proving your worth and credibility was especially important to get a meaningful job in Finland. As Interviewee 10 explained, she had a job but was dissatisfied as it was monotone work which did not allow her to fully use her skills. As she was looking for a meaningful job, in her words a "*possibility where I would see myself like based on my education and experience and kind of like, who I wanted to be and how I wanted to work*". To get access to such opportunities, she went on to explain she needed something with the 'Finnish stamp', to prove her credibility in the country, and that's why she enrolled at the Finnish university, as she perceived her current qualifications were not sufficient. "*So that's it's very good that I have a master's degree and that I have professional qualifications but I need something with the Finnish stamp, that kind of, somebody would look at me and think, okay, yes, we know this stamp, so we know who she could be because she has come from there..*" As this example illustrates, getting a Finnish degree was one path towards getting recognition in the community and having in your CV something that is familiar to recruiters and that they can relate to. This puts at a greater disadvantage those coming with degrees from non-Finnish educational institutions. In addition, one possible implication is making internationals more prone to career breaks to pursue their studies, as a way to increase their chances of getting the job they want.

Networking does not come naturally to all, however, and sometimes cultural differences may be an obstacle to adjusting to the rules in the host country. As interviewee 3 explained, getting a job in Finland through a friend made her very uncomfortable, noting that different standards apply in

her home country: "*..if you get a job through a friend in [home country], that's, that's a no, no, that's embarrassing, and people will treat you differently. So I was uncomfortable with that.*" Thus, not only not knowing the local rules and norms or having local connections is a challenge, but at times those rules and norms may be opposite to the value system an international was socialized into in their home country and a person would need to reconcile those conflicting values and navigate the way around it. The close connections with friends and family in their home countries may be an additional challenge to reconcile those values, as one would have to explain and justify a completely different system and approach, potentially facing peer pressure to resist and continue searching for a job in a 'proper' way as accepted in their local culture.

4.2.2   Adjusting expectations and the sense of professional identity

Lowering their expectations, considering jobs and organization they would not (have they stayed in their home countries), and having to start from an entry-level position despite having years of professional experience outside Finland were shared experiences of numerous interviewees. One important implication is that this factor, too, can be seen as a contributor to having internationals more prone to non-linear career paths, with more deviations. In addition, each of those experiences required interviewees to reconcile their sense of professional identity with the given situation and adapt. Findings of this research suggest this is another sensitive point in careers of the international women. It requires them to renegotiate, at least temporarily, the expectations of themselves: where they hoped to be at that point in life, who they wanted to become and reconcile those ambitions with the situational constrains outside their control. However, while the experiences of interviewees are very different, their sense-making has many similarities, although manifested in different strategies to renegotiate their professional identities.

Different factors are contributing to creating the need for internationals to revise and lower their expectations. The example of Interviewee 11 is useful as it encompasses a wide range of such factors, painting a picture of complex circumstances an international has to navigate around. In her case, her future career expectations were influenced by the broader context (ongoing financial crisis), the nature of her profession (high level of competitiveness), her personal circumstances (visa constraints for non-EU nationals) as well as the local context (structural barriers for internationals). In addition, an important aspect of her professional identity to renegotiate was linked to the career expectations set by her educational institution. Her job search experience is

based in the context of another Scandinavian country, but is highly valuable for this study, too, as it summarizes many aspects voiced by other interviewees describing their experience in Finland.

Interviewee 11 described her experience of being a fresh graduate from a business school, taught to have ambitious aims and high expectations, encouraged to seek opportunities with the biggest companies. However, the reality hit her hard, when in the same period the 2008-2009 financial crisis hit. In addition, she started to learn her profession is a rather competitive field, creating additional challenges for her, in addition to those she identified affected her as a foreigner. "*And you have those structural differences, inequalities, you know, barriers, so you just need to work twice as hard because you don't come from this country. And, and I'm not I'm not a scientist, I'm not a software developer, I was you know, doing very similar topic, anyone else can do it, even with engineering background. Communication, marketing is just ruthless to be in.*" The observed influence of profession of career building experience was echoed by other interviewees, including Interviewee 9 pointing out there are more or less wanted skills, and someone can be highly educated in the field, which is not popular in the host country, which will make it more difficult compared to someone who may not be so highly skilled, but is working in the field where there is a lot of demand, such as nursing. Those are important instances highlighting the choice of the profession have the potential to significantly influence the career building experiences of internationals and determine their growth and advancement opportunities, too.

Coming from a non-EU country, visa constraints were another issue affecting Interviewee 11's approach to job seeking. To adapt to the circumstances, she had to re-think her choice of potential employers, shifting focus from the big, multinational companies she was taught to be her natural next destination during her studies to SMEs, start-ups and family-owned companies. "*So what it taught me is that what education or business schools don't teach is that you can get a dignified job workplace, even in a small company. They make you only look at high end and aim at big companies, rather than startups, middle-sized, or at least family-owned [...]. And it made me also humble to say: Listen, any job is a good job in the sense that you need to find meaning in that, at the moment, because that's just the best you can do.*" Her first job was different from what she studied and expected following her graduation, but her approach was to take the best of any opportunity she encounters and find a way to use it as a starting point to create something better for herself. This has also influenced her to frame her current situation as a moment of gaining new skills she will benefit from later and changed how she perceived her situation. In addition, another

part of her strategy was to get involved in additional activities at her workplace not related to her work as those were closer to her interests. "*So yeah, I think it was nice to kind of be on the go and find opportunities where others wouldn't.*" This approach also differentiated her from others in terms of behaviour and approach to career building, perceptions of the current situation and enhanced her ability to proactively look for opportunities in creative ways, outside the dominant career progress path in her field.

Another important aspect was appreciating skills gained on the job, despite not closely related to her studies. "*It was just really needed to say, Okay, this fits my visa requirements. It fits my bills. It felt like: Oh, I'm doing the shipping job, like, come on. But then it was like: Hey, this is so cool. I get to travel all the time, you know, and I am good at what I do, I can actually sell, like, this is awesome.*" For her, to make sense of her situation and reconcile the need to adapt to unfavourable circumstances with her ambitions, desires and career goals was to focus on the best she can get out of any opportunity, appreciate new skills she learned and focus on the benefits from her job, although not ideal. In addition, this insight highlights an example of an external condition affecting career building experiences of internationals, and in the context of Finland, non-EU (third country) nationals. Having to meet immigration requirements to be eligible for a visa means at times being strategic and practical about the types of jobs one considers and takes. In some instances, waiting for the 'right' opportunity may not be feasible and career ambitions have to come second to meeting the immigration conditions. Thus, career building experiences, decision-making and career choices of third-country nationals may be affected by this additional hurdle, differentiating their experiences from the rest of internationals. It may, as it was in the case of Interviewee 11, create strains on one's sense of professional identity, leading to a feeling of failure and missed opportunities and having to revise and lower their expectations, hopes and dreams at least temporarily, to adjust to the given circumstances.

Similarly to building networks, adjusting expectations was particularly difficult for already experienced interviewees, with years of professional work experience outside Finland. When they started looking for a job in Finland, many realized their past work experience is not valued. Interviewee 2 recalled she had to start from the internship level after graduating her master's in Finland despite she already had three years of work experience in two industries and a few different countries. However, she explained that despite she found this to be unfair, she understood this is how things work here, and that she "*had to work within the system*". In her mind, it was

something to be done and she rather focused on the benefits her prior work experience will bring her once she starts working. Thus, similarly to Interviewee 11, the sense-making of Interviewee 2 was also to accept the circumstances and remain focused on the positive aspects. Despite her prior professional experience was not valued in the recruitment phase, it will bring her advantage as soon as she passes this threshold and gets into a workplace.

Interviewee 9's experience resonates with the past examples, as she was hoping her EU degree, ten years of prior work experience, fluent English and French, and basic Finnish language skills, as well as work experience in another Scandinavian country would help her get a job in Finland. "*I had to lower my expectations, which enabled me to go back and to start all over again. So that was another delusion, my ten years of experience was not as valued as a person having a Finnish degree. This is my take.*" Her approach to making sense of her situation was to draw from the experiences of her parents, who themselves migrated to her home country and experienced similar struggles to find employment. "*I said: Okay, that is the same, same story. [...] It's easy to lower your expectations, given that you're in another country, probably more advanced than in [home country]. And so, when I saw my parents I said: Okay, then that's the path I have to go. So yes, I think I accepted things quite easily. And, and that my background, it helped me a lot to accept the situation.*" Her example illustrates an important dynamic, as it shows the fact she is building a career in a foreign country imposes numerous challenges, but at the same time makes it easier to justify adjusting the expectations. While in her home country she would be on a more equal footing with her peers, in Finland she has experienced numerous barriers to finding a job in her field that it does not feel like a personal failure to lower the starting point, as she is already behind her Finnish counterparts and the rules of the game differ for her. This could also be liberating for some, as it allows them to experiment, explore their interests and pursue their passions, considering there is little to lose.

4.2.3   Demonstrating commitment to Finland

An expectation from internationals to demonstrate their commitment to staying in Finland and integrating into the Finnish society was another shared experience of several interviewees. Speaking the Finnish language was seen as useful in job search, considering that is the language of the country. However, for internationals, Finnish language skills had a second purpose, too – to demonstrate one's commitment to staying in Finland. Interviewee 9 explained her basic Finnish

language skills were, in her opinion, an important factor for her to get a gig she applied for. "*What helped me I guess, [...] is that I had my first interview in Finnish. Given that it was very very, very basic, I managed to prepare a pitch in Finnish and, of course, the follow up question were in English. But it showed really my motivation to be able to work in Finnish and to get to embrace this culture. So I guess that helps.*" This example illustrates how even an attempt to learn the language can be a point of difference between candidates and interpreted by the local society as a sign of their openness to integration and commitment to staying in Finland.

In addition to learning the language, Interviewee 1 detailed the dilemma between her own instincts and the advice she got from people who have secured a job already when she started looking for her first job in Finland. "*[...] people mentioning like, carry a Marimekko bag. It gives the impression that, you know, or a scarf, something that very clearly speaks of Finnish brand. Because you are an international, it shows that you are ready to acclimatize to Finnish environment. As a student, you cannot afford something from Marimekko, you can't. But that I know, people who have saved up money from their part-time job just to do that. I know girls, especially, who've done that just so that they get taken a little more seriously during an interview.*" This is another illustration of perception among internationals that their country of origin affects their chances of getting a job and strategies they employ to navigate through this challenge.

Another aspect of showing your level of integration into the Finnish society was a need to manage your appearance to be as close to standards of Finnish working culture when going for an interview. However, it is not always easy for an international to understand those unspoken norms and rules, as well as to reconcile their principles and what they believe is important with what they are being told to pay attention to. As Interviewee 1 explained, "*[...] me being [from her home country], something as simple as I have very, extremely curly hair. But just having huge curly hair might not be seen as professional. Putting it back would also not be professional, I should probably straighten it up. Something I've never done in my life. [...] What I wear, it should sort of be professional enough, irrespective of what's comfortable, or not, just, just stuff like that, right? Like, wear a sweater, which is thin, but not too thin, wear heels, which are high, but not too high.*"

However, she then explains what she observed at the university, her main source of information about Finnish culture at that point, was that teachers did not pay attention to such things, "*they were dressed to teach, not impress. And that sort of showed me, from a work culture point of view,*

that might not be the most important thing. It just did not feel right in my gut that I might not get, I might be rejected in my job interview because my heels were not high enough that I was like if that is the case, then I probably don't even want that job." She decided to "*stand [her] ground*", and go to the interviews feeling comfortable, insisting it was important for her that her knowledge and skills are appreciated over her looks. But, as she explains, she was lucky to get a job relatively quickly, but if this would not be the case, she would most probably decide to apply some of the recommendations she got from her peers. As this example shows, international may struggle to 'crack' the local codes, values and norms, especially if what they are sensing from their environment is different to the advice they have been getting. While this example suggests that in certain cases the perception of what is valued in the recruitment process and the reality of that process may differ, there is also an understanding that different criteria apply for local and international candidates.

Another important insight was that there is a perception this pressure to 'strike the right tone with the appearance' is bigger for women than for men. As Interviewee 1 continued to explain, while her female colleagues saved up money and looked out for a sale, for her male colleagues the focus was on preparing as good as possible from the knowledge point of view. "*This is not a complaint I've heard from guys. Of course, now I'm generalizing. And I'm playing the woman stereotype as well. But I've never heard guys ever complain about: Oh, my suit was not, or is a suit really good enough to go, or should I buy.. and I've never heard a guy discuss that. It's always been about: Oh, should I also maybe look at this video so I have some idea about what this technology is? Or, maybe should I study up that paper just so that I have some more background about that..*" This example highlights the perception of how different standards applied for male and female internationals affect their career chances. It also includes an assumption that for men their competence is valued, while for women various factors, including their appearance are considered, too. The reference 'playing the gender stereotype as well' suggests also that invoking gender to explain different experiences can be seen by women as making an unjustified excuse instead of a valid observation based on their experiences.

4.3   Career building opportunities in the context of Finnish working culture

This section discusses the career building experiences of interviewees from the early starts of their careers in Finland to the present moment. The findings illustrate subjective understandings and

perceptions of the Finnish working culture as discussed by interviewees in this research as well as how the Finnish working culture has facilitated or hindered their career building experiences. The findings should not be generalized, as those relate to the experiences of only twelve women who took part in this research and are not reflective of all experiences of other international women across different professions. However, the findings do provide an important insight into how international women perceive the Finnish working culture, how they adjust to it and what aspects of this working culture they find particularly important from their point of view as accomplished, international female professionals.

As discussed earlier, although coming from different backgrounds, cultures, professions, geographical regions, with generational differences as well as at different points in their careers, interviewees strongly emphasized the subjective perception of career success, defining it as something dependent on each individual's needs, interests and priorities, as well as evolving over time. In addition, they have provided an extensive record of stories illustrating the importance of career growth and professional development, doing purposeful and meaningful work, creating positive impact, in adherence to their personal values and professional identity and integrity.

This section aims to explore what features of the Finnish working culture the interviewees perceived as important for their career building experiences and how the features of that working culture relate to their above-mentioned priorities and preferences. Reflecting upon their experiences and perceived career opportunities back home and in Finland, interviewees have identified several features of the Finnish working culture they believe to have positively impacted their career building experiences and prospects, as well as some challenges they had to navigate through. The perceived low hierarchy, high level of trust and gender equality, being heard, as well as openness to career changes and lack of judgement among employers in Finland, have been seen as positive factors enabling career growth and success.

Those features of the Finnish working culture were particularly useful as they allowed them to compensate for the negative effect of migration on a career. As established in prior research and illustrated in the findings of this study as well, moving to another country often means career sacrifices for the migrating professional. They often need to take a break in their careers, spend time learning and adjusting to a new context, going back to study, building their career capital from the beginning, and also starting from lower positions than they held back home, to work their

way up in the new country. While all those were shared experiences of interviewees, the unique features of the Finnish working culture helped them navigate their career paths better and progress faster, getting more career growth and professional development opportunities. This meant they did not perceive moving to Finland as a 'punishment' for their careers, but as an opportunity, despite challenges experiences along the way. It also confirms the profound importance of the local context into which internationals are being integrated for their career building experiences.

4.3.1 Low vertical hierarchy

Low vertical hierarchy has been identified as another important feature of the subjective perceptions of the Finnish working culture by the interviewees. As the main characteristics of the low hierarchy were mentioned access to the top management, transparency and participation in the decision-making process, being consulted and listened to by the top management. Considering the low hierarchy was for most interviewees a drastic change compared to the experiences in their home country, it created a sense of belonging, being valued, trusted and respected, which further contributed to their integration into the workplace.

Interviewee 6 explained the contrast between the workplace in the home country and in Finland. She discussed strong hierarchy, layers of management and no access to the leadership of the company, noting that back home CEO is seen as this "*mighty person*" by the rest of the company as if they are higher beings than the rest. The relationships with staff reflected this perception. She told a story of her walking into the elevator and greeting the CEO who happened to also be there, but she got no reply back. "*I said good morning to our CEO to be like, nice, and he just ignored me. Because, you know, I was just some entry-level, nobody.*" Coming from this background, she quickly took notice of a different approach in the Finnish workplace. She started her first job in Finland on a Monday, which happened to start with a CEO talk in the morning. As everyone gathered around, she was sitting on the couch waiting for the CEO talk to start. "*And then all of a sudden, someone came and sat next to me. And then this person started talking. And then I realized it was the CEO, and I was like: Oh, my God! Am I allowed to sit on his couch? Like: Oh, I'm so sorry! And he was so nice [...]. And so it was, it was just this new thing for me to be able to have a conversation with the CEO and him think of me as a person, and, you know, [...] actually connect with me. So that was also something that I really appreciated.*"

In this case, prior negative experience makes the different working environment even more appreciated, being such a strong contrast to what the interviewee experienced before. Furthermore, for professionals building careers in foreign countries, having open access and the opportunity to build a relationship with a person on the top of the organization can help build essential social contacts. This is especially since a CEO of a company and foreigners tend to have very different social circles in which they move. Internationals lack networks and contacts, while CEOs are usually well familiar with the local context, deeply embedded in the local (or wider) ecosystem with rich networks of contacts and influence spheres. Thus, building relationships with a CEO, even while on a temporary assignment in an organization can create numerous opportunities for an international which otherwise would not be there.

Participation in decision making, transparency and sharing information with employees also surfaced in several stories. Interviewee 10 detailed her experience of working for a big Finnish company without middle management, comparing the company working culture as a "*living organism*". "*If it detects that, kind of like, that some part is sick, or in pain or isn't working, then the whole organism kind of like discusses it, and decides what to do. So with the super high transparency on the good, and also one of the bad things it brings out the solutions, and it's, I was not able to even believe it, that that it can like really bring to the solution*". She recalled the experience in her home country was rather different, no input was asked from employees and the focus was more on superiors delegating the tasks and checking if those were performed. Many interviewees noted that office space in Finland tends to be arranged to reflect this low hierarchy, as in many cases the offices of top management are on the same floor, leadership works with their door open for example and there is a culture of calling everyone by their first name, not using the titles.

4.3.2   The importance of being listened to

Having the opportunity to contribute to the decision making, to bring ideas and be heard was one of the most distinctive features of the career building experiences interviewees detailed in their stories. Having their ideas heard and considered, and in many cases accepted by the leadership in Finland was contrasted to a different culture in their home countries. This finding is even more interesting considering that the women came from different countries, including Europe, Asia and Latin America for example. Being heard in their workplace made interviewees feel valued and

opened new opportunities for their career growth. Lack of openness of the leadership or their superiors to hear out their ideas or address their needs and concerns led interviewees to leave their workplace. Prior to leaving, in many cases, interviewees recalled feels of demotivation, disengagement at work and struggle to address the growing conflict between their professional and personal values and the experiences and work culture in their workplaces.

A couple of interviewees, coming from different countries and industries, described similar experiences of noticing a shortcoming in their service delivery and being shut down after approaching their superiors or the leadership with the potential solutions for the problems they have experienced in their daily work. The main issue for all three of them was that they felt they could not serve their clients as they think they should, as they think clients deserve and as they would like to be served. Interviewee 7 battled with a feeling of compromised professional integrity and the ideal of a professional adhering to high standards in her work. "*I don't think that it's fair or that it's a good representation of the company or even yourself, I maybe took it personally. I would go home with a bad feeling in my head, you know, you need to say like, sorry, and you need to hear the client complain or you can feel their disappointment. It's reflected on yourself. That's how I felt.*"

For Interviewee 4, the lack of potential to bring her own resources and skills and use them to help her current employer had detrimental effects on her motivation and work performance, as she felt her potential was unacknowledged and unused. "*So in that time, I started being really unhappy, because I was just very frustrated at work, [...] and I think after six months, I made that the hard decision to actually not care anymore about the company, right? It feels terrible, it's like, you know, firstly, your confidence goes, you know, your confidence was the kind of the first one to leave throughout the door. And then it's like the kind of the energy as well you bring to the work that it's quite, quite miserable. And it affects you really a lot. And it affects as well that, you know, you're not willing anymore to go that little mile. Right? To make the job perfect. You're just like, this is acceptable enough. And for me, was kind of, like, I didn't feel that I wanted to, to give more to the company that deserved. But at the same time, by doing that, I was kind of compromising my, kind of, professional integrity.*" The two examples illustrate well the struggles one's sense of professional identity endures in situations where they feel their integrity is being compromised, where they are unable to bring and utilize their full potential and meet the standards they have often set for themselves. The failure to meet those standards was taken as a reflection of personal

professionalism and has impacted significantly how they see themselves as professionals. An attempt to compromise has proven untenable long-term.

On the other side, leadership open for ideas and suggestions for Interviewee 2 was one of the important factors she felt positively about her current workplace in Finland. She recalled that she approached the company leadership after less than half a year of working there with ideas on how to reach new markets, including the region she comes from and has prior experience working in. This example suggests that allowing international talents to bring their unique knowledge and experiences from different parts of the world and use that for the benefit of the current employer is important for those individuals.

For some, however, the mere prospect of a potential to be heard and form coalitions in her workplace was one of the factors behind her decision to pursue a career in Finland. As Interviewee 1 explained, in one of her first interactions with the Finnish companies during a job fair, she observed they were very innovative, using the most recent technologies she could recognize also from her studies. This openness to innovation and perceived receptiveness to new ideas in her view meant that company is not afraid of trying new things, and that also meant more freedom, more flexibility and more opportunities for her as a prospective employee. She explained that while she did not expect to get to work directly on the newest technologies as a trainee, knowing that there is someone in the company working on that means her ideas will not sound outrageous. *"So you know, it becomes more easy to sell good ideas or fresh technologies and that it's not like, Oh, no, there's nobody who's never touched us before. So do not talk about it that that's that sort of sense is not present."*

Having their values and a sense of professional identity in harmony and reinforced in their workplace is an important factor shaping career building experiences of international women in Finland. The findings of this research suggest that being open to new ideas regardless of persons' seniority, finding ways to utilize the unique resources international employees bring (such as knowledge of other markets and networks in different parts of the world) can be an effective tool for talent attraction and retention and increases motivation of employees, as well as their sense of being valued. Being able to contribute with their unique resources tends to reinforce a sense of purpose and meaning, while the lack of the same leads to increased frustration and demotivation. In addition, it offers an important career growth avenue for internationals, which was especially

important to the experienced professionals who had to start from the beginning and take on much lower positions at first due to their experiences outside Finland being undervalued. The opportunities to propose ideas that are aligned with their skills and interests and allow them to utilize their unique resources helps internationals to further their career growth faster, and compensate for having to go back in their career after moving to Finland.

4.3.3   High level of trust

Building trust to land a job was an important obstacle identified by many, with Interviewee 9 noting that while people may trust you in other areas, they may not trust you enough to give you a job. However, once in a workplace, many experienced a changing situation and a higher level of trust in employees. Interviewee 4 pointed that "*you're not building trust, but trust is there from the beginning.*" Comparing this insight with the experiences from the job search phase of their careers, this research suggests the 'trust barrier' for internationals. Creating and leveraging the relationships of trust in the job search phase appeared to be a significant challenge for many interviewees. However, once they overcome that barrier and got the job, they experience a high level of trust in the workplace. In many cases, interviewees described experiences in their home country of being told what to do and checked on by their superiors, with little to no autonomy. This was contrasted with the experiences in Finland, where they had more freedom and autonomy, resulting in a feeling of being valued and respected. As Interviewee 10 explained: "*It's kind of like you are like, you are valued as the employee and, I don't know how it would be possible to have that feeling that that you are valued, if somebody is all the time coming and checking and asking [...] Have you done this? Do you do this? Have you noticed this is that something... if you kind of like don't have that that trust from the employer, then I think that you don't feel comfortable at the place where you work.*"

This also had important implications for their career development, as they could get faster more responsibilities. As Interviewee 1 explained, her career growth and professional development were much faster in Finland compared to her experience back home "*Once I've come to Finland, it [growth rate] became much faster. You do not need to do the time, if you have what it takes, nobody is going to hesitate to give you the responsibility for it. Whereas back home, I never thought the idea that I can ask for responsibility was an option. It was just like, if you're lucky, you were given. End of story. There was no bargaining happening over that.*" Lack of requirement

to 'do time' and ability to progress based on their competencies is especially important for internationals with prior experience who had to re-start their careers from the entry-level positions. This allows them to faster catch up with their peers and contributes to, at least partially, mitigating the negative effects of migration on their careers. Also, as discussed earlier, a perspective of career growth was perceived as more relevant than the starting position. The perception of a fast growth rate allows internationals to easier negotiate their sense of professional identity and accept the sacrifices (i.e., going back in their careers) as they can focus on opportunities ahead – a popular sense-making strategy applied in the job search phase by many.

An important difference in Finland is that also less emphasis was paid to the actual education one has, allowing interviewees to experiment, take on different roles and boost their career development much more than they experienced was possible in their home countries. Interviewee 9 noted that currently, she is in the business development field, something she felt she would not be able to pursue back home, as she studied humanities, and there, what you studied had a strong impact on the type of opportunities that were available for you. Having to "tick the relevant boxes" in terms of education and prior experience was an important career growth limited, whereas the situation is different in Finland. "*I think it's more liberal more open and you have to prove yourself on the field.*"

Having strong competence and skillset, "knowing your stuff" was seen to carry more weight and contribute to a higher extent to career growth in Finland, compared to what some interviewees experienced back home. A few interviewees pointed out being good at your work is more important than seniority or physical appearance. This was particularly important considering that many interviewees came very young to Finland, and thus for them the opportunity to be taken seriously and treated with respect early on in their careers was of immense importance. Engaging in different 'people management' activities and 'office politics' essential in some other countries, was not seen to be relevant in Finland. Interviewee 1 explained that back home, even if you have the best skillset, you will find it had to succeed without developing soft, people management skills and to "*work around your bosses and co-workers*". This includes actions such as "*talking to your boss for even nonprofessional things, like you know, going out for that one cigarette with your boss, where you get to interact about other things or stuff like that, right? Doing stuff which is playing some small politics, bad-mouthing somebody else If required, or just blowing up what you've done more than what actually is, or sidestepping your boss and talking to one level above,*

trying to get a small, make your presence known over there, stuff like that. [...] Here in Finland, I do not need to know who my boss's boss is. And I know that's not going to impact my chances of promotion." For those lacking familiarity with local norms, values, culture, language skills and connections, having the opportunity to be evaluated based on their competencies can help improve their career prospects significantly.

4.3.4 Culture of knowledge sharing and asking questions

Another feature of adjusting to working in Finland which was seen as highly relevant for their career growth opportunities was a culture of knowledge sharing, approach to mistakes and encouragement to ask questions. Interviewee 6 recalled her big surprise at the openness of her colleagues in her Finnish workplace towards sharing their knowledge. They even went as far as to demonstrate and show her what new technique they have learned and how they have applied it, and how she can use it. "*This like concept of sharing information and knowledge that.. I was so blown away, I just couldn't understand, not hoarding information, so that you could use it to like climb the ladder and stab someone in the back.*"

Another feature was the openness to experiment, try out new things, ask questions and learn the best from those experiences, without the fear of punishment for mistakes or failures. Being used to a workplace where mistakes were being punished and one could even have their job on a line, Interviewee 6 recalled this approach discouraged her from "*pushing the boundary in terms of uniqueness or the innovativeness.*" Her experience in Finland was that trying out different approaches in controlled settings, testing our different things and learning from those trial-and-mistake experiences was seen as positive and encouraged, with an attitude of "*if it works, if not at least we learned.*"

An additional aspect of a different approach to mistakes was an encouragement to asking questions. Whereas in her former workplace asking questions was seen as a weakness, a sign the person is incompetent and unable to do their job, in Finland, it was seen as a strength. Asking for help was interpreted as a sign a professional understands areas where she is strong at and those where she needs to improve. "*And so that mindset change was slightly difficult for me, but, it has helped me so much, because now there's no longer this fear that like, if I don't know something, I'm gonna get fired. You know, it's like, if I don't know something, I learn it and then I'm better. And that's like a really good thing, because then you're not afraid to take on new types of projects*

and stuff." This comment illustrates how different approach to mistakes can contribute to improving someone's confidence in their own skillset and, in turn, lead to more innovative approaches and faster career growth of the employees, opening opportunities they would not otherwise consider exploring. Interviewee 6 observations about the openness to trying new things, innovations and learning resonate with experiences of several other interviewees who shared similar impressions of the Finnish working culture and education system, too.

4.3.5 Openness to different career paths and lack of judgement

Closely related to enabling employees to explore different opportunities was seen the open-minded approach to learning in all phases of one's life and career, without being judged by society, your peers or employers. This, too, was a distinctive feature of working in Finland identified by the interviewees, and in high contrast to what they experience and knew about this culture back home. As many interviewees notes, in their home countries university was reserved for young people, 18-25 age bracket, and there was an understanding education is reserved for young people. In addition, taking a break in their career to do studies would put one behind her peers, something that was seen as negative and had a strong negative effect on prospects of getting a job, in addition to struggles that would follow to catch up with your peers. Comparing this to her experience in Finland, Interviewee 5 shared her observations from the period of her studies in Finland: "*Nobody gives you like a bad look: Oh my god, you're about to die soon, like, why are you studying here? You know what I mean? So that is also like a very positive thing*."

One implication of this approach is the ability to pursue opportunities in different areas, without social pressure, judgement, or stigma. According to Interviewee 10, "*I have more options to influence myself, and do those do those changes, not so that I grow in the career in this one line, but like, I can change the line completely and start trying new things*." This is also an important tool in the toolbox for those coming from the outside, as it allows them to go outside their profession, learn new things, explore and experiment and find a place for themselves in the Finnish labour market. In some cases, it can also provide a valuable opportunity to change a profession and perhaps choose something one has strong interests in and/or what would increase the chances of finding meaningful employment. Finally, this type of environment can help in career changes and allow internationals to break the unfulfilling employment relationships and pursue better

opportunities, without fear that a change of profession or a direction in their career would be considered as a disadvantage by prospective employers.

4.3.6   High level of gender equality

Coupled with low hierarchy, a high level of gender equality perceived by the interviewees was among the important factors directly influencing their career building experiences. The gender equality aspect was discussed focusing on several aspects. First, gender representation was an important factor. For Interviewee 1 in a highly male-dominated industry, having women in the top management was a good sign. "*Number of women in general, were not very high. So there are a few like, like my boss's boss is a lady. There are a few and those are the few people who have, you know, come back in the day, they've stuck it out and now are in senior positions. So that was encouraging to know that there is a possibility of actually going up the ladder as a woman. And there was also the space that you know, there are not a lot of women. So it was sort of to me a little motivating in that sense that you can do this.*" As highlighted in this comment, the presence of women in the top management was a sign she can get there one day, too. In addition, the fact few women were working with her was seen also as an advantage and a motivator in a sense of opening further promotion opportunities. This also indicates the awareness on the side of the interviewee that the number of women in her workplace is an important indicator that should be improved.

Another important aspect was the respect interviewees felt they enjoyed among their colleagues and clients. A dominant experience was one of mutual respect, regardless of their seniority or gender, seen as an important positive factor in their career building. Interviewee 2 reflected upon the reality of her work in Finland, being often the only woman in the room, a young professional among senior male clients, giving advice on how to improve their processes, for example, and being treated equally to everyone else, listened to and taken seriously. Interviewee 1 recalled her experience from back home when she could clearly notice her presentation did not enjoy the same attention as the presentation of her male peer. "*It's very easy for them to just dismiss me, or when I am talking about presenting something, they'll have their own conversations going on. Just being like: Oh, she's a new girl, doesn't matter. But at the same time, this guy who could join with me, but when he is present, they'd pay attention. And that's certainly not because he speaks better or is it's not one of those, it's just a very simple woman thing. And I know this because I would talk*

about this to other ladies, and they would share some of their experiences that I know I've been told that you're on one of those days just get a little differently, just dress in a way to make yourself look a little older, and they'll pay more attention to you, which is true." This example illustrates well a situation where gender is perceived to influence how a professional will be treated in the workplace. In addition, it shows how those who do not match the stereotype of a 'serious, accomplished professional' use clothing in this example as a strategy to navigate around this challenge. The interviewee compared this experience with working in her Finnish workplace where she is often the only female, international, young professional working with more senior male colleagues. Nevertheless, she has a feeling of being treated equally as everyone else, enjoying the same authority and respect.

Interviewee 8 recalled her experience of supervising a project and being in close contact with field workers, who are all male. While she noted it took her time to gain their respect, she observed that whenever they would explain to her something about complex machine processes or parts, for example, they would not simplify or leave out anything, but explain as they would to any male colleague. For her this was important and she interpreted it as a sign of respect. Thus, coming with a prior experience of being treated differently because they are female or having to work more and use different strategies, including clothing, to overcome gender-based discriminatory practices and prejudices, for many interviewees coming to a context which they perceived to be characterized with a high level of gender equality was understood as a positive influence on their career building experiences.

Lastly, an important aspect pertains to work-family balance. Interviewee 2 and Interviewee 7 reported being promoted, in the case of Interviewee 2 shortly before her maternity leave, and in the case of Interviewee 7 a few months before she was supposed to be back from her maternity leave. As Interviewee 2 shared in her story, her pregnancy was unexpected and at the time she was halfway through an important project which was also supposed to be a steppingstone in her career. She recalled thinking she would have to leave the project earlier due to maternity leave and would not manage to get the benefits of the had work she has already put into that project. The fact she was still promoted despite her employer was well aware she is soon going on maternity leave meant her employer recognized and appreciated her efforts in the past and awarded her for the hard work. In her case, her competencies were what matters, and her pregnancy did not have negative effects on her career. Interviewee 7 shared a similar experience noting that she

appreciated the acknowledgement of her past work by her employer and felt privileged to know she has a place to return to and even got promoted, as she is aware this is not a situation for everyone. Those two experiences illustrate how gender equal Finnish working culture creates an environment where it is possible to have work-family balance and that allows women to successfully pursue their careers alongside their family responsibilities.

4.4   Career building challenges of female internationals in Finland

In addition to numerous positive aspects of building a career in Finland, there are also several challenges and obstacles that surfaced in the stories of interviewees. Those challenges relate to the lack of essential resources they do not possess due to their international background (such as language skills), lack of inclusion and effective diversity management in their Finnish workplaces, as well as the contextual and cultural conditions that put female internationals from different countries in a different starting position compared to their local, as well as international counterparts coming from a context of higher gender equality. This section discusses the challenges detailed by interviewees, as well as strategies and resources they used to overcome those challenges.

4.4.1   Finnish language skills

The lack of Finnish language skills has emerged as one of the most relevant career development challenges, but also highly dependent on the profession of interviewees and the nature of their work. First, in some instances, interviewees noted they felt they would be able to do their job better if they spoke Finnish, despite working with English-speaking clients. As Interviewee 2 explained, while she was assigned to work with clients for whom English is a norm, still many documents relevant for her work are in Finnish and thus it takes her longer to get into the detailed, practical issues related to processes she is tasked to improve for example. Moreover, sometimes the management works in English, but the employees in the field who have crucial pieces of information for her work speak only Finnish, thus slowing down her work and adding layers of intermediaries facilitating access to information and data for her.

While often some knowledge of Finnish is helpful, there are professions in which only a very sophisticated, native level of language is needed. Interviewee 6 noted that she does not feel she can ever learn Finnish so well to work in that language, due to the nature of her work. "*I, okay, I*

still think I should learn Finnish. I'm not trying to make an excuse, why I shouldn't. But I'm just saying like, I still don't think that I would do the service that I need to do for those users. You need to like really understand what the user is feeling, even when they don't say it outright when they're just like, talking. So it's not just about the words that they're saying. It's also like how they're saying it. [...] you need to know the intricacies of the language, like, having lived it for a long time. So I still think that I wouldn't have.. I wouldn't get the nuances that I should. And I wouldn't want to like put myself in that situation. Because I wouldn't... I would be doing a disservice to that company by not being able to, like, read between the lines." Her comment illustrates that while she still believes learning a language is important as such, still the native level of Finnish required for her imposes a significant challenge to navigate around. At the same time, it shows that language can be a strong and permanent obstacle in professions where only the perfect, native level of language skills would allow her to do her work in quality she believes is expected and needed. It is another manifestation of how a choice of a profession affects career building experiences of internationals in a unique and unfavourable way.

The lack of Finnish skills is perceived to increases the glass ceiling for internationals to reach the top management positions in Finnish companies. According to Interviewee 4 "*[...] if you only are English speaking, then you know, the job opportunities are quite reduced. And they're even more reduced as you want to progress in your career, right? Like, maybe they are enough Junior positions, but then like, you will never reach the C level, right, it will always be the Finn appointed to be in the C level position. [...] and I think people always assume that we are here temporarily. Right? So they might be afraid to put you in a strategic position in your company, because somehow they think that we can leave at any minute that we're not creating roots here. So I always as well tell with friends that, you know, they are applying for a job to really tell to the employer, like, you know, this is my house and, like, say that explicitly, because otherwise people might think that you're, you know, leaving at any point.*" In this example, language skills are coupled with the perceptions of internationals in the Finnish society and the perceived need among internationals to prove their commitment to staying in Finland.

However, language dynamic affects also Finnish-speaking workforce, as well, especially if they have worked for years in Finnish, only to need to change the language relatively recently. In the case of Interviewee 6, she was working in English, in an English-speaking company, and everyone who joined the team knew it is an English-speaking workplace. After a couple of years, her

company was bought by a bigger, Finnish-speaking company. Suddenly, hundreds of employees who used to work in Finnish were exposed to a small team of English-speaking colleagues. "*It's not that they didn't want to, but like they hadn't applied to a job where they knew they would have to speak English all the time. So it was like they were being forced to shift to English without, like, their own consent in a way, it's very shocking, I am sure.*" This example highlights an important aspect of how language can affect the experiences of internationals and Finns likewise, and that requires sensitivity from the organizations when going through this transition.

4.4.2 Diversity and inclusion-related challenges

Adjusting to working in a new environment can be a difficult task for all sides involved. It assumes re-negotiating old habits, getting to know each other and learn from each other, changing established practices, learning what from the 'old way of working' is worth keeping, and communicating effectively. Lack of exposure to internationals can be a 'shock' for the system in some companies, with profound, and long-lasting effects on the experiences of both locals and internationals. While the experiences of interviewees integrating into the Finnish workplace were overwhelmingly positive, there are also those who experienced a lack of inclusion in the workplace and have deployed different strategies to fight for their place in the company and the team they were working on.

In some instances, the local employees may be intimidated by the new people coming and the extent of changes they are bringing, undermining their 'old ways of doing things' and, at times, their relevance. Interviewee 12 worked for her Finnish employer as a consultant remotely, before joining the company as an employee to consult on-site. However, internationalization created numerous concerns among the local employees. "*[...] people were really scared and sceptical, because they have been working in that company for like 15 years, 20 years, and they have been working with the same technology. And they had this feeling that now these young people, the new people coming with new technology, it might be make them irrelevant. So they were really scared.*" The lack of organization, communication and training in the company led to additional challenges in managing daily work as well. She was sitting in a different office and struggled to follow up on developments communicated in Finnish. "*So I was almost out of the loop all the time. And I was I had to, like ask them, Hey, what's going on? Like, I don't know anything about what what is going on what's happening. So you have to be really proactive in getting the information out,*

because it's also kind of like you're the outsider coming." This example illustrates the implications of poor diversity management in a workplace and a detrimental effect on career building experiences of internationals and local employees, alike. While the former experience isolation and inability to participate and fully contribute, the latter struggle with a feeling of insecurity, worried for their job and livelihood.

Navigating through a workplace characterized by the lack of inclusion and diversity management is a challenging experience. Interviewee 12 reported that for her, standing up for herself was of great importance. "*I think what's important, at least for me would have been speaking up and standing up for myself. [...] And I decided to educate people about what I did not like. [...] So I just thought that if people don't take the measure to come and talk to you, you are you can make that proactive action to stand up for yourself and talk and discuss.*" Common to most of the strategies employees used is that they relied on their own agency, looked for take-aways they could get from those experiences and get the most out of their experiences to advance their future prospects, standing up for themselves and advocating for themselves, too.

Cultural differences were reported as another inclusion-related challenge. According to Interviewee 11, her way of being at work was quite different to the local culture. "*Because I dare to come as a whole of a person, so I will do the sales, I will also arrange a party. I'll also create different comp, you know, nice employee surprises, you know, some part of like this really team player in the company, which was not always understood by others.. And I just want to get more of life more out of my team. I don't want to wait three years to understand that I'm working with some of the greatest climbers in the world, elite sports people, they just don't open up. And that's what I tried to do was like, hey, come over for dinner or come over for beer, let's do something together. And if you don't see that reciprocity, you just whisk down, right? Because you want that reciprocity.*"

This example suggests internationals struggle not only to understand the local norms and habits, especially in the working environment. Sometimes their past experiences and the features of the culture they bring prevail over the local traditions. In this case, Interviewee 11 did not choose to change her behaviour after she learned what is the common working culture, as it would not be possible to reconcile the new cultural norms (taking an extended period to build relationships with

colleagues) with her perceptions of what is important in life and what she values (getting more out of life and people around her).

Another important example of culturally driven inclusion challenges is a strong Finnish culture of going to the sauna, described as an uncomfortable experience, especially by those interviewees who tend to work in male-dominated professions. Sauna evenings were a valuable networking opportunity, where promotion decisions are made, but also a setting where the interviewee as often only female present, was tasked to navigate around the dominant 'bro culture' and at times inappropriate behaviours of her male colleagues. "*And I was like, there's no way I'm going, and then I'm like, yeah, if I don't go, actually promotions happen in those, afterwards. And if I'm not there, like, you know, then I don't exist.*" This created a situation where she perceived her career opportunities would be negatively affected by her absence from social gatherings. On the other side, participating brought a new set of challenges for her, including having to witness and deal with unpleasant experiences. "*And yeah, that was very uncomfortable moments, because yeah, people start getting drunk. And then they started saying things that are not nice.*" Her strategy was to compromise. Joining sauna evenings at first and leaving by 10 allowed her to 'make herself present' and get at least partial benefits of networking and team bonding.

Being often the only international, female and young professional in a room of senior male colleagues was a reality shared by a few interviewees. As Interviewee 4 recalled, in the team meetings she would be assumed to do the secretary work such as taking notes, make bookings for lunch and send calendar invitations. "*And people assumed that I would be the secretary of those meetings, for example. And I had the gut instinct in the beginning saying that, I had a good excuse as well, because like I was from operative side, so actually, I had to show slides and information and budgets. So I said, I cannot do both. Like, if I'm presenting things, I cannot be taking notes. So maybe someone else so but I had always that impression, right? The woman was always the one that should be taking notes.*"

Interviewee 12 shared her experience of steering group meetings where she would often be the only female, noting that sitting in the room with 40 or 50 senior male colleagues was challenging, and recalled feeling 'out of place'. While she noted being the only female already contributed to feeling excluded, not knowing the local language or their culture significantly increased the feeling of not belonging there, especially since she had to fight for her opportunity to speak. While she

noted this was an unpleasant experience that will eventually lead her to quit her job and start her own business, reflecting on the situation she saw it as a learning opportunity. "*But I think I have also learned in the process. Now I don't wait for people to give me the opportunity to speak, I just speak and take the opportunity myself.*" With age and accumulated experience her confidence has also grown, the negative experiences were understood as an opportunity to learn, growing as a female professional in a foreign country.

4.4.3 Building a career as a foreign woman in an egalitarian society

The findings of this research touch upon the unique challenges international women experience when moving from a background with a low level of gender equality to an egalitarian society like Finnish, characterized with a high level of gender equality. One of the issues that emerged in this research is a need for international women to develop new skills and attitudes which are appreciated and valued in a gender equal society, but which may not be like anything they had experienced before or were taught to nurture as they were socialized into their home country culture. This, in turn, suggests that experiences of international women differ greatly and depend on the context they are coming from, the context they are integrating into, but also their upbringing.

Several interviewees hinted at what they perceived helped them succeed in building their careers in Finland. Often, this included showing personal agency, the ability to be assertive, to express themselves, advocate for their interests, be proactive in creating their opportunities and open to stepping out of their comfort zone, trying new things and learning on the go. For example, Interviewee 8 explained what made a difference in her career is her 'being pushy'. "*So I would always say what I want to say, or I will always say what I want to get, you know, and so that was also important to voice what you want.*" For Interviewee 12, being able to speak for herself, let everyone know when they made her uncomfortable, advocate for herself and bring sensitive issues upfront with people was the key to navigate the lack of inclusive work culture at her workplace. For interviewee 11, being aware and confident in your own skills and competencies and not being afraid to show that confidence was an important aspect of getting a job in Finland in the first place. "*So in Finland, I mean, first of all, you need to have your own self-assurance that you have something to offer, I think that takes form for many takes many years to understand that, hey, I have something to offer.*"

Several interviewees recalled one of the main characteristics of her work experience in Finland was being trusted with responsibilities and finding your way to do the work, and do it well. As Interviewee 4 shared, succeeding in Finland required her to step out of their comfort zone, be very proactive, think and work on the go and do the best she could given the circumstances. She explained feeling like an imposter at times. "*I was like, honestly, I had no idea what I was doing. When I started in both, I was improvising, right? I was like, you know, kind of going to Google, calling people: What do I do in here? I have no idea and but then it's like, okay, I'm like I maybe the result could have been better, but I figure it out.*" This comment illustrates well the need for fast thinking, independent and proactive attitude to succeed. Consequently, being open to embrace new challenges and get the courage to get new responsibilities was also important. "*And, and even though many times I know that I have not been the most confident in myself, right, like, but I don't know, really just going for the opportunities, and then kind of, I'll figure it out later how to get there.*"

At the same times, those are not the skills and mindsets women from contexts with a low level of gender equality are often encouraged to develop and apply. According to Interviewee 3 "*Within my studies [in Finland], this encouragement to think bigger, to think like an entrepreneur, so that is something I learned here. In [home country], I was always an employee, my mindset was always on executing what I'm told to do. Here in the school, I learned that my thinking is allowed my being my, my working autonomously is allowed, it's encouraged. So now I work completely differently.*" This comment illustrates an important aspect of the type of mindset internationals need to build career opportunities in Finland. Interviewee 3 saw this new way of thinking as a decisive factor for her findings a meaningful job in Finland. "*I thought that I'm going to go for it, you know, I'm gonna write to this person, it was the CEO of the company, I don't know him. I'm just gonna pitch myself to him. So I had prepared pitching myself. So it's more of this, you know, I'm pitching my own business here.*" This helped her advance in the recruitment line and eventually get the job offer.

Self-assurance and self-advocacy are the key factors for success for Interviewee 11. Those are, however, also something that does not come naturally to women. "*You should continuously advocate for yourself because nobody else will. And that's also difficult for women, because you always advocate for others, you'll sell somebody else's product like this [thumb up], but when it comes to showing yourself: oh, I'm not sure I want to be that, you know, to show off or that place*

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and that place and that kind of woman." Thus, those coming from backgrounds where 'showing off' was not deemed as 'appropriate' or even allowed behaviour for women, must now adjust to the very different norms and values in the host society. "*In Finland, everyone gets an equal chance. But you need to make sure that you feel worthy of that equal chance, and many people are waiting for that.*" Having to go through the self-discovery and self-development process in order to develop skills, mindsets and attitudes that are needed to succeed in Finland sets those women back in their careers compared to their Finnish or other international counterparts.

However, this empowerment and self-development process is in itself a challenge. "*There's so many women that are negatively controlled, socially controlled, which I was, you know, also part of that, because you're negatively socially controlled by your parents, by your brothers, by your fathers, that you don't have a control of your own life and making decisions for yourself. And that puts even women back as an immigrant woman. Who is an immigrant woman? A Russian, an Arab, a Jew, a Finn, a Pole, a Dutch, they are all on different levels. And that way, gives much more complexity to say, when I tell that woman who's been social control from childbirth, I left I, like, run away from my home country to live my life. But a lot of them are sitting there as in prison of their own homes, not able to make decisions for their bodies for their choice for career for education. So that self-assurance as in depth, self of, you know, finding yourself dignity, and honouring that dignity is so powerful to go through that experience and you need, and you need to go through this period. [...] So first of all, because for social human beings, we need to learn to be a know who we are to interacting with others. So when, when you are socially controlled, you're afraid of your own shadow, and you're afraid to communicate with others.. [...] Then second thing is that when you want to understand what you're worth, you need to find those small cases that gives you a sense of experience of success. [...] So those experiences of success builds up your self-confidence, [...] your, you know, your full self.*" Those observations show different dynamics and challenges international women face. The patterns someone was socialized into the bigger part of their lives do not disappear as they cross borders. Instead, the process to become empowered and take control over your life and pursue a career is a long and difficult one. Thus, those women may find it difficult or even intimidating to go out there, assert themselves, engage with people, build relationships. Those are skills that are taught in certain societies and not in others, and, thus, requires strong efforts to adjust, and a lot of support from different sides.

Upbringing and values a person internalized during childhood in her family can sometimes mitigate the fact overall societal culture is discriminatory towards women. As Interviewee 12 explained, despite growing up in times when her family was financially struggling and in a highly gender unequal society, the values she learned from her family were an important factor for shaping her personality. "*I still remember, like, there were times when we were going to this, this huge financial depression in [home country] during the 90s. And we, my parents lost their jobs. And it was really difficult time and they were people coming to our house and saying that you shouldn't send your girl to the school, it's not of any use. And he [the father] would always say that, no, she will do what she wants to do. And so he it has been really, all the time inspiring and a positive thing, that, okay, it doesn't matter what everybody thinks I can or I cannot do, I have the choice to continue and to do whatever I want to do.*" This is one example of how unconventional upbringing can serve as a vehicle for self-agency and navigating through different societal and cultural norms.

4.5   Pillars of support in career building

In their career journeys, interviewees relied on and benefited from various support pillars. Those include their partners and other family members, mentors, communities of people from their home country living in Finland, different professional associations and civil sector organizations, networks they have established, including colleagues and professors at the university they attended. All those were a source of support, providing encouragement, useful pieces of advice, insights about the Finnish working culture, as well as sharing relevant information and resources interviewees used to advance their careers. However, one important insight from this research is the profoundly important role of their bosses (superiors or line managers). Several interviewees shared stories illustrating the important role their superiors played in creating an inviting and inclusive work culture, enabling them to do their work well and excel, to bring new ideas and their own unique contributions to the team. In addition, two interviewees touched upon using their foreignness and the fact they were outsiders to the Finnish system as their competitive advantages.

4.5.1   The significance of the superiors and line managers

Superiors and line managers played an important role in the career building process for interviewees, in different ways. First, their green light to hire an international was seen by a few

interviewees as the key to why they got the opportunity. "*Where I join in my team, my boss was sort of considered almost revolutionary in terms of the people he picked for his team. So for the first time ever, they had somebody who was International, roaming around between them.*" – Interviewee 1

Superiors had an important role in ensuring an inclusive work environment that enabled interviewees to perform their job the best they could, effectively contribute to the team, and achieve their full potential. This included making sure everyone spoke English in meetings, as well as taking care that materials and resources interviewees would need from those outside their team were made available to them, as well, to have someone to ask questions and get answers they needed. Their support and reassurance made a big difference in how interviewees dealt with and experienced difficult periods in their careers. As Interviewee 9 explained "*I'm very grateful that my employer really believed and still believes in me, despite the hardship. Sometimes I just feel hopeless, [Boss] is really supportive: I'm doing the right thing, and I will make it, in Finland takes time, it's the pandemic, the competition is hard. So there's nothing wrong about me.*" This example illustrates how challenging periods in the career can shake up one's perception of self-worth and make one question their skills and capabilities. It also shows the power of a supportive employer aware of those challenges and struggles, encouraging the employee to move on and persist despite the temporary challenges.

The ability of superiors to pick up different damaging dynamics in interpersonal relations and confirm they have the back of their international team members reinforced the interviewees' sense of belonging and acceptance to the workplace. In the experience of Interviewee 1, she was working with an unpleasant and disrespectful client. The client was very dismissive towards her, shooting down and brushing off everything she said. "*And my boss luckily noticed that after two times that had happened. So when I would say something and he would brush it off, my boss would just repeat the same thing in exactly the same words and he would agree. And at least work get going.*" In this context the reaction of her boss was understood as an acknowledgement of the difficult personality she had to work with and support for her, as a sign he had her back.

Often superiors would have insight and information interviewees did not, they could see how different employees were treated and raise their attention towards discriminatory practices interviewees would have no way of proving otherwise. Interviewee 4 recalled a situation when her

boss was the one to alert her she was being underpaid, compared to her male, Finnish counterparts. "*And I remember with my new boss, he was just like, asked me kind of who did your contract and I said the name of the person and he was saying back then you're earning less than 1000 euros a month than everyone else.*" As salaries were not public information, she would not have otherwise been able to learn this. In addition, having this information come from her boss, a person with first-hand knowledge and access to the most recent information across the department gave her sufficient grounds and credibility to raise this issue with HR and fight for a promotion and a salary raise.

4.5.2 Foreignness as an advantage

Being a foreigner and an outsider can impose numerous challenges for career development, but at times, it can also serve as an advantage. It can be an opportunity to stand out and bring in unique input based on the unique skills and lived experiences those raised and educated in the host country do not have. Coming from a much larger country compared to Finland, Interviewee 12 emphasized for her Finland is a small market, which has its' advantages. "*So you can create an impact faster than you can create in a very big, big market. So that was a really good advantage of the place that you could create some kind of unique selling point about yourself. And when you are, you know, sometimes when you're an outsider or an international person, you also have an advantage because you are unique, and you have some skills that people here don't have.*"

Being new to the country and doing things differently, not bound by the local traditions and thinking, as well as bringing resources which back home would not be appreciated as much (for example language skills) can help internationals to stand out and get new opportunities. As Interviewee 8 recalled, her experience of being socialized in her home country's culture made her stand out quickly in the workplace. "*I think I was a little bit more pushy than some of my colleagues. So I would always say what I want to say, or I will always say what I want to get, you know, and so that was also important to voice what you want. Whereas other colleagues won't necessarily do it because either they are shy or, you know, it's not like Finnish culture.*" The proactive approach was particularly appreciated among the international partners in her workplace and she quickly had an opportunity to advance in her career. In this instance, the fact she was not socialized in the Finnish workplace provided her with an attitude and approach which helped her advance her career from the early start.

In addition, coming from places with high gender inequality, international women are used to a much tougher work environment compared to the highly gender equal Finnis society. This in turn helps them to appreciate the distinct feature of the Finnish working culture, such as being judged based on competencies, treated equally to others, valued and respected. Furthermore, it helps to prepare international women better coming to Finland from a much more sexist culture made it easier to navigate gender-related challenges they do encounter in Finland. Interviewee 8 described her experience of working with male-only field workers in Finland as part of the project she was supervising. Having a female supervisor was not something they were used to, and she reported having to 'earn their respect', but she also added that her experience back home prepared her well for this type of challenge. For example, she recalled never reacting to their small provocations by provoking back, but rather kept on asking questions, showing them she does not get 'intimidated' easily. "*I never felt insulted by them because the culture I'm coming from is way tougher, you know?*" The ability to take out the personal impression of an insult enabled the interviewee to approach her colleagues differently, respond to their comments in an unexpected way and 'earn their trust' this way made a big difference in the relationships of mutual respect they created and allowed her to do her work better.

5 Discussion

This chapter brings together the literature review with its different concepts and the previously discussed empirical findings. The chapter details contributions of the research to the existent pool of academic knowledge, as well as practical implications for Finnish national talent attraction policy and organizational leadership, and provides suggestions for future research at the end.

5.1   Theoretical contributions of the research

This research explored how gender, foreignness and professional identity come together and shape career development experiences among skilled international women in Finland. The study aimed at contributing to the existent knowledge about the subjective career building experiences of international women in Finland. The overall research findings closely resonate with the trends outlined in prior research. In addition, the study brings several novel insights. In the remaining of this section, first I will reflect on what the literature review and the findings show about the broader societal changes affecting career building experiences of modern professionals, including internationals. This will provide the general context for the second part of this section, which will answer the research question and reflect upon the findings in the context of the literature review.

The study findings show strong support for trends in the career development field explored within management studies, as well as vocational psychology. One of the most important changes in modern society is the shift from a traditional, linear career to a modern, non-linear (see Litano & Major, 2016; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Interviewees reported pursuing boundaryless (as discussed by Sullivan & Baruch, 2009; Wiernik &Wille, 2017) career paths, which often would include moving within and across organizations, as well as in both opposite and negative direction of career progress, as traditionally understood. Their careers prior to and after coming to Finland have been characterized by interrupting careers to study, studying in parallel with working, working more jobs at the same time, and combining different modes of employment. For instance, several interviewees reported working a full or part-time job as an employee and freelancing on the side. In addition, some interviewees moved from their corporate positions to entrepreneurship or freelancing. However, Sullivan and Arthur's (as discussed in Sullivan & Baruch, 2009, pg. 1553) point out that while some barriers are diminishing, others are emerging, such as cultural differences or discrimination. These research findings suggest this especially applies to

internationals, who face barriers such as lack of knowledge about local culture, social network or language skills, and are affected by perceptions of migrants in the host community.

Another important characteristic of the modern career is a shift in motivations and factors driving the career development of modern professionals. This study suggests the main drivers of career development are strongly related to the personal values and believes of individuals, their needs, priorities and aspirations. For most interviewees, important career drivers were related to their career growth and professional development opportunities. In addition, one of the key drivers was having the work which is aligned with the personal values of interviewees and which enabled them to be true to themselves. According to several interviewees, this also includes the ability to have their professional integrity intact, to do their work the best they can, according to what they believe is a professional standard and what clients deserve. Thus, this study supports the prior research within the kaleidoscope career model as an alternative to a traditional career (see Sullivan & Baruch, 2009), and provide ample evidence for a shift in career development drivers from organizational needs and priorities to individuals preferences.

Finally, a shift in understanding and defining career success is characteristic of the modern career, too. Modern professionals are likely to move away from objective career success indicators to placing more value on what they themselves find important (see Litano & Major, 2016, pg. 54). In addition, this perception of career success is likely to evolve and change, as individuals progress through different life and career phases, revising and shifting their needs and priorities as well (see Dries, 2011, pg. 376). This study provides ample evidence in support of this shift, too. Interviewees defined career success as something dependent on individual preferences, needs and ambitions. The main characteristics mentioned were the aspect of happiness and impact. However, what contributes to someone's happiness and what type of impact an individual strives to achieve is highly personal. A few interviewees also discussed the evolution of their career success definition, moving away from objective indicators of success such as the compensation or the title, to valuing other aspects of the work, such as their personal fulfilment or professional growth opportunities. This research shows the evolution of career success understanding can be a result of an individual ageing and going through different life phases, reaching a certain level of career accomplishments, moving to a foreign country, societal values in the host country as well as organizational values and culture.

Another important contribution of this research is evidence to suggest the PE and developmental theories which have been a dominant approach in vocational psychology when it comes to researching and understanding career development (as discussed by Wiernik &Wille, 2017). This study suggests those theories are insufficient to fully understand the career development experience of international women. Instead, postmodern social constructionism career theories, such as the career construction theory put forward by Savickas (2013) can be a better tool for understanding the totality of complex career building experiences of skilled international women. The findings of this study show understanding the subjective perceptions and interpretations of career events by individuals living those careers can uncover important meanings behind different career decisions, and provide an in-depth understanding of their experiences which is not evident to the outside observer. This was evident in several instances in this research. For example, a few interviewees reported the starting position does not matter to them, as long as they see promising career growth and professional development opportunities in the future, as well as the ability to do work they like and find fulfilling. Thus, in many instances, they made career choices to leave a higher-paid position and accept less prestigious, less paid and riskier position in another organization or start their own business. While those career events would be likely seen as negatively related to career progress by an outside observer, the interviewees taking those steps perceived it completely differently. The interviewees' perception was shaped by their subjective goals, preferences and values. In this case, evaluating career events against objective career progress standards would not be able to capture the essence of their career development experiences, further demonstrating the need for more research focused on subjective understandings of career development, especially among international women (as also pointed out by Colakoglu et. al, 2018).

As previously mentioned, the main question this study explored was how gender, foreignness and professional identity come together and shape career building experiences among skilled international women living and working in Finland. The outline of the broader context and societal changes, as well as the identified implications for career development, provide a general context for understanding how those women experience and navigate their career building experiences. The findings of this study show that all three factors (gender, foreignness and professional identity) have profound effects on career development among skilled international women. Moreover, the insights from this research highlight the intertwined nature of the three factors, with often two or

all three factors reinforcing each other. For example, Interviewee 11 story illustrates this dynamic well, as she describes experiences of women coming from highly gender unequal backgrounds, deprived of opportunities to exercise their agency and make decisions for themselves. Once they arrive in the new country, they must develop their sense of self-worth and renegotiate their personal and professional identities in this new context. At the same time, the context of the new country (egalitarian and gender equal in this case) and its specificities has the potential to shape those experiences, in some instances in a positive and in some in a negative way.

This research suggests professional identity has an important role in shaping the career development of international women. First, a strong professional identity is linked to less willingness to make career-related compromises (Creed et. al, 2020). Several interviewees detailed their experiences of feeling their professional integrity was compromised by their inability to perform the work to their best ability, to bring in their skills and knowledge and to put them fully into practise at their workplace. Furthermore, for an individual to internalize their professional identity, it has to be in harmony with other values and believes that the individual holds (Cornelissen & van Wyk, 2007, pg. 839). Thus, a person's inability to enact those values and beliefs in their workplace results in strains to their sense of professional identity. Interviewees reported the experience of compromised professional integrity and value mismatch led them to lose confidence, motivation, and productivity at work, finally leading them to quit. In addition to compromised integrity, lack of alignment between the values and beliefs interviewees held and those promoted in their workplace was another important factor shaping their career development.

Second, in modern society, work has a central role in individuals' lives, often defining how individuals see themselves and are perceived by the society, a key component of their identity (Brown & Lent, 2013, pg. 3-4; also Vondracek et. al, 2016). Professional identity, when internalized, becomes an integral element of the personal identity of an individual (Cornelissen & van Wyk, 2007, pg. 839), a "constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role" (Baugh & Sullivan, 2005). This research suggests professional identity can also become a vehicle for international women to pursue better career opportunities. The findings show interviewees had a clear preference about the types of jobs they aspired to have, and a vision whom they wanted to become as professionals, which has been an important factor shaping their career development experiences. In some cases, wanting to achieve more and become more as a professional contributed to the decision to

reallocate to Finland (i.e., Interviewee 3), while in other cases it was a strong driver behind the decision to pursue different opportunities with a potential to improve their career prospects (such as studies) and lead them to the type of job where they can grow and become who they aspired to be (Interviewee 10).

Professional identity is especially important in times of big changes, such are moving to a foreign country, requiring internationals to adjust to the new context, as well as navigate around new culture, norms, and value system (Zikic, 2010; Zikic & Richardson, 2016). This can be particularly challenging with migrants with already established strong professional identities in their home countries since what they encounter in the host country can significantly differ from what they knew their whole lives (Zikic & Richardson, 2016, pg. 140), especially since some resources they have developed in their home country may not have the same, or at all, value in the new context. Interviewees in this research detailed their experiences illustrating the dynamic interplay between their professional identity and immigrant background.

In the job search phase, facing rejections from recruiters, having to build social capital from the beginning, prove their worth and competence, and lower expectations have been identified as important instances where interviewees were required to renegotiate their sense of professional identity. This was especially difficult for experienced professionals (i.e., Interviewee 5), who enjoyed a strong reputation back home and had extensive social networks to rely on, only to realize the value of those networks diminishes in Finland. Interviewees reported feeling anger and frustration, as well as questioning their professional capabilities and self-worth. In addition, having to revise their expectations in terms of positions they aimed at led to a feeling of failure and missed opportunities. Thus, those situations required them to make sense of their situations, and come up with a strategy to renegotiate their sense of professional identity and their expectations.

At the same time, this strong sense of professional identity informed also how interviewees made sense of their circumstances. Their professional identity informed their vision of who they wanted to become and where they were aiming at. While this vision was questioned and challenged, it was also used as a tool to enable interviewees to accept the status quo and move forward. For example, interviewees reported valuing prospects of career growth more than the current position, they focused on leveraging the current situation in the best way possible to carve their career path in the desired direction. It motivated them to constantly look for opportunities and focus on the

positive side of all experiences. As those examples show, moving to Finland caused strains and challenged the professional identity of interviewees, in line with Zikic & Richardson's (2016) observations, but also strongly influenced how they make sense of their experiences in the new context.

Alongside the professional identity, gender has also played an important role in shaping the career experiences of interviewees. However, one contribution of this research in relation to understanding how gender affects the career development of international women is evidence of different perceptions among the interviewees about the way gender affects their careers, as well as the varying degree to which they believe it is justified and valid to invoke gender to explain their experiences. Thus, this research shows reasons behind including or not gender component may vary. Thus, what interviewees mention is valuable information, but this research shows what they do not mention is not irrelevant, either.

Despite some interviewees chose not to raise gender-related points, others provided ample evidence gender of how the fact they are women in Finland affected their careers. International women tend to experience additional obstacles in their careers in the host country (Colakoglu et. al, 2018, pg. 261; see also Cooke et. al, 2013). This research documents perceptions of different standards applied to female internationals compared to their male counterparts. For example, physical appearance was perceived as more important for women in the recruitment phase. It was also perceived as an indicator of their willingness to integrate into Finnish society. Having a piece of clothing from a famous Finnish brand or adjusting your haircut to fit the perceived preference of Finnish employers was understood to increase the prospect of getting a job. At the same time, it was perceived that for male candidates, their skills and competencies were the main criteria.

Building a career as a female international in a highly egalitarian and gender equal society is considered beneficial for career-oriented international women (Traavik & Richardsen, 2010, pg. 2800). In this research, first, gender representation was perceived as a positive sign and encouragement for interviewees that women can succeed in the organization. Next, being treated with respect, equally to male colleagues at the workplace positively contributed to the career development of interviewees. Several interviewees noted in their workplace the focus was on skills and competencies, not physical appearance, which enabled them to advance their careers faster.

Finally, this research shows gender equal nature of Finnish society has a positive effect on work-family conflicts. The tensions between work and family responsibilities disproportionally negatively affect women's career development (see Mayrhofer et. al, 2008; Linehan & Walsh, 2000, pg. S51). However, this research shows positive career experiences among interviewees who paused their careers to go on maternity leave. One interviewee was promoted shortly before the start of her maternity leave, while the other received a promotion near the end of her maternity leave. Both interviewees interpreted this as appreciation for their past efforts and not 'being punished' for having a family.

While the dominant perception among women is that balancing career and family is not feasible (see Ezzedeen et. al, 2015, pg. 355), this research suggests societal values and gender equal working culture in Finland positively contributes to career experiences of working international women with children. This finding highlights different experiences among internationals compared to the findings of Kuitto et. al. (2019, pg. 252), related to the experiences of Finnish women and families. Kuitto et. al.'s research suggests that the 'child penalty' (as defined by Orser & Leck, 2010, pg. 391) applies also to young Finnish working mothers who are more likely to take longer maternity leave and be underpaid. Considering that both Interviewee 2 and Interviewee 7 had already extensive career experience before taking maternity leave, while Kuitto et. al.'s research focused on families in the early phases of their careers, this may at least partially explain the difference in findings. In addition, this research is limited to the experiences of the interviewees, and there is a possibility a general picture across other groups of working international women differs.

On the other side, gender equal nature of the Finnish society also imposed challenges for career development among women coming from less gender equal backgrounds. This is since those women may lack the skills, mindsets and attitudes which are needed to succeed in their careers in a gender equal society like Finnish. Prior research demonstrated being "brave, curious and confident and to accept challenges that are offered" (Mattila & Uusilehto, 2019, pg. 35) is needed for career success. In this research, interviewees also emphasized showing personal agency, being assertive, proactive, able to speak and advocate for themselves, finding an innovative way to create opportunities, being courageous to ask for new responsibilities, to challenge themselves and take opportunities without hesitation as key to career success in Finland. Those are, however, not the skills, mindsets and attitudes women coming from backgrounds of high gender inequality have

the opportunity to develop and exercise. In this way, the gender equal context can also impose additional challenges for the career development of international women.

Finally, foreignness has also emerged as an important factor shaping the career development experiences of international women. The immigrant background of interviewees, the fact they were socialized in a different culture and had limited knowledge about the Finnish system affected their career development in both positive and negative ways. In addition, as discussed above, foreignness as a factor is strongly linked to the dynamics of gender and professional identity, reinforcing them.

In terms of challenges, building a career as a foreign female in Finland brought numerous challenges for interviewees. First, their lack of career capital, defined by Inkson and Arthur (as referenced in Cooke et. al, 2013, pg. 2630) as "knowing-why, knowing-how and knowing-whom" surfaced as a significant barrier to get a job in Finland. This was additionally complicated by the perceptions among interviewees that the importance of networks and social capital seems to be amplified in Finland, compared to their experiences from other countries. Fossland (2013, pg. 200) points out that recruitment is a "multi-levelled and relational process", where language skills, social networks, knowledge of the local ecosystem and relationship among local actors can play a significant role. This study provides ample evidence of a recruitment system in Finland where social connections, networks, reputation and relationships of trust manifested through referrals and recommendations plays a key role in the hiring process, according to the stories and experiences of the majority of interviewees. The lack of language skills has been reported to affect interviewees throughout their career development, making it more difficult to get a job, to get promoted to C-level positions or to pursue different career paths, especially in professions where native-level of Finnish is required to perform the work in good quality. In addition, this study shows interviewees perceived pressure to demonstrate their commitment to staying in Finland across all career phases in Finland. According to the findings of this study failure to do so was seen as a significant barrier to start and later advance their careers.

Second, being a foreigner meant starting from zero to build the needed career capital to succeed, which put interviewees' careers several steps behind those of their Finnish counterparts, as well as peers in their home country. With their career, and in particular social capital left behind in their home countries, internationals must start integrating into the host community and building their

networks and connections from scratch (Cooke et. al, 2013, pg. 2629). This was a shared experience of the majority of interviewees, and they reported it resulted in them obtaining a degree despite they had an EU degree already, as they perceived this would help them get the 'Finnish stamp' and recognition of their skills and abilities to open new career opportunities. For others, it meant having to start their careers from entry-level positions despite years of experience outside Finland or to lower and re-think their expectations and consider jobs and employers they did not initially. While this created strains on their professional identity, as discussed above, it also puts them steps behind in their careers, as they had to start from the beginning and build their way up.

Third, building a career as an international in Finland also brought numerous advantages and career development opportunities, this research shows. The importance of the host society, the dominant values, norms and the culture, as well as perceptions and openness towards migrants, has been documented from different aspects (see for example Van den Bergh and Du Plessis, 2012; Aygoren & Wilinska, 2013; Krivonos, 2020). However, for most of its history, career development remained 'divorced from the context' in which careers had been built and lived, with the focus on the individual (see Wiernik & Wille, 2017, pg. 554; McMahon & Watson, 2012, pg. 3-5; Gunz et. al, 2011). While this has started to change recently (Litano & Major, 2016, pg. 52), there is still limited knowledge and understanding of how particular features of the context into which internationals are being integrated shape their career experiences (Gunz et. al, 2011).

This research provides valuable insights and evidence of how unique features of the egalitarian Finnish society and Finnish working culture shape the career development experiences of skilled female internationals. The findings of this study show the unique features of the Finnish working culture have an overwhelmingly positive effect on the career development of internationals. The key features of the Finnish working culture were identified as low vertical hierarchy, easy access to the top leadership and their openness to inputs and ideas from all employees, high level of trust and autonomy at work, the culture of knowledge sharing, openness to exploring new interests and career paths and learning new knowledge and skills at any point in the career, and high level of gender equality (as discussed in detail above).

This study shows those features of the Finnish working culture were seen as positively associated with the career development of interviewees. Several interviewees reported that access to leadership and a culture of all voices being heard meant they could provide suggestions on how to

improve processes or share new ideas on how they could contribute, despite being very new to the company. This was reported as essential in creating an environment where they felt they could achieve their full potential, bring in their unique resources, insights and skills and actively contribute to the success of the team. In addition, being able to provide suggestions and having your opinion considered meant they could influence how the work in their domain was done, to improve shortcomings and ensure they can perform their best work, as well as that clients get better service. As discussed above, this was essential in maintaining their professional integrity and identity.

A high level of trust in the workplace, this research shows, did not only make interviewees feel valued and respected members of the team but also enabled them to proactively seek and get new responsibilities, making advancements in their careers. This helped them progress faster in their careers in Finland, and contributed to compensating for career setbacks at the start of their careers in Finland. This allows internationals to catch up with their counterparts and peers, and reduced the negative effects of migration on a career, as was thus positively associated with career development opportunities.

Finally, this study suggests internationals may particularly benefit from a working culture open to employees exploring different career paths as well as encouraging them to pursue new knowledge at all stages of their careers. First, many internationals, as also highlighted in this research, may decide to pursue their studies upon arrival to Finland as a strategy to open new career opportunities. Considering internationals migrate at different points in their lives and careers, an environment where their future careers will not suffer because of the decision to pursue their studies, for example, is important for their career development. In addition, as Remennick (2003, 2012) points out, in some professions, international may be required to undertake further studies to have their foreign degrees recognized, and this environment offers them a path forward. Finally, this research shows an opportunity to explore different career paths within the organization, continuously learn new skills and challenge oneself has been positively associated with career development opportunities. It has allowed interviewees to pursue different types of roles in their organizations and develop their careers in different directions, fulfilling their professional needs and interests. Litano and Major (2016) point out that enabling work-life balance is the key to the retention of talented professionals. This research suggests, in addition to that, the increased

importance of intra-organizational flexibility and openness to allow their employees to pursue different career opportunities and interests inside the organizations.

To conclude, the above-mentioned examples show (in line with Gunz et. al, 2011; McMahon & Watson, 2012; Litano & Major, 2016) that the context in which careers are being built has a profound effect on the career experiences of the individuals, imposing challenges and bringing opportunities alike. In addition, this study brings novel insights into how different features of the Finnish working culture and the context facilitate and shape the experiences of skilled international women.

5.2   Practical research implications

The research offers valuable practical insights for both the decision-makers on the national level and the organizational level leadership and management in Finland. As established earlier, attracting new talent is an important priority of the Finnish government, due to their ageing population and growing economy (see Teivainen, 2020, January 30; Teivainen, 2021, April 20). One important insight from this study is that early integration efforts and early exposure to the working environment in Finland, in particular, can be decisive factors in keeping highly educated international women in Finland even at times when the original reason for moving to Finland does not apply any longer (finishing the studies or breaking up with the partner in Finland in cases where this was the primary reason). As reported, some interviewees felt they have already invested a lot to learn the language and integrate to Finland that they decided to stay even though they could choose any other country. Others pointed out that once they experienced the Finnish working culture and learned to appreciate the benefits of it, as well as saw career growth and development potential, it was a decisive reason to keep them in Finland. Early integration into the Finnish labour market appears to be essential for this group of international women, considering that many of them had to re-start their careers from the entry-level positions in Finland and thus were behind their peers and counterparts. Having the opportunity to get access to integration services and quickly get exposed to the Finnish working culture allows international women to easier find their career paths, start building much-needed resources such as networks and relationships of trust with the local actors and organizations and envision a future for themselves in Finland.

Another potentially relevant insight is the important role of the values promoted in the Finnish society, working environment and education. Findings of this study show that interviewees

perceived the Finnish society as promoting equality and giving equal chance to everyone, including foreigners, which contributed to their decision to come or return to Finland to work and live. In addition, the Finnish education system was attractive to many, in particular for the values it promoted. This research suggests interviewees perceived the Finnish education system as offering them an opportunity to learn, including learning from mistakes, which was important for some. Others reported enjoying the responsibility for own learning process and freedom to tailor their studies to their interests, which suggests that Finnish education system places significant trust on the students to be an active participant in their education, treating them with respect and dignity, which was of great importance for many. Those could be important elements to inform the national talent attraction policy and how opportunities in Finland are advertised abroad.

In relation to the implications for organizational leadership and management, this study shows organizational structures and the ability of the leadership on different levels – from the top leadership to middle management – to create an inclusive environment and enable internationals to grow their careers is of immense significance for talent attraction and retention. This suggests that organizations should revise their structures and policies to acknowledge that with accepting the international workforce the system should adjust to respond to their needs. Allowing employees to explore, try new roles and expand their careers is one example of such organizational features. The organizational ability to be responsive and find innovative ways to map and utilize the unique resources internationals bring to the organization helps create sense of purpose and belonging to the organization. Immediate superiors have emerged as an important factor in enabling international talents to fulfil their potential. Thus, ensuring superiors working on diverse teams are equipped and supported in their people management tasks is another critical step for organizations to become a more attractive place for internationals.

5.3   Suggestions for future research

This study has touched upon several important topics that need further research. First, the findings of this study suggest gender, immigrant background and a strong sense of professional identity strongly affect career building experiences of international women. In addition, the study indicates challenges and opportunities international women perceive in building a career are context-dependent, affected by the particular background the women come from and are being integrated into, as well as influenced by their profession, personal circumstances and individual

characteristics. Further research is needed to provide better insight into the subjective experiences of career building among international women, as a way to understand how their sense of professional identity, gender and immigrant background inform how they form perceptions, evaluate opportunities, make decisions, solve challenges and make sense of their situations.

Next, more research is needed to understand how the entirety of the context specificities affect experiences of internationals building a career, and in particular international women. This research established that international women integrating into the Finnish local culture and context encountered a set of challenges, but also identified valuable advantages of building a career in an egalitarian, gender equal country such as Finland. The findings also suggest integrating into gender equal societies come easier for some women and more difficult for others (i.e., socially controlled women discussed by Interviewee 11). In addition, the study showed entrepreneurship as a strategy to create a job they wanted to do and work on solving the challenges they have identified and cared about, not necessarily only as a strategy to find any type of employment. This indicates that integrating into a gender equal context brings unique challenges for international women, as well as offer different tools and strategies for them to move forward in their career. Further research is needed to understand the complexities of those differences, the subjective experiences of female internationals, how women from different backgrounds and professions navigate their careers in gender equal contexts and how this change affects the other aspects of their lives. More knowledge is needed on how international women from different backgrounds perceive integrating into the gender equal contexts, what skills, mindsets and resources they deem critical for their career success, how this differs from experiences in other, less gender equal contexts, as well as how they work to bridge the gap in those critical resources they may not have, due to their immigrant background.

Third, the current research in career development is predominantly focused on interorganizational mobility as a strategy of individuals to achieve their career objectives (Litano & Major, 2016, pg. 53). This research suggests that internationals may be particularly prone to having non-linear careers, as the findings show they have to often start from the beginning in the new country, despite years of experience outside Finland, or interrupt their careers to complete a degree in Finland as a strategy to open new career opportunities. Thus, more research is needed to understand better the career paths of internationals, and especially international women, what factors determine how

they move along their career paths, how they made decisions and how they make sense of those decisions in the broader context of their lives.

In addition, while internationals are prone to more dynamic, non-linear career paths, this research shows this is not necessarily inevitable. Litano and Major (2016) argue that if organizations want to keep their top talents, they must create conditions for achieving work-life balance. This research suggests providing opportunities for career growth and personal development, being attentive to the needs and interests of internationals, and allowing them to bring their unique resources and used them to contribute to the work is another essential factor that can help organizations retain their employees over the longer period. Thus, further research is needed to understand how organizations can adjust their structures to allow more meaningful inclusion of internationals and their unique contributions, as well as the role of the local working culture in this process.

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