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# From home to host: The instrumental kaleidoscopic careers of skilled migrants

human relations

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DOI: 10.1177/0018726719828452

journals.sagepub.com/home/hum



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## Abstract

Is it time to reimagine the kaleidoscope career model (KCM) beyond gendered career patterns? In this article, we draw upon the KCM in a novel way to show how skilled migrants, just like a kaleidoscope, adjust their career parameters and construct bespoke career paths in order to cope with the career disruption of an international move. Specifically, the study unpacks the careers of 38 skilled migrants in Ireland and suggests an alternative explanation for skilled migrants' underemployment. The findings show that this macro career transition – from home to host country – presents both opportunities and challenges for individual migrants in their quest to balance their work- and non-work-related demands. The study contributes to existing literature and debate on skilled migrants' careers in the business and management discipline by presenting a more complete overview of the concerns and instrumental career choices of skilled migrants in the host country.

## Keywords

instrumental careers, international careers, kaleidoscope careers, skilled migrants

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## Introduction

Increased worker mobility, along with an increased international demand for skilled and specialized labour (Fernando and Cohen, 2016), has resulted in skilled migration becoming a permanent feature of national and international economies (Crowley-Henry et al., 2016). Despite being a potential source of strategic value and competitive advantage for organizations (Zikic, 2015), skilled migrants, making a macro career transition (Zikic and Richardson, 2016) in moving to a new country without organizational support, tend to be excluded from organizational talent pools (Crowley-Henry et al., 2016). Their qualifications, skills and experiences are often portrayed as being undervalued in the host country (Pearson et al., 2011). Indeed, the extant literature ‘points to a dominant picture of obstacles and constraints’ (Fernando and Cohen, 2016: 1279), with migrants, in general, experiencing poor employment outcomes (Fang et al., 2009). This article uses career narratives to deepen our understanding of ‘accepted underemployment’ by skilled migrants in a host country, as well as unpacking the instrumental host country career paths followed by the interviewees. An instrumentalist approach to career is where work is seen as a means to other ends (Thomas, 1989), such as an improved quality of life or improved future opportunities for one’s family.

While there has been an increase in academic interest in worker mobility studies (e.g. Andresen et al., 2014), there is still much to learn about skilled migrants’ career actions and career outcomes at the individual (Guo and Al Ariss, 2015; Zikic et al., 2010) and contextual levels (Crowley-Henry et al., 2016). This research addresses this gap by utilizing the Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM) (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005) to explain how skilled migrants from Poland and the Baltic Republics, who are currently living and working in Ireland, cope with the change and career disruption of their home to host country macro career transition (Zikic and Richardson, 2016).

This study broadens the utility of the KCM beyond its application and relevance in relation to gender variation in career prioritization over time. In this study, we show that the KCM is an appropriate career theory for explaining skilled migrants’ unfolding careers in the host country. We show how the KCM maps neatly with the empirical study, where changes were evident in the migrants’ need for varying levels of authenticity, balance and challenge between their home and host career paths over time. Overall, we found that the discontinuous careers of skilled migrants, both male and female, could be aptly explained by the KCM.

This article’s research question asks: *how does the act of migration, and the career transitions this entails, affect the skilled migrants’ career motivations, actions and outcomes?* The study, in answering the research question, explores the micro-level career impact of the broad (political and economic), proximal (personal, family) (Cohen and Duberley, 2015) and temporal contexts (social and historical time) (Elder, 1994) using the KCM lens. In doing this, the study offers a deeper understanding of the varied career influences, actions and outcomes associated with skilled migrant careers over time (Zikic et al., 2010).

In the following sections, the literature relating to skilled migrant careers and to the KCM are reviewed. After this, the research approach is presented. Then the findings of the study are reported and discussed, with the key points highlighted in the final section,

the conclusions. Limitations of the study and recommendations for further research are also shared.

## Careers of skilled migrants

The definition of a skilled migrant is a 'widely debated subject' (Kōu et al., 2015: 1645), with a lack of consistent conceptual coherence existing in the international worker literature (Andresen et al., 2014). This is possibly owing to the heterogeneous nature of the skilled migrant population (Zikic, 2015). The result is that the differences between the different internationally mobile worker concepts are not always clear, with many studies, such as Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry (2013), Andresen et al. (2014), and Cerdin and Selmer (2014), highlighting this conceptual issue. There are other terms synonymous with 'skilled migrants' in the literature, such as immigrant professionals (Fang et al., 2009) and qualified immigrants (Zikic et al., 2010). In line with Tharenou (2015), it is important for researchers to clearly describe the international population being examined in their respective studies. Our research uses the Iredale (1999) definition of a skilled migrant as 'having a university degree or extensive experience in a given field' (Iredale, 1999: 90). This definition's use of the term 'extensive experience in a given field' allows for this study to include 'highly skilled specialists, independent executives and senior managers, technicians, tradespersons, investors, business persons, keyworkers and sub-contract workers' (Iredale, 1999: 9).

Skilled migrants are portrayed as possessing and supplying an important resource of skills that can be utilized to assuage, or even solve, skills shortages in specific sectors (Borjas, 2001). However, despite this stated importance, the extant research on skilled migrants' careers 'requires synthesis, consideration to gaps in the existing research, and direction on future research opportunities' (Crowley-Henry et al., 2016: 2). There are many fundamental assumptions in the existing literature on the careers of skilled migrants (Al Ariss et al., 2012; Crowley-Henry et al., 2016), which propound a negative narrative (Berry and Bell, 2012; Cross and Turner, 2012; Feldman et al., 2008). The existing literature talks of skilled migrants facing unfair treatment in the host country (Berry and Bell, 2012; Crowley-Henry and Al Ariss, 2016), a lowering of status (Al Ariss and Syed, 2011) and struggling in the host labour market (Pearson et al., 2011).

This article focuses on skilled migrants' careers as informed by a sample of 38 skilled migrants living and working in Ireland. Similarly to the ambiguity of different labels being used in management literature (see Crowley-Henry et al., 2016), the academic study of 'career' is clouded in 'a fog of ambiguity' (Gunz and Heslin, 2005: 106). Our study takes a 'whole life approach' (Litano and Major, 2016) to the interviewees' careers and adopts the Sullivan and Baruch (2009) definition. Sullivan and Baruch (2009) define career as being 'an individual's work-related and other relevant experiences, both inside and outside of organizations that form a unique pattern over the individual's lifespan' (Sullivan and Baruch, 2009: 1543). Careers 'as events in the life course do not take place in isolation but in a specific place and time' (Kōu et al., 2015: 1645). Therefore, in order 'to understand careers we need to consider the wider contexts' in which career actions and career outcomes take place (Inkson et al., 2015: 4). Careers are mediated by time, evolving over an individual's life (Hartl, 2003), with time not only specifying when

situational limitations and opportunities occur, but also how the individual perceives them (Johns, 2006). Therefore, building on Inkson et al.'s (2015) and Hartl's (2003) postulations, this study views the migrant's career as 'anchored in time and space' (Hartl, 2003: 6), with the migrant's career actions and motivations dynamic owing to the impact of context (Cohen and Duberley, 2015; Hartl, 2003; Inkson et al., 2015) and time (Fried et al., 2007).

A prominent issue in contemporary literature is how skilled migrants' careers are damaged, or stagnate, when they move across borders (Ramboarison-Lalao et al., 2012). However, the literature on migrant careers tends to adopt a narrow focus (Al Ariss and Syed, 2011), with the assumption that human capital is the main form of capital possessed by migrants (Tharmaseelan et al., 2010) and is undervalued in the host country (Almeida et al., 2014; Crowley-Henry et al., 2016). Human capital (Becker, 1975) refers to the workers' stock of skills, knowledge and attributes used in employment to add economic value to the organization. This concentration on human capital (Almeida et al., 2014) has led to a gap in the knowledge of migrant career development, as career studies focusing on human capital lack a more nuanced unpacking of how career is experienced by the individual (Al Ariss and Syed, 2011). This article adopts a whole life focus on skilled migrants' careers through a detailed examination of the qualitative exploratory career narratives of the interviewees.

Career success can be operationalized in two different ways, objective or subjective success (Heslin, 2005). The first method, objective career success, includes variables that measure objective and externally visible criteria of career success, such as salary and title, which are 'visible manifestations of success' (Gunz and Heslin, 2005: 106) that can be objectively evaluated by others (Ng et al., 2005). Subjective career success is experienced directly by the individual (Heslin, 2005). It is a person's intrinsic appraisal of their career, in terms of areas he/she deems important, such as a healthy work-life balance or job satisfaction (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013; Ng et al., 2005). Despite the differences between objective and subjective career success, understanding how objective and subjective success coexist in an interdependent, cyclical relationship is important for career studies (Gunz and Heslin, 2005; Heslin, 2005; Zikic et al., 2010). For example, a person can have what appears to be objective career success, such as high levels of pay and status in an organization, but experience low subjective career success because of a poor work-life balance or social exclusion owing to the long hours they spend working to achieve the status and salary. Conversely, salary and promotion (indicators of objective career success) may lead to feelings of personal satisfaction and wellbeing (indicators of subjective career success) (Ituma and Simpson, 2011). Abele and Spurk (2009) recommend a simultaneous examination of both the subjective and objective perspectives, which helps illustrate both the dichotomy and interdependence between these two sides of career success. In this study, the individuality of career success perceptions is captured in the individual career narratives of each research participant.

This article utilizes the KCM, detailed next, to reflect how the individual migrant changes the pattern of her/his career and perceptions of career success by rotating the various aspects of their work and non-work lives to arrange their host country careers and life in new ways.

## The KCM

The KCM was the outcome of a five-year study examining the career patterns of both men and women (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005). The study found distinct gender and generational differences in how careers are enacted (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005). Mainiero and Sullivan (2006) proposed the metaphor of the kaleidoscope career to describe the career paths that were apparent during 'the opt-out revolt' (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006: 3). The 'opt-out revolt' referred to a new age of careers, where workers (men and women) are 'no longer bound to the idea of traditional career . . . and are motivated more by self-fulfillment and balancing work/non-work than the stability and security' of the linear, traditional organizational career (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005: 108). In particular, they were concerned with the 'alarming talent drain of highly trained women' who were opting out of senior executive aspirations (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005: 106).

A kaleidoscope utilizes three mirrors to create numerous and dynamic patterns as its cylinder is twisted, creating different patterns with each rotation and new arrangement of the moving glass chips. Mainiero and Sullivan (2005) maintain that individuals alter their career paths in a similar manner, by rotating 'the varied aspects of their lives in order to arrange their relationships and roles in new ways' (Sullivan et al., 2009: 290). The individual appraises the 'choices and options available through the lens of the KCM. They use this appraisal to determine the best fit among work demands, constraints, and opportunities as well as relationships and personal values and interests' (Sullivan et al., 2009: 290). They offer the kaleidoscope career as a career created by employees on their own terms, values, life choices and parameters (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005). Just as the kaleidoscope utilizes three mirrors to create an infinite number of patterns, the individual, in her/his career decision-making, concentrates on three areas to create her/his own bespoke kaleidoscope career path and outcome. The three parameters, or 'mirrors', in the KCM that affect the individual's career pattern are authenticity, balance and challenge, which are the A, B, C (authenticity, balance, challenge) dimensions of the KCM. Authenticity is how a person can be true to her or his self and make authentic decisions in their life. The alignment of the individual's internal values with his/her external behaviours and the values of their employing organization are important aspects of this parameter (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005). Balance is the equilibrium an individual seeks between his/her work and non-work aspects of their life, such as relationships and personal concerns (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005). He/she also seeks 'quality experiences in both work and family domains' (Mainiero and Gibson, 2017). Finally, challenge is the individual's desire for challenging and stimulating work, such as responsibility and autonomy, while also permitting career advancement. The KCM suggests that an individual will always need certain levels of authenticity, balance and challenge in their career, but the levels of authenticity, balance and challenge needed will depend on the individual's life stage (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006). The KCM is a dynamic and contextual paradigm, where 'the three ABC parameters – authenticity, balance, challenge – ebb and flow in intensity over the course of a lifetime' (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006: 119) and one parameter may rise to ascendancy at a given point when confronting a career transition. Mainiero and Sullivan (2006) propose that the male and female career

focus is different over the lifespan, with the male career more typically following a C – A – B pattern, where they firstly focus on challenge in their career, then authenticity and then finally balance. On the other hand, females tend to follow a C – B – A pattern, focusing firstly on challenge, similar to the male orientation, but then prioritizing balance, before finally authenticity.

The KCM was found to fit ‘women's careers well as a means of understanding how women operate relationally to others in both work and non-work realms’ (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005: 106). The Mainiero and Sullivan research showed that ‘the interplay of work and family, and work and self’ (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005: 109) were strongly interwoven, with life and career decisions strongly influenced by each other. They found that ‘instead of living to work, people are now working to live’ (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006: 2). A further study by Sullivan and Mainiero (2007) on how ‘gender differences impact the enactment of careers . . . found two major career patterns, with distinct gender differences’ (Sullivan and Mainiero, 2007: 238). These two career patterns are the alpha career pattern and beta career pattern. The alpha career pattern, ‘which was displayed by individuals who were strongly focused on their career’ (Sullivan and Mainiero, 2007: 246), was more common among men. The beta career pattern, ‘which was displayed by individuals who had made adjustments in their careers to have a more balanced family/non-work life vis-a-vis their careers’ (Sullivan and Mainiero, 2007: 246) was stronger among women.

The KCM was developed in response to a call for new career approaches that incorporated greater awareness of the ‘career shifts, changes, transitions, and compromises employees are making in their careers’ (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005: 108). As the model puts gender in the foreground, it has become more associated with the discontinuous nature of female careers (Sullivan and Mainiero, 2007). However, this study broadens the utility of the KCM by utilizing the model to examine the discontinuous careers of skilled migrants, both male and female. As described, the KCM is a dynamic and contextual paradigm for unpacking careers. Since migrant careers are dynamic owing to the impact of context (Cohen and Duberley, 2015; Hartl, 2003; Inkson et al., 2015) and time (Fried et al., 2007), we considered the KCM as a potentially valuable and under-explored model for unpacking skilled migrant careers. Therefore, in this article, we utilize the A, B, C (authenticity, balance and challenge) dimensions of the KCM to unpack differences in career orientation between the home country and the host country. The KCM incorporates a whole life perspective and provides the basis for a more holistic examination of what career means. We utilize the model to examine how careers are experienced by skilled migrants in the host country, as they look back on their career stories and histories from home to host country in their relayed narratives. The study’s context and methodology are outlined next.

## Context

The broad international and national contexts (institutions) were similar for all of the study’s interviewees, all of whom stemmed from Eastern Europe and were interviewed between 2014 and 2016. At the national level, the study is situated during the economic and political transition of the interviewees’ home countries (which were the former

communist entities of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) to open market economies. This transition fostered the structural push factors that motivated many of the interviewees to emigrate (Krings et al., 2013), such as the new market and low wage economies, which, for the interviewees, resulted in a meagre lifestyle (Grabowska, 2003) and poor work–life balance (Saunders, 2015). Alongside this, the then booming economy of ‘Celtic Tiger’ era Ireland (Boyle, 2006) provided the availability of work and wage levels that attracted the interviewees and their family or friends (Aptekar, 2009; Cook et al., 2011; Grabowska, 2003).

The study took place after the historical time of EU (European Union) enlargement in 2004, which permitted the interviewees from those Eastern European countries that had recently joined the EU to freely move to Ireland. The push factors leading to the migrants’ motivations to leave Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were linked to the pull factors of Ireland’s abundant employment opportunities in its then vibrant ‘Celtic Tiger’ economy (mid-1990s to late-2000s). Thus, in an example of duality, not only did these political and social structures create the conditions that forced, or pushed, the interviewees to leave home, but these structures also endowed the interviewees with the agency to move to and work in a host EU country.

## Method

This qualitative study considers the career narratives of 38 skilled migrants, from Poland and the Baltic Republics, who are now living and working in Ireland. The details of the 38 interviewees are outlined in Table 1 below. The interviewees are all either educated to a minimum of a bachelor degree level, or have a skilled trade, such as ‘Anthony’ who is a qualified and experienced cabinet maker. The average interview lasted for 45 minutes and the 38 transcribed interviews amount to just over 200,000 words. The interviews were conducted in English with non-English native speakers, but all of whom had fluent English. The names used in this article are pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

A topic guide was used to direct the interviews, ensuring the same topics were covered in each interview. The aim of the interviews was to collect the individual career stories from the sample of respondents in order to be able to abductively group common themes and experiences across the sample, moving from existing concepts and literature on the topic of international careers and the respondents’ career narratives (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012).

### *Data collection*

To source the initial interviewees for the study, the first author utilized purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007), and used contacts he had developed in the migrant community from previous employment. In purposeful sampling, the researcher selects the respondents and location for the research from those that can purposely provide information and knowledge about the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007). Snowball sampling (Browne, 2005) was then used to continue the process, and to fill out the research population. The initial interviewees, using their own work and social networks, were encouraged to recommend appropriate interviewees for the next round of research interviews

Table 1. Interviewee details.

| Nationality        | Pseudonym | Age | Married | Children | Education/skill | Underemployed in host country | Home country occupation      | Host country occupation  |
|--------------------|-----------|-----|---------|----------|-----------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Estonian           | 'Anthony' | 35  | Yes     | 1        | Skilled Trade   | Yes                           | Cabinet Maker                | Semi-Skilled Operative   |
| Estonian/Russian   | 'Lisa'    | 34  | No      | 0        | Degree          | Yes                           | Finance Professional         | Bank Manager             |
| Estonian/Russian   | 'Steve'   | 36  | No      | 1        | Skilled /Degree | Yes                           | Mechanic                     | General Operative        |
| Latvian            | 'Andy'    | 35  | No      | 2        | Skilled Trade   | Yes                           | Builder                      | Maintenance              |
| Latvian            | 'Arnold'  | 33  | No      | 0        | Degree          | Yes                           | Builder                      | Security Guard           |
| Latvian            | 'Ian'     | 35  | Yes     | 2        | Degree          | Yes                           | IT Technician                | Semi-Skilled Operative   |
| Latvian/Russian    | 'Molly'   | 28  | No      | 0        | Degree          | No                            | Business Manager             | Retail manager           |
| Latvian/Russian    | 'Tommy'   | 42  | Yes     | 0        | Skilled Trade   | No                            | Metal Worker                 | Metal Worker             |
| Latvian/Russian    | 'Vicky'   | 31  | Yes     | 0        | Skilled/Diploma | No                            | Model                        | Entrepreneur             |
| Lithuanian         | 'Adam'    | 32  | No      | 0        | Masters         | No                            | Unemployed                   | Researcher               |
| Lithuanian         | 'Bruce'   | 44  | No      | 0        | Skilled Trade   | Yes                           | Chef                         | General Operative        |
| Lithuanian         | 'Luke'    | 40  | No      | 1        | Skilled Trade   | No                            | Builder                      | Sales Manager            |
| Lithuanian         | 'Muriel'  | 26  | No      | 0        | Degree          | Yes                           | Recent Graduate – Bar worker | Trainee Manager          |
| Lithuanian/Russian | 'Sarah'   | 31  | No      | 0        | Degree          | No                            | Customer Service             | Sales Manager            |
| Lithuanian/Russian | 'Sindy'   | 33  | No      | 0        | Degree          | No                            | Tourism Manager              | Hotel Manager            |
| Lithuanian/Russian | 'Timmy'   | 32  | No      | 0        | Skilled Trade   | Yes                           | Crash Repair Specialist      | Semi-Skilled Operative   |
| Lithuanian/Russian | 'Vince'   | 36  | Yes     | 2        | Masters         | Yes                           | Teacher                      | Entrepreneur             |
| Polish             | 'Alan'    | 28  | Yes     | 1        | Masters         | No                            | Business Owner               | Entrepreneur             |
| Polish             | 'Alfie'   | 42  | No      | 2        | Degree          | Yes                           | Bank Official                | General Operative        |
| Polish             | 'Amanda'  | 35  | Yes     | 2        | Masters         | Yes                           | Recent Graduate              | Carer for elderly/infirm |
| Polish             | 'Annie'   | 36  | No      | 2        | Degree          | Yes                           | Nurse                        | Carer for elderly/infirm |

(Continued)



Table 1. (Continued)

| Nationality | Pseudonym  | Age | Married | Children | Education/skill | Underemployed in host country | Home country occupation | Host country occupation  |
|-------------|------------|-----|---------|----------|-----------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| Polish      | 'Arnie'    | 33  | Yes     | 2        | Skilled Trade   | No                            | Recent Graduate         | Sales Manager            |
| Polish      | 'David'    | 35  | Yes     | 3        | Degree          | Yes                           | IT Manager              | Line Supervisor          |
| Polish      | 'Duke'     | 47  | Yes     | 2        | Degree          | Yes                           | Mechanic                | General Operative        |
| Polish      | 'Eddie'    | 36  | No      | 0        | Skilled /Degree | No                            | Plumber                 | Business Manager         |
| Polish      | 'Eleanor'  | 33  | No      | 0        | Degree          | Yes                           | Recent Graduate         | General Operative        |
| Polish      | 'Georgina' | 58  | Yes     | 2        | Masters         | Yes                           | Radiographer            | Carer for elderly/infirm |
| Polish      | 'Gerry'    | 33  | No      | 0        | Degree          | Yes                           | Unemployed              | Security Guard           |
| Polish      | 'Jack'     | 35  | Yes     | 2        | Masters         | No                            | Psychologist            | Psychologist             |
| Polish      | 'Karen'    | 42  | Yes     | 3        | Masters         | Yes                           | Physiotherapist         | Carer for elderly/infirm |
| Polish      | 'Maria'    | 28  | Yes     | 0        | Masters         | No                            | Finance Professional    | Finance Professional     |
| Polish      | 'Mary'     | 28  | Yes     | 0        | Masters         | Yes                           | Teacher                 | Carer for elderly/infirm |
| Polish      | 'Ollie'    | 41  | Yes     | 2        | Masters         | Yes                           | Psychologist            | Truck Driver             |
| Polish      | 'Paddy'    | 35  | Yes     | 3        | Degree          | Yes                           | Computer Engineer       | Semi-Skilled Operative   |
| Polish      | 'Susan'    | 37  | Yes     | 3        | Masters         | Yes                           | Business Manager        | Cleaner                  |
| Polish      | 'Terry'    | 29  | No      | 0        | Masters         | No                            | Business Manager        | Entrepreneur             |
| Polish      | 'Tony'     | 37  | Yes     | 3        | Degree          | No                            | Recent Graduate         | Entrepreneur             |

(Browne, 2005). This became an iterative process until data saturation was achieved. Data saturation, the most common guiding standard for sample size in qualitative research, occurs when the researcher is no longer hearing or finding new or relevant information (Saumare and Given, 2008).

Semi-structured interviews were used to access the interviewees' career narratives. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) describe narrative as both the phenomenon, with people leading storied lives and telling stories of those lives, and the method, where researchers describe those lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of the experience. Narrative inquiry helps the researcher to construct an in-depth understanding of the individuals' perspectives of their contextual experiences (Miller, 2000), creating knowledge of their everyday life and experiences, as well as the meanings they attach to these experiences.

### *Coding and analysis*

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and the qualitative data analysis software, Max QDA 11, was used to abductively code the interviews. Abductive reasoning, a method of knowledge production that inhabits the center point between induction and deduction (Järvensivu and Törnroos, 2010) starts with consequences and then constructs reasons. This is a recursive process where theory, data collection and analysis are all developed concurrently in a logical argumentative process, with the researcher iteratively moving between data analysis and the process of explanation (Timmermans and Tavory, 2012).

The coding followed a three level process: open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Open coding developed the initial categories of information by giving each relevant piece of the transcribed interviews a code, or label. This process resulted in each individual interview having between 80 and 120 codes. For example, some of the motivations for the interviewee choosing to emigrate to Ireland were open coded as *the right to work*, *better wages*, *family member situ in Ireland* and *availability of work*. These open codes were then grouped together and were axial coded as *pull factors*. Axial coding identifies the interconnecting themes between the various open codes, and groups similar codes under overarching themes. The final stage, selective coding, identifies particular themes that form a core theme, a form of critical action or important concept that has the power to illuminate many different aspects of the research (Kolb, 2012). It is around this core theme that the final analysis is based. In continuing with the above coding example, the 'critical action' identified was the *impact of macro contexts* on the interviewees' career actions.

### **Findings and discussion**

The findings, in answering the research question '*how does the act of migration, and the career transitions this entails, affect the skilled migrants' career motivations, actions and outcomes?*', highlight the effects and role of the home and host country structures and contexts in influencing the skilled migrants' career actions. When they made the decision to emigrate, 36 of the interviewees were either working full time, or had recently graduated from university in their home countries. This finding is contrary to earlier work on

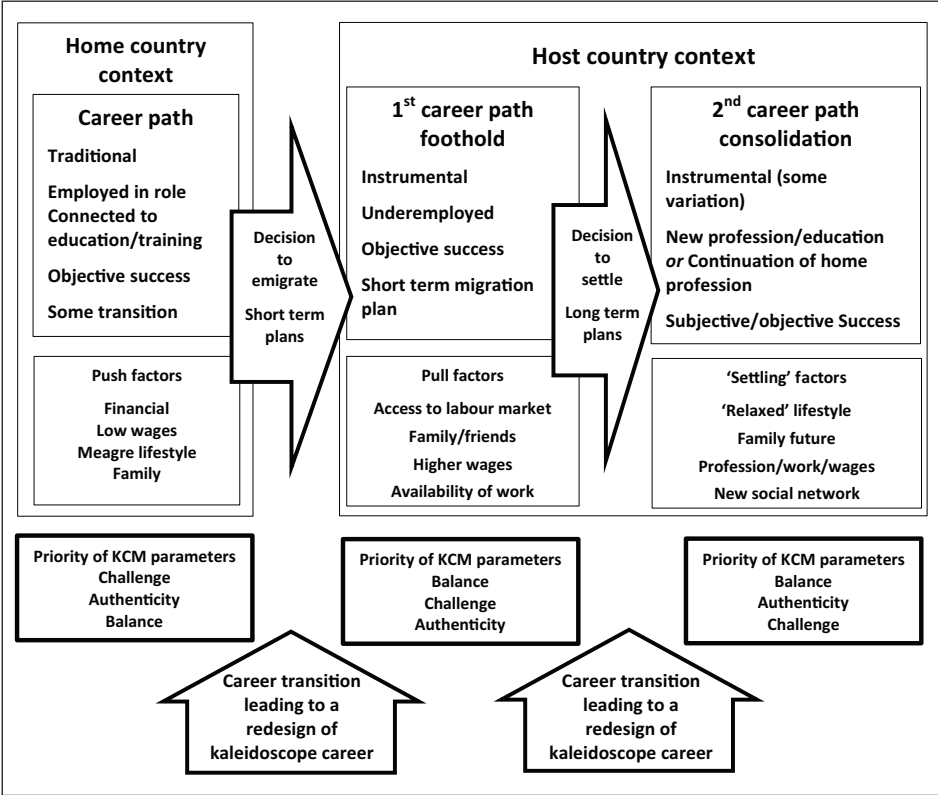


Figure 1. Framework of skilled migrants' career transitions across home and host country.

skilled Polish and Baltic Republic emigration, which cites ‘the inability to find work’ (Saunders, 2015: 106) and the lack of employment opportunities for university graduates (Grabowska, 2003) as major push factors.

While the narratives of each of the migrants is different across their individual life stage, with each migrant crafting their own career path, there are commonalities to their career paths across both male and female respondents. A framework of this career path is illustrated in Figure 1.

Home country career

In their home countries, the majority of the interviewees (n = 28) followed an alpha career pattern, with objective career success to the forefront of their career motivations:

Back in Poland I studied for 5 years in university. I am an electronic technician by trade. It involves IT and that’s what I worked at in the hypermarket . . . By the time I finished I was the manager of [the] IT department. – David (home country occupation: IT manager – host country occupation: line supervisor)

During the home country career path, it was apparent that the need for challenge (career development and stimulating work connected to one's education/training) was at the forefront of the interviewees' kaleidoscope career lenses:

It took me seven years to complete my third level education . . . But I used my education to get a job in a language company, I ran this company . . . I was the manager. It was stressful, but I was in control . . . happy with my life. – Terry (home country occupation: business manager – host country occupation: entrepreneur)

A need for authenticity, as in being genuine to one's career identity, also played a major role in the early home career paths of 21 of the interviewees. For instance, Jack's need for authenticity, as in his sense of professional identity (Pearson et al., 2011), is highlighted in his narrative of how important his profession was to him, both in the home and host country:

I worked hard to become a psychologist, sometimes two jobs to survive, but it is important to me. That is why I fought, and it was a fight . . . so hard to get my professional qualifications recognized here in Ireland. – Jack (home country occupation: psychologist– host country occupation: psychologist)

For those following a professional career path in their home country ( $n = 20$ ), their early career involved a number of years of university education (such as a Bachelor's degree), followed by work experience in an associated field. Again, this path was followed because of a need for challenge (career development and stimulating work connected to one's education/training), as well as a need for authenticity, as in a sense of professional identity gained from working in the field they had trained or were educated in (Pearson et al., 2011): 'I wanted to use my [IT] degree to make a career for myself in IT. I was happy working in IT . . . work was like an advanced university, but I was getting paid for it' (Ian. Home country occupation: IT Technician – host country occupation: semi-skilled factory operative).

Similarly for Ollie, who described his career as a psychologist as his passion 'driven by personal values rather than organizational rewards' (Hall and Chandler, 2004: 2). In an example of the prioritizing of his need for authenticity, Ollie displays an alignment of his values with his work role and the values of his employer: 'I have a Masters in Psychology and extensive experience from working in a centre helping addicts. This was what I wanted to do. It was my passion; helping these people' (Ollie. Home country occupation: psychologist– host country occupation: truck driver).

However, most developed a need for greater balance in their work/life balance, as in an improved quality to their overall life became important. This lack of balance between their work and non-work lives caused a rearranging of the factors in their kaleidoscope careers, as well as acting as a push factor in their decision to emigrate. Twenty-six of the interviewees cite the need to seek a better balance between their work and lifestyle as the main reason for leaving (push factor) their home country (Kropiwiec and King-O'Riain, 2006). This factor was augmented by other push factors, such as lack of career development (challenge) and poor future prospects for their families (balance): 'I was working

two jobs, and my salary in total was only about, I would say, €500 a month. My daughter was born about this time; it just wasn't enough to live on' (Jack . Home country occupation: psychologist – host country occupation: psychologist).

The need for balance, at this stage of their life, was prioritized over the need for authenticity:

Even though I was making furniture . . . it was my ideal job, it was long hours and miserable money. I was living at home . . . But I couldn't live with my 'Ma' [mother] forever . . . that was I decided to move to Ireland. – Anthony (home country occupation: cabinetmaker – host country occupation: semi-skilled factory operative)

For just two interviewees, a lack of professional work experience (Kropiwiec and King-O'Riain, 2006) or perceived future prospects (Grabowska, 2003), both personal and career wise, acted as catalysts for them to leave:

After I graduated, I couldn't get a job using my degree . . . I had never worked in a job where I was using my education . . . well that's the main reason I left, no future, no money, and no idea if it will improve. – Muriel (home country occupation: bar worker – host country occupation: trainee manager)

For 17 of the interviewees the importance of the family institution (Duberley et al., 2006), as in providing a better life balance and future for their children, had an important influence on the decision to emigrate, and to settle in, Ireland (Kropiwiec and King-O'Riain, 2006):

We had three children, and we wanted a better future for them. I think if I was not married I might have stayed, because my work meant a lot to me. But with three children, I had to think of them. – Karen (home country occupation: physiotherapist – host country occupation: carer)

The changing political institutions in the Baltic Republics created contextual effects that were unique to four of the study's eight ethnic Russian interviewees, where institutional nationalism acted as a push factor (Aptekar, 2009):

As a Russian, living in Latvia, I didn't feel comfortable there; life was not good . . . So when I got the chance I came over . . . I moved to Ireland. – Ian (home country occupation: IT Technician – host country occupation: semi-skilled factory operative)

The interviewees' home country career path is an example of how changing macro and micro-level contexts can cause a dynamic effect on the individual's kaleidoscope career, causing a change in the arrangement and priority of the needs of the KCM. The importance of balance, in both the subjective quality of work (less stress and sociable hours) and life (time with family and future prospects for family), above the objective importance of career development and advancement opportunities, becomes very prominent in the interviewees' instrumental career path. The narratives describe the instrumental career as a path followed in pursuit of a work role that ensures financial stability and home-work equilibrium, rather than working to pursue a passion. It is this emphasis on

quality of life, beyond the work context, which bonds the instrumentalist sample in terms of a common career script.

### *Host country 2 career paths*

Originally, for the majority, the planned duration of expatriation was set at two to three years. The objective aim of this migration was to build up financial capital in order to improve the balance of their life. Twenty-six of the interviewees explicitly state they originally came to Ireland with the intention of staying short term (2–4 years). The interviewees came to Ireland to obtain work in any well-paying job, in order to earn higher wages than they could back home. These jobs tended to be in low skilled but well paid roles, or at least well paid compared to what the interviewees earned in their skilled or professional job roles back home. Critically, most made little or no preparation for career development when they emigrated, such as getting their qualifications ratified or their university transcripts translated. This was because of the planned short duration of their emigration, and, more importantly, because they were not moving countries for career development reasons. The need for authenticity or challenge were not prominent factors at this stage of their career. Therefore, with this stage of their kaleidoscope career fluctuation, they put their profession or trade on hold and arranged their career in a new pattern of order and priority, which had the need for balance to the forefront.

When they first arrived in Ireland they developed what this study has termed the ‘foothold’ career path, where they quickly sought out the first available jobs to establish themselves, and their dependents, in a secure setting. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a foothold as ‘a secure position from which further progress may be made’ (“Foothold”, n.d.): ‘We planned to stay 2 to 3 years . . . work hard, earn good money and go back to Poland. At first, I worked as a labourer’ (Paddy. Home country occupation: computer engineer – host country occupation: semi-skilled operative).

However, despite the instrumental nature of their careers, the effects this career path (foothold) had on some migrants’ feelings of authenticity was an area of concern for certain interviewees:

I got hired as a shop assistant in a Polish shop, I had shop work experience. I remember thinking, is my shop work experience more important than my education? – Maria (home country occupation: finance professional – host country occupation: finance professional)

The interviewees eventually realized, usually during a holiday back home, that they would not be repatriating anytime soon. This transition, from short-term to long-term migration, was partly caused by the continuing structural issues back in the migrants’ home countries, but also by the positive effect of the new kaleidoscope career pattern (the Balance focus) in the host country. This next career transition, to a more long-term orientation, led to three possible outcomes from the foothold career path.

The findings also highlight how the interviewees experience career transitions *within* the particular host/home country context, and not just the macro level transition (Zikic and Richardson, 2016) from the home to host country career. For some of the respondents, such as Ian, there were career transitions within the home country. Before migrating

to Ireland, Ian had left his IT role for a lesser, but better paid, manual role as a warehouse operative. This transition was because of family needs and financial pressures while still in his home country. There is also the home country to host country transition. Then, within their host country career path, there was further transition, from the initial 'foothold' career path to the 'consolidation' career path. The study identified three career paths emanating from the initial 'foothold' career path. Each of these outcomes led to the interviewees once again rearranging the pattern of their kaleidoscope career. The outcomes are described in detail next.

Outcomes one and two involve career decisions and actions that lead to the 'consolidation' career path and result in the skilled migrants transitioning to occupations outside of their initial 'foothold' occupations. The majority of our sample were in this category ( $n = 34$ ). In our study, outcome one resulting in the 'consolidation' career path involved 20 of the migrants moving out of their initial 'foothold' career path in the host country and moving into a profession different to the one for which they were qualified back in their home country. However, some of this cohort, in a possible attempt to retain certain levels of authenticity or challenge, did end up in jobs somewhat connected to their original profession, or in jobs connected to their personal interests. For instance, Timmy, who was a crashed car repair specialist back home and is now working as a spray painter in an engineering company. Similarly, Vince, a history teacher back home, has turned what was his gardening hobby into a garden maintenance business, while history is now his hobby. Others, such as Paddy (home country occupation: computer engineer – host country occupation: semi-skilled operative) and Mary (home country occupation: teacher – host country occupation: carer), keep in contact with their home country profession and career identity through private work for cash payments on the black economy.

Outcome two, where the skilled migrants move from their initial 'foothold' occupation in the host country to the 'consolidation' path, represents those respondents where the need for challenge or authenticity was more intense. In our study, this cohort ( $n = 14$ ) eventually succeeded in continuing their home country occupations in the host country. Examples here include Victoria, who continued her nursing career; and Jack, who obtained verification of his qualification as a psychologist. For this cohort the alpha career pattern, where the individual is strongly focused on his/her career (Sullivan and Mainiero, 2007), was most prominent. An example of this is Victoria (home country occupation: nurse – host country occupation: nurse), whose narrative identifies her as following an alpha career pattern, where continuation and advancement of her nursing career are very important to her. Victoria obtained validation for her home country qualifications (specialized intensive care nursing) by taking extra classes and exams in Ireland in order to restart her career from the home country:

I had to return to university, and take more exams . . . it was important to me. I wasn't happy working as a carer . . . Yes I was caring for people, but I am a nurse, so that is what I wanted to work at. – Victoria (home country occupation: nurse – host country occupation: nurse)

The third outcome ( $n = 4$  of the respondents in our study) involves the individual being 'Trapped' on the 'foothold' career path, stuck between settling long term in the host country and a desire to return home. The four 'Trapped' interviewees' narratives

illustrate a perception of a lack of agency and helplessness. Georgina and Alfie, examples of interviewees stuck on the trapped career path, do not perceive their migration as successful. However, for reasons such as ill health or family issues they feel they cannot return to their home countries and are thus 'trapped' in Ireland. Georgina described this experience, of being trapped in the host country, in a low skilled/low paid role, as being similar to being 'stuck in a swamp'. Alfie has separated from his wife and feels trapped here. He feels he must stay in Ireland in order to be close to his children. Yet, he describes himself as no longer settled in Ireland. As regards the KCM: for the Trapped, the need for balance, is to the fore, with little evidence of the need for challenge or authenticity.

All those who progressed to the consolidation path ( $n = 34$ ) were, contrary to the extant literature (Al Ariss et al., 2012; Cook et al., 2011), influenced by agentic career decisions. For those on the consolidation career path, who had changed their occupation and objective career focus in the host country, the balance factor of the kaleidoscope career is now the most prominent. The importance of both the subjective quality of work (less stress and sociable hours) and life (time with family), above the objective importance of career development and advancement opportunities, is very prominent for them: 'My family don't want to leave here; they want to live in the countryside. We can afford a decent house with a garden here. But we couldn't afford one in, or near Dublin, where all the IT jobs are' (Paddy. Home country occupation: computer engineer – host country occupation: semi-skilled operative).

The objective financial aspect of having a means to follow a particular lifestyle is also very relevant. It is this emphasis on the quality of their work/life balance, be it personal and/or family, which bonds this sample in terms of their kaleidoscope career. Work is seen as a means of achieving balance in their quality of life: 'I earn a lot more money working here than I did back home, we have a good life . . . nice apartment and but I also have a lot less stress than back in Latvia' (Ian. Home country occupation: IT Technician – host country occupation: semi-skilled factory operative).

The majority of the interviewees have been living in Ireland for 6–8 years and intend to remain for the foreseeable future. Ten of the interviewees, highlighting the importance of balance in their career, described the 'relaxed' quality of life in Ireland as a major factor influencing their decision to remain in Ireland:

Back in Latvia that [quality of life] didn't exist when I was there, and I don't think it exists now. There is something in Ireland that has made me want to stay; something . . . relaxed, it is hard to explain . . . something that makes it a good country to live in. – Arnold (home country occupation: builder – host country occupation: security guard)

Overall, family-related factors, such as future prospects for children, have a large influence on the interviewees' reasons for settling long term in Ireland. For example, Annie sees her life in Ireland as providing a better future for her two children:

Having a good family life is important. Providing the best future for our children is why we do what we do . . . Working as a carer is how I provide this. It seems appropriate in a way, working as a caregiver to provide and care for my family. – Annie (home country occupation: nurse – host country occupation: senior carer)



As lifestyle and family are the top priorities, with profession a lower priority, the interviewees tend to be underemployed in objective terms. This does not mean that work is not important, or necessarily that the individual is not happy or satisfied in his/her work role. All of the interviewees ( $n = 38$ ) expressed a pragmatic view to work and realized its importance in providing the balanced lifestyle and future they desire. Thirty-three of the interviewees describe themselves as being happy, or content, with their work in Ireland, but happy with the lifestyle that this job has provided for them and/or their families. However, what was more important for these respondents was that lifestyle, future prospects for their family or quality of family life were not some things they were prepared to sacrifice for career development reasons. This emphasizes the strong desire for balance at this stage of the interviewees' kaleidoscope career path. This need for balance, overcoming the desire for a challenging career, is exemplified in David's narrative:

The whole family went to the Canaries last year, and me and 'Angela', we went to Barcelona for a weekend . . . We would never get the money or chance to do this back home . . . I am not an IT manager here, but I have a better life . . . I can see my kids in the morning and be home to help with their school work . . . That's more important than being head of IT. – David (home country occupation: IT manager – host country occupation: line supervisor)

The appeal of an instrumental career was, for many, a consequence of what they perceived as their failed home career. The interviewees adopted a 'been there, done that' attitude. They looked back on what they perceived as a failed home country career, where their pursuit of a challenging, skilled profession failed to provide the lifestyle or balance that they considered important for their life, family or ambition. They make sense of their host country career transition by comparing their perceived failed home career paths and lifestyle, with what they perceive as a successful life and career path in the host country.

This successful host career path has been, for many, achieved by working in an underemployed role ( $n = 23$ ; see Table 1), with 20 of the interviewees in roles unconnected to their home country occupation or education. Yet, the individual narratives present the migrants as satisfied and experiencing subjective career success, illustrating how subjective career motivation (such as lifestyle and work life balance) can explain a voluntary aspect to migrant underemployment.

Contrary to existing literature, which tends to focus on the structural and institutional barriers that cause skilled migrant underemployment, the narratives unpacked in this study highlight the dynamic nature of careers and assert the transformative capacity of career actions (Duberley et al., 2006: 1131). The narratives describe skilled migrants that craft an instrumental career as following a more agentic career path than the existing literature would suggest, and provide an alternative explanation to the phenomenon of migrant underemployment. Critically, the narratives also highlight an awareness of, and reaction to, the structural constraints and barriers faced along the skilled migrants' career paths.

Further studies, such as Mainiero and Sullivan (2005), Sullivan et al. (2009) and Mainiero and Gibson (2017), have found that life stage affects the intensity and mix of

an individual's needs for authenticity, balance and challenge over the course of his/her career. This study finds the career transition between the home and host career paths has a similar dynamic effect on the individual migrant's career. The discontinuous nature of the migrants' careers affects the levels of authenticity, balance and challenge needed in the different stages of their home and host country career paths. In this study, the effects of the career transition between home and host career paths were found to be similar for both male and female migrants, which is in contrast to previous findings on the KCM, which suggest gender differences in career enactment. This may be because the discontinuous nature of the career paths of the interviewees was a common feature for both male and female interviewees, with push and pull factors common to both genders.

It is also notable that the majority of the skilled migrants ( $n = 22$ ) interviewed opted out of professional careers related to their home country skills and qualifications. They fashioned and enacted an instrumentalist career script in Ireland in order to satisfy their need for balance between work, life and family. This career path bears resemblance to the beta kaleidoscope career pattern (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006), where balance is the primary concern, with the need for challenge and authenticity varying as secondary concerns. This beta career pattern was common to both male and female interviewees.

The findings also show that most ( $n = 34$ ) of the interviewees went through a number of career transitions, and not just the single transition from the home to host country. For some this included career transitions in the home country. The career transitions also include the development of two consecutive career paths in the host country, which we term the 'foothold' and 'consolidation' career paths. The first path – 'foothold' – is where the migrant takes employment in a role that will ensure financial means to sustain themselves and their families while finding their feet in the new country. The second path – 'consolidation' – reflects the temporality of career transitions.

The framework highlights the effects of the career transition (between, and within, the home and host countries) on the individual's career motivation, action and perception of success. The effect of the career transitions on the prominence of the three parameters (authenticity, balance and challenge) in the KCM are also highlighted in the framework.

Finally, the quotes that were shared in this section exemplify the dynamic contextual influences on the career actions and outcomes of the skilled migrants in our sample. The temporal nature of careers, as unfolding over time with a 'unique pattern over the individual's lifespan' (Sullivan and Baruch, 2009: 1543) is represented in our framework (see Figure 1).

## **Contribution, limitations and further research opportunities**

This research makes a number of contributions to the skilled migrant and careers literatures. The study investigated the careers of skilled migrants beyond their objective career success and the underemployment categorization, thereby presenting a more complete overview of the concerns and career choices skilled migrants make. This empirical study details evidence of voluntary downward transitions by skilled migrants in the host country. With the exceptions of studies such as Cabrera (2007) and Mainiero and Sullivan (2006) that emphasized voluntary downward transitions for females, and Hall's (1976 )

protean career concept outlining the possibility of people transitioning downward, there are few studies of people taking voluntary demotions/downward career shifts.

This study finds the career transition between home and host career paths has a similar dynamic effect on the individual migrant's kaleidoscope career to the effect that life stages were found to have on the kaleidoscope careers of previous research populations. Just like a 'kaleidoscope that produces changing patterns when the tube is rotated and its glass chips fall into new arrangements' (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005: 106), migrants adjust the pattern of their careers by rotating different aspects in their lives to arrange their host country work and non-work lives into new paths and outcomes (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005). We posit that this rotation of different aspects of the migrants' lives leads to the migrants fashioning and enacting an instrumental approach to their career paths in the host country. The study found the effects of the career transitions, between home and host career paths, were similar for both male and female interviewees, which is in contrast to previous findings on the KCM where the focus was on gender differences in the career outcomes. This may be because the discontinuous nature of the career paths of the interviewees was a common feature for both male and female interviewees. In addition, the instrumental career paths, for both male and female interviewees, tended to follow a beta kaleidoscope career pattern (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2006), with balance being the primary concern for this cohort, both male and female.

This research found that what constitutes career and career success for the sample population varied between their home and host country career paths. The instrumentality of their career success in Ireland is not something that we found in our review of the extant literature on skilled migrants.

Finally, the study ameliorates the understanding of, and answers a call for more research into the impact of context on the careers of internationally mobile workers. The study answers this call by unpacking the context-specific career actions and outcomes of skilled migrants working in a host country.

The research undertaking is not without its limitations. Given the researchers' interest in providing a deeper analysis of a sample of skilled migrants' careers, a qualitative approach was adopted in this study. The findings from the sample size of 38 participants cannot be generalized to the wider population of skilled migrants. However, the study does provide an unpacking of the motivations and actions in the careers of skilled migrants in both their home and host country.

Our research opens up several further avenues for future research. For instance, our study shows how the host and home country contexts are important and relevant when studying skilled migrants' careers. All the participants in this study were able to legitimately move to and work in Ireland, given their home countries' membership of the European Union. Therefore, many of the obstacles faced by other migrants did not apply to them, such as visa restrictions or difficulties in entering the host country legitimately. It would be interesting to compare their experiences with those from non-EU countries, for instance, and to further unpack nuances in their experiences and perceptions of their career challenges and facilitators in the same host country. Similarly, comparing the experiences of skilled migrants from the Eastern European EU accession countries who may have moved to a different host country would be interesting in order to ascertain the host country effects on skilled migrants' career orientations and career perceptions. More

research on the careers of semi-skilled, unskilled and illegal migrants would also be welcomed in order to compare experiences across different types/categories of migrants. Future research could unpack further the factors that facilitate skilled migrants either continuing in their profession in the host country, or moving into a new host country profession. Such studies could look at factors such as the talent management of skilled migrants (Crowley-Henry and Al Ariss, 2016), of individuals following boundaryless or protean careers (Crowley-Henry, Benson and Al Ariss, 2018), or the importance of networks and its utilization as a career management behaviour (Forret, 2014).

From a career theory point of view, this study, importantly, unpacks the duality (of both structure and agency respectively) of careers, and their effects on the career actions and outcomes of the interviewees. The ability of many of the contemporary career theories, such as the protean and boundaryless career, to effectively capture the nature of modern careers has been questioned (Guest and Rodrigues, 2012). Many contemporary career theories have emphasized the individual responsibilities of agentic career actors. However, these perspectives do not conceptualize 'the individual as acting in a broad life context, constrained by . . . personal life factors or events beyond the individual's control' (Lee et al., 2011: 1533). Our study, conversely, does that, with its unpacking of the choices, actions and contextual influences faced by the migrants,

While the macro and meso implications are not discussed in this article, it is apparent that, in many cases, qualified migrants are not working in positions commensurate with their educational qualifications. The human capital pool in nation states is therefore under-utilized, with consequences for countries and industries, particularly if these under-utilized skills are in areas where skills shortages exist. This would suggest that both macro and meso level talent management strategies and programmes are failing to take into account skilled migrants (Crowley-Henry et al., 2016), making this an important area for future study.

## **Conclusions**

This article shares the findings from an in-depth qualitative study on skilled migrants from Eastern Europe who moved to Ireland. The findings contribute to filling gaps in the skilled migrant, international careers and IHRM literature (Crowley-Henry et al., 2016) at the individual (Al Ariss et al., 2014; Guo and Al Ariss, 2015; Zikic et al., 2010) and contextual levels (Crowley-Henry et al., 2016), specifically pertaining to both the host and home career paths of this particular cohort of skilled migrants. It has furthered our knowledge on the nature and outcomes of skilled migrant careers as experienced and lived by the sample population, as they adjusted to their international career transition between home and host country.

Theoretically, we show that the KCM enables a valuable insight into how skilled migrants' careers unfold from the home to host country context, developing that model beyond its male/female gender focus. Indeed, the KCM facilitated a more nuanced and inclusive unpacking of the dynamic and varied aspects of career influences from the interviewees' career narratives.

Our findings highlight the instrumental nature of careers for skilled migrants. They offer an alternative explanation for some of the often cited underemployment, which it is

claimed that skilled migrants experience (in studies such as Al Ariss et al., 2012; Alberti et al., 2013; Almeida et al., 2014; Cross and Turner, 2012; Dietz et al., 2015; Hakak and Al Ariss, 2013). The instrumental career serves as a means to a greater end, be that enabling a perceived better quality of life, family focus or overall well-being. We argue that careers need to be considered holistically as interwoven with other aspects of life. Lifestyle, well-being (health/stress levels) and family life tend to be prioritized by the skilled migrants in this study, thus making their objectively perceived potential underemployment more acceptable to them. A 'one size fits all' career conceptualization is therefore not suggested for studying skilled migrant careers, but a more nuanced and holistic interpretation of the career influencing dimensions is required. To finish, the findings of this study could be best summed up by one of the research participants, David, as follows: 'Am I happy with my job? No, I wouldn't say that... Content? Yes, I'm content with my job..., but I'm very happy with the life my job has given me.'

### Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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## Appendix I. Interview topic guide

Questions in plain text are from first, original guide – *Questions in italics were added to cover information/new questions developed during pilot interviews, which were then added to the topic guide as it evolved.*

### *i. Background to Interview*

Essential question: Tell me about yourself, your background and life back home.

The focus here is gathering information on the migrant, their home country career capital and how the subjects see themselves leading up to making the decision to migrate. A migrant's career capital is the motivation, expertise and network connections that they have accumulated through their career. This part of the interview focuses on the migrant's past work experiences, past qualifications, education, social network and identity.

Probing questions if required: What did you study in university? What did you work at back home in XXX? Was your job connected to your qualification? *If not why not?* Can you elaborate on that? How did you get this job? Have you ever worked in a role that your qualification/degree/masters is connected to? *Are you married? Were you married before you decided to leave \*\*\*\*? Did you have family, children, before leaving? Had anyone in your family emigrated before you? Had you travelled before?*

### *ii. Motivation to Emigrate*

Main questions: Why did you choose to emigrate? Why did you emigrate to Ireland?

The theme this information is required for is the migrant's reasons for migrating and the migrant's reasons for migrating to Ireland. The research's aim is to find out about their career experiences in Ireland, with the objective to obtain the migrant's views on the following themes: Career Development, Push/Pull factors, Identity (migrant/SIE), (possible) Structural/Career Barriers, Capital Mobilization.

Probing questions: Were you working when you decided to migrate? *Why did you leave that job? Why did you leave your 'home country'? Did you have support or help from family/friends/organization etc. already living abroad? Did you come straight to Ireland? If not where did you migrate to first? What was your experience there? Did you feel you had any real choice in the decision to leave? Why did you then migrate to/on to Ireland? What did you know about Ireland? What were your expectations for yourself in Ireland, career-work-lifestyle? Were your initial expectation met? Did your partner/family migrate with you? If not when did they travel? Was there a role*

*model or influence in your decision to migrate, and in your decision to come to Ireland? How did you see yourself, as a migrant? Would you have preferred to stay at home if circumstance were different?*

### iii. Career and Work life in Ireland

Main questions: Tell me about your work life/career since moving to Ireland.

The theme being explored here is the migrant's Career in Ireland. I want to find out about their career experiences in Ireland, with the objective to obtain the migrant's views on the following themes: Career Development, (possible) Career Barriers, Capital Mobilization, Career Outcomes and Identity.

Probing questions: *What does career mean to you? How has your career progressed to date? Who or what influences your career decisions? Is your present role connected to your qualification/Trade/experience from back home? How did you get your job/role? Are, or were, your skills/experience/qualifications used or recognized in your work in Ireland experiences? What skills/knowledge/connections – forms of capital – if any, have been beneficial in their career development in Ireland? What have been the main obstacles to obtaining skilled work, or work more suited to your skills in Ireland? Can you rate your job satisfaction; are you happy with your career? If unhappy, or not satisfied, are you looking for a more suitable job? Why work at something that you are not happy doing? What steps have you taken to improve your career? How important is your work/job/career to you? How important is your work/life balance? How do you see yourself now, are you a migrant, Irish, what?*

### iv. Future Career Plans

Main questions: Tell me about your career and life plan for the future.

The theme here relates to the migrants' future plans for their career (in Ireland). I will need to find out about their future career plans. Does this involve staying in Ireland, with the objective to obtain the migrant's views on the following themes: Future Career Development, Future Plans, nomenclature best suited to the population (SIE, migrant, localized worker)?

Probing questions: Do you see yourself staying in Ireland? Why? Do you see your career changing if you stay? *What effect has your career experiences in Ireland had on you, your life? Do you intend to obtain further training or education? If so why? So can you say you are happy with your career in Ireland?*