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Integration Journey of South Asian Professional Migrants into the Finnish Labour Market

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Master's thesis

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Master's thesis**Subject:** International Business**Author:** Md Abu Usuf**Title:** Integration Journey of South Asian Professional Migrants into the Finnish Labour Market**Supervisor:** D.Sc. Birgitta Sandberg**Number of pages:** 122 pages + appendices 12 pages**Date:** 01.12.2025**Abstract**

The globalisation of the labour market, perception of boundaryless careers, demographic changes in the host country, and increasing international competition for specialised talent have driven the global mobility of highly skilled professionals. Finland, facing significant talent shortages in technology, engineering, and scientific disciplines alongside rapid population ageing, has become increasingly dependent on international recruitment. In recent years, migration flows from South Asia have grown substantially. Despite national efforts to attract global talent, many highly educated migrants in Finland face difficulties securing employment commensurate with their qualifications, and a considerable number ultimately leave the country.

Existing research on migrant labour-market integration mainly focuses on English-speaking liberal labour-market environments and frequently examines refugees, low-skilled workers, or international students. Researchers often depend on single frameworks that do not fully capture the complexity of integration. Little is known about how highly skilled professionals from culturally distant regions navigate Finland's institutional frameworks, workplace expectations, and social norms. To fill this gap, the study aims to understand how South Asian professional migrants experience and manage their integration into the Finnish labour market. It explores two key questions: (1) What challenges do South Asian professional migrants face when integrating into the Finnish labour market? and (2) How do they overcome these challenges? To gain a comprehensive understanding of their integration journey, the study adopts a multi-theoretical approach involving Human Capital, Social Capital, and Cultural Intelligence Theory. An exploratory qualitative method was used, including nine semi-structured interviews with South Asian professionals from various sectors, predominantly within Finnish-based multinational companies. Thematic analysis revealed key patterns in participants' experiences.

The analysis identifies three interconnected categories of challenges: structural, social capital and networking, and adapting to new cultural mindsets. Structural challenges include employers' preference for local credentials, Finnish language requirements, employers' preference for cultural fit, and unfamiliar labour-market and organisational practices. Social capital and networking challenges stem from reserved interaction norms, slow and competence-based trust formation, and differing communication and knowledge-sharing practices that hinder migrants' access to meaningful professional ties. Cross-cultural challenges involve understanding new cultural expectations, adapting to new work and social cultures, and balancing personal identity. Despite these barriers, migrants employ three complementary strategies: strategic adaptation to labour market demand and localisation of their human capital, building and enriching social capital, and cultivating cultural intelligence. They pursue Finnish-recognised education and targeted upskilling, form diverse professional networks, cultivate trust-based relationships, and apply cultural learning and behavioural flexibility to navigate workplace norms.

The thesis outlines six key theoretical contributions, including: addressing an empirical gap by examining South Asian professionals; developing a multi-theoretical model through proposing a revised conceptual framework that reflects the cyclical and interconnected nature of integration; broadening Human Capital Theory with the concept of human capital localisation; refining Social Capital Theory by emphasising trust-building and cognitive alignment within culturally specific contexts; and advancing Cultural Intelligence Theory by illustrating how migrants adapt selectively in emotionally regulated cultures. These insights enhance understanding of skilled migration in coordinated market economies and provide practical implications for policymakers, employers, and migrants aiming to improve Finland's capacity to attract and retain global talent.

Keywords: Labour Market Integration, South Asian Professional Migrants, Human Capital, Social Capital, Cultural Intelligence.

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1 Introduction

This chapter starts by outlining the broader context of global talent mobility and the labour-market challenges currently shaping Finland's workforce landscape. It then reviews existing research to identify underexplored areas, clarifying the specific gap this study aims to fill. The chapter continues by presenting the purpose of the study and the research questions guiding the analysis. Together, these elements establish the academic and contextual foundation of the study. Lastly, the chapter concludes with an overview of the structure of the remaining chapters.

1.1 Global Talent Mobility and Labour Market Challenges in Finland

The globalisation of labour markets has intensified the movement of highly skilled professionals across borders, reshaping workforce structures in many advanced economies (Andersson & Konrad 2003, 211; Schuler et al. 2011, 507; Nieto-Aleman et al. 2023, 1055). This mobility aligns with the emergence of the boundaryless career, characterised by professional trajectories that extend beyond single organisations and national borders (Arthur et al. 2005, 177). By emphasising mobility between employers, re-evaluating career opportunities, and broadening perceptions of long-term employability, the boundaryless career concept challenges traditional career systems and redefines how professionals navigate global labour markets (Sullivan & Arthur 2006, 20). As a result, global talent flows have become an essential source of diversity and specialised expertise, enriching labour markets with skills that are valuable, rare, and difficult to replicate (Lewis & Heckman 2006, 145). Innovation-driven sectors, in particular, depend heavily on such professional migrants to sustain competitive advantage and foster economic growth (Thangavelu 2017, 726).

Worldwide, governments and multinational corporations face heightened competition for specialised talent due to demographic shifts, talent shortages, and growing demands for advanced skills (Tarique & Schuler 2010, 122). Reflecting these pressures, 44% of governments aim to increase, and 41% plan to maintain the inflow of highly skilled migrants (International Migration Policies 2017, 4).

Recognising the importance of attracting global talent, the European Union has responded by easing mobility through the revised Blue Card Directive, enabling more efficient entry routes for non-EU professionals (EU Blue Card -- 2021). Globally, the number of international migrants has nearly doubled from 154 million in 1990 to 304 million in 2024, with Europe hosting the largest share at 94 million (International Migrant Stock 2024, 2). A considerable proportion of these migrants originates from countries in the Global South, a pattern increasingly reflected in Finland's immigration trends (Immigration and Emigration by Nationality, Origin and Language 1990–2023). These global

developments create an important backdrop for understanding Finland’s evolving labour-market context.

In Finland, the labour market is significantly influenced by structural demographic challenges, including a declining birth rate and an ageing population (Sorsaa 2020, 9; OECD 2025). These pressures lead to serious shortages of skilled workers in sectors such as technology, engineering, and science (Talent continues--2022; OECD 2025). Although demand for specialised talent is rising, Finnish employers often underutilise the labour potential of older workers nearing retirement, which increases reliance on international recruitment (Finnish Centre for Pensions 2024). Recognising these issues, Finnish municipalities and national agencies have prioritised attracting and retaining international talent to support economic resilience and competitiveness. Consequently, Finland’s immigration patterns have changed significantly from 2021-2023, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Immigration to Finland by Nationality and Year

Data extracted from Statistics Finland’s free-of-charge statistical database (Immigration and Emigration by Nationality, Origin and Language 1990–2023)

Nationalities	2021	2022	2023
All nationalities (Total Number of Immigrants)	36,364	49,998	73,236
Afghanistan	820	939	1,456
Bangladesh	236	1,172	2,503
Bhutan	1	3	0
India	1,387	2,638	3,065
Maldives	1	2	2
Nepal	352	724	1,319
Pakistan	355	960	1,433
Sri Lanka	143	1,142	3,260
Total Number of South Asian Immigrants	3,295	7,580	13,038
South Asian share of total immigration (%)	9%	15%	18%

The data presented in Table 1 indicates a substantial rise in immigration between 2021 and 2023. Total immigration more than doubled during this period, rising by approximately 101%. The increase in arrivals from South Asia was striking, rising by roughly 296%. This remarkable demographic shift suggests that Finland’s labour-market institutions must adapt quickly to better support a more diverse pool of highly skilled migrants. Nonetheless, successfully integrating these professionals into the Finnish labour market remains a complex challenge. Barriers related to cultural adaptation, social embeddedness, and professional positioning continue to restrict the full utilisation of migrant expertise (VanRiemsdijk et al. 2016, 20; Teivainen 2017; Smith 2021).

Additionally, empirical evidence from Finnish labour market analyses and customs statistics highlights ongoing mismatches between migrant qualifications and available employment opportunities. Highly educated individuals, including PhD holders, frequently struggle to access employment aligned with their skills (Finland's PhD--2025; It's pretty--2025). Reports from the Research Institute of the Finnish Economy (ETLA) further show that nearly half of foreign experts leave Finland within 5 years, underscoring persistent challenges in retention and integration (Kauhanen 2024). Moreover, the challenges faced by international mobile migrants vary significantly based on their country of origin (Abramitzky et al. 2014, 468-469). Professional migrants from South Asian countries typically encounter different obstacles in Finland than those from EU countries (see, for example, Teivainen 2023).

Although the global context provides substantial insight into talent mobility, the Finnish case displays unique institutional characteristics that remain underexplored. The following section identifies the specific research gaps this study addresses.

1.2 Research Gaps

To contribute something new and relevant to the field, it is essential to compare existing studies and theories and to identify what is missing, underexplored, or insufficiently addressed in previous research (Efron & Ravid 2019, 2). This is commonly known as a research gap, and referring to these gaps helps justify the study's purpose and value. Table 2, presented on the following page due to layout considerations, summarises key studies from various countries, including Finland, highlighting their theoretical perspectives, contexts, and methodological choices. It charts the conceptual and methodological approaches used in the current literature, providing a transparent view of what remains underexplored.

Although global research on migrants' labour-market integration has increased significantly, several important gaps remain, particularly in the Finnish context. Much of the existing literature concentrates on English-speaking countries, such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Australia, whose labour-market structures and institutional settings differ significantly from those of coordinated market economies like Finland, as shown in the table placed on the next page. (Chiswick & Miller 2009, 162; Parutis 2014, 36; Mahmud et al. 2014, 339; Nardon et al. 2021, 1994; Pareliussen et al. 2016, 5; Sorsa et al. 2024, 561). These studies frequently rely on human capital-centric interpretations, examining isolated factors such as education or language proficiency (Dustmann & Fabbri 2003, 695; Chiswick & Miller 2009, 162). While informative, this body of work frequently

neglects how migrants actively mobilise their skills, networks, and cultural competencies to navigate new labour environments (Pio & Essers 2014, 252; Kozhevnikov 2021, 705).

Table 2. Previous Studies Related to the Research Topic

Author (s), Year	Context	Target Group	Method	Theoretical Lens	Focus of Study
Dustmann & Fabbri 2003	UK	Non-white immigrants	Quantitative	Human Capital Theory	Effect of language on earnings and employment
Parutis 2014	UK	Eastern European Migrants	Qualitative (Interview)	Cultural Capital Theory	Cultural and migrants' work experiences
Kozhevnikov 2021	UK	Skilled migrants	Qualitative (Interview)	Career Capital Theory	City-specific factors on migrants' career capital
Chiswick & Miller 2009	USA	Immigrants	Quantitative	Human Capital Theory	Education and Employment
Nardon et al. 2021	Canada	Highly skilled refugees	Qualitative (Interview)	Acculturation Theory	Refugee labour market integration
Turin et al. 2022	Canada	International medical graduates	Quantitative	Matching theory	Integrate into the alternative job market
Mahmud et al. 2014	Australia	Immigrants (IT & engineering professional)	Qualitative (Interview)	Matching Theory	Gaps in skills and attributes compared to employer expectations
Pio & Essers 2014	New Zealand	Indian women, Professional migrant	Qualitative (Interview)	Transnational Feminist Theory	Workplace Inequality
Kogan 2011	Germany	Immigrants	Quantitative	Human Capital Theory	Education and Employment Patterns
Lochmann et al. 2019	France	Immigrants	Quantitative	Human Capital Theory	Impact of language training on economic integration
Brekke & Mastekaasa 2008	Norway	Immigrants university graduates	Quantitative	Human Capital Theory	Earnings and Employment Differences
VanRiemsdijk 2014	Norway	IT Professional	Qualitative (Interview)	no single explicit theory	How skilled migrants make a new place feel like home
Strömmer 2017	Finland	Migrant Cleaner	Qualitative (Interview)	Human Capital Theory	Language at work
Jousmäki et al. 2024	Finland	Immigrants	Qualitative (Interview)	Human Capital Theory	Interrelationships of language, work, & place
Lu & Everson Härkälä 2024	Finland	International student	Qualitative (Interview)	Acculturation theory	Employment Integration
Kara et al. 2025	Finland	Social workers & migrants' advisors	Qualitative (Interview)	Human Capital Theory	Role of Language in Migrant Integration
Lång et al. 2025	Finland	Refugee	Qualitative	Systematic literature review	Refugee Entrepreneurship

In the European and Nordic regions, research often concentrates on broad immigrant populations or refugees, again highlighting human-capital-driven explanations without elaborating on how professional migrants engage with social and cultural structures (Brekke & Mastekaasa 2008, 507; Kogan 2011, 917). However, these findings are not fully transferable to Finland because of differences in qualification-recognition systems, institutional arrangements, and sociocultural expectations (Pareliussen et al. 2016, 5; Böckerman et al. 2017, 9; Lu & Everson Härkälä 2024, 134). Even within the Nordic region, Finland exhibits distinct labour-market patterns, further restricting the transferability of regional findings (Böckerman et al. 2017, 9; Sorsa et al. 2024, 561).

Within Finland, research has largely centred on general immigrant populations, low-skilled workers, or international students (Strömmer 2017, 137; Lu & Everson Härkälä 2024, 133; Lång et al. 2025, 438). Recent studies address topics such as workplace language practices, social belonging, and access to integration services (Jousmäki et al. 2024, 78; Kara et al. 2025, 100). However, research specifically examining skilled or professional migrants remains scarce. This scarcity is particularly surprising in the view of Finland's strategic emphasis on attracting international expertise. As shown in Table 1, the number of South Asian professionals in Finland has grown markedly in recent years. Moreover, South Asian professionals have unique linguistic, cultural, and educational background that may influence their integration differently from that of EU or East Asian migrants (Abramitzky et al. 2014, 468–469; Pareliussen et al. 2016, 9). Understanding this group is therefore essential for advancing Finland's long-term talent-management objectives.

Another important gap relates to theoretical approaches. Existing studies often rely on single frameworks, typically Human Capital Theory or acculturation models, which do not fully capture the multidimensional nature of integration (Lu & Everson Härkälä 2024, 133; Jousmäki et al. 2024, 78; Kara et al. 2025, 100). Collectively, these limitations, including the limited focus on professional migrants in Finland, the scarcity of studies on South Asian professionals, and the reliance on single theoretical lenses, indicate the need for more comprehensive and context-sensitive research. The next section outlines how this study addresses these gaps.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Building on the gaps identified earlier, *this study aims to understand how South Asian professional migrants experience and manage their integration into the Finnish labour market.* To achieve this aim, this study applies theories of Human Capital, Social Capital, and Cultural Intelligence. Situating these multiple theoretical perspectives within Finland's coordinated market economy offers a deeper

understanding of the integration journey of South Asian professional migrants into the Finnish labour market.

To guide this investigation, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. What types of challenges do South Asian professional migrants face when integrating into the Finnish labour market?
2. How do they overcome these challenges?

The first question identifies and categorises the key challenges shaping South Asian professionals' labour-market experiences in Finland. The second question explores the strategies, behaviours, and forms of human, social, and cultural capital individuals mobilise to develop their careers despite these obstacles. The remainder of this manuscript is organised as follows:

Chapter 2 reviews the key theoretical concepts and existing research on labour-market integration. Chapter 3 explains the research methodology, including the approach taken, data collection, and analytical procedures. Chapter 4 presents and interprets the empirical findings in relation to previous studies. Chapter 5 concludes the study by summarising the main contributions and discussing both theoretical and practical implications. This structure ensures a logical progression from foundational concepts to empirical insights, preparing the ground for the theoretical review that follows. Finally, it concludes with a comprehensive summary of the research. Following this structure, the next chapter reviews key theoretical concepts and existing knowledge on labour-market integration.

2 Key Concepts and Existing Knowledge on Labour Market Integration

This chapter establishes the conceptual and theoretical foundation for the study by clarifying key ideas and scholarly debates related to labour market integration. It begins by introducing the main concepts used throughout the research, including labour market integration and professional migration, to create a common analytical vocabulary. The chapter then reviews existing research on the challenges migrants face in host-country labour markets and the strategies they use to overcome these obstacles. This is followed by a discussion of the theoretical perspectives applied in the study and the reasons for their selection. Finally, the chapter synthesises these insights and presents a conceptual framework that combines Human Capital, Social Capital, and Cultural Intelligence theories. This framework provides the analytical lens through which the empirical findings are interpreted.

2.1 Conceptual Foundation

2.1.1 Understanding Labour Market Integration

In migration studies, integration is seen as a multifaceted and long-term process through which migrants access, engage with, and are accepted by the key institutions of the host society (Bejan 2017, 151; Penninx 2019, 5). This process involves both structural and relational aspects, including gaining rights, opportunities for participation, and developing social connections that foster a sense of belonging (Brell et al. 2020, 96). Within this broader context, labour market integration specifically relates to migrants' entry into and advancement within the labour market under conditions similar to those of native workers (Mahmud et al. 2014, 340; Martín et al. 2015, 46). It emphasises economic participation, equitable treatment, and the effective utilisation of one's skills and qualifications within the host economy (Chiswick & Miller 2009, 162).

Labour market integration, therefore, extends beyond merely securing employment. It encompasses work quality, career development opportunities, and migrants' ability to mobilise their professional and social networks to build stable career paths in the host country (Mahmud et al. 2014, 340; Brell et al. 2020, 96). When migrants can engage in the labour market on an equal basis, as demonstrated by comparable wages, working conditions, and promotion prospects, they are seen as being structurally integrated (Martín et al. 2015, 46).

Scholars often conceptualise labour market integration through three interconnected dimensions: legal-political, social, and economic, as shown in Figure 1 (Penninx 2019, 6; Brell et al. 2020, 96).

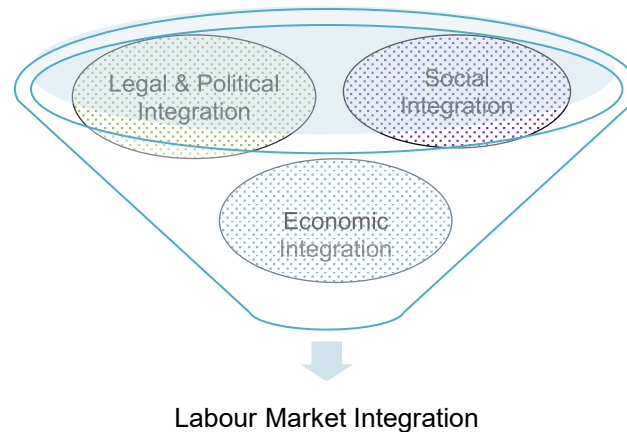


Figure 1. Labour Market Integration of Migrants

This model is especially relevant because it also shapes the analysis of subsequent empirical findings. As illustrated in Figure 1, the legal-political dimension includes regulatory conditions that support migrants' participation, such as residence and work rights, credential recognition, and compliance with employment regulations (Penninx 2019, 6). The social dimension pertains to migrants' adaptation to workplace norms while balancing culture, building professional relationships, and accessing networks that foster trust, information exchange, and career development (Mahmud et al. 2014, 340; Penninx 2019, 6; Brell et al. 2020, 96). The economic dimension relates to migrants' capacity to find suitable employment, utilise their skills, and advance in their careers under fair and equitable conditions (Chiswick & Miller 2009, 162; Martín et al. 2015, 46). Collectively, these dimensions provide a comprehensive view of labour market integration as a structural, social, and economic process that affects migrants' long-term inclusion and opportunities in the host society. Having clarified what labour market integration involves, the discussion next focuses on defining the specific migrant group whose experiences are examined in this study.

2.1.2 Understanding Professional Migrants

Migration scholarship uses various terms to classify migrants, recognising that internationally mobile individuals cross borders for different reasons and in diverse contexts (Andresen et al. 2014, 2303; IOM 2019, 132). Among these, economic migrants are those who relocate primarily for employment and financial improvement, seeking better jobs, higher wages, or improved living standards (IOM 2019, 62; Parutis 2014, 36). Other groups, such as academic migrants or immigrants, may overlap with economic migrants. Academic migrants are a distinct group who move primarily for education or research purposes and may include professors, researchers, postdoctoral scholars, or international students (Teichler 2015, S6). Immigrants represent the broadest category, typically associated with

permanent or long-term residence in a host country (IOM 2019, 103). Additionally, countries often interpret these terms differently depending on national policies (see, for example, Andresen et al. 2014, 2311). Essentially, there is no universally accepted definition of these categories. Furthermore, definitions vary across disciplines such as International Human Resource Management, Migration Studies, International Business, Political Science, and related fields (Andresen et al. 2014, 2300–2308; Tharenou 2015, 162; IOM 2019, 132). Such inconsistencies in defining internationally mobile populations contribute to conceptual ambiguity and can make academic discussions more complex (Andresen et al. 2014, 2295). To address this confusion, it is important to clarify the concept of professional migrants.

Professional migrants are internationally mobile, highly educated individuals who relocate mainly for career-related opportunities (Csedő 2008, 819; Pio & Essers 2014, 253). In this study, the term refers to migrants whose advanced qualifications and specialised skills are expected to support their integration into roles aligned with their expertise in the host labour market, while still needing to negotiate how their human capital is valued in the new context (Salt 1997, 5; Csedő 2008, 819; Cerdin & Selmer 2014, 1281; IOM 2019, 91). They migrate whether their stay is temporary or permanent, with their mobility mainly driven by professional development and employment opportunities (Tharenou 2015, 150). This distinguishes them from broader categories of migrants, where motivations might include family reunification, humanitarian protection, or general economic improvement. In academic literature, five distinct types of professional migrants are commonly recognised, as illustrated in Figure 2: assigned expatriates, inpatriates, drawn expatriates, self-initiated expatriates, and intra-organisational self-initiated expatriates (Harvey et al. 2000, 825; Andresen et al. 2014, 2307–2308; Doherty 2013, 447; Tharenou 2015, 162).

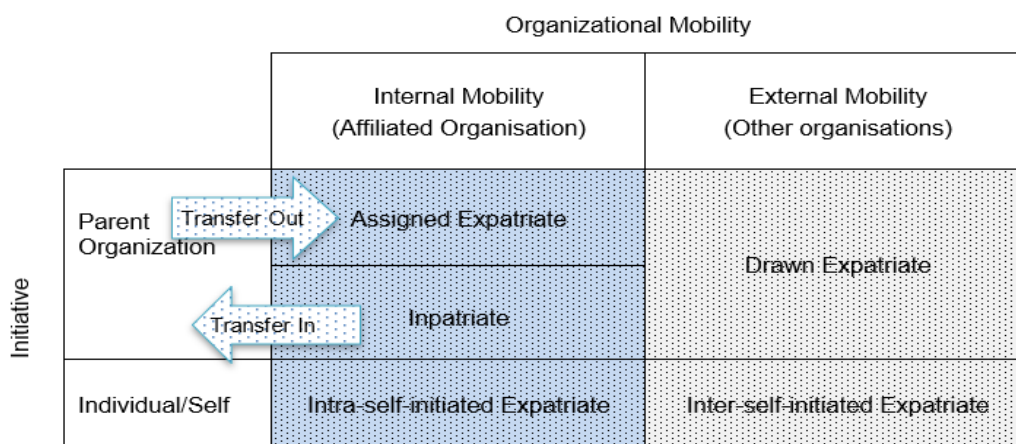


Figure 2. Typology of Professional Migrants (based on Andresen et al. 2014, 2307; Harvey et al. 2000, 825, and Salt 1997, 7)

Figure 2 visually distinguishes organisationally driven versus individually driven mobility trajectories. Firstly, assigned expatriates are dispatched abroad by their employers to specific subsidiaries for a fixed period, whereas inpatriates (a concept introduced by the author) relocate to the domestic headquarters to improve organisational understanding and cross-cultural skills (Harvey et al. 1999, 459–460). The arrows in the diagram indicate the transfer of employees between the parent organisation and its foreign subsidiary (concept added by the author). Next, drawn expatriates are highly skilled professionals actively recruited by organisations aiming for a competitive edge (Khilji et al. 2015, 236). Finally, self-initiated expatriates independently seek career opportunities abroad, either within their current organisation or with external employers (Cerdin & Selmer 2014, 1281; Andresen et al. 2014, 2308).

In this study, the term ‘professional migrants’ is used as a comprehensive term encompassing all five categories discussed earlier. This broader grouping prevents fragmentation in analysis and reflects Finland’s diverse inflow patterns. This definition aligns with current ideas in migration and international careers research and serves as a guiding concept for this study. After clarifying the key concepts, the next section reviews existing research on the challenges migrants face during labour market integration.

2.2 Existing Knowledge on Labour Market Integration Challenges

Migrants face a variety of obstacles when integrating into a foreign labour market. Research consistently shows that these challenges originate from structural, social, and cultural factors that influence access to employment, opportunities for career progression, and prospects for long-term inclusion (Mahmud et al. 2014, 345–346; Sirkeci et al. 2018, 908). Although an increasing amount of research focuses specifically on professional migrants, the wider labour-market integration literature often treats migrants as a single, undifferentiated group (De Coninck & Solano 2023, 3). Many empirical studies, covering both large-scale quantitative and qualitative research, report labour-market outcomes broadly under a general term that includes various forms of international migration, without differentiating between migrant subgroups (Chiswick & Miller 2009, 162; Mahmud et al. 2014, 340; Andresen et al. 2014, 2295; Tharenou 2015, 162). Therefore, insights from the broader migrant-integration literature remain relevant to this study. Based on the reviewed literature, three main categories of challenges emerge: structural barriers, social and networking issues, and cross-cultural difficulties. These categories also align directly with the theoretical lenses used in this study. The discussion now turns to the structural challenges.

2.2.1 Structural Challenges

Structural challenges refer to the institutional and systemic barriers that shape migrants' opportunities in the host labour market (Penninx 2019, 6; Mahmud et al. 2014, 340). These challenges stem from national regulations, organisational practices, and labour market institutions that determine how easily newcomers can enter and advance in the labour market (Penninx 2019, 6). Existing research highlights four major structural challenges: *recognition of foreign qualifications, adapting to a new official language, underemployment, and unequal access to career advancement*.

The *recognition of foreign qualifications* presents a significant structural barrier to labour market integration (Chiswick & Miller 2009, 162; Mahmud et al. 2014, 339; Sirkeci et al. 2018, 908; Sommer 2021, 26). Although migrants may hold advanced degrees and specialised expertise from their home country, their qualifications are not always accepted or evaluated equally by host employers (Chiswick & Miller 2009, 162; Sirkeci et al. 2018, 908). This problem is especially evident in regulated professions (e.g., medicine, law, engineering), where formal certification, licensing, or accreditation by a governing body is required to uphold professional standards and protect public safety (Sommer 2021, 28). Furthermore, even in non-regulated professions, employers often encounter difficulties in verifying the validity of certificates issued by unfamiliar authorities (Sommer 2021, 28). This verification problem is particularly significant in coordinated market economies such as Finland, where credentialism tends to be stronger.

After migrants enter the host country, they face the challenge of *adapting to a new official language* (Dustmann & Fabbri 2003, 695; Chiswick & Miller 2009, 162; Sirkeci et al. 2018, 908). Limited proficiency affects employment prospects and the pace of labour market integration, resulting in wage penalties and reduced earnings (Dustmann & Fabbri 2003, 695). Language is more than what employers assess, such as correct interpretation (Salt 1997, 9). It also signals professionalism. Employers additionally value skills like confidence, fluency, modesty, and effective face-to-face interaction (Mahmud et al. 2014, 341). Language proficiency is vital for successful integration, as it influences professional networking, workplace participation, and meeting employers' skill requirements, which are essential for long-term career development (Chiswick & Miller 2009, 166; Rafferty 2012, 987–1006; Mahmud et al. 2014, 345; Sirkeci et al. 2018, 908).

Another significant structural challenge in labour market integration is *underemployment* (Battu & Sloane 2002, 192; McKee-Ryan & Harvey 2011, 962). When migrants face underemployment or are forced into roles that do not match their expertise, it results in brain waste (Salt 1997, 20; Chiswick & Miller 2009, 163; Sirkeci et al. 2018, 908). This dynamic is especially relevant to South Asian

professionals entering Finland's specialised sectors. This misalignment in employment generates wage inequality and imposes wage penalties on migrants (Rafferty 2012, 987; Johnston et al. 2015, 197). It also diminishes job satisfaction and restricts opportunities for professional growth (Green & Zhu 2010, 740). Moreover, it prevents the effective use of human capital and reduces the potential contributions of migrants to the labour market (Green & Zhu 2010, 740; Mavromaras & McGuinness 2012, 619).

After entering the employment, *unequal access to career advancement* presents another significant structural challenge in the labour-market integration of migrants. Migrants frequently encounter limited opportunities for promotion, training, and career development, which hinder their progress in the labour market. Ethnic biases affect wages, career progression, and job prospects (Booth et al. 2012, 566; Sirkeci et al. 2018, 907). Consequently, migrants often face restricted access to employer-defined criteria for advancement, including promotion, training opportunities, new roles, or innovative work options (Battu & Sloane 2002, 193; Rafferty 2012, 989). Empirical evidence further shows that applicants with foreign names, specific ethnic backgrounds, and countries of origin in their CVs are less likely to receive interview invitations, even when they are equally or more qualified than local candidates (Booth et al. 2012, 566; Mahmud et al. 2014, 342). This systemic discrimination in the labour market constrains career progression, impacts psychological well-being, and contributes to economic inequalities (Viruell-Fuentes et al. 2012, 2100; Sirkeci et al. 2018, 907). In addition to these structural constraints, difficulties in network building and social integration create another layer of obstacles for migrants.

2.2.2 Networking and Social Capital Development Challenges

Networking and social integration challenges refer to the difficulties professional migrants encounter in establishing and maintaining relationships within and outside organisations, which affect their access to career opportunities (Ryan 2011, 707). In many host-country settings, career progression relies not only on formal qualifications but also on informal networks, collegial ties, and participation in workplace interactions that enhance credibility and competence (Brell et al. 2020, 114). For migrants, however, developing these forms of competence is often hindered by four major challenges that impact their integration into the host-country labour market: *limited access to professional networks, exclusion from native informal workplace interactions, limited access to mentorship and sponsorship, and the double-edged role of co-ethnic networks*. These challenges are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Alongside developments in human capital, one of the major challenges in labour market integration is *limited access to professional networks* (Csedő 2008, 807; Ryan 2011, 707). For professional migrants, establishing social ties is crucial for ensuring protection, accessing resources, and participating in knowledge-intensive activities (Lin 2001, 179; Csedő 2008, 807). Additionally, organisations maintain complex networks of skill exchange due to their expanded local and global operations and the difficulties in screening unfamiliar applicants, which leads to network-based job referrals (Salt 1997, 10; Beaman 2012, 128). Professional migrants must engage with these networks to access career opportunities and progress professionally (Salt 1997, 10). Limited access to professional networks significantly restricts the prospects of professional migrants securing suitable employment (Rafferty 2012, 993). Furthermore, the benefits derived from networks depend on their quality and composition (Brell et al. 2020, 114-115). For instance, larger professional networks connected with skilled, employed, or entrepreneurial members enhance career prospects, whereas weak or scattered networks restrict access to opportunities (Beaman 2012, 128; Brell et al. 2020, 115).

After entering the labour market, many migrants face the challenge of *exclusion from native informal workplace interactions* due to homophily (Ramsay et al. 2008, 114; Bandiera et al. 2008, 728). Homophily, a sociological principle, often causes individuals to form connections with others who share similar cultural or linguistic backgrounds (Ramsay et al. 2008, 115; Bandiera et al. 2008, 728). Consequently, shared identity frequently leads to the exclusion of those who do not possess the same characteristics (Ramsay et al. 2008, 115). Moreover, perceptions of social status—shaped by occupational position, self-identification as highly qualified, expectations, and ambition—can further contribute to exclusion processes (Ryan 2011, 716). These exclusions restrict migrants' ability to develop weak ties—informal workplace connections that lack closeness or deep friendship—that are especially valuable for accessing job-related information and career opportunities (Granovetter 1973, 1360; Ryan 2011, 719). Additionally, informal recommendations and local references are highly valued in recruitment; this lack of access significantly diminishes migrants' chances of securing professional employment (Kogan 2011, 114; Rafferty 2012, 993).

Another significant challenge for professional migrants is their *limited access to mentorship and sponsorship*, both of which are essential for ongoing knowledge acquisition, career development, and job satisfaction (Wayne et al. 1999, 577; De Janasz et al. 2003, 78; Sharma et al. 2019, 232). In this context, mentorship refers to a developmental process where an experienced individual provides guidance, knowledge, and support to someone with less experience (see, for example, Sharma et al. 2019, 232; Thompson & Taylor 2023, 43). Sponsorship, by contrast, is an active process in which a senior or influential individual not only offers guidance but also uses their position to advocate for

and create career opportunities for their protégés (Sharma et al. 2019, 232; Thompson & Taylor 2023, 43). Such sponsors have significant influence over key decisions concerning professional migrants' promotions, leadership appointments, and recognition (Sharma et al. 2019, 232). For professional migrants, mentoring and sponsorship can come from various sources within or outside organisations, including senior colleagues, peers, family members, and community networks (Higgins & Kram 2001, 264; Sharma et al. 2019, 232).

A further challenge for professional migrants in labour market integration stems from *the double-edged role of co-ethnic networks* (Ryan 2011, 707–724). International migrants often establish nation-based communities, commonly called 'expatriate bubbles' (Peltonen & Huhtinen 2023, 75). These networks offer initial support with housing, entry-level jobs, and emotional well-being, helping to reduce loneliness in the early stages of settlement (Ryan 2011, 709; Wilkinson et al. 2017, 640; McCarthy et al. 2025, 1). However, these networks can also restrict career progression and language skills by limiting contact with broader professional and host social circles (Ryan 2011, 710). Nonetheless, the value of co-ethnic networks depends on the circumstances of their members and their willingness to share relevant information (Ryan 2011, 711). Alongside these social and networking barriers, migrants also face cross-cultural challenges that shape their integration into the host-country labour market.

2.2.3 Cross-Cultural Challenges

Cross-cultural challenges represent a major barrier to labour market integration, as interpersonal and intercultural differences can hinder migrants' ability to adapt to workplace norms and expectations (Le et al. 2023, 273–274). Entering a new labour market requires navigating unfamiliar behavioural rules, communication styles, and professional expectations, which may lead to misunderstandings, reduced access to opportunities, or acculturative stress (Berry 2005, 697; Mahmud et al. 2014, 341). Frameworks such as Hofstede's (2001, 2011) cultural dimensions illustrate how differing assumptions about hierarchy, uncertainty, and relational norms shape professional interaction. When cultural distance between home and host contexts is substantial, the risks of misalignment, exclusion, and disrupted collaboration increase (Mahmud et al. 2014, 341; Hofstede 2011, 4). Scholarly literature consistently points to three central cross-cultural challenges affecting migrants' professional integration: *adjusting to communication styles, adjusting to an organisation's culture, and negotiating identity and managing acculturation stress*. These are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The first cross-cultural challenge concerns *adjusting to communication styles*. Successful workplace integration requires not only linguistic competence but also an understanding of culturally embedded communication norms, such as the appropriate use of directness, silence, humour, and professional jargon (Ramsay et al. 2008, 117; Roberts 2010, 212–215). Hall's (1976) distinction between high- and low-context communication is particularly relevant: migrants from high-context environments, where meaning is conveyed implicitly, may struggle in low-context settings that prioritise clarity and explicitness, and vice versa (Smith 1981, 132). Such mismatches can impede collaboration, create misinterpretations, and reduce perceptions of professional competence. As Roberts (2010, 218) notes, limited communicative mastery imposes practical 'linguistic penalties,' restricting workplace participation and advancement.

Migrants face another challenge, *adjusting to an organisation's culture*, which differs from national cultures in terms of depth and mode of acquisition. National cultures reflect deeply rooted value systems acquired in childhood, whereas organisational cultures are shaped through workplace socialisation and expressed in visible practices (Hofstede 2011, 3). Organisational cultures vary along dimensions such as process-versus results-orientation and job-versus employee-orientation (Hofstede 2011, 19–21; Blake et al. 1962). These variations affect expectations about autonomy, performance evaluation, and appropriate professional behaviour. Although organisational cultures are more flexible than national cultures, they nonetheless interact with national value systems, meaning migrants must navigate both embedded societal norms and workplace-specific practices.

A further cross-cultural challenge lies in *negotiating identity and managing acculturation stress*. Migrants often need to reconcile their heritage values with the behavioural expectations of the host-country labour market (Berry et al. 1987, 491; Phinney 1990, 499). Conflicts may arise when cultural values such as collectivism, deference to authority, or diffuse role boundaries differ sharply from host-country norms (Hampden & Trompenaars 1997, 149). These tensions influence how migrants present themselves professionally and how they are perceived by colleagues. Pressure to assimilate or downplay one's ethnic identity can lead to cultural dissonance, frustration, or reduced well-being (Phinney et al. 2001, 505).

Overall, cross-cultural challenges demonstrate that labour market integration extends beyond structural access or social connections. It requires developing the cultural competencies necessary to interpret workplace norms, adjust communication styles, and negotiate identity within the host-country professional environment.

Taken together, the existing literature provides a comprehensive overview of the cross-cultural challenges that professional migrants face when integrating into the host-country labour market, as illustrated in Figure 3.

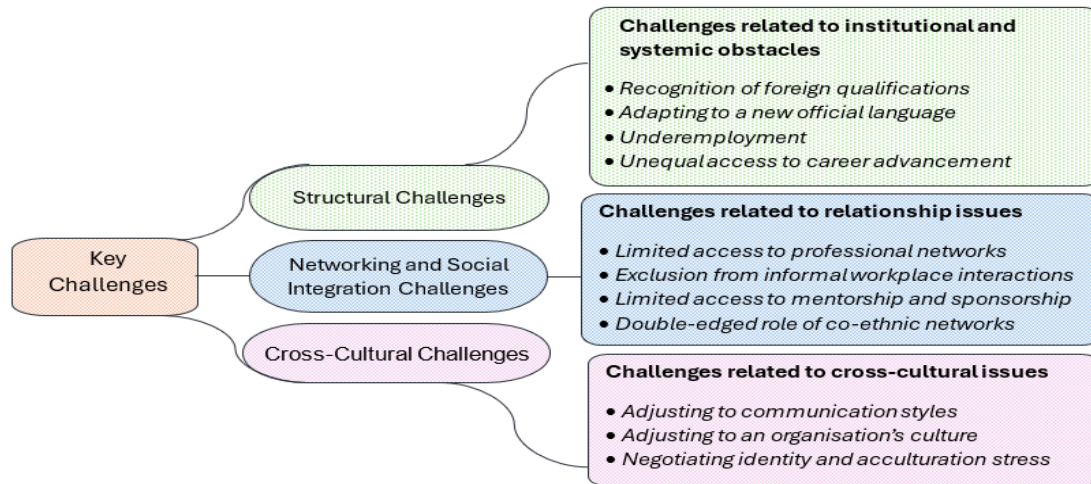


Figure 3. Key Challenges in Labour Market Integration

As shown in the figure, migrants' labour market integration is shaped by three broad categories of challenges: structural challenges such as recognition of foreign qualifications, adapting to a new official language, underemployment, and unequal access to career advancement; networking and social challenges including restricted access to professional networks, exclusion from informal interactions, limited mentorship and sponsorship, and the double-edged role of co-ethnic ties; and cross-cultural challenges related to communication styles, organisational culture, and identity negotiation and managing acculturation stress. While these challenges illustrate the barriers migrants encounter in host-country labour markets, existing research also identifies a range of strategies that migrants use to navigate and overcome them. The following section reviews these integration strategies across structural, social, and cross-cultural domains.

2.3 Existing Knowledge on Labour Market Integration Strategies

Existing research highlights a range of strategies employed by both individuals and institutions that support migrants' integration into host-country labour markets. As this study focuses on migrants' own strategies in overcoming labour market challenges, this section concentrates specifically on individual-level strategies. These strategies address the structural, social, and cross-cultural challenges outlined above and show how migrants actively work to improve their access to employment, career prospects, and workplace inclusion. The first set of strategies identified in the literature relates to how migrants attempt to overcome structural barriers in the labour market.

2.3.1 Strategies for Structural Challenges

Structural challenges often hinder professional migrants' entry and career progression in host-country labour markets. Migrants employ various strategies to overcome these obstacles, particularly those related to language, recognition of qualifications, limited local experience, and underemployment (Dustmann & Fabbri 2003, 695; Mahmud et al. 2014, 339; Sommer 2021, 26). Academic literature highlights three main strategies that facilitate migrants' structural integration: *acquiring the necessary language proficiency, pursuing credential recognition and local education and acquiring local work experience*. These strategies are discussed in the following paragraphs.

The first strategy to overcome structural challenges is *acquiring the necessary language proficiency*. This serves as the foundation for integration into the labour market, as it is not only a communication tool but also the medium for acquiring and developing skills and knowledge (Dustmann & Fabbri 2003, 697; Adserà & Pytliková 2015, F49). Migrants invest heavily in language learning and regard it as a form of human capital that yields measurable returns in employment and wages (Chiswick & Miller 2009, 162). Furthermore, proficiency in reading and writing is particularly vital, as literacy significantly influences employment prospects and access to higher-skilled roles (Dustmann & Fabbri 2003, 696). Research indicates that earlier arrival, prior education, age, and longer residence notably enhance language acquisition, highlighting the advantages of early and continuous exposure (Dustmann & Fabbri 2003, 696; Bleakley & Chin 2004, 481). In addition to formal courses, migrants must also develop implicit communication skills, such as confidence, courtesy, effective face-to-face communication techniques, and the utilisation of professional jargon, which employers increasingly require (Daly et al. 2005, 581; Mahmud et al. 2014, 341). Therefore, language acts both as a skill and as the basis for effectively leveraging other qualifications.

A second strategy is to *pursue credential recognition and local education* when necessary (Bauder 2003, 706; Chiswick & Miller 2009, 162; Mahmud et al. 2014, 346, 350; Sommer 2021, 28). Migrants often seek formal recognition of their home-country credentials, especially in regulated professions, but success depends on how well they compare with host-country standards (Sommer 2021, 28). When recognition is partial or refused, migrants frequently pursue education in the host country to boost their credibility with employers (Bauder 2003, 706, 710). This is a common response to the devaluation or limited recognition of foreign qualifications, professional knowledge, and prior work experience (Söhn 2016, 194). Such education increases the chances of obtaining recognition and enhances employment prospects (Bauder 2003, 710; Söhn 2016, 194). Additionally, gaining knowledge of the host-country context through further education or training helps bridge skill gaps

and aligns migrants with country-specific professional expectations (Mahmud et al. 2014, 346, 350). For instance, engineers in Australia sought additional project management qualifications and local software training to improve their employability (Mahmud et al. 2014, 346).

A third approach involves *acquiring local work experience*, often by initially accepting roles below one's qualifications (Bauder 2003, 703; Chiswick & Miller 2009, 163; Sirkeci et al. 2018, 908). Such overqualification among migrants is frequently a transitional phase in labour market integration (Chiswick & Miller 2009, 163; Frei & Sousa-Poza 2012, 1837). Taking on underemployment offers essential new insights into host labour markets and organisational practices (Chiswick & Miller 2009, 163; Sirkeci et al. 2018, 908). This strategy reflects a pragmatic trade-off where immediate financial stability and workplace access are prioritised, while aiming for long-term upward mobility (Sirkeci et al. 2018, 908). Local experience underscores the need for adaptability, cultural competence, and qualities that employers deem vital for integration (Mahmud et al. 2014, 347). Over time, overqualification tends to decrease as migrants gain experience in the host country and shift into roles better suited to their skills (Chiswick & Miller 2009, 163). In this way, short-term local underemployment can act as a pathway to eventual career advancement. However, addressing structural barriers alone is not sufficient for successful integration. Migrants also depend on social and networking strategies to develop relationships and access social resources. The following section discusses these strategies.

2.3.2 Networking and Social Capital Development Strategies

The existing literature emphasises that migrants need to rely heavily on their ability to enhance social capital through network development when integrating into host-country labour markets (Kosyakova & Kogan 2024, 288; Zhao et al. 2025, 3-4, 14). Developing social capital and employing networking strategies are crucial because access to employment, career progression, and credibility often depends less on formal qualifications and more on relational resources such as information, professional knowledge, referrals, and sponsorship (Sharma et al. 2019, 232; Kosyakova & Kogan 2024, 289-290). As a result, effective integration requires not only establishing social ties but also actively mobilising them to create professional opportunities (Rungo et al. 2024, 118). Current research identifies four main social and networking strategies that migrants use to strengthen their labour market integration: *actively mobilising social contacts, diversifying their networks, enhancing social skills and host-country human capital, and participating in institutional initiatives*.

The main strategic approach to improving employment opportunities and career development for migrants involves *actively mobilising social contacts* (Kosyakova & Kogan 2024, 289; Zhao et al.

2025, 2). Research indicates that migrants can strategically use their social networks to access information, such as vacancy details, company culture, and industry expectations (Zhao et al. 2025, 9). This flow of information helps them make informed career choices and enhances workplace performance. Migrants also depend on referrals, where trusted contacts recommend them for assignments, promotions, or pay increases that might otherwise be inaccessible (Zhao et al. 2025, 2). Additionally, working with high-performing peers or “star” colleagues can create productivity spillovers, increasing visibility and perceived competence (Campbell et al. 2017, 845; Zhao et al. 2025, 10). These mechanisms show that career success relies not only on building social ties but also on how effectively they are utilised (Rungo et al. 2024, 118).

The second strategy is to *enter diversifying networks* that include both bridging and vertical ties, rather than depending exclusively on bonding ties within co-ethnic communities. While co-ethnic networks provide important emotional and practical support during settlement, they often constrain upward mobility by limiting exposure to broader professional circles (Ryan 2011, 710; Kazlou 2025, 2). Weak ties are informal, less intimate connections that serve as crucial bridges across social boundaries, providing unique information and resources unavailable within close-knit groups (Seibert & Kraimer 2001, 220). Professional migrants, therefore, benefit from cultivating such ties, especially with individuals at higher organizational levels who can offer mentorship, sponsorship, and access to developmental opportunities (Wayne et al. 1999, 577; Seibert & Kraimer 2001, 222; De Janasz et al. 2003, 78; Rungo et al. 2024, 119). Effective social integration thus requires deliberate network management that aligns relational resources with long-term career objectives.

The third strategy concerns *enhancing social skills and host-country human capital*, which enable professional migrants to activate and grow their social capital (Ramsay et al. 2008, 117; Ryan 2011, 713; Brell et al. 2020, 111). Language proficiency is crucial, as strong linguistic ability helps interaction beyond co-ethnic groups and supports the development of weak ties (Dustmann & Fabbri 2003, 695; Brell et al. 2020, 114). Equally significant are confidence and interpersonal skills, which aid adaptability and effective participation in workplace networks (Ramsay et al. 2008, 117; Ryan 2011, 719). Highly qualified migrants facing temporary downward mobility need to actively renegotiate their professional status by demonstrating competence and credibility in the host context (Ramsay et al. 2008, 112). In this way, social strategies are strongly connected to investments in human capital, as relational resources cannot be used effectively without adequate communication and social skills (Ryan 2011, 713; Brell et al. 2020, 111; Kosyakova & Kogan 2024, 289).

Finally, existing studies show that professional migrants improve social integration by *participating in institutional initiatives* that build connections and expand their networks (Bandiera et al. 2008, 746; Jokisaari et al. 2024, 463, 465). Research highlights that employer-led programmes, such as group training, mentoring schemes, team-building exercises, trade unions, and diversity networks, offer valuable social capital within organisations (Bandiera et al. 2008, 746; Jokisaari et al. 2024, 463, 465). Evidence also indicates that trade unions play a key role, especially in sectors where reliance on co-ethnic ties might restrict wider integration (Kazlou 2025, 3). In Sweden, for example, unions in the hospitality industry have supported migrants in balancing bonding ties with broader linking social capital (Kazlou 2025, 1). Training interventions are most effective when combined with supportive social environments, where network-based sponsorship along with organisational mentorship improves the acquisition of new knowledge (Jokisaari et al. 2024, 465-466).

Overall, the literature suggests that successful integration involves more than merely establishing social connections. It depends on the strategic use of networks, building weak ties, enhancing social skills, and engaging with institutional support. Migrants who invest in diverse, high-quality networks and actively utilise them for information, mentorship, and sponsorship are more likely to attain professional progress in the host country's labour markets. Besides social and networking strategies, migrants also adopt various cross-cultural approaches as discussed in the following section.

2.3.3 Cross-Cultural Strategies

Existing research indicates that professional migrants employ various strategies to confront cross-cultural challenges. These include gaining cultural capital, adjusting to organisational norms, and negotiating their identity as vital cultural resources in the host country's labour markets (Lamont & Lareau 1988, 153; Berry 2005, 697; Van Riemsdijk & Basford 2022, 637). The subsequent discussion centres on the key cross-cultural strategies migrants utilise during their integration process. Existing research highlights three primary cross-cultural strategies that migrants adopt to facilitate their integration: *acquiring cultural capital, adapting to workplace norms, and negotiating identity as a form of cultural capital*.

The initial method used by professional migrants to overcome cross-cultural challenges is *acquiring cultural capital* through mastery of communication (Bourdieu 1986, 243; Lamont & Lareau 1988, 153; Harzing et al. 2011, 282; Van Riemsdijk & Basford 2022, 637). Cultural capital refers to the resources individuals gain through socialisation and then use to navigate complex social situations, systems, or structures to gain advantages (Lamont & Lareau 1988, 153). Gaining cultural capital helps professional migrants understand formal and informal high-status cultural signals, including attitudes,

preferences, the value of formal knowledge, behaviours, goods, and credentials (Bourdieu 1986, 243; Lamont & Lareau 1988, 156). Recognising these high-status cultural signals is vital because they are used to distinguish and unify people, grant access to high-status groups and resources, and exclude others from the high social and cultural groups (Lamont & Lareau 1988, 156). In other words, actively acquiring such cultural capital is essential for generating both professional and social benefits (Lamont & Lareau 1988, 154). However, language proficiency alone is not enough to acquire cultural capital, as migrants must also learn culturally embedded communication (Harzing et al. 2011, 282). Beyond vocabulary, this involves understanding verbal and non-verbal behaviours, including gestures, tone, expressions, and unwritten rules that carry cultural significance in workplace communication (Roberts 2010, 215; Agbon & Ouedraogo 2025, 5). Through mastery of communication, professional migrants can enhance their cultural capital to succeed professionally (Van Riemsdijk & Basford 2022, 637).

The second approach to overcoming cross-cultural challenges involves *adapting to workplace norms* (Malik et al. 2014, 196; Ocampo et al. 2022, 2–3; Agbon & Ouedraogo 2025, 4). Here, adaptation refers to how well an individual undergoing acculturation can manage daily life within a new cultural environment (Berry 2005, 709). The literature suggests that acquiring cultural capital is merely an initial step, better equipping professional migrants to mobilise psychosocial resources for accepting and adjusting to unfamiliar and sometimes conflicting work norms (Malik et al. 2014, 196; Ocampo et al. 2022, 2–3). A broad range of psychological resources, such as concern, control, curiosity, and confidence, allows individuals to develop new capacities essential for confronting challenges and facilitating adaptation (Ocampo et al. 2022, 3). For instance, a career-adaptable migrant might anticipate the need to understand host-country workplace etiquette (concern), manage communication challenges by learning local professional norms (control), explore culturally appropriate ways of networking (curiosity), and remain confident when facing unfamiliar or conflicting cultural expectations (confidence). Furthermore, migrants may actively employ newcomer adjustment strategies such as monitoring, seeking information, requesting feedback, networking, negotiating job changes, and building relationships to adapt to workplace norms (Malik et al. 2014, 200). Beyond internal adjustments, migrants are required to demonstrate culturally appropriate behaviour in daily interactions (see, for example, Van Riemsdijk & Basford 2022, 648). This may include modifying verbal and non-verbal conduct to reduce miscommunication and align with workplace expectations (Harzing et al. 2011, 283; Van Riemsdijk & Basford 2022, 648; Le et al. 2023, 273-274).

The third strategy involves *negotiating identity* as cultural capital to stay productive and minimise acculturation stress (Bourdieu 1986, 243; Berry et al. 1987, 491; Lamont & Lareau 1988, 153;

Phinney 1990, 499; Phinney et al. 2001, 495). In this process, professional migrants do not necessarily fully assimilate but instead adapt aspects of their heritage culture, particularly high-status cultural signals, into valuable professional resources (Lamont & Lareau 1988, 162; Phinney et al. 2001, 495). The theory of acculturation indicates that immigrants can adjust through various strategies, such as integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalisation. This suggests that successful integration does not always require forsaking their culture of origin (Phinney et al. 2001, 495; Berry 2005, 697). In particular, multicultural policies are aimed at ensuring immigrants' equal access to rights and resources, while also recognising and preserving their cultural identity (Van Riemsdijk & Basford 2022, 635). Furthermore, there is growing recognition that diverse experiences and cultural differences can boost organisational productivity and innovation (Malik et al. 2014, 203; Van Riemsdijk & Basford 2022, 648). However, professional migrants must also recognise that negotiating cultural identity as a resource is context-dependent and may be limited by organisational openness and dominant-group controls (Phinney 1990, 509; Phinney et al. 2001, 493; Berry 2005, 704).

Taken together, the existing literature outlines a comprehensive set of strategies that professional migrants employ to integrate into host-country labour markets, as illustrated in Figure 4.

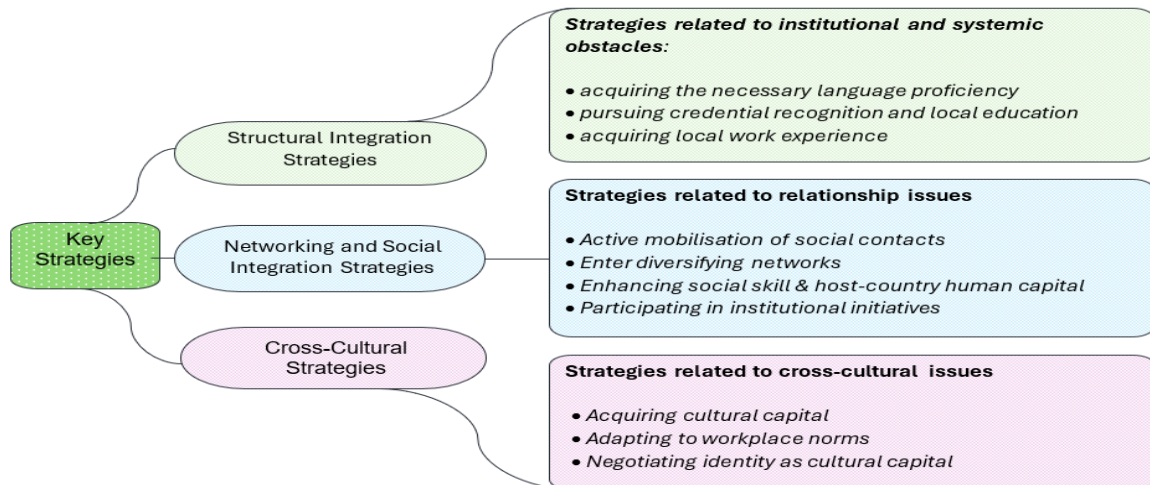


Figure 4. Key Strategies for Labour Market Integration

In summary, existing research indicates that migrants employ a variety of individual strategies to overcome labour market barriers. Structural strategies include enhancing language proficiency, securing recognition of qualifications, and gaining host-country work experience. Social and networking strategies involve mobilising contacts, diversifying networks, building social skills, and engaging in supportive initiatives. Cross-cultural strategies focus on acquiring cultural capital,

adapting to workplace norms, and negotiating identity in culturally unfamiliar settings. Collectively, these strategies demonstrate how migrants actively address structural, social, and cultural obstacles in the labour market. The discussion of challenges and strategies forms the foundation for choosing the theoretical frameworks through which labour market integration can be better analysed. The next section presents these perspectives along with their reasoning.

2.4 Theoretical Perspectives on Labour Market Integration

The challenges outlined in Section 2.2 and the strategies discussed in Section 2.3 demonstrate that labour market integration can be viewed from multiple perspectives: structural, social, and cultural (Penninx 2019, 6). To gain a comprehensive understanding of these multi-dimensional processes, it is important to recognise that no single framework can fully explain how professional migrants utilise their skills, build networks, and adapt to cultural expectations (Ager & Strang 2008, 167; Lu & Everson Härkälä 2024, 133; Jousmäki et al. 2024, 78). Therefore, this study draws on three theoretical perspectives: *Human Capital Theory*, *Social Capital Theory*, and *Cultural Intelligence Theory* that together provide a coherent foundation for the study. Each theory focuses on different dimensions of integration, as outlined in the following sections, enabling the study to explore professional migrants' experiences from multiple analytical viewpoints and generate new insights.

2.4.1 Human Capital Theory

The concept of human capital has increasingly gained recognition among scholars since the 1940s (Teixeira 2014, 2). Human capital develops when individuals invest in themselves to build a stock of knowledge and skills that improve their future productivity (Melton 1965, 270). Early versions of the theory highlighted schooling and on-the-job training as the main forms of human capital investment (Becker 1962, 9; Teixeira 2014, 3). Later, the dimension of human capital was expanded to include the knowledge, skills, competencies, and health that individuals gain through education, training, and personal development, which are intangible and inseparable assets that cannot be transferred like physical or financial capital (Becker 1992, 85). These investments boost occupational competence, productivity, and earning potential, leading to long-term labour market outcomes (Schultz 1961, 1038).

The effects of investing in human capital can be better understood through practical examples, such as operational training, language courses, or skill-development certificates that support labour market integration (Dustmann & Fabbri 2003, 697; Adserà & Pytliková 2015, F49). The pattern is illustrated in Figure 5.

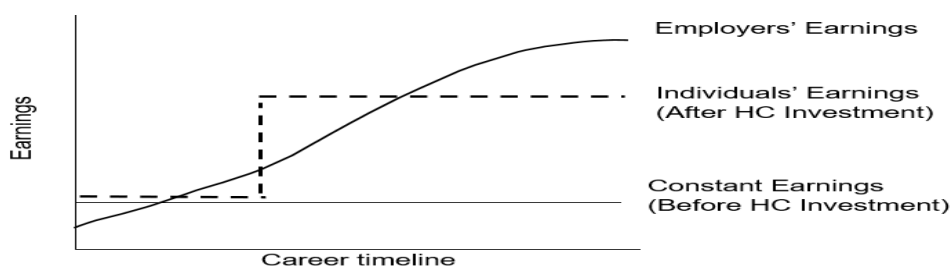


Figure 5. Effects of Investment in Human Capital on Earnings

Figure 5 illustrates the economic logic of human capital investment, showing how deficiencies in one form of capital and the effort to acquire another shape migrants' labour market integration, particularly their access to comparable wages, working conditions, and promotion prospects, key indicators of structural integration (Dustmann & Fabbri 2003, 695; Mahmud et al. 2014, 342; Martín et al. 2015, 46). As shown in the figure, without investing in human capital, individuals' earnings would remain constant throughout their careers, as illustrated by the horizontal line labelled 'Constant Earnings'. However, individuals' earnings would initially be below their marginal productivity during the human capital development phase and then rise sharply at its conclusion, as shown by the dashed line marked 'Individuals' Earnings' in the figure. Conversely, employers may experience lower returns, for example, from trained individuals during the on-the-job training period because they bear the training costs. Nonetheless, they achieve higher productivity and subsequently increased earnings, as reflected in the 'employers' earnings' curve displayed in the figure. Beyond the immediate benefits to individuals, human capital externalities positively influence the productivity and earnings of others in the labour market (Ciccone & Peri 2006, 381). In other words, the spillover effects of investing in human capital boost productivity and wages not only for those who acquire education, skills, and knowledge but also for less educated workers (Ciccone & Peri, 2006, 381).

Essentially, Human Capital Theory provides a strong theoretical framework for understanding how South Asian professional migrants experience and manage their integration into the Finnish labour market. The elements of Human Capital Theory, such as education, training, and skills, help this study uncover new insights into labour market integration. However, this theory alone cannot encompass the full scope of the research purpose (Penninx 2019, 6). The study also necessitates Social Capital Theory to understand how social networks and the ability to access and mobilise them help professional migrants integrate into the new labour market. Therefore, the next section shifts focus to Social Capital Theory.

2.4.2 Social Capital Theory

Social capital is a concept that describes a resource for action arising from the social structure in which individuals are embedded (Coleman 1988, S95). In other words, this capital refers to the actual and potential resources ingrained within an individual's social networks and the ability to access and mobilise them to achieve individual or collective goals (Bourdieu 1986, 248; Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 243; Adler & Kwon 2002, 17; Payne et al. 2011, 491). While human capital concerns individual knowledge and skills, social capital constitutes foundational resources, where social ties, trust, and reciprocity enable purposeful action and sustained value creation (Becker 1992, 85; Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 242; Adler & Kwon 2002, 17). These resources incorporate goodwill, information, influence, trust, and shared norms that enable individuals to generate other forms of capital to pursue goals more effectively than they could through isolated effort (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 244–245; Adler & Kwon 2002, 18, 21, 26).

Social capital is a durable and appropriable asset, where ties established for one purpose can be utilised for another, and continuous maintenance is vital for sustained returns (Adler & Kwon 2002, 21–22). These returns and accomplishments of goals are otherwise impossible to achieve or only attainable at significant extra financial and social expense (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 244). Furthermore, unlike physical capital, it does not depreciate with use; instead, like human capital and public goods such as knowledge, it typically grows and develops through use (Adler & Kwon 2002, 22). However, this concept can be further developed theoretically through three interconnected dimensions: structural, relational, and cognitive, as illustrated in Figure 6. (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 243; Maurer & Ebers 2006, 263; Payne et al. 2011, 492). Although these dimensions can be distinguished analytically, they are closely linked (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 243).

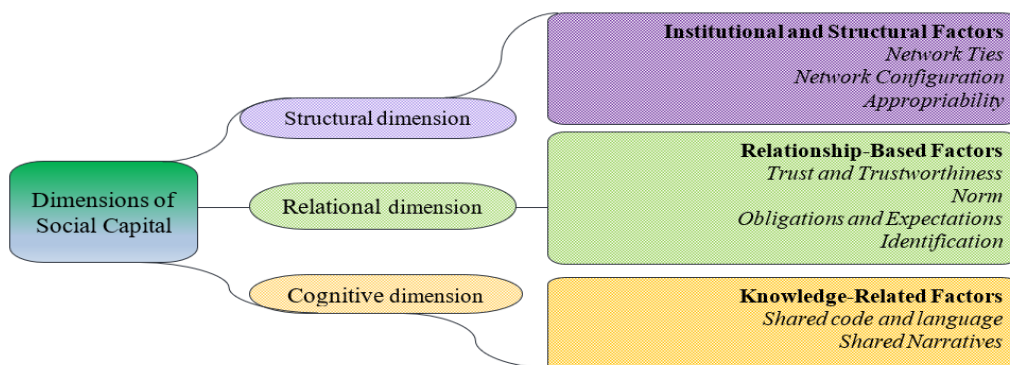


Figure 6. Dimensions of Social Capital

The structural dimension concerns the overall pattern of connections among individuals or units, mainly indicating who is linked and how these links are formed (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 244; Jokisaari et al. 2024, 464). It encompasses key aspects, as shown in the figure, such as the presence or absence of network ties, network configuration, and appropriability (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 244). *Network ties* provide access to resources and help reduce the time and effort needed to collect knowledge (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 252; Seibert & Kraimer 2001, 221; Zhao et al. 2025, 7). They influence how networks are used for sharing and exchanging knowledge, thereby determining its value (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 252). Furthermore, they also offer referrals that boost reputations and create new career opportunities (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 252; Seibert & Kraimer 2001, 219; Zhao et al. 2025, 1). *Network configuration* determines how easily members exchange information through factors such as density, connectivity, and hierarchy (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 252). Access to higher organisational levels is a structural feature that directly enables sponsorship (Jokisaari et al. 2024, 464). Weak and sparse networks with structural holes provide diverse knowledge and lower access costs, supporting new ideas and intellectual capital (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 252; Adler & Kwon 2002, 24). On the other hand, closed networks strengthen norms and trust, which enhances social cohesion and reduces the risk of norm violations (Adler & Kwon 2002, 24). Lastly, *appropriability* refers to networks created for one purpose that can be repurposed for another (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 244). Social capital, such as ties, norms, and trust developed in one context, can often be reused in different social settings but not necessarily across all contexts (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 253).

The relational dimension highlights the personal relationships formed through interactions that influence behaviour (Coleman 1988, S105; Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 244; Bandiera et al. 2008, 726). It encompasses trust and trustworthiness, shared norms and sanctions, mutual obligations and expectations, along with a sense of identity and identification (Coleman 1988, S95; Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 244). *Trust and trustworthiness* foster cooperation by building confidence in others' actions and facilitating quicker dispute resolution (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 254-255; Adler & Kwon 2002, 30). They promote openness and risk-taking, enabling knowledge sharing and ideas, particularly in uncertain situations (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 254-255). Over time, trust helps establish enduring norms of cooperation, where collaboration and mutual trust continuously reinforce each other, creating high-quality working relationships (Jokisaari et al. 2024, 465). *Norms* are a significant form of social capital that influence behaviour and encourage cooperation by establishing shared expectations that enable collective effort (Coleman 1988, S104-S105). They also promote knowledge sharing and foster openness, teamwork, and tolerance for failure (Nahapiet & Ghoshal

1998, 242–266). *Obligations and expectations* arise from relationships where trade-offs are anticipated and establish commitments (Coleman 1988, S102). For example, when someone offers help or support to another, they build an informal claim for future assistance, known as a “credit slip,” which nurtures trust and cooperation (Coleman 1988, S102; Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 255). These obligations motivate knowledge exchange and collaboration, extending beyond formal agreements to support complex projects (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 255). Lastly, *identification* occurs when individuals see themselves as part of a person or group, strengthening their concern for collective goals and outcomes (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 256). It also influences motivation and the anticipation of value, increasing opportunities and willingness to exchange and combine knowledge (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 255).

The cognitive dimension concerns the contents of ties that offer shared representations, interpretations, and systems of meaning among actors (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 244; Adler & Kwon 2002, 23). Such a shared framework is vital for supporting mutual understanding and effective collaboration among professionals in interpreting information and coordinating activities efficiently (Grant 1996, 116). Key elements include a common language, shared codes, and collective narratives that promote mutual understanding (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 253-254). These cognitive resources are essential for effective communication and for developing knowledge within a group or organisation, and their absence leads to a wage penalty (Dustmann & Fabbri 2003, 695; Mahmud et al. 2014, 345). *Shared language and codes* facilitate communication by enabling people to exchange information and access valuable knowledge (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 253). Conversely, lacking a common language hinders clear communication and coordination, impeding the adoption of integration-focused manufacturing techniques in multilingual organisations (Grant 1996, 116). They shape perception and provide a common framework for evaluating benefits, supporting mutual understanding and effective collaboration (Grant 1996, 116; Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 253). Additionally, they strengthen the ability to combine knowledge, develop new concepts, and integrate information across social exchanges (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 253).

Finally, *shared narratives* establish and uphold common meaning, enabling members to exchange and sustain rich shared understanding (Grant 1996, 116; Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 254). However, communication-based knowledge integration involves transforming tacit knowledge, which is difficult to articulate, into explicit form, a process that often leads to considerable knowledge loss (Grant 1996, 116). By transmitting such embedded knowledge and facilitating its combination with explicit knowledge, shared narratives promote new insights and assist in integrating different types of knowledge (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 254).

However, the value of social capital depends on its ability to identify specific aspects of social structure based on their functions (Coleman 1988, S95–S120). Accordingly, drawing on the preceding discussion, Table 3 summarises the functions of key elements across the dimensions of social capital.

Table 3. Functions of Key Elements within the Dimensions of Social Capital

Dimensions	Elements of Dimensions	Functions of Elements
Structural Dimension Refers to the overall pattern and structure of connections between actors	Network Ties	Access to Resources and Information Facilitating Knowledge Exchange and Combination Timing and Referrals
	Network Configuration	Flexibility and Ease of Information Exchange Information Diversity and Efficiency Cohesiveness and Trustworthiness
	Appropriability	Resource Transferability Providing Access
Relational Dimension Focuses on the personal relationships individuals develop through interactions, which in turn shape their behaviour.	Trust and Trustworthiness	Facilitating Cooperation and Exchange Increasing Openness and Risk-Taking Developing Norms of Cooperation
	Norms	Guiding Behaviour and Enabling Cooperation Influencing Access and Motivation
	Obligations and Expectations	Credit and Future Action Motivating Exchange and Combination
	Identification	Enhancing Collective Concern Influencing Value Anticipation and Motivation
Cognitive Dimension Encompasses resources that provide shared representations, interpretations, and systems of meaning among actors.	Shared Language and Codes	Facilitating Communication and Access Shaping Perception and Evaluation Enhancing Combination Capability
	Shared Narratives	Creating and Preserving Meaning Facilitating Practical Knowledge Exchange Enabling Knowledge Combination

The dimensions of social capital and the functions these dimensions serve provide a strong analytical foundation that can be examined across multiple levels—individual, group, organisational, and interorganisational (Maurer & Ebers 2006, 264). This framework helps explain how the absence of, or investment in, different dimensions of social capital shapes migrants’ labour market integration journey because it directly influences access to opportunities, resources, and career progression (see, for example, Adler & Kwon 2002, 17). However, because social capital alone cannot account for the cultural and behavioural aspects of workplace adaptation, the next section turns to Cultural Intelligence theory to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of migrants’ integration into the Finnish labour market.

2.4.3 Cultural Intelligence Theory

Due to the practical reality of globalisation, cultural intelligence has gained significant attention as a key to success in the global workplace (Abdul Malek & Budhwar 2013, 223). Cultural intelligence is especially relevant in culturally distant contexts, where migrants must sustain engagement despite slow initial integration. This intelligence is defined as an individual's ability to effectively navigate a cross-cultural environment (Ang et al. 2006, 101; Lisak & Erez 2015, 4; Schlaegel et al. 2021, 1). It is regarded as a measure of intercultural competence and is broadly applicable across different culturally diverse situations to make it culture-neutral (Lisak & Erez 2015, 4; Schlaegel et al. 2021, 1). Thomas (2006) and Thomas et al. (2008, 2015) proposed a related three-dimensional model encompassing cultural knowledge, cross-cultural skills, and metacognition (Stoermer et al. 2021, 432–453). However, the cultural intelligence framework developed by Ang et al. (2006) remains the most widely used model for understanding how individuals operate within cross-cultural environments (Stoermer et al. 2021, 434; Schlaegel et al. 2021, 1). This is because Ang et al.'s (2006) model provides stronger empirical validation, broader scholarly adoption, and clearer support for motivational cultural intelligences, offering a more comprehensive explanation of intercultural effectiveness than Thomas et al.'s framework (Ang et al. 2006, 100; Schlaegel et al. 2021, 1, 17). Nonetheless, the cultural intelligence framework developed by Ang et al. (2006) is conceptualised through four dimensions: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioural cultural intelligences, as illustrated in Figure 7 (Ang et al. 2006, 100).

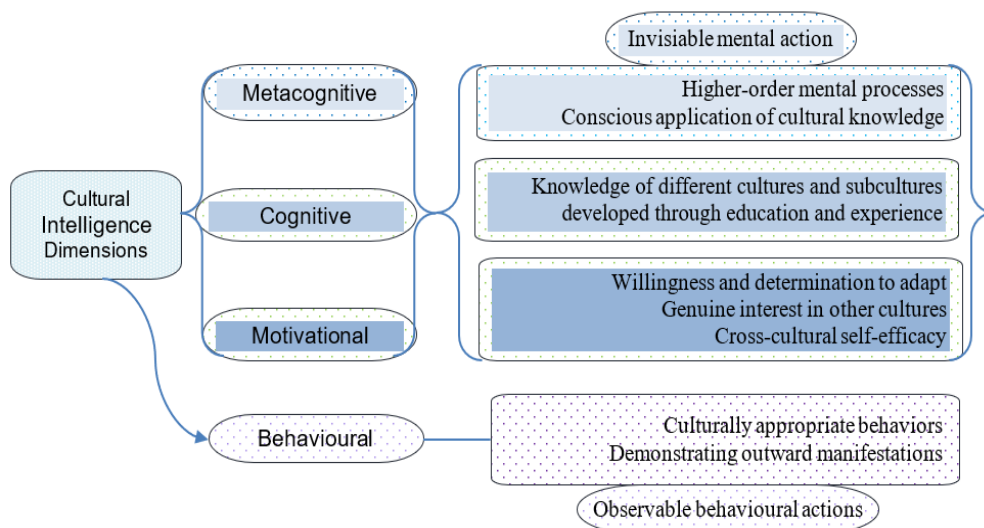


Figure 7. Cultural Intelligence Dimensions

Metacognitive cultural intelligence refers to the mental processes involved in acquiring and understanding cultural knowledge, including planning, monitoring, and revising thinking processes (Ang et al. 2007, 338; Schlaegel et al. 2021, 2). Applying cultural knowledge in cross-cultural

interactions requires conscious awareness of individuals when applying the knowledge (Ang et al. 2007, 338). Nevertheless, metacognitive cultural intelligence is viewed as the most dynamic component, developing progressively through intercultural experiences (Stoermer et al. 2021, 435). Individuals with high metacognitive cultural intelligences critically examine cultural assumptions and refine their mental models throughout and following interactions (Ang et al. 2007, 338).

Cognitive cultural intelligence reflects a person's accumulated knowledge and understanding of cultural norms, practices, and conventions (Ang et al. 2006, 101; Stoermer et al. 2021, 434). It also includes an understanding of economic, legal, and social systems, as well as the basic structures of cultural values (Ang et al. 2007, 338). However, this knowledge is developed through education and personal experience (Lisak & Erez 2015, 5). Individuals with high cognitive cultural intelligence possess a clear understanding of cultural similarities and differences (Ang et al. 2007, 338).

Motivational cultural intelligence denotes an individual's willingness and determination to adapt and succeed in diverse cultural contexts (Ang et al. 2007, 338). In other words, this component encompasses psychological processes that guide, energize, and sustain action and a strong commitment to adaptation and adjustment (Chen et al. 2010, 1113; Lisak & Erez 2015, 5). It includes a genuine interest in other cultures, such as enjoying interactions with people from different backgrounds, and cross-cultural self-efficacy, which is confidence in one's ability to work and socialise effectively in unfamiliar cultural environments (Chen et al. 2010, 1113).

Behavioural cultural intelligence reflects the ability to demonstrate culturally appropriate verbal and nonverbal behaviours during cross-cultural interactions (Ang et al. 2007, 338; Abdul Malek & Budhwar 2013, 224; Lisak & Erez 2015, 5). This includes a broad and flexible set of behaviours, such as adjusting accent, tone, gestures, and facial expressions to suit the cultural context (Ang et al. 2007, 338). Essentially, it's about what a person does rather than what they think, demonstrating outward manifestations or overt actions (Ang et al. 2007, 337).

In comparison, metacognitive, cognitive, and motivational cultural intelligences are internal psychological capacities that function within the mind (Ang et al. 2007, 337; Chen et al. 2012, 94). Conversely, behavioural cultural intelligence, although originating from psychological processes, is observable actions and adaptations that an individual performs in culturally diverse contexts (Ang et al. 2007, 337-338; Chen et al. 2012, 94; Abdul Malek & Budhwar 2013, 224). In other words, this dimension directly expresses cultural intelligence through outward behaviour (Ang et al. 2007, 337). Overall, these dimensions of cultural intelligence aid migrants' integration into work organisations, career advancement, effective job performance, and social adaptation in the workplace (Malik et al.

2014, 195; Agbon & Ouedraogo 2024, 1). Ultimately, this theoretical framework offers a solid foundation for understanding how South Asian professional migrants experience and manage their integration into the Finnish labour market.

The concepts introduced in Section 2.1, the challenges outlined in Section 2.2, the strategies discussed in Section 2.3, and the theories presented above each emphasise different aspects of labour market integration. The following synthesis brings these elements together to form a cohesive framework and concludes Chapter 2.

2.5 Synthesis

Building on the reviewed literature, this section introduces the conceptual framework, as shown in Figure 8, which provides a solid foundation for the study. Its aim is to offer a comprehensive overview of the research by integrating key concepts, existing knowledge, and theoretical perspectives that collectively guide the research design, while excluding other influential factors from its scope.

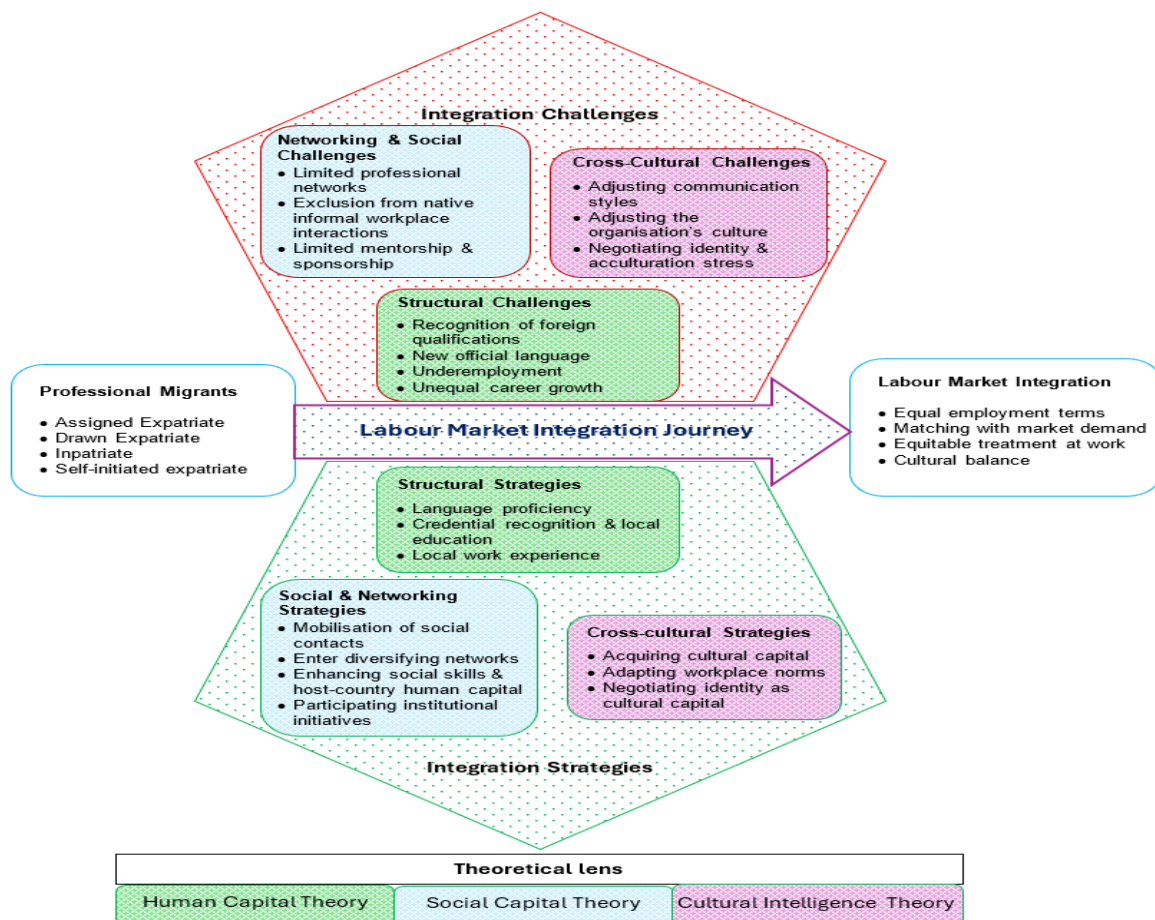


Figure 8. Conceptual Framework

While integrating into a new labour market, migrants undergo a complex journey, as demonstrated in Figure 8. They face various challenges, as illustrated in the red pentagon shapes at the top of the figure. These significant challenges are categorised into three main groups: structural, networking and social, and cross-cultural. Existing research shows that professional migrants experience structural integration difficulties such as recognition of foreign qualifications, learning a new official language, underemployment, and unequal career advancement (Battu & Sloane 2002, 192; Dustmann & Fabbri 2003, 695; Chiswick & Miller 2009, 162; McKee-Ryan & Harvey 2011, 962; Booth et al. 2012, 566; Mahmud et al. 2014, 339; Sirkeci et al. 2018, 908). Other challenges include networking and social barriers such as limited professional networks, exclusion from informal native workplace interactions, limited mentorship and sponsorship, and the influence of co-ethnic networks (Wayne et al. 1999, 577; De Janasz et al. 2003, 78; Ramsay et al. 2008, 114; Csedő 2008, 807; Bandiera et al. 2008, 728; Ryan 2011, 707; Sharma et al. 2019, 232). Moreover, professional migrants face cross-cultural challenges such as adapting communication styles, acclimatising to organisational culture, and negotiating identity, alongside acculturation stress (Berry et al. 1987, 491; Phinney 1990, 499; Phinney et al. 2001, 493; Ramsay et al. 2008, 117; Roberts 2010, 212; Hofstede 2011, 3).

To address integration challenges, professional migrants employ various strategies throughout their integration journey, as depicted in Figure 8 below the integration journey arrow, to successfully join the new labour market. The existing knowledge of key strategies is viewed from three different perspectives: structural, networking, and social, as well as cross-cultural viewpoints. Migrants adopt structural strategies that include improving language proficiency, securing credential recognition, pursuing local education, and gaining local work experience (Dustmann & Fabbri 2003, 697; Bauder 2003, 703, 706; Chiswick & Miller 2009, 162–163; Mahmud et al. 2014, 346, 350; Adserà & Pytliková 2015, F49; Sirkeci et al. 2018, 908; Sommer 2021, 28). Migrants also adopt social and networking strategies which include mobilising social contacts, diversifying networks, enhancing social skills and host-country human capital, and participating in institutional initiatives (Ramsay et al. 2008, 117; Bandiera et al. 2008, 746; Ryan 2011, 710, 713; Brell et al. 2020, 111; Jokisaari et al. 2024, 463, 465; Kosyakova & Kogan 2024, 289; Kazlou 2025, 2; Zhao et al. 2025, 2). Finally, to address cross-cultural challenges, professional migrants adopt cross-cultural strategies that include acquiring cultural capital, adapting to workplace norms, and negotiating identity as cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986, 243; Berry et al. 1987, 491; Lamont & Lareau 1988, 153; Phinney 1990, 499; Phinney et al. 2001, 495; Harzing et al. 2011, 282; Malik et al. 2014, 196; Van Riemsdijk & Basford 2022, 637; Ocampo et al. 2022, 2–3; Agbon & Ouedraogo 2025, 4).

The bottom box illustrates the theoretical lens used to examine, from various dimensions of each theory, as discussed in 2.3, the integration journey of professional migrants. It refines the focus by choosing Human Capital Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Cultural Intelligence as the main analytical frameworks for understanding structural, social, and cross-cultural challenges, along with related integration strategies (Schultz 1961, 1038; Bourdieu 1986, 248; Coleman 1988, S95; Becker 1992, 85; Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 243; Adler & Kwon 2002, 17; Ang et al. 2006, 101; 2007, 335; Payne et al. 2011, 491; Lisak & Erez 2015, 4; Sirkeci et al. 2018, 906–924; Schlaegel et al. 2021, 1). Building on this foundation, the following chapter details the research methodology employed to apply these concepts in this study.

3 Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological choices guiding this study and describes how the research questions were addressed. Clarifying these methodological choices strengthens the transparency and coherence of the study's research design. It begins by introducing the exploratory qualitative research approach and its underlying philosophical stance. The chapter then details the data collection process, including the rationale for using interviews, the participant selection strategy, the data collection tools, and the practical steps taken during the interviews. Subsequently, the approach to data analysis is explained comprehensively. The chapter ends by discussing the ethical considerations implemented throughout the study and the strategies employed to ensure its trustworthiness.

3.1 Exploratory Qualitative Research Approach

Usually, the research questions guide the methodological choices of any study because they determine the type of data needed and the most suitable strategies for collecting and analysing it (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, 29; Creswell & Creswell, 2023, 4). In this study, a qualitative approach was chosen because it aligns closely with the goal of understanding participants' meanings, interpretations, and lived experiences within their social worlds (Fossey et al. 2002, 717; Efron & Ravid 2019, 17). Unlike quantitative research, which emphasises measurement, causality, and generalisation to larger populations, qualitative research allows for an examination of how social and cultural processes influence individuals' actions and sense-making (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 4; Williams et al. 2021, 14). This makes it particularly suitable for exploring the complexities of labour market integration, which cannot be fully understood through structured or statistical methods (Malterud 2001, 483; Grosseohme 2014, 109).

Philosophically, this study is rooted in interpretivism, which presumes that reality is socially constructed and is best understood through individuals' subjective meanings (Creswell & Creswell 2023, 8). This stance is particularly appropriate because labour-market integration involves subjective evaluations, identity negotiation, and context-dependent meanings. From a subjectivist perspective, knowledge is not external or fixed; rather, it is generated through social interaction and personal interpretation within specific cultural contexts, and migrants' interpretations of their workplace experiences cannot be separated from the cultural contexts in which they occur (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 14–15; Efron & Ravid 2019, 17). Therefore, interpretivism supports close engagement with participants and provides the analytical perspective needed to understand professional migrants' experience and management of their integration into a new labour market.

The study is also exploratory. Exploratory research is especially valuable when knowledge on a topic is limited and when the goal is to develop new insights into complex human experiences (Stebbins 2001, 2; Swaraj 2019, 665–666). Given the scarcity of research on South Asian professionals in Finland, this exploratory stance is not only suitable but necessary. It enables the researcher to explore ‘what is happening’ in a specific context and to view a phenomenon from new perspectives (Saunders et al. 2009, 139; Makri & Neely 2021, 3). Ultimately, an exploratory qualitative approach was both appropriate and necessary to understand how South Asian professional migrants experience and manage their integration into the Finnish labour market.

To illustrate the methodological process applied in this study, Figure 9 presents the sequential yet iterative steps that structured the research.

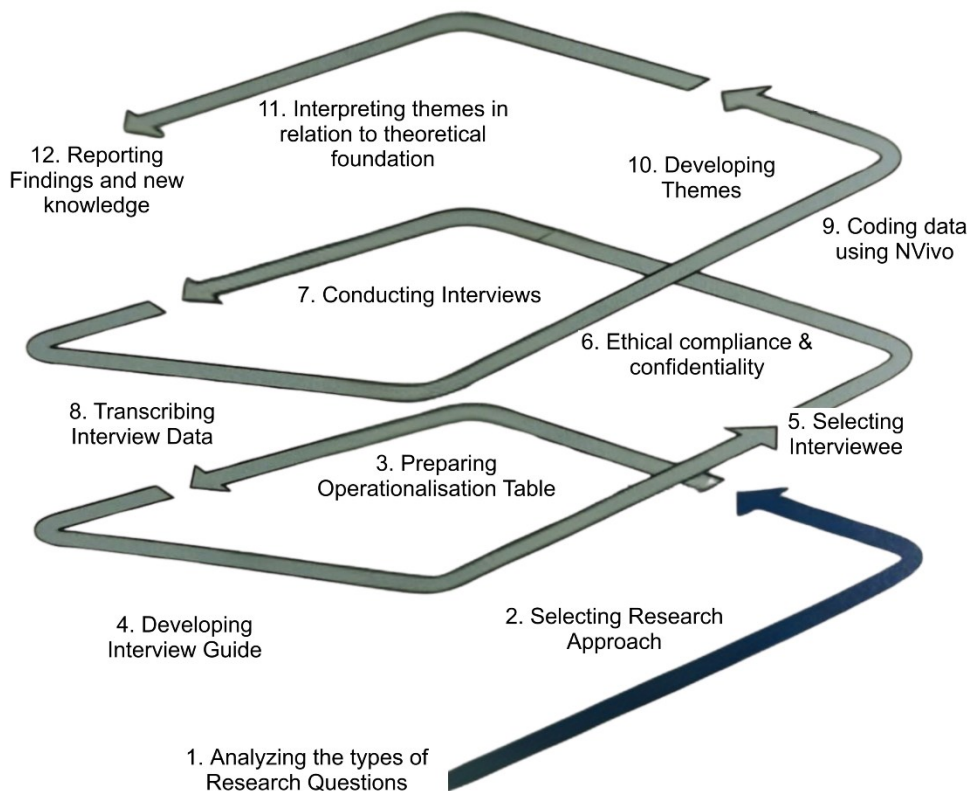


Figure 9. Research Design and Thematic Analysis Workflow of the Study

The figure first presents the study's sequential steps, beginning with analysing the research questions and selecting an appropriate qualitative approach. It then shows the preparation of the operationalisation table, the development of the interview guide, the selection of participants, and the ethical procedures undertaken prior to conducting and transcribing the interviews.

Alongside this sequence, the figure also reflects the iterative aspects of the process, such as refining the interview questions after some pilot interviews and revisiting the operationalisation table in response to early data. It further visualises how the thematic analysis progressed through coding the data in NVivo, developing themes, and interpreting them in relation to the theoretical foundation.

By demonstrating how each stage builds on the previous one while allowing for necessary iteration, the figure enhances the transparency and coherence of the research design. Overall, it highlights the study's systematic structure and illustrates the progression from formulating the research questions to generating and reporting new knowledge.

3.2 Data Collection: Semi-structured Interviews

Exploratory research often employs multiple data collection methods, such as interviews, observations, and document analysis, to achieve a thorough understanding of a topic (Fisher 2011, 182; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 94). Interviews are frequently used in qualitative research because they provide direct access to participants' perspectives and socially constructed meanings relevant to this study (Fisher 2011, 182; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 94). This data collection method is particularly appropriate for migrant-integration studies, where experiences are emotionally influenced by cultural and social interpretations. This method offers a practical and efficient way to gather information not found in published sources (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 94). Therefore, interviews were suitable for this study. However, there are different types of interviews. The choice depends on the type of information the study requires-whether open, narrative-style responses, detailed personal experiences, or more structured factual data so that the interview design aligns with the overall research purpose (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 93).

Within interview-based approaches, semi-structured interviews were selected because they offer both structure and flexibility (Fisher 2011, 182; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 95). This type of interview includes a set of guiding questions to ensure consistency across interviews, while open-ended dialogue allowed participants to describe their experiences in their own words and introduce themes meaningful to them (Fisher 2011, 182; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 94). This approach aligns with the study's interpretivist perspective, which emphasises subjective experiences and co-constructed meanings (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 20, 92). The following subsection describes the selection of the interviewee for this study.

3.2.1 Selection of Interviewee

For this study, nine participants were deliberately selected using a purposive, criterion-based approach. This ensured that participants possessed substantive firsthand experience directly aligned with the research questions. This approach is widely used in qualitative research to obtain rich, detailed, and meaningful insights from individuals with direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Mays & Pope 1995, 183; Palinkas et al. 2015, 533). Instead of aiming for representativeness, the goal was to engage participants whose backgrounds and experiences could illuminate the research questions, which reflects Eisenhardt's principle that cases in qualitative inquiry are chosen for the depth of understanding they can provide rather than for statistical generalisation (Eisenhardt 1989, 536–537).

Table 4 outlines both the criteria used to identify suitable participants and the key particulars of the nine individuals selected. These criteria, current employment in Finland, a minimum of two years' residence, an advanced degree, variation in job roles, gender balance, and representation from several South Asian countries, were selected to maximise analytical depth. Together, they allowed the study to incorporate different perspectives that reflect the complexity of migrants' labour-market integration

Table 4. Overview of the Participants Interviewed

Participant ID	Gender	Country of Origin	Current Role & Organisation type	Living in Finland	Host Country Job Level	Pre-migration Job Level	Interview Date	Interview Duration
Participant 1	Male	Bangladesh	Finance Professional, (Finnish MNE)	7 Years	Professional	Professional	30.09.2025	53 min
Participant 2	Male	India	Chemical Engineer (Finnish MNE)	8 Years	Professional	Professional	25.09.2025	66 min
Participant 3	Male	Bangladesh	Production Manager (Manufacturing Firm)	8 Years	Managerial	Managerial	30.09.2025	78 min
Participant 4	Male	Pakistan	Cryptography Engineer (Global Tech. Firm)	5 Years	Professional	Professional	16.10.2025	54 min
Participant 5	Female	Bangladesh	Executive Coordinator (Finnish MNE)	2 Years	Managerial	Managerial	29.09.2025	54 min
Participant 6	Male	India	Researcher (University)	3 Years	Professional	Professional	16.10.2025	36 min
Participant 7	Female	Pakistan	Logistics Employee (Nordic MNE)	3 Years	Operational	Professional	28.09.2025	66 min
Participant 8	Female	Bangladesh	Textile Worker (Finnish MNE)	3 Years	Operational	Professional	16.10.2025	38 min
Participant 9	Male	Sri Lanka	Laundry Service Worker (Finnish MNE)	3 Years	Operational	Professional	30.09.2025	24 min

As shown in Table 4, the final group consisted of 9 South Asian professionals: 6 males and 3 females. Their job roles included two managers, four professionals, and three operational-level employees.

Regarding country of origin, four participants were from Bangladesh, two from India, two from Pakistan, and one from Sri Lanka. All had lived in Finland for at least two years, with most having resided in the country between three and eight years. The interviews ranged from 24 to 78 minutes. Regardless of duration, each participant provided substantial and meaningful insights based on their professional integration experiences.

The number of participants was considered sufficient because subsequent interviews produced little additional significant information, a phenomenon commonly referred to as data saturation in qualitative research (Saunders et al. 2018, 1893). Saturation is appropriate mainly in qualitative studies that aim to gather factual information, but it is not strict; rather, it is a matter of degree, for interpretive research that focuses on meanings and lived experiences (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, 89). Therefore, in this study, saturation is understood cautiously and not as a strict or final endpoint. This cautious interpretation aligns with current methodological discussions that view saturation as a flexible, judgment-based principle rather than a strict numerical limit. Nevertheless, the researcher observed recurring patterns across participants' accounts, indicating that the dataset was substantial enough to effectively address the research questions. After selecting the participants, it was essential to prepare the data collection tools in a structured yet flexible manner so that the researcher could obtain relevant, focused responses from the interviewees within a limited timeframe.

3.2.2 Data Collection Tools and Operationalisation Table

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews using a researcher-developed interview guide (see Appendix 1) structured around the study's three theoretical frameworks. The guide consisted of open-ended questions organised under thematic areas such as education and skills, networking and trust-building, and cultural adaptation in the workplace. Brief interviewer notes accompanied each question to prevent unnecessary repetition and to prompt deeper exploration when appropriate. To ensure the clarity and practicality of the interview guide, a pilot interview was conducted with a South Asian professional who did not participate in the final study. This pilot helped evaluate the flow, timing, and coherence of the questions. Minor adjustments were then made to improve phrasing and sequencing, which enhanced the flow of discussion and ensured that questions were easily understood by participants.

Along with the interview guide, an operationalisation table (Table 5) was created to link abstract theoretical concepts to specific interview questions. This operationalisation helps ensure coherence between the theoretical framework and the empirical data collection.

Table 5. Operationalization Table

Research Purpose	Research questions	Themes	Concepts in Chapter 2	Interview Question(s)
To understand how South Asian professional migrants experience and manage their integration into the Finnish labour market	RQ1: What types of challenges do South Asian professional migrants face when integrating into the Finnish labour market? RQ2: How do they overcome these challenges?	Education	2.4.1	3, 4
		Experience	2.4.1	5, 6
		Network Ties	2.4.2	7, 8
		Trust	2.4.2	9, 10
		Shared Language & Understanding	2.4.1 and 2.4.2	11, 12
		Cultural Awareness	2.4.3	13, 14
		Behavioural Adaptation	2.4.3	15
		Emergent theme	2.4.1-2.4.3	16,17

The operationalisation table shows how the links between the research questions and relevant conceptual frameworks, along with their associated interview items, ensure data collection aligns with the theoretical foundations introduced in Chapter 2. Based on the frameworks outlined in Sections 2.4.1, 2.4.2, and 2.4.3, each theory was divided into practical themes, which were then mapped onto specific interview questions (see Table 5 and Appendix 1).

Human Capital Theory was operationalised through themes of education and experience, examining how formal qualifications and prior professional backgrounds influence the labour-market integration. Interview questions 3–6 addressed RQ1 and RQ2 by exploring how degree requirements, skill sets, and previous work experience affect integration outcomes. Subsequently, Social Capital Theory was operationalised through themes of network ties, trust, and shared language or understanding, capturing the relational and communicative aspects of workplace integration. Questions 7–12 investigated participants' access to professional networks, the role of trust in workplace relationships, and challenges related to language or cultural codes. Lastly, Cultural Intelligence was operationalised through themes of cultural awareness, motivation, and behavioural adaptation, examining participants' abilities to interpret and adjust to Finnish workplace norms. Questions 13–15 addressed these aspects in relation to both challenges and strategies. Finally, questions 16 and 17 invited participants to share additional reflections or emerging themes that had not been covered earlier. Together, the interview guide and operationalisation table provided a systematic, theoretically grounded framework for collecting rich, in-depth data while ensuring consistency across all interviews.

3.2.3 Conducting Actual Interviews

The interviews were conducted via Zoom to offer flexibility and facilitate participation from locations convenient for interviewees. While online interviewing offers flexibility, it may also limit the observation of non-verbal cues; this was mitigated through active probing and summarising. Before scheduling, participants were contacted by email, phone, or text to confirm their willingness to participate in the study. Prior to each interview, participants received the Consent Form (Appendix 2), the Privacy Notice (Appendix 3), and the Data Management Plan (Appendix 4), which outlined the study's purpose, participant rights, confidentiality procedures, and data-management practices.

At the start of each interview, written consent was reaffirmed, and verbal consent for recording was obtained. Recording only began after explicit permission was granted. In accordance with recommended interview procedures, the researcher verified that all technical equipment, such as the microphone, internet connection, and Zoom recording function, was functioning properly, as equipment failure can reduce data quality and memory-based reconstruction is not reliable (Fisher 2011, 184).

Each session began with warm-up, open-ended questions to build rapport and create a comfortable environment for discussing personal experiences (DeJonckheere & Vaughn 2019, 1). These practices enhanced data quality by encouraging richer and more candid reflections. Although the semi-structured interview guide was followed, flexibility was maintained so that participants could elaborate on issues they considered important. Simple and easy-to-understand questions were used instead of overly complex ones, as complicated wording can disrupt the flow of discussion (Fisher 2011, 182; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 96). Neutral phrasing was also deliberately used to avoid guiding participants toward particular interpretations or responses (Fisher 2011, 186; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 96). Probing was used throughout the interviews to encourage elaboration and clarify meanings. Participants were asked for concrete examples when appropriate, which helps prevent misunderstandings and ensures that responses reflect actual experiences rather than general impressions (Fisher 2011, 187). Reflective questions were also used to deepen understanding, while the researcher avoided sharing personal opinions to prevent influencing participants' responses (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 97).

When a topic had been thoroughly explored, the researcher summarised the participant's comments to ensure accuracy before progressing to the next question. At the end of each interview, participants were invited to share any additional thoughts, as concluding remarks often generate valuable insights once participants feel more relaxed (Fisher 2011, 182; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 94). After each

interview, the recording was stopped, the participant was thanked, and the researcher jotted down brief reflective notes to capture contextual impressions that might be useful during later analysis.

The following subsection covers the confidentiality measures and ethical principles that directed the entire data collection process.

3.2.4 Confidentiality and Ethics

Ethics are important at every stage of the research process, from data collection to analysis, writing, and sharing findings (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 64). Ethical practice in qualitative inquiry involves not only producing accurate and trustworthy results but also ensuring that the researcher's actions are morally responsible towards participants and society (Miles & Huberman 1994, 288; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 63). Participation in research must always be voluntary, and individuals should never feel pressured to take part or continue if they become uncomfortable (Fisher 2011, 73; Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK 2019). Confidentiality, informed consent, and the protection of participants are therefore recognised as core ethical principles in empirical research (Miles & Huberman 1994, 291–294; Fisher 2011, 73–74; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 77; Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK 2019).

In this study, the researcher adhered to these principles and followed the University of Turku's ethical guidelines and the national ethical recommendations outlined by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK (2019). Participants received written information detailing the purpose of the study, their rights, and the voluntary nature of participation. Each individual provided written informed consent before the interview and verbal consent before the recording began. This ensured that participants were aware of how their data would be used and that participation was voluntary and transparent. These ethical measures also contributed to the study's credibility by fostering participant trust and openness.

At the beginning of each interview, the researcher used the following introductory script:

“Hello, and thank you for meeting me today. The purpose of this interview is to understand your experiences of integrating into the Finnish labour market as a South Asian professional. Everything you share will remain confidential, and you may skip any question or stop at any time. With your permission, I am recording the session only for research purposes. Is this okay if I record the interview?”

Once consent was reconfirmed, the recording began. After each interview, the audio file was transcribed verbatim. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned during transcription, and all identifying information was removed. Audio files, transcripts, and consent forms were stored

separately in password-protected and encrypted cloud folders accessible only to the researcher, in accordance with the approved Data Management Plan. The researcher used DMP Tuuli to ensure that the plan met institutional and national standards for secure handling, storage, and long-term disposal of research data.

Overall, the study involved minimal risk to participants, and every effort was made to ensure a respectful, safe, and confidential environment throughout the research process. Ethical considerations, therefore, guided not only the protection of participants but also the responsible management and integrity of the research as a whole (Fisher 2011, 186; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 96; Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK 2019).

After confirming that the data collection process adhered to the necessary ethical and confidentiality standards, data analysis commenced. The following section details how the collected interview data were organised, coded, and analysed using a thematic analysis approach.

3.3 Data Analysis: Thematic Method

Thematic analysis is well-suited for exploratory qualitative research, as it allows the detection, examination, and presentation of patterns and themes within the data in a structured yet flexible way (Braun & Clarke 2006, 77–78; Kiger & Varpio 2020, 846; Byrne 2022, 1392). This is particularly appropriate here because integration experiences are multifaceted and require flexible categorisation. This method is considered foundational for qualitative analysis in providing core skills that are also useful for conducting other forms of qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006, 78). Mainly, this is intended for analysing non-numeric data (Roberts et al. 2019, 66). Therefore, this study adopts this foundational method to analyse the data collected through semi-structured interviews. The data were analysed using the latest version of NVivo 15.3.0 (10) to ease the research work, thereby helping identify patterns and develop themes and subthemes to answer the research questions. Using software also strengthened transparency by maintaining a clear audit trail of coding decisions.

However, at the end of the Zoom meeting with the participants, the interview, conducted in English, was transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and preserve the meaning of the participants' responses. During transcription, filler words (e.g., “uh,” “yeah,” “hmm,” “umm”) and repeated phrases (e.g., “and, and,” “like, like”) were removed, and minor grammatical errors were corrected to improve readability while maintaining the original intent of the participants' statements. After removing filler words and unnecessary repetition, a total of 70 pages containing 24,524 words were uploaded to NVivo. At this point, questions arose about how to carry out thematic analysis.

Several scholars have outlined different versions of thematic analysis (Kiger & Varpio 2020, 848). Nevertheless, this study employed the six-phase approach, as shown in Table 6, suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), which has become the most widely used method of thematic analysis in qualitative research (Kiger & Varpio 2020, 848; Byrne 2022, 1391).

Table 6. Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase		Description of the process
1	Familiarisation with data	Begin by transcribing the interviews (if required), thoroughly reading the data multiple times, and making initial notes and observations
2	Generating initial codes	Identify and label meaningful segments of the data that appear relevant to the research questions
3	Searching for themes	Group related codes together to begin forming broader patterns or potential themes
4	Reviewing themes	Check and refine themes to ensure they accurately reflect the coded data and the dataset.
5	Defining and naming themes	Clearly describe what each theme captures and decide on concise and informative theme names
6	Producing the report	Integrate the final themes into a coherent narrative supported by data extracts, linking findings to research questions and literature

Note: Although presented as a sequence, the process is recursive and may require revisiting earlier steps (Byrne 2022, 1398)

The analysis began with familiarisation, during which the researcher reviewed the interview recordings and transcripts multiple times to gain a thorough understanding of the data. This initial stage was followed by the development of preliminary codes assigned to segments of data deemed meaningful or relevant to the research questions. Coding was performed manually in NVivo 15.3.0 to ensure close engagement with the data, rather than using automatic coding features. A hybrid coding approach was used. A total of 434 items were coded (see screenshots in Appendix 5).

The coding process included both semantic and latent coding. Semantic coding focused on the explicit content expressed by participants e.g., direct mentions of job search challenges or language barriers (Braun & Clarke 2006, 87; Kiger & Varpio 2020, 848; Byrne 2022, 1397). Latent coding extends beyond surface content to uncover the underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualisations, and ideologies reflected in participants' experiences (Braun & Clarke 2006, 87; Kiger & Varpio 2020, 848; Byrne 2022, 1397). This combination allowed the analysis to capture both explicit descriptions and deeper underlying meanings.

Additionally, the analysis combined both deductive and inductive approaches. In thematic analysis, both approaches can be adopted simultaneously (Kiger & Varpio 2020, 848). Deductive coding is directed by the researcher's theoretical or analytical interests (Braun & Clarke 2006, 83; Roberts et

al. 2019, 5; Kiger & Varpio 2020, 848; Byrne 2022, 1396-1397). For example, this study was guided by the frameworks of Human Capital Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Cultural Intelligence, and accordingly, the empirical themes were organised into the same three main categories identified in the existing literature: structural, social, and cross-cultural challenges. Conversely, inductive coding themes are developed directly from the data, allowing new insights to arise naturally from participants' narratives (Braun & Clarke 2006, 83; Roberts et al. 2019, 5; Kiger & Varpio 2020, 848; Byrne 2022, 1396-1397).

After establishing a comprehensive coding structure, the analysis progressed to higher-level theme development. Once initial codes were developed, they were organised into broader conceptual categories based on thematic similarities. These categories were then reviewed and refined to produce overarching themes that captured essential aspects of South Asian professional migrants' experiences in the Finnish labour market. Each theme was supported by coherent and meaningful quotes from the dataset, ensuring the analysis remained grounded in the participants' perspectives. Verbatim quotations were chosen to illustrate each theme in the findings chapter, thus maintaining participants' voices' authenticity and ensuring transparency in interpretation. Finally, the themes were analysed in relation to the research questions and the theoretical perspectives outlined in Chapter 2.

Although this study follows Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach to thematic analysis, the visual representation of the coding process is inspired by Gioia et al.'s (2012) data structure model, which helps demonstrate transparency between raw data, codes, and themes (Gioia et al. 2013, 20-21). An illustration of the coding process is provided in Figure 10, presented on the following page due to layout considerations.

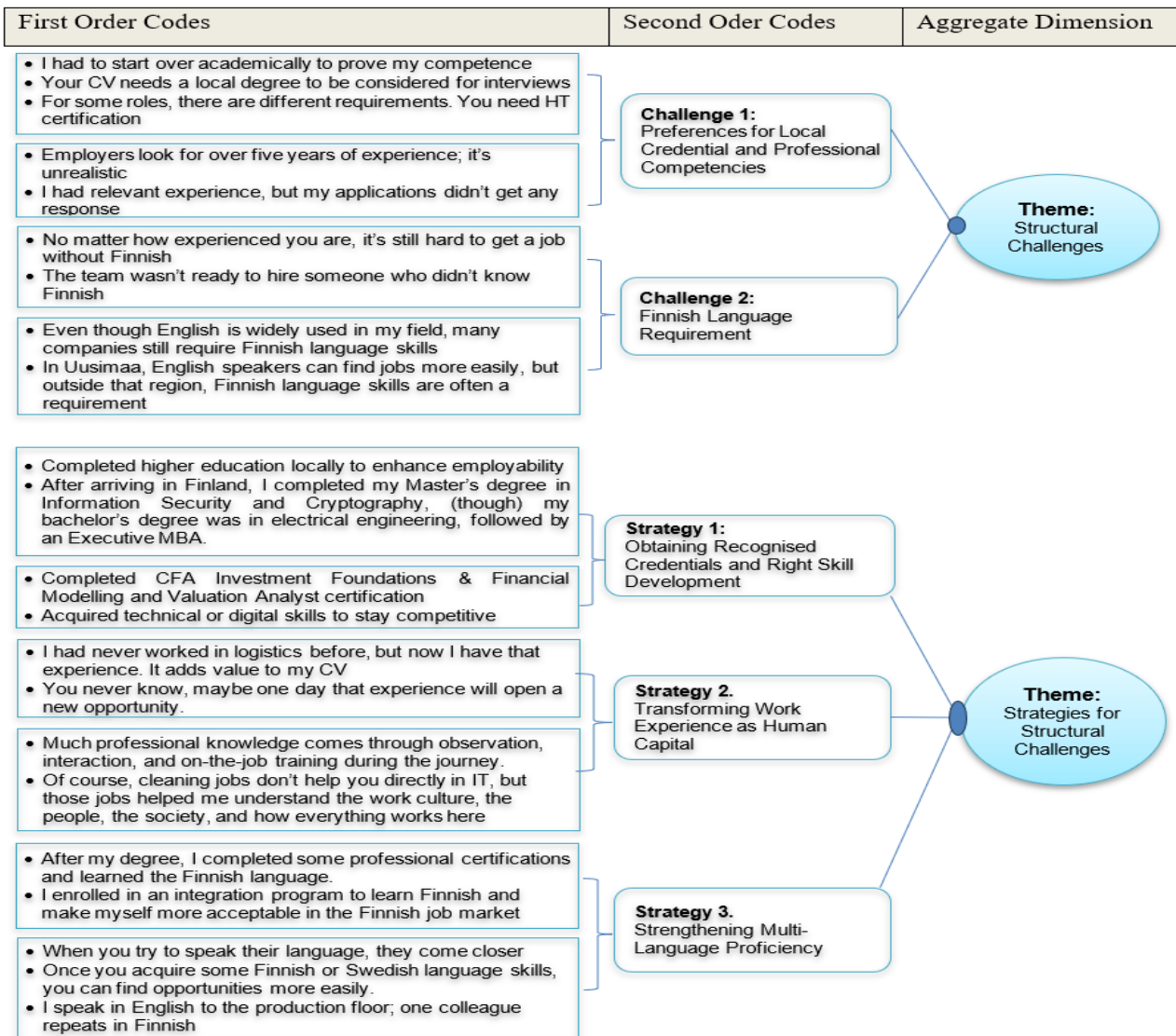


Figure 10. Coding Process of the Study

Figure 10 illustrates how raw interview data were systematically elevated into theoretical themes, supporting analytical transparency. Appendix 5 outlines additional coding patterns for this study. Once the first-order concepts, second-order themes, and aggregate dimensions were identified, a thorough understanding of the integration journey emerged, which helped answer the research questions. These steps are vital to the analysis, as they evidently show how raw data are systematically transformed into higher-level theoretical insights (Gioia et al. 2012, 20). Finally, the methodological process involves evaluating the study's trustworthiness. The next section evaluates the study's trustworthiness by considering the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

3.4 Evaluation of the study

The evaluation of research quality in qualitative studies requires a different set of criteria from those traditionally used in quantitative research (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 304; Stenfors et al. 2020, 596). Classic evaluation concepts such as reliability, validity, and generalisability are based on a positivist worldview, where reality is seen as objective, stable, and measurable (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 305; Rose & Johnson 2020, 433). Since qualitative research assumes that reality is socially constructed and that interpretation is context-dependent, several scholars argue that using the same criteria is neither suitable nor sufficient; rather, they advocate incorporating evaluation criteria that align with the philosophical position (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 307; Stenfors et al. 2020, 596). As a result, the classic criteria have moved towards alternative evaluation frameworks that better align with the philosophical foundations of qualitative inquiry.

One of the most influential and widely accepted concepts of research trustworthiness was introduced by Lincoln and Guba (1985), who proposed four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, to replace the traditional quantitative criteria, as shown in Table 7 (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 308; Stenfors et al. 2020, 597; Ahmed 2024, 100051). These criteria align well with the study's interpretivist stance.

Table 7. Key Criteria in Evaluating the Trustworthiness of Qualitative Research

(Based on Lincoln and Guba 1985, 289-331; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 308; Stenfors et al. 2020, 597; Ahmed 2024, 100051)

Criteria	Description of the criteria
Credibility	The accuracy and believability of findings from participants' perspectives
Transferability	The extent to which the findings can be applied in other contexts
Dependability	The logic, stability and consistency of the research process, demonstrated through clear documentation rather than replication.
Confirmability	The extent to which the findings are shaped by the participants rather than the researcher's bias

Based on the four criteria above, the following discussion demonstrates how each was practically addressed to the limitations that could affect the overall trustworthiness of the study.

Credibility pertains to how well the findings genuinely reflect participants' lived experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 308). In this study, credibility was strengthened through several methodological choices. Firstly, semi-structured interviews allowed participants to describe their experiences in their own words, fostering depth, richness, and unexpected insights. This was essential given the study's focus on lived experiences of integration. Secondly, participants were selected from diverse backgrounds based on current role and organisational types and role levels,

genders, and country of origin, which facilitated data triangulation by incorporating multiple perspectives into the analysis (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 306; Ahmed 2024, 100051). Thirdly, theoretical triangulation was employed to examine participants' integration experiences through three perspectives: Human Capital Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Cultural Intelligence, though a single theory might suffice for a master's-level thesis (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 306). These three complementary theoretical frameworks were deliberately used to prevent overly narrow interpretations and promote a more comprehensive understanding of participants' realities. Employing multiple theories enabled the findings to be interpreted from various viewpoints and helped validate the results, as participants' challenges and strategies often aligned with more than one theoretical lens. Participants frequently reflected overlapping elements across these theories (see subsection 4.3). This theoretical triangulation enhanced the credibility of the analysis by ensuring interpretations were not reliant on a single perspective (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 306). During interviews, the researcher asked probing and follow-up questions to verify understanding and ensure that interpretations reflected participants' intended meanings. At the end of each interview, participants were asked whether the researcher's summary accurately captured their views, serving as a form of member checking (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 307). Furthermore, rapport-building techniques helped participants feel comfortable, encouraging more open and detailed accounts (Ahmed 2024, 100051). Nonetheless, credibility might still be influenced by the fact that some participants were experiencing an unusually difficult labour market at the time of data collection, which could have shaped how they recalled or emphasised particular experiences. Additionally, many participants were relatively successful professionals who had already worked at MNEs before migration, which may limit the diversity of experiences represented.

Transferability concerns the researcher's responsibility to help readers determine whether the findings may be applicable in other contexts or groups (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 308). In this study, transferability was improved by providing detailed descriptions of the research context, participant backgrounds, and labour market conditions in Finland. Comprehensive accounts of participants' educational histories, migration paths, job levels, and duration of residence offer sufficient contextual information to evaluate the relevance of the findings for other migrant groups. The selection of interviewees based on defined inclusion criteria (see Table 4), enables readers to understand who was included, why, and how the group's composition might influence the findings. Furthermore, the interview guide, operationalisation table, and description of the theoretical frameworks provide additional contextual clarity.

However, since the study focused solely on South Asian professional migrants who already had a high level of professional experience before migration, including those with experience in world-renowned MNEs, the insights may not directly apply to migrants with lower levels of education or to beginner-level professional migrants. Transferability is therefore possible may be limited.

Dependability pertains to the researcher's responsibility to ensure the research process is logical, consistent, and well-documented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2016, 308; Ahmed 2024, 100051). In this study, dependability was supported by maintaining a transparent and traceable research process. All steps of the research process were systematically documented. The same interview guide was used for every interview, while still allowing flexibility for deeper exploration when participants raised relevant issues. Data analysis followed the six-phase thematic analysis framework by Braun and Clarke (2006), and the entire process was documented through coding logs, decision notes, and NVivo records. The use of NVivo (v. 15.3.0) facilitated the structured organisation of transcripts, codes, and themes, generating a clear audit trail. A total of 24,524 words of cleaned transcript data and 434 coded units were digitally stored and referenced with the participants' ID. Short reflective notes were recorded immediately after each interview, supporting a consistent analytical approach. Nonetheless, dependability could have been further strengthened had multiple researchers independently coded the data, although, given time and resource constraints common to master's-level research, single-coder analysis is acceptable. A single-researcher design ensures consistency but limits opportunities for inter-coder discussion.

Confirmability relates to the researcher's duty to ensure that findings originate from participants' narratives rather than researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Ahmed 2024, 100051). In this study, confirmability was maintained through several practices. Participant quotations were extensively used to illustrate themes, ensuring that interpretations remained grounded in actual statements. Reflexive notes taken after interviews helped the researcher remain aware of personal assumptions, emotional reactions, and potential biases. The study avoided leading questions, and clarifying questions were phrased neutrally to prevent influencing participants' responses. The systematic coding process in NVivo, involving both semantic and latent coding, promoted transparency between raw data and emerging themes. Patterns were verified across participants to confirm the insights. Additionally, feedback from classmates and former department alumni working at the university as teachers validated interpretations and reduced personal biases. Although confirmability was carefully addressed, complete elimination of researcher influence is impossible in interpretive qualitative research. Because the researcher shared some cultural background with participants, there is a risk that certain meanings were taken for granted rather than explicitly probed. However, active reflexivity

and systematic coding helped minimise this risk. Although reflexivity and systematic coding helped mitigate this issue, it cannot be entirely eliminated. At the master's level, there is a time limit for thesis submission. Future research can further improve this area.

However, the measures outlined above reflecting credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, collectively strengthen the overall trustworthiness of this study and provide a rigorous foundation for the empirical findings presented in Chapter 4.

4 Empirical Findings on Labour Market Integration

This chapter presents the empirical findings from the thematic analysis of the interview data. The results are organised according to the two research questions and summarised in Table 8. The first part of the chapter addresses Research Question 1 by examining the types of challenges faced by South Asian professional migrants when integrating into the Finnish labour market. The second part responds to Research Question 2 by analysing the strategies and adaptive practices used by migrants to overcome these challenges. Each subsection highlights the main themes identified from the data and is supported by illustrative quotations from participants to ensure transparency and authenticity in interpretation. Presenting the findings in this structured manner enhances the study's analytical transparency and shows how empirical patterns connect to the theoretical framework.

The empirical themes are organised under the same three main categories identified in the existing literature: structural, social, and cross-cultural challenges, because the interview patterns naturally aligned with the conceptual framework and the three related theoretical perspectives: Human Capital, Social Capital, and Cultural Intelligence theory guided this study. This reinforces the consistency between the empirical findings and established scholarship. As described in Section 3.3, applying both deductive and abductive coding ensured that the analysis remained theoretically grounded while still allowing new empirical subthemes to emerge without creating unnecessary complexity or ambiguity (Braun & Clarke 2006, 83; Roberts et al. 2019, 5; Kiger & Varpio 2020, 848; Byrne 2022, 1396-1397).

Table 8. Summary of Labour Market Integration Challenges and Strategies

(Context: South Asian Professional Migrants and Finland)

Labour Market Integration Challenges	Labour Market Integration Strategies
○ Theme 1. Structural Challenges	○ Theme 1. Strategies for Structural Challenges
⊕ ○ Challenge 1. Preferences for Local Credential and Professional Competencies	⊕ ○ Strategy 1. Obtaining Recognised Credentials and Right Skill Development
⊕ ○ Challenge 2. Finnish Language Requirement	⊕ ○ Strategy 2. Transforming Work Experience as Human Capital
⊕ ○ Challenge 3. Employer Preference for Cultural Fit	⊕ ○ Strategy 3. Strengthening Multi-Language Proficiency
⊕ ○ Challenge 4. Different Labour Market and Institutional Practices	⊕ ○ Strategy 4. Understanding the Labour Market Demand
○ Theme 2. Networking and Social Capital Development Challenges	○ Theme 2. Social Capital Development and Networking Strategies
⊕ ○ Challenge 1. Reserved Social Norms and Network Formation	⊕ ○ Strategy 1. Developing Diverse Collaborative Networks
⊕ ○ Challenge 2. Competence-Based Gradual Trust Formation	⊕ ○ Strategy 2. Cultivating Trust as the Foundation of Relationships
⊕ ○ Challenge 3. Different Communication and Knowledge Sharing Practices	⊕ ○ Strategy 3. Exchanging Knowledge and Improving Shared Understanding
○ Theme 3. Cross-Cultural Challenges	○ Theme 3. Cross-Cultural Strategies
⊕ ○ Challenge 1. Understanding New Cultural Mindsets and Workplace Norms	⊕ ○ Strategy 1. Motivational Drive to Adapt and Integrate
⊕ ○ Challenge 2. Adapting to New Work and Social Culture	⊕ ○ Strategy 2. Developing Cultural Knowledge through Observation and Experience
⊕ ○ Challenge 3. Balancing Cultural Identity and Belonging	⊕ ○ Strategy 3. Cultivating Cultural Intelligence and Behavioural Adaptation
	⊕ ○ Strategy 4. Balancing Cultural Identity and Dual Belonging

Table 8 summarises 10 labour-market integration challenges and 12 corresponding strategies adopted by professional migrants to address them. This summary table helps readers grasp the complexity of migrants' experiences before engaging with the detailed thematic analysis. A more detailed discussion of these findings is presented in the following subsections.

4.1 Labour Market Integration Challenges

This section outlines the challenges faced by South Asian professional migrants when integrating into the Finnish labour market. The findings are derived from thematic analysis of interview data and demonstrate how structural, social, and cultural factors influence their integration journey.

4.1.1 Structural Challenges

When seeking employment and career progression in Finland, South Asian professional migrants encounter a range of institutional and systemic challenges, as illustrated in Figure 11.

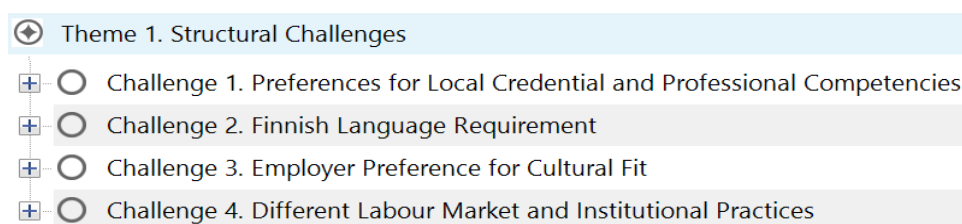


Figure 11. Structural Challenges

This figure visually consolidates the key institutional barriers, providing a clear entry point into the structural themes. These challenges mainly stem from how employers and regulatory frameworks value qualifications, establish language requirements, and assess cultural compatibility. A detailed discussion of these specific issues follows in the subsequent subsections.

4.1.1.1 Preferences for Local Credential and Professional Competencies

Although existing scholarship highlights *recognition of foreign qualifications* as a significant structural barrier to labour market integration, the findings of this study extend this understanding by showing an explicit employer preference for locally acquired credentials (Chiswick & Miller 2009, 162; Mahmud et al. 2014, 339; Sirkeci et al. 2018, 908; Sommer 2021, 26). This finding indicates not only non-recognition but a structural privileging of Finnish qualifications. Despite having strong academic backgrounds and extensive experience, many participants reported that their previous human capital did not easily transfer to the regulated Finnish labour market. This pattern was common among managerial, professional, and operational-level interviewees, with only one participant at the

managerial level disagreeing with this view. Participants consistently emphasised that Finnish employers tend to trust local or EU-based degrees more, often perceiving them as more credible, verifiable, or better aligned with Finnish workplace expectations. This preference causes delays in entering the labour market, pressure to pursue additional qualifications, and, at times, downward occupational mobility (Battu & Sloane 2002, 192; McKee-Ryan & Harvey 2011, 962). One participant described this as a baseline requirement for being considered employable:

“It’s clear that your CV needs to include a local degree, preferably from a Finnish or other EU university, to even be considered for interviews.” (Participant 7)

Others observed that their previous accomplishments did not lead to interview opportunities. One participant with extensive experience at a leading multinational firm said:

“When I started looking for jobs, I was surprised that I wasn’t even getting interview opportunities from companies, even though I had the experience they asked for... Still, when I applied, there was no response. It felt like my applications didn’t even go through.” (Participant 3)

Similarly, another participant with over a decade of experience described the need to restart their professional journey upon arrival:

“At first, it was discouraging, I had prestigious degrees and more than ten years of work experience, but after coming to Finland, I had to start over academically to prove my competence.” (Participant 8)

These accounts reveal a broader pattern. While foreign human capital was strong, it was not easily transferable. Instead, many felt compelled to pursue Finnish education or additional training to symbolically and practically confirm their competence. Participants explained that employers considered local degrees as a sign of quality, familiarity, and alignment with Finnish workplace expectations. As one participant noted:

“Some jobs in my field require a PhD as a minimum qualification... Most other positions require at least a master’s degree, preferably obtained in Finland. That’s a major challenge because degrees from outside Finland are sometimes less valued...In IT sector, most employers look for candidates with over five years of experience. At my stage, very few people have that much experience, so it’s unrealistic.” (Participant 6)

Recognition challenges also varied across sectors. In some fields, local certification was necessary for compliance reasons:

“For some roles, if they deal with tax regulations, there are different requirements. But in my role, I don’t deal with local tax regulations. For local tax, you need an HT (Hyväksytty Tilintarkastaja) certification in Finland.” (Participant 1)

These exceptions show that recognition challenges differ by sector, qualification type, and the extent to which professional standards are recognised worldwide. However, for most participants, recognising foreign credentials was time-consuming and emotionally challenging. The need to validate or requalify often delayed their career progress and restricted initial job opportunities. However, not all participants experienced this issue equally. This variation underscores that credential recognition is partly sector-specific and shaped by the degree to which industries rely on standardised qualifications. A few noted that their educational backgrounds were readily accepted, especially in technical or specialised fields. When discussed, one participant stated:

“Not really. I already completed my master’s degree in my home country, so that part was covered.” (Participant 5)

Overall, these findings strongly support earlier research indicating that recognising foreign qualifications poses a significant structural obstacle for migrants, but extend this understanding by showing an explicit employer preference for locally acquired credentials (Chiswick & Miller 2009, 162; Mahmud et al. 2014, 339; Sirkeci et al. 2018, 908; Sommer 2021, 26). Studies consistently show that employers often struggle to assess unfamiliar degrees or prefer local ones, even when foreign credentials are considered equivalent. This is particularly true in regulated professions where licensing requirements create formal barriers (Sommer 2021, 28). Participants’ experiences reflect these patterns but also reveal sector-specific differences, such as internationally recognised credentials being more easily accepted in global operations roles. However, participants also emphasised a related barrier: the requirement for Finnish-language proficiency, which is discussed in the following section.

4.1.1.2 Finnish Language Requirement

Previous research highlights the general challenge migrants face in *adapting to a new official language* (Dustmann & Fabbri 2003, 695; Chiswick & Miller 2009, 162; Sirkeci et al. 2018, 908). This study extends that understanding by showing that Finnish language proficiency functions not only as a communication skill but also as a symbolic marker of commitment and belonging, and as a means of access to opportunities, even in English-speaking professional environments. For some, the language expectation was seen as essential for effective communication and teamwork. Others viewed it as an implicit barrier that limited opportunities despite their skills. Participant 3 illustrated this dynamic by acknowledging not only it as a barrier but also as an essential requirement when reflecting on his job search and interview experiences. Participant 3 stated:

“Although I was qualified for those jobs, the biggest problem was the language barrier. I didn’t have proper communication skills in Finnish, and that became a major obstacle. People are normally reluctant to change management styles, and Finnish people at that time were not very open to using English as the common workplace language. They had a proper interview with me, and I felt they really liked me. But in the end, it didn’t work out because when they discussed hiring someone who didn’t know Finnish, the team was not ready for that change.” (Participant 3)

This indicates that language expectations serve not only as skill requirements but also as markers of social cohesion. This experience demonstrates how language proficiency transcends mere communication. Even if employers acknowledge a candidate’s qualifications and skills, the final hiring decision still depends on the local work environment. The phrase ‘the team wasn’t ready for that change’ reflects employers’ concern for the overall work environment, team comfort, and attitudes towards inclusion within the organisation, despite the participant being qualified. In some organisations, the Finnish language requirement was more rigid, even when roles involved minimal public interaction. Participant 4, working in IT, shared how this influenced project participation.

“There were many projects I was really interested in, but I wasn’t allowed to join, not because of skills, but because they required native-level Finnish. Documentation and client communication were entirely in Finnish.” (Participant 4)

This experience illustrates how language proficiency becomes a structural challenge. Therefore, for skilled professionals, being excluded from core activities due to language requirements can restrict their work scope, confidence, and opportunities. Regional and organisational contexts also influenced the extent of this challenge. Participant 7 described differences between Finland’s capital region and other areas:

“The language barrier becomes more apparent when you live outside the Uusimaa region. In Helsinki or Vantaa, people are used to interacting in English because there are many immigrants. But outside these areas, if you don’t know Finnish, it becomes very difficult to communicate and integrate.” (Participant 7)

This reflects findings in prior research noting that linguistic expectations vary between metropolitan and regional labour markets. Migrants’ integration journey can vary depending on where they live and work. In metropolitan areas, English is widely accepted. In smaller towns or locally focused companies, Finnish remains the dominant medium of professional and social life. While some participants viewed this situation as restrictive, others framed it as a realistic part of integration. For many, learning Finnish was not only about employability but also about independence, self-assurance, and social interaction. Participant 9 also underlined this necessity, stating:

“No matter how experienced you are or how many places you’ve worked, in Finland you need to have at least a good level of Finnish.” (Participant 9)

This shows that migrants understand and respect the central role of Finnish. However, not everyone faced language-related barriers to the same extent. Participants working in global or English-speaking organisations reported smoother integration experiences. Participant 1 shared,

“Our working language is English. Everyone on the team can speak it well.” (Participant 1)

Similarly, Participant 5 mentioned:

“My work environment is entirely in English, so I don’t face any language barriers. The main difficulty I experience is more about working alone.” (Participant 5)

These examples demonstrate that Finnish workplaces are diverse. In globally focused companies, English helps different teams work well together without language barriers.

Overall, these findings are consistent with research demonstrating that language proficiency significantly shapes migrants’ employment prospects, workplace participation, and long-term earnings (Dustmann & Fabbri 2003, 695; Chiswick & Miller 2009, 162). Furthermore, the use of Finnish as a gatekeeping mechanism echoes earlier findings that language expectations can influence social belonging, team cohesion, and perceptions of workplace fit (Rafferty 2012, 987–1006; Sirkeci et al. 2018, 908). The findings extend previous research by emphasising how organisational readiness for linguistic diversity can shape hiring decisions, even when candidates have strong skills. The focus on team comfort, expressed through the phrase ‘the team was not ready for that change’, reveals a subtle social aspect that has not been widely explored in earlier studies. Additionally, participants’ contrasting experiences between international and local companies illustrate how language requirements intersect with organisational culture and regional labour markets. However, another institutional challenge for professional migrants was employers’ preference for cultural fit. This is discussed in the following subsection.

4.1.1.3 Employer Preference for Cultural Fit

A third significant challenge identified from the interviews concerns employers’ focus on cultural fit when assessing candidates. Participants consistently explained that, in addition to qualifications, language skills, or professional expertise, Finnish employers also evaluate whether applicants can adapt to local workplace norms, communication styles, and interactional expectations. Hiring decisions often depend on whether candidates are seen as compatible with Finnish organisational

culture. For example, Participant 7 highlighted that recruiters actively seek individuals who can integrate smoothly into existing team structures.

“Recruiters want candidates who already understand the nature of the new work environment ... teamwork, independent projects, and collaboration with Finnish organisations so that they don’t face a cultural shock at work.” (Participant 7)

This perspective suggests that employers assess not only technical competence but also a candidate’s expected behavioural adaptation. Participants also highlighted how cultural misunderstandings were perceived as potential risks within Finnish workplaces. Participant 3 explained how cultural differences may raise concerns during recruitment:

“Cultural difference sometimes raises questions for recruiters whether someone coming from a different culture will fully understand how Finnish workplaces operate. Because in production environments, it can be risky if the team dynamic is disrupted... say, through miscommunication, arrogance, or aggressive behaviour. Once things get out of control, it’s very hard to bring them back, because we are dealing with people, not machines...in Finland, if you want to make any changes, it requires proper discussions often with the union and formal approvals before anything can be implemented. So, it’s not that easy to make changes here.” (Participant 3)

This example demonstrates how Finnish workplaces emphasise interpersonal harmony, procedural compliance and collective decision-making. Migrants from countries with more flexible or hierarchical management styles may find these norms unfamiliar, reinforcing employers’ concerns about cultural adjustment. These observations reflect the cross-cultural literature, which indicates that national value systems strongly influence workplace practices and expectations (Hofstede 2011, 3–4).

Taken together, the participants’ experiences indicate that ‘cultural fit’ serves both as a behavioural expectation and an implicit selection criterion. Although not always presented as a barrier, it often serves as a necessary condition for successful integration. The next challenge identified by participants concerns different labour market and institutional practices.

4.1.1.4 Different Labour Market and Institutional Practices

Participants described Finland’s labour market as highly competitive, regulated and sometimes hard to access. They often felt that getting a job depended on factors beyond their skills or qualifications. Many highlighted that, while Finland’s recruitment processes seem structured and transparent, the reality of competition, informal decision-making, and subtle discrimination makes integrating into the professional labour market challenging. One participant captured this reality:

“The third challenge relates to employers’ preferences. The job market is tough, even many Finns struggle to find employment. So, when an immigrant’s profile is compared to a Finnish candidate, it can be harder to secure interviews or get shortlisted.” (Participant 7)

This reflection illustrates how limited opportunities affect both locals and newcomers. Migrants face additional scrutiny. Employers often favour local candidates with Finnish education or experience. This creates an uneven starting point for international professionals. Participant 2 provided a direct quotation:

“One of the main challenges is hidden discrimination related to language and nationality. Finnish people usually prefer to hire their own citizens first, even if there are equally or more qualified international candidates. I applied for many jobs, and fortunately, I got one position. That’s how it worked out for me. In fact, the company where I currently work hired me because they had no other choice at that moment. Otherwise, I don’t think they would have hired a foreigner” (Participant 2)

This suggests that perceived discrimination may link with structural factors like limited vacancies and employers’ familiarity with local candidates. This aligns with the literature, which describes how migrants often face restricted access to employer-defined selection criteria, new roles, or innovative work options (Battu & Sloane, 2002, 193; Rafferty, 2012, 989). However, several participants recognised that the high level of competition was not solely about nationality but also related to the small size of Finland’s labour market. Participant 5 reflected on this reality:

“After moving here, I initially thought finding a job would be relatively easy for me, but it wasn’t. Considering Finland’s employment situation, it’s understandable that the job market is challenging. Even many Finnish people I’ve met during my two years here have struggled to find jobs. So, it’s natural that someone coming from another part of the world might find it even more difficult.” (Participant 5)

The competitive nature of Finland’s job market, along with limited opportunities for foreigners, affects the speed of integration. Overall, competition is intense, and informal preferences for local candidates can delay or limit professional entry.

After outlining the structural and institutional challenges, the next challenge concerns migrants’ ability to build social capital and access meaningful professional networks in Finland.

4.1.2 Networking and Social Capital Development Challenges

Participants observed that building social capital through networks is considered one of the main challenges in integrating into the Finnish labour market. Figure 12 presents novel challenges in networking and social capital development, offering new insights into the existing literature on migrants’ labour market integration.

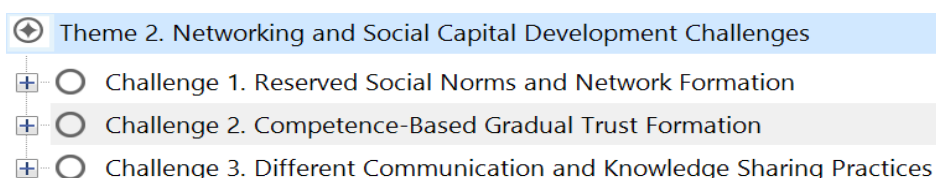


Figure 12. Networking and Social Capital Development Challenges

These challenges mainly stem from reserved social norms, slow trust-building based on competence, and difficulties in communication and knowledge sharing. The figure highlights how interpersonal dynamics intertwine with access to information and trust.

4.1.2.1 Reserved Social Norms and Network Formation

All participants emphasised that Finland’s socially reserved culture made it difficult to initiate relationships and develop networks. Especially during the early stages of their integration, it was very challenging. Although Finnish people are often described as polite and respectful, participants felt that establishing closer professional or personal connections required time and persistence. The reserved nature of social interactions meant that newcomers had to actively seek opportunities to connect and demonstrate trustworthiness before being accepted into existing circles. Participants 5 and 4 explained the challenge, respectively:

“I think it’s quite challenging here. Finnish people are generally polite and friendly, but they don’t easily open up to strangers.” (Participant 5)

This reflects Finland’s low-contact communication culture, where social boundaries are clearly maintained. Participant 4 elaborated on this theme by stating:

“The only problem or the only challenge I faced here was the communication gap, or the silence. The closeness and generally too restricted behaviour of people. That was a challenge, because I came from Pakistan, a quite talkative and interactive culture. It took me at least three years to get my first relevant, field-related job after completing my master’s in Finland. I tried to attend many job fairs and meet a lot of people—Finns and non-Finns. As a job seeker, there is almost nobody willing to give you a referral for your first job, unless you have strong roots in Finnish society.” (Participant 4)

Most participants confirmed this observation. They found it difficult to expand their professional and social contacts due to their reserved nature and a reluctance to accept newly migrated professionals. Participants felt that Finnish colleagues tended to maintain a certain social distance from strangers. This is also evident outside working hours.

The existing literature does not consider cultural factors that can limit network formation and, consequently, the development of social capital. These experiences closely align with existing

research on migrants' limited access to host-country networks. Studies highlight that professional migrants often find it difficult to penetrate native networks, which are essential for accessing job-related information, referrals, and opportunities (Ryan 2011, 707; Csedó 2008, 807). Participants' reflections also support the concept of homophily, where people tend to gravitate towards individuals similar to themselves (Ramsay et al. 2008, 115; Bandiera et al. 2008, 728). The perceived reluctance of Finns to form quick social bonds further reinforces migrants' sense of being outsiders in both professional and informal contexts. As the literature indicates, such exclusion diminishes opportunities for informal recommendations and employment referrals (Kogan 2011, 114; Rafferty 2012, 993).

Overall, this finding confirms earlier research but also expands on it by showing that social reserve in Finland is not merely a cultural difference. It has tangible effects on migrants' access to referrals, trust-building, and early labour-market entry. However, participants noted another challenge in social capital development: trust formation, discussed in the next section.

4.1.2.2 Competence-Based Gradual Trust Formation

A common theme in the interviews was the importance of demonstrated competence in earning trust within Finnish workplaces. Participants consistently explained that trust does not develop quickly or through personal warmth alone; rather, it grows gradually through observable performance, reliability, and adherence to Finnish professional norms. These reflections highlight that, for many South Asian professionals, proving competence is not merely a job requirement but also a crucial requirement towards social integration and workplace acceptance.

Participants 5, 8, and 2 described this dynamic respectively:

“You need someone who truly believes in you, someone who trusts your capabilities. If you find that person, your journey becomes much smoother.” (Participant 5)

“In Finnish culture, people take time to trust newcomers or someone from a different background.” (Participant 8)

“Trust is based on capability. ... Of course, nobody knows everything on day one ... if someone is stuck, others help the first time; next time you handle it yourself. It's friendly and practical.” (Participant 2)

These accounts illustrate a consistent pattern. Trust is constructed through competence, and practical help is available, but independence and responsibility are expected once a task is understood. This reflects the Finnish professional ethos, where support is not withdrawn, but self-sufficiency is strongly valued. Several participants also emphasised that earning trust required more effort than for

their Finnish colleagues. They felt they needed to exceed expectations in visibility, performance, and commitment:

“If you really want to grow from zero, you need to provide 200%. You need to stand out, be clearly visible.” (Participant 3)

“For promotions or career development, you need to put in extra effort compared to local employees... Trust comes from your approach and mindset... if you focus on learning and deliver consistently, people notice... So, it’s less about proving trust and more about building capability; once capability is visible, trust follows.” (Participant 7)

These statements demonstrate how trust-building contributes to slower integration trajectories for many migrants, who feel the need to compensate for initial perceptions of unfamiliarity or difference. Participants’ experiences strongly reflect the relational dimension of social capital, where trust, shared norms, and mutual expectations emerge gradually through repeated interactions (Coleman 1988, S95–S105; Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 244, 254–255).

Overall, participants viewed competence not just as a professional requirement but also as a mark of trust. Building trust in Finland was a gradual, evidence-based process, developed through consistent performance, which poses a significant challenge for professional migrants. Another challenge in building social capital is the different communication and knowledge-sharing practices discussed in the next subsection.

4.1.2.3 Different Communication and Knowledge Sharing Practices

Participants highlighted that effective communication is crucial for collaboration, but differences in linguistic expression, conversational pace, shared language and inaccurate interpretation often made workplace interactions more challenging for newcomers. Such differences can delay workplace inclusion by limiting early access to implied facts. These issues affected not only daily operations but also the development of trust and access to organisational knowledge. Participants described how small misunderstandings could escalate into practical difficulties. For instance, Participant 2 highlighted how variations in communication style shaped interactions:

“I speak English quite fast; Finns often prefer a slower pace.” (Participant 2)

Several participants noted that misunderstandings frequently occurred in multilingual teams, especially when assumptions about shared meaning were made. Participant 3 reflected on an incident illustrating how differences in interpretation can disrupt routine tasks:

“I told a line technician, the person was from outside Finland, English not strong, and no Finnish, ‘Could you please put this instrument here?’ I left. After an hour, I came back

and saw that a picture had been put there because it was also on the table just beside the equipment. The person didn't understand what I meant.” (Participant 3) (The quotation has been modified and generalised at the participant's advice)

This illustrates the challenge of translating implicit assumptions into explicit instructions, a core issue in knowledge transfer. The participant further explained that this example highlights the need for explicit instructions and confirmation of understanding. Even minor linguistic gaps can create operational errors, particularly in roles where accuracy and safety are critical. This reflects the challenge of converting implicit knowledge into explicit instructions that others can reliably act upon, a difficulty emphasised in the cognitive dimension of social capital (Grant 1996, 116; Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 254).

Participants also observed that knowledge sharing in Finnish workplaces tends to be mutual and interest-driven rather than automatic. Colleagues were more inclined to provide guidance when they perceived genuine motivation, as described by Participant 9:

“... nobody is going to teach you if you don't show interest in learning or working. If you seem unwilling, people might ignore you. But if you show motivation, others are more open to teaching and sharing knowledge.” (Participant 9)

This comment reflects the importance of shared codes, mutual understanding, and perceived commitment, all of which influence how knowledge circulates within professional networks (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 253–254). Without a shared communicative framework, migrants may struggle to access the information necessary for performing confidently and independently.

Overall, participants' experiences indicate that communication and knowledge-sharing challenges stem from differences in linguistic fluency, implicit expectations, and the need for shared interpretive frameworks. These findings align with social capital literature, which emphasises the importance of common language, shared codes, and collective narratives for effective knowledge integration (Grant 1996, 116; Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 253–254). For South Asian professional migrants, gaps in shared meaning and communication styles made it more difficult to acquire implicit knowledge, coordinate tasks efficiently, and build collaborative relationships.

The challenge of communication and knowledge sharing is also closely connected to wider cultural issues that migrants may have to navigate, which are examined in the next subsection.

4.1.3 Cross-Cultural Challenges

The participants observed that the cultures of Finland and South Asia were markedly different. They faced challenges in adapting to the new cultural environment, as shown in Figure 13.

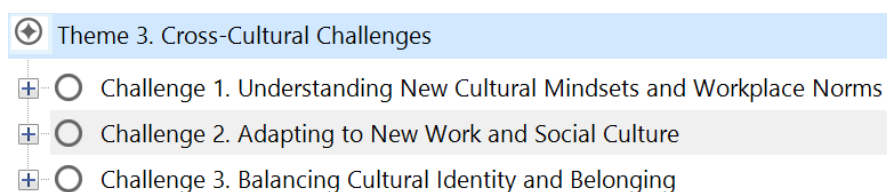


Figure 13. Cross-Cultural Challenges

These categories reflect the layered nature of cultural adjustment: cognitive, behavioural, and identity-related. Several migrants mentioned that developing a new cultural mindset requires time and effort. In most cases, the challenge arises from understanding the new perspectives of host communities, adapting to new social and workplace norms, and balancing these with their own cultural heritage.

4.1.3.1 Understanding New Cultural Mindsets and Workplace Norms

A significant and previously overlooked theme emerging from the interviews was the difficulty of understanding new cultural mindsets and workplace norms. Existing literature on labour market integration often neglects the vital, intangible differences related to deeply rooted cultural expectations. Participants consistently noted that expectations around communication, hierarchy, emotional expression, and professionalism varied considerably from those in South Asia. These differences shaped their daily interactions and affected how quickly they could become integrated into organisational environments. Participants often described the Finnish workplace as egalitarian, calm, and highly structured, features that initially felt unfamiliar. Participant 3 emphasised these differences:

“What really creates the difference is the cultural mindset. In Finland, the production environment operates with a very different culture compared to South Asia. Here, people are treated equally, with the same level of respect; it doesn’t matter whether you’re in production or in management. Everyone is seen as equal. ... Say, through miscommunication, arrogance, or aggressive behaviour. Once things get out of control, it’s very hard to bring them back.” (Participant 3)

This description aligns with research on cross-cultural differences showing that Finland scores low on power distance and values equality, predictability, and calm interpersonal behaviour (Hofstede 2011, 4; Mahmud et al. 2014, 341). Participants emphasised that while these values were positive, they often required considerable adjustment, particularly for those coming from more hierarchical and emotionally expressive workplace cultures. Participants also found that Finnish communication norms were less emotionally driven than those common in South Asia. Emotional regulation,

neutrality of tone, and subtle expression were considered essential professional behaviours. Participant 7 described this contrast:

“We South Asians are very emotional and sensitive. We often notice others’ facial expressions, whether they feel good or bad, because, in our culture, connection is based on emotions. Here, it’s quite the opposite. You have to be careful and sensitive about it.” (Participant 7)

This adds new insights to cultural intelligence literature, which emphasises the role of emotional regulation in intercultural interactions. This experience reflects what cross-cultural research describes as differences in communication norms and relational expectations, where emotional expressiveness might be acceptable in some cultures but seen as unprofessional or disruptive in others. In Finland, neutrality and calmness signal maturity, respect, and reliability standards that participants have had to learn over time. Several participants also noted that Finnish workplaces operate through structured, sequential processes, which initially appeared slow or overly meticulous. This perception is consistent with research noting that when cultural distance between home and host contexts is large, misalignment in expectations may lead to misunderstandings or slow adaptation (Mahmud et al. 2014, 341).

This challenge reflects the core mental process described in Cultural Intelligence (CQ) theory namely, metacognitive CQ, which involves consciously monitoring and adjusting one’s cultural assumptions (Ang et al. 2007, 338; Schlaegel et al. 2021, 2). Understanding a new cultural mindset is not the only challenge; migrants must also navigate the deeper challenge of adapting to new work and social culture, as discussed in subsection 4.1.3.2.

4.1.3.2 Adapting to New Work and Social Culture

Participants described adapting to the new Finnish work and social culture as a demanding process. They often faced unfamiliar expectations regarding hierarchy, communication, and workplace behaviour. These differences caused confusion and uncertainty in daily interactions. Such experiences reflect broader contrasts between national and organisational cultures (Hofstede 2011, 3). A significant challenge involved adjusting to Finnish workplace equality. Participants explained that hierarchy exists formally but not socially. Participant 3 noted:

“In Finland, people are treated equally, with the same level of respect. It doesn’t matter whether you’re in production or in management. Everyone is seen as equal.” (Participant 3)

This norm differed from South Asian workplaces, where hierarchy is highly visible. Participants sometimes struggled to understand authority, roles, and workplace boundaries in Finland. Autonomy

also posed challenges. Many felt uncertain about expectations for independent decision-making. Participant 3 further described this cultural norm:

“We need to create acceptability. That comes from dedication, energy, and analytical skills, how good we are at solving problems. It also comes from openness, and from how much ‘freedom through responsibility’ we carry as a person. If we are not responsible, we can’t get freedom.” (Participant 3)

This belief reflects a results-oriented, trust-based work culture, which migrants found challenging as they were still learning local practices (Hofstede 2011, 19–21). Communication differences were another source of challenge. Participants often compared Finnish directness with more relational South Asian norms. Participant 9 shared:

“In Finland, people are very straightforward. If they want to say something, they’ll say it in one or two words, very direct with their answers.” (Participant 9)

Participant 5 added:

“In Finland, people are more open and straightforward in their communication, which I appreciate.” (Participant 5)

Participant 9 also contrasted this with his home culture:

“In Sri Lankan workplaces, communication can go to a more personal level. In Finland, it’s small talk and work-related; we don’t get into too many details. Work is work.” (Participant 9)

These experiences reflect shifts from high to low context communication (Hall 1976; Smith 1981, 132). Such shifts can cause misinterpretations and discomfort (Ramsay et al. 2008, 117; Roberts 2010, 212–215). Participants often felt unsure about how to express respect or build rapport. Differences in emotional expression added further complexity. Participant 7 explained:

“We South Asians are very emotional and sensitive. We often notice others’ facial expressions, whether someone feels good or bad, because in our culture, connection is based on emotions. It was frustrating in the beginning. We tend to take things very deeply. Something that is normal for Finns can feel like a shock to us, and something normal for us can surprise them. The mutual understanding of cultures in a diverse environment takes time. The first thing I learned was not to interrupt when someone is talking, let them finish first.” (Participant 7)

These comments show the emotional strain caused by unfamiliar norms. Silence also challenged participants. In Finland, silence often signals respect. In South Asia, silence may signal discomfort. Until participants understood this norm, silence increased uncertainty in conversations. In addition, different work practices presented further difficulties. Participant 5 explained:

“Whenever I send a request by email, they always respond, but I’ve noticed that they work according to their own priorities, not mine. You need to be patient. They follow a clear sequence, and your request will be handled when it’s your turn.” (Participant 5)

The process-oriented approach in Finnish workplaces could feel slow or rigid compared with South Asian environments (Hofstede 2011, 21). Social culture also created early misunderstandings. Participant 4 reflected on this:

“In the beginning, I had the perception that if you’re not a drinking person, it’s difficult to integrate into Finnish society—which is true to some extent... But you can sit with them without drinking.” This experience shows the gap between expected and actual social norms.” (Participant 4)

Overall, this subtheme shows that adapting to Finnish work and social culture includes multiple challenges. These challenges relate to equality, autonomy, communication, emotional display, silence, pace, and social participation. Participants often felt uncertain because local norms differed from those described in the literature on communication and organisational culture (Hall 1976; Hofstede 2011; Roberts 2010). Organisational cultures vary along dimensions such as process-versus results-orientation and job-versus employee-orientation (Hofstede 2011, 19–21; Blake et al. 1962). The next subsection examines the challenge of balancing cultural identity and belonging faced the South Asian professional migrants.

4.1.3.3 Balancing Cultural Identity and Belonging

Participants faced ongoing challenges when balancing their cultural identity with expectations in Finland. This balance was not straightforward. Many experienced tensions between their heritage values and Finnish norms. These challenges reflect identity negotiation processes described in acculturation research (Berry et al. 1987, 491; Phinney 1990, 499).

Some participants tried to maintain a calm and selective approach. Participant 2 stated:

“No stress. Everyone has their own culture. If I like something, I follow it; if not, I don’t. I don’t pressure myself.” (Participant 2)

Although the comment sounds relaxed, it also suggests constant decision-making about cultural behaviour. Other participants felt pressure to adjust.

Participant 3 said:

“It’s important to understand what’s different in this culture... Sometimes we are reluctant or arrogant to blend in, and that takes us farther away from integrating into Finnish culture.” (Participant 3)

This shows how participants felt judged by both cultures. Literature notes that such pressure may create cultural dissonance or emotional strain (Phinney et al. 2001, 505). Belonging in social settings also posed challenges. Participant 4 described this through two connected reflections:

“In the beginning, I had the perception that if you’re not a drinking person, it’s difficult to integrate into Finnish society which is true to some extent. If you go out with colleagues even to a bar you can sit with them without drinking. They still give you space and make you feel included.” This shows uncertainty about how much cultural adjustment is required to belong (Participant 4)

Participants also spoke indirectly about living between two cultural worlds. References to “we South Asians” showed ongoing connection to their heritage communities. This dual orientation can create both support and tension. Research on bicultural identity notes that such positioning often involves ongoing negotiation rather than a settled state (Phinney 1990, 499).

Overall, this subtheme shows that balancing cultural identity and belonging is an ongoing challenge. This supports the acculturation perspective that identity integration is iterative rather than linear. Participants had to evaluate cultural expectations, manage emotional reactions, protect their identity, and interpret social norms. These findings align with research on acculturation stress and identity tension among migrants (Berry et al. 1987, 491; Phinney et al. 2001, 505).

However, the previous section 4.1 highlighted the challenges related to structural, networking & social capital, as well as cross-cultural issues, faced by South Asian professionals in the Finnish labour market. Following this, the next section examines the labour market integration strategies they employed to overcome these challenges.

4.2 Labour Market Integration Strategies

This section explores the strategies migrants employ to address the challenges identified earlier. This provides a direct bridge between the challenges identified in Section 4.1 and the methods migrants use to navigate them. The findings demonstrate how participants actively developed skills, networks, and cultural understanding to enhance their employment prospects in Finland.

4.2.1 Strategies for Structural Challenges

To address the structural challenges outlined in Section 4.1.1, South Asian professional migrants employed a range of novel strategies, which are consolidated in Figure 14. These strategies provide a valuable contribution to the current understanding of migrants’ labour market integration.

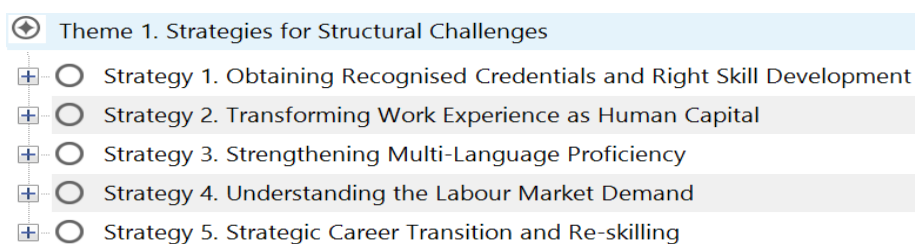


Figure 14. Strategies for Structural Challenges

South Asian professional migrants particularly focus on enhancing and localising their human capital for the Finnish context. These strategies involve obtaining recognised credentials and appropriate skill development, upgrading their language skills and other aspects of human capital, and making strategic career decisions throughout their professional journey.

4.2.1.1 Obtaining Recognised Credentials and Right Skill Development

For most participants, obtaining credentials recognised in Finland and developing relevant skills were the first and most essential strategies for enhancing employability. All participants arrived in Finland with strong educational backgrounds and significant professional experience. However, they soon realised that success in Finland required aligning their qualifications with local market expectations. This process of localising their human capital involved pursuing new degrees, certificates, and practical training opportunities valued by Finnish employers. This is consistent with Human Capital Theory but overlooks the role of context-specific credentials in signalling competence to employers.

Participant 8 reflected on this:

“I have both a BBA and an MBA in Finance, which were highly recognised in Bangladesh, but not in Finland. At first, it was discouraging. I had prestigious degrees and more than ten years of work experience, but after coming to Finland, I had to start over academically to prove my competence. That’s why I decided to pursue a Master’s degree.” (Participant 8)

Most of the participants with Finnish degrees often found it necessary to supplement their qualifications with practical, job-relevant certifications. Participants exemplified the strategic combination of self-study and professional certifications. After recognising that a master’s degree alone did not guarantee employment, they took proactive approaches. Participants 1 and 4 explained how further education, specialised certifications, and practical skills widened both their technical and professional skills. Participants 1 and 4 explained:

“I did my bachelor’s degree in my home country, worked there for a few years, then moved to Finland and did my master’s here... After my master’s, I completed (CFA

Chartered Financial Analyst) Investment Foundations and Financial Modelling and Valuation Analyst certification from the Corporate Finance Institute... I learned Python, how to code, and how to write scripts that automate repetitive finance and accounting tasks, making them more efficient and effective... I also learned SQL (Structured Query Language)... Those were very valuable for me. Looking back ten years, I couldn't do many things I can do now. These really helped me a lot.” (Participant 1)

“After graduating from the University of Turku, I realized my master's degree alone was not enough to get my first job in IT (Information Technology). So, I started doing online courses and self-study through different platforms like FFTECH, PyTech (Python Technology), MOOC (Massive Open Online Course), and open university courses. There is also an organization in Helsinki called The Shortcut, which offers cloud-related courses and certifications. Although it was basic level, it was very important. That certification and those courses helped me a lot to land my first IT job in September 2023.” (Participant 4)

Some participants also utilised government and official programmes to enhance their skills.

Participant 2 mentioned:

“Turku employment office provides similar services — training and professional upskilling. I've used some of those.” (Participant 2)

Such programmes, designed to improve employability, frequently act as a bridge between academic qualifications and practical job readiness.

Overall, participants viewed their skill development and credential recognition as a process of validating their job qualifications. This approach was adopted to recognise their qualifications to the employer. They built their qualifications by acquiring new degrees, certifications, and practical training that aligned with Finnish standards. These findings align strongly with existing research demonstrating that migrants often pursue additional education or credential recognition when their foreign qualifications are undervalued in the host labour market (Bauder 2003, 706–710; Chiswick & Miller 2009, 162; Söhn 2016, 194). Studies show that local education increases credibility with employers and helps align migrants with country-specific professional norms (Mahmud et al. 2014, 346–350; Sommer 2021, 28). Similar patterns have been observed globally, such as engineers obtaining project-management credentials and software training to meet local labour market demands (Mahmud et al. 2014, 346). The participants' experiences are therefore consistent with broader evidence that additional host-country education serves both as a corrective mechanism for credential devaluation and as a strategic form of human capital investment. Having strengthened their human capital through recognised credentials and skill development, participants also described the next strategy of transforming their work experience into human capital.

4.2.1.2 Transforming Work Experience as Human Capital

A second strategy that emerged strongly from the interviews was the deliberate use of practical work experience even in roles below participants' qualifications as a way to strengthen human capital within the Finnish context. Participants often entered the labour market through temporary, part-time, or unrelated jobs. Although initially mismatched with their education and previous managerial or professional roles, these early positions became valuable learning platforms that helped them understand Finnish workplace culture, norms, and expectations. This reinforces the argument that early overqualification can serve as a transitional phase rather than a permanent state.

Participants described how these experiences played a foundational role in shaping their confidence and professional adaptation. Participant 3 emphasised that hands-on work provided deeper cultural exposure than formal education alone:

“I would not say my education helped me integrate into the culture that much. What helped more was work. I started in production as a normal worker, so I went into the core of the culture from the beginning.” (Participant 3)

This reflection aligns with existing research showing that migrants often take up roles below their skill level as a pragmatic step into the host labour market (Bauder 2003, 703; Chiswick & Miller 2009, 163). Such roles expose migrants to local organisational routines, tacit norms, and behavioural expectations that education alone cannot provide.

Several participants explained that even unrelated jobs helped them internalise key Finnish values such as punctuality, equality, and self-management. As Participant 4 noted:

“Of course, cleaning jobs don't help you directly in IT, but those jobs helped me understand the work culture, the people, the society, and how everything works here.” (Participant 4)

Similarly, Participant 7 highlighted how these roles revealed expectations related to customer interaction and workplace behaviour:

“Even temporary jobs teach you how the system works, how people behave, and what customers expect. You learn the Finnish work culture and mindset, which is very important for your future career.” (Participant 7)

These narratives are consistent with research suggesting that early underemployment often acts as a transitional phase in migrants' integration, providing essential insights that gradually reduce overqualification over time (Chiswick & Miller 2009, 163; Frei & Sousa-Poza 2012, 1837).

Participants also described communication as a key component of turning work experience into human capital. Repeated interactions at work helped them refine their understanding of Finnish communication norms and build confidence. Participant 7 explained how active engagement supported both learning and conflict resolution:

“My strategy was to interact as much as possible... Sometimes something I said was taken the wrong way, but for me it was normal... Later, when we communicated, it became clear it was just a misunderstanding. So, communication is the key. It helps to avoid stress and misunderstandings.” (Participant 7)

For some, these early roles also became sources of broader social and cultural learning. Participant 5 expressed that practical experience, rather than academic degrees, provided the most meaningful learning:

“Honestly, the most valuable education I’ve gained has come from my professional experience over the years... it helped me understand the social norms, cultural practices, and the work-life balance that people maintain here.” (Participant 5)

Taken together, these accounts demonstrate how participants strategically converted diverse work experiences into context-specific human capital. Although these roles did not always directly advance their careers, they provided opportunities to learn Finnish workplace norms, demonstrate reliability, and ultimately secure better positions. This pattern aligns with broader research showing that local work experience, especially in the early stages, serves as a pathway to long-term professional mobility (Mahmud et al. 2014, 347; Sirkeci et al. 2018, 908). By enhancing their human capital through local work experience, many participants also concentrated on developing multiple language skills, as discussed in the following subsection, as a strategic tool for progressing in the Finnish labour market.

4.2.1.3 Strengthening Multi-Language Proficiency

Language learning became one of the most effective strategies participants employed. This approach enhanced their professional and social integration in Finland. Participants also observed that even basic Finnish skills positively influenced employers’ perceptions of commitment. For many, proficiency in English served as a gateway to the workplace. However, learning Finnish, even at a basic level, was regarded as crucial for gaining acceptance, trust, and long-term career opportunities. Participants also developed multilingual communication skills. They utilised all available linguistic resources to foster clarity and inclusion in multicultural work environments. Participant 8 explained how she tackled the communication challenge:

“To address that, I enrolled in an integration program to learn Finnish and make myself more acceptable in the Finnish job market.” (Participant 8)

For many, multiple language skills showed the difference between limited opportunities and full professional participation. Even in sectors where English sufficed, participants believed that knowing multiple local languages gave them advantages. Participant 7 reflected:

“Of course, there are some exceptions. In fields like IT and healthcare, employers are more flexible because those sectors have labour shortages. Once you acquire some Finnish or Swedish language skills, you can find opportunities more easily...I also passed the YKI exam in Swedish” (Participant 7)

Beyond professional necessity, learning the Finnish language was seen by many participants as a way to build relationships. A key insight was shared by Participant 3, who also explained how trying to speak Finnish or other local languages helped create connections.

“When you try to speak their language, they come closer because they feel you need support and you’re trying. Same as in Bangladesh—if a Nigerian speaks Bengali, I’d be more open, say a few more words, teach more. It’s the same here: you try, you make mistakes—who cares?” (Participant 3)

This relational effect aligns with the social capital literature, which states that language effort enhances bonding and bridging ties. This reflection underscores the relational aspect of language learning. Even trying to speak a few local words demonstrated humility and prompted colleagues to respond with understanding and kindness.

Overall, participants’ experiences show that improving multiple language skills served as both a professional and personal strategy for integration. This finding supports previous research emphasising language as a fundamental component of human capital and a key factor influencing labour market outcomes (Dustmann & Fabbri 2003, 697; Chiswick & Miller 2009, 162). Strong reading, writing, and communication skills improve access to higher-skilled roles (Dustmann & Fabbri 2003, 696). Participants also highlighted the importance of understanding labour market needs, which is discussed in the next subsection.

4.2.1.4 Understanding the Labour Market Demand

Participants highlighted the importance of understanding the Finnish labour market. They also emphasised the need to explore the changing demands of the labour market as a key strategy for successful integration. They discovered that, beyond qualifications and experience, employability depends on recognising which sectors are expanding, which skills are valued, and how to align their professional journey with these trends. By observing the market, engaging with employers, and reflecting on their own capabilities, participants developed informed, realistic, and forward-looking career strategies. Participant 1 described how he approached this process after completing his studies:

“After finishing my master’s, I did a part-time job, then moved to another position. But I was looking for something more long-term, so I started researching the job market, what skills and roles would be in demand in the future. During that research, I discovered that many new things were emerging in finance and accounting. Since then, I’ve been developing skills that could put me five or ten years ahead of the market.” (Participant 1)

This proactive attitude shows how participants took responsibility for their professional development. Instead of waiting for opportunities to arrive, they actively researched which industries were hiring, what skills employers valued, and how to position themselves competitively. Through this research, Participant 1 recognised the need to focus on emerging skill areas within his field. Participant 3 emphasised another job-market demand, adaptability and cultural fit. He highlighted:

“After that, other things, like technical skills and experience with tools, come later. Those are secondary compared to showing that we can adapt and fit into the cultural environment.” (Participant 3)

This demonstrates a behavioural component of cultural intelligence, where adaptability enhances organisational fit. Participant 6 added that cultural acceptance and willingness to integrate also influenced hiring outcomes:

“Accept the local culture and show you’re willing to integrate.” (Participant 6)

These insights emphasise that understanding the job market extends beyond analysing vacancies. It involves recognising employer expectations related to teamwork, communication, and professional demeanour. South Asian professionals realised that success in Finland requires both competence and cultural understanding. Several participants described receiving feedback from employers to help them integrate into the job market. They also acknowledged the time needed to become prepared according to the employer’s standards. Participant 5 reflected on how success in Finland requires feedback. Participant 5 reflected:

“I also received feedback about why I wasn’t selected, and I respected those insights. Be patient and trust the system. Success here takes time, but it comes through perseverance, networking, and openness to learning.” (Participant 5)”

Participant 1 advised others to take the initiative and not hesitate to engage with employers directly in the reserved Finnish environment. Participant 1 shared:

“Trust your abilities—don’t self-reject; apply and call the contact person to discuss roles. Be proactive and prepared; don’t doubt your skills or knowledge.” (Participant 1)

Overall, participants demonstrated that successful integration into the Finnish labour market depends not only on technical qualifications but also on an informed strategy that aligns with job-market

demands. These insights show that labour-market success depends on aligning both hard skills and cultural expectations. This understanding of market demand naturally encouraged participants to pursue more strategic career transitions and re-skilling initiatives, as discussed in the next subsection.

4.2.1.5 Strategic Career Transition and Re-skilling

Participants stressed the importance of flexibility and openness to career change. This can be a crucial strategy for professional survival and development in Finland. Some acknowledged that rigidly sticking to one career path might limit opportunities, especially when language barriers or credential recognition pose challenges. Instead, they adopted a pragmatic approach by moving into fields with higher demand or easier access.

Participant 4 shared how he completely changed his professional route to align with Finland's labour market needs:

“I completely switched my field. My background was in electrical engineering back in Pakistan, but I shifted to information security and IT fields where I didn't have much prior experience, though I knew the basics. This change caused difficulties, and it took a long time to secure my first full-time job in IT in Finland.” (Participant 4)

His experience highlights both the difficulties and the eventual benefits of changing careers. By entering a high-demand sector, he slowly built a sustainable career. The process required patience, learning, and resilience to create new professional opportunities. Another participant shared a similar view through a peer's experience.

“A friend with an IT master's became a chef here and is doing well. Don't get stuck in one track, sometimes moving fields works better in Finland. Be flexible based on opportunities.” (Participant 2)

This example shows that transitioning to a new career was not viewed as a loss but as a practical strategy to ensure stability and acquire local work experience.

Overall, strategic career switching and re-skilling were vital approaches for some South Asian professionals to integrate into the Finnish labour market. By remaining adaptable and responsive to labour market demands, participants redefined their careers and expanded their professional prospects. After all, human capital development provided an important foundation for employability, but the interviews revealed that social capital played an equally critical role in accessing opportunities. The following section analyses how participants built, expanded, and utilised social networks within the Finnish context.

4.2.2 Social Capital Development and Networking Strategies

To address the challenges of building social capital and networks in Finland outlined in Section 4.1.2, participants employed proactive strategies to grow and strengthen their social connections. Specifically, Figure 15 offers a concise visual map of how migrants expand and utilise these diverse connections.

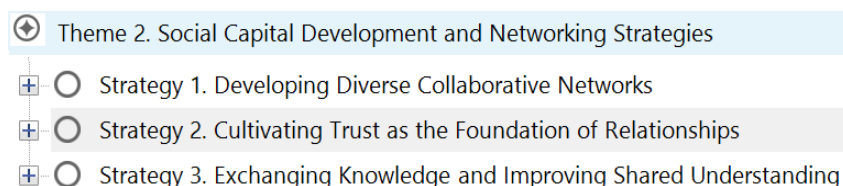


Figure 15. Social Capital Development and Networking Strategies

The strategies displayed in the figure enabled them to turn social distance into social capital in their professional journey. Instead of relying solely on co-ethnic ties, they actively engage across various connections to cultivate collaborative and trust-based relationships.

4.2.2.1 Developing Diverse Collaborative Networks

Developing diverse collaborative networks was a vital strategy for South Asian professional migrants to integrate into the Finnish labour market. Participants recognised the value of personal connections and trustworthy recommendations. They established a range of collaborative networks both at work and beyond. Both formal and informal networks helped them access job opportunities and share knowledge. Participants actively used online platforms, university environments, and professional communities to connect with others. They also focused on sector-specific networks that improved their job search. Participant 1 explained how he began building networks during his job search.

“... I did try to build a network in the sector I wanted for my career. That really helped mostly via LinkedIn and a few programs I attended. I connected with many people who shared insights on social and recruiting sites. From there, I learned a lot, including which companies employ many international people. That helped me narrow my job search.”
(Participant 1)

Participant 5 repeated this experience and emphasised the importance of online and in-person networking. She also noted that the Finnish labour market, especially in specialised sectors, depends significantly on well-established connections. She shared:

“I started applying and networking through LinkedIn and reaching out to my professional contacts to help me settle in. Finland is a relatively small country with a small, close-knit group of professionals, especially in the sustainability field. Many people have been

working in this sector for a long time, and they have established networks and references that play a big role in recruitment decisions. That's how things tend to work here." (Participant 5)

This highlights the importance of both weak and strong ties in accessing credible referrals. Participants also discussed the importance of face-to-face interaction in reinforcing these bonds. Participant 7 noted that while digital platforms are helpful, in-person meetings are significantly more effective.

"On LinkedIn, it's hard to start real conversations because many recruiters or managers don't read messages. So, my advice is: stay active on LinkedIn, but prioritize in-person networking, job fairs, recruiting events, or even a short coffee meeting. When you meet face to face, you can explain the value you bring." (Participant 7)

Participants found that universities also played a crucial role in connecting participants to professional networks. Participant 8 explained how his university experiences directly supported his career transition:

"During my master's studies at the University of Turku, I worked with many groups and met several people from my community. One of them became a good friend, we did many group assignments together. Later, he helped me apply for a job, and that's how I got my current position. So, my university network directly helped me enter the job market." (Participant 8)

Participant 3 demonstrated how diverse networking spaces can support integration. He built a connection with a recruitment agent who shared his profile with employers, took part in EU and Finnish government case competitions, and used sports as an informal way to connect with others. He shared:

"The biggest thing for me was my connection with a recruiting company. I built a good understanding with one of their agents, and she started sending my profile to different companies. If they see potential in you, they really try to place you somewhere you can make a difference. I also joined case competitions organised by the European Union and the Finnish government, where groups solve real problems faced by companies and present their solutions. That's another way to connect with well-established professionals who already have strong networks. Outside work, I found sports to be a great networking space because there's no division. Playing sports like squash or simulation golf provided access to influential professionals, including CEOs and entrepreneurs, especially during winter when outdoor activities were limited. Although such settings can be costly, you get expensive people in expensive places. Sports is a place where there is no discrimination between what background you come from, what kind of life structure you have." (Participant 3)

This demonstrates how informal, leisure-oriented spaces facilitate connecting with valued people and help develop social capital. Informal and community-based networks also contributed to participants'

integration. Participant 2 mentioned that Indian community gatherings supported building social networks and practical exchanges.

“We have Indian community gatherings, usually monthly or occasionally, where we share issues and support each other.” (Participant 2)

These findings strongly align with Social Capital Theory, which emphasises the value of diverse, bridging, and vertical ties in enhancing access to labour market opportunities (Seibert & Kraimer 2001, 220; De Janasz et al. 2003, 78). Prior research shows that professional migrants benefit most from networks that extend beyond co-ethnic circles, as broader ties provide access to unique information, industry insights, and referrals that increase employability (Ryan 2011, 710; Rungo et al. 2024, 119). Participants’ emphasis on university networks, recruiting agents, and cross-cultural social spaces reflects the importance of cultivating both weak ties (bridging contacts) and vertical ties (connections with more influential individuals), which are known to support career advancement.

The findings extend existing knowledge by showing that migrants in Finland adopt multi-site networking strategies that combine digital platforms, academic communities, professional events, sports clubs, and co-ethnic support networks. This demonstrates a more holistic and adaptive approach than what much of the earlier literature describes. While diverse networks help migrants access opportunities, sustaining these relationships requires trust. The next subsection examines how participants cultivated trust as the foundation for meaningful and supportive professional relationships.

4.2.2.2 Cultivating Trust as the Foundation of Relationships

Another novel approach, building trust, emerged as a key relational strategy that helped participants enter and stay engaged in Finnish workplaces. This aligns with the relational aspect of social capital, where trust supports resource exchange. Participants consistently stressed that in Finland, trust is not given upfront but is gradually earned through demonstrated competence, reliability, and respectful behaviour. Since trust plays a vital role in shaping workplace collaboration, knowledge sharing, and team stability, cultivating trust became a crucial way for South Asian professional migrants to strengthen their social capital.

Participants described how trust formation in Finland differs from more relationship-oriented or hierarchical cultures. Rather than being based on personal familiarity, trust in Finnish organisations develops through observable actions and consistent contributions to shared work goals. Participant 1

illustrated this dynamic when describing how his early work performance shaped his acceptance in the team:

“When I joined the company, my colleagues, mentors, and supervisor were very welcoming and helpful... At the end of the day, it’s a fair game: if you grow, I grow; if you help me, I help you... It’s like a six-legged table: if one leg breaks, the whole team is affected. I showed colleagues how to replace 50 individual emails with a templated Excel process; helped others automate repetitive tasks with Python/VBA. Helping them created repeated touchpoints and trust, and stronger relationships.” (Participant 1)

This experience reflects how repeated interactions and acts of support strengthen relational ties over time. Social Capital Theory similarly emphasises that trust and trustworthiness emerge through ongoing exchanges and cooperative behaviour, which help establish stable expectations among colleagues (Coleman 1988, S102–S105; Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 254–255).

Participants also highlighted that trust is closely linked to observable work ethic and the ability to perform tasks independently. Trial periods were especially important for demonstrating capability. Participant 5 explained how her employer’s confidence grew during the six-month integration placement:

“Trust begins when you start working for or with someone... During the six-month trial period, I was assigned different tasks, which gave the company a chance to evaluate my performance and capabilities. Through that process, they developed confidence in me and decided to continue working with me.” (Participant 5)

Trial periods serve as structured ways to build trust in Finnish work culture. These early-stage experiences offer opportunities to demonstrate dependability and initiative. Such interactions reflect the concept of mutual obligations and expectations outlined in Social Capital Theory: when individuals show reliability, colleagues respond with support, mentorship, and additional opportunities (Coleman 1988, S102; Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 255).

Participants also noted that building trust required consistency in daily actions such as punctuality, responsibility, and cooperation. Participant 9 emphasised how small, routine behaviours shaped others’ perceptions:

“My way of working is to always give 100%. I make sure to be on time and help my team whenever I can... If you’re new, and senior colleagues see that you have a good attitude and are willing to help others, they will also help you.” (Participant 9)

This reflects how shared norms, such as reliability, helpfulness, and commitment, facilitate integration. Norms form a key component of the relational dimension of social capital, enabling high-

quality working relationships, openness, and collective problem-solving (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 242–266; Jokisaari et al. 2024, 465).

These findings extend existing literature by showing that trust-building is not only an interpersonal outcome but also a deliberate integration strategy employed by professional migrants. Participants used trust to gain credibility, secure mentorship, and open pathways to more complex responsibilities. Unlike earlier studies that mainly focus on structural barriers, this research highlights how migrants actively foster trust through daily work practices, repeated contributions, and consistent displays of value. After establishing trust as a relational foundation, the next strategy explores how participants relied on these trusted relationships to exchange knowledge and improve shared understanding within Finnish workplaces.

4.2.2.3 Exchanging Knowledge and Improving Shared Understanding

Participants identified knowledge exchange as another vital strategy for strengthening collaboration and ensuring smooth integration into Finnish workplaces. They emphasised that open communication, shared learning, and mutual support were not only essential for teamwork but also central to building a sense of inclusion and professional belonging. By sharing expertise and learning from colleagues, participants cultivated a collaborative environment that helped them adapt to organisational expectations and enhance their professional performance.

Participant 1 illustrated how knowledge-sharing practices helped his team operate more effectively:

“We back each other and help each other. Ultimately, the team helps during bad days and uncertainties. I also support newcomers so they can ‘get skin in the game’ and start contributing quickly. We created video tutorials on how tasks are done. We also run many one-on-one onboarding sessions. Some tutorials I made; others my colleagues made. We split the work and help newcomers integrate and contribute as soon as possible.”
(Participant 1)

Creating shared learning resources helped build trust, reduce misunderstandings, and support new employees, a reflection of Finland’s strong emphasis on equality and collective responsibility.

Participant 2 described a similar collaborative approach centred around structured communication:

“We do a lot of group work. We meet in Microsoft Teams, define tasks, discuss likely difficulties, and clarify responsibilities ‘this is your part, this is mine.’ We only start once we all understand the goal and output. This avoids wasting time and keeps collaboration smooth.” (Participant 2)

This example emphasises the importance of establishing a shared understanding before starting any collaborative task. Such clarity reduces early-stage integration friction and fosters team cohesion.

Participants learned that Finnish workplaces prioritise clarity and consensus, which are vital for efficiency and trust.

Mentoring also emerged as an important component of knowledge exchange. Participant 7 described how guidance from an experienced colleague helped him adapt to workplace expectations:

“Mentoring is key. I have a Finnish mentor with both teaching and industry experience.”
(Participant 7)

These mentoring relationships helped participants understand communication norms, problem-solving methods, and organisational practices. Through regular interaction, they internalised both technical knowledge and culturally embedded meanings.

These practices closely relate to the cognitive aspect of social capital, which stresses shared language, interpretations, and collective narratives that promote mutual understanding (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 253–254). As participants collaborated, developed shared resources, and clarified expectations, they helped create a common interpretive framework that facilitated smoother communication and coordination. This shared cognition enabled them to navigate multicultural work environments, integrate tacit and explicit knowledge, and participate more confidently in professional tasks. It also reflects the cognitive aspect of cultural intelligence, where shared schemas strengthen cooperation.

In summary, sharing knowledge and promoting mutual understanding strengthened teamwork, improved efficiency, and fostered a sense of belonging. Participants’ experiences show that collaboration is not only a practical necessity but also a social process through which trust, respect, and workplace inclusion are developed. These collaborative learning processes also helped participants build the cultural sensitivity and adaptability needed to succeed in Finnish workplaces, skills that form the foundation for cultivating cultural intelligence, as discussed in the following subsection on cross-cultural strategies.

4.2.3 Cross-Cultural Strategies

Several cross-cultural strategies assisted South Asian professional migrants in their labour market integration in Finland. Among these, developing cultural intelligence functioned as the primary cross-cultural method. Figure 16 presents a range of cross-cultural strategies:

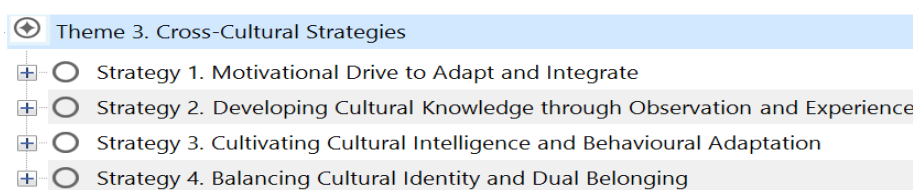


Figure 16. Cross-Cultural Strategies

Each strategy outlined in the figure directly corresponds to the motivational, cognitive, and behavioural components of cultural intelligence, demonstrating their interaction in supporting workplace adaptation. The subsequent discussion elaborates on each strategy in detail.

4.2.3.1 Motivational Drive to Adapt and Integrate

A strong motivational drive to adapt and integrate emerged as a central personal strategy among participants as they navigated Finnish workplaces. Their reflections show that intrinsic curiosity, commitment to growth, and respect for host-country norms played a decisive role in shaping successful integration experiences. Participants consistently highlighted that adapting to a new environment required ownership, proactive effort, and an open mindset. Participant 3 emphasised this sense of personal responsibility:

“It’s a new culture, a new society, and a new way of working. We must be able to blend into this culture because it’s totally different, and I am responsible for blending in well. It’s not their responsibility to make me fit in. If I don’t try, then what’s the point? I should try to fix my issues in terms of personal development. It’s a matter of time, but also a matter of commitment and as an individual, I also need to be open and adapt to the culture well.” (Participant 3)

This illustrates a core element of motivational cultural intelligence: the willingness and determination to adapt to culturally unfamiliar settings. Motivation, therefore, functions as both a psychological resource and a signalling mechanism. Participants’ narratives reveal that such motivation was not merely reactive but demonstrated deliberate commitment to personal development and long-term integration objectives. Participant 8 exemplified a similar attitude towards continuous change and adaptability:

“Change is constant. Everything around us evolves. Fashion, technology, rules, national progress. We shouldn’t be rigid; we should accept, adapt, and develop with change. That’s my belief.” (Participant 8)

Motivation also functioned as a social signal. Participants learned that visible interest, willingness to learn, and active engagement enabled trust-building with Finnish colleagues. Participant 9 clearly articulated this connection between effort and support:

“Nobody is going to teach you if you don’t show interest in learning or working. If you seem unwilling, people might ignore you. But if you show motivation, others are more open to teaching and sharing knowledge.” (Participant 9)

Motivation, therefore, enhanced interpersonal cooperation and encouraged colleagues to share knowledge reflecting the link between motivational cultural intelligence and effective cross-cultural interaction (Ang et al. 2007; Chen et al. 2010).

Some participants also identified role modelling as a source of motivation. Participant 2, for example, explained how Finnish behavioural norms inspired him to learn and integrate:

“Finns’ dedication, trustworthiness, and timely responses motivated me to learn their culture.” (Participant 2)

Participants also described the emotional dimension of motivation, particularly the need to remain positive despite cultural misunderstandings or misinterpretations. As Participant 7 noted:

“You shouldn’t get demotivated by someone’s behaviour. What you think is negative might not be meant that way. Sometimes what is said and what is understood are different. So, I stay positive and motivated.” (Participant 7)

This emphasises the role of resilience and cross-cultural self-efficacy, key components of motivational cultural intelligence that sustain engagement even when navigating uncertainty (Chen et al. 2010).

In summary, participants’ reflections indicate that motivational drive was a foundational strategy in their integration journeys. It supported proactive learning, fostered openness to new norms, and enabled constructive participation within Finnish workplaces. This aligns closely with the concept of motivational cultural intelligence, which describes the internal energy that guides individuals to adapt, persist, and succeed in culturally diverse environments. Alongside strong motivation, participants developed cultural knowledge through observing daily practices and learning from lived experiences.

4.2.3.2 Developing Cultural Knowledge through Observation and Experience

Participants emphasised that cultural understanding cannot be fully learned through books, online research, or pre-arrival orientation. Instead, it develops gradually through everyday observation, interaction, and participation in Finnish society. This experiential learning is key to understanding unwritten, unspoken, or unconscious rules and standards that are rarely communicated explicitly. This helps migrants interpret social cues, workplace norms, and communication styles in ways that theoretical knowledge alone cannot provide. Participant 6 described cultural learning as both intellectual and emotional growth:

“Culture itself is knowledge—shaped by history and reasons. Learning it improves communication and conflict resolution. Understanding different perspectives helps calm tense situations and make people comfortable.” (Participant 6)

Exposure to different environments enabled participants to better understand Finnish behavioural expectations. Many stressed that observation was often more valuable than advance preparation. Participant 7 explained how practical engagement deepened his understanding:

“You can study beforehand, but unless the other person interacts with you, you can’t fully understand... So it’s better to learn by observing and doing, not just by prior preparation.” (Participant 7)

Cultural knowledge was also shaped through interactions with both Finnish people and co-ethnic communities. Participant 8 noted that her understanding developed through a combination of observation, classroom learning, and multicultural social settings:

“I develop cultural knowledge through observing how people react, interact, and express themselves... My Bangladeshi surroundings, the university’s multicultural setting, my workplace, and Finnish language classes all built my cultural knowledge.” (Participant 8)

Some participants gained insight through short work placements, which provided structured yet informal opportunities to observe Finnish work culture. Participant 5 described how her one-month internship expanded her understanding and allowed her to verify her assumptions:

“During that one month, I learned a lot about Finnish culture... It was an eye-opener to see how they balance their professional and personal lives. It helped me understand the social norms, cultural practices, and the work-life balance people maintain here.” (Participant 5)

This supports arguments that short placements accelerate cultural learning through structured exposure. For others, cultural learning was supported by community networks. Participant 9 explained how both his previous work experience and his Sri Lankan community contributed to his cultural understanding:

“My Sri Lankan community supported me when I was new here... Working with Finnish people also helped me learn more about the culture.” (Participant 9)

Participant 2 offered a particularly practical perspective, emphasising that cultural knowledge grows through intentional social engagement. He advised newcomers to interact openly with Finns, even when differences feel unfamiliar:

“Spend time with local Finns, don’t avoid them. Learn and understand their customs (you don’t have to follow them, but know them). Invite colleagues home for coffee or a meal;

sharing time builds warmth and they may share valuable experiences and knowledge. Never underestimate anyone, everyone has something to teach.” (Participant 2)

His words underscore that cultural understanding is co-created through curiosity, respect, and reciprocal interaction.

Overall, these findings reinforce the idea that cultural knowledge is built through lived experience, interpretation, and relational engagement. The cognitive dimension of cultural intelligence explains that individuals develop understanding of cultural norms and social systems through education and direct exposure (Ang et al. 2006, 101; Lisak & Erez 2015, 5). Participants’ emphasis on observing behaviour, testing assumptions, and learning through interaction aligns with how cognitive cultural intelligence deepens through active sense-making (Stoermer et al. 2021, 434). Having developed cultural awareness through experience, participants then moved toward applying this understanding in flexible and adaptive behavioural responses, discussed in the following subsection.

4.2.3.3 Cultivating Cultural Intelligence and Behavioural Adaptation

Participants emphasised the importance of continuous cultivation of cultural intelligence through unseen mental effort and adoption of culturally appropriate verbal and nonverbal behavioural strategies for sustained integration into the Finnish workplace (Ang et al. 2007, 337-338; Chen et al. 2012, 94; Abdul Malek & Budhwar 2013, 224). By observing and learning from everyday experiences, they adapted their communication styles, professional behaviour, and emotional responses to align with Finnish norms. Participant 2 highlighted a practical example of behavioural adjustment:

“When coming from India to Finland, you have to adapt. I speak English quite fast; Finns often prefer a slower pace, so I’ve learned to slow down. Finns are very punctual. In Asia, we’re not always that punctual, so I adjusted to their time culture.” (Participant 2)

Participants recognised the importance of time discipline and respect for others’ schedules and comfort in Finland. This reflects the behavioural dimension of cultural intelligence, where individuals visibly adapt their communication and interaction styles. They shared that Finns do not interrupt when someone is speaking. However, interruption is very common in South Asian countries. Participant 4 also shared how he modified his communication behaviour:

“I have become a good listener, which I wasn’t previously. Now, when somebody is talking, I pay attention, let them finish, then I proceed. In Pakistan, sitting among five people, we wouldn’t hesitate to interrupt and we wouldn’t even apologize. Mostly, the concept of privacy and personal space has been deeply embedded in me. Back home, if I called somebody and they didn’t pick up, I would call again and again. Now, here, I first

drop a message and ask if they are available. I wait for the response; then we agree on a time and call.” (Participant 4)

This demonstrates how participants learned to adopt conversational norms that reflect equality and attentiveness. The concept of privacy is largely embedded in his behaviour. Participants perceived privacy and silence as core features of Finnish culture. They also valued openness alongside these norms. Participant 3 provided a broader view of this transformation:

“It’s a drastic change in my politeness, openness, and patience. Before, if something was said, it needed to be done immediately, that’s the practice in South Asia. Here, everyone knows there are priorities, and nothing will fall apart if I don’t do it immediately. I learned patience, cooperation, and to be more open in saying things. Now, I can easily say, ‘I have made a mistake’ because I know I won’t be charged for a mistake. Mistakes are allowed. That assurance raises your potential to deliver outside the box.” (Participant 3)

This shift in behaviour towards openness fostered a sense of psychological safety, encouraging creativity and innovation. Participants’ reflections indicate that learning from mistakes rather than fearing them was a crucial adaptive shift in Finland. Participant 7 shared how emotional regulation improved her professionalism:

“I used to be very emotional, which sometimes led to unprofessional reactions. But now I’ve learned to be calm and flexible. When you adapt to a culture, it becomes easier to behave professionally and manage people.” (Participant 7)

Participants learned to observe, interpret, and adjust their communication, emotions, and work practices to align with Finnish cultural expectations. Overall, participants adopted broader work values as part of their adaptation process.

These reflections illustrate cultural adaptation processes described in the literature, where successful cross-cultural adjustment requires individuals to modify verbal and non-verbal behaviour to minimise miscommunication and align with host-country norms (Harzing et al. 2011; Van Riemsdijk & Basford 2022; Le et al. 2023). At the same time, participants stressed that adapting does not mean abandoning their own culture. Instead, they highlighted the need to balance cultural identity and maintain a dual sense of belonging, which is discussed in the final subsection on labour market integration strategies.

4.2.3.4 Balancing Cultural Identity and Dual Belonging

The findings also endorse the strategy of negotiating identity as cultural capital, as discussed in Section 2.3.3. They further contribute by revealing an emerging sense of dual belonging. Several participants described Finland as a second home. Participants did not view cultural integration as a replacement for their original identity. Instead, they saw it as harmonising two cultural frameworks.

They characterised this process as selective adaptation, where compatible elements from both cultures could coexist. Rather than abandoning their heritage, they adopted Finnish norms that supported their professional and personal development while retaining meaningful aspects of their South Asian background. As Participant 3 explained:

“Every culture has goods and bads; we must understand what fits us. I’ve taken positive things from Finnish culture like politeness, punctuality, honesty, and a systematic approach to work and life. The biggest value I learned here is that my personal time is my personal time, that’s very important. At the same time, I keep the best parts of my own culture, like friendliness, talkativeness, a smiley face, and showing that I am capable. Those things don’t need to change. What I didn’t take: the drinking culture, weaker family attachment in some Finnish contexts. You have to choose what blends with your ethics and helps you grow. That’s how I’ve changed positively, by respecting Finnish culture while keeping what matters from my own.” (Participant 3)

This illustrates integration as a form of synthesis rather than substitution. These reflections demonstrate that integration involved both adopting and selecting aspects. Participants retained practices that supported their growth and well-being and set aside those that conflicted with their ethical or familial values. This balanced approach allowed them to develop a dual sense of belonging in which Finnish and South Asian orientations were combined rather than opposed. Over time, this dual sense of belonging became more natural. Participant 1 described this gradual internalisation:

“I’ve been living in Finland for almost nine years now, and it has become my second home. Because of that, I’ve actually forgotten many things, even my communication style from ten years ago. Major differences are less noticeable now.” (Participant 1)

This indicates that long-term exposure leads not only to behavioural adjustment but also to deeper incorporation of Finnish cultural norms into one’s everyday identity. This dual-belonging perspective enriches acculturation theory by showing how professional settings shape identity negotiation (Berry 2005, 697).

Overall, these empirical insights strongly support the idea that migrants can negotiate their identity as a form of cultural capital, utilising selected elements of their heritage as valuable resources rather than seeing them as obstacles (Bourdieu 1986, 243; Lamont & Lareau 1988, 153, 162). Participants’ accounts of combining Finnish values such as punctuality and systematic work practices with South Asian warmth and friendliness, allowing individuals to retain their original culture while engaging fully with the host society (Phinney 1990, 499; Phinney et al. 2001, 495; Berry 2005, 697). Simultaneously, their experiences demonstrate how multicultural environments can benefit organisations by drawing on diverse cultural groups to enhance collaboration, creativity, and productivity (Malik et al. 2014, 203; Van Riemsdijk & Basford 2022, 635, 648). The findings also

show that the challenges and strategies related to labour market integration are interconnected and complex. The next section discusses this new understanding.

4.3 Interconnected Nature of Challenges and Strategies

Participants did not see structural, social, or cross-cultural challenges as separate issues, as shown in Figure 17. Instead, they recognised that one challenge often triggered or worsened another, resulting in overlapping difficulties. Likewise, the strategies used by migrants followed this pattern. No single approach was enough on its own, and multiple strategies needed to be combined to address even a single challenge.

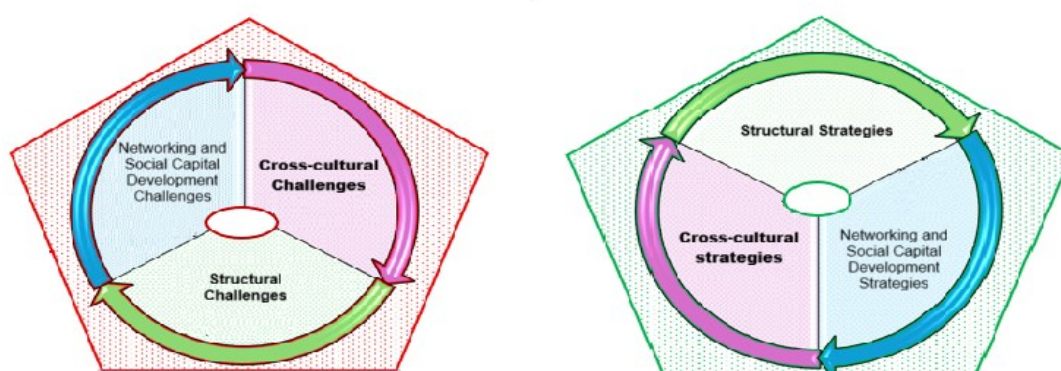


Figure 17. Interconnected Nature of Challenges and Strategies

This visualisation reinforces that integration is a system of mutually influencing processes rather than isolated events. Sometimes, the absence of specific strategies, such as networking or language development, led to additional challenges. Previous studies failed to recognise this complexity because they relied on only a single theoretical perspective (Dustmann & Fabbri 2003, 695; Parutis 2014, 36; Lu & Everson Härkölä 2024, 133; Jousmäki et al. 2024, 78; Kara et al. 2025, 100). The following sections explore these interconnections in more detail.

4.3.1 Interconnected Nature of Challenges

The findings presented in Sections 4.1 and 4.2, together with the additional dialogue below, show that the challenges migrants encounter do not occur in isolation but accumulate and intersect over time. Rather than experiencing structural, social, and cultural barriers as separate domains, participants described them as interconnected processes that shape and reinforce one another. Participant 3 illustrated this interplay by explaining how language, cultural expectations, and employer perceptions combine to create obstacles:

“Although I was qualified for those jobs, the biggest problem was the language barrier. People were normally reluctant to change their management style, and Finnish people at that time were not very open to using English as the common workplace language. This cultural difference sometimes raises questions for recruiters, whether someone coming from a different culture will fully understand how Finnish workplaces operate. Before going for interviews, we must understand how Finnish workplace culture works and show that we are mentally prepared to adapt to it.” (Participant 3)

This example illustrates how a single barrier can often trigger secondary forms of exclusion. It shows how structural, social, and cross-cultural challenges become interconnected during the integration process. Although the participant met the technical requirements for manufacturing roles, the language barrier immediately created a structural obstacle and raised concerns about communication at the workplace. This concern then developed into a social challenge, as teams were hesitant to adapt routines or communicate in another language. Simultaneously, expectations surrounding management styles and workplace behaviour introduced a cross-cultural aspect, influencing perceptions of organisational fit and behavioural understanding.

Together, these overlapping dynamics show how a single issue, such as language, can trigger multiple, mutually reinforcing barriers. While previous studies often emphasise language proficiency primarily as an economic factor, they give less attention to how language difficulties simultaneously affect migrants’ social relationships and cultural adaptation (Dustmann & Fabbri 2003, 695; Jousmäki et al. 2024, 78). Most participants described similarly interconnected challenges. Participant 7 explained how cultural norms and language barriers combined to shape his early experiences:

“Finns are generally quite reserved, and it’s not easy to start conversations or build networks, especially in the beginning. There are personality and cultural differences between South Asians and Finns, which make it difficult to connect. This affects professional networking as well. Outside the Uusimaa region, if you don’t know Finnish, it becomes very difficult to communicate and integrate.” (Participant 7)

This example further demonstrates how different types of challenges interact in practice. Cultural and personality differences initially create social distance, making it harder to build networks. Limited Finnish language skills then worsen this challenge by restricting communication and reducing access to informal interactions, especially outside major cities.

Collectively, these findings show that social, cultural, and structural challenges reinforce each other during labour market integration. The next subsection shows that the strategies employed by participants are similarly interconnected, with each form of capital supporting and reinforcing the others.

4.3.2 Interconnected Nature of Strategies

Like the challenges of labour market integration, the interview data show that the strategies migrants use are also interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Participants emphasised that meaningful progress rarely results from a single action; instead, it requires combining multiple strategies that support each other over time. Participant 5 illustrated this progression by describing how initial skill development expanded into broader professional integration.

“Education gives you the foundation, the backbone, but having the right skills allows you to communicate effectively and understand your surroundings. When you combine that with cultural awareness, you can interact smoothly with others. With the right knowledge and work experience, you naturally begin to build networks. These networks then open doors to new opportunities and help you move forward in your career.” (Participant 5)

This cyclical process demonstrates how progress in one area, such as skills, networks, or cultural knowledge, drives improvements in others. It shows how integration strategies function as a connected system. Education improves communication and clarifies labour-market expectations. Cultural awareness makes interpersonal interactions smoother. As migrants gain relevant experience, they become better able to build networks that open up new opportunities. In this way, skill development, cultural learning, and social capital growth reinforce each other rather than acting separately. Another participant described a similar pattern, illustrating how investing in one strategy can stimulate progress in several others.

“I invested in automation skills like Python, macros, and templates. I showed colleagues how to replace 50 individual emails with a templated Excel process, and helped others automate repetitive tasks with Python or VBA. Helping them created repeated touchpoints and trust, which led to stronger relationships. Those relationships opened cultural conversations, which then deepened collaboration.” (Participant 1)

This example demonstrates how developing technical skills enabled the participant to support colleagues, thereby enhancing relationships and fostering trust. These trusted relationships then created opportunities for cultural exchange and deeper collaboration. The progression shows how skills, relationships, and cultural understanding function together as a connected process rather than as separate domains.

Overall, the findings show that South Asian professional migrants experience labour-market integration in Finland as a dynamic, interconnected process shaped by structural conditions, social interactions, and cultural expectations. Challenges do not arise in isolation; they intersect and reinforce one another, creating layered barriers that shape participants’ opportunities and workplace experiences. At the same time, the strategies used are also interconnected. Human capital

development, social capital building, and cultural adaptation work together as mutually reinforcing processes that support gradual adjustment over time. Through these combined efforts, participants gradually develop the skills, networks, and cultural knowledge needed to navigate the Finnish labour market.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that integration is an iterative and multidimensional process rather than a linear path. Building on this foundation, Chapter 5 situates the results within a broader academic and practical discussion and offers final reflections and directions for future research.

5 Conclusions

Chapter 5 concludes the study by synthesising the main findings and highlighting their broader importance. It examines how the results contribute to existing theoretical frameworks and details the practical implications for relevant stakeholders. The chapter also recognises the study's limitations and proposes suggestions for future research that could further deepen understanding of professional migrants' labour-market integration. By organising the chapter in this manner, the study evidently connects empirical insights to wider theoretical and practical debates.

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the academic discussion on professional migrants' labour-market integration by presenting a comprehensive, multi-theoretical explanation of the structural, social, and cultural processes of integration. The following five contributions show how this research adds new knowledge to the academic literature, expands theoretical perspectives, and illuminates processes that have been underexplored in studies of migrant integration within coordinated labour markets such as Finland (Sorsa et al. 2024, 561).

First, this study addresses the key research gaps identified in subsection 1.2 and answers the research questions, focusing specifically on South Asian professional migrants in Finland. Much of the global literature on migrant integration focuses on English-speaking liberal market economies, where institutional structures, qualification systems, and mobility norms differ significantly from those in Finland (Chiswick & Miller 2009, 162; Parutis 2014, 36; Mahmud et al. 2014, 339; Nardon et al. 2021, 1994; Pareliussen et al. 2016, 5; Sorsa et al. 2024, 561). Research within Finland has primarily explored language use, belonging, integration services, and the experiences of low-skilled workers or international students, leaving the experiences of professional migrants insufficiently examined (Strømmer 2017, 137; Lu & Everson Härkälä 2024, 133; Lång et al. 2025, 438). No studies have specifically investigated South Asian professionals, despite their increasing presence and Finland's strategic reliance on skilled migration to address demographic and labour shortages (Pareliussen et al. 2016, 5; Böckerman et al. 2017, 9). This study addresses this gap by providing an empirically grounded analysis of how highly skilled South Asian professional migrants navigate credential recognition, Finnish-language expectations, employer preferences, recruitment practices, and informal institutional norms. It uncovers new insights, such as employers' focus on 'cultural fit' and the vital role of trust-based relational norms, which have not been documented in previous Finnish research (Mahmud et al. 2014, 341; Kara et al. 2025, 100). Focusing on this group brings visibility to

a growing yet understudied segment of Finland’s labour market. This contribution is theoretically important because it broadens migrant integration frameworks beyond liberal market economies. This contribution shows that, in coordinated systems like Finland, institutional rigidity, cultural norms, and social interaction patterns together influence labour-market outcomes (Sorsa et al. 2024, 561).

Second, this study contributes a revised conceptual framework that reconceptualises labour-market integration as a dynamic, multi-dimensional, and multi-theoretical process driven by reciprocal interactions across structural, social, and cross-cultural domains, as illustrated in Figure 18.

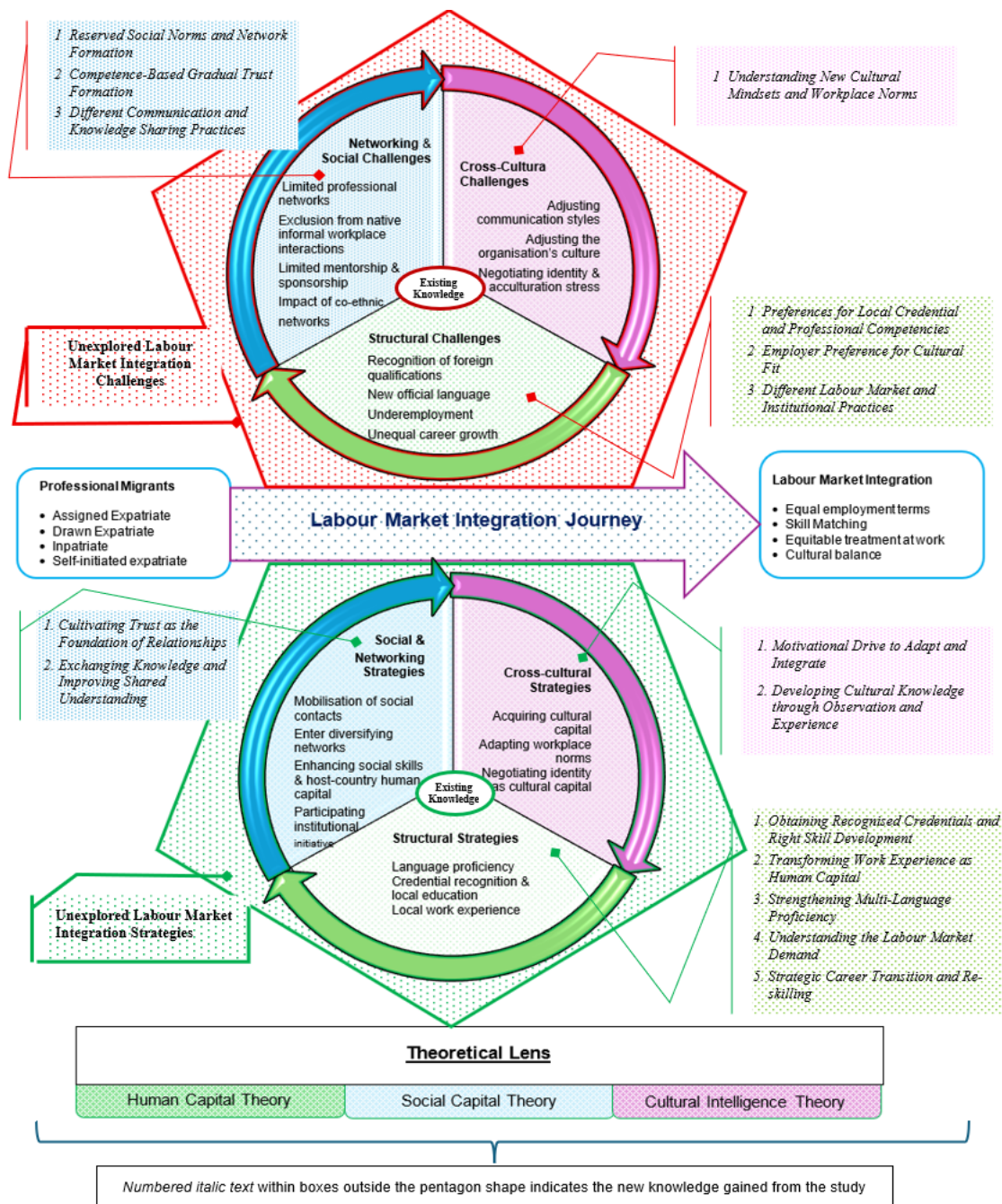


Figure 18. Revised Conceptual Framework

This visual structure communicates not only the complexity of integration but also the iterative way migrants move between challenges and strategies. This revised conceptual framework contributes to academic discussions by generating new insights into labour-market integration and clarifying how professional migrants navigate the Finnish context. While the inner pentagon circles in Figure 18 synthesise challenges and strategies already recognised in existing literature, the numbered, italicised boxes outside the pentagon illustrate the new knowledge that emerged directly from this study. These contributions include previously underexplored challenges such as reserved social norms and gradual, competence-based trust formation, new cultural mindsets and workplace expectations, and employers' preference for local credentials and cultural fit. These insights deepen existing work that has acknowledged but not fully theorised these processes in Finnish workplaces.

Similarly, the framework introduces innovative integration strategies that migrants employ to overcome these specific contextual challenges. These include motivation-driven adaptation, developing cultural knowledge through observation and experience, transforming foreign work experience into locally recognised human capital, strategic career transition and re-skilling, and cultural identity negotiation. These strategies go beyond what previous studies have documented.

Another important contribution of this framework is that it challenges the way existing models typically treat structural, social, and cultural challenges as separate and independent domains, an approach illustrated in Figure 8 in subsection 2.5 (see, for example, Seibert & Kraimer 2001, 222; Ryan 2011, 707; Le et al. 2023, 273–274). In contrast, the revised framework developed after this study (Figure 18) demonstrates that these domains are fundamentally interconnected, evolving through feedback loops where constraints and strategies reinforce each other over time, as discussed in subsections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2. The revised framework suggests that Human capital only becomes valuable when supported by social and cultural capital. Even highly qualified professional migrants find it difficult to access suitable employment without recognised qualifications, local work experience, and culturally aligned communication skills (Dustmann & Fabbri 2003, 695; Mahmud et al. 2014, 346). Trust-based relational ties are vital for allowing migrants to demonstrate competence and gain opportunities to utilise their skills (Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 254–255; Zhao et al. 2025, 9). Cultural intelligence further assists migrants in interpreting norms, adapting behaviour, and presenting themselves credibly (Ang et al. 2007, 337–338; Harzing et al. 2011, 282). Moreover, this framework indicates that social capital develops more effectively when migrants display cultural intelligence. Relational trust in Finland is heavily reliant on consistent behaviour, modesty, calmness, integrity, and clear communication, all of which require behavioural and metacognitive cultural intelligence (Ramsay et al. 2008, 117; Jokisaari et al. 2024, 465). Conversely, cultural intelligence is

enhanced through the development of human and social capital. As migrants obtain recognised credentials, micro-credentials, and local work experience, they gain contextual knowledge that improves cognitive cultural intelligence (Mahmud et al. 2014, 346; Sommer 2021, 28). Engagement in social networks, from university teamwork to volunteering and professional communities, presents opportunities to observe Finnish communication norms and refine behavioural cultural intelligence (Grant 1996, 116; Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 253).

Overall, the second contribution is significant due to its novel insights into the challenges and strategies that affect labour-market integration. It also presents a multi-theoretical model that explains how human capital, social capital, and cultural intelligence work together to influence the labour-market integration of professional migrants.

Third, this study broadens Human Capital Theory by showing that human capital must be localised, legitimised, and continually adapted within Finland's institutional and cultural context. This aligns with emerging research emphasising contextualised human capital rather than universal portability. Traditional Human Capital Theory views education, skills, and experience as portable, universally valuable assets (Becker 1962, 9; Schultz 1961, 1038; Becker 1992, 85). Existing literature recognises the challenges of transferring foreign-acquired human capital into the host country's value due to credential misalignment and institutional barriers (Chiswick & Miller 2009, 162; Bauder 2003, 703; Sirkeci et al. 2018, 908). This study advances the theory by demonstrating that human capital is not only transferred but must also be actively localised. Participants required Finnish-recognised degrees, micro-credentials, and targeted reskilling to align their expertise with the labour market. They engaged in continuous skills updating as labour-market expectations evolved. These findings are illustrated in Figure 18, where new knowledge, such as *strategic career transition and reskilling* and *transforming work experience into human capital*, shows that skill value is shaped by institutional credibility, cultural legitimacy, and social recognition. This contribution moves Human Capital Theory towards a more contextualised model, illustrating that human capital gains value only when embedded within local institutional and cultural norms.

Fourth, this study refines Social Capital Theory by showing how migrants build structural, relational, and cognitive social capital in a culturally specific environment characterised by reserved communication norms and slow trust formation. Migrants developed structural social capital through diverse, reserved networks such as universities, recruitment agencies, digital platforms, and sector events, which offered access to information, referrals, and visibility (Csedő 2008, 807; Zhao et al. 2025, 7). Relational social capital was shaped by modesty, sincerity, and competence-based trust

(Coleman 1988, S95; Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 254; Jokisaari et al. 2024, 465). Trust built up gradually but had a significant impact, enabling access to insider knowledge and sponsorship. Cognitive social capital emerged through shared meaning, aligned language, and collaborative understanding developed in study groups, multicultural teams, volunteering, and sports activities (Grant 1996, 116; Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998, 253–254). This demonstrates that social capital formation among migrants requires deliberate and emotionally demanding interaction, not simply network access. This contribution demonstrates that social capital is actively co-created through emotional and communicative labour. The new knowledge outside the pentagon shapes: *reserved social norms and network formation, competence-based gradual trust formation, cultivating trust as the foundation of relationships and exchanging knowledge and improving shared understanding*, mechanisms not previously detailed in Finnish migration literature.

Fifth, this study advances Cultural Intelligence Theory by illustrating the reflective, selective, and emotionally regulated nature of migrants' cultural adaptation. Participants employed all four dimensions of cultural intelligence: metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioural (Ang et al. 2006, 100; Ang et al. 2007, 338; Stoermer et al. 2021, 434–435). They reflected on assumptions, interpreted workplace cues, adjusted behaviours, and maintained motivation despite setbacks. Importantly, adaptation was selective rather than assimilative. This distinction is important because it challenges traditional assumptions that successful integration requires full assimilation. Migrants retained their cultural identity while adopting Finnish norms when beneficial. Many developed a stable bicultural orientation. New insights into motivational drive, behavioural flexibility, and adaptation further contribute to Cultural Intelligence Theory. This shows that cultural intelligence is not merely an interpersonal skill for assimilation but a mechanism for negotiating legitimacy, belonging, and identity.

Overall, these five contributions advance theoretical understanding of migrant labour-market integration by addressing significant research gaps, introducing a revised multi-dimensional framework, and extending three foundational theories. Building on these theoretical contributions, the following section outlines the practical implications of the study's findings for policymakers, employers, educational institutions, civil society actors, and professional migrants.

5.2 Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide several practical implications for policymakers, employers, educational institutions, and professional migrants. These implications emphasise feasible, coordinated actions that recognise integration as a multi-dimensional process.

First, for policymakers and government integration services, the results indicate that professional migrants depend not only on formal degrees but also on short courses, online certifications, and micro-credentials. Therefore, flexible learning pathways should be supported. Degree programmes should be blended with market-relevant upskilling opportunities. Policies should also encourage fair and inclusive hiring practices. Instead of concentrating solely on local credentials, employers should be urged to adopt competency-based assessments, such as project tasks or trial periods, to evaluate actual skills and potential.

Next, for employers and recruitment agencies, the study suggests that transparent and competency-based hiring is essential. Employers should reduce their reliance on local qualifications and provide opportunities for candidates to demonstrate skills through assignments or probation periods. Workplaces should also support social and professional integration by offering mentoring programmes, diverse-team onboarding, and informal activities that build relationships between Finnish and international employees. Since trust plays a vital role in career success and professional learning, organisations should create predictable, respectful environments that allow migrants to learn and prove their reliability and performance over time.

Then, for universities and education providers, stronger connections between study and employment are necessary. Universities can incorporate real-world projects, case competitions, and partnerships with companies to help students gain visibility among Finnish employers. Creating mixed learning environments where Finnish and international students collaborate can enhance mutual understanding and help build professional networks. Career services should also be adapted to migrant needs by offering guidance on local labour-market expectations. They should support students in presenting their international experience in ways recognised by Finnish employers.

Furthermore, for integration facilitators and civil society organisations, it is essential to establish spaces for cross-cultural networking. Activities based on shared interests such as tech meetups, sports, volunteering, or creative workshops, can encourage interaction between migrants and locals. Informal networks should be recognised as valuable environments for building trust, cultural understanding, and gaining access to hidden job markets.

Finally, for migrant professionals, the study emphasises the importance of a layered approach to skill development. Successful migrants combined formal education with targeted certifications and practical projects to stay aligned with industry demands. They also valued relationship-building equally. They also recognised that networks based on trust and reciprocity generate long-term

opportunities. Cultural intelligence was utilised to navigate professional and social settings with empathy and flexibility. This enabled them to adapt carefully without losing their cultural identity.

Together, these implications emphasise that successful integration is not solely an individual effort. This is a shared responsibility. Successful integration depends on cooperation among institutions, workplaces, and communities, where skill development, social connection, and cultural understanding support one another in building a more inclusive Finnish labour market. Ultimately, integration succeeds when all stakeholders recognise their interdependent roles.

5.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Although this study offers valuable insights, it also has certain limitations that should be acknowledged. Firstly, the data were collected from a relatively small and intentionally selected group of South Asian professional migrants residing in Finland. This limits the transferability of all findings to other migrant groups or national contexts. Acknowledging this helps refine where the findings can and cannot be transferred. While the participants represented various professional fields and different durations of residence in Finland, the study may not fully capture the integration experiences of individuals with diverse backgrounds, such as refugees, low-skilled migrants, or those from regions outside South Asia. Secondly, the timing of data collection may have influenced participants' reflections on their integration journey. For instance, the interviews took place during an economic recession in Finland, characterised by unusually high unemployment. This context could have shaped participants' views on job scarcity and competition, potentially intensifying certain challenges related to structural barriers and employability. This contextualizes the findings as reflective of a specific macroeconomic moment. While these contextual factors offer valuable insights into integration during economic recessions, they might not reflect conditions during periods of economic growth. Thirdly, the study relied on self-reported narratives, which are susceptible to recall bias and personal interpretation. Lastly, this study examined the role of three theoretical perspectives—human capital, social capital, and cultural intelligence. Although this framework permitted a multidimensional analysis, it also limits the scope, possibly overlooking other relevant factors such as institutional discrimination, policy frameworks, and mental health considerations that may influence integration.

This study emphasises several areas for future research. Based on the limitations, several research avenues emerge. First, it would be beneficial to include migrants from diverse regions and professional backgrounds. This would help determine whether similar challenges and strategies are observed across various migrant groups. For example, future research could compare South Asian professionals with migrants from Europe, Africa, or the Middle East. Second, conducting a long-term

longitudinal study would be advantageous. Tracking migrants over several years could provide a clearer understanding of how their careers, networks, and cultural adaptation evolve. This would illustrate how integration changes at different stages of living and working in Finland. Third, future research could incorporate the perspectives of employers, not just migrants. Understanding how Finnish employers evaluate international job applicants, perceive cultural differences, and make hiring decisions would help develop more effective policies and workplace practices. Fourth, researchers could employ different methods, such as surveys or additional interviews, to gather results representing a broader group of migrants. This approach would facilitate the identification of common patterns across the population. Fifth, future studies might also explore different regions within Finland. Integration experiences could vary between large cities like Helsinki and smaller towns or rural areas. Examining this would provide clearer insights into how geography influences access to jobs, networks, and cultural acceptance. Finally, research could investigate the emotional and mental health aspects of integration. Topics such as stress, identity, and well-being were mentioned but not examined in depth in this study. Understanding these aspects would support the development of more comprehensive assistance for skilled migrants.

With the theoretical contributions, practical implications, and limitations now outlined, the final chapter offers a concise summary of the entire study, revisiting the main objectives, methods, findings, and core contributions.

6 Summary

The globalisation of the labour market, migrants' changing views of boundaryless careers, demographic pressures, and increasing international competition for specialised talent have significantly transformed labour mobility in recent decades. This global context frames the relevance of examining Finland's specific labour-market challenges. Advanced economies increasingly depend on highly skilled migrants to sustain innovation, productivity, and long-term economic resilience. Consequently, the movement of professional workers across borders has become more significant than ever. In Finland, there is currently an acute shortage of talent in technology, engineering, and scientific sectors. The country is also experiencing rapid population ageing and declining birth rates. These structural challenges have stimulated the country to seek increased inflows of international professionals. A trend is evidenced by the notable rise in South Asian migration in recent years. Nevertheless, despite government initiatives to attract global talent, Finland continues to encounter persistent difficulties in integrating skilled migrants into its labour market. Many highly educated newcomers are working below their skill level or leaving the country due to unmet expectations and limited opportunities.

Although global talent flows are well studied, significant areas of research remain underexplored or insufficiently addressed. This study aims to fill important gaps in current knowledge. While migrant labour-market integration has been extensively examined in English-speaking contexts, the experiences of skilled migrants in Nordic coordinated market economies are less understood. Research within the Finnish setting has mainly focused on refugees, low-skilled workers, or international students, often relying on a single theoretical approach, primarily Human Capital Theory. As a result, little is known about how highly skilled migrants from culturally isolated regions, such as South Asia, manage to navigate Finland's institutional frameworks, social norms, and workplace expectations. This study directly addresses this gap through a focused empirical examination of South Asian professionals. To explore this neglected area, this study aims to understand how South Asian professional migrants experience and manage their integration into the Finnish labour market. Two research questions guide this study: (1) What types of challenges do South Asian professional migrants face when integrating into the Finnish labour market? and (2) How do they overcome these challenges?

To support the study's aim, Chapter 2 establishes the conceptual and theoretical foundations. It first clarifies the key concepts of labour-market integration and professional migration to create a shared analytical basis. The chapter then synthesises existing research on the structural, relational, and cross-

cultural challenges commonly encountered by migrants, alongside the strategies they use to overcome these barriers. Building on this literature, the three best theoretical lenses were identified: Human Capital Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Cultural Intelligence Theory, with explanations of why they are particularly suited to this study. These theories complement one another by addressing structural, relational, and cultural dimensions. The chapter concludes with a revised conceptual framework that integrates these theories into a multi-dimensional model of labour-market integration. This framework guided both the methodological approach and the interpretation of the empirical findings.

To answer the research questions, the study adopted an exploratory qualitative methodology because this approach closely aligns with the goal of understanding participants' meanings, interpretations, and lived experiences within their social worlds. The study conducted semi-structured interviews with South Asian professionals and analysed the data through thematic analysis. This allowed the researcher direct access to participants' perspectives and the socially constructed meanings relevant to this study.

The findings identify three interconnected categories of challenges: structural, social capital & networking, and adapting to new cultural mindsets. Structural challenges include employers' preference for local credentials, Finnish language requirements, employers' preference for cultural fit, and unfamiliar labour-market and organisational practices. Social capital and networking challenges stem from reserved interaction norms, slow and competence-based trust formation, and differing communication and knowledge-sharing practices that hinder migrants' access to meaningful professional ties. Cross-cultural challenges involve understanding new cultural expectations, adapting to new work and social cultures, and balancing personal identity. Despite these barriers, migrants employ three complementary strategies: strategic adaptation to labour market demand and localisation of their human capital, building and enriching social capital, and cultivating cultural intelligence. They pursue Finnish-recognised education and targeted upskilling, form diverse professional networks, cultivate trust-based relationships, and apply cultural learning and behavioural flexibility to navigate workplace norms.

Taken together, the findings reveal the multi-layered nature of integration. The study makes six key theoretical contributions. First, it fills an important research gap by focusing on South Asian professionals in Finland. Second, it introduces a revised conceptual framework that captures the iterative and interconnected nature of integration. Third, it broadens Human Capital Theory by demonstrating how migrants need to localise and legitimise human capital within the host

environment. Fourth, it enhances Social Capital Theory by showing how social capital is co-created through trust-building and shared understanding. Fifth, it advances Cultural Intelligence Theory by illustrating the reflective and selective process of cultural adaptation. Lastly, it presents a multi-theoretical model showing how the three forms of capital interact to influence integration outcomes. Together, these contributions deepen the academic understanding of skilled migrant integration in coordinated market economies.

The study also offers practical implications for policymakers, employers, educational institutions, civil society actors, and migrants. Policymakers should streamline credential recognition, strengthen industry-specific language training, support flexible learning pathways such as micro-credentials, and expand structured networking programmes. Employers should adopt transparent and inclusive recruitment practices, provide mentoring opportunities, promote intercultural competence within teams, and create predictable, trust-based environments that support long-term professional integration. Universities and civil society organisations also play key roles by facilitating mixed learning environments, project-based collaboration, and informal cross-cultural networking spaces. These institutional interventions complement migrants' own efforts, making integration a shared process. Migrants themselves can benefit from strategically localising their human capital, building diverse networks, and strengthening cultural intelligence to navigate Finnish workplace norms. These actions demonstrate migrants' active agency rather than passive adjustment.

Finally, the study acknowledges several methodological, theoretical, and contextual limitations, including the small qualitative sample, focus on a single migrant group, reliance on English-language interviews, and the influence of labour-market conditions at the time of data collection. It suggests future research avenues such as longitudinal studies, comparative analyses across nationalities and sectors, employer-focused research, mixed-methods approaches, regional comparisons within Finland, and a more in-depth exploration of emotional and mental health aspects of integration.

Overall, this study provides a comprehensive, multidimensional understanding of how South Asian professional migrants navigate the Finnish labour market. By integrating structural, relational, and cultural perspectives, it offers a holistic explanation of migrant integration and provides valuable insights for strengthening Finland's talent-attraction and retention strategies.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Interview Guide

Question Number	Interview Questions	Theme & Theory	Researcher's Notes
1	Could you tell me about your professional background?	Wrap-up questions	Note professional background in short
2	How long have you been working in Finland?		Note the year or duration
3	What was your experience in meeting educational or degree requirements for your career in Finland?	Education (Human Capital)	Note down specific degrees, skills, training, or Finnish education as job requirements.
4	What kind of educational strategies supported your career and enhanced your job prospects?		Notice how specific education enhanced job prospects, and how these supported career
5	How easy or difficult has it been for you to meet experience requirements in Finland?	Experience (Human Capital)	Note specific short-term or long-term, paid or unpaid work mentioned
6	How did you gain relevant experience?		Note how the specific work mentioned helped participant
7	How easy or difficult has it been for you to build professional networking?	Network Ties (Social Capital)	Note what difficulty the participant faced
8	How have you built your network?		Notice what type of network participant was mentioned
9	How was your experience in building trust at work?	Trust (Social Capital)	Notice what difficulties participants mentioned
10	How did you build trust with colleagues or supervisors?		Note what action helped build trust.
11	How was your experience on communication issues at your work?	Shared Language & Understanding (Human and Social Capital)	Notice what kind of difficulties participants mentioned
12	How did you handle it?		Note what actions the participant mentioned
13	How was your experience with cross-cultural issues at work?	Cultural Awareness and Motivation (Cultural Intelligence)	Note what kind of problems participants mentioned
14	How do you prepare before interacting with people from different cultures?		Note what kind of preparation participants described
15	How has working in a multicultural setting affected your behaviour?	Behavioural Adaptation (Cultural Intelligence)	Note what differences the participant mentioned
16	What advice would you give to other South Asian professionals who wish to work here?	Wrap-up questions	Note the strategies participants mentioned
17	Is there anything we haven't covered that you think is important?		Note the new issue participant described

Appendix 2 Consent Form



Consent for participation in scientific research

Research project title: Integration Journey of South Asian Professional Migrants into the Finnish Labour Market

Place of research: Turku, Finland

Person responsible for the research: Md Abu Usuf

I have been invited to participate in the above-mentioned research.

I understand that participating in the research is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the research at any time without giving a reason or cancel my consent without any negative consequences.

I have received sufficient information about the research and how my personal data is processed. I have had the opportunity to ask the researchers questions. By signing below, I give my consent to participate in the research.

I consent that my interview may be audio-recorded for research purposes, and I agree that the transcribed content of the recording may be used in the research results and publications in an anonymised form.

Yes

No

I consent that my interview can be video recorded

Yes

No

I agree that I can be identified as a pseudonym/code chosen by the researcher.

Yes

No

Verification

I have given my consent, and the researcher has documented it in a reliable way.

Name of the interviewee

Date

Signature

Contact information

Md Abu Usuf
Turku School of Economics
University of Turku, Turku, Finland
Phone: +358417216984 email: abu.m.usuf@utu.fi

Appendix 3 Privacy Notice

1. Master's Thesis Title	Integration Journey of South Asian Professional Migrants into the Finnish Labour Market
2. Data controller	Md Abu Usuf, M. Sc. Student, Department of Marketing and International Business, University of Turku, Turku School of Economics, Rehtorinpellonkatu 3, 20500 Turku Email: abu.m.usuf@utu.fi
3. Contact information of the responsible person	Md Abu Usuf Email: abu.m.usuf@utu.fi Mobile No. +358417216984
4. Purpose and legal basis for the processing of personal data	The researcher collects views and experiences of labour market integration of South Asian Professional Migrants in Finland through interviews. The legal basis for processing personal data under Article 6 of the EU GDPR is: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Processing is necessary for scientific research (public interest, Point 1a of Article 6). <input type="checkbox"/> Data subject has given consent (Article 6, Paragraph 1e). <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
5. Processes personal data	The following personal information will be stored in the register: Name, email address, position, company, experiences, and views on the research topic.
6. Recipients and recipient groups of personal data	The data will not be transferred or disclosed to parties outside the researcher or academic supervisors.
7. Information on transferring data to third countries	Personal data will not be disclosed outside the EU or the European Economic Area.
8. Retention period of personal data or criteria for its determination	The recorded interviews will be transcribed into text files and the audio recordings will be destroyed. The research data will be anonymised by removing identifiable personal and company information. Personal data will be stored until December 2025, after which it will be securely destroyed.
9. Rights of the data subject	The data subject has the right to access their personal data, request rectification or erasure of data, and restrict or object to its processing. The right to erasure does not apply to scientific research where deleting data may make the research impossible or seriously impair research objectives. Requests are assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Appendix 4 Data Management Plan



PLAN OVERVIEW: A Data Management Plan developed with DMPTuuli

Title: Integration Journey of South Asian Professional Migrants into the Finnish Labour Market

Creator: Md Abu Usuf

Principal Investigator: Md Abu Usuf

Affiliation: University of Turku

Template: General data management plan - University of Turku

Project abstract:

This study examines the integration journey of South Asian professional migrants in Finland, focusing on the challenges they face and the strategies they employ to overcome them. Using the perspectives of Human Capital Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Cultural Intelligence, the study explores how education, skills, professional networks, and cross-cultural adaptation converge to impact career progression and workplace inclusion. A qualitative, exploratory approach is adopted, involving semi-structured interviews with South Asian professionals from various sectors.

ID: 29072

Start date: 23-09-2025

End date: 01-12-2025

Last modified: 09-11-2025

INTEGRATION JOURNEY OF SOUTH ASIAN PROFESSIONAL MIGRANTS INTO THE FINNISH LABOUR MARKET

1. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE DATA

1.1 What kinds of data is your research based on? What data will be collected, produced or reused? What file formats will the data be in? Additionally, give a rough estimate of the size of the data produced and collected.

The research is based on qualitative interview data collected from South Asian professional migrants working in Finland. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted to explore professional integration challenges and related strategies using Human Capital Theory, Social Capital Theory, and Cultural Intelligence as analytical lenses. The data will consist of video and audio recordings (MP4/MP3) and verbatim interview transcripts (Word .docx and PDF formats). Additionally, research notes and coding files (e.g., NVivo or .xlsx) will be created during transcription and thematic analysis. No external or previously collected datasets will be reused.

The total estimated size of the data is approximately 5 GB, comprising around 10 Zoom video and audio recordings of 20–90 minutes each (about 300–600 MB per interview), plus associated transcripts and analysis files.

1.2 How will the consistency and quality of data be controlled?

Consistency will be ensured through:

Use of a uniform interview guide and structured question format.

Immediate transcription after each interview to maintain data accuracy.

Cross-checking transcriptions with audio recordings for verification.

Use of consistent file naming conventions and version control (e.g., Participant 1).

Periodic backups to prevent loss of data.

2. ETHICAL AND LEGAL COMPLIANCE

2.1 What legal issues are related to your data management? (For example, GDPR and other legislation affecting data processing.)

This research involves personal data and is subject to the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Finnish data protection laws.

2.2 How will you manage the rights of the data you use, produce and share?

All rights to collected data belong to the researcher (Md Abu Usuf) and the University of Turku.

Participants' personal information will be pseudonymized and stored separately from the main dataset.

The consent form specifies that anonymized data may be used for academic research and publications.

Third-party data will not be used.

3. DOCUMENTATION AND METADATA

How will you document your data in order to make it findable, accessible, interoperable and re-usable for you and others? What kind of metadata standards, README files or other documentation will you use to help others to understand and use your data?

Data will be documented with README files describing:

The content and structure of files, Interview codes and themes, Data collection methods, File formats, and Anonymization procedures. Metadata will include information on the date of interview, demographic characteristics (e.g., age range, gender, occupation), and language.

All files will include clear naming, version numbers, and dates. Metadata will follow the University of Turku metadata guidelines and the FAIR principles.

4. STORAGE AND BACKUP DURING THE RESEARCH PROJECT

4.1 Where will your data be stored, and how will the data be backed up?

All data will be stored on the University of Turku's secure OneDrive or other university-approved cloud storage with automatic backup.

4.2 Who will be responsible for controlling access to your data, and how will secured access be controlled?

Access will be restricted to the researcher (Md Abu Usuf) and the academic supervisor(s) only.

5. OPENING, PUBLISHING AND ARCHIVING THE DATA AFTER THE RESEARCH PROJECT

5.1 What part of the data can be made openly available or published? Where and when will the data, or its metadata, be made available?

Only anonymized and aggregated data may be published or shared for academic purposes.

5.2 Where will data with long-term value be preserved, and for how long?

Anonymized research data will be securely stored on the University of Turku data repository until December 2025, after which it will be deleted.

6. DATA MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESOURCES

6.1 Who (for example role, position, and institution) will be responsible for data management?

Responsible person: Md Abu Usuf, researcher

Supervisor: University of Turku, Turku School of Economics

The University's Data Protection Officer provides guidance on GDPR compliance.

6.2 What resources will be required for your data management procedures to ensure that the data can be opened and preserved according to FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Re-usable)?

No external resources are required beyond the existing University of Turku infrastructure.

The university provides secure storage (OneDrive), backup systems, and IT support.

The researcher will ensure sufficient time for anonymization, metadata creation, and documentation according to FAIR principles.

Appendix 5 Screenshots of NVivo (Data Analysis Process)

The screenshot shows the NVivo interface with the 'Transcriptions' table selected. The table lists data for nine participants, including their names, number of codes, references, and modification dates.

Name	Codes	References	Modified on	Modified by	Classification
Participant_1	64	168	21/10/2025 19:01	USUF	
Participant_2	65	159	21/10/2025 20:30	USUF	
Participant_3	96	284	21/10/2025 16:21	USUF	
Participant_4	70	183	21/10/2025 16:21	USUF	
Participant_5	73	196	21/10/2025 16:21	USUF	
Participant_6	45	104	21/10/2025 16:21	USUF	
Participant_7	81	220	21/10/2025 16:21	USUF	
Participant_8	58	156	21/10/2025 16:21	USUF	
Participant_9	52	120	21/10/2025 16:21	USUF	

The screenshot shows the NVivo interface with the 'File Classifications' table selected. The table lists various classification fields for a participant, including their type, creation date, and the user who created or modified them.

Name	Type	Created on	Created by	Modified on	Modified by
Participant_ID		21/10/2025 16:11	USUF	21/10/2025 16:22	USUF
Name	Text	21/10/2025 16:11	USUF	21/10/2025 16:11	USUF
Gender	Text	21/10/2025 16:11	USUF	21/10/2025 16:11	USUF
Nationality	Text	21/10/2025 16:11	USUF	21/10/2025 16:11	USUF
Current_Role	Text	21/10/2025 16:11	USUF	21/10/2025 16:11	USUF
Position_Level	Text	21/10/2025 16:11	USUF	21/10/2025 16:11	USUF
Duration_in_Finland	Text	21/10/2025 16:11	USUF	21/10/2025 16:11	USUF
Fin_Organization_Type	Text	21/10/2025 16:11	USUF	21/10/2025 16:11	USUF
Previous_Role	Text	21/10/2025 16:11	USUF	21/10/2025 16:11	USUF
Home_Organization_Type	Text	21/10/2025 16:11	USUF	21/10/2025 16:11	USUF

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Quick Access

IMPORT

Data

ORGANIZE

Coding

- Codes
- Sentiment
- Relationships
- Relationship Types

Cases

Notes

- Memos
- Framework Matrices
- Annotations
- See-Also Links

Sets

EXPLORE

Queries

- Query Criteria

File Home Import Create Explore Share Modules

Clipboard Item Organize Query Visualize Code Autocode Range Code Uncode Case Classification File Classification Workspace AI Assistant

Codes

Search Project

Name	Files	Referenc	Created	Created	Modifie	Modifie	
RQ1 Labour Market Integration Challenges	9	132	26/10/2	USUF	01/12/2	USUF	●
Theme 1. Structural Challenges	9	62	23/10/2	USUF	28/11/2	USUF	●
Theme 2. Networking and Social Capital Development Challenges	9	44	25/10/2	USUF	28/11/2	USUF	●
Theme 3. Cross-Cultural Challenges	7	26	25/10/2	USUF	28/11/2	USUF	●
RQ2 Labour Market Integration Strategies	9	264	26/10/2	USUF	01/12/2	USUF	●
Theme 1. Strategies for Structural Challenges	9	48	25/10/2	USUF	28/11/2	USUF	●
Theme 2. Social Capital Development and Networking Strategies	9	117	25/10/2	USUF	28/11/2	USUF	●
Theme 3. Cross-Cultural Strategies	9	99	25/10/2	USUF	28/11/2	USUF	●
XY Interconnected Nature of Challenges and Strategies	8	11	27/10/2	USUF	01/12/2	USUF	
Interconnected Nature of Challenges	4	6	28/11/2	USUF	28/11/2	USUF	●
Interconnected Nature of Strategies	5	5	28/11/2	USUF	28/11/2	USUF	●

USUF 434 Items

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Quick Access

IMPORT

Data

ORGANIZE

Coding

- Codes
- Sentiment
- Relationships
- Relationship Types

Cases

Notes

- Memos
- Framework Matrices
- Annotations
- See-Also Links

Sets

EXPLORE

Queries

- Query Criteria

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Codes

Search Project

Name	Files	Referen	Create	Created	Modifi	Modifie	
RQ1 Labour Market Integration Challenges	9	132	26/10/	USUF	01/12/	USUF	●
Theme 1. Structural Challenges	9	62	23/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
Challenge 1. Preferences for Local Credential and Professional Competencies	7	16	26/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
Challenge 2. Finnish Language Requirement	9	18	26/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
Challenge 3. Employer Preference for Cultural Fit	2	4	26/10/	USUF	29/10/	USUF	●
Challenge 4. Different Labour Market and Institutional Practices	6	24	26/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
Theme 2. Networking and Social Capital Development Challenges	9	44	25/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
Challenge 1. Reserved Social Norms and Network Formation	7	21	27/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
Challenge 2. Competence-Based Gradual Trust Formation	5	6	27/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
Challenge 3. Different Communication and Knowledge Sharing Practices	6	17	27/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
Theme 3. Cross-Cultural Challenges	7	26	25/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
Challenge 1. Understanding New Cultural Mindsets and Workplace Norms	4	10	27/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
Challenge 2. Adapting to New Work and Social Culture	6	11	27/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
Challenge 3. Balancing Cultural Identity and Belonging	4	5	27/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
RQ2 Labour Market Integration Strategies	9	264	26/10/	USUF	01/12/	USUF	●
Theme 1. Strategies for Structural Challenges	9	48	25/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
Theme 2. Social Capital Development and Networking Strategies	9	117	25/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
Theme 3. Cross-Cultural Strategies	9	99	25/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
XY Interconnected Nature of Challenges and Strategies	8	11	27/10/	USUF	01/12/	USUF	

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File Home Import Create Explore Share Modules

Clipboard Item Organize Query Visualize Code Autocode Range Uncode Case Classification File Classification Workspace AI Assistant

Codes Search Project

Name	Files	Referen	Create	Created	Modifie	Modifie	
○ RQ2 Labour Market Integration Strategies	9	264	26/10/	USUF	01/12/	USUF	●
○ Theme 1. Strategies for Structural Challenges	9	48	25/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
○ Strategy 1. Obtaining Recognised Credentials and Right Skill Development	6	14	26/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
○ Strategy 2. Transforming Work Experience as Human Capital	8	15	26/10/	USUF	30/10/	USUF	●
○ Strategy 3. Strengthening Multi-Language Proficiency	5	7	26/10/	USUF	30/10/	USUF	●
○ Strategy 4. Understanding the Labour Market Demand	6	10	26/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
○ Strategy 5. Strategic Career Transition and Re-skilling	2	2	26/10/	USUF	30/10/	USUF	●
○ Theme 2. Social Capital Development and Networking Strategies	9	117	25/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
○ Strategy 1. Developing Diverse Collaborative Networks	9	39	27/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
○ Strategy 2. Cultivating Trust as the Foundation of Relationships	9	42	27/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
○ Strategy 3. Exchanging Knowledge and Improving Shared Understanding	9	36	27/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
○ Theme 3. Cross-Cultural Strategies	9	99	25/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
○ Strategy 1. Motivational Drive to Adapt and Integrate	9	21	27/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
○ Strategy 2. Developing Cultural Knowledge through Observation and Experience	9	35	27/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
○ Strategy 3. Cultivating Cultural Intelligence and Behavioural Adaptation	8	32	28/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
○ Strategy 4. Balancing Cultural Identity and Dual Belonging	5	11	28/10/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
○ XY Interconnected Nature of Challenges and Strategies	8	11	27/10/	USUF	01/12/	USUF	
○ Interconnected Nature of Challenges	4	6	28/11/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●
○ Interconnected Nature of Strategies	5	5	28/11/	USUF	28/11/	USUF	●

USUF 434 Items

NVivo Integrati...

File Home Import Create Explore Share Modules

Clipboard Item Organize Query Visualize Code Autocode Range Uncode Case Classification File Classification Workspace AI Assistant

Codes Search Project

Name	Files	Referenc	Created	Created	Modified	Modified	
○ Challenge 1. Reserved Social Norms and Network Formation	7	21	27/10/20	USUF	28/11/20	USUF	●
○ Costly sports like squash or simulation golf help build valuable connectio	1	1	22/10/20	USUF	27/10/20	USUF	
○ Difficulty accessing local professional networks	1	1	23/10/20	USUF	27/10/20	USUF	
○ Difficulty aligning diverse employees in multicultural workplaces	1	1	22/10/20	USUF	26/10/20	USUF	
○ Finnish are not easily open up for strangers	1	1	23/10/20	USUF	25/10/20	USUF	
○ I feel isolated due to remote work	1	1	23/10/20	USUF	27/10/20	USUF	
○ Initial exclusion from professional circles	1	1	23/10/20	USUF	23/10/20	USUF	
○ Isolation due to language	1	1	23/10/20	USUF	23/10/20	USUF	
○ it was difficult to find a local referral; I couldn't secure one	1	1	23/10/20	USUF	27/10/20	USUF	
○ it's hard to start real conversations because many recruiters or managers	1	1	27/10/20	USUF	27/10/20	USUF	
○ Limited access to formal professional networks	1	1	23/10/20	USUF	23/10/20	USUF	
○ Limited Personal Communication in Finnish Workplaces	1	1	23/10/20	USUF	23/10/20	USUF	
○ negative attitude leads to social exclusion and stagnation	1	1	25/10/20	USUF	25/10/20	USUF	
○ Networking is essential in finalnd	1	1	27/10/20	USUF	27/10/20	USUF	
○ networks	1	1	23/10/20	USUF	01/12/20	USUF	
○ nobody willing to give you a referral for your first job unless you have str	1	1	23/10/20	USUF	27/10/20	USUF	
○ People might speak finnish among themselves	1	1	23/10/20	USUF	27/10/20	USUF	
○ Perceives Finnish society as closed	1	1	23/10/20	USUF	25/10/20	USUF	
○ Reserved social culture as barrier to interaction	1	1	23/10/20	USUF	23/10/20	USUF	
○ Selective accessibility of professional networks	1	1	23/10/20	USUF	23/10/20	USUF	
○ Social norms as interaction barrier	1	1	23/10/20	USUF	23/10/20	USUF	

USUF 434 Items

NVivo
Integrati...

Quick Access

IMPORT

- Data

ORGANIZE

- Coding
 - Codes
 - Sentiment
 - Relationships
 - Relationship Types
- Cases
- Notes
 - Memos
 - Framework Matri...
 - Annotations
 - See-Also Links
- Sets

EXPLORE

- Queries
 - Query Criteria

File Home Import Create Explore Share Modules

Clipboard Item Organize Query Visualize Code Autocode Range Code Uncode

Case Classification File Classification Workspace AI Assistant

Codes Search Project

Name	Files	Refere	Create	Create	Modifie	Modifi
○ Strategy 2. Cultivating Trust as the Foundation of Relationships	9	42	27/10/	USUF	28/11/2	USUF
○ Become closure with some colleagues	1	1	23/10/	USUF	26/10/2	USUF
○ Behavioral alignment with Finnish professional norms	1	1	23/10/	USUF	25/10/2	USUF
○ Building social warmth through informal hospitality	1	1	21/10/	USUF	25/10/2	USUF
○ Builds rapport through non-work cultural topics	1	1	21/10/	USUF	22/10/2	USUF
○ Builds trust through reliability and accountability	1	1	21/10/	USUF	22/10/2	USUF
○ Collaborative mindset and mutual respect	1	1	23/10/	USUF	23/10/2	USUF
○ Collaborative problem-solving broadens connections	1	1	21/10/	USUF	22/10/2	USUF
○ Demonstrating reliability and learning attitude to gain trust from supervisors	1	1	23/10/	USUF	26/10/2	USUF
○ Gradual relationship building	1	1	25/10/	USUF	25/10/2	USUF
○ Helping them created repeated touchpoints and trust → stronger relationships	1	1	27/10/	USUF	27/10/2	USUF
○ I show I'm trustworthy by being punctual, flagging issues early, and planning ahead...	1	1	27/10/	USUF	27/10/2	USUF
○ If you have a good attitude and willing to help others they will also help you	1	1	25/10/	USUF	27/10/2	USUF
○ Importance of individual trust and sponsorship	1	1	23/10/	USUF	23/10/2	USUF
○ Interacting made easier inclusion	1	1	23/10/	USUF	23/10/2	USUF
○ Interconnected capitals	1	1	23/10/	USUF	23/10/2	USUF
○ Language learning as a relational bridge	1	1	23/10/	USUF	23/10/2	USUF
○ Mutual respect as a foundation for support and growth	1	1	23/10/	USUF	23/10/2	USUF
○ Personal connections enhance collaboration efficiency	1	1	21/10/	USUF	22/10/2	USUF
○ Recognising the time and quality of network	1	1	22/10/	USUF	22/10/2	USUF
○ Respect for individual freedom and boundaries	1	1	23/10/	USUF	23/10/2	USUF

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Appendix 6 Declaration of the use of AI

The researcher declares that Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools were used ethically and transparently in the preparation of this study. The following tools were utilised in limited and clearly defined ways to support the research work:

AI Tool	Purpose of Use	Extent and Ethical Considerations
Zotero	Used for managing references, organising citations, formatting the bibliography, and highlighting text in different colours to categorise information (e.g., identifying challenges and strategies of migrants, key concepts etc).	Zotero was used strictly as a research support and organisational tool. All highlighted and categorised materials were reviewed and interpreted independently by the researcher to ensure analytical accuracy and academic integrity.
Scispace	Used for summarising and understanding academic literature more efficiently.	The researcher verified all summarised content by consulting original sources to ensure accuracy and academic integrity.
ChatGPT (OpenAI)	Used for improving academic language clarity, grammar correction, and refining sentence structure. Used for idea organisation, checking logical flow, and reviewing consistency between sections.	No original content, arguments, or analyses were generated. The researcher maintained full control over interpretation, findings, and conclusions. The researcher critically evaluated all suggestions, ensuring that the final text reflected independent reasoning and original contribution.
Grammarly	Used for proofreading and correcting grammatical, spelling, and punctuation errors.	Grammarly was employed only for language refinement. But the decision to correct was made entirely by the researcher. All substantive edits, interpretations, and final writing decisions were made independently by the researcher.

Sample queries asked in Scispace:

Generate a summary of this paper; explain the Abstract of this paper in short; and What Methods are used in this paper?

Sample queries asked in ChatGPT:

1. Clarify and make it easy to understand the concept explained in the following text.
2. I want 2 articles from top-scoring AJG publishers that define exploratory qualitative research
3. Please, share a list of Journals in the Academy of Management Review on this topic:...

The use of these AI tools complied with the ethical standards of academic research and the University of Turku's quality assurance guidelines. All intellectual judgments, theoretical applications, and final analyses represent the independent work of the researcher.