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# Decolonizing Settler Workspace: Insights from an Indigenous Meaning of Work Perspective

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Decolonizing Settler Workspace:

Insights from an Indigenous Meaning of Work Perspective

by

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A THESIS

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### **Abstract**

The present study conducted a literature review on divergent streams of research in the ‘Meaning of Work’ (MW) literature and proposed a theoretical model that encapsulates existing knowledge. I explored the links and relevance of the mainstream MW (Meaning of Work) literature, as represented by the proposed model, to the literature on Indigenous employment. Using this model as an analytical foundation, I conducted qualitative content and thematic analyses on interview data from 18 Indigenous employees of Western Canadian universities, representing diverse professions, seniority levels, and genders. My analyses show that the criteria for meaningful work for my Indigenous employee participants were linked to their cultural identities.

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## Chapter 1 - Introduction

Work is a consuming activity that dominates a significant portion of a person's lifespan; therefore, people often want their job, career, and work to mean something more than a paycheck or to pass the time (Mei, 2019). Humans have an intrinsic need for meaning (Yeoman, 2014; Li-Wiersman & Morris, 2009), and we often satiate this need through work (Arendt, 2013). Those who find their work meaningful have greater job satisfaction (Kamdron, 2005), a higher sense of well-being (Arnold et al., 2007), better health (Allan et al., 2019), and greater general life satisfaction (Steger et al., 2012). Thus, accessing and attaining meaningful work<sup>1</sup> is important in predicting positive life outcomes.

Individuals' ability to attain meaningful work is dependent on employment<sup>2</sup> availability and employment quality available to them. By employment availability, I refer the individuals' access to any employment as well as employment options at different professions and income brackets. By employment quality, I refer to the various factors that influence one's experience once they are hired, such as organizational support, relationships of co-workers/leaders, income, and workload. In Canada, both employment availabilities and employment qualities are affected by demographic categories (e.g., Allahar & Côté, 1998; Fuller & Vokso, 2008). Groups that have

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, "meaningful work" denotes a job or set of tasks in which an individual finds purpose or fulfillment. In this thesis, the term "meaningful work" pertains to the individual's perception and experience, rather than societal or cultural prescriptions of what constitutes meaningful work.

<sup>2</sup> In this thesis, "employment" is defined as participation in the wage labor economy, wherein an employee receives compensation from an employer for their labor. The term does not encompass economic activities carried out domestically or within the community that fall outside the bounds of the employee-employer relationship.

been historically marginalized—including women, racialized individuals, people with disabilities, and Indigenous Peoples—encounter systematic barriers to employment (Agocs, 2002). Consequently, their access to opportunities for meaningful work may also be unequal.

The topic of this study is the meaning of work<sup>3</sup> and the attainment of meaningful work for Indigenous employees in Canadian post-secondary institutions. Specifically, I focus on the relationship between their sense of meaningful work and their employment experience<sup>3</sup>. In this study, I seek to advance research by 1) expanding on the mainstream meaning of work literature and 2) expanding existing understandings of workplace inequality experienced by Indigenous employees from how they experience and attain meaningful work. Indigenous Canadians and Employment

In the Canadian context, the term ‘Indigenous Peoples’ generally refers to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis<sup>45</sup>. These groups are the descendants of the first peoples who lived in North America and have been there for thousands of years prior to European arrival and the establishment of Canada as a nation-state (Adelman & Aron, 1999). Ever since the arrival of European settlers in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the original inhabitants of Canada experienced substantial

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Meaning of work’ refers to the criteria from which an individual decides if their work is meaningful or not. Thus, the ‘meaning of work’ is the criteria to the attainment of meaningful work. The term has different conceptualizations depending on the area of research, an overview of different streams of research and conceptualization of the ‘meaning of work’ is provided in the literature review section of this thesis.

<sup>4</sup> Indigeneity is both a personal identity and a collective identity (Palmater, 2011). A person may identify with an Indigenous ancestry or have Indigenous heritage but are disconnected from their Indigenous community or excluded as Indigenous based on governmental classification (Kenrick & Lewis, 2004; Sarivaara et al., 2013).

<sup>5</sup> In this thesis, the terms ‘Indigenous person’ and ‘Indigenous Individual’ to refer to any individuals who claim membership or heritage to any Indigenous communities in Canada.

marginalization (Greer, 2018). In a process now coined as colonialism (Logan, 2015), settlers were driven by their desire to claim lands, ecological resources, and political competition among themselves. They proceeded without regard and caution for the Indigenous peoples' rich history, cultures, well-being, and rights (Greer, 2018; Lowman & Barker, 2015).

A comprehensive review of Canada's colonial history is beyond the scope of this paper, and my primary focus is on how historical and ongoing colonialism experienced by Indigenous Peoples affects their ability to attain meaningful work. Canadian Indigenous populations are systematically disadvantaged in terms of many aspects of employment. On average, Indigenous Canadians have a lower employment rate (Health Canada, 2014), lower income (Anderson, 2019), and face barriers to higher education that are needed to access high-income jobs (Hu et al., 2019) compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts. Even after an Indigenous person has secured employment, the attainment of meaningful work is often more challenging (Hunt, 2022) because of cultural differences (e.g., Steel & Heritage, 2020) and racism and discrimination (Lashta et al., 2016).

### **The Need to Decolonize Settlers' Workspaces**

Within Canada, decolonization involves an examination of how colonialism has impacted Indigenous Peoples and responds to the history of oppression they have endured. In the

employment and workplace context, decolonization would mean investigating and ameliorating systemic factors that negatively affect Indigenous employees<sup>6</sup>.

Through centuries of colonial processes, including the infamous residential school system (Wilk et al., 2017), land appropriation and destruction (Pasternak, 2015), displacement (Emsley, 2010), and numerous other colonial processes, Indigenous Canadians have occupied economically disadvantageous positions compared to other Canadians (Hajizadeh et al., 2018)<sup>7</sup>. Even after an Indigenous person has secured employment, they often feel disconnected from their community (Julian et al., 2017), discriminated against (Cotter, 2022), do not feel they belong (Hunt, 2022), and experience identity and cultural tension (Hunt, 2022) due to colonial processes that can occur inside settler organizations, such as racism (Lashta et al., 2016), lack of sufficient organizational support (Julien et al., 2017), and discriminatory hiring policies (e.g., Proulx, 2020), among others.

Actions and research are urgently needed to improve the Canadian Indigenous employment situation. While Indigenous-owned business ecosystems are developing (Anderson et al., 2006; Voyageur, 2014), settler organizations, such as governmental bodies, healthcare

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<sup>6</sup> In this thesis, the term 'Indigenous employee' denotes Indigenous individuals working within the wage economy for an employer or organization, either in full-time or part-time roles, in exchange for financial compensation. Unless stated otherwise, this term specifically refers to Indigenous individuals employed by non-Indigenous organizations or employers.

<sup>7</sup> In this thesis, I use the term 'colonialism' in the employment context to describe systemic processes and factors affect an Indigenous employees' ability access employment or impede their employment quality. I use the term 'colonialism' an umbrella term to encompass the effect of all colonial processes have on Indigenous peoples and their employment. Example of colonial processes in Canada include slavery (Neeaganagwedgin, 2012), Residential School System (Wilk et al., 2017), mass incarceration (Chartrand, 2019), commodification of traditional lands (Pasternak, 2015) and more. Please see Baker et al. (2017) for an overview of colonialism in Canada.

systems, and non-Indigenous private companies, play pivotal roles in offering economic and employment opportunities to Indigenous individuals and communities (Anderson, 1997). Yet, for these opportunities to be truly beneficial and equitable, it is imperative to decolonize settler workspaces to create a labor environment where Indigenous employees can work and thrive (e.g., Pickering, 2004).

Though excluded in the telling of mainstream history, Indigenous labor was critical in the development of the Canadian economy and its infrastructures (Knight, 1978; High, 1996; Tough, 2011). Moving forward, Indigenous employees will continue to become an increasingly important actor in the Canadian economy as the Indigenous population continues to increase (Statistics Canada, 2018). Over the past four decades, Voyageur (2014) highlighted the increasing involvement of Indigenous communities in the mainstream Canadian economy and their rising pursuit of higher education and advanced professional roles. The decolonialization of settlers' workspaces will ensure that Canada is ready to tap into the growing workforce's economic potential and ensure that all employees have equal access to meaningful work regardless of their cultural affiliation.

Decolonizing settler workplaces requires enhancing both the accessibility and quality of employment. Researchers in organizational studies have delved into classic variables within industrial-organizational psychology to understand their impact on Indigenous employees, thereby shedding light on effective strategies to decolonize these work environments. For example, Lampe (1975) interviewed 89 Yukon Indigenous males on their perception of job acceptance and retention factors, such as organizational support, culture, and discrimination. What did they ask for? More recently, Julien et al. (2017) interviewed 56 Indigenous employees across six Canadian provinces and investigated organizational support factors that negatively

affect Indigenous employees' work-life balance. What did they find? Hunt (2022) interviewed seven Indigenous employees to examine factors behind employment dissatisfaction and low retention of Indigenous employees. Hunt (2022) found that some Canadian Indigenous employees feel uncomfortable with the physical layout of the workspace, hierarchical organizational structure, and transactional organization culture of their settler employers<sup>8</sup>.

A lesser-examined organizational factor that influences employment experiences, and which could offer insights into decolonizing settler workspaces, is the 'meaning of work', or 'work meaningfulness'. In studying this variable, we examine the criteria and pathways from which Indigenous employees would judge their work or employment as meaningful or meaningless. Spowart and Marshall (2015) found connections to their traditional culture, that relational support from local Indigenous communities and the ability to give back to local communities provide a sense of meaningfulness to young Canadian Indigenous men's work life and future. Miley and Read (2013) observed that Australian Indigenous<sup>9</sup>, and White employees define meaningful work differently; they argued that meaningful work for Indigenous employees

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<sup>8</sup> In this thesis, I will draw on Indigenous and non-Indigenous accounts of employment experience from existing literature. Though the tremendous diversity of Canadian Indigenous cultural histories may diverge the employment experiences of Indigenous persons across Canada, the present study focuses on experiences of Indigenous employment as the structural product of historical Indigenous and settler relations; thus, the generalized theorization and investigation of Canadian Indigenous employment experience in settler organizations are appropriate.

<sup>9</sup> The colonial relations and histories in these countries are comparable but not identical. Readers should be mindful that the examples of Indigenous employment experiences I provide from these countries still have unique constraints specific to each country. For example, the USA's Indigenous populations are culturally heterogeneous and occupy a low percentage of the total population (United States\ Census Bureau, 2023). In contrast, New Zealand's Indigenous population is homogenous (i.e. Māori), and occupies a larger percentage of the total population (StatsNZ, 2020). Nonetheless, the shared historical similarities mean that examples from these countries could illustrate Canadian Indigenous work experience could be or can be.

requires satisfying kinship obligations<sup>10</sup>, integrating relational/Indigenous-specific knowledge<sup>11</sup>, and a sense of connectedness<sup>12</sup>. This thesis will add to this line of research.

## **Purpose of the Study**

This research employs a meaning of work perspective to explore the decolonization in settler's workspaces. The meaning of the work perspective premises that everyone has a fundamental human need for meaningful work. This study employs a meaning of work perspective to examine how being employed in a settler organization affects the process of an Indigenous employee of attaining meaningful work. This includes an examination of Indigenous employees' criteria for meaningful work, the barriers embedded in settler organizations that impede meaningful work, and how Indigenous employees attain meaningful work despite these barriers.

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<sup>10</sup> In this thesis, terms like 'kinship obligation' and 'Indigenous family value' refer to an established phenomenon that Indigenous people are often deeply embedded in responsibility, roles, and relationship that Indigenous individuals have with their family, community members, their environment, and their ancestry. This is beyond and distinct from convention Western perspective of family ties or blood relations (Topa & Navaez, 2022).

<sup>11</sup> In this thesis, I use the term 'relational knowledge' and 'Indigenous-specific knowledge' interchangeable. These terms refer to ways of understanding or knowledge that exist within specific Indigenous communities or traditions. Relational knowledge cannot be decontextualized from their cultural and relational context. The discussion on the nature of relational knowledge is beyond the scope of thesis, for more detail please read Abadía and Poor (2017), Haig-Brown (2008), and Romm (2017).

<sup>12</sup> In this thesis, the term 'sense of connectedness' refers to how an Indigenous employees feel connected to another entity in a positive way through their work or employment. The 'sense of connectedness' is different from the 'sense of belonging' in industrial-organization psychology where it refers to the degree an employee is connected to their immediate employment workgroup, team, or organization (Waller, 2020). For Indigenous employee, the 'sense of connectedness' may go beyond connection to their employment workgroup, team, or organization (but not excluding them), the 'sense of connection' may also indicate the degree an Indigenous employee feel a connection to their traditional community, connection to traditional landscape, spirituality, or Indigenous identity through work (Miley & Read, 2013).



The purpose of this study is threefold:

- 1) Review the meaning of work literature and explore how the literature pertains to Canadian Indigenous work experience.
- 2) Conduct a qualitative analysis of interview data concerning the Indigenous employee experiences from the meaning of work perspective.
- 3) Drawing from the analysis, I will discuss how the meaning of work perspective can elucidate how post-secondary institutions (and other non-Indigenous employers) can decolonize their workspace and better support their Indigenous employees.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

The following literature review section will provide an overview of the meaning of work literature. I explore the value propositions of the meaning of work literature, and then I summarize divergent research streams into paradigms and discuss the nuances of each paradigm. In the latter part of the literature review, I discuss the applicability of this literature on Indigenous employment experience and explore additional factors that need to be considered specific to Indigenous employment. After reviewing the literature, I introduce my research questions. In the methods section, I describe my coding and analysis process, where I used qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis to analyze interview data from 18 Indigenous employees at post-secondary institutions. The results section outlines all the categories and themes produced during the analysis and coding process. In the discussion section, I discuss the implication of my findings to the larger meaning of work literature and Indigenous employment research.

## Chapter 2 – Literature Review

### The Meaning of Work & Meaningful Work

Meaning of work is an important area of academic investigation for two reasons. First, employers and society at large have a moral obligation to maximize work meaningfulness because meaningful work is essential to human dignity (Bowie, 2019). Second, meaningful work has significant utilitarian benefits for both employees and employers.

Evidence suggests that meaningless work can harm an individual's autonomy, judgment, and self-efficacy, leading to various social, physical, and mental harm (Yeoman, 2014). Consequently, it can be argued that managers and employers have a moral responsibility to ensure that their employees are provided meaningful work (Harding, 2019). Individuals and employees are morally obligated to seek meaningful work, while employment providers are argued to have a moral obligation to provide it. According to Michaelson (2019), morally autonomous individuals should pursue meaningful work when it is available, as they have a duty to cultivate themselves and not squander opportunities when meaningful work is accessible.

The second reason why the academic inquiry of work meaning is crucial is that meaningful work has demonstrated practical benefits for both employees and employers. Using meta-analytic structural equation modeling on data from 44 primary studies on work meaningfulness, Allan and colleagues (2019) found that meaningful work has strong to moderate correlations with job satisfaction (also, Kamdron, 2005), life satisfaction, a sense of life meaningfulness, and better general health. Having meaningful work for employees is also beneficial to employers. Allen and colleagues' model (2019) also showed that employees with meaningful work have higher work engagement, organizational commitment, and job

satisfaction, subsequently predicting higher self-rated performance, higher organizational citizenship behaviors, and lower withdrawal intention.

The positive outcomes of meaningful work are evident across studies with diverse samples. For example, in a longitudinal study on work meaningfulness among Israeli employees, Hapaz (2002) and Hapaz and Fu (2002) identify a link between work meaningfulness and work centrality. Employees who find their work meaningful often prioritize work over other life demands. This finding was consistent in both 1981 and 1993 measurements. Similarly, with a North American sample (90% White American), Steger et al.'s (2012) correlation analysis found that having meaningful work correlates with lower employee absenteeism.

While it may not always be feasible or ethically mandated for organizations to provide perfectly meaningful jobs (Bailey & Madden, 2017; Yeoman et al., 2019), ensuring meaningful work has been proven to enhance organizational productivity and bolster employee well-being (Allen et al., 2019), hence meaning of work is an important area of organizational studies. However, in my literature review, I found that the meaning of work is a relatively underrepresented area in organizational studies. I suspect it is primarily due to conceptual ambiguity in this literature.

Terms like 'Meaningful Work' and 'Meaning of Work' are explored across various disciplines, with definitions varying by discipline (Yeoman et al., 2019). This leads to inconsistent use of terminology and conceptual ambiguity. For example, in philosophy, the 'meaning of work' pertains to the debate about the moral value of work as a human activity and how much work should constitute a good life (Brief & Nord, 1990). On the other hand, social scientists define the "Meaning of Work" as the meanings people attribute to their work or

employment (Yeoman et al., 2019), as well as the meaning-making (sense-making process) that occurs through work (in philosophy, this is called "Meaning *in* Work").

Even within social sciences and management studies, the definitions of 'Meaningful Work' and 'Meaning of Work' can diverge based on theoretical orientations<sup>13</sup> and on the chosen research methodology, such as ethnography, interviews, or quantitative survey research<sup>14</sup>. The multicuity, and incommensurability, of theoretical orientations and methodologies create an excess of definition models whose connections to each other are unclear. These variations and intricacies create a gap that hinders the integration of this literature into the larger realm of organizational studies. In the following paragraphs, I will address this gap by identifying and summarizing distinctive research trajectories in the literature, particularly within social sciences and management studies. I aim to draw connections between these divergent research avenues to create an overarching theoretical framework that encapsulates our current understanding on the 'Meaning of Work' and 'Meaningful Work'.

### **The Meaning of Work Research Streams**

In psychology and management studies, the 'Meaning of Work' and 'Meaningful Work' are studied through three distinct paradigms. First, the 'Meaning of Work' is studied as the

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<sup>13</sup> How researchers perceive 'Meaning of Work' and 'Meaningful Work'—whether as products of individual agency or as outcomes of cultural and social institutions—significantly influences the content and scope of these terms.

<sup>14</sup> There is a critical lack of discourse between ethnographic, interview and quantitative survey studies on 'Meaning of Work' and 'Meaningful Work'. Each methodology formulates and confirms these definitions differently: ethnographies typically rely on historicization and participant observation, interview studies favor content/thematic analyses, while quantitative studies often combine exploratory and confirmatory analyses.

proportional role 'work' plays in one's life and the worth/value a person attributed to that work per societal norms (Harpaz & Fu, 2017; MOW International Research Tea, 1987). Second, the 'Meaning of Work' is studied as the harmony between the 'self,' 'work/tasks,' and the 'workplace' (Chalofsky & Cavallaro, 2013). Third, the "Meaning[s] of Work" has been studied as Guiding Influences that affect individuals' actions, experiences, and identity at work (Rosso et al., 2010)<sup>15</sup>. These influences can be conceptualized as criteria (e.g., "do I make sufficient amount of money from this job?", "do I get along with my coworkers?") or as experience or affiliation in one's life that affects one's definition or perception of meaningful work (e.g., religion, spirituality, community affiliation; see Rosso et al., 2010 for a comprehensive list).

### **Paradigm 1: Work-Centrality Paradigm**

The Work Centrality Paradigm was pioneered by the MOW project (Meaning Of Work International Research, 1987), which conducted large-scale interviews on eight industrialized countries (Belgium, Germany, Great Britain, Israel, Japan, Netherlands, USA, Yugoslavia). Their "Meaning of Work" model consists of the following five dimensions: 1) work centrality, 2) societal norms regarding work, 3) valued work outcomes, 4) importance of work goals, and 5) work-role identification. Work centrality denotes the anticipated or perceived significance and dedication of one's professional life compared to other facets of one's existence, such as family and leisure. Societal norms regarding work refer to the collective expectations and unwritten

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<sup>15</sup> My use of the term 'paradigm' serves to distill and organize the expansive and varied literature on the 'meaning of work.' The 'paradigm' terminology is not common in the literature.

rules within a society about work-related behaviors, such as the traditional work hours. Valued work outcomes refer to the positive results or benefits of employment or work that workers appreciate and seek, such as compensation, the capacity to provide for one's family or job prestige. The importance of work goals refers to the degree to which achieving professional milestones or completing work tasks is important to an individual daily<sup>16</sup>. Work-role identification refers to the degree that an individual identifies with their profession or organization<sup>17</sup>, and the degree that identification is salient in the person's general sense of self.

The research findings under paradigm 1 are statistically rigorous and stable over time in each country (e.g., Brief, 1991; Harpas & Fu, 2002; Kuchinke et al., 2011). However, assessing the meaning of work from a national cultural perspective is problematic because the notion of national culture fails to account for factors such as within-nation variability, acculturation, the evolving nature of cultural values, and cultural tightness and looseness (Rothmann et al., 2019). This is especially problematic in the Indigenous contexts, as Indigenous populations are often described as 'nations within nations' (Anik Gagné, 1994). Indigenous peoples often have a distinct culture from their colonizers, but studies using national-level statistics systematically distort or underrepresent Indigenous populations. Furthermore, Indigenous peoples across the globe have immense cultural diversity but often share similar circumstances due to the shared

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<sup>16</sup> This is the conceptually the same as 'work orientations' which are discussed in a subsequent section of this thesis.

<sup>17</sup> Professional identity and organizational identity are different types of identities. Professional identity pertains to one's attachment to a profession (e.g., identity as an accountant, nurse, teacher). Organizational identities pertain to one's attachment as a member of an organization (e.g., identity as a member of corporation A). These two identities are conflated in Paradigm 1, as it focuses on the proportionality of either professional or organizational identities on an individual total sense of self (general identity).

history of Western colonialism, especially Indigenous peoples in Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand (Cornell, 2005). While using a national-level statistics approach is not suitable for examining Indigenous populations, concepts like work centrality, societal norms about work, valued work outcomes, importance of work goals (or work orientation), and professional/organizational identification provide valuable perspectives for understanding the employment experiences of Indigenous individuals.

### Work Orientations

Of the five dimensions from the MOW project (Meaning Of Work International Research, 1987), *the importance of work goals*, correspond to the *work orientation literature* in organizational psychology and management studies. Work orientation is a typology of workers' attitudes toward their work (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). It is premised that the meanings workers find in their work can impact their work orientation (Boova et al., 2019).

Wrzesniewski and colleagues' (1997) influential paper identified three work orientations: Job, Career, and Callings. People with a Job orientation are only interested in material or monetary benefits from work. People with a Career orientation are interested in work beyond monetary benefits and want to pursue greater social standings and achievement through work. People with a Calling orientation are interested in work beyond monetary gain or career advancement, and they gain other personal, religious, or moral meanings through work. Willner and colleagues (2020) identified two additional orientations. The Social Embedded orientation describes people who work to satiate their social needs. The Busyness orientation describes people who work primarily to pass the time.

While Boova and colleagues (2019) proposed a model delineating the relationships between work orientation, the meaning of work, and culture, the relationships between these constructs are under-researched, especially in a cross-cultural context. Each of the five orientations appears to correspond to a different source of meaning and a different calibre of meaningfulness experience. For example, a Career orientation could be explained by a high drive for self-actualization (Feldman & Weitz, 1991); a lack of meaningful experience at work may explain Business and Job orientations.

Most critically, it is currently unclear whether work orientation is resulted from intrinsic individual quality (like personality traits) or the result of an individual's (in)ability to procure meaningful work (Boova et al., 2019). In a sample of 370 Chinese accounting practitioners, Lan and colleagues (2012) found that dissatisfaction with work is linked to job orientation, whereas satisfaction with promotion is linked to career orientation, and satisfaction with current job with calling orientation. Lan and colleagues' (2012) findings suggest that work orientations are not only intrinsic individual qualities but also the results of an individual's sense of satisfaction with one's employment circumstances. Whether work orientations are products of personality or values, or the products of employee and employment environment compatibility is currently unclear (Schabram et al., 2023).

In cross-cultural settings, even when individuals desire a deeper sense of purpose from their work, external factors may prevent them from achieving it. Such constraints might manifest in work orientations, but these are often a result of institutional limitations rather than individual preferences. For example, in a qualitative interview study of 45 qualified immigrant workers in Canada, Spain, and France, Zikic and colleagues (2010) show immigrants experience cross-cultural barriers such as a lack of local networks, recognition of foreign credentials, and language



barriers. These barriers, and how immigrant workers perceive them, affect workers' attitudes toward their careers and work satisfaction. The link between how cross-cultural circumstances affect career orientations is underdeveloped in the existing literature.

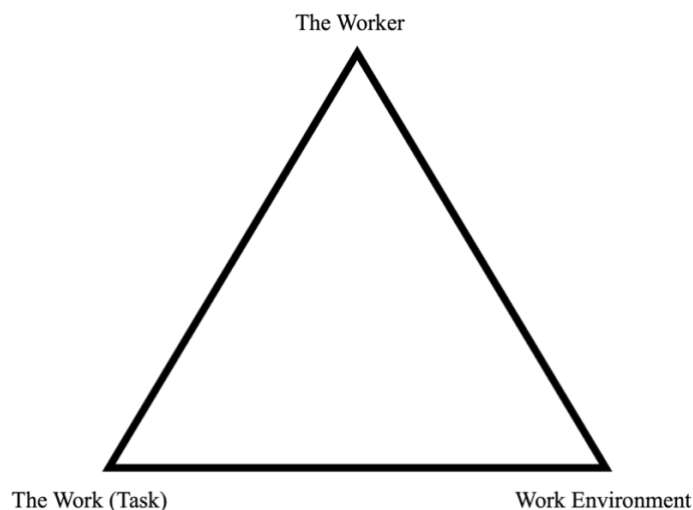
Further research and theory development are needed to delineate the relationship between work orientation typology and meaningful work, whether as criteria or product of meaningful(less) work experience. Research also needs to establish if work orientations are products of personality or personal values or products of the compatibility between employee and employment circumstances. Despite these shortcomings, the work orientation typology remains useful in describing how individuals experience meaningfulness at work.

### **Paradigm 2: Harmony Paradigm**

Chalofsky and Cavallaro's (2019) Meaning of the Work model exemplifies the Harmony Paradigm. This line of research is grounded on the presumption that meaningful work requires a degree of harmony between the individual (e.g., identity, ability), the work (e.g., task type, expectation), and the work environment (e.g., physical space, organizational culture). A way that organizations try to establish harmony between the individual and the work environment is through their hiring process. But while organizations' employee selection processes can aim to ensure that individuals' ability and knowledge match their roles and tasks, social identities often

cannot be actively selected against due legal regulations that seek to prevent discriminatory hiring practices (Arvey, 1979; Jain et al., 2015)<sup>18</sup>.

**Figure 1:** *Harmony Paradigm*



*Note.* This is heavily based on the meaning of work construct model by Chalofsky and Cavallaro (2019; 2013). Chalofsky and Cavallaro (2019) used different labels: “self of self”, “the work itself”, and “the workplace”.

Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974) suggests that individuals can form connections and a sense of belonging to a group based on social identities. While some social identities can be formed at work (e.g., professional identity; Fitzgerald, 2020), social identities that originated outside of work<sup>19</sup> still play an impactful role in employment experience (Tajfel, 1974). Fr

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<sup>18</sup> With the exception of affirmative action policies where company actively try to hire equity deserving groups (Aberson & Hagg, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> I will refer to social identities from outside of work as ‘personal identity’ or ‘cultural identity’ going forward.

example, Black employees may feel a lack of belonging or experience discrimination in a predominantly White organization (Greenhaus et al., 1990; Rubin et al., 2019); women may feel a lack of belonging in a male-dominated work environment (Germain et al., 2012). Gardner et al. (2001) argued that individuals attain meaningful work when their personal identity and beliefs can be reflected in their work or employment.

Another aspect of harmony is task type, which further breaks down into 1) the type of labour being performed and 2) the meanings the worker can attribute to the task. Conventionally, we can categorize labour into white-collar versus blue-collar, for knowledge or service work versus manual labour (Locke, 1973), though distinctions can be much more specific. An individual's preference for a certain type of labour can inhibit the range of work or employment that the individual can find meaningful<sup>20</sup>. For example, in Nixon's (2006) interviews of 35 British male manual labourers, Nixon found that these men continued to seek male-dominated and low-skill labours even though the labour market has been declining in Britain because they preferred "working with their hands." In contrast, Irigaray et al. (2019) suggest that many professors find meaning in their roles as the tasks associated with professorship are inherently motivating, despite sometimes feeling pressured by the workload.

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<sup>20</sup> In industrial-organizational psychology, variables like personality and cognitive abilities are studied explained the relationship between individual and task type preference (e.g., Weed et al., 1976), however a full review of these relationships is beyond the scope of this thesis.

The other mechanism in the harmony between the individual and task is the degree individuals can ascribe meanings to the task being done<sup>21</sup>. For instance, healthcare and emergency workers often ascribe ethical value to their tasks (e.g., saving human lives; Horowitz et al., 2023; Pervez, 2019). While some tasks may be considered to have intrinsic meaningfulness due to their ethical ramification or directly visible contribution (i.e., saving human lives), some tasks are meaningful in relation to the worker's social identities. Nixon (2006) also reported that manual labor (task) can provide male workers with a sense of masculinity, which then allows those men to ascribe meanings to their tasks and, by extension, ascribe meaning to their employment (Nixon 2006).

The harmony between the worker, task, and the work environment is studied both qualitatively and quantitatively. Qualitative studies, such as case studies, interviews, and ethnographies, explore this harmony by observing or asking participants about their work experience and their perception and understanding of organizational factors that affect them. For this thesis, studying the harmony paradigm qualitatively is helpful in narrating the incongruences between Indigenous employees and settler organizations (e.g., Kuntz et al., 2014).

Quantitatively, the harmony paradigm is studied either by 1) measure the consistency between specific meaning of work (criteria for meaningful work) between employees and the organization (e.g., Lips-Wiersma & Write, 2012; Pignault & Houssemand, 2021) or 2) using the organizational-fit variables as predictor or mediators for perceived work meaningfulness (e.g.,

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<sup>21</sup> The harmony or disharmony between task type and work environment, and how it affects the perception of meaningful work, is an understudied area. The literature on this relationship is not reviewed in this thesis because it is uncondusive to my research goal.

Ng et al., 2022; Zang et al., 2019; Duffy, 2015). Studies that measure consistency between employees and organizations (e.g., Lips-Wiersma & Write, 2012; Pignault & Houssemand, 2021) use the meaning of work constructs identified from exploratory factor analysis and then produce a model and a scale through confirmatory factor analysis. The construct identification process is affected by the cultural context of the participant sample, but this is invisible unless comparative exploratory factor analyses are used. Since cultural context affects both the employee and the organization, these meanings of work models and scales are susceptible to construct validity and equivalence issues when applied to populations outside of the cultural context on which the exploratory factor analysis is conducted (Rothmann et al., 2019). This weakness is relevant in the study of Indigenous employment experience since construct equivalency has not been established between Indigenous and non-Indigenous meaning of work. Furthermore, the diversity and specificity of Indigenous peoples (in Canada and across the world) mean that generalizability to that meaning of the work model and scale produced via this methodology needs to be scrutinized<sup>22</sup>.

Championed by industrial organizational psychology, the ‘organizational fit’<sup>23</sup> variable presents another way to study the harmony paradigm quantitatively. The organizational fit theory asserts that individuals thrive in an environment where their skills, interests, goals, and values

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<sup>22</sup> Snowshoe and colleagues’ (2015) Cultural Connected Scale for First Nations Youth is an example of scale and model development that used exploratory and confirmatory analyses of Canadian Indigenous participants. This scale would have high construct validity specific to Canadian Indigenous youths. Even then, construct equivalency cannot be ascertained if Shoe and colleagues’ (2015) work is applied to the Indigenous population outside of Canada. The discussion on the relationship between culture and the meaning of work literature is provided in the next section.

<sup>23</sup> Also known as ‘personal-environment fit’.

align with the organization (Dawis, 2005; Holland, 2007). Organizational fit is associated with higher perceived work meaningfulness (Duffy et al., 2015). The ‘organizational fit’ variable breaks down into three specific measures: person-organization fit, needs-supplies fit, and demand-ability fit (Cable & DeRue, 2002). Person-organization fit is measured as the degree an individual thinks they fit into their employer organization’s culture. Needs-supply fit measures an individual’s perception of the discrepancy between their needs (e.g., compensation, organizational support) and what their employer organization supplies. Demands-ability fit measures individuals’ perception of the fit between their abilities, skills, and work tasks. Altogether, these organizational fit metrics infer the harmony between the worker, tasks, and the work environment.

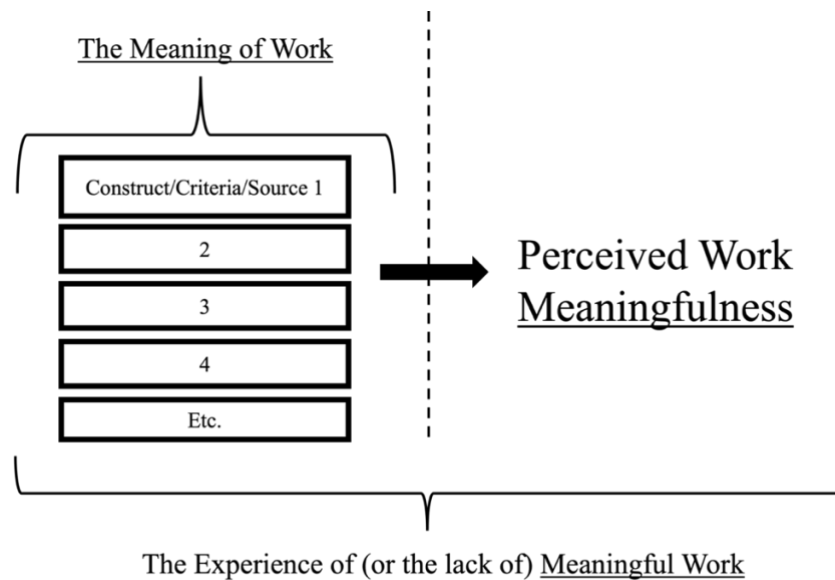
A key characteristic of the ‘organizational fit’ research is that it measures the perception of harmony or disharmony, but it makes little assumption and exploration of the reasons beyond perceived (dis)harmony since ‘organizational fit’ is often used as a predictor or mediator to other organization outcomes (e.g., meaningful work). Given the current state of Indigenous employment research, more exploration of the underlying factors affecting Indigenous employees in settler organizations is needed to identify sources to (dis)harmony; thus, an exploratory qualitative method is preferred over measuring the ‘organizational-fit’ variable.

In this section, I explained the harmony paradigm and reviewed the various research methodologies used to study. I provided justifications to why studying the relationship between Indigenous employment experience and the meaning of work is premature. Consequently, I also provided justification for employing a qualitative method to study this relationship, which I provide in this thesis.

### Paradigm 3: Guiding Influence Paradigm

The third way scholar studies the ‘meaning of work’ is by analyzing the personal and cultural influences or principles that govern a person's meaning-making process at work. This approach, which I encapsulate as the Guiding Influences Paradigm, differentiates between the ‘meanings of work’ and ‘meaningfulness’ (see *Figure 2*). The ‘meaning of work’ refers to the criteria for attaining ‘meaningful work’, asking, "**What** is meaningful about your work?" In contrast, ‘meaningfulness’ refers to the degree work or employment can be considered ‘meaningful work’ by the individual, asking, "**How** meaningful is your work?" (Rosso et al., 2010).

**Figure 2:** *Guiding Influence Paradigm*



#### *Meaning of Work as Criteria for Meaningful Work*

Meaningful work occurs when workers' work experience or work conditions match their criteria (meaning of work) of worth (see *Figure 2*). Common examples of such criteria include

satisfying one's financial needs (Harpaz, 2002), working in a field of interest (i.e., vocational interest; Arieli et al., 2020), and investing in oneself and one's growth (Maehr & Braskamp, 1986). The early meaning of work scholars in organizational sciences sought to identify universal criteria for meaningful work. For example, Bowie (1998, p 1083) argued that meaningful work requires workers to 1) have consent and willingness to do the task, 2) have autonomy and independence at work, 3) have the potential to develop their rational capacities, 4) provide enough financial resource through work, 5) support the moral development of employees, and 6) acknowledge and response to the worker's self-determination and their criteria for happiness.

Researchers who seek universal criteria for meaningful work often use quantitative and survey methodology. Bowie's (1998) emphasis on autonomy and independence as the prime criteria for meaningful work is supported by Yankelovich (1974) and Freeman and Rogers (1999)'s large-scale surveys across U.S. workers. Bowie's (1998) findings are also corroborated by the focus group and interviews Terez (2002) conducted. Terez's (2002) qualitative study found that meaningful work entails 1) having interesting tasks, 2) realizing one's full potential, 3) being ethical, 4) making money, 5) providing service to others, and 6) having a good relationship with one's work community.

### ***Culture and Social Institution and the Meaning of Work***

In discussions about the criteria for meaningful work, researchers have started to explore the systemic factors, like culture and social institutions, that shape how individuals determine these criteria. The research on the meaning of work (paradigm 3) took a turn in the early 2000s when discussion on the effect of culture and social institutions on individuals' meaning of work



began to emerge. Lips-Wiersman (2002) suggested that Mitroff and Denton's survey (1999) does not uncover the universal meaning of work construct (criteria for meaningful work) because it is biased by highly individual U.S. national culture. Similarly, Diener et al. (1999) argued that the individualism-collectivism dimension of culture is impactful in how workers perceive their meaning of work and well-being at work.

The literature has fragmented further as different researchers employed different methodologies to account for the effects of culture and social institutions on the meaning of work. Quantitative meaning of work researchers began to integrate more qualitative data or more diverse samples in their scale and theory development processes (e.g., Lips-Wiersma & Write 2012). Some researchers developed the meaning of work scales and models by targeting a specific cultural group or cultural environment. With only Israeli participants, Willner et al. (2020) created the Work Orientation Questionnaire in Israel. Similarly, Pignault and Houssemand (2021) validated a Meaning of Work Questionnaire and model in France. Another approach is to create a meaning of work scale and model from one cultural environment, then perform confirmatory analysis in another environment to confirm generalizability (e.g., Schnell & Hoffman, 2020).

In contrast to quantitative organizational researchers, social and cultural researchers took a more history-driven approach to account for culture by examining the intersection between an individual's cultural background, experiences, and social institutions they are embedded (Bendassolli & Tateo, 2018). Every person's criterion for what constitutes meaningful work is influenced by their cultural background and experiences, and they are often drawn from social institutions (e.g., moral code, family, religion, government, tradition) and cultural definitions of meanings and work (Bendassolli & Tateo, 2018). For example, Bhappu (2000) eludes that the

meaning of work in Japan is affected by historically engrained concepts (e.g., responsibility to parents, extended ‘family’ structure that extends beyond kinship, and responsibility to care for subordinates). The Japanese meaning of work also intertwines with social institutions like family and gender (Robinson, 2003). Some Japanese first-born sons found meaning and pride in their work because they gave up higher education to support their younger siblings and parents (Roberson, 2003). Ethnographic accounts like these demonstrate that groups that are governed by different social institutions and cultural definitions will have different criteria for meaningful work.

The Criteria Paradigm currently posits that meaningful work is determined by rules about value and worthiness woven into the space between individuals and cultures (e.g., Bendassoli & Tateo, 2018; Valsiner, 2014). Even though culture and social institutions are immutably impactful to individuals' criteria for meaningful work, individuals ultimately decide these criteria for themselves (Bendassoli & Tateo, 2018). Culture justifies work's worthiness (Boova et al., 2019), but individuals may choose to reject the justification from their culture. For example, Māori cultural affiliation can impact an individual's career path, regardless of whether they embrace traditional Māori values (Reid, 2011). Some Māori individuals, referred to as ‘keeper,’ rely on their Māori cultural identity to define and explain their career choices and forgo developing their own criteria for meaningful work. In contrast, Māori ‘seekers,’ actively challenge and change values and stereotypes associated with their cultural identity in their work and career.

### ***The Role of Individual Agency in Determining Ones' Meaning of Work***

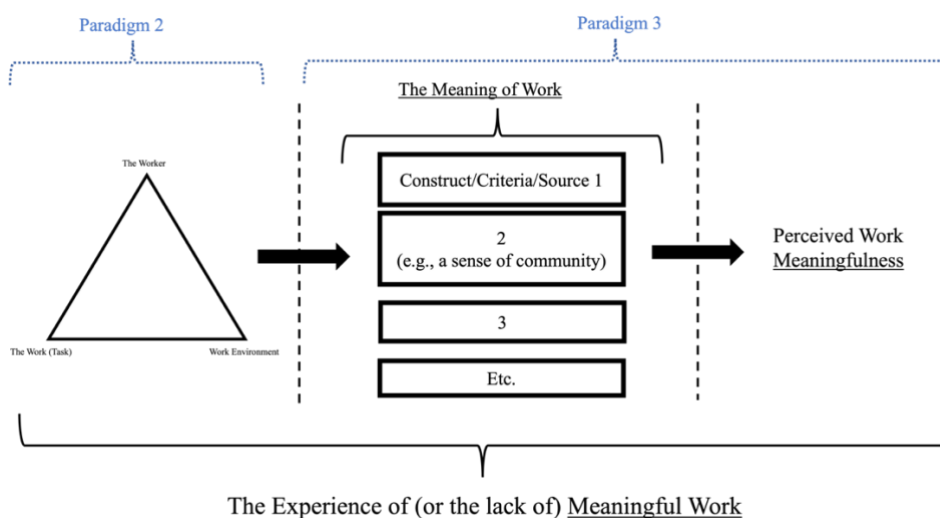
While sociological and anthropological investigations of meaningful work focus on the influence of culture and social institutions, psychological theories on meaningful work emphasize the role of the individual. Self-actualization (Ford, 1991), self-determination (Deci et al., 2017), and social identity (Tajfel, 1974) theories are prominent psychological theories that explain an individual's agency in defining their meaning of work. Self-actualization theory emphasizes the importance of personal growth, development, and fulfillment. This theory suggests that meaningful work results from an individual's pursuit of their interests and talents. Self-actualization posits that work is meaningful when it allows individuals to actualize their full potential (Gopinath, 2020). Self-determination theory focuses on the importance of autonomy and control in an individual's work experience (Deci et al., 2017). This theory suggests that meaningful work is achieved when individuals can choose and control their work to become more than a cog in the organizational machine (Bowie, 2019). Lastly, social identity theory describes how individuals develop their identities through work. Harding (2019) elucidates that not all identities developed through work are meaningful; meaningful work and meaningful selves are co-emergent.

### **Connections between Research Paradigms**

Research in paradigms 2 (Harmony) and 3 (Guiding Influences) can be connected on a theoretical level. The harmony between the worker, the work/task, and the work environment (paradigm 2) as antecedent to the criteria (paradigm 3) for meaningful work. Factors in paradigm 2, such as specific task type, organizational culture, and the individual's requirement for certain organizational support conditions, can be as criteria for work meaningfulness in paradigm 3 (see

Figure 3). For example, an individual might have ‘a sense of community’ (Burroughs et al., 1998) as a required criterion for meaningful work, and if the work environment and the work task are unable to foster a ‘sense of community’ for that individual, the individual will not be able to experience meaningful work.

**Figure 3:** Combined Meaning of Work Model between Paradigm 2 and Paradigm 3

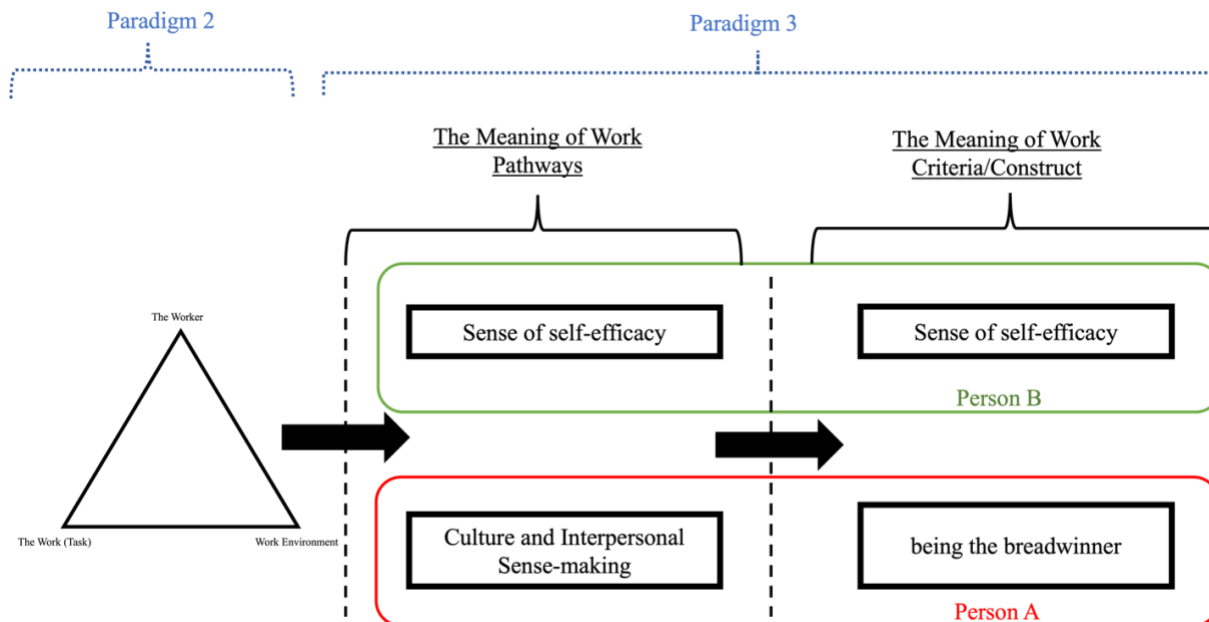


Though not explicitly stated as such in the literature, I observe that a way that researchers from paradigm 3 account for the harmony between the worker, tasks, and the work environment is by identifying specific psychological experience that accompanies meaningful work. Rosso and colleagues (2010) call these psychological experiences ‘Meaning of Work’ pathways. The meaning of work criteria/constructs refers to the question, “What is meaningful about your work/employment?”; whereas pathways refer to the question, “How does work become meaningful?”. Rosso and colleagues (2010) identified seven psychological experiences as pathways: 1) a sense of authenticity, 2) self-efficacy, 3) self-esteem, 4) a sense of purpose, 5) a sense of belonging, 6) transcendence, and 7) cultural and interpersonal sense-making.

There is a lack of consensus on what constitutes as meaning of work criteria versus the meaning of work pathways (e.g., Steger 2016). Notably, the distinction between pathways and criteria might not be observable if the pathway happens to be the same as the criteria. For example, one of person A's required criteria for meaningful work is 'being the breadwinner' (Griffin, 2020), the pathway to meet this meaning of work criterion would be 'culture and interpersonal sense-making'. Another example, one of person B's required criteria for meaningful work is having a sense of self-efficacy at work. In the case of person B, a distinction between the meaning of work criterion and pathway becomes unobservable (*Figure 4*).

The theoretical delineation between the meaning of work criteria/constructs versus pathways is unclear and subject to further theoretical development in Paradigm 3. However, for the purpose of this thesis, the concept of the meaning of the work pathway is useful in bridging literature and evidence from paradigms 2 and 3; and thus, allows to me provide a more congruent and comprehensive overview of the divergent meaning of work literature.

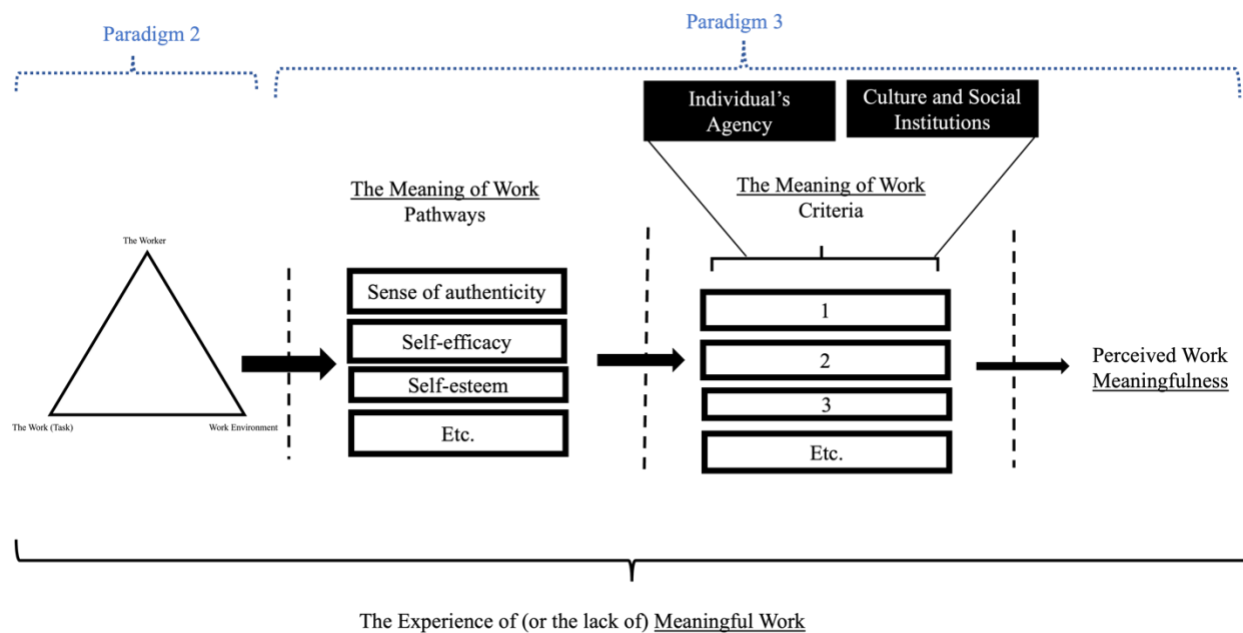
**Figure 4:** *Meaning of Work Pathways versus Criteria/Constructs*



The theoretical delineation between the meaning of work criteria/constructs versus pathways is unclear and subject to further theoretical development in Paradigm 3. However, for the purpose of this thesis, the concept of the meaning of the work pathway is useful in bridging literature and evidence from paradigms 2 and 3; and thus, allows to me provide a more congruent and comprehensive overview of the divergent meaning of work literature. *Figure 5* includes all components of the meaning of work literature that I have discussed thus far.

Notice paradigm 1 (work-centrality), as well as work orientations, are underemphasized in the total theoretical model (*Figure 5*). Paradigm 1 asks a different research question than that of paradigms 2 (harmony) and 3 (guiding influence). Paradigms 2 and 3 inquire how meaningful work (experience) and meaningful work (concept) come to be based on experiences at an individual level. Paradigms 2 and 3 inquire, ‘How do individual experiences (e.g., psychological experience, cultural identity) shape meaningful work (experience) and meaningful work.

**Figure 5: Total Meaning of Work Theoretical Model**



(concepts)?' In contrast, research under paradigm 1, exemplified by the MOW project (Meaning of Work International Research, 1987), has a structuralist assumption. Paradigm 1 research inquires the impact of social structures (i.e., social norms, national cultures) affecting the predetermined meaning of work metrics (i.e., work centrality, valued work outcome, work orientations, work-role identification). My model focuses on the mechanisms of emergence of 'meaningful work' and of 'meanings of work' (see *Figure 5*), but paradigm 1 focuses on structure-induced trends, which is why paradigm 1 is underemphasized in my theoretical model.

The five dimensions of paradigm 1 are 1) work centrality, 2) societal norms regarding work, 3) valued work outcomes, 4) importance of work goals, and 5) work-role identification. Social norms and valued work outcomes are already ingrained in my model. The considerations for social norms are included under 'culture and social institutions,' while 'valued work outcomes' are encapsulated by 'meaning of work (criteria).' Instead of seeing 'effects of social norms' and 'valued work outcomes' as unilateral outcomes of social structure (per paradigm 1

research conventions), my model looks at the interaction between individual agency and social structures and identifies ways that interactions manifest (meaning of work, criteria).

Work centrality and work-role identifications from paradigm 1 are not included in the model because they are inquiries of amount (i.e., “how much?”), not inquiries of mechanism (i.e., “how?”). These dimensions do not explain ‘meaningful work’ and ‘meanings of work’ emerge as independent phenomena; instead, they infer meaningfulness by investigating the proportional salience of work in life. The ‘importance of work goals,’ by extension, the work orientation literature, is excluded from the model because of the theoretical issue I highlighted previously. While work orientation typology can describe the experience of meaningfulness at work, The determination of whether work orientation originates from inherent personal characteristics, such as personality traits, or is a consequence of a person's success or failure to secure significant employment remains uncertain (Boova et al., 2019).

### **Meaning of Work in Indigenous Contexts**

The thesis is situated in the Canadian context, but I will draw from academic and non-academic accounts of Indigenous employment in colonial-settler organizations across Canada, USA, Australia, and New Zealand. Per insights from multiple historical comparative analyses (Cornell, 2005; Goznález & Colangelo, 2010; Schotz 2013; Fleras & Elliott, 1992), the Indigenous and colonial settler relations and their effects on Indigenous peoples in each colonial state followed similar and comparable trajectories. On the premise that the strengths, barriers, and trajectories observed from Indigenous employment experiences in these colonial states are shaped by similar and comparable historical and structural colonial processes, the inclusion of accounts from the USA, Australia, and New Zealand, is not only appropriate but helpful in



aiding my analyses of the Indigenous ‘meaning of work’ experience in Canadian settler organizations<sup>24</sup>.

Qualitative research from disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology indicate that Indigenous perspectives on the meaning of work often diverge from those of settler populations. I’ve discerned three primary distinctions in how Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants perceive the meaning of work. Firstly, while Indigenous groups might share some work constructs with settlers, the emphasis and historical contexts differ. Secondly, Indigenous communities may possess unique meaning of work criteria/constructs specific to their culture and Indigenous identities. Lastly, the influence of colonialism profoundly affects Indigenous work experiences and their interpretations of meaningful work.

In the following sections, I will elaborate on the three ways the meaning of work can differ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees.

### *Different Emphasis & Historical Contexts*

Rosso and colleagues (2010) attempted to provide a comprehensive list of all possible factors influencing meaningful work. Of all the factors listed, a few were frequently observed in studies on work experience with different Indigenous populations. Examples include reciprocal interpersonal relationships, social embeddedness motivation, preference for non-hierarchical social structure, strong cultural identity salience, and co-existence with communities (e.g., Musharbash, 2004). Warlpiri workers in Australia and Indigenous workers in Canada reported

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<sup>24</sup> See footnote 9.

expectations of reciprocal social obligation between employees and supervisors instead of a transactional relationship (Musharbash, 2004).

The salience of traditional cultural identity is clearly across the Indigenous employment experience literature. Indigenous employees' traditional cultural identity appears to precede their organizational identity; this is reported in Inuit workers in Canada (St-Cry, 2016), Indigenous workers from British Columbia, Canada (Gallagher & Lawrence, 2015), Navajo workers in the United States (Miller & Joe, 1993), and Māori workers from New Zealand (Haar & Brougham, 2011).

The connection between Indigenous employees' traditional cultural identity and their employment (task and work environment) may directly affect their perception of work meaningfulness. For example, Spowart and Marshall (2015) found that Canadian Indigenous young men's cultural identities and their relationships with their tribal communities provide meaning for these men's work. When the 'self' that develops through work is not related to the employee's social identity outside of work, the employee may find the work less meaningful (Harding, 2019). Hunt (2022) reported that some Indigenous Canadians experience internal conflict between their cultural and organizational identities.

Even if Indigenous and settler employees reported similar constructs, these constructs might correspond to distinct experiences due to specific historical contexts. According to the cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), human behaviour and activity (i.e., work) must be understood within the cultural and historical practices that shape those activities and behaviours (Miettinen, 2006). Thus, Indigenous activities and cultural artifacts should be understood within the context of that specific Indigenous group's traditions, histories, ceremonies, cosmology, and

pre-colonial and post-colonial ways of life (e.g., Lin & Yidaw, 2013; Caneba & Maitland, 2017). Baeyer (2011) observed Mohawk workers of North America have been attracted to ironwork since the late 1800s. Participating in ironwork is meaningful because it has been seen as contributing to their community's economic prosperity, and its participation is seen as the transition from boyhood to manhood. Ironworking resonates with the Mohawk culture, as the Mohawk are renowned for their exceptional building prowess (Baeyer, 2011). In another example, like many settlers, Inuit Canadians emphasize survival and subsistence as their meaning of work (St-Cry, 2016). But distinctively, Inuit's notion of survival is rooted in their unique historical and environmental contexts. Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada (2006) and St-Cry (2016) suggest that Inuit value work to help themselves and their community survive in the unforgiving arctic landscape.

### ***Unique Meaning of Work Construct***

Indigenous groups share some meaning of work constructs with settlers, albeit with different emphasis and historical contexts. However, there are also accounts of the meaning of work constructs that are uniquely present or absent in Indigenous groups. For instance, the notions of ancestral connection (Robin et al., 202), cultural authenticity (Linnekin, 1991), and customary economy (Woods, 2015) are not, or very rarely, observed in settler groups. An example of ancestral connection is the Inuit people of Canada's traditional culture encourages eponymous naming practices (Searles, 2008). The name of an Inuk who recently died is passed on to a new Inuk baby, and it is believed that the baby will inherit skills from the passed Inuk (St-Cry, 2016).

Separately in the Inuit of Canada (St-Cry, 2016), the Lakota of the U.S. (Pickering, 2004), and the Māori populations of New Zealand (Haar & Brougham, 2011), the degree the Indigenous employee's work is culturally authentic to their traditional cultural identity creates tension within individuals and between employees and employers. Some studies observed that Indigenous individuals engage in meaningful work in their traditional customary economy, often unrecognized by settlers' colonial employment standards (e.g., Altman, 2018; Pickering, 2004).

Indigenous individuals often do impactful economic work within social networks and communities that serve each other (Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada, 2006), improve the social standing of themselves or their offspring (Pickering, 2004), or participate in traditional ceremonies and customs (Willson, 2020). Thus, many Indigenous groups do not think conventional full-time employment is equivalent to meaningful work (e.g., St-Cry, 2006), and hence some studies report a lack of resemblance to the Career orientation in Indigenous populations (Miller & Joe, 1993; St-Cry, 2016). Pickering (2004) found that Lakota people's criteria for meaningful work are relationship-bound and task-based, whereas settler Americans' criteria for meaningful work are employment and clock-based. "When you need money, you engage in a wage job. When you don't need money, you engage in other activities that may or may not appear economic from the viewpoint of the federal government, but nonetheless, secure future access to and participation in social ventures that generate material necessities of life" (Pickering, 2004, p. 92).

### ***Colonialism and the Meaning of Work***

Work is a historically and culturally situated activity, and as colonialism has affected all aspects of Indigenous cultures and histories, colonialism also profoundly impacts Indigenous

peoples' meanings of work (Parker, 2011). Colonialism asserts vices over Indigenous cultures in various ways throughout the past centuries (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005). A thorough examination of colonialism is beyond the scope of this review <sup>25</sup>.

An effective way to understand the impact of colonialism on Indigenous peoples' meaning of work would be to examine how various colonial processes transform Indigenous traditional economies. The Indigenous traditional economy in Canada includes economic systems in which Indigenous peoples sustainably provide material goods and specialized services within their communities (Brascoupé, 1993). These systems are grounded in Indigenous knowledge of their environment, traditions, and ceremonies and have been in place for centuries before the arrival of settlers (Brascoupé, 1993). The Indigenous traditional economy in Canada, which involves 'living off the land,' continues to persist in the contemporary era (Lester, 1993; Kuokkanen, 2011). In these traditional economic systems, wealth is conceptualized as the health of the land and the community instead of a monetary amount (Kuokkanen, 2011).

The arrival of settlers did not mark the end of Indigenous traditional economies worldwide; many Indigenous communities underwent hybridization, combining traditional customary economy and mainstream capitalistic economy (e.g., First Nations in Alberta, Voyageur, 2014; Cree Nations, Gagné, 1994; Warlpiri People of Australia, Curchin, 2016). Nonetheless, in numerous instances, the colonial processes that accelerated in Canada after the

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<sup>25</sup> For more information on Canada's colonial history, see Alfred and Corntassel (2005), Logan (2015), and Lowman & Barker (2015).

settlers' arrival crippled or destroyed many traditional Indigenous economic systems (Menzie & Butler, 2008).

The activities of settlers can significantly damage ecological landscapes that are vital to Indigenous traditional economic systems, disrupting Indigenous work productivity and negatively impacting Indigenous cultures wholly (Tough, 2007; Ilyniak, 2014). The commodification of traditional lands (Pasternak, 2015), cultural artifacts (Whitt, 1995) and food (Koberinski et al., 2022) are also disruptive to Indigenous cultures and work life. Some colonial processes in Canada have been directly assaultive, including slavery (Neeganagwedgin, 2012), the Residential School System (Wilk et al., 2017), and mass incarceration (Chartrand, 2019). Physical subjugation of Indigenous individuals weakened traditional economies by halting work, disrupting the transfer of Indigenous knowledge across generations, and inflicting inter-generational trauma (Wilk et al., 2017; Burrage et al., 2022), the result in systematic deterioration of Indigenous health (Whyte, 2016; Gone et al., 2019). There are also more subtle and symbolic colonial processes. Settler groups often portrayed work in the Indigenous traditional economy as "hard, primitive, and dying" (Brascoupé, 1993), thus justifying economic assimilation under the guise of tribal development (Johnson, 2010). Defining what constitutes meaningful work for others can be a manipulative process (Harding, 2019), as it was through the colonial project (Menzie & Butler, 2018).

With the disruptions and transformations of traditional Indigenous economic systems in Canada, ascertaining Indigenous peoples' ability to participate in mainstream settler economy is critical. For some Indigenous individuals and communities, where colonial processes had crippled their traditional economic system, access to conventional employment can be a matter of survival (Rowse, 2008). In other cases, access to resources from conventional employment

(via Indigenous individuals keeping a job in a settler organization) could be crucial in supplementing traditional economic systems or helping those local systems recover and evolve (i.e., Indigenous entrepreneurial ecosystems; Gallagher & Lawrence, 2012). However, without decolonizing settlers' workspace, the absorption of Indigenous individuals into settler organizations is another colonial process for assimilation, cultural disruption, and creating dependency (Gagné, 1994). Furthermore, Indigenous individuals who are employed full-time in a settler organization are often under high pressure due to participating in both the mainstream and traditional economies (Jewell et al., 2022; Miller & Joe, 1993), in addition to pressures from tokenism, discrimination, and role conflicts (Hunt, 2022).

### ***Decolonization and the Meaning of Work***

The harmony paradigm, in particular, is useful in narrating cultural incongruences and the experience of colonialism in settler workspaces; thus, able to generate insights into ways to decolonize settler workspaces. The harmony (or disharmony) between the employee, the work (tasks), and the workplace is negotiated between the employee and the employer. This harmony requires both the employees and the employers to actively adapt to each other. Given the power dynamic between the settler organization and the Indigenous employees, and that Indigenous peoples are often designated equity-serving groups in employment (e.g., in Canada's Employment Equity Act; Abella, 1984), settler organizations should take a proactive role in ensuring this harmony (Thiessen, 2016)

Aside from outright hostilities (i.e., discrimination and racism against Indigenous persons in the workplace; see Readings, 2014), Indigenous employees can experience colonialism and cultural differences experienced in the settler workspaces in more subtle ways, such as

organizational norms (Thiessen, 2016), insufficient organizational support (Julien et al., 2017), communication style (Morford et al., 2004), and organizational leadership (Thiessen, 2016; Caron et al., 2020).

When settler organizations fail to properly accommodate their Indigenous employees, Indigenous employees may be forced to compromise a part of themselves (e.g., identity, preferences) to stay in employment, leading to inequity and poor employment experience for the Indigenous employee. For instance, Warlpiri employees who work for mainstream settler Australian organizations reported intercultural tensions (Steel & Heritage, 2020). Warlpiri employees often find that the settler organizations' social norms contradict their traditional Indigenous cultural norms and protocols, and they are often forced to choose between facing punitive responses from employers and co-workers at work or negotiating or decompartmentalizing with their traditional cultural identity outside of work (Steel & Heritage, 2020).

Similarly, Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada (2006) observed that Inuit Canadians often emotionally withdraw or quit their job due to value and communication differences and conflict with their settler employers. Disharmony occurs both in the cultural-social space, as well as the physical space. Hunt (2022) reported that Canadian Indigenous employees feel uncomfortable with the physical layout of the workspace, hierarchical organizational structure, and transactional organization culture of their settler employers. These reports collaborate on the notion that work orientation is the product of employee-workplace harmony (Miller & Joe, 1993; St-Cry, 2016), and thus, Indigenous employees in North America may have a systemically limited range of work orientations because they are experience disharmony systemically in settlers' workspaces.



The disharmony between Indigenous employees and settler employers is common but not inevitable. Kuntz and colleagues (2014) reports that settler New Zealand organizations that adhere to traditional Māori values, specifically manaakitanga (caring), whakawhanaungatanga (relationships), wairua-tanga (spirituality), auahatanga (creativity) and kaitiakitanga (guardianship), have Māori employees who are more committed and perform more citizenship behaviors. These companies often have Indigenous-led leadership and have been committed to integrating Indigenous values since founding.

The harmony paradigm is useful in narrating cultural incongruences and the Indigenous employees' experience of colonialism in settler workspaces, and it highlights an approach for settler organizations to actively co-adapt along with their Indigenous employees. Since Indigenous employees are already having to adapt, a way to engage in decolonialization is effort from the settler employers (Kuntz et al., 2014; Pickering, 2004; Musharbash, 2004).

The Guiding Influence paradigm may help pinpoint specific pathways or criteria conducive to meaningful work. A modicum of existing studies suggests that decolonization can occur via more flexible organizational policies to account for Indigenous employees' cultural obligations (Hunt, 2022), creating reciprocal relationships at work and fostering collaborative leadership (Thiessen, 2016), allowing opportunities to integrate Indigenous identity and perspective (Kuntz et al., 2014), and make organizational culture congruent with traditional Indigenous values (Harmsworth, 2015; Haar & Brougham, 2011). This thesis contributes to this body of crucial literature and expands upon its findings.

### **The Present Study & Research Questions**

My study is situated within a larger research program led by Dr. Adam Murry and housed at the Indigenous Organization's and Community's Research (IOCR) lab at the University of Calgary. This research program's charter is to conduct research that informs practical solutions to organizational problems, in partnership with Indigenous and non-Indigenous teams, organizations, and agencies who are working to advance Indigenous thriving and self-determination. While this charter is broad enough to include a range of topics across sectors, our primary commitment is to employment issues.

My thesis is part on a larger project funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Counsel's (SSHRC) Insight Development Grant (IDG, #66391346). The funding was procured by the Principal Investigator, Dr. Murry, to support the activities of *ii'taa'poh'to'p* Working Circle 2 on faculty and staff experiences, which he co-chaired from 2019-2023. *ii'taa'poh'to'p* is the campus-wide Indigenous Strategy at the University of Calgary, which is comprised of seven Working Circles, previously known as sub-committees, designed support decolonization and Indigenization efforts through authentic partnerships with local and attending Indigenous communities and community members (e.g., Elders counsel, Circle of Indigenous Scholars). Of the seven Working Circles, Working Circle 2 is chartered to inform organizational changes that support the recruitment, selection, and retention of Indigenous employees at the university.

The IDG funded a targeted inquiry into the employment experiences of Indigenous faculty and staff in post-secondary institutions across Western Canada. The inquiry involved semi-structured interviews using a guide developed for this study (see Appendix C). The present study analyzes selected interview data from a 'meaning of work' perspective by looking

at the 'meanings of work' and what Indigenous employees constitute meaningful work in settler organizations.

### ***Research Questions***

1. What are the meanings of work for Indigenous employees in settler organizations?
2. What constitutes meaningful work?
3. How can settler organizations make their Indigenous employee's work more meaningful?

### **Research Objective**

1. To provide insights into how settler organizations can better support Indigenous employees.

## Chapter 3 - Methods

### Researcher Positionality

I am a Taiwanese Canadian settler who immigrated from Taipei, Taiwan, in 2008. I have lived in Calgary ever since (traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy, including the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai Nations; the Stoney-Nakoda, including the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley Nations; and the Tsuut'ina Nation. Also, the home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3.) My familiarity with Indigeneity began in Taiwan, where Indigenous Taiwanese faced similar challenges to Indigenous Canadians. I am not affiliated with any Indigenous Taiwanese or Canadian Indigenous groups. My interest in culture and circumstances surrounding Indigenous peoples grew throughout my undergraduate Education in Cultural Anthropology and Psychology. During my undergraduate study, I approach my current supervisor, Dr. Adam Murry, to gain practical quantitative research knowledge. Dr. Adam Murry is an experienced Indigenous researcher with decades of experience working with Indigenous communities in North America. Through Dr. Murry's tutelage (now as the supervisor of my master's degree in industrial organizational psychology), I am opportune to learn more about Indigenous scholarships. Per The Truth and Reconciliation of Canada, every non-Indigenous Canadian is responsible for contributing to the reconciliation effort. I am privileged for the opportunity to contribute to reconciliation in my current capacity as a graduate student researcher.

### Participants Demographics

Eighteen Indigenous faculty and staff participated in our interviews. Indigenous participants were affiliated with specific First Nations (e.g., Cree, Mi'kmaq, Lheidli T'enneh), and eight identified as Métis. Nine participants identified as females, six as males, and two as Two-Spirit.

Two-spirit is a non-binary gender specific to North American Indigenous cultures (Hunt, 2016), and two-spirited individuals often use they/them pronouns. At the time of their interviews, seven participants were university staff (e.g., librarians, non-academic administrators, assistants, and coordinators); and eleven participants were university faculties (i.e., tenure and non-tenure track professors). At the time of their interviews, all participants were employed full-time. Two participants were employed at their role for more than a year; another two participants were employed between one to five years; seven participants were employed at their role for between five to seven years; another seven participants were employed at their role for more than 10 years.

**Table 1: Demographics**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Tenure</b>	<b>Position Type</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Province of Employment</b>
Female = 9 (50%)	<1 yr. = 2 (11%)	Staff = 7 (39%)	Métis = 8 (44%)	Alberta = 7
Male = 6 (33%)	1-5 yr. = 2 (11%)	Faculty = 11 (61%)	First Nations = 10 (56%)	British Columbia = 7
Two-Spirit = 3 (16%)	5-10 yr. = 7 (39%)			Manitoba = 4
	10+ yr. = 7 (39%)			

### ***Recruitment***

The current study focuses on Indigenous faculty and staff at public post-secondary institutions in Western Canada. Studying Indigenous employment in post-secondary institutions is significant because Canadian universities are both deeply embedded in Western bureaucracies

and worldviews, yet actively involved in decolonization, Indigenization, and reconciliation initiatives (Haig-Brown, 2008). Moreover, the attraction of post-secondary employment for Indigenous individuals has broader implications in society, as academia provides training for high-income occupations and serves as a platform for promoting and empowering Indigenous epistemologies and cultures (Haig-Brown, 2008).

Eligible participants had to be Indigenous and working at a post-secondary institution in Western Canada (i.e., British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba). Western Canadian provinces were selected since 60% of the Indigenous population in Canada resides in those provinces (cite). Efforts were made to recruit participants at different stages of employment (e.g., temporary/permanent position, pre/post tenure) with equal representation by gender. Participants were recruited via purposive sampling, using a combination of direct outreach to Indigenous staff and faculty whose information was publicly available and utilizing pre-existing networks, and snowball sampling, where participants connected us to other eligible Indigenous employees.

Most potential participants were contacted over email (see Appendix A); if they knew the PI personally, then they could have been contacted directly by the PI. Over email communication, the IOCR research coordinator arranged the time for an interview with each participant. The participants were told that the interviews were between 40 minutes and two hours, depending on how long they wanted to talk. The participants had the option to have the interview online through Zoom, in person, in IOCR's lab space, or at their work offices.

We aimed to recruit 20 participants, as per the recommendations of Terry, Hayfield, Clarke, and Braun (2017) for a PhD or larger project using thematic analysis. We attempted

recruit a diversity of genders, employee types (university faculties, staff, funded students, administrators, etc.), tenure length (i.e., how long they have been employed at their organization), although some cells were more difficult to recruit than others.

The recruitment process was significantly constrained in three ways. First, the eligible participant pool is small and eligible participants often had very limited availability. Second, since the present study readapts data from a larger project, the interview guide was not written exclusively for meaning of work content. Third, the COVID-19 pandemic limited the number of participants we could recruit, especially for in-person interviews.

## **Interview Procedures**

### *Overview*

The interview length ranges from 30 minutes to two hours. Each interview was conducted by two interviewees, a primary interviewer (the principal investigator or a graduate student) and a secondary interviewer (undergraduate research assistant). After an introduction, ascertaining the participant had completed the consent form (Appendix B), and a ceremonial smudge (when appropriate), the interview officially began when interviewers started recording the conversations. The interview was semi-structured, in that we used a pre-written guide (Appendix C) to focus attention to certain experiences while still allowing flexibility for topics to wander (Adeoye-Olatunde, & Olenik, 2021) and adopted a conversational approach to foster open and organic dialogue (Kovach, 2010).

### *Cultural Protocols*

The interview process was designed to align with Indigenous research protocols (Wilson, 2020), and we prioritized participants' comfort and building long-term relationships. Before the interview begins, the principal investigator (an Indigenous researcher) joins the meeting to provide an overview of the project and research program and explain how the project helps to support local constituencies in addition to the scholarly outputs. Following the University of Calgary's Stoney Nakoda campus guidelines for smudging, which were developed by protocol experts Elissa Twoyoungmen and Elder Una Wesley (Taylor, 2021), the principal investigator or an interviewer who is Indigenous invites the participant to engage in a ceremonial smudge. The act of smudging involves burning specific ceremonial grasses in moments of silent. The acts set good intention and signify the establishing of a culturally safe space for authentic dialogue. The smudges were conducted in both virtual and in-person interviews; participants often have their own smudging equipment. At the end of the interview, the interviewers collected additional information from the participants for gifting purposes and asked if they are willing to participate in future studies. The gift to each participant was traditional tobacco and 50 Canadian dollars.

### *Anonymity & Consent*

The IOCR coordinator sent the consent form (Appendix B) to each participant at least three days prior to their scheduled interview time. At the beginning of their scheduled interview, interviewers ascertained whether the participant had completed the consent form if they had any questions or concerns regarding the consent form. The participants were asked whether they wanted their real name or a pseudonym used when represented in the write-up, a data identifier



(i.e., their favorite animal) to connect interview data and informed consent across platforms (i.e., Qualtrics), and whether we could reach out to them for data clarity or future projects. .

### *Semi-structured Interview Guide*

A semi-structured interview guide was created before participant recruitment (Appendix C). The interview guide was created with the IDG's broader research objectives in mind and revolved around four topics: 1) barriers to work, 2) working for others, 3) working for self, and 4) the meaning of work. The interview guide contained open-ended questions and follow-up prompts.

#### **1. Barriers to Work.**

The participant is asked to complete a short online Qualtrics questionnaire on the employment barriers they experienced. In the Qualtrics questionnaire, the participant indicates whether they had experienced the following specific barriers to employment: inadequate education, lack of jobs near their community, racism/discrimination/stereotypes, lack of transparency, lack of driver's license, lack of available childcare, lack of transportation, lack of affordable housing, inadequate support in making the transition to employment, and personal barriers (e.g., disability, mental health, addiction, or inadequate life skills). The participant was given the option to indicate whether they were currently experiencing these barriers, had experienced them in the past, or had never experienced them. These barriers were borrowed from the Alberta Government's Indigenous Labor Force Survey (2010). The Qualtrics questionnaire asked if the participant had experienced barriers other than the specified ones. After answering this question, the participant completed the Qualtrics questionnaire, and the interviewers verbally asked if there were additional stories about work barriers they would like to share. Only the work barrier interview

section is conducted in an online questionnaire format. Indigenous employees are more likely to have systematic barriers affecting their employment, and we used an online format for this topic to minimize the risk of re-traumatizing the participants. Furthermore, we do not want the negative or traumatic experience of discussing work barriers to dominate the participants' overall interview experience.

## **2. Working for Others.**

Interviewers first asked if the participant was currently looking for a new position and then if they liked their current employment situation. After the participant indicated whether they liked their current employment situation, the interviewers asked why the participant liked or disliked their current employment. The participants then narrated their current employment situation in response. The interviewers were looking for the following items in participants' responses: 1) specific factors that support employees in their job (e.g., co-workers, leadership, flexibility, training, specific personal skills), 2) how the presence or absence of Indigenization or cultural inclusion efforts at their organization affect their work, 3) factors that affect the participants' intention to stay at their current job, 4) factors that affect participants' performance at work, and 5) factors affect participants' sense of commitment to their work. If the participant did not mention the following items in the initial narration of their current employment situation, or if the narration is unclear, the interviewers would ask follow-up questions or request clarification. If the participant was looking for new employment (other than self-employment), the interviewers would ask them to narrate their job search experience.

## **3. Working for Self.**

The interviewers asked if the participant was currently self-employed (holding a self-employed position alongside university employment). The interviewers also asked whether the participant was considering self-employment or had engaged in self-employment in the past. The interviewers asked the participant to narrate their past self-employment experience, motivation, and barriers to engaging in self-employment.

#### 4. **Meaning of Work.**

This section contains two main questions: First, the interviewer asks the participant, "What do you think work is for? Why do we work?". The participant then narrated why they thought people (in general) worked and why they worked. Here, the participant often explicated specific meanings of work constructs or reasons behind their experienced work meaningfulness (e.g., financial circumstances, connection with community, and prestige). The topic is highly abstract; the participant often required additional prompts to answer the initial question. If the participant struggles to answer the initial question, the interviewers ask the participant to think about the meanings 1) themselves, 2) their cultural norms, and 3) what they think the general population would ascribe to their current employment<sup>26</sup>. The second question in this section was, "What would make your work more meaningful?". By answering this question, the participants identified and narrated factors that facilitate a sense of meaningfulness in their current employment. Though not explicitly prompted, the participant often directly told the interviewers if they found their employment overall meaningful.

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<sup>26</sup> This prompt is only used if participants requested elaboration or prompt to help them think about the initial question.

However only the last section of the interview guide explicitly addressed the meaning of the work content. The entire verbal interview, excluding the Qualtrics questionnaire, was analyzed in the current study.

## **Transcription**

The transcription process was conducted in two phases. The first phase of transcription was done through Zoom's auto-transcription function. In this second phase, the research team manually refined the transcription on Otter.ai. The research team manually removed auto-transcription errors and attributed transcribed content to speakers. Since the analyses focus topical content and not verbal behaviors, "ah," "hmm," "uhh-oh" and pauses, which do not contribute to substantive content, were removed during the second phase. The second phase also involved carefully removing identifiable information about the participants. The finalized transcription is stored on secured cloud storage provided by the host university.

## **Coding and Analysis Procedure**

### *Overview*

To answer my research questions, I employed a methodological bricolage approach (Pratt et al., 2022), drawing from qualitative content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Braun & Clark, 2006), and employed both focused-coding (deductive coding) and open-coding (inductive coding) methods to analyzing the transcripts. Define what each is here. Coding took place on NVivo.

The focused coding and categorization process, following the guidelines of qualitative content analysis as outlined by Elo and Kyngäs (2008), aids in addressing my first research

question: "What do work meanings entail for Indigenous employees within settler organizations? What defines work as meaningful?". By developing a codebook from the existing meaning of work literature and implementing the coding in the focused coding process, I was able to establish a connection between my data and the existing literature on the meaning of work. The categorization process in the qualitative content analysis allowed me to compare the salience and frequency of the meaning of work categories in my participant pool. Concurrently, I also performed the open coding process so I could identify and include the meaning of work categories I did not encounter during my literature review.

The model-building and theme-identification processes in subsequent thematic analysis helped address my second research question: "How can settler organizations make their Indigenous employee's work more meaningful?". During the thematic analysis, codes and categories from the initial qualitative content analysis were reorganized in an open-coding format. The goal of the reorganization was to emphasize specific factors that influenced my participants' experience of work meaningfulness. By identifying these specific pathways to my participants' work meaningfulness, I am positioned to comment on strategies for how settler organizations can better support their Indigenous employees, thereby addressing my second research question.

**Table 2:** *Coding and Analytics Overview*

<b>Analyses</b>	<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Coding Procedures</b>	<b>Results</b>
Qualitative Content Analysis	Research Question 1	1. Focused Coding & Open Coding (concurrent), two times.	Comparison of Meaning of Work categories
Thematic Analysis	Research Question 2	2. Open Coding & re-organizing existing codes	Identify pathways to participants' meaning of work experience

### *Qualitative Content Analysis*

**Codebook Development.** I created the codebook from selected typologies from my literature review of the meaning of work in preparation for focused coding. From the psychology and management literature, I include the comprehensive list of factors related to the meaning of work presented by Rosso and colleagues (2010) and the work orientation typology closely related to meaningful work (Boova et al., 2019) and can be highly descriptive of my participants' employment experience. From the sociology literature, I include Reinecke and colleagues' (2017) typology of moral worthiness. Meaningful work is determined by a rule about values and worthiness (Bendassolli & Tateo, 2018), and social institutions and culture shape those rules. Lastly, from the anthropology, ethnographic and case studies literature, I include codes that represent the meaning of work themes commonly reported in the Indigenous work experience but not covered by Rosso and colleagues (2010), these include Indigenous-specific values,

colonialism, discrimination, dissatisfaction with settler organizational culture (see *Table 3* in Appendix D).

**First Round of Coding.** During the coding process, a single code could fit into multiple categories. For example, the following code “I like my job, I love my job. I love that I get to work with primarily Indigenous students. This, I've never had a job where I feel so connected to the people I'm working with”, fits into the ‘communities’, ‘Design of the Job Task’ categories’, ‘Cultural Identity / Indigenous identification’, and ‘Connection/relevance to traditional culture and values categories’ categories.

Following the initial round of coding, some categories were either eliminated, merged, relabeled, or expanded (see *Table 4* in Appendix D). These adjustments were informed by various factors, including the categories' infrequent appearance in the data, ambiguity in their conceptual boundaries, or their overly broad scope. Notably, the work orientation typology was dropped due to insufficient data. There was not enough data to consistently categorize each participant into work orientation type. In some instances, categories were relabeled to enhance their ability to succinctly encapsulate the content of the codes. Additionally, new categories emerged during the coding process; these categories either encompass some meaning of work codes more accurately (e.g., ‘integrate Indigenous knowledge at work’) or refer to salient organizational factors that appear to affect participants’ work experience and work meaningfulness (e.g., bureaucracy, racism/discrimination, tokenism).

**Second Round of Coding.** Once the codebook underwent modifications following the initial round of coding, I proceeded to revisit and recode the complete dataset using the updated codebook. After two rounds of coding, I used NVivo’s ‘Text Search’ function to scan if I had

missed any codes in each category. This involved employing keyword-based searches within each category, thereby identifying any potential codes that might have been inadvertently overlooked during two rounds of coding.

**Category Creation and Comparative Analyses.** Throughout the coding process, NVivo automatically kept track of the code frequency of each category. Once the coding process was completed, the finalized categories, as delineated in *Table 3*, were extracted from NVivo. In a subsequent step, using Excel, I organized the entire participant pool, classifying individuals based on gender, tenure length, and employment type. This segmentation facilitated comparative analyses, enabling the examination of potential differences in the prevalence of the meaning of work categories contingent on demographic factors (i.e., gender, tenure length, position type).

### *Thematic Analysis*

The application of thematic analysis techniques subsequent to qualitative content analysis serves three purposes. First, the thematic analysis aims to further explore the dataset and identify nuances that could have been missed in the initial qualitative analysis. Second, the thematic analysis emphasizes the pathways and contingency factors affecting participants' work meaningfulness, thereby addressing my second research question. Third, the thematic analysis endeavors to construct a meaning of work model that is directly tailored and applicable to Indigenous employees. By leveraging the model, I seek to derive actionable insights concerning strategies and measures that have the potential to ameliorate the overall Indigenous employment experience and foster heightened work meaningfulness (addressing Research Objective 1).

**Theme Creation.** Themes and categories are similar in that they are constructed from a series of related codes. They are different in that themes are relatively more theory and



interpretation driven, whereas categories are relatively more descriptive and grounded in data (Vaismoradi et al., 2016; Vaismoradi & Snelgrove 2019). In the present study, the theme creation process involves adding interpretative and theoretical depth to previously identified categories, I have done this in three ways. First, I revisited large categories (e.g., 'communities' as a source of meaning) and re-examined their codes to identify additional nuances. Second, I merge smaller categories with similar content, or could fall under a united schema into more easily interpretable themes and expand on the theme further with additional coding. For example, I merged smaller categories like 'co-workers' and 'supervisors' and created an overarching theme of 'colleagues'. Subsequently, I add depth to this broader theme, 'work environment', by looking for instances in my dataset where department-level or team-level work environment could have affected my participants.

Lastly, I differentiate the categories/themes into two distinct facets: *meaningfulness constructs/criteria* and *meaningfulness pathways*. The distinctions between pathway and construct were explained by Rosso et al. (2010). The *meaningfulness constructs* encompass specific criteria that an individual uses to determine whether a particular work or employment is meaningful or not. The *meaningfulness constructs* (or *criteria*) parallels to the Guiding Influences Paradigm 3 explained in the literature review. In contrast, the *meaningfulness pathways* are psychological experiences resulting from the individual-task-work environment alignment (Paradigm 2), and they explain how individuals attain meaningfulness through work (see *Figure 3*).

To provide an illustration, consider these two themes: *autonomy at work* and *connection to one's Indigenous community*. The former, *autonomy at work*, is a *meaningfulness pathway*, while the latter, *connection to one's Indigenous community*, is a *meaningfulness criteria*. My data

indicates that the degree of autonomy and control that my participants have over their work content affect their ability to maintain connections with their community. However, *autonomy at work* does not seem affect work meaningfulness directly, but through how it affects factors like *participants' connection to their Indigenous community*, signifying *autonomy at work* as a meaning of work pathway rather than a meaning of work criteria. This differentiation between pathways and criteria is a pivotal underpinning for the subsequent model construction.

**Model Construction.** The model aims to structure key themes and illustrates the relationships between the meaning of work concepts. I borrowed the logic from the general meaning of work model presented by Rosso et al. (2010), I differentiated meaning of work *pathways* and *constructs* and suggested how the employment conditions reported by my participants may affect their meaning of work.

The model emphasizes prevalent themes/categories that emerged from the data and are specific to my Indigenous sample. I used category size from the preceding qualitative content analysis to estimate the salience of each theme (both meaningfulness constructs and pathways). A visual presentation of the model was created to offer a coherent and overarching perspective on Indigenous employees' work meaningfulness experience.

## Chapter 4 - Results

### Qualitative Content Analysis

I conducted this qualitative content analysis to answer my first research question: What are the meanings of work for Indigenous employees in settler organizations? What constitutes meaningful work for them? The most salient categories that participants attributed as their meaning of work are *civic and kinship worth*, encompassing the *community* and *family* subcategories. *Civic and kinship worth* were mentioned by 15 out of 18 participants and were coded 51 times (83%). The second most salient categories are *generational/legacy of effort* (11/18, 61%) and *design of the job tasks* (11/18, 61%), followed by *co-worker* (8/18, 44%), *relationship with land* (8/18, 44%), *financial circumstances* (8/18, 44%), and *integration of Indigenous knowledge at work* (7/18, 39%). These categories correspond to the Guiding Influences paradigm, which I elaborated on in the literature review section. These categories represent criteria or sources that give participants' work meaning. Example quotations and descriptions of these categories and their subcategories can be found in *Table 4*. These categories are the meaning of work constructs, participants attribute these categories as the source of meaning to their work. Three of these seven categories appear to be Indigenous-specific meaning of work constructs; these three categories are not part of the mainstream meaning of work literature; they are *generational/legacy of effort*, *relationship with land*, and *integrate Indigenous knowledge at work*.

The most salient meaning of work pathway that the participants expressed was *autonomy/self-efficacy/freedom at work*. Fourteen out of 18 participants expressed having a sufficient degree of autonomy in their work is vital to them; seven expressed that their work

experiences are enhanced because of how much autonomy and freedom they have. The second most salient pathway is the *sense of purpose* (11/18, 61%), followed by the *sense of belonging* (8/18, 44%) and *self-esteem* (7/18, 39%). Example quotations and descriptions of these categories and their subcategories can be found in *Table 5* (Appendix D).

Seven categories that are not from the mainstream meaning of work literature emerged from the data, they are *bureaucracy* (11/18, 61%), *racism/discrimination* (8/18, 44%), the *importance of flexibility at work to maintain work-life balance* (7/18, 39%), *tokenism* (5/18, 28%), *hybrid economy* (4/18, 22%), *lateral violence* (2/18, 11%), and *gender-based discrimination* (2/18, 11%). Example quotations and descriptions of these categories and their subcategories can be found in *Table 4*. These categories represent specific work conditions that theoretically would impede meaning of work pathways. For instance, discrimination, racism, and tokenism would impede an Indigenous employee's sense of belonging or self-esteem; and bureaucracy and a lack of work-life balance can impede an Indigenous employee's sense of autonomy and self-efficacy.

Comparative analyses between my participants based on gender, employee types, and tenure length did not show notable changes in the order of category sizes. Though there are some experiences specific to specific participant positionalities. For example, two-spirited participants face both racial discrimination from non-Indigenous coworkers and gender-based discrimination from cisgender coworkers (see 'Gender-based discrimination' in *Table 5* in Appendix D).

### **Thematic Analysis**

In this analysis, I discuss overarching themes and propose a theoretical model that describes the meaning of the work of Indigenous employees and focusing on my second

research: *How can settler organizations make their Indigenous employee's work more meaningful?*

***Theme 1: Belonging to a trans-generational community.***

Indigenous employees in my sample were driven by a strong sense of purpose and responsibility to contribute to their Indigenous community through their work. Most of my participants engage in work that involves protecting and proliferating Indigenous knowledge and voices in their settler institutions, conducting research on Indigenous topics, or directly serving Indigenous communities (e.g., students, patients, and community members).

Another thing that keeps me going is service, right? Community service. So being connected to these local communities where I live, you know, an hour north of [City Name], the [Name] tribes and [Name] nations, and just like this is their territory, where we live, and we, you know, my family and I acknowledge that and try and be of service to local folks. – Jen.

My participants often describe the worth of their work based on how it contributes to their family and community and how their work has the potential to improve the lives of future generations. “Community. Everything we work so hard for. Hoping that the next generation, you know, are my own family, my children, my cousins, my little nieces, and nephews, have a better experience.” According to Oak.

Meaningful work connects my participants to both the future and the past. My participants also attribute the worth of their work as a continuation of their ancestors/predecessors’ effort to improve the circumstances of Indigenous peoples and communities.

We're standing on the shoulders of greatness. So always show respect for the generation that came before you. Um, but you know, put respect to the generation

that's about to come that you're working for, but also to, you know. Um, protect what we hold sacred, protect our teachings, protect our networks, protect our economies. And in my job as a Metis person..."— Etienne.

This sense of contributing to an Indigenous legacy of resistance and survival extends beyond the person's direct tribal/familial lineage but also extends to Indigenous communities across Canada at large. Participants believed that their work is a continual historical legacy of resisting colonial brutalities and carving out a livelihood for Indigenous peoples, and they see that their effort potentiates and sets precedence for better futures for not just their immediate community but also all Indigenous Canadians.

The sense of work meaningfulness driven by being a part of a legacy of Indigenous resilience is consistent and prominent across my data, evident in how the *community & family* and *generational/legacy of effort* are the most salient meanings of work construct categories. Additionally, I observed that the categories related to the individualistic meaning of work constructs are small. A consistent pattern that emerged is the association between the meaning of work with their contribution to their Indigenous community; and the sense of connectedness fostered by their work with Indigenous communities (and often extending to non-Indigenous communities as well). According to Opal (a professor), "I would say that it's relationships. And I can already see that happening, that it's the personal relationships that I'm developing with other people in my department or at the university, as well as the people who take the time to create a relationship with me."

***Theme 2: Creating space for Indigenous knowledge in settler institutions.***

While the content analysis revealed that the integration of Indigenous knowledge at work comprises a relatively modest category (7/18), this topic holds particular significance within the

context of settler post-secondary institutions. Most Canadian universities answer the mandates from The Truth and Reconciliation of Canada (2015) for decolonization, Indigenization, and reconciliation (Haig-Brown, 2008), which include creating and sustaining space for Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing. As evident from my data, my Indigenous participants find this initiative meaningful. This theme corresponds with the previous theme; creating space for Indigenous knowledge is part of serving the larger community which Indigenous employees are embedded. Star commented, “I work in the academic world...we need to work harder at recognizing the different pathways that Indigenous peoples take and the different types of knowledge that they bring...”

Some participants find meanings beyond merely establishing a space for Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing but also integrating them with mainstream Western knowledge. They allude to the potential of how Indigenous knowledge could enhance and enrich the broader academic landscape. Opal further commented, “I shouldn't have to make a choice between those two streams of thought and knowledge, I should be able to freely pursue them both and weave them together and have that recognized. Have both recognized. Yeah. as being important.”

In addition, Opal said,

It's been most effective when I've kind of used a dual approach to getting over issues or dealing with things in the workplace. And to really weave together kind of a very traditional Indigenous value-based approach, as well as a very formal administrative approach and understanding policy and so on. So, like to take those two things and use them in conjunction. That's been the most effective for me.

Aside from creating the space themselves, my participants had invited elders and knowledge keepers from their communities to create the space with them, aiming to close the distance between institutionalized academic knowledge and Indigenous knowledge in the communities.

Opal also said,

I've also worked with knowledge keepers. So, part of the call-to-action graduate program I developed was designed to have elders, knowledge keepers, teaching alongside of me for the 10 days of the two summer courses... I was able to make a case in our faculty that these are people [elders, knowledge keepers] who need to be recognized for their knowledge.

Participants reported that bringing in elders and community knowledge keepers is an effective strategy, however, some are concerned about the non-reciprocal nature of post-secondary institutions and see that universities do not reciprocate the knowledge, good-will, and labour provided by Indigenous elders and knowledge keepers. Failure to establish reciprocity and mutual respect risks perpetuating a colonial legacy of privileged settler institutions extracting knowledge from Indigenous communities. Diamond said, "I think universities need to find a way to accredit Knowledge keepers and recognize that these privileged institutions have a lot to give back to community." They also said, "...there has to be consideration of those elders and knowledge keepers, bringing requisite expertise into this post-secondary setting."

***Theme 3: Autonomy, freedom, and flexibility at work is the most crucial pathway to meaningfulness.***

As per the preceding qualitative content analysis, most of the participants expressed that having sufficient autonomy and freedom in their job is important to their work (14/18). Through the autonomy, freedom and flexibility they are afforded, my participants tend to modify their work or identify work that maximizes their work meaningfulness, which often entails connecting to the Indigenous community, working with Indigenous knowledge, and contributing to Indigenization or decolonization initiatives. Diamond said,

So, I, like my job, because I have the authority to make decisions, and I have some funding to make plans with. I am being heard on a number of things that prior to our



Indigenous strategic plan at the university- I've seen a big shift in how much fiscal focus there is for Indigenous initiatives.

The desire to attain more autonomy and freedom at work appears can be a motivator, but autonomy and freedom are often described as means for them to work for a higher purpose, such as enhancing their ability to contribute to community and Indigenization initiatives, and desire to make changes to policies and culture of the settler institution. Thus, I consider autonomy and freedom a meaning of the work pathway, not a meaning of the work construct. Diamond also said,

The whole concept of reconciliation in Canada, like it's going to take it's going to take a lot. And in these hierarchical institutions with all the bureaucracy, and the personalities, and the politics. The leadership from the top will have a very important role in setting the tone and the base of what that looks like. And what the investment in it is, and so that's why I would like to get the top.

My participants appreciate autonomy and freedom not only in terms of the work tasks and goals but also freedom from overbearing and restrictive organizational policies. For example, a participant shows their frustration against their university's communication policy against back-channeling. Back-channeling in the organizational communication context refers to informal communications between workers and stakeholders outside of official communication channels designated by the institution. This participant argues that back-channeling is essential for connectedness and a sense of community for Indigenous employees in a Settler institution.

Etienne said,

...largely Indigenous women, especially on campus, especially for the last thirty years, have used back channeling as a very, very effective route to communicating a kind of female Indigenous power as well as a community, a sense of community Indigenous power on a campus. So back-channeling is an essential component, an essential component of Indigenous capacity... And yet, if you sat in an administrative professional development session in an institution in Canada today, they would tell you back channeling is toxic, and you have to stop it at all costs.

And what I have to do is, I have to stand up in those meetings and say, ‘No, you're wrong. Back channeling is only dangerous because it threatens your power. Back channeling is a very powerful component that we need, so ‘back off.’

I coded *flexibility* as a subcategory under the *Self-efficacy, autonomy, freedom at work* category. A sizable number of participants mentioned flexibility (having or the lack of) affects their work-life balance and their work experience (7/18, 39%). Mel commented, “The academic road is such a sweet deal. I love the independence I’m able to work at home today, the flexibility. I have a daughter. I can pick her up and drive her home from school because we're not in a bus zone. I really love that part of my job.” On this same topic, Catherine added: –

...you know, it's impossible to have a balanced life while working as an academic, in my experience... They could, under I don’t know, they could help us achieve a better balance in our lives, like, be flexible with schedules and so on, like, the cookie cutter thing just doesn't work for everybody.

While most employees would likely appreciate having more flexibility at work, my data suggests that flexibility is essential for Indigenous employees because many engage in a hybrid economy. Three of my 18 participants have explicitly mentioned that they are heavily involved in the economic and social activities of their community and families while also holding down a full-time job. Their heavy involvement with their community competes with their full-time job for their time, energy, and resources. Furthermore, older, highly educated and higher-earning Indigenous employees are often more likely to play important roles in their communities. Jen recalled:

Well, the kind of barriers that- I mean the kind of situations that I was getting involved in with my family was, you know if somebody was going to court, I was expected to go with them. You know... somebody – all- you know because I all sudden was seen as a person who was gainfully employed finally in my life. So, I have obligations- I was perceived as having obligations to give people money whenever they wanted it for whatever reason. To go running in the middle of the night is somebody having a crisis or look after their kids for, you know, time immemorial.

***Theme 4: A meaningful work experience is not always a pleasant one.***

My sample of Indigenous employees displays instances where work is both meaningful but deeply unpleasant or uncomfortable, which is uncommon or under-investigated in mainstream work literature. Serving as an Indigenous team member frequently implies being shouldered with all the Indigenous tasks of that team, which can result in an oppressive workload. For example, an Indigenous student support advisor working at a large Canadian university, they observe that they take on a larger workload because they are the only Indigenous advisor on the team. Alex said,

I've been telling my manager straight up, I'm like, I'm so worried I'm gonna burn out, I'm so worried I'm gonna get a burnout because the demands of grad school. Along with the high amount of students I see, I'm seeing the most students out of all the students support advisors, they have no one. All their caseload drops off in April, because they go for their summer, and their concerns are academic. And if they're not taking Spring, Summer classes, they're not gonna stick around because, well, my students, the demands have not changed. They are, I'm just as busy as I was in April. And it's really stressful.

While there is no specific rule requiring Indigenous students to seek help from an Indigenous advisor, all requests from Indigenous students tend to be directed towards the Indigenous student professor as Indigenous students generally feel more comfortable seeking advice from someone who understands their background. Despite the excessive workload, the student advisor still found their work deeply meaningful. Alex further commented, "I like my job, I love my job. I love that I get to work with primarily Indigenous students. This, I've never had a job where I feel so connected to the people I'm working with. I really feel like I'm, and I don't mean this in an egotistical way, I really feel I'm making a difference in my own community."

As mentioned before, Indigenous employees are often heavily involved with the economic and social activities of their community. They may hold significant roles within their

communities or feel a strong sense of obligation to contribute their time and labor to the community they are researching. Due to the extreme workload from both their university full-time job and their obligations to the Indigenous community, a senior professor at a large university, developed stress-induced health damage despite an active attempt to manage stress. Nonetheless, the professor still found their work meaningful overall. Ashwood remarked, “I did take the position with [University Name], with the understanding that I will be allowed to continue my work with the Métis community, thus the dilemma I'm in today. So, I do actually do two full time jobs. It feels like it anyway.” They further noted:

The expectations are extreme... , beyond unreasonable, I developed type one diabetes from the stress of the work. I'm [amount] pounds [participant's height]. So, I'm not overweight. I work out four times a week. And I've done that to manage the stress. Starting back in 1996, when I went to school, and have consistently been engaged in fitness, so it's not lifestyle related at all. It is stress.

Beyond increased workload, Indigenous employees often work closely with evidence and traumas from colonialism, which can be emotionally laborious, potentially traumatic, and even personal. Another professor with an Archeology background whose recent project involves recovering the identities of unmarked graves of Indigenous children who were killed in the Canadian residential school system. Pine remarked:

Since [year], I was working with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on the missing children's project and then even after the [program name] completed its mandate I continued working on that missing children, and I currently am the principal investigator at the project that we've had since [year] With the [Location Name] [First Nation Name] nation where we're investigating a cemetery that was associated with the residential school there, and you know there a there was a survey to [Location Name] cemetery we found there were [three-digits number] unmarked graves, but over the course of our research we've been able to reclaim the identities of [two-digits number] of the children were buried there.

The morbid nature of the missing children project does not impede the professor's sense of meaningfulness in their work. Alongside other Indigenous-related projects, such as an

Indigenous language revitalization project, the professor finds their work meaningful and satisfying.

In addition to the increased workload and working with traumatic and emotionally laborious topics, Indigenous employees are vulnerable to racism and discrimination. Eight out of 18 participants reported that they have experienced, or are currently experiencing, racism and discrimination in the workplace. Pine also mentioned, "...racism, has been a constant threat throughout my career... racism that I experienced from my colleagues and from people within universities, even students..."

Interestingly, none of the participants suggest that their experiences of racism/discrimination make their work less meaningful. Perhaps they see overcoming and resisting racist and discriminatory workspaces as part of their work and part of a generational effort to ameliorate colonial institutions.

***Theme 5: Call for culturally sensitive and tangible organizational support for Indigenous employees.***

Although the burdens discussed in the preceding theme do not appear to diminish Indigenous employees' work meaningfulness, it is still crucial for universities to provide organizational support and continue Indigenization initiatives to enhance the well-being of current and future Indigenous employees.

Indigenization initiatives in Canadian universities appear to yield some visible changes, as my participants commented on the increased Indigenous presence on campus, increased number of Indigenous studies programs and options, and visibility of universities' decolonization

and Indigenization initiatives. However, there is still much work to be done. Per my coding of the bureaucracy category from the qualitative content analysis, 11 of my 18 participants emphasized the need for further changes on cultural, policy, and institutional levels to advance decolonization and Indigenization in post-secondary education. Etienne stated, "...when you are handling the delicate sensitivities and egos of the institutional bureaucracy... you can basically run out of patience, and it's just a constant ongoing emotional labor to make sure that people never feel bad that you don't agree with them."

Some of my participants reported experiencing institutional constraints, such as excessive administrative tasks, exclusion from communication and decisions that impacted them, and a lack of recognition for Indigenous-specific work. The failure of universities to acknowledge Indigenous-specific work in their performance evaluation protocol has significant consequences, creating an unbalanced playing field for competition between Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees, putting additional strain on the workloads of Indigenous employees, and hindering the promotion and career advancement of Indigenous employees. Oak noted that:

...as an Indigenous person you'll see, let's say you spent three months, working with a Community pouring your spirit and your heart into going out there and sitting with Community members and helping take care of babies and cooking food and driving people around and like and then you know you have like this beautiful project and the whole Community came out and it was as amazing and life changing and yet you know when you're evaluated at the university it's just one line. And a colleague who published three things in that time in their own name, because they didn't do any land-based work or any cultural or community-based work gets three lines because they worked alone, without giving back, but they seem like they're more productive than you.

Some participants believe that the performance evaluation of Indigenous researchers can be improved by considering community involvement and contribution rather than following conventional protocols. Oak also mentioned:

I think an Indigenous lens on performance and what really matters and using Community and Knowledge keepers and Community participants, as the ones who get to say 'did this work have value? Is this person performing well? Is it more in line with an Indigenous approach?' Rather than usually like the way senior Prof who's never been out in Community deciding if your work [has] merit.

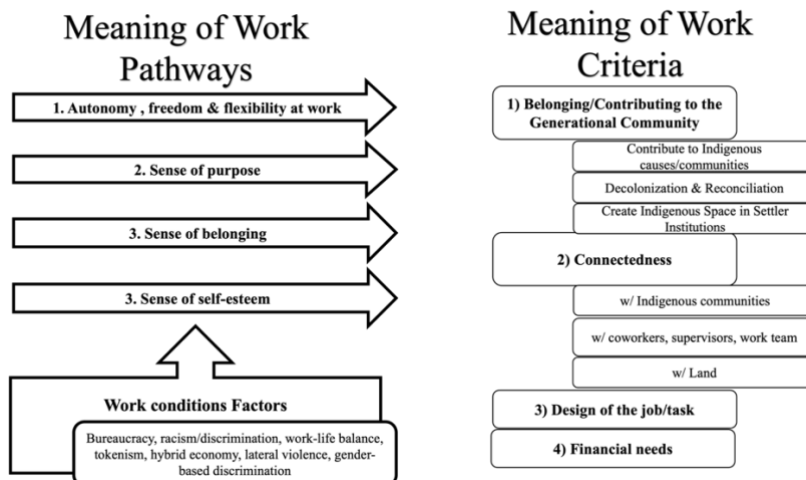
Some participants expressed disappointment with the lack of tangible, culturally relevant support for Indigenous employees and deemed their universities' Indigenization initiatives as superficial and tokenistic. (5/18). They are concerned that these initiatives might do more harm than good. Without appropriate practice, value systems, and policies that support Indigenous employees, ceremonies and rituals such as land acknowledgment and smudging are tokenized performances. In these empty performances, the meanings of Indigenous ceremonies, knowledge, and values are misinterpreted and lost. Finally, Oak remarked:

...some of the Indigenisation [initiative] is actually more harmful than when there was nothing because when practices and policies that we request are misinterpreted and then appropriated and institutionalized by administrators who don't understand Indigenous cultures and realities, they get diluted of all their sacred power. They get diluted and then they get commodified and tokenized in a way that is actually even more harmful than when there was nothing at all...

### ***Theoretical Meaning of Work Model for Indigenous Employees***

Based on the categories and themes identified in my previous analyses, I created a theoretical model to describe how Indigenous employees come to find their work to be meaningful (see *Figure 6*). The mode includes three facets the meaning of work constructs, the meaning of work pathways, and work condition factors.

**Figure 6:** Meaning of Work Model based on my Indigenous Participants



*Note.* The number ranking in this figure refers to salience. One meaning the most salient and four being the least salient. Salience is inferred from the categorized size from the qualitative content analysis.

The current model differs from the general model presented by Rosso et al. (2010) in that it focuses on the unique sources of meaning for Indigenous employees, which is primarily derived from their relationships with others (e.g., community, land, and co-workers). The model illustrates how the meaning of work for Indigenous employees differs from the mainstream literature on the subject.

The work pathways in the model are identical to those delineated by Rosso et al. (2010). They range from the most prominent to the least prominent: 1) autonomy, freedom, and flexibility at work, followed by 2) a sense of purpose, 3) a sense of belonging, and 4) a sense of self-esteem.

My data suggests that work condition factors (e.g., bureaucracy, racism/discrimination, tokenism) do not directly affect Indigenous employees' perception of work meaningfulness.



Instead, these factors may influence work meaningfulness through the pathways. Work condition factors affect an employee's sense of autonomy, purpose, belonging, and self-esteem, which in turn can affect the employee's perception of the meaningfulness of their work.

## Chapter 5 - Discussion

Work meaningfulness, or the opportunity to attain meaningful work, is an underappreciated aspect of employment equity. Having meaningful work is associated with numerous positive life outcomes (e.g., Allan et al., 2019; Kamdron, 2005); while meaningless work is harmful (Yeoman, 2014). Research on the meaning of work, especially when focused on equity-deserving groups like Indigenous employees (Abella, 1984), sheds light on the challenges they face in attaining meaningful work. Such studies offer insights into ensuring that meaningful work is equally accessible to all.

To extend the meaning of work research and explore the meaning of work in the Indigenous employment experience context, I organized the existing meaning of work literature into three paradigms, two of which I identify as most relevant to organizational efforts to improve Indigenous employment experiences. The two paradigms are the harmony paradigm (paradigm 2) and the guiding influence paradigm (paradigm 3). The harmony paradigm examines how the positive or negative relationship between the worker, work/task, and the work environment affects the worker's perception of work meaningfulness (Chalofsky & Cavallaro, 2019). The Guiding Influence paradigm examines the individuals' criteria for meaningful work and the systemic factors (i.e., culture and social institutions) that affect those criteria. Using these paradigms as an analytic framework, I sought to examine 1) the meaning of work (criteria for meaningful work) for Indigenous employees inside settler organizations, and 2) identified organizational conditions in settler organizations that may negatively affect Indigenous employees' perception of work meaningfulness, and how those conditions can be improved. My

analyses produced confirmatory and exploratory findings that help to confirm meaning of work research and extend it using a culturally distinct group of Indigenous employees.

### **The Guiding Influence Paradigm**

Meaning of work criteria/constructs I identified from my Indigenous participants may be distinct from non-Indigenous participants from in two ways. First, compare to the full list of meaning of work criteria/constructs<sup>27</sup> presented by Rosso and colleagues (2010), there may be a range restriction and a higher degree of homogeneity of meaning of work criteria/construct among Indigenous employees. Second, my findings indicate the presence of historicized and culturally specific meaning of work criteria/constructs.

#### ***Range Restriction and a High Degree of Homogeneity***

There is an absence of certain criteria/constructs from Rosso et al. (2010) reported in my findings. ‘Organizational mission’ (2/18) and ‘national culture’<sup>28</sup> (0/18) as the meaning-of-work criteria/constructs is limited in my Indigenous sample, but these criteria/constructs are commonly reported in non-Indigenous populations (Kopaneva, 2015). Participants only identified with organizational missions if the organizational missions are conducive to empowering Indigenous-specific causes, such as increasing Indigenous presence on post-secondary campuses. ‘National

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<sup>27</sup> The term ‘meaning-of-work criteria/constructs’ refer to categories I produced from my qualitative content analysis. I use the term ‘meaning of work criteria/constructs’ instead of ‘categories’ in this section because I am talking about these variables in the theoretical framework of paradigm 3.

<sup>28</sup> In this thesis, the term ‘national culture’ refers to the cultural environment at a nation-state level (e.g., Canadian national culture).

culture' as a meaning of work criteria/construct is not observed. These findings are consistent with existing Indigenous employment experience research findings (e.g., Gallagher & Lawrence, 2015), my participants' identification with their Indigenous tribal community is much more salient than their identification with their nation-state or their employer organization.

Another evidence for range restriction and a higher degree of homogeneity of meaning-of-work criteria/constructs among Indigenous employees is my low coding counts for 'personal values', 'personal motivation', and 'personal beliefs' criteria (from Rosso et al., 2010) and high coding counts for 'family' and 'community' (collectively, I categorized them as 'Civic + Kinship Worth', see *Table 5*). I observed no instances of 'personal beliefs' as a meaning of work criteria where the instances could not also be categorized as another meaning-of-work criteria/construct (see *Table 4*). Similarly, I observed no instances of 'personal values' as a meaning of work criteria/construct from my participants; instead, my participants described their family and cultural values as their criteria for meaningful work (see *Table 4*). This distribution of meaning of work criteria/constructs that I could observe from my data supports the previous research suggesting that Indigenous individuals are more collectively oriented than their non-Indigenous counterparts in Western society who are more individualistic (Grambrell, 2017). A participant who wished to remain anonymous noted, "I was raised by a generation of Métis men and Metis women who only understand ourselves in our capacity to hold [a] job."

I observed even more range restriction in Reinecke and colleagues' (2017) moral worthiness typology than Rosso and colleague's (2010) meaning of work typology. Five of the eight moral worthiness were not observed as meaning-of-work criteria/constructs, namely 'fame worth', 'market worth', 'industrial worth', 'projective worth', and 'inspired worth'. The range

restriction on these typologies indicates high homogeneity in the meaning-of-work criteria/constructs in Indigenous employees, which corroborates the notion that culture, and social institutions have a significant influence on individuals' criteria for meaningful work (Bendassolli & Tateo, 2018). Overall, paradigm 3 is supported in my Indigenous employee sample. The pathway-to-criterion logic still holds (Rosso et al., 2010).

### ***Historicized and Culturally Specific Meaning-of-Work Criteria/Constructs***

Of the seven most salient meaning-of-work Criteria/Constructs, four of them are historicized or culturally specific, namely 1) 'civic and kinship worth', 2) 'generational legacy', 3) 'relationship with land', and 4) 'integration of Indigenous knowledge at work'. Note that the 'civic and kinship worth' is historicized by 'generational legacy' (combination of 'family' and 'community' criteria) as I elucidated in my reporting of Theme 1 (Belonging to a trans-generational community). My findings suggest that Indigenous conceptualize 'community' and 'family', and the sense of connectedness to them, differently from their non-Indigenous counterparts because they include future and past generations of their lineage. This notion of the entire tribal lineage as a community or extended family can be found in existing Indigenous employment research (e.g., Baeyer, 2011).

These findings are consistent with existing research on Indigenous employment experience by a) supporting the notion that Indigenous culture and the way Indigenous identities are embedded in social institutions affect the way Indigenous employees define and experience meaningful work (e.g., St-Cry, 2016; Pickering, 2004; Haar & Brougham, 2011), and b) Indigenous employees have meaning-of-work criteria/constructs not shared with their non-Indigenous counterparts.

The prominence of Indigenous culture and social institutions (e.g., identity, values, traditions, and community) in shaping the criteria for meaningful work among Indigenous employees offers a compelling lens through which to examine classic psychological theories of individual agency in self-actualization (Ford, 1991) and self-determination (Deci et al., 2017). My findings suggest that Indigenous employees' agency is not undermined by their Indigenous culture or social institutions, rather sometimes, they assert their individual agency by aligning them with their culture and community. Future research on Indigenous employment experience in psychology should develop further explore the relationship between individual agency and Indigenous culture and social institutions in the context of self-actualization (Ford, 1991) and self-determination (Deci et al., 2017).

### **The Harmony Paradigm**

Five of the eight organizational conditions variables that I coded for represent factors that indicate disharmony between the employee, the work/task, and the work environment. They are 'bureaucracy', 'racism/discrimination', 'tokenism', 'lateral violence', and 'gender-based discrimination'. 'Bureaucracy' (11/18), 'racism/discrimination' (8/18), and 'tokenism' (5/18) categories have high salience. These categories represent the disharmony that is located between the work and their work environment. Experience of racism, discrimination, and tokenism indicates that the participants found their work environment (or past work environment) at a settler organization to be overly hostile to them. In contrast, the 'bureaucracy' category represents more subtle marginalization or obstacles, such as unfair and non-transparent decision-making or leadership process and the university's inability to acknowledge Indigenous-specific workload (see Theme 2 and Theme 5) in the result section.

As opposed to the harmony between the Indigenous employees and their own environment, the harmony between the Indigenous employees and their tasks seems to be mostly positive and appears to be the driver of their work meaningfulness. 'Design of the job tasks' is the second most salient meaning-of-work criterion/construct after 'civic and kinship worth', many participants were satisfied with their tasks and saw them as the reason behind their sense of work meaningfulness. The 'design of the job tasks' was coded when participants expressed satisfaction in doing specific tasks (e.g., "I love teaching", "I love working with library archive", "I enjoy administrative tasks"). The high salience of this meaning-of-work criterion/construct suggests that demand-ability fit (Cable & DeRue, 2002) is important for Indigenous employees as well.

Beyond specific task types (e.g., teaching, administrative tasks, research tasks), the way Indigenous employees can connect to their community through their job tasks gives their work the most meaning<sup>29</sup>. Existing Indigenous employment experience literature shows that Indigenous employees find their work in settler organization more meaningful if they feel connected to their Indigenous community or Indigenous social identity (e.g., Spowart & Marshall, 2015). This present research contributes by identifying 'job task' as an important connector between Indigenous employees and their community/culture at work.

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<sup>29</sup> This falls under the 'community + kinship worth' category. I have set aside the 'design of the job tasks' category for instances where participants find motivation from specific job tasks, such as teaching, administrative tasks, or research tasks. This excludes situations where the primary value of the task is its connection and contribution to their Indigenous community."

The importance of ‘job tasks’ as an important connector between Indigenous employees and their community or culture is further supported by how, *autonomy/self-efficacy/freedom at work*, is the most salient meaning-of-work pathway. Though autonomy has established importance as a central meaning-of-work and work satisfaction factor in the West (Bowie, 1998; Yankelovich, 1974; Terez, 2002), I argue that autonomy has special implications for Indigenous employees. Indigenous employees who have more autonomy in deciding their tasks can design their tasks to suit their meaning-of-work match, such as increasing Indigenous community involvement when performing tasks for their settler employers. Many of participants, particularly university faculty members and those in management positions, found their work meaningful because they could alter their job tasks. Perhaps the logic that autonomy and freedom enhance employees' experience of meaningful work — because they enable employees to meet more criteria for meaningful work — is relevant to all employees, not just those who are Indigenous. Further research is needed to ascertain the relationship.

### **The Work Centrality Paradigm and Work Orientation**

In both the theoretical model and the analysis of this study, the work centrality paradigm is underemphasized<sup>30</sup>. Though paradigm 1 did not contribute significantly to my theoretical orientation or the structure of my data analysis, my analysis results correspond with some of paradigm 1 dimensions. The five dimensions are paradigm 1 are 1) work centrality, 2) societal

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<sup>30</sup> Explanations on why paradigm 1 is underemphasized in the theoretical model is provided earlier under the ‘Connections between Paradigms’ section of this thesis.



norms regarding work, 3) valued work outcomes, 4) importance of work goals (work orientations), and 5) work-role identification.

Work centrality is difficult to examine in a qualitative study, as it would require highly specified interview questions, which were not included in the present study. Even if participants suggest work plays a central role in their lives, we cannot ascertain the proportionality of work to other aspects of their lives without asking for proportionality specifically. The psychometric approach is more suited for inquiry of work centrality. Inquiry of social norms have different obstacles. I cannot derive a set of social norms from my data that would be generalizable to a wider population or address my research objectives, considering the data's specific context (academic institutions), the diverse backgrounds of the participants, and the limited sample size. Thus, identifying social norms among my participants was not part of the deductive coding process.

Evening though work centrality and social norms were removed from the deductive coding process, some social norms content emerged via the inductive coding process. Most notably, the *Métis Work Value* category showcases how some Indigenous employees are affected by social norms of their specific cultural affiliation, and those norms affect work centrality. Separate and dedicated research is needed to investigate the various social norms of work upon Canadian Indigenous groups and how their work centrality is affected by both social norms and employment availabilities.

The meaning of work typologies covered the valued work outcomes I included in the codebook (Rosso et al., 2010; Reinecke et al., (2017)). Some meaning of work categories/criteria identified in the qualitative content analysis results correspond with valued work outcomes of my

participants. Many salient meaning of work categories/criteria are valued work outcomes, such as serving/connecting with family and community (11/18, 61%), attaining financial resources (8/18, 44%), and integrating Indigenous knowledge at work (7/18, 39%). Meaning of work categories identified in the qualitative content analysis are more than just valued work outcomes; they included valued work experiences, such as *design of job tasks* (11/18, 61%) and *relationship with the land* (8/18, 61%). Incongruences between valued work outcomes of Indigenous employees and their institutional employers were detected in the thematic analysis, as shown in themes 2 and 3.

Examination of work orientations was attempted, but the typology was removed from the coding process in the early stage of the analysis due to insufficient data. Like work centrality, perhaps work-role identification is better observed psychometrically or was not solicited appropriately in our interview guide. Yet, my coding process highlighted discernible patterns regarding the interactions between my Indigenous employee participants' sense of identity and their colonial work settings. First, professional identity or organization-membership-based identities failed to emerge as categories in the inductive coding process. Though these identities were not part of the codebook, it is unlikely that I would have missed them if they were salient in the data. My analyses show that my participants' identification with their work or job is usually narrated as an extension of their cultural identity or community-member identity (with their traditional community). This is evident in theme 1, theme 2, and theme 3. Traditional psychometric approach to work-role identification would have failed to capture this important nuance. Future research on work-identification should properly differentiate professional and organizational-membership identities (Barbour & Lammers, 2015), and investigate their (in)dependency on other social identities.

## **Relationship between Meaningful Work and Indigenous Employment Experience**

I began this research with the expectation that colonialism that occurs within settler organizations would compromise Indigenous employees' attainment of meaningful work, however, my findings show that this relationship is more nuanced. My participants had experienced and been harmed by the colonial processes in settler organizations (e.g., racism and discrimination), but those experiences did not appear to affect their attainment of meaningful work. As long as participants had adequate control over their tasks to meet their criteria for meaningful work (often involving collaboration with Indigenous communities), they found their work meaningful. This was true even when faced with obstacles from colonial experiences (as noted in Theme 3 of the results section) or when it adversely affected their physical or psychological well-being (refer to Theme 5 in the results section). Thus, my findings partially contradict the harmony paradigm (Chalofsky & Cavallaro, 2019). My participants leverage their control over their tasks to compensate for the disharmony between themselves and their work environment.

The present research also identifies a subtle colonial process, where settler institutions (i.e., post-secondary universities) exploit their Indigenous employees' strong drive to attain meaningful work. Universities employ Indigenous employees for their Indigenization community initiatives and research. While capitalizing on employees' efforts, these institutions fall short in providing ample organizational support or duly acknowledging the invaluable contributions of these employees, as elaborated in Theme 5 of the results section. This is a subtle continuation non-reciprocal relationship between the exploitative relationship between settler organizations and the Indigenous community that has a long historical precedence. This subtly perpetuates the

historically rooted, non-reciprocal, exploitative relationship between settler organizations and the Indigenous community (Baker et al., 2017).

## **Implications**

### *Contribution to the meaning of work literature*

The most notable contributions I made to the meaning of work literature are the ‘Meaning of Work’ research paradigms I organized and the theoretical model (see *Figure 5*) I created to connect these paradigms. The meaning of work literature consists of multiple divergent streams of research that do not communicate with each other. The paradigms and the model I created may help to reconcile and bridge divergent streams of research and offer a roadmap for researchers less familiar with this domain to navigate the literature more efficiently.

In the evolving landscape of work meaningfulness theory, my research has shed new light on the experiences of equity-deserving groups, particularly Indigenous employees. While work meaningfulness is often overlooked in discussions of employment equity, it is crucial given its link to numerous positive life outcomes (e.g., Allan et al., 2019; Kamdron, 2005) and its potential harm when absent (Yeoman, 2014). My qualitative analysis identifies the importance of autonomy over one’s job tasks as the primary mechanism from which Indigenous employees attain meaningful work; this corroborates self-determination theory (Deci et al., 2017). The effect of autonomy over one’s job task on attaining meaningful work for Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations warrants further research.

### *Implications to the Indigenous employment experience literature*

This research is among the first to examine Indigenous employment from a meaning of work perspective and open a nascent avenue to understanding Indigenous employment experience. My findings suggest that Indigenous employees' criteria for determining their work meaningfulness are relatively homogenous within post-secondary institutions. While Indigenous employees encounter systemic challenges in colonial institutions, they can still attain meaningful work, especially if they have autonomy over their tasks and can connect with Indigenous communities at work. My findings highlight the inherent strength of Indigenous employees and nudge Indigenous employment research discourse further away from the deficit model (Ponting & Voyageur, 2001). Lastly, my findings showcase an insidious trend within settler institutions, particularly universities, where Indigenous employees are exploited for their strong drive for meaningful work despite a lack of sufficient organizational support and fair recognition.

### **Applications**

This research uncovered insights that can be directly applied by Indigenous employees in settler institutions, post-secondary institution leaders and administrators, and Indigenous right advocacy groups. My findings illuminate the criteria and processes that my Indigenous employees had expressed and experienced, especially in post-secondary universities. Indigenous employees from other settler institutions may find use in the vocabulary and concepts I identified to advocate for more autonomy, more organizational support, and fairer organizational processes to create an environment conducive to meaningful work.

Settler organizations, particularly universities can use the findings of this research as a guide to enhance their support for their Indigenous employees. To that end, my finding suggests that universities should aim to maximize Indigenous employees' autonomy over their job tasks, increase opportunities to connect and serve their Indigenous communities through and at work and implement an equitable performance evaluation system that acknowledges Indigenous-specific labour. My findings can remind these institutions that their Indigenous employees are likely overburdened. Indigenous individuals often have kinship or community obligations or even hold important positions in their community; more flexibility and organizational support at work can help to reduce their burden. Institutions should acknowledge that community-based research and sustaining an ethical and reciprocal research relationship (Craven et al., 2016) often require more effort and time from Indigenous researchers than non-Indigenous researchers performing over forms of research, performance expectations and evaluation should be adjusted accordingly. Indigenous support staff on campus (e.g., student advice, counsellors) often have a higher workload than their non-Indigenous counterparts, so universities should consider hiring more Indigenous staff or adjusting hours and pay. Louie (2019) provides a guideline for guidelines on how to evaluate Indigenous scholars fairly.

## Chapter 6 - Conclusion

### Limitations

Due to the timeline of IDG, the interview guide was developed, and interviews were conducted before the completion of the meaning of work literature review and the formulation of this study's analysis plan. The quality of the data might have been enhanced if the literature review and analysis plan had been finalized before data collection. An interview guide dedicated to the meaning of work content could have improved data quality, reduced the construct ambiguity issues I encountered during the coding phase, and facilitated more specific research questions on the meaning of work.

In general, this study has compromised generalizability due to the small sample size and data-collection limitations. The age of the participants was not collected, which limits generalizability across age groups. Though tenure length is collected, it is not a sufficient proxy for age or industry experience. Highly senior or experienced employees could be new arrivals at a company, and they would have different work experience than less experienced employees even if they share similar tenure lengths. The small sample with specifically Indigenous employees within large post-secondary institution setting limits the generalizability of my research finding.

The transferability of research findings to Indigenous employees outside of post-secondary institutions is limited. Some findings are clearly context-dependent. For example, the opportunity and ability to integrate Indigenous and Western institutional knowledge is likely limited to academic or research employment contexts. Other insights, such as the role of autonomy over job tasks and the need for more organizational support, are likely transferable to

other employment settings. Future research on Indigenous employees in other labor sections is needed to augment my research findings and the proposed model.

Lastly, though I am acquainted with the Indigenous employment literature, I do not have an Indigenous background, so I could have missed important culturally specific nuances during my coding and analysis process. I attempted to minimize this risk by a) considering all established the meaning of work constructs in the mainstream literature, b) using multiple and redundant typologies during the focused-coding process, and c) seeking out and integrating relevant findings from case studies of Indigenous employment during the focused-coding process.

### **Conclusion & Future Direction**

My findings suggest that Indigenous employees in Canadian post-secondary institutions consistently find meaning in their work through community engagement and forming positive and reciprocal relationships. When granted adequate autonomy and freedom, they actively seek out meaningful work, despite challenges such as bureaucratic constraints, discrimination, and inadequate organizational support. My findings suggest that post-secondary institutions are currently exploiting their Indigenous employees' strong inclination to work for greater purposes by overworking them, providing a lack of support, and imposing inappropriate policies. The future of decolonization and Indigenization university spaces requires updated policies that recognize the workload and community obligations of Indigenous employees, maximizing their opportunity for community engagement, and fostering reciprocal relationships with local Indigenous communities beyond the campus. Future research on Indigenous employment should explore the meaning of work and organizational support factors in other labor sectors. Also, by



researching Indigenous-owned businesses, researchers and settler organizations may gain new insights on enhancing support and work meaningfulness for the Indigenous workforce.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Initial Recruitment Email

“Dagote Friends,

I am writing to ask if you would be willing to participate in an interview about work and your employment experiences. My team and I are hoping to produce advice for Indigenous employees at different stages of employment and to organizations for how to support their Indigenous employees. The current study focuses on employment in the academic setting, including faculty and non-faculty staff. The interview will last between 1-3 hours depending on how long or how much you would like to share. An honorarium of \$50 will be provided.

Interviews can be conducted over an online platform (Zoom) or in-person and can be scheduled for whatever time of day works for you. If you would prefer to be interviewed in-person, please let us know, and for participants near Calgary, we can coordinate a meeting place instead. For long-distance participants, we will do our best to coordinate an in-person visit. Please reach out if you're interested or have any questions: [Indigenousresearch@ucalgary.ca](mailto:Indigenousresearch@ucalgary.ca).

Ixehe,

-Adam

Adam T. Murry, PhD  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Industrial-Organizational Psychology  
University of Calgary  
(403) 220-6002  
[adam.murry@ucalgary.ca](mailto:adam.murry@ucalgary.ca)

Indigenous Organizations' and Communities Research Lab

*The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this study (REB20-0374).*

## Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:

Adam T. Murry, Faculty of Arts, Department of Psychology, 403-220-6002,  
[adam.murry@ucalgary.ca](mailto:adam.murry@ucalgary.ca)

Title of Project:

Indigenous experiences at work: Exploring Indigenous employment barriers, ways of overcoming them, positive experiences, and organizational supports.

Sponsor:

Faculty of Arts Seed Grant; PURE

This consent form, a copy of which has been provided to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, please ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

Participation is completely voluntary, and your data is confidential.

Purpose of the Study

For this study, you will be asked to participate in conversational interviews with a member(s) of the research team. The questions in the interview will address your prior and current work experiences. The purpose of this study is three-fold: 1) First, we are hoping to challenge the discourse around Indigenous barriers to employment. We feel the way research presents

Indigenous barriers to employment has been oversimplified and uses a deficit model. We hope to contextualize barriers in through a broader lens of the context of one's life. 2) Second, we will ask about the strategies, resources, supports, and personal characteristics that have helped you overcome common barriers to employment to help other Indigenous employees in similar circumstances. The goal here is to utilize a strength-based approach that views Indigenous people as proactively adapting and navigating barriers rather than being passive recipients of external pressures. 3) We will be asking for stories about what you enjoy and value about your job. The goal is to provide advice to organizations and employers for how to better support Indigenous employee's retention and well-being at work.

### What Will I Be Asked To Do?

While we would normally conduct interviews in person, due to COVID-19 regulations and safety precautions, all interviews will now be conducted virtually through an online meeting platform (Microsoft Teams). While we acknowledge that this is far from the ideal way to share in a conversation about work experiences, we will strive to create a comfortable virtual interview environment.

You will have received this consent form by email after having identified that you are interested in participating in this study. We will be as flexible as possible when scheduling interviews and will make sure that we find times to connect that are convenient for you. One to three days before your scheduled interview, you will be sent the necessary information for the virtual meeting. If you agree to participate in the study, you can either choose to sign this form and return it to us via email or verbally agree to the consent from at the beginning of our first interview. Either way, we will discuss it together before starting our interview. Participation in the interviews is entirely voluntary.

We aim to have an open and casual conversation throughout interview, however there are some specific questions we will ask directly pertaining to your previous or current work experiences. These questions are designed to guide our interview about your experiences in a way that provides thorough coverage of the topics of interest. You will be asked questions about your experiences with barriers to employment, strategies you have used or are using to overcome those barriers, and organizational experiences that support or hinder your commitment to and performance at work. Please offer as much or as little information about these experiences as you are comfortable sharing.

Because your participation is completely voluntary, you are free to decline answering any or all the questions if you would prefer not to answer them. There is no penalty for declining to respond. Your continued willingness to participate extends even after we have completed the interviews. If, after the interviews are over, you wish your data to be removed, simply contact us and we will remove it.

### What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

Should you agree to participate, you will be asked about your current employment status including position title, if applicable, how long you've been in your current position, past positions held, your gender, your tribal affiliation. These questions are being asked so that we can evaluate if work experiences are the same (or not) for different people.

There are several options for you to consider if you decide to take part in this research. Please review each of these options and choose Yes or No:

I grant permission for my interview(s) to be recorded: Yes: \_\_\_ No: \_\_\_

I wish to remain anonymous, but you may refer to me by a pseudonym: Yes: \_\_\_ No: \_\_\_

The pseudonym I choose for myself is: \_\_\_\_\_

You may quote me and use my name: Yes: \_\_\_ No: \_\_\_

I grant permission to use my data in the publication of this study's results: Yes: \_\_\_ No: \_\_\_  
 I grant permission to use my data in content designed for community-use: Yes: \_\_\_ No: \_\_\_

## Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate

Though we aim to facilitate an engaging conversation, participation in the interviews may cause boredom, and questions of a sensitive nature may evoke memories about experiences that cause negative feelings. The goal of these interviews is to help prevent such experiences from happening in the future (to the extent possible) by equipping organizations with tools to reduce employment barriers for Indigenous employees, and community members with strategies to overcome workplace hurdles. If, by chance, the interviews cause you distress, we can stop, pause, or skip any question of the interview.

To demonstrate our appreciation of the time and knowledge you are sharing with us, we will provide an honorarium of \$50. This gift is not to serve as compensation for your information but as a genuine “thank you” for your generous contribution to our study. Another benefit to participating in the project is that you will be helping us develop deliverables for use within community and industry outlets, which we hope will contribute to improving Indigenous employment experiences. We appreciate your help in providing us with this information and trusting us with your stories.

## What Happens to the Information I Provide?

Your interview will be recorded, transcribed, and combined with other interviews for analysis by researchers in the Indigenous Organizations and Communities Development Research Lab, housed in the Department of Psychology at the University of Calgary. After recordings are transcribed, they will be encrypted and stored on a password protected computer. In the transcriptions, your name will be replaced with a pseudonym if you desire. Any additional identifying details from the interviews (other people’s names, position titles, company names, locations, etc.) will be anonymized or removed during the transcription process as well. One document connecting your name to your pseudonym will be saved in a secure folder accessible only to the Principal Investigator (PI), which will only be accessed if you wish to have your interview recording or transcript returned to you or withdrawn from the study at a later date.

Interview transcripts will be coded by several members of the research team. Each interview transcript will be read over completely and thoroughly, during which main topics and ideas that are discussed in the interviews will be highlighted. Several different coders will review each transcript and if any discrepancy in interpretation occurs, the coding team will discuss the topic in question until a consensus is reached. Once all transcripts have been coded, common themes can then be identified and discussed.

At some point during this analysis process, we hope to connect with you to review our interpretation of your data. If you do not agree with our findings or would like to alter our analysis, we can use this time to discuss how we can most accurately represent your stories and their intended meanings.

According to OCAP, First Nations communities have the right to own, control, access, and possess their data from research projects. Although this is meant to apply to communities rather than individuals, we extend these protections to you by giving you copies of your data, providing you with access to your data, and consulting with you regarding our interpretations.

It is anticipated that analysis and initial write up of results will occur within one year. Though because this study is projected to be just the first in a larger, more occupationally and geographically diverse project on Indigenous employment, we will likely integrate this data into future data sets and thus, there are no plans to destroy your data at this time. After the publications have been submitted, you can still request your data be removed from future publications or from revised drafts, but it will not be possible to remove your contribution to any publications that have already been circulated.

Would you like to receive a summary of the study's results?

Yes:

\_\_\_ No:--\_\_--\_\_\_

If yes, please provide your contact information (e-mail address, or phone number)"

-----  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Are you interested in being contacted about a follow-up interview or coding check, with the understanding that you can always decline the request?

Yes: \_\_\_ No: \_\_\_

Signatures

Your signature on this form indicates that 1) you understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) you agree to participate in the research project.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date:  
\_\_\_\_\_

#### Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Dr. Adam T. Murry

Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts

403-220-6002, [adam.murry@ucalgary.ca](mailto:adam.murry@ucalgary.ca)

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact the Research Ethics Analyst, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-6289/220-4283; email [cfreb@ucalgary.ca](mailto:cfreb@ucalgary.ca). A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

## Appendix C: Interview Guide

### Indigenous Employment Experiences

#### Interview Guide

##### I. Introduce self and project

- II. Greetings, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am \_\_\_\_\_ and a researcher with the Indigenous Organizations' and Communities' research lab (share a bit about yourself). Over the next hour or so, we will be asking you questions about work and work life. Before we begin, we'd like to make sure you've had the chance to read our consent form and that you provide consent. If you have any questions about that document, we can answer them now or at any time during the interview. It is important to us that you know that this is entirely voluntary, that you can decline any question or quit at any time, and that there is no penalty for doing so.

##### Review/confirm informed consent form:

[https://survey.ucalgary.ca/jfe/form/SV\\_6G7AqiMBk8RhwGy](https://survey.ucalgary.ca/jfe/form/SV_6G7AqiMBk8RhwGy)

##### What's this all about again?

- A. This project my adviser's attempt to contribute to long-standing issue of unemployment and underemployment among Indigenous Peoples. His vision to improve employment opportunities began in 2003, when work to support substance use prevention on a reservation in the southwest showed the pervasive impact of unemployment. He has since dedicated himself to contribute to improving Indigenous employment and has worked to support it the last 12 years. Many of his research attempts to support employment have been in education (e.g., Indigenous mentorship in health science, Indigenous parent supports for child disabilities services). This study is the first time he's been able to focus specifically on employment experiences. The goal is to help redesign work so that it is better for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people alike.

##### III. Contextual checklist



- A. To begin, we'd like to start with your introduction. In addition to anything you'd like to share about yourself, please include whether you are employed and/or searching for work, your working title, how long you've been at your job, and preferred pronoun.

Interviewer to make sure we have info for the following questions:

1. Interview employment status: Employed AND/OR Searching
2. If employed, interviewee occupation/title:
3. If employed, interviewee tenure: Temporary New ( $\leq 4$  years) Middle ( $>4$ ,  $<10$  years) Long-term (10+ years)
4. Interviewee gender:
5. Tribal affiliation (if mentioned):
6. Interviewee location/date and time stamp:

Thank you for your introduction. If it's alright with you, we'll move on to the interview [wait for confirmation]. [confirms, if not, allow more time]. Okay, the following interview involves questions about four domains: work barriers, work supports, working for yourself, and the meaning of work. Each domain is inter-related, but we'd like to walk through one at a time. Do you have any questions before we get going? [answer questions]. Great! Ready? [wait for confirmation again].

#### **IV. Experiences with barriers to employment**

- A. The government of Alberta has stated that Indigenous people experience the following barriers to employment. We don't want to dwell on these, so I'm going to share with you a link to a short survey in the chat [share link: [https://survey.ucalgary.ca/jfe/form/SV\\_6tcV9nReut906vc](https://survey.ucalgary.ca/jfe/form/SV_6tcV9nReut906vc)].
1. The first question on the survey asks about your favourite animal – this serves as an identifier linking your interview transcript to your barriers survey. What is your favourite animal?

- B. Please type that same animal into the favourite animal field on the survey and then go ahead and click “Next.” You’ll see a table with ten barriers listed and a place where you can select two different options. Please indicate whether you have experienced, currently or in the past or both, the barriers to employment listed there. Justification for this weird thing: The research on Indigenous employment is dominated by stories of poverty and barriers to employment. We want to add complexity to this conversation by showing how barriers change with time and should not be applied universally to Indigenous people. Take as long as you need and let me know if you have any questions.

Barrier type	Experiencing this now	experienced this in the past	never experienced this
Inadequate education			
Lack of jobs near your community			
Racism, discrimination, or stereotypes			
Lack of transportation			
Lack of driver’s license			
Lack of available childcare			
Lack of affordable housing			
Inadequate support making the transition to employment			
Personal barriers (e.g., disability, mental health, addictions, or inadequate life skills)			

Other?			
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**V. Strategies, resources, and circumstances for overcoming barriers**

**VI.** Thinking for a moment about the barriers to employment that you've experienced or are experiencing, are there any stories or lessons you've learned that have helped you press on that you'd be okay to share with us?

**VII. Current work experiences**

Thank you for sharing about how you've worked through or are working through challenges to employment...

A. [If employed] Now we'd like to ask you about your current job.

1. Overall, do you like your job?

a. Prompt: Why? Why not?

2. Is there anything that helps you to be committed to your job?

i. Follow-up (if needed): For example, things you like about your job (e.g., co-workers, leadership, flexibility, students), resources you have available (e.g., cultural supports, training, flexibility, tools), or personal characteristics that you have (e.g., intrinsic interest, work ethic, specific skills or abilities, availability of role models)

ii. Follow-up (if not brought up organically): Do Indigenization or cultural inclusion efforts at your work impact your job commitment?

a. Prompt: How so?

3. Thank you. I'd like to ask you now about your performance at work. Is there anything that helps you to perform well at your job?

i. Follow-up (if needed): For example, things you like about your job (e.g., co-workers, leadership, students), resources you have available (e.g., cultural supports, training, flexibility, tools), or

personal characteristics that you have (e.g., intrinsic interest, work ethic, specific skills or abilities, availability of role models)

- ii. Follow-up (if not brought up organically): Do Indigenization or cultural inclusion efforts at your work impact your job performance?
  - a. Prompt: How so?
- 4. Is there anything getting in the way of your work?
  - i. Follow-up (if needed): For example, bureaucracy, family obligations, bosses, co-workers, cultural differences, leadership challenges, discrimination, tokenizing, over-work, burnout?
  - ii. Follow-up (if not brought up organically): Do Indigenization or cultural inclusion efforts get in the way of your job commitment or performance?
    - a. Prompt: How so?
- 5. How long do you plan on staying at this job?
  - i. Follow up (if needed): What types of things could influence how long you stay?
- 6. Overall, do you feel like your organization supports you?
  - B. [If searching] Now we'd like to ask you about your job search.
    - 1. What type of work are you looking for?
      - i. Why?
    - 2. What kinds of things are you looking for in an employer?
    - 3. Do you think you have the qualifications to get the job you want?

### **VIII. Self-employment**

- 1. Have you ever considered going into business for yourself?
  - i. Follow-up (If they have their own business concurrent with their university job): How is that going (i.e., pros and cons)? (We care about pros and cons!)
  - ii. Follow-up (If they have considered it but haven't pursued it): Why?
  - iii. Follow-up (If they used to be self-employed but aren't anymore): Why did you leave that work?
  - iv. Follow-up (If they have not considered it): Why not?

2. If you could describe your ideal job, what would it look like?

**IX. Meaning of work**

1. What do you think work is for? Why do we work?
  - i. Yourself
  - ii. Everyone
  - iii. Your culture
2. What would make your work more meaningful?

**X. Wrap-up**

1. Is there anything that we missed that you think we should have asked about?
2. Do you have any questions or need any clarification about anything?
3. Thank you! [Explain honorarium, next steps, etc.]

## Appendix D: Large Tables

**Table 3** : Initial Codebook

	<b>Codes</b>	<b>Additional Explanation</b>	<b>Additional References</b>
Rosso et al. (2010): Meaning of Work typology	Personal Values	A source of meaning	
	Personal Motivation	A source of meaning	
	Personal Beliefs	A source of meaning	
	Coworker	A source of meaning	
	Leaders	A source of meaning	
	Communities	A source of meaning	
	Family	A source of meaning	
	Design of Job Tasks	A source of meaning	
	Organizational Mission	A source of meaning	
	Financial Circumstances	A source of meaning	
	National Culture	A source of meaning	
	Spirituality	A source of meaning	
	Sacred Calling	A source of meaning	
	Being Authentic	Pathway	
	Self-Efficacy, autonomy, freedom	Pathway	Breen (2019)
	Self-Esteem, dignity	Pathway	Bowie (2019)
	Sense of Purpose	Pathway	
	Belongingness	Pathway	
	Transcendence	Mechanism of meaning, from the source of meaning to the feeling of meaningfulness. Vertical Transcendence: a sense of connection to a divine, abstract, and sacred entity (i.e., God) Horizontal Transcendence: perfecting meaningful connections with the surrounding world. To transcend self- interest and become part of a whole.	Bailey & Pratt (2019)
Wrzensniewski et al. (1997) & Willner et al. (2020):	Job	Work solely as a mean for material and monetary gains	
	Career	Wish to climb career ladder and increase influence	
Work Orientation Typology	Calling	Work for a greater moral purpose	
	Social Embeddedness (belonging)	Work is meaningful primarily because it satiates social needs	
	Busyness	Work is meaningful primarily because it is an efficient way to pass time	
Reinecke et al., (2017): Moral Worthiness Typology	Inspired Worth	Creativity	
	Domestic Worth	Kinship	
	Fame Worth	Reputation	
	Civic Worth	Common Good	
	Market Worth	Reciprocal Worth	
	Industrial Worth	Efficiency	
	Projective Worth	Connectivity and flexibility	
Green Worth	Environmentally and ecologically valuable		

Constructs specific or common to Indigenous work experience that are not covered above	Traditional/Customary economy	Work directly with traditional lands. Work primarily generates cultural and social values, instead of market values. Work pertaining to traditions and ceremonies.	Brascoupe (1993); Pickering (2004); Wilson (2020)
	Task-based notion of work and time		Pickering (2004)
	Connection/relevance to traditional culture and values		Kuntz et al., 2014
	Cultural Identity / Indigenous identification		Spowart & Marshall, 2015
	Ancestral Connection		Robin et al. (2022)
	Reciprocal interpersonal relationship		Musharbash (2004)
	Valuing non-hierarchical organizational structure		Hunt (2022); Musharbash (2004)
	Conflict between organizational and traditional identities, norms, or role	Cultural tension within the individual, or between the individual and the employing organization.	Steel & Heritage (2020)
	Engage in hybrid economy	The individual is employed full time at a settler organization, yet still is involve equally in traditional community work	Wood (2015)
	Dissatisfaction with the physical environment of the workplace due to cultural reasons		Hunt (2022)
	See their own Indigenous identity or affiliation as hinderance		Reid (2011)
	Tokenism		Hunt (2022)

*Notes.* For explanations on the terms ‘a source of meaning’ and ‘pathway’, please read sub-chapter ‘Connection between Research Paradigms’ (page 36 to 40).

**Table 4: Modified Codebook**

Code & Modification	New Categories	Modification Type	Reason for Modification & Explanation
<del>Personal Values</del> → Family/Cultural Values	Family/Cultural Values	Eliminated & Re-label	My participants exclusively talked about how their culture and family's work values. Not about their own.
Family/Cultural Values → Personal Motivation <del>Personal Beliefs</del> Coworker Leaders →	Métis Work Value  1) Elders Involvement 2) Settler Supervisor Relationship	New sub-category  Unchanged Eliminated Unchanged Expanded	Métis work value stood out as a sub-category of "Family/Cultural Values"  Lack of data
Communities		Unchanged	Specifically, the Indigenous community. Codes regarding non-Indigenous community at work would be coded under the 'co-worker' category
Family Design of Job Tasks Organizational Mission Financial Circumstances <del>National Culture</del> Spirituality		Unchanged Unchanged Unchanged Unchanged Eliminated Unchanged	Lack of data Construct ambiguity. All the codes in this category are covered by other categories.
<del>Sacred Calling</del>		Eliminated	Construct ambiguity. All the codes in this category are covered by other categories.
<del>Being Authentic</del>		Eliminated	Construct ambiguity. All the codes in this category are covered by other categories.
Self-Efficacy, autonomy, freedom	Having enough autonomy Impeded by a lack of autonomy	Expanded	There were enough data to code for directionality
Self-Esteem, dignity Purpose Belongingness (to the employing settle org.) →	Feeling belonged Feeling not belonged	Unchanged Unchanged Expanded	There were enough data to code for directionality
<del>Transcendence</del>		Eliminated	No accounts of vertical transcendence. Accounts of horizontal transcendence were already coded under the "community" category, creating redundancy.
<del>Job</del> <del>Career</del> <del>Calling</del> <del>Social Embeddedness</del> (belonging) <del>Busyness</del>		Eliminated	Not enough data to profile each participant. And it is redundant to code for traits under each orientation.



<del>Inspired Worth</del> <del>Domestic Worth</del> → <del>Civic Worth</del> →	Civic + Domestic Worth	Eliminated Merged	Lack of Data Beyond “financial circumstances”, the value of participants’ employment were attributed to long-term improvement of families’ and descendants’ circumstances (beyond just finance). Family and community often mentioned concurrently in the same code (if not the same sentence), so the two categories were merged.
<del>Fame Worth</del> <del>Market Worth</del> <del>Industrial Worth</del> <del>Projective Worth</del> <del>Green Worth</del> → Connection with Land	Connection with Land	Eliminated Eliminated Eliminated Eliminated Re-label	Lack of Data Lack of Data Lack of Data Lack of Data Beyond conventional environmentalism, participants expressed desire to stay connected and working with the ‘Land’ (natural landscape or their traditional territories).
<del>Traditional/Customary economy</del> <del>Task based notion of work and time</del> <del>Connection/relevance to traditional culture and values</del> → Cultural Identity / Indigenous identification <del>Ancestral Connection</del> → Reciprocal interpersonal relationship <del>Valuing non-hierarchical organizational structure</del> Bureaucracy	Family/Cultural Values  Generational Effort	Eliminated Eliminated Re-label  Re-label Unchanged Relabeled	Lack of Data Lack of Data Subsumed under the new category “Family/Cultural Values”.  This is mentioned in every single interview and an underlying topic in almost every discussion.  Covered under the new ‘Bureaucracy’ category
<del>Conflict between organizational and traditional identities, norms, or role</del> →	Bureaucracy Indigenous specific tasks are not recognized by institutions.	Expanded / Relabeled	
Engage in hybrid economy <del>Dissatisfaction with the physical environment of the workplace due to cultural reasons</del> <del>See their own Indigenous identity or affiliation as hinderance</del> Tokenism	Racism/Discrimination	Unchanged Unchanged Newly Added	Lack of Data Lack of Data

Lateral Violence	Newly Added	Violence experienced by participants from other Indigenous peoples at work or affecting work
Integrate Indigenous Knowledge	Newly Added	Participants find meanings in involving Indigenous knowledge keepers and elders in their work. Participants find meanings in combining traditional and Settler knowledge.
Gender-based discrimination	Newly Added	

**Table 5:** Categories (Qualitative Content Analysis Results)

Category Name	Description / Sample Code	N=18	Ref	Type *	Categories Type **
Civic + Kinship Worth	“...serving a community need or national need. And I work to be creative as well. And I also work to support my family” - Catherine	15	51	C	Established
Community	“...work is community, work is human connection.” - Diamond “My heart is in my community and the work that I do alongside my community members. They had to send me an email and say, “Are you taking the position or not?” And I actually am not a crier. I can't be I have too much work to do. I cried for four days, I cried to leave my Elder. I cried to leave my community and I cried to leave the work that I knew needed to be done.” - Ashwood	14	37	C	Established
Family	“We work to take care of our families and to make sure that we're eating and progressing...” - Oak	8	19	C	Established
Self-efficacy, autonomy, freedom at work	“I have just incredible amounts of freedom, I get to read interesting things, I get to talk to interesting people, I win grants that allow to me to travel to interesting places...” - Ruby	14	43	P	Established
Autonomy & Flexibility is important to maintain work-life balance	<i>Participants believe that autonomy and flexibility at work are important for them to maintain work-life balance.</i> “The academic road is such a sweet deal. I love the independence I'm able to work at home today the flexibility. I have a daughter. I can pick her up and drive her home from school cause we're not in a bus zone. I really love that part of my job” - Mel	7	9		Emergent
Having autonomy, freedom	<i>Participants believe that autonomy and freedom make their job more meaningful.</i> “I, like my job, because I have the authority to make decision...and I have some funding to make plans with. I am being heard on a number of things that prior to our Indigenous strategic plan at the university- I've seen a big shift in how much fiscal focus there is for Indigenous initiatives” - Diamond	7	12	P	Established

Lack of autonomy, freedom	<i>Participants believe a lack of freedom and autonomy makes work less meaningful.</i>	3	3	P	Established
bureaucracy	<p>“Before the reserve, there was no such thing as Indian time there, people are busy, then they were out there working morning, noon and night to ensure that their families are comfortable and that they had sufficient resources to help them help get them through, but then through the reserve era. ...they were expected to be farmers, but at the same time, you know there were so many controls on them, that they lost their lost their autonomy, through uh government intervention and as a result, you know people didn't have the same.” - Pine</p> <p><i>Participants expressed that organizational rules and settler organizational culture negative affect their work experience. Examples include, lack of administrative support, unfair treatment of Indigenous employees compare to their White counterpart, meaningless administrative work, and being excluded from important decision-making processes.</i></p> <p>“The more checks I can cut, I'll do it. I love giving away money. I love giving away seats I love holding non-Indigenous administrators accountable for crappy policy and process.” - Etienne</p> <p>“As faculty members, we should not be spending our time doing meaningless administrative work, I have to do all the hire paperwork, I have to fill out forms. I have to send them. I have to like it's, it's ridiculous, the amount of meaningless work that we have to do when we're supposed to be producing knowledge.” - Ashwood</p>	11	15		Emergent
Institutions fail to acknowledge Indigenous specific work	<p><i>This sub-category of bureaucracy stood out and appear to be an experience specific to Indigenous faculties.</i></p> <p>“A colleague who published three things in that time in their own name, because they didn't do any land-based work or any cultural or community-based work gets three lines, because they worked alone, without giving back, but they seem like they're more productive than you.” - Oak</p> <p>“I think transparency and fairness are really important, because a lot of times, you know as an Indigenous person you'll see, let's say you spent three months, working with a Community pouring your spirit and your heart into going out there and sitting with Community members and helping take care of babies and cooking food and driving people around and like and then you know you have like this beautiful project and the whole Community came out and It was amazing and life changing and yet you know when you're evaluated at the university it's just one line.” - Oak</p>	3	6		Emergent
Sense of Purpose	<p><i>Participants feel that their labour at work is directly serving a greater purpose.</i></p> <p>“My job is rooted in advocacy for the increased access to higher education for Indigenous students and the number one, the number one indicator of reducing</p>	11	28	P	Established

Generational/Legacy of Effort	<p>violence against Indigenous women is to increase literacy, literacy for non-Indigenous and Indigenous folks alike.” - Etienne</p> <p><i>Participants see their work as carrying out the legacy of their past generations and serving the generations to come.</i></p> <p>“We're standing on the shoulders of greatness. So always show respect of the generation that came before you. But you know put respect to the generation that's about to come that you're working for, but also to you know.... protect what we hold sacred, protect our teachings, protect our networks, protect our economies.” - Etienne</p>	11	15	C	Emergent
Design of the Job Tasks	<p><i>Participants' talent or personality compliments or enhance their employment experience.</i></p> <p>“I think that I have a personality that allows me to perform quite well, like I enjoy, even though I'm a bit of an introvert, which is also why I like this job because you can be an introvert and do quite well.” - Ruby</p>	11	13	C	Established
Sense of Belongingness	<p><i>Participants expressed that having a sense of belonging is important to them at work.</i></p>	8	16	P	Established
Feeling belonged	<p>“As my career went on, I saw people who appreciated me for some of the like the strategic or vision aspects that I brought to the table.” - Sapphire</p> <p>“Feeling a sense of connection to people. And not just like um, other Indigenous people I mean like everybody at the Institute if I feel connected to them and I feel welcome I want to put more effort into what I'm doing. I want to make sure that I'm, I'm bringing my whole self there.” - Silver</p>	6	7	P	
Feeling not belonged	<p>“I am leaving directly due to like the ongoing institutional constraints and violence. I think it just takes a toll on you and you're always fighting the same fight.” - Oak</p> <p>“And I was told in those interviews, so they were all for Indigenous positions, I was told, either behind whispered or right up front, I was the wrong kind of Indian.” - Ashwood</p>	5	8	P	
Leadership-related categories Elder Involvement	<p><i>Participants found the support or involvement of elder in their work meaningful.</i></p> <p>“At the spiritual and cultural level having access to the wisdom and supportive elders and knowledge keepers is essential, I think, to keeping your spirit intact when you're working in a colonial institution, because the violence operates at so many levels, you know interpersonal policy, institutional practices.” - Oak</p> <p>“My work is so different. It's not. It's meaningful. It's intentional. And it doesn't feel like a job always. Sometimes at work, I get to go to ceremony, I get to talk with elders.” - Alex</p>	6	9	C	Emergent

Settler-Leader Relationship	<i>Participants find that their good relationship with their settler supervisor enhance their work experience.</i> “What else helps me be successful? My supervisor, I couldn't, I couldn't do this work without her support and encouragement, but also her help in knowing it's okay to say no to things.” - Rose	3	5	C	Established
Coworker	<i>Participants expressed that their co-workers (settler or Indigenous) positively affect their work experience.</i> “I do love my job. One is, I found a university environment that is like intent on being very collegial. So political science was a great place to work. Indigenous studies is a great place to work, because everyone there are kind of reasonable people.” - Ruby	9	16	C	Established
Racism, Discrimination	Directly at work. Not coded if it is talked about generally.	8	11		Emergent
Relationship with Land	<i>Relationship with land or land-based work is meaningful.</i> “There has to be that learning from the land, learning from the elders, and real encouragement to develop who you are, as a person.” - Diamond “Some people love-love the land, I mean like I love the land, and then so, and I, and I even worked in the bush, you know when I was working up in the education system in northern BC in the summertime, we had it off, I worked in the bush. In general, I would say yes, I like my job.” – Robert. “My dream is to provide counseling (that is) very informed by Indigenous ways of knowing, like land-based counseling, like all that stuff excites me so much” - Alex	8	13	C	Emergent
Financial Circumstances	<i>Participants explicitly stated that their work is meaningful for financial reasons.</i> “Why do we work? to pay our bills” - Rose	8	11	C	Established
Survival (historicized)	<i>Participants stated that their work is meaningful because work is a mean of survival.</i> “...in Blackfoot tradition work was they were very busy people, work was expected because people didn't work, they didn't survive, it was just that simple, you know when you're hunting gathering culture. you're harvesting the foods from the land, the country foods so if you don't harvest those foods and store them yeah, you're not going to last very long when winter shows up you know.” - Pine	4	4	C	
Self-esteem	<i>Participants expressed that having or upholding self-esteem is important to their work experience.</i> “Being a good relative doesn't mean you let people walk all over you.” - Jen “The Indigenous studies department and the growing Faculty, hiring new (Indigenous) faculty. Expanding the programs and even. Creating space for (Indigenous) students... has been the result of my work.” - Pine	7	13	P	Established

Integrate Indigenous knowledge at work	“I've also worked with knowledge keepers. So, part of the call-to-action graduate program I developed was designed to have elders, knowledge keepers, teaching alongside of me for the 10 days of the two summer courses. So, they were there from nine to five, not guest lectures with me” - Ashwood	7	9	C	Emergent
Combine Indigenous and Western Streams of Knowledge	<i>Participants found meanings in creating spaces for combining Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge in their work.</i> “How to bring in our knowledge keepers into the academy in a good way. And right now, they're being brought in primarily for guest lectures. And, you know, we've got the whole payment schedule set out there. But I was able to make a case, in our faculty that these are people who need to be recognized for their knowledge. At the same time, there has to be consideration of those elders and knowledge keepers, bringing requisite expertise into this post-secondary setting.” - Ashwood	4	4	C	Emergent
Create space for Indigenous knowledge in Institutions	<i>Participants found meanings in creating spaces for Indigenous knowledge in their institutions.</i> “The Indigenous studies department and the growing Faculty, hiring new (Indigenous) faculty. Expanding the programs and even. Creating space for (Indigenous) students... has been the result of my work.” - Pine	2	2	C	Emergent
Helping Indigenous Students	“Well, I don't know about the organization, but you know we tend to attract a number of Indigenous students. And, for me, you know that's what it's all about.” - Jen	8	9	C	Emergent
Family/Cultural Values	<i>Participants express that they internalized their family or culture's work values.</i> “I mean really, it's internally motivated. I have a pretty rich system of values and understanding of my obligations um under Wahkotowin I mean the interrelationship of all of us, um it's, it's internally motivated my commitment.” - Silver	6	11	C	Emergent
Métis work value	“I was raised by a generation of Métis men and Metis women who only understand ourselves in our capacity to hold job.” - Etienne	3	4	C	Emergent
Tokenism	“Some of the Indigenization is actually more harmful than when there was nothing because again when practices and policies that we request are misinterpreted and then appropriated and institutionalized by administrators who don't understand Indigenous cultures and realities.” - Oak	5	8		Emergent
Hybrid economy	<i>Participants hold a full-time job at their institutions while also extensively engage in economic and social activities of their Indigenous communities.</i> “You know because I've had to be a caregiver for so many people in my family over the years and, and I still am. And I'm 70 years old.” - Jen “...you know as an Indigenous person you'll see, let's say you spent three months, working with a Community pouring your spirit and your heart into going out there and sitting with Community members and helping take care of babies and cooking food and driving people around and like and then you know	3	9		Emergent

you have like this beautiful project and the whole Community came out and It was amazing and life changing and yet you know when you're evaluated at the university it's just one line.” - Oak

Personal Motivation	<i>Participants Of believed that their personal characteristics drive them at work. If participants mentioned culture or family were referenced, those codes would fall under “Family/Cultural Values” category instead.</i> “I think I have a really high work-drive.” -Alex “it's not about individual ambition, or, I mean, sometimes it is, but like, these are the kind of values that we aspire to.”	2	2	P	Established
Organizational Mission	<i>Participants expressed that organizational missions of their institution make their work meaningful, specifically if those missions pertain to Indigenization or Reconciliation.</i> “I went back for my further training, because the First Nations health authority was forming and BC. Like what a privilege, I was like involved in conversations that were like just amazing as we were setting up this structure...” - Sapphire “We first started talking about it in [Year]. You know this office opened in [Year] to address what is known as Indigenization and you know they started up these committees and we're starting to see it. We're starting to see the results. And I'm a part of them. And, in general, I would say, you know, obviously there's a lot of different opinions about everything. I do know that this Institute is... when it comes to Indigenization, is further ahead than other institutes.” - Robert	2	3	P	Established
Lateral Violence	<i>Participants experienced violence from other Indigenous peoples at work or in their community that affected their work experience.</i> “Why else do I not like my job? There's lateral violence there, from other Indigenous people.” - Catherine “[Institutions] don't know how to handle lateral violence, they just shove it under the rug.” - Catherine “You have toxicity your team breaks down and you reproduce all of the colonial lateral violence that you're trying to fix and you find yourself right back in the exact same place so...” - Oak	2	4		Emergent
Gender-based discrimination	“It almost feels like transphobia. Because they're like, ‘well, you're not a man or a woman, what are you?’. That hurts. And I must explain my existence constantly.” - Alex	2	2		Emergent

*Note.* Cases refer how many out of 18 participants the category is present. References refer to how many times a category is coded. Established category refers a meaning of work concept that is established in the mainstream meaning of work literature. Emergent category refers to salient categories that emerged from the data during the coding process.