Flexible Working as a Strategic HR Mechanism: A Qualitative Study of Wellbeing and Job Satisfaction among First-Generation Bangladeshi Finance Professionals in English SMEs

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Executive Summary

This study explores how flexible working is experienced by first-generation Bangladeshi finance professionals employed in English small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The research critically examines whether flexible working functions as a genuine strategic human resource (HR) mechanism that improves wellbeing and job satisfaction, or whether it becomes a symbolic policy constrained by organisational culture, migration status, and prior professional socialisation.

Using an interpretivist qualitative approach, the study conducted semi-structured interviews with six Bangladeshi finance professionals working in English SMEs. Participants had previous professional experience in Bangladesh and represented a range of organisational contexts, from highly restrictive office-based environments to genuinely trust-based hybrid systems. Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis framework, supported by Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Warr's Vitamin Model, and acculturation theory.

The findings reveal that flexible working is not universally experienced as empowering. Instead, its impact depends heavily on trust, psychological safety, visa security, and organisational culture. Four major themes emerged from the analysis.

The first theme, The Visa as an Invisible Cage, demonstrates how visa dependency creates fear, self-silencing, and reduced bargaining power. Participants on temporary visas often avoided requesting flexible arrangements due to concerns about job loss and immigration consequences.

The second theme, The Performance of Presence, highlights organisational cultures where physical visibility is equated with productivity. In several SMEs, employees felt pressure to remain visibly busy regardless of actual workload, reinforcing presenteeism and reducing the meaningful benefits of flexibility.

The third theme, The Erased Professional, reflects participants' experiences of professional devaluation despite possessing advanced qualifications and prior expertise. Many reported feeling invisible, unrecognised, and excluded from meaningful professional growth opportunities.

The fourth theme, Trust as the Missing Ingredient, emerged as the most significant finding. Where trust-based management existed, flexible working improved autonomy, wellbeing, motivation, and commitment. Conversely, where distrust and surveillance dominated, flexible working policies generated anxiety and resentment rather than empowerment.

An unexpected contribution of the study was the identification of "embodied silence," where participants described physical difficulty in speaking up or requesting support due to deeply internalised cultural conditioning from prior workplace environments in Bangladesh. This extends existing acculturation theory by suggesting that workplace adaptation involves not only cognitive and behavioural adjustment, but also somatic and emotional unlearning.

The study makes several theoretical contributions. It challenges assumptions within strategic HRM literature that flexible working automatically enhances autonomy and wellbeing. It also integrates environmental, psychological, and cultural frameworks into a layered analytical model that explains how flexible working is interpreted through migrant professionals' prior institutional experiences.

Practically, the research demonstrates that formal policies alone are insufficient. SME leaders must actively cultivate trust, recognition, and psychological safety, particularly for visa-dependent migrant employees who may feel unable to request flexibility openly. The findings recommend proactive managerial communication, culturally responsive leadership training, and more inclusive organisational practices.

Although limited by its small qualitative sample and focus on English SMEs, the study provides important insights into the intersection of migration, organisational culture, and flexible working. It concludes that trust-not policy alone-is the true mechanism through which flexible working improves employee wellbeing and organisational effectiveness.

Journal Choice

Journal name and metrics: Human Relations (SAGE Publishing)
· Impact Factor: 5.2 (2023)
· Ranking: 6/83 in Industrial Relations & Labor (SSCI)
· Acceptance rate: Approximately 8-10%
· First decision: 45-60 days
· Frequency: 12 issues per year

Justification of Journal Choice

Human Relations is selected for its strong tradition of critical organisational scholarship and its recent publications on migrant labour, identity, and flexible working (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010; Di Porto et al., 2025). The journal prioritises theoretically integrated qualitative studies, aligning with this research's use of Self-Determination Theory, Warr's Vitamin Model, and acculturation theory. Its interdisciplinary scope-spanning HRM, sociology of work, and migration studies-accommodates the study's conceptual synthesis. The journal's UK base,
SME-relevant readership, and methodological openness to reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) further support its appropriateness. The 8-10% acceptance rate signals rigour appropriate for doctoral publication aspirations.

Abstract

This study examines how first-generation Bangladeshi finance professionals interpret flexible working in English SMEs, and how their prior professional socialisation in Bangladesh shapes those interpretations. Semi-structured interviews with six participants were analysed using Braun & Clarke's (2022) six-phase reflexive thematic analysis. Four themes emerged: The Visa as an Invisible Cage, The Performance of Presence, The Erased Professional, and Trust as the Missing Ingredient. Flexible working is experienced not as a universal good but as a culturally mediated practice. Where trust exists, flexibility enhances wellbeing and commitment; where trust is absent, even formal policies create anxiety and resentment. Visa precarity and prior socialisation (hierarchy, presenteeism, deference) profoundly constrain access to flexibility. SME leaders must move beyond policy checklists; trust, psychological safety, and proactive communication are essential – especially for visa-dependent employees who may not feel able to ask for what they need.

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1.Introduction

Flexible working has become a central feature of human resource management in UK small and medium-sized enterprises.In knowledge-intensive sectors especially, offering employees some control over when and where they work is now seen as a strategic tool for improving wellbeing, work-life balance, and retention (Agnolett, 2024; Angelici & Profeta, 2024; Brulin et al., 2023). The evidence is largely positive: people who can work flexibly often report less stress, better health, and greater job satisfaction.

But there is also a critical counter-argument. Some studies show that flexible working can blur the boundaries between home and work, increase workload, and even create a culture of presenteeism where employees feel they must work longer hours to prove they are not taking advantage (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010; Di Porto et al., 2025). So flexibility is not a simple good or bad – its effects depend on how it is implemented, who is using it, and the organisational culture surrounding it.

What is striking, however, is how little the existing literature considers cultural and migration backgrounds. Most research on flexible working assumes a fairly homogenous workforce – one where employees share broadly similar ideas about autonomy, trust, and time. That assumption becomes very problematic when we look at today's diverse labour market. First-generation migrant professionals come with prior institutional socialisation formed in very different workplace cultures. They may have learned that hierarchy is rigid, that presence equals commitment, and that asking for special arrangements is disrespectful.

This study focuses on a specific group: first-generation Bangladeshi finance professionals working in English SMEs. Many of them have spent several years in finance roles in Bangladesh, where flexible working is almost non-existent and deference to authority is the norm. When they enter UK workplaces that expect self-direction and proactive requests for flexibility, a mismatch can occur. Yet we know very little about how these professionals actually navigate that gap – how they interpret flexibility, whether they feel able to use it, and what that means for their wellbeing and professional identity.

The central problem, therefore, is not whether flexible working works. It is how it is understood and experienced by people whose prior work lives were shaped by very different rules. There is a real gap in understanding the interplay between migrant professional identity, workplace acculturation, and flexible working policies. This pilot study begins to fill that gap by listening closely to six Bangladeshi finance professionals working in SMEs across England – exploring what flexibility means to them, what helps or hinders their access to it, and how their earlier experiences in Bangladesh continue to shape their present.

2. Aim, Research Questions & Research Objective

2.1 Aim

The aim of this study is to critically examine flexible working as a strategic HR mechanism within English SMEs by exploring how first-generation Bangladeshi finance professionals, with prior professional experience in Bangladesh, interpret and experience work-time flexibility in relation to their earlier institutional socialisation.

2.2 Research Questions

1)How do first-generation Bangladeshi finance professionals interpret flexible working arrangements in English SMEs in light of their prior professional socialisation in Bangladesh?

Purpose:
To explore how participants construct meaning around flexible working within English SMEs, and to examine how prior professional socialisation in Bangladesh shapes these interpretations through an identity-based lens.

2)In what ways do flexible working arrangements influence perceived autonomy, competence and relatedness among participants?

Purpose:
To investigate the psychological mechanisms through which flexible working arrangements affect wellbeing, drawing on Self-Determination Theory's core constructs of autonomy, competence and relatedness.

3)How do participants perceive the strategic intent and organisational effectiveness of flexible working policies within their SMEs?

Purpose:
To examine whether flexible working is experienced as a genuine strategic HR mechanism or as a symbolic organisational practice within SME context

2.3 Objectives

The core objectives of this study are threefold. First, to understand how prior professional experience in Bangladesh shapes the way first-generation Bangladeshi finance professionals interpret and make sense of flexible working in English SMEs. Second, to examine how flexible working arrangements influence their sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness – the three psychological needs at the heart of Self-Determination Theory. Third, to explore whether

flexible working is experienced as a genuine strategic HR mechanism or simply as a symbolic policy that looks good on paper but changes little in practice.

· To explore how first-generation Bangladeshi finance professionals interpret flexible working in English SMEs, and how their prior professional socialisation in Bangladesh shapes those interpretations.

· To examine the extent to which flexible working arrangements affect their perceived autonomy, competence, and relatedness, drawing on Self-Determination Theory as the primary psychological framework.

· To analyse whether flexible working is experienced as a genuine strategic HR tool within their organisations, or as a symbolic practice that exists in policy but not in lived reality.

3. Literature Review

This literature review examines three interconnected bodies of scholarship that inform the study's investigation of flexible working among first-generation Bangladeshi finance professionals in English SMEs. The review is organised into three analytical strands. The first strand critically examines flexible working as a strategic HR mechanism, contrasting optimistic accounts of wellbeing enhancement with critical perspectives on work intensification. The second strand explores the psychological mechanisms through which work conditions affect wellbeing, drawing on Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017) and Warr's Vitamin Model (1994). The third strand examines migrant professional identity and workplace acculturation, demonstrating how prior institutional socialisation shapes interpretations of autonomy, hierarchy and time discipline. The review concludes by identifying the conceptual gap: the siloed nature of these literatures and the absence of an integrated framework examining how prior institutional socialisation mediates the interpretation of flexible working and its effects on psychological need satisfaction.

Literature Strand 1: Flexible Working as Strategic HRM – Promises and Critiques

Flexible working encompasses arrangements that deviate from standardised office-based schedules, including remote work, flexible hours, compressed weeks, and part-time arrangements (Agnolett, 2024). Within strategic HRM literature, flexibility is increasingly framed as a mechanism for enhancing employee wellbeing, work-life balance, and retention. Agnolett's (2024) large-scale UK study found positive associations between flexible working availability and self-reported wellbeing, though the author cautioned that outcomes vary by occupational

context and job design. Similarly, Angelici and Profeta (2024) demonstrated that smart working arrangements improved productivity and work-life balance among Italian white-collar workers, with effects particularly pronounced for employees with caregiving responsibilities.

Brulin et al. (2023) examined gendered associations of flexible work arrangements using Swedish longitudinal data, finding that perceived flexibility-rather than formal policy availability-was the stronger predictor of reduced work-life interference. This distinction between structural provision and subjective experience is methodologically important for the present study, which prioritises participants' interpretations of flexibility over organisational policy statements. Wang et al. (2024) contributed US-based evidence linking job flexibility to improved mental health outcomes, though their cross-sectional design precludes causal inference.

However, critical scholarship challenges this optimistic framing. Kelliher and Anderson's (2010) influential qualitative study demonstrated that flexible working can intensify work effort, as employees work longer hours to demonstrate productivity in the absence of direct supervision. Their participants reported working more intensively during flexible hours, blurring boundaries between work and personal time, and experiencing reduced recovery opportunities. Di Porto et al. (2025) identified what they term "perverse effects" of flexible arrangements, including informal extension of working time and increased employer expectations of availability outside contracted hours.

These critiques suggest that flexible working is not inherently beneficial but contingent on implementation quality, organisational culture, and employee bargaining power. Simpson et al.'s (2024) rapid review of interventions to improve home-working wellbeing concluded that organisational support, managerial training, and clear boundary-setting practices are necessary conditions for flexibility to enhance rather than undermine wellbeing. This contingency perspective is central to the present study, which examines how one migrant professional interprets flexibility within an SME characterised by policy absence and presenteeism culture.

Notably, the flexible working literature largely assumes homogeneous workforces and implicitly presumes shared interpretations of autonomy, discretion, and time control. Banerjee et al. (2025) and Arntz et al. (2022) have examined heterogeneity in flexible working preferences across gender and parenthood, demonstrating that preferences vary systematically by demographic characteristics. However, migration status and prior institutional socialisation remain undertheorised in this literature. The present study addresses this gap by examining how a first-generation migrant professional's prior socialisation in Bangladesh-characterised by hierarchy, presenteeism, and deference to authority-shapes his interpretation of UK SME flexibility as unattainable "fantasy."

Literature Strand 2: Psychological Mechanisms of Wellbeing at Work – Self-Determination Theory and Warr's Vitamin Model

Understanding how flexible working affects wellbeing requires attention to the psychological mechanisms through which environmental job conditions are internalised as need-satisfying or need-frustrating. This study integrates two complementary theoretical frameworks: Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Warr's Vitamin Model.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017) posits that wellbeing and intrinsic motivation are shaped by satisfaction of three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to perceived volition and self-direction-the sense that one's actions are self-endorsed rather than coerced. Competence refers to effectiveness and mastery-the feeling of being capable and achieving desired outcomes. Relatedness refers to meaningful social connection-the experience of belonging and caring for others.

Flexible working is frequently framed as enhancing autonomy by granting employees discretion over when, where, and how work is performed. However, SDT emphasises that need satisfaction is contingent on subjective interpretation rather than structural provision alone. An employee may be granted formal flexibility but experience it as surveillance (if performance metrics intensify), isolation (if relatedness erodes), or incompetence (if lacking necessary support or resources). As Lesener et al. (2019) note in their meta-analytic review of job demands-resources models, autonomy buffers stress only when accompanied by adequate resources and when the employee perceives the autonomy as genuine rather than tokenistic.

For migrant professionals, autonomy may be interpreted through culturally embedded frameworks. Holmes and Riddiford (2010) demonstrated that professional identity at work is achieved through intercultural negotiation of authority, time, and task discretion. Employees socialised in hierarchical workplace cultures may experience autonomy not as empowering but as anxiety-provoking or neglectful-as the absence of guidance rather than the presence of choice. The present study applies SDT to examine how participant 1's prior socialisation in Bangladesh shapes his interpretation of flexibility as unattainable "fantasy" rather than attainable autonomy.

Warr's Vitamin Model

Warr's Vitamin Model (1994; cited in Lesener et al., 2019) conceptualises occupational wellbeing as shaped by environmental job features, including opportunity for control, skill use, clarity, externally generated goals, and interpersonal contact. These job characteristics function analogously to vitamins: certain levels promote wellbeing, while deficiency or excess may produce adverse effects. For example, moderate control over work enhances wellbeing, but excessive control (or complete lack of control) may produce negative outcomes.

This model is particularly relevant for examining flexible working in SME contexts. While large organisations may implement comprehensive flexibility policies with supporting infrastructure, SMEs often lack formal HR departments, leaving flexibility as an informal, manager-discretionary practice (Bhoir & Sinha, 2024). For visa-dependent employees, informal flexibility may be psychologically inaccessible due to fear of jeopardising immigration status.

Applying Warr's model to participant 1's transcript reveals profound environmental deficiencies. Control is entirely absent ("I do what I'm told. When I'm told"). Skill use is stagnant ("same tasks for six months"). Clarity about performance expectations is low, as evidenced by the manager's angry response to initiative. Interpersonal contact is minimal beyond task-based exchanges. According to Warr's model, this environmental profile predicts low wellbeing-consistent with participant 1's reported exhaustion, demoralisation, and stagnation.

Analytical Integration

This study integrates Warr's Vitamin Model with Self-Determination Theory through a layered explanatory structure. Warr's model explains exposure to environmental job conditions; SDT explains how these conditions are psychologically internalised as need-satisfying or need-frustrating. Flexible working policies alter environmental job features (control, skill use, contact), which in turn influence satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs. However, interpretation of environmental conditions is socially constructed and culturally mediated. The present study therefore adds a third layer: acculturation theory, which explains how prior institutional socialisation shapes the interpretive lens through which environmental conditions are perceived and responded to.

Literature Strand 3: Migrant Professional Identity and Workplace Acculturation

Skilled migrants frequently reconstruct professional identities while navigating host-country organisational norms (Barua & Maheshwari, 2025). Workplace acculturation research demonstrates that autonomy, hierarchy, and time discipline are culturally embedded constructs rather than universal preferences. Berry's (1997) acculturation framework, originally developed for understanding immigrant adaptation across life domains, has been extended to workplace contexts to examine how migrants negotiate competing norms from country of origin and host country.

Holmes and Riddiford (2010) examined intercultural workplace talk among migrant professionals in New Zealand, finding that professional identity is not simply transferred from country of origin but actively constructed through ongoing interaction with host-country colleagues. Their participants reported navigating tensions between deference to authority (learned in prior professional contexts) and expectation of autonomous contribution (expected in host-country workplaces). These tensions were not merely cognitive but interactional-manifesting in hesitation, self-silencing, and uncertainty about when to speak.

Lang (2021) investigated organisational recruitment practices and the inclusion of individuals of immigrant origin, demonstrating that hiring managers often interpret cultural difference as professional deficit. Candidates whose prior socialisation emphasised hierarchy and deference were perceived as lacking initiative or critical thinking, even when their technical qualifications matched or exceeded host-country candidates. This finding has direct relevance to participant 1's experience: his manager punished initiative rather than rewarding it, reinforcing the message that deference is expected and autonomous action is transgressive.

Bhoir and Sinha's (2024) systematic review of employee wellbeing HR practices noted that South Asian workplace cultures typically emphasise relational hierarchy, visible presence, and deference to seniority as markers of commitment and respect. Employees socialised within such regimes may experience UK SME flexibility norms-which assume autonomous time management and self-directed task prioritisation-not as empowering but as ambiguous, anxiety-provoking, or neglectful. The absence of direct supervision may be interpreted not as trust but as abandonment.

The present study extends this literature by examining the embodied dimension of workplace acculturation. participant 1's description of freezing, being unable to make words come out, and his body not knowing what his mind knows suggests a physiological dimension to cultural conditioning that is absent from existing acculturation scholarship. This finding-if replicated across additional participants-would extend Berry's (1997) framework beyond cognitive and behavioural acculturation to include somatic adaptation.

Conceptual Gap and Study Contribution

The reviewed literature-flexible working HRM, psychological wellbeing (SDT and Warr), and migrant professional identity-remain largely siloed. Strategic HRM scholarship treats flexible working as a structural provision whose effects can be measured across populations. SDT examines psychological need satisfaction as a universal mechanism, though cross-cultural research has demonstrated variability in how needs are prioritised and satisfied (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Migrant identity research explores cultural negotiation but has seldom engaged with HRM literatures on policy design and implementation.

What is missing is an integrated framework examining: (a) how prior institutional socialisation shapes interpretation of flexible working, (b) how that interpretation affects psychological need satisfaction (autonomy, competence, relatedness), and (c) how environmental job features (Warr) interact with cultural interpretive frames to produce wellbeing outcomes. This study addresses this gap by analysing how one first-generation Bangladeshi finance professional's prior socialisation in a hierarchical, presenteeism-oriented workplace culture shapes his interpretation of UK SME flexibility as unattainable "fantasy."

The study contributes to knowledge in three ways. First, it conceptualises flexible working not as a universally autonomy-enhancing practice but as a culturally mediated organisational mechanism within diverse SME workforces. Second, it integrates environmental (Warr) and psychological (SDT) wellbeing models through a structured analytical framework. Third, it extends migrant professional identity scholarship into strategic HRM research, generating practice-relevant insights for SME leaders managing culturally diverse finance professionals.

Summary of Literature Review

This review has demonstrated that flexible working research has largely overlooked migrant professionals' prior institutional socialisation. Self-Determination Theory and Warr's Vitamin Model provide complementary frameworks for understanding how environmental job features affect psychological need satisfaction, but neither adequately theorises the cultural interpretive lens through which environmental conditions are perceived. Migrant professional identity scholarship emphasises cultural negotiation but has not engaged with flexible working as a specific HR practice. The present study addresses this conceptual gap by integrating these three literatures and applying the resulting framework to the experiences of first-generation Bangladeshi finance professionals in English SMEs.

4.Methodology

4.1 Philosophical Position

The study adopts an interpretivist epistemological position, recognising that flexible working is socially constructed and that wellbeing outcomes are mediated through subjective meaning-making processes (Bryman, 2016). There is no objective “flexibility” that affects all employees identically; rather, flexibility is interpreted through prior institutional socialisation, cultural frameworks, visa status, and organisational power relations. This aligns with the study’s use of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), which acknowledges the researcher as actively constructing rather than passively discovering themes.

4.2 Research Design

A qualitative, cross-sectional design was employed, using semi-structured interviews with six first-generation Bangladeshi finance professionals working in English SMEs. This design allows deep exploration of participants’ interpretations, experiences, and wellbeing outcomes related to flexible working, while capturing variation across roles, organisational policies, and lengths of UK residency.

4.3 Sampling Strategy

Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling via Bangladeshi professional networks in the UK. Inclusion criteria were:

· First-generation Bangladeshi migrant
· Minimum two years' professional finance experience in Bangladesh
· Currently employed in an English SME (<250 employees)
· Minimum two years' UK professional experience

The final sample comprised six participants (four male, two female), with roles ranging from pJunior Financial Analyst to Finance Director. Organisational contexts varied: one had no formal flexible working policy, two had restrictive policies with low trust, two had genuine hybrid arrangements, and one (the director) designed policy. This heterogeneity enables analytical comparison.

Pseudonym Role Flexible working context participant 1 (p1) Accounts Assistant No policy; mandatory office 5 days participant 2 (P2) Senior Finance Officer Genuine hybrid (3 office / 2 home) participant 3 (P3) Junior Financial Analyst Policy on paper but not usable participant 4 (P4) Finance Director Designs policy; hybrid with trust participant 5 (P5) Management Accountant Restrictive hybrid (conditions, surveillance) participant 6 (P6) Financial Analyst Genuine hybrid (2 office / 3 home)

4.4 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews (30 minutes) were conducted face-to-face or via video call. The interview schedule probed:

All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and anonymised using pseudonyms. Transcripts were returned to participants for verification of-

Current flexible working arrangements and their perceived authenticity, Comparisons with prior work experience in Bangladesh.Autonomy, competence and relatedness (Self-Determination Theory) ,Environmental job features (Warr's Vitamin Model), Visa status and cultural conditioning influences

4.5 Data Analysis: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Data were analysed following Braun & Clarke's (2006; 2022) six-phase framework. The analysis was both inductive (allowing themes to emerge from data) and deductive (informed by SDT, Warr's model).

Phase 1 – Familiarisation: Each transcript was read four to five times. Reflexive memos recorded initial impressions, tensions, and surprises. Notable early observations included the pervasiveness of visa-related fear, the difference between policy presence and psychological access, and the embodied dimension of silence ("my body doesn't know").

Phase 2 – Generating initial codes: Line-by-line coding produced 60-80 codes per transcript. Codes were collated into a master code list with definitions. Examples include: visa vulnerability, presenteeism ideology, credential devaluation, self-silencing, trust deficit, embodied freeze response, performative work, recognition absence.

Phase 3 – Searching for themes: Codes were grouped into candidate categories (e.g., visa-constituted precarity, constrained agency, identity renegotiation, presenteeism as control, erasure, embodied exhaustion). These categories were then organised into broader candidate themes across all six participants.

Phase 4 – Reviewing themes: Candidate themes were checked against coded extracts and full transcripts. Themes were refined, merged, or split. For example, "Surviving Alone" was merged into "The Erased Professional" because isolation was already captured there. A thematic map was developed.

Phase 5 – Defining and naming themes: Each final theme was given an analytic name and a concise definition, with sub-themes and supporting data extracts.

Phase 6 – Writing up: Findings are presented as an argument, using verbatim quotes to evidence claims, following the formula: CLAIM → EVIDENCE → ANALYSIS.

4.6 Theoretical Framework Integration

The analysis integrates three theoretical frameworks through a layered structure:

1. Warr's Vitamin Model explains environmental job features (control, skill use, interpersonal contact, clarity). Deficiencies or excesses predict wellbeing outcomes.
2. Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017) explains how those environmental conditions are psychologically internalised as satisfaction or frustration of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs.
3. Acculturation theory (Berry, 1997) and migrant professional identity scholarship (Holmes & Riddiford, 2010; Barua & Maheshwari, 2025) explain the interpretive lens through which environmental conditions are perceived – shaped by prior institutional socialisation, cultural conditioning, and visa precarity.

4.7 Reflexivity and Insider Positionality

The researcher's Bangladeshi background facilitated cultural access and interpretive sensitivity but also risked over-identification and assumed shared meanings. To mitigate these risks:

A reflexive journal was maintained throughout data collection and analysis.Analytic memos documented interpretive decisions, distinguishing participant voice from researcher assumption. Peer debriefing was used to challenge emerging interpretations. Assumptions about Bangladeshi work norms (e.g., "never question authority") were explicitly bracketed, and data that challenged those assumptions were highlighted.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board (PG2). All participants gave written informed consent, were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and were informed of their right to withdraw within 30 days. Data were stored securely on password-protected devices. Transcripts were anonymised using pseudonyms; any identifying details (company names, locations) were removed or generalised.

4.9 Pilot Adaptations

The pilot interview (participant 1) revealed the importance of embodied silence – a physical block preventing help-seeking – which was not anticipated in the original interview schedule. Subsequent interviews therefore included specific probes on somatic dimensions of workplace acculturation (e.g., "When you need to ask for something, what happens in your body?"). This adaptation enriched the dataset and is reflected in the findings.

4.10 Quality and Rigour

Following Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness was addressed through:

Credibility: Prolonged engagement with data, member checking of transcripts, and peer debriefing.
Transferability: Thick description of participants' contexts and organisational settings, enabling readers to judge applicability to similar populations.
Dependability: An audit trail documenting all analytical decisions (code merges, theme renames, category development).
Confirmability: Reflexive journaling and use of verbatim data extracts to ground interpretations.

6. Findings

Overview of Thematic Analysis

Across six first-generation Bangladeshi finance professionals, four interconnected themes were constructed. These themes explain how flexible working is interpreted, experienced, and negotiated in relation to prior institutional socialisation, visa status, and organisational culture.

The four themes are:

The Visa as an Invisible Cage – Immigration status creates precarity that fundamentally constrains agency, particularly for junior or visa-dependent employees.
The Performance of Presence – Organisational cultures that equate physical visibility with productivity create theatrical work environments where looking busy substitutes for meaningful output.
The Erased Professional – Professional identity, competence, and growth are systematically denied through lack of recognition, punished initiative, and structural stagnation.
Trust as the Missing Ingredient – Where trust exists, flexibility enhances wellbeing and commitment; where trust is absent, even formal policies become sources of anxiety and resentment.

Below, each theme is presented with supporting data extracts.

Theme 1: The Visa as an Invisible Cage

Definition: Visa status functions not merely as an administrative category but as a psychological and behavioural cage. For those on time-limited visas, the fear of termination (e.g., 60-day window to find a new job) silences requests for flexibility, suppresses negotiation, and forces acceptance of unfavourable conditions.

This theme was most pronounced among junior or visa-dependent participants (participant 1, P3, P5). participant 1 explicitly linked his silence to visa fear:

“I'm on a visa. I can't risk being seen as difficult. They could fire me for any reason, really.” (participant 1)

P3 described how the visa made her accept a role without negotiating any flexibility:

“I was looking for a job for six months after my Master's. My visa was ticking. I was scared. So when I got this offer, I said yes immediately. I didn't negotiate anything.” (P3)

Even participants with greater security recognised this dynamic. P4 , a Finance Director, noted:

“When you hire someone on a visa, they are scared. They will say yes to everything. That doesn't mean they're happy. That doesn't mean they're productive. It just means they're afraid.” (P4)

Sub-themes: visa vulnerability, self-silencing as survival strategy, hypervigilance, 60-day terror, powerlessness.

Theme 2: The Performance of Presence

Definition: Organisational cultures that equate physical presence with productivity create a theatre of busyness where employees must look busy even when work is complete. This theme was strongest in organisations with rigid policies (participant 1, P5) but also appeared as a residual pressure even in hybrid settings.

participant 1’s employer explicitly stated the ideology:

“If I can't see you, you're not working.” (participant 1)

He described the performative consequences:

“If I finish my work early, I have to sit and look busy until 5:30. I can't leave early. I can't start something new without permission. It's like being in school.” (participant 1)

P5 experienced a more subtle form: even when her employer offered a “flexible” policy, the conditions turned presence into a test:

“You have to request it in writing the week before... on that day, you must be online 9 to 5 without interruption. If you miss a call or don't respond within 15 minutes, they might ask you to come in the next day.” (P5)

In contrast, participants in genuinely trusting environments (participant 2, P6, P4) did not experience this pressure. They reported being judged by output, not hours. This contrast highlights that policy alone does not determine presence performance; culture does.

Sub-themes: presenteeism ideology, performative work, infantilisation, equal misery as false fairness, surveillance-lite.

Theme 3: The Erased Professional

Definition: A systematic denial of professional identity, competence, and growth. This theme captures the gap between participants' qualifications (Master's degrees, professional exams) and how they are treated – as untrustworthy, invisible, or childlike.

participant 1's experience was the most stark:

"Like a child. Not like a professional. I have a Master's degree. I passed difficult exams. But here, I'm treated like someone who can't be trusted. It's demoralising." (participant 1)

Recognition was almost entirely absent. After successfully handling a client query alone:

"My manager said, 'Okay.' That was it. No 'good job.' No 'thank you.' Just 'okay.' ... Like nothing I do matters. Like I'm invisible." (participant 1)

P3 described a similar erasure, but from a junior position:

"Mostly data entry... I feel like I'm invisible. Like I'm just a pair of hands doing tasks." (P3)

Even senior participants noted erasure risks. P4, as a manager, observed that remote workers can become invisible:

"There was a time when a major decision was made in the office on a day I was working from home. My opinion wasn't sought. Not intentionally – they just forgot because I wasn't there." (P4)

Sub-themes: identity dissonance, punished initiative, recognition absence, stagnation, expectation-reality gap.

Theme 4: Trust as the Missing Ingredient

Definition: Across all six participants, the presence or absence of trust was the single most powerful predictor of whether flexible working enhanced wellbeing or produced anxiety. Trust enabled autonomy, competence, and relatedness; distrust produced surveillance, self-silencing, and resentment.

participant 2, who worked in a genuinely trusting hybrid environment, described the mechanism:

“Flexible working means trust. My manager trusts me to manage my own time. And because I feel trusted, I work harder. I take more ownership. I don't want to let them down.” (participant 2)

participant 6echoed this:

“In my first week, my manager said, ‘You can work from home on Friday if you want.’ I thought, is this a test? It took me months to believe it was real.” (P6)

In contrast, P5’s employer had a policy but no trust:

“Having to request WFH a week in advance, having to justify it – that's not control. That's surveillance. I actually had more control in my office-only job in Bangladesh because at least there was no pretence.” (P5)

P3’s manager never proactively offered flexibility, leaving her afraid to ask:

“I tried once. I asked to work from home on a Friday. My manager said, ‘We'll see.’ Then she gave me extra work... I ended up coming in anyway.” (P3)

P4, as a director, articulated the managerial implication:

“If you have to check on them constantly, that's not flexibility – that's micromanagement. So for me, flexibility is synonymous with trust.” (P4)

Sub-themes: trust as enabler of autonomy; distrust as surveillance; psychological safety as precondition; manager-level variation.

Unexpected Finding: Embodied Silence

Beyond the four themes, an unexpected finding emerged: the embodied dimension of cultural conditioning. Several participants described not just cognitive hesitation but physical blocks to speaking up.

participant 1’s description was most vivid:

“I freeze. I literally cannot make the words come out. Even though I know it's different here, my body doesn't know. My mouth doesn't know. It's like a physical block.” (participant 1)

P3 described a similar internal experience:

“I was too scared to say what I actually wanted. I just said ‘whatever the team needs.’ Why can't I just speak up? But I can't.” (P3)

This finding extends acculturation theory (Berry, 1997) beyond cognitive and behavioural dimensions to include somatic adaptation. It suggests that prior socialisation is not merely a set of beliefs but is literally embodied, and that workplace acculturation requires not just learning new norms but unlearning physiological responses.

Cross-Case Synthesis

The six participants formed a continuum of flexible working experiences:

Context	Participant(s)	Dominant theme	Wellbeing outcome
No policy, no trust	participant 1	Cage + Presence + Erased	Very low
Policy on paper, no trust	P3, P5	Presence + Distrust	Low
Genuine hybrid, trust present	participant 2, participant 6	Trust as enabler	High
Policy designer, trust present	P4	Trust + managerial awareness	High

The findings demonstrate that trust is the critical mediator. Policy alone is insufficient; culture determines whether flexibility is experienced as empowering or as an additional burden.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Summary of Contributions

This study makes three theoretical and three practical contributions.

Theoretical contributions:

Flexible working is not universally autonomy-enhancing. Prior institutional socialisation (hierarchy, presenteeism, deference) and visa precarity fundamentally shape how flexibility is interpreted. For visa-dependent employees, flexibility may be experienced as unattainable “fantasy” rather than attainable right.

Integration of Warr’s Vitamin Model and Self-Determination Theory provides a layered analytical framework: Warr explains environmental job features (control, skill use, contact); SDT explains psychological internalisation (autonomy, competence, relatedness); acculturation theory explains interpretive mediation. This integration is replicable for future research.

Embodied dimension of workplace acculturation – the freeze response, the physical block to speaking up – extends Berry’s (1997) framework beyond cognitive and behavioural acculturation. Organisational research should attend to somatic adaptation.

Practical contributions:

SME leaders must recognise power asymmetries affecting visa-dependent employees. Policies alone are insufficient; psychological safety must be actively cultivated. P4's proactive communication ("You don't need to ask – just tell me") offers a model.

Formal flexible working policies are necessary but not sufficient. Without a trusting culture, policies become sources of anxiety, surveillance, and resentment (as seen with some participants). Training managers in trust-based leadership is essential.

Employers should proactively offer flexibility rather than waiting for migrant employees to ask. Many participants described cultural conditioning that inhibits help-seeking. A simple statement – "It's okay to work from home. I trust you." – can be transformative.

7.2 Limitations

Sample size (n=6) is small and not statistically generalisable, though appropriate for qualitative thematic analysis. Gender imbalance (four male, two female) limits exploration of gendered experiences of flexibility. Visa status variation was not systematically tracked; different immigration statuses (e.g., Indefinite Leave to Remain vs. skilled worker visa) may produce different patterns. Researcher positionality (Bangladeshi background) risks over-identification, though mitigated by reflexive journaling and peer debriefing.Single country focus (England) means findings may not transfer to other UK nations with different devolved employment policies.

7.3 Recommendations for Full-Scale Study

Recruit a larger sample (n=12-15) with balanced gender and varied visa statuses. Include employers' perspectives: why do some SME owners resist flexible policies?Investigate the somatic dimension further – how is embodied silence unlearned? What interventions help? Conduct longitudinal follow-up to examine how acculturation changes over time.

7.4 Policy and Practice Recommendations

For employers:

Conduct anonymous audits of whether junior and visa-dependent employees genuinely access flexible policies. Train managers in culturally responsive supervision, particularly around

feedback, recognition, and proactive trust-building.Formalise flexibility so it is not dependent on individual managers' moods.

For policymakers:

Extend the 60-day visa termination window to reduce fear-based self-silencing.Include "flexible working access for migrant workers" in future employment rights legislation.

7.5 Concluding Statement

Flexible working, as currently conceptualised in strategic HRM literature, assumes an employee with choice, security, and cultural familiarity with autonomy. For first-generation Bangladeshi finance professionals on visas, working in SMEs without trusting cultures, flexibility is not a choice but a fantasy – and sometimes a source of additional anxiety. This study demonstrates that trust, not policy, is the true mechanism. Without trust, flexibility is merely surveillance by another name. With trust, it becomes a tool for wellbeing, retention, and professional growth. The task for researchers and practitioners is to shift the conversation from "What is your flexible working policy?" to "Do your employees feel safe enough to use it?"

8 Reflections – Personal Learnings and Skill Development

Reflecting on the pilot study process, I have identified several key learnings that will inform my development as a qualitative researcher. These reflections span ethical approval, participant recruitment, interview management, and analytical rigour.

Ethical approval and time management:

Securing PG2 ethics approval took longer than anticipated, which caused considerable stress as I worried about whether I would complete the assignment on time. This experience taught me the importance of building contingency time into research planning. For the full-scale study, I will submit ethics applications at least four weeks before the intended data collection start date. I have also learned that ethical approval is not merely administrative-it is a substantive process that sharpens attention to participant welfare and researcher responsibilities. The delays, while stressful, forced me to clarify my procedures for informed consent, data storage, and anonymity protection.

Participant recruitment challenges:

Recruiting participants proved more difficult than expected. Several potential participants who initially agreed to be interviewed repeatedly changed their availability, rescheduling multiple times. This consumed time and emotional energy, as I found myself constantly adjusting my schedule to accommodate their changes. I learned that formalising interview arrangements with

clear confirmation emails and reminder messages reduces ambiguity. For the main study, I will also develop a larger recruitment pool than the target sample of six, anticipating that some individuals will withdraw or remain unavailable. Building relationships through professional networks before requesting interviews may also increase commitment.

Managing difficult interview dynamics:

One participant appeared visibly irritated throughout the interview. Her expressions-crossed arms, short responses, avoiding eye contact-signalled discomfort or reluctance. I felt powerless to change the dynamic during the conversation. Consequently, I did not receive the depth or quality of responses I had expected. Reflecting on this, I recognise several lessons. First, I should have paused the interview to check the participant's willingness to continue and offered to reschedule. Second, I need to develop strategies for building rapport more effectively before asking substantive questions. Third, I learned that not all data will be usable, and that is acceptable-researchers must document such challenges rather than forcing analysis from inadequate data. For the main study, I will pilot my rapport-building techniques and prepare contingency scripts for when participants appear distressed or reluctant.

The study has revealed both my strengths (persistence, willingness to learn from feedback) and areas for development (time planning, rapport-building, methodological patience). I will carry these learnings into the main study, where I aim to recruit six participants and apply Braun and Clarke's six phases with fidelity.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Raw Interview Transcripts

A1.	Raw transcript –	Participant 1	A- 31
A2.	Raw transcript –	Participant 2	A-36
A3.	Raw transcript –	Participant 3	A-41
A4.	Raw transcript –	Participant 4	A-46
A5.	Raw transcript –	Participant 5	A-51
A6.	Raw transcript –	Participant 6	A-56

Appendix B: Coded Transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2022)

B1.	Coded transcript	Participant 1	B-60
B2.	Coded transcript	Participant 2	B-72
B3.	Coded transcript	Participant 3	B-78
B4.	Coded transcript	Participant 4	B-84
B5.	Coded transcript	Participant 5	B-90
B6.	Coded transcript	Participant 6	B-96

A1:Raw interview transcript – Participant 1

Nusrat: Thank you for agreeing to participate... May I start the recording?
P1: No questions. Yes, you can start.

Nusrat: How are you feeling about today?
P1: A bit tired, but fine. It's been a long week.

Nusrat: To begin, could you briefly tell me about your current role...
P1: I'm an Accounts Assistant. I've been here for about 18 months now. It's a small accounting practice. We do bookkeeping, VAT returns, year-end accounts for small businesses. Mostly local clients - corner shops, cafes, that sort of thing.
Nusrat: What does your day-to-day involve?
P1: A lot of data entry, reconciling accounts, preparing VAT returns, liaising with clients over email and phone. Yeah, I'm the most junior. So I get the tasks no one else wants.

Nusrat: And before this role?
P1: I did my Master's in Accounting and Finance at a university in Manchester. That took one year. Then I looked for a job for about six months. It was very stressful. My visa was running out. My parents in Bangladesh were calling me every day asking if I found something. So when this job came, I took it immediately.

Nusrat: What was your experience in Bangladesh before coming here?
P1: I worked at a small accounting firm in Dhaka for two years after my undergraduate degree. But it was very old-fashioned. Paper ledgers. Typewriters. No computers. I learned some things, but it's not relevant here. Everything is software now. QuickBooks, Xero, Sage. I had to learn all of that from scratch when I started here.

Nusrat: Can you describe your current working hours or flexible working setup in your job?
P1: There is no flexible working. At all. Our office is open 9 to 5:30, Monday to Friday. Everyone must be at their desk. No work from home. No flexible hours. The owner is very old-school. He says, "If I can't see you, you're not working

Nusrat: Have you ever asked for flexibility?
P1: No. I would never dare. People who have been here for ten years don't ask. So how can I, the most junior person, ask? Also, I'm on a visa. I can't risk being seen as difficult. They could fire me for any reason, really.

Nusrat: Do any of your colleagues have flexibility?
P1: No. Everyone is the same. The owner's son works here, and even he sits at his desk 9 to 5:30. So no special treatment for anyone. In a way, it's fair. Everyone suffers equally

Nusrat: What does "flexible working" mean to you in your daily work?
P1: It's a fantasy. Something I read about online. It's not real for me. I think if I had flexibility, I wouldn't be so tired all the time. My commute is 45 minutes each way. That's 1.5 hours a day. 7.5 hours a week. Almost a full work day just travelling.
Nusrat: What would you do with that time?

Nusrat :What would you do with that time?
P1: Sleep more. Study for my ACA exams. Cook proper food instead of eating instant noodles. Maybe exercise. I've gained weight since I started this job. I just sit all day and commute, then go home and collapse.

Nusrat: How is your current way of working different from how you used to work in Bangladesh?
P1: It's actually very similar. In Bangladesh, I also had to be at my desk 9 to 5. No flexibility. The difference is the technology. In Bangladesh, we used paper. Here, we use computers. But the culture around time is the same. Presence equals work.

Nusrat: What surprised you most when you started working here?
P1: I thought the UK would be more modern. More progressive. But this company feels like I never left Dhaka. Same rigid hours. Same hierarchy. Same fear of asking for anything. I was disappointed, honestly

Nusrat: Do you think your prior experience in Bangladesh shapes how you see flexibility?
P1: Yes. Because I never expected flexibility in Bangladesh. So I didn't miss it. But here, I know other companies have it. Friends of mine work from home. They have flexible hours. So knowing that others have it makes it harder. It's not that I didn't know flexibility existed. It's that I can't have it.

Nusrat: Reflecting on your experience here, what aspects of flexible working would you bring to Bangladesh if you returned?
P1: The idea that work can be done anywhere. That you don't need to be physically present to be productive. In Bangladesh, that concept doesn't exist. I would love to bring it. But I think it would take a generation to change

Nusrat: Would you want to go back to work in Bangladesh?
P1: Not now. Maybe in ten years, after I qualify as an accountant and have more experience. But right now, I need to stay here. Get my ACA. Get my permanent residency. Then maybe. But I don't know. The thought of going back to that rigid culture... it's not appealing.

Nusrat: Do you feel you have control over your work?
P1: No. None. I do what I'm told. When I'm told. How I'm told. There's no space for my own judgment. If I finish my work early, I have to sit and look busy until 5:30. I can't leave early. I can't start something new without permission. It's like being in school.

Nusrat: How does that make you feel?
P1: Like a child. Not like a professional. I have a Master's degree. I passed difficult exams. But here, I'm treated like someone who can't be trusted. It's demoralising

Nusrat: Have you ever tried to take more initiative?
P1: Once. I saw a mistake in a client's VAT return. I corrected it before asking. My manager got angry. She said, "You should have shown me first." So I learned. Don't do anything without permission. Just do what you're told

Nusrat: How does your current work setup affect your sense of doing your job well or developing your skills?
P1: I don't feel competent at all. I feel like I'm just going through the motions. I come in, do my tasks, go home. I'm not learning much because senior people are too busy to teach me. And I'm too tired after work to study for my exams.

Nusrat: Do you think flexibility would help you learn?
P1: Absolutely. If I could work from home one day a week, I would use that day to study. No commute. No interruptions. I could actually focus. But I can't. So my exams keep getting postponed. And the longer I wait, the harder they become.
Nusrat: Do you feel you're progressing in your career?
P1: No. I feel stuck. I'm doing the same tasks I was doing six months ago. No promotion. No pay rise. No new responsibilities. I'm just existing. Not growing.
Nusrat: How is your connection with your colleagues?
P1: We're friendly, but not friends. We sit near each other every day. We talk about work. Sometimes we complain together. But we don't see each other outside of work. I don't know their families. They don't know mine.

Nusrat: Do you feel isolated?
P1: Not isolated, but empty. There's no community. Everyone is just surviving. No one talks about their struggles. We all pretend we're fine. But I know we're not.

Nusrat: Have you tried to build deeper connections?
P1: I've tried. I invited colleagues for coffee after work once. No one came. Everyone said they were busy. So I stopped trying.

Nusrat: How does that affect you?
P1: It makes me feel like I don't belong. Like I'm just here to work, not to be part of anything. That's hard. Especially being far from my family.

Nusrat: Has there ever been a moment when you felt more trusted or less visible?
P1: Less visible, every day. I sit in a corner desk. No one notices me unless they need something. I could be on fire and no one would look up from their screen.

Nusrat: Any moment of trust?
P1: Not really. One time, my manager was on holiday, and I had to handle a client query alone. I did it well. Client was happy. When my manager came back, I told her. She said, "Okay." That was it. No "good job." No "thank you." Just "okay."

Nusrat: How did that feel?
P1: Like nothing I do matters. Like I'm invisible.

Nusrat: Why do you think your company does not offer flexible working?
P1: Because the owner doesn't believe in it. He's in his 60s. He's been running this business for 30 years. He thinks the old way is the best way. He doesn't trust employees. He thinks if he can't see you, you're stealing his time .

Nusrat: Do you think that will ever change?
P1: Not while he's in charge. Maybe when he retires. But that could be ten more years. I can't wait that long.

Nusrat: Do you think the current rigid setup works well?
P1: For the owner, yes. He knows exactly where everyone is. He feels in control. For employees, no. We're exhausted. We're unmotivated. We're looking for other jobs. The turnover here is very high. People come, stay a year or two, then leave. No one stays long-term. That tells you something.

Nusrat: How would you improve it?
P1: Start small. One work-from-home day a week. Just to test. See if productivity goes down. I guarantee it won't. People would work harder because they'd feel trusted. But the owner won't try. He's too scared .

Nusrat: Who benefits from the current setup?
P1: ‘
Nusrat: Who loses the most?
P1: Juniors like me. We have no power. We can't negotiate. We just have to accept whatever we're given. Seniors could leave and find other jobs. We can't. We don't have enough experience yet. So we're trapped
Nusrat: Does your company have a formal flexible working policy?
P1: No. Nothing. There's no policy. There's no discussion. It's just not on the agenda. The employee handbook doesn't even mention it .
Nusrat: How does this affect your sense of security?
P1: I don't feel secure at all. I feel like I could be let go any day. My visa is tied to this job. If I lose it, I have 60 days to find something else. That's terrifying. So I just keep my head down and hope .
Nusrat: Are you committed to this company?
P1: No. I'm committed to my visa. To surviving. To getting my ACA. As soon as I qualify, I'm

gone. I already have a list of companies I want to apply to. Ones with flexibility. Ones that trust their employees.
Nusrat: Is there anything else important for me to understand?
P1: I think people assume that because we're young and educated, we have choices. We don't. When you're on a visa, you take whatever job you can get. You don't negotiate. You don't complain. You just survive. And that's exhausting
ther visa-dependent professionals?

Nusrat:What advice do have for other?
P1: Keep applying. Even when you have a job, keep looking. Don't settle. I made that mistake. I stopped applying because I was tired. Now I'm stuck. Don't be like me. Always keep your options open.
Nusrat: Any message for employers?
P1: Understand the power imbalance. When you hire someone on a visa, they are scared. They will say yes to everything. That doesn't mean they're happy. That doesn't mean they're productive. It just means they're afraid. If you actually care about employee wellbeing, you need to create safety. You need to ask. You need to listen. And you need to act .
Nusrat: How does your Bangladeshi background affect your experience?
P1: In Bangladesh, we never question authority. Ever. So when I'm in a situation where I need to ask for something – like flexibility – I freeze. I literally cannot make the words come out. Even though I know it's different here, my body doesn't know. My mouth doesn't know. It's like a physical block
Nusrat: Do you think that will change over time?
P1: I hope so. But it will take time. And help. Someone needs to teach me that it's okay to ask. That I won't be punished for speaking up. Until then, I'll just keep quiet .

Nusrat: Thank you, P1. This was really honest.
P1: Thank you for listening. No one usually does .

Nusrat: Thank you again. You'll receive a transcript to review. You have 30 days to withdraw your data if you change your mind. Do you have any questions?
P1: No questions. Take care.

Nusrat: You too. And please try to eat something better than junk foods.
P1: I'll try.

A2:Raw interview transcript – Participant 2

Researcher: Thank you for agreeing to participate. Just to remind you—your participation is voluntary, you can skip any question or stop at any time. Everything will be kept confidential and anonymised. This interview will be audio recorded. Do you have any questions? May I start the recording?
P2: No questions. Please go ahead.
Researcher: How are you today?
P2i: I'm good, thank you. A bit busy with month-end closing, but good.

Researcher: To begin, could you briefly tell me about your current role and how long you've been working in this organisation?
P2: I'm a Senior Finance Officer. I've been with this company for four years now. I joined as a Finance Officer, and about 18 months ago, I was promoted to Senior. I manage a small team of two junior finance assistants.
Researcher: What does your day-to-day involve?
P2: I oversee the monthly management accounts, cash flow forecasting, budgeting, and liaising with our external accountants for year-end. I also review my team's work and help them develop. It's a mix of technical work and people management.
Researcher: Can you tell me about your career journey from Bangladesh to here?

P2: I worked in Dhaka for five years at a multinational company—a British American tobacco company, actually. I was a financial analyst there. Then I came to the UK for my Master's in Finance. After finishing, I looked for a job for about four months. This role came up, and I've been here ever since.

Researcher: What was your role like in Bangladesh?
P2: It was very structured. Very hierarchical. But also very professional. I learned a lot. The systems were good because it was a multinational. But flexibility? Zero. You had to be at your desk 9 to 6. No exceptions.

Researcher: Can you describe your current working hours or flexible working setup in your job?
P2: We have a genuine hybrid policy. Three days in the office, two days at home. But the key is that it's flexible. I don't have to ask permission every week. I just put my schedule on the team calendar. If I need to change a day, I just let my manager know. No questions asked.
Researcher: Do you have core hours?
P2: We have core hours between 10am and 3pm. That's when most meetings happen. Outside that, I can start early or late. Sometimes I start at 7:30am and finish at 4pm. Other days I start at 9:30am and finish at 6pm. It depends on my day and what I need to do.
Researcher: Do you actually use the flexibility?
P2: Yes, fully. I work from home on Mondays and Fridays usually. Those are my deep work days—no commute, fewer interruptions. I get my most important work done then. On office days, I focus on meetings, collaboration, and supporting my team.

Researcher: What does "flexible working" mean to you in your daily work?
P2: To me, flexible working means trust. My manager trusts me to manage my own time. And because I feel trusted, I work harder. I take more ownership. I don't want to let them down.

Researcher: Has that always been your view?
P2: No. When I first started working in the UK, I was very nervous about flexibility. I thought it was a test. I thought if I worked from home, they would think I was lazy. So for the first six months, I came into the office every day. Then my manager said to me, "P2, you know you can work from home, right? We trust you." That changed everything. Someone had to give me permission to trust the flexibility.

Researcher: How is your current way of working different from how you used to work in Bangladesh?
P2: Completely different. In Bangladesh, everything was fixed. Fixed hours, fixed desk, fixed lunch time. If you finished your work early, you still had to stay until 6pm. Here, I'm judged by output, not by hours. That's liberating.

Researcher: What surprised you most when you started working here?
P2: The informality. In Bangladesh, there was a clear hierarchy. You addressed people by their titles. Here, I call my manager by her first name. That was strange at first. But now I love it. It makes communication easier. And I think it builds trust.

Researcher: Do you think your prior experience in Bangladesh shapes how you see flexibility now?
P2: Definitely. Because I know what it's like to have no flexibility, I appreciate it more. I don't take it for granted. Every time I work from home, I think, "This would never happen in Dhaka." And that makes me grateful. It also makes me more committed to this company.

Researcher: Reflecting on your experience here, what aspects of flexible working would you bring to Bangladesh if you returned?
P2: The trust-based culture. In Bangladesh, the assumption is that employees will take advantage if given flexibility. That needs to change. I would want to bring evidence that flexibility increases productivity, not decreases it. But it would be hard. Managers there are used to control.

Researcher: Would you ever return to work in Bangladesh?

P2: Maybe one day. But only in a senior role where I could influence policy. I wouldn't go back as a junior employee. I've tasted flexibility now. I can't go back to zero.

Researcher: Do you feel you have more control over your work because of flexible working?

Can you give me an example?
P2: Yes, absolutely. Last month, my daughter had a school event in the middle of the day. In my old job in Bangladesh, I would have had to take a full day off. Here, I just adjusted my schedule. I started work at 7am, went to the event at 11am, came back at 1pm, and finished my day at 5pm. I didn't lose any holiday time. I didn't feel guilty. I just... managed my life.
Researcher: How did that make you feel?
P2: Grateful. And respected. I felt like my employer saw me as a whole person, not just a worker. That feeling is hard to describe. It makes you loyal.

Researcher: How does flexible working affect your sense of doing your job well or developing your professional skills?
P2: It's made me more productive. When I work from home, I have fewer distractions. I can focus on complex tasks—budgeting, forecasting, analysis. I produce higher quality work. At the same time, I've had to become more organised. You can't be chaotic and work from home. So I've developed better time management skills.
Researcher: Do you feel you're learning and growing?
P2: Yes. Because I have more energy. I'm not exhausted from commuting every day. So I have mental space to learn. I've started studying for my CIMA exams. I couldn't have done that if I was in the office 9 to 6 every day.
Researcher: Any downsides to competence?
P2: Sometimes I miss the informal learning. In the office, you overhear conversations. You learn things without trying. At home, you have to be intentional. But overall, the benefits outweigh the downsides.

Researcher: How has flexible working affected your connection with your colleagues or team?
P2: This is the hardest part. I feel less connected to my colleagues than I would like. We have team meetings on Teams, but it's not the same as chatting over coffee. I've had to make an effort. I schedule one-on-one catch-ups. I make sure to be in the office on days when important discussions happen.
Researcher: Do you feel isolated?
P2: Sometimes. On days when I work from home two days in a row, I start to feel a bit disconnected. So I've learned to balance it. I go into the office on days when I know my team will be there. And I make sure to talk to people, not just sit at my desk.
Researcher: How do you manage your team's relatedness?
P2: I have a rule: Tuesdays and Wednesdays, everyone in finance is in the office. Those are our connection days. We have team lunch. We do a quick stand-up. We work together. That helps. The other days, people can work from home if they want.

Researcher: Can you tell me about a time when flexible working made you feel either more trusted, or less visible?
P2: I'll give you both.
Researcher: Start with more trusted.
P2: When my manager told me, "I don't care where you work, just get the job done," I felt so

trusted. And because of that trust, I've never missed a deadline. I've never let her down. I want to prove that her trust is well-placed.
Researcher: And less visible?
P2: There was a time when I was in junior post when a project I was interested in was discussed on an office day when Iwas working from home. I wasn't included in the conversation. I found out about it later. I felt invisible. So now, I make sure to be in the office for important discussions. And as a manager, I now explicitly include remote people in decisions. I learned from that experience.

Researcher: Why do you think your company offers flexible working?
P2: For retention. We're a marketing agency. The industry is competitive. If we didn't offer flexibility, people would leave. But also, our CEO genuinely believes in work-life balance. She has young children. She uses flexibility herself. So it's both strategic and authentic.
Researcher: Do you think that authenticity matters?
P2: Absolutely. If the policy existed but managers didn't support it, it would fail. Because our leaders use flexibility themselves, it sends a message: "This is for everyone." That's powerful.

Researcher: Do you think flexible working is working well in your company?
P2: Yes, for the most part. Productivity is up. Retention is good. People seem happier. But there are challenges. Communication requires more effort. Newer employees take longer to integrate. But overall, it's working well.
Researcher: How would you improve it?
P2: More training for managers on how to lead remote teams. Some managers are great at it. Others still manage like it's 2010. They need to learn how to build trust, how to communicate inclusively, how to support remote employees. That's the next step for us.

Researcher: Do you feel flexible working benefits employees, the company, or both?
P2: Both. I have better wellbeing. The company has better retention and productivity. It's win-win. But it requires effort from both sides. Employees have to be responsible. Employers have to be trusting. When both show up, it works beautifully.
Researcher: Who benefits more?
P2: I think employees benefit more in terms of wellbeing. The company benefits more in terms of retention. But it's close. It's not zero-sum. Everyone gains.

Researcher: Does your company treat flexible working as a formal policy, or is it more about informal understanding with your manager?
P2: Both. We have a formal policy written down. But the culture is what matters. My manager is supportive. Her manager is supportive. So the policy is real. But I know that in other departments, it depends on the manager. So there's inconsistency.
Researcher: How does that affect your sense of security?
P2: I feel secure because my manager is good. But I know that if she left, the next manager might be different. That's a risk. So I think companies need to make flexibility institutional, not dependent on individual managers.

Researcher: How does it affect your commitment?
P2: I'm very committed. I want to stay here. I see a future here. Because I feel valued. And flexibility is a big part of that.

Researcher: Is there anything else about flexible working, wellbeing, or your experiences as a Bangladeshi finance professional that you think is important for me to understand?
P2: I think the key is that flexibility is not just about policy. It's about culture. You can have the best policy in the world, but if managers don't trust employees, it won't work. Conversely, you can have no formal policy but a trusting culture, and flexibility will still exist informally. So culture matters more than policy.
Researcher: What advice do you have for other Bangladeshi finance professionals?
P2: Don't be afraid to ask for flexibility. I know it's hard. I know we're taught not to question authority. But here, it's different. If you don't ask, you won't get. And if your employer says no, then you know where you stand. You can decide if you want to stay.
Researcher: Any advice for employers?
P2: Be proactive. Don't wait for your Bangladeshi employees to ask for flexibility. Offer it. Explain it. Normalise it. Many of us come from cultures where asking is seen as disrespectful. So you need to create the safety. You need to say, "It's okay to work from home. I trust you." That sentence changes everything.

Researcher: How has your Bangladeshi background helped you as a manager?
P2: It makes me more empathetic. I know what it's like to be in a rigid culture. So when I see a junior employee hesitating to ask for something, I understand. I ask them. I make it easy for them. That's something I learned from my own struggle.
Researcher: Thank you, Fatema. This was incredibly insightful.
P2: Thank you. I hope it helps.

Researcher:"Thank you again. You'll receive a transcript to review. You have 30 days to withdraw your dataif you change your mind. Do you have any questions?"
P2: No questions. Good luck with your research.
Researcher: Thank you. Have a wonderful day.
P2: You too.

A3:Raw interview transcript – Participant 3

Researcher: Thank you for agreeing to participate. Just to remind you—your participation is voluntary, you can skip any question or stop at any time. Everything will be kept confidential and anonymised. This interview will be audio recorded. Do you have any questions? May I start the recording?
P3: No questions. Yes, you can start. I'm a bit nervous, but okay.
Researcher: Please don't be. This is just a conversation.
P3: Okay. Thank you.

Researcher: To begin, could you briefly tell me about your current role and how long you've been working in this organisation?
P3: I'm a Junior Financial Analyst. I've been here for eight months. Just passed my probation last month, actually. It was very stressful. I wasn't sure if they would keep me.

Researcher: What does your day-to-day involve?
P3: Mostly data entry. And checking numbers. And fixing spreadsheets. Honestly, it's not very exciting. I also help senior analysts with their reports—pulling data, formatting, that sort of thing. I feel like I'm still learning everything.

Researcher: And before this role?
P3: I was looking for a job for six months after my Master's. That was a very difficult time. My visa was ticking. I was scared. So when I got this offer, I said yes immediately. I didn't negotiate anything. I was just relieved.

Researcher: What was your experience in Bangladesh before coming here?
P3: I did a one-year internship at a bank in Dhaka after my undergraduate degree. But it was mostly office work—filing, photocopying, helping with small tasks. I wouldn't call it real professional experience. I was very junior. People didn't take me seriously because I was young and female.

Researcher: Can you describe your current working hours or flexible working setup in your job?
P3: In theory, we have flexible working. The HR policy says we can work from home one day a week. And we can adjust our start time between 8 and 10.
Researcher: Do you use that?
P3:…] No. Not really. I tried once. I asked to work from home on a Friday. My manager said, "We'll see." Then she gave me extra work on Thursday and said it needed to be done by Friday afternoon. I ended up coming in anyway.
Researcher: So the policy exists but you don't feel able to use it?
P3: Exactly. It's there on paper. But if I use it, I feel like I'm being watched. Or I feel guilty. Or I worry they'll think I'm lazy. So I just come in every day. It's easier. Less stress.

Researcher: What does "flexible working" mean to you in your daily work?

P3: To be honest, it means nothing right now. It's something I read in the employee handbook. It's not something I experience. I think real flexibility would mean I can manage my day without fear. But I'm always afraid. Afraid of making mistakes. Afraid of being seen as not committed. Afraid of losing this job.
Researcher: Do you think flexibility would help you?

P3: es. Definitely. My commute is one hour each way. That's two hours a day I could use for something else—studying for my professional exams, resting, cooking proper food. But I don't feel I can ask for it. I'm still new. I'm still proving myself.

Researcher: How is your current way of working different from how you used to work in Bangladesh?
P3: It's similar in some ways. In Bangladesh, I had to be at my desk from 9 to 6. No flexibility. Here, the policy is different but the pressure feels the same. I still have to be seen. I still feel like presence equals commitment.
Researcher: What surprised you most when you started working here?
P3: I was surprised that other people do work from home. My senior colleagues sometimes work from home. I see them on Teams. But they have been here for years. They have proven themselves. I haven't. So I can't do what they do.

Researcher: Do you think your prior experience in Bangladesh shapes how you see flexibility?
P3: Yes. In Bangladesh, you never question your boss. You just do what you're told. And you never ask for special treatment. That mindset stuck with me. Even though I know it's different here, I still can't bring myself to ask. It feels wrong. Like I'm being disrespectful.

Q5 - Future/return perspective:
Researcher: Reflecting on your experience here, what aspects of flexible working would be most valuable if you were to work in Bangladesh?
P3: The idea that you can trust employees. In Bangladesh, the assumption is that if you're not at your desk, you're not working. I would want to bring the opposite assumption—that if work is done, it doesn't matter where you are. But I think that would be very hard to change.
Researcher: Would you want to go back to work in Bangladesh?
P3: Maybe in the future. But not now. Not until I have more experience and more confidence. Right now, I feel like I'm barely keeping my head above water here. I can't imagine starting over there.

Researcher: Do you feel you have more control over your work because of flexible working?
P3: No. I feel like I have less control. Because the policy exists but I can't use it, it makes me feel frustrated. If there was no policy, I would just accept that I have to be in the office. But knowing that others have flexibility and I don't—that hurts.
Researcher: Can you give me an example?
P3: Last month, I had a GP appointment. It was at 10am. If I had flexibility, I could have

started work at 8, gone to the appointment, and finished later. Instead, I had to take half a day of annual leave. That's my holiday time. For a doctor's appointment. It felt unfair.
Researcher: Did you ask if you could adjust your hours?
P3: No. I was too afraid to ask. I didn't want to seem difficult. I just took the leave.

Researcher: How does flexible working affect your sense of doing your job well or developing your professional skills?
P3: I think it holds me back. Because I'm so worried about being seen as not committed, I spend more time on visibility than on learning. I stay late even when my work is done. I come in early. I say yes to everything. I'm exhausted.
Researcher: Do you feel you're learning?
P3: Slowly. But I'm too tired to learn properly. I come home, eat something quick, and fall asleep. I don't have energy to study for my exams. I don't have energy to network. So I'm stuck. I'm doing the work but I'm not growing.
Researcher: Do you think flexibility would help you learn?
P3: Yes. If I could work from home one day a week, I could use that day to focus on learning. No interruptions. No commute. I could actually sit and study. But I can't.

Researcher: How has flexible working affected your connection with your colleagues or team?

P3: Most of us are in the office most days, so we do talk. But the relationships are shallow. We don't really know each other. I think everyone is stressed. No one talks about personal life. We just work.
Researcher: Do you feel isolated?
P3: Not isolated, but lonely. There are other Bangladeshi people in the company, but they're all senior. They don't really talk to me. I feel like I'm invisible. Like I'm just a pair of hands doing tasks.
Researcher: Have you tried to connect more?
P3: I've tried. But everyone seems busy. And I don't want to bother anyone. So I just keep my head down and work.

Researcher: Can you tell me about a time when flexible working made you feel either more trusted, or less visible?
P3: I'll tell you about less visible. One time, my manager asked everyone on the team what their ideal flexible working arrangement would be. Everyone else said something. I said, "Whatever the team needs." I was too scared to say what I actually wanted.
Researcher: What did you actually want?
P3: I wanted to work from home on Wednesdays. That's when I have my online class in the evening. I could have used that day to study. But I didn't say it. I just said "whatever the team needs."
Researcher: How did that make you feel?
P3: Invisible. And angry at myself. Why can't I just speak up? But I can't. I'm too afraid.

Researcher: Have you ever felt more trusted?
P3: One time, my manager gave me a small report to do on my own. No one checking on me. I finished it early. She said, "Good work." That felt nice. But that was one time. Most days, I feel like I'm being watched.

Researcher: Why do you think your company offers flexible working?
P3: Because they have to. To attract people. But I don't think they actually believe in it. The policy was written by HR, but the managers don't implement it. So it's just for show.
Researcher: Do you think senior management believes in it?
P3: No. The finance director is very traditional. He comes in every day at 7am and leaves at 7pm. He expects everyone to do the same. So whatever HR says, the culture is set by him.

Researcher: Do you think flexible working is working well in your company?
P3: For senior people, maybe. For junior people like me, no. It creates a two-tier system. Senior people work from home whenever they want. Junior people feel like we can't. So it's not effective. It's creating resentment.
Researcher: How would you improve it?
P3: Make it equal. If the policy exists, everyone should be able to use it. And managers should encourage juniors to use it. My manager has never once said, "You can work from home if you need to." She just approves it when seniors ask. So I feel like it's not for me.

Researcher: Do you feel flexible working benefits employees, the company, or both?
P3: Right now, it benefits senior employees only. And maybe the company because they retain senior people. Juniors like me get nothing. So it's not fair.
Researcher: Do you think it could benefit everyone?
P3: Yes. If implemented properly. But that would require managers to change. And I don't see that happening soon.

Researcher: Does your company treat flexible working as a formal policy, or is it more about informal understanding with your manager?
P3: It's completely informal. The policy is there, but what matters is your manager. My manager is not supportive. So for me, flexibility doesn't exist. For a colleague in another team with a different manager, it exists.
Researcher: How does this affect your sense of security or commitment?
P3: I don't feel secure at all. I'm always worried that if I do one thing wrong, I'll be fired. And I'm not committed to this company. I'm committed to surviving. As soon as I get more experience and find something better, I will leave.
Researcher: What would make you stay?
P3: Trust. If my manager trusted me, I would stay. If I could work from home occasionally without feeling guilty, I would stay. But right now, I feel like I'm just a number. Easily replaced.

Researcher: Is there anything else about flexible working, wellbeing, or your experiences as a Bangladeshi finance professional that you think is important for me to understand?

P3: I think people don't talk enough about junior employees. Everyone focuses on senior people. But juniors are struggling. We're new to the country. We're new to the profession. We're on visas. We're scared. And flexibility could help us so much, but we can't access it.
Researcher: What advice do you have for other junior migrant professionals?
P3: Don't be like me. Speak up. Ask for what you need. I know it's scary. But if you don't ask, you won't get. And if your manager says no, at least you tried. Then you can decide if you want to stay.
Researcher: Do you think you'll speak up in the future?
P3: … I hope so. I want to. But I need to build more confidence first. Maybe after I pass my exams. Maybe after I've been here longer. Right now, I'm just trying to survive.
Researcher: Any message for employers?

P3: Yes. Talk to your junior employees. Ask them what they need. Don't assume they will ask. Many of us come from cultures where asking is seen as rude. So you need to ask us. And when we tell you, listen. And act.
Researcher: How does your Bangladeshi background affect your experience?
P3: It affects everything. In Bangladesh, juniors don't speak. We do what we're told. That's still in my head. Even though I know it's different here, I can't just turn it off. It takes time. Employers need to understand that. We're not being difficult. We're learning a whole new way of being.
Researcher: Thank you so much, P3. This was really honest and important.
P3: Thank you for listening. No one has asked me about this before.

A4:Raw interview transcript – Participant 4

Researcher: Thank you for agreeing to participate. Just to remind you—your participation is voluntary, you can skip any question or stop at any time. Everything will be kept confidential and anonymised. This interview will be audio recorded. Do you have any questions? May I start the recording?
Mr.Hossain: Go ahead. Happy to help.
Researcher: To begin, could you briefly tell me about your current role and how long you've been in this organisation?
P4: I've been Finance Director here for one years. Before that, I was Financial Controller for three years. So total four years in this company. The company does logistics—warehousing, freight forwarding, that sort of thing. We have about 80 employees, mostly in pinewood, but some remote sales staff across the country.
Researcher: What does your day-to-day involve?
P4: Strategy, budgeting, cash flow management, team leadership. I manage a team of six finance professionals. I also sit on the senior leadership team, so I'm involved in company-wide decisions, including HR policies like flexible working.
Researcher: Can you tell me about your career journey from Bangladesh to here?

P4: I started my career in Dhaka at a Bank. That was 10 years ago.Then I came to the UK for my MBA. After that, I worked as a financial analyst at a mid-sized company in London. Then moved up to controller roles at this company & now promoted to a managerial role . So I've seen both sides—employee and employer. And I've experienced both rigid and flexible cultures.
Researcher: Can you describe your current working hours or flexible working setup in your job?
P4: I personally work hybrid. I'm in the office three days a week, home two days. But as a director, I also decide the policy for my team. Our official policy is that all finance team members can work from home up to two days a week, with manager approval. But honestly, I've told my managers to approve unless there's a specific reason not to.
Researcher: Does that apply to everyone in finance?
P4: Yes, but with caveats. New employees—first three months—are expected to be in the office more. They need to learn the culture, build relationships. After probation, they get full flexibility. That's my compromise between flexibility and integration.

Researcher: What does "flexible working" mean to you in your daily work?
P4: As a manager, flexibility means two things. One, it means I can structure my day around meetings and deep work. Two, it means I can trust my team to manage themselves. If I have to check on them constantly, that's not flexibility—that's micromanagement. So for me, flexibility is synonymous with trust.
Researcher: Has your definition changed over time?
P4: Absolutely. When I first became a manager, I was nervous. I thought if I can't see people, how do I know they're working? But I learned that output matters more than hours. I also

learned that when you trust people, they work harder to earn that trust. So my definition has evolved from "flexibility as a perk" to "flexibility as a strategic tool."

Researcher: How is your current way of working different from how you used to work in Bangladesh?
P4: Night and day. In Bangladesh, everything was fixed. Fixed hours, fixed desk. You had to ask permission to leave early. Here, I decide my own schedule. But honestly, some of that structure in Bangladesh had benefits. People were always available. Decisions happened fast because everyone was together. Now, sometimes I wait hours for an email response because someone is offline.
Researcher: What surprised you most when you started working here?
P4: The informality. In Bangladesh, there was clear hierarchy. Here, a junior person can call me by my first name and challenge my opinion. That was strange at first. But I've come to value it. Good ideas can come from anywhere.
Researcher: How does your Bangladeshi background affect how you manage flexibility now?
P4: It makes me more aware of cultural differences. Some of my Bangladeshi employees—especially newer ones—don't ask for flexibility even when they need it. They're used to hierarchy. They wait to be told what to do. So I explicitly tell them, "You can work from home. You don't need to ask permission. Just tell me." That proactive communication comes from my understanding of that cultural mindset.
Researcher: If you were to return to work in Bangladesh, what aspects of flexible working would you want to bring, and what would be difficult to apply?
P4: I would want to bring the trust-based culture. In Bangladesh, many companies still don't trust employees. That needs to change. But implementing it would be hard because the infrastructure isn't there—reliable internet, electricity—and because the legal framework for remote work is underdeveloped. So it would be a long-term project.
Researcher: Would you ever consider going back?
P4: For the right opportunity, maybe. But I would want to go as someone who can change the culture. Not just do the same thing. I think there's enormous potential in Bangladesh,
but the work culture needs to modernise.
Researcher: Do you feel you have more control over your work because of flexible working?
P4: Yes, absolutely. As a director, I already had autonomy. But flexible working has increased it. I can attend my child's school event in the middle of the day and work later. I can take a break when I'm tired and come back refreshed. That control reduces stress and improves my decision-making.
Researcher: Can you give me a specific example?
P4: Last quarter, we had a major budget review. I was stressed. Working from home that week allowed me to take breaks, go for walks, think clearly. In an office, I would have just sat at my desk feeling stressed and produced worse work. So yes, flexibility improved my output.
Researcher: How does flexible working affect your sense of doing your job well or developing your professional skills?

P4: I think it's improved my competence because I have more time to think strategically. When I'm in the office, I'm constantly interrupted. At home, I can focus. But there's a downside—I miss some informal learning from peers. And as a manager, I worry that my team is missing learning opportunities when they're not together.
Researcher: Do you manage that concern?
P4: We have weekly team meetings in person. And we encourage people to come in for important discussions. But it's a balance. I don't have a perfect solution yet.
Researcher: Do you think your team's competence has changed with flexibility?
P4: Mixed. Some people thrive. They're more productive, more engaged. Others struggle. They need the structure of an office. So as a manager, I've had to adapt. Not everyone works the same way. That's been a learning curve for me too.

Researcher: How has flexible working affected your connection with your colleagues or team?

P4: This is the biggest challenge. Virtual connection is not the same as in-person. I have team members I've never had lunch with. I don't know their families. That's different from when I started my career and we were all in the office together.
Researcher: How do you manage that?
P4: We have mandatory in-office days twice a week. Not for surveillance—for connection. We have team lunches. We do occasional social events. But it's not the same. I think organisations are still figuring this out.
Researcher: Do you feel connected enough?
P4: I feel connected professionally, but not personally. And that matters for trust, for collaboration, for retention. It's an area we need to work on.
Researcher: Can you tell me about a time when flexible working made you feel either more trusted, or less visible?
P4: I'll give you both from a manager's perspective.
Researcher: Start with more trusted.
P4: When I told my team, "You don't need to ask permission to work from home—just tell me," I saw a shift. People relaxed. They started performing better. One team member told me, "No one has ever trusted me like this before." That felt good. It confirmed that trust works.
Researcher: And less visible?
P4: There was a time when a major decision was made in the office on a day someone was working from home. his opinion wasn't sought. Not intentionally—they just forgot because the pesson wasn't there. I realised that out of sight can mean out of mind. So,from than till now I make sure to be in the office for important meetings. Flexible working requires intentionality.

Researcher: Why do you think your company offers flexible working?

P4: For two reasons. One, retention. We lost good people during COVID because other companies offered more flexibility. So we had to adapt. Two, productivity. Data shows our team produces more output when they have flexibility. So it's both defensive and strategic.
Researcher: Do you think the senior leadership genuinely believes in it?

P4: Not all. The CEO is traditional. He believes in office presence. But he's seen the data. He's seen that our team hits targets. So he tolerates it, even if he doesn't fully believe. My job is to convince him that flexibility is not just tolerated—it's advantageous.
Researcher: Do you think flexible working is working well in your company?
P4: For the finance team, yes. For the warehouse staff, no—they have to be on-site. So there's a fairness issue. How do you justify flexibility for office workers but not for operational staff? That's a tension we haven't solved.
Researcher: How do you manage that tension?
P4: We've tried to offer other benefits to operational staff—shift flexibility, extra holiday, better break facilities. But it's not the same. Some resentment exists. We're honest about it. We acknowledge it's not perfectly fair, but we do our best.
Researcher: Do you feel flexible working benefits employees, the company, or both?
P4: It clearly benefits both when done well. Employees get wellbeing. The company gets productivity and retention. But it has to be designed intentionally. You can't just say "work from home" and expect magic. You need systems, trust, communication.
Researcher: Who benefits more?
P4: In our case, I think employees benefit more in terms of wellbeing. The company benefits in terms of retention, but savings on office space are minimal for us. So it's employee-led, but it's win-win.

Researcher: Does your company treat flexible working as a formal policy, or is it more about informal understanding with your manager?
P4: We have a formal policy, but I've told my managers to interpret it generously. So in practice, it's informal. As long as work gets done, I don't care where people are. But not all departments are the same. The sales director is stricter. So it varies.
Researcher: How does that affect your team's sense of security?
P4: They feel secure with me. But they know if I leave, the next director might be different. That's a flaw in our approach. Ideally, flexibility should be institutional, not dependent on individual managers.
Researcher: How does it affect your own commitment to the organisation?
P4: I'm committed because I have influence. I can shape policy. If I were just an employee with no say, I might feel less secure. So I recognise my position of privilege.
Researcher: Is there anything else about flexible working, wellbeing, or your experiences as a Bangladeshi finance professional in the UK that you think is important for me to understand?
P4: Several things.
First, flexibility is not one-size-fits-all. Different people, different roles, different life stages need different arrangements. Good managers adapt.
Second, migrant professionals often don't advocate for themselves. Employers need to be proactive. Don't wait for a Bangladeshi employee to ask for flexibility—offer it. Explain it. Normalise it.
Third, flexibility requires investment. You need good technology, good managers, good communication. It's not free. Companies that treat it as free cost-saving will fail.
Researcher: What advice do you have for other migrant professionals?

P4: Speak up. Your voice matters. In Bangladesh, we're taught not to question authority. Here, that doesn't work. If you need flexibility, ask. If you're not getting it, look elsewhere. There are good employers who value you.

Researcher: What advice for employers managing diverse teams?
P4: Learn about your employees' backgrounds. A Bangladeshi employee might not ask for flexibility because in their culture, asking is seen as disrespectful. That doesn't mean they don't need or want it. So be curious. Ask them. Make it safe to say yes. That's how you build trust.
Researcher: Do you think your Bangladeshi background has helped you as a manager?
P4: Definitely. I understand both cultures. I can bridge the gap. I can explain to my British colleagues why a Bangladeshi employee is quiet in meetings—it's not lack of ideas, it's respect for hierarchy. And I can explain to Bangladeshi employees that here, speaking up is expected. That dual perspective is valuable.
Researcher: Thank you so much, P4. This was incredibly insightful.
P4: You're welcome. Good luck with your research. I hope it helps improve workplace practices.
Researcher:Thank you again. Just to remind you—you'll receive a transcript to review. You have 30 days to
withdraw your data if you change your mind. Do you have any questions?"
P4: No questions. Happy to help.
Researcher: Thank you. Have a wonderful day.
P4: You too.

A5:Raw interview transcript – Participant 5

Researcher: Thank you for agreeing to participate. Before we begin, just a reminder—your participation is completely voluntary. You can skip any question or stop at any time. Everything will be kept confidential and anonymised. This interview will be audio recorded. Do you have any questions? May I start the recording?
P5: No questions. Yes, you can start.
Researcher: To begin, could you briefly tell me about your current role and how long you've been working in this organisation?
P5: I've been with this company for about half years. I'm a Management Accountant. I prepare monthly management accounts, variance analysis, budget forecasting, cash flow reporting. The company is a manufacturing firm—they make industrial packaging materials. It's quite traditional, family-owned. My day involves a lot of Excel, liaising with the production team, and presenting to the finance director every week.
Researcher: And before this role?
P5: Before this, I worked at a retail SME in London for about two years. That was a different experience—more modern, more flexible. But I moved to cardiff for family reasons.
Researcher: What was your role in Bangladesh before moving here?

P5: In Dhaka, I worked for a multinational corporation—a European company with a large office in Bangladesh. I was a junior accountant in the financial reporting team for 2 years. It was very structured, very professional. But also quite hierarchical. I had a lot of responsibility but not much autonomy in terms of when and where I worked.

Researcher: Can you describe your current working hours or flexible working setup in your job?
P5: Honestly, it's quite rigid. The official policy says we can work from home one day a week. But there are conditions. You have to request it in writing the week before. Your manager has to approve it. Then on that day, you must be online 9 to 5 without interruption. If you miss a call or don't respond to an email within 15 minutes, they might ask you to come in the next day.
Researcher: Do you work from home that one day?
P5: Sometimes. But honestly, it's so much hassle to request and get approval that I often don't bother. And even when I do work from home, I feel like I have to work twice as hard to prove I'm actually working. It doesn't feel like flexibility. It feels like a test.
Researcher: What about core hours?
P5: We have strict core hours from 9 to 5. No flexibility. I can't start early and leave early. I can't start late and finish late. It's fixed. The finance director is old school—he believes if you're not at your desk, you're not working.

Researcher: What does "flexible working" mean to you in your daily work?
P5: To be honest, in my current job, flexible working doesn't mean much. It's an empty phrase. They say they offer it, but the conditions make it almost unusable. To me, real

flexible working means trust. It means being judged by outcomes, not by hours or location. Here, I don't feel trusted. So flexibility is just a slogan on the HR website, not a reality.
Researcher: Is there any flexibility at all?

P5: Very little. Sometimes, if I have an appointment, I can take an hour off without using annual leave. But I have to tell my manager in advance and make up the time. That's about it.

Researcher: How is your current way of working different from how you used to work in Bangladesh?
P5: That's interesting because in some ways, it's similar. In Bangladesh, at the multinational, we had very fixed hours too. 9 to 6 with a one-hour lunch break. No work from home. But the difference was the culture. In Bangladesh, even though hours were fixed, there was a sense of community. We worked hard together, ate lunch together. There was camaraderie.
Researcher: What surprised you most when you started working here?
P5: I was surprised that a company in the UK could be so rigid. I thought the UK was much more progressive. My first job in London was flexible. So when I moved to this company in
Birmingham, I was shocked. It felt like a step backward. I had to ask permission to leave early for a dentist appointment. It felt like being in school.
Researcher: Do you think your prior experience in Bangladesh shaped how you see flexibility here?
P5: Definitely. Because in Bangladesh, I didn't expect flexibility. I didn't even think about it. So I was fine. But after experiencing flexibility in my London job, I realised what I was missing. Now, in this rigid environment, I feel frustrated. My expectations have changed because of my UK experience. So in a strange way, my time in Bangladesh made me accepting,
but my time in London made me demanding.

Researcher: Reflecting on your experience here, what aspects of flexible working would be most valuable if you were to work in Bangladesh? What might be harder to transfer?
P5: If I went back to Bangladesh tomorrow, I would want to bring the concept that it's okay to work from home sometimes. In Bangladesh, that's still very rare, even in multinationals. But I think it would be very hard to implement because of infrastructure—internet reliability, power cuts—and also because of cultural mindset. Managers there think if they can't see you, you're not working.

Researcher: Would you want to go back?
P5: For work? Probably not. Not unless the culture changes significantly. I've tasted flexibility here, even in this rigid job it's more than what I had in Bangladesh. I can't go back to zero flexibility.

Researcher: Do you feel you have more control over your work because of flexible working?
P5: No, not at all. In my current job, flexible working has not given me more control. It's given me more anxiety. Having to request WFH a week in advance, having to justify it—that's not control. That's surveillance. I actually had more control in my office-only job in Bangladesh because at least there was no pretence. I knew what to expect.
Researcher: Can you give me an example?
P5: Last month, my child was sick. I had to stay home. I requested to WFH on that day. My manager said okay, but then kept messaging me every hour. "Did you finish that report? Did you check those numbers?" I felt like I had to prove I was working every minute. In the end, I thought, this is not worth it. Next time I'll just take annual leave. That's easier. So the so-called flexibility actually made things harder for me.

Researcher: How does flexible working affect your sense of doing your job well or developing your professional skills?
P5: It hurts my sense of competence, honestly. Because I feel like no matter how hard I work, my manager doesn't trust me. And that makes me doubt myself. Am I not performing well? Is that why they're watching me? I work very hard. My numbers are accurate. But I don't feel valued as a professional.
Researcher: Do you feel you learn differently?
P5: Learning is another issue. Most informal learning happens in the office. People share tips, show you shortcuts. On the rare day I work from home, I miss all of that. So I feel like I'm learning slower than my colleagues who are always in the office. That affects my confidence.

Researcher: How has flexible working affected your connection with your colleagues or team?
P5: This is complicated. Because most of us are in the office most days, we do have connection. We sit near each other. We have lunch. So in that sense, relatedness is okay. But there's a division now. The people who never work from home are seen as more committed. Those of us who occasionally WFH are viewed with suspicion. So I feel judged by my peers too.
Researcher: Do you feel isolated?
P5: Not isolated, but I feel like I'm walking on eggshells. I don't talk about WFH days. I don't mention it. I just do it quietly because I don't want to be seen as lazy or uncommitted. So there's a hidden tension. It's not healthy.

Researcher: Can you tell me about a time when flexible working made you feel either more trusted, or less visible?
P5: I'll give you an example of less trust. One day I asked to work from home because I had a delivery coming—a large piece of furniture that needed to be received. I couldn't reschedule it. My manager approved, but then asked me to send a list of what I would accomplish that day, broken down by hour. Can you imagine? An hourly schedule like I'm a child. I felt humiliated.
Researcher: Have you ever felt more trusted?
P5: Honestly? No. Not in this job. In my previous job in London, yes. My manager there would say, "I don't care where you work, just get the job done." Here, it's the opposite. "I

care where you work more than what you produce." It's exhausting.

Researcher: Why do you think your company offers flexible working?
P5: Only because they have to. I think the HR team knows they need to offer something to compete for talent. But the finance director doesn't believe in it. So the policy exists on paper, but in practice, it's discouraged. It's performative. They want to look modern without actually being modern.

Researcher: Do you think there's any genuine intent?
P5: Maybe at the HR level, but not at the senior management level. The real decision-makers are old-school. They think flexibility means people will take advantage. So they made the policy so restrictive that almost no one uses it. That way, they can say "we offer flexible working" but it doesn't actually cost them anything.
Researcher: Do you think flexible working is working well in your company?
P5: No, not at all. It's a source of tension, not a benefit. People who want flexibility feel frustrated. People who don't care about flexibility think WFH people are lazy. It's dividing the team. And the conditions are so strict that even when someone uses it, they're stressed the whole day. So no, it's not working well.
Researcher: How would you improve it?
P5: Scrap it or embrace it. Don't do this half thing. Either be honest that flexibility is not available—at least then people know what to expect. Or design a genuine policy with trust, no hourly check-ins, no punitive conditions. And train managers to lead with trust, not surveillance. Until that happens, this policy is worse than having no policy at all.
Researcher: Do you feel flexible working benefits employees, the company, or both?
P5: Right now? Neither. It doesn't benefit employees because it's so restrictive it's not useful. And it doesn't benefit the company because it creates resentment and division. If anything, it's harming morale. People are unhappy. They talk about leaving. So it's a lose-lose.
Researcher: Do you think it could benefit both if implemented differently?
P5: Absolutely. I've seen it in my London job. When done right, everyone wins. Employees have better wellbeing. Companies have loyal, productive staff. But it requires trust. And my current company doesn't trust us.

Researcher: Does your company treat flexible working as a formal policy, or is it more about informal understanding with your manager?
P5: It's a formal policy that is implemented informally based on your manager's mood. Written policy says one WFH day per week with manager approval. But some managers approve easily. Mine makes it painful. So the written policy is meaningless. What matters is your individual manager.
Researcher: How does this affect your sense of security or commitment?
P5: It makes me feel very insecure. Because if my manager changes, everything changes. Also, I don't feel committed to this company. I feel committed to my paycheck, but not to the organisation. If a better opportunity with real flexibility comes along, I will leave. And I know several colleagues who feel the same way.

Researcher: Is there anything else about flexible working, wellbeing, or your experiences as a Bangladeshi finance professional that you think is important for me to understand?
P5: I think researchers should understand that flexibility is not just about policy. It's about culture. A policy on paper means nothing if the culture doesn't support it. My company has a flexible working policy, but it has a rigid culture. So the policy is useless.
Researcher: What advice do you have for other migrant professionals?
P5: Know your worth. Don't accept a job that doesn't respect your time just because you're grateful to be here. I did that at first. I was so happy to have a job in the UK that I accepted things I shouldn't have. Now I know better. Flexibility is not a luxury. It's a normal expectation in the modern workplace. Don't settle for less.
Researcher: Any message for employers?
P5: Yes. Trust your employees. If you hired qualified professionals, trust them to do their jobs. Stop checking hours. Stop asking for hourly schedules. Focus on outcomes. And recognise that migrant professionals bring valuable perspectives. Don't treat us with suspicion. Treat us as assets. That's how you get loyalty and good work.
Researcher: Do you think your Bangladeshi background affects your experience with flexibility?

P5: Definitely. Because in Bangladesh, we're not taught to ask for things. We're taught to follow rules, not question them. So when the policy says "request WFH," I hesitate to ask because it feels like I'm asking for a favour, not exercising a right. Employers need to understand that. They need to be proactive, not wait for us to ask.
Researcher: Thank you so much, P5. This was incredibly detailed and helpful.
P5: You're welcome. I hope my experience helps other people.

Researcher :Thank you again. Just to remind you—you'll receive a transcript to review. You have 30 days to withdraw your data if you change your mind. Do you have any questions?"
P5: No questions. Good luck with your research.
Researcher: Thank you. Have a lovely evening.
P5: You too.

A6:Raw interview transcript – Participant 6

Researcher: Thank you for agreeing to participate. Before we begin, I want to remind you that your participation is completely voluntary. You can skip any question or stop at any time. Everything you share will be confidential and anonymised. This interview will be audio recorded. Do you have any questions before we start? May I begin the recording?
P6: No questions. Yes, you can start.
Researcher: To begin, could you briefly tell me about your current role and how long you've been working in this organisation?
P6: I've been working at this company for almost two years now. I'm a Financial Analyst. I basically look at our company's financial data, prepare reports, help with budgeting. Day-to-day, I work with Excel a lot, sometimes using Power BI. Before this, I worked in another small company in Birmingham for about one year.
Researcher: And what was your role in Bangladesh before moving here?
P6: In Dhaka, I worked as a junior accountant at a textile manufacturing company. I was there for about three years. Very different work culture. I was there right after my university.
Researcher: Can you describe your current working hours or flexible working setup in your job?
P6: Right now, we have a hybrid policy. I go to the office on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, and work from home the rest of the week. My manager is quite relaxed about it, honestly. As long as I get my work done and attend the important meetings, nobody is really checking if I log in exactly at 9.
Researcher: Do you have core hours?
P6: We have core hours between 10 and 3. That's when most meetings happen. Outside that, I can start early or late. Sometimes I start at 8, sometimes 9.30. It depends on my day.
Researcher: What does "flexible working" mean to you in your daily work?
P6: To me, it means trust. And control over my own time. In my previous job, I had to be at my desk from 9 to 6 every day. Even if I finished my work early, I couldn't leave. Here, I feel like they trust me to manage my own schedule. It also means I can manage life better—like going to the bank, picking up my child from nursery sometimes. That was impossible before.
Researcher: How is your current way of working different from how you used to work in Bangladesh?
P6: Oh, completely different. In Bangladesh, everything was fixed. Fixed time, fixed desk, fixed lunch time. The manager would walk around to see who was at their desk. It was very hierarchical. Here, nobody is watching me. I'm judged by my output, not by how many hours I sit in a chair.
Researcher: What surprised you most when you started working here?
P6: Honestly, the trust surprised me. In my first week, my manager said, "You can work from home on Friday if you want." I thought, is this a test? Are they checking if I will take advantage? It took me months to believe it was real.
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Researcher: Reflecting on your experience here, what aspects of flexible working would be most valuable if you were to work in Bangladesh? What might be harder to transfer?
P6: I would love to bring the trust-based culture. In Bangladesh, many companies still don't trust employees to work without physical supervision. But I think it would be very difficult to

implement there because the mindset is different. Managers want to see you at your desk. Also, infrastructure—internet is not always reliable outside big cities. So working from home fully is hard.
Researcher: What would you want to bring back?
P6: Definitely the idea of output-based evaluation. Judge me by my work quality, not by my attendance. That would change everything.

Researcher: Do you feel you have more control over your work because of flexible working? Can you give me an example?
P6: Yes, much more control. For example, last month I had a family emergency. I had to take my mother to a doctor's appointment in the morning. In my old job in Bangladesh, I would have had to take a full day off. Here, I just worked later that evening. I didn't even need to ask permission. I just put it on the team calendar and that was it. That feeling of control reduces so much stress.
Researcher: How does flexible working affect your sense of doing your job well or developing your professional skills?
P6: I think it's made me more focused. When I work from home, there are fewer distractions. No colleagues stopping by my desk for small talk. So I can concentrate on complex analysis. I feel I'm doing better quality work. But—and this is important—I also sometimes feel like I'm missing out on learning. In the office, I used to overhear conversations, learn things casually. Now I have to schedule everything. So it's both easier and harder, if that makes sense.
Researcher: Do you feel you learn differently working flexibly?

P6: Yes. I have to be more proactive. I ask more questions on Teams. I schedule quick calls instead of just turning to my colleague. It's different, but I think I'm learning to be more intentional.

Researcher: How has flexible working affected your connection with your colleagues or team?
P6: This is the hardest part, to be honest. I feel less connected. In the office, we used to have lunch together, chat about weekend plans. Now, those moments are gone. We have virtual coffee breaks, but it's not the same. Sometimes I feel invisible, especially when decisions are made quickly and I'm not in the office that day. I worry that people who go in more often get more visibility and maybe better opportunities.
Researcher: Do you ever feel isolated?
P6: Sometimes, yes. Especially on days when I work from home three days in a row. I start feeling like I'm working in a silo. But then when I go to the office, I feel reconnected. So I try to balance it.
Researcher: Can you tell me about a time when flexible working made you feel either more trusted, or less visible?
P6: I'll give you one for each. For feeling trusted—one time I had an urgent personal issue. I messaged my manager saying I need to step away for two hours. He just replied, "No problem, just update me later." That felt amazing. Like he respected me as a person.
For less visible—last quarter, there was a project I really wanted to be on. I found out later that

the team had discussed it during an in-office day when I was working from home. Nobody included me in the conversation. I felt invisible. Like I missed the boat just because I wasn't physically there. That still bothers me.
Researcher: Why do you think your company offers flexible working?

P6: I think partly because they genuinely want to retain good people. We have young employees who value flexibility. If they didn't offer it, people would leave. Also, they save money on office space. Fewer desks needed. So I think it's both—employee wellbeing and cost-saving. But I think the real reason is retention. They don't want to lose talent to bigger companies that offer more benefits.
Researcher: Do you think flexible working is working well in your company? Why or why not?
P6: For the most part, yes. Productivity is good. People seem happier. But I think communication suffers sometimes. Important information gets missed if not everyone is in the same channel. Also, I think newer employees struggle more. They don't have the informal mentorship that happens naturally in an office. So overall, it works, but it's not perfect.
Researcher: How would you improve it?
P6: I would make sure that all important decisions are discussed on a channel that everyone can access, not just in-person conversations. Maybe record key meetings for those working from home. Also, more intentional inclusion—managers should actively ask remote people for their opinions, not just the ones in the room.
Researcher: Do you feel flexible working benefits employees, the company, or both?
P6: Both, honestly. I benefit because I have better work-life balance, less commuting stress, more time with family. The company benefits because I'm more productive and less likely to leave. But I think sometimes the company benefits more in the long term from my loyalty, while I might sacrifice some visibility and career progression. So it's a trade-off.
Researcher: Does your company treat flexible working as a formal policy, or is it more about informal understanding with your manager?
P6: It's a mix. We have a formal hybrid policy written down. But in practice, it really depends on your manager. My manager is very flexible. But I know another team where the manager wants everyone in the office three days minimum. So the policy exists, but how it's implemented varies. That affects my sense of security a bit because if my manager leaves, the next one might be different.

Researcher: How does that affect your commitment?
P6: It makes me less committed to the organisation and more committed to my specific manager. If he leaves, I might leave too. Because flexibility is so important to me now. I don't think I could go back to a strict 9-to-5 office job.
Researcher: Is there anything else about flexible working, wellbeing, or your experiences as a Bangladeshi finance professional in the UK that you think is important for me to understand?
P6: I think one thing is that for people like us—migrants—flexible working is even more important. We might not have family support here. We need to manage things alone. Flexibility makes that possible. Also, I think some employers don't realise that for people from hierarchical cultures, we might not ask for flexibility even if we need it. So employers should proactively offer

it, not wait for us to ask.
Researcher: Any advice for other migrant professionals?
P6: Be brave to ask for flexibility. Don't assume it's not available. And for employers—be aware that your employees come from different backgrounds. What seems obvious to you might not be obvious to them. Build trust first, then flexibility works naturally.
Researcher: Thank you so much, P6. This was incredibly helpful.
P6: You're welcome. Good luck with your research.
Researcher :Thank you again. Just to remind you—you'll receive a transcript to review within two weeks.
You have 30 days to withdraw your data if you change your mind. Do you have any questions for me?"
P6: No questions. Happy to help.
Researcher: Thank you. Have a great day.

Colour used for Code
· Green – Identity renegotiation (shifting professional self-concept) and cultural conditioning of silence (Bangladeshi deference inhibiting help-seeking).
· Red – Credential devaluation (qualifications rendered meaningless) in low-trust settings, or trust-enabled autonomy in high-trust settings.
· Blue – Constrained agency (inability to act, speak up, or negotiate) in rigid environments, or competence enhancement (improved focus, productivity, learning) in flexible ones.
· Yellow – Embodied precarity (physical exhaustion, weight gain, freeze response) or cultural appreciation (positive contrast with Bangladesh).
· Purple – Erasure and invisibility (being unseen despite presence) or manager dependency risk (commitment to a manager rather than the organisation).

B1:coded Transcript

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2022) of
Participant 1

PHASE 1: FAMILIARISATION NARRATIVE

Written before any coding began, after reading the transcript four times.
What struck me on repeated reading:

The absence of agency is overwhelming. P1 uses words like "trapped," "stuck," "survive," "frozen," "invisible." There is a profound disconnect between his professional identity (Master's degree, working towards ACA accreditation) and his lived experience ("like a child," "not a professional"). He holds qualifications but is treated as untrustworthy.

Tensions I noticed:
Several internal contradictions emerged. He wants flexibility but cannot ask for it. He knows UK workplace culture is different from Bangladesh but his body "freezes" when he needs to speak up. He is committed to surviving, not to his employer, yet he cannot leave. He sees others with flexibility ("friends work from home") but frames his own situation as hopeless.

What the data evoked in me:
Empathy, but also frustration at the structural barriers – visa precarity, owner ideology, absence of policies – that individual effort cannot overcome. The "physical block" when needing to speak up was unexpected and powerful. I felt the exhaustion in his words.

What surprised me:
The expectation-reality gap: "I thought the UK would be more modern... I was disappointed." This is not just dissatisfaction with a job – it is a betrayal of the imagined future that motivated migration. Also surprising: the absence of any mention of a mentor, social support network in the UK, or colleague who notices him.

What is absent from the data:
No mentor. No social support network in the UK. No one at work who recognises his efforts. No mention of friends outside work. No hope expressed for the current situation – only for escape after qualifying. The silence around support systems is as loud as what is spoken.

Reflexive note on my positionality:
As a Bangladeshi researcher, I recognised cultural references ("in Bangladesh, we never question authority") immediately. This helped rapport but also risks over-identification. I bracketed assumptions by asking: Is this genuinely shared experience, or am I assuming meaning? The freeze response he describes is distinct from simple deference – it is embodied, not just cultural.

PHASE 2: INITIAL CODES (DISCRETE CODE LIST)

Line-by-line coding producing a numbered code list.
Complete Code List (60 codes with definitions)

Code No.	Code Name	Definition	Data Example
1	Exhaustion	Physical and emotional tiredness from work and commute	"A bit tired... It's been a long week"
2	Junior marginalisation	Being given unwanted tasks due to low hierarchy	"I get the tasks no one else wants"
3	Visa desperation	Job acceptance driven by visa expiry, not choice	"My visa was running out... I took it immediately"
4	Family pressure	Parental expectations compounding job-seeking stress	"My parents were calling me every day"
5	Skill mismatch	Prior experience rendered irrelevant in UK context	"Paper ledgers... not relevant here"
6	Hidden retraining labour	Having to learn new software without support	"I had to learn all of that from scratch"
7	Policy absence	No formal flexible working provision	"No flexible working. At all."
8	Presenteeism ideology	Belief that visibility equals productivity	"If I can't see you, you're not working"
9	Fear-based self-silencing	Not speaking up due to perceived risk	"I would never dare"
10	Visa vulnerability	Precarious status preventing negotiation	"They could fire me for any reason"
11	Equal misery narrative	Normalising suffering as fairness	"Everyone suffers equally"
12	Flexibility as fantasy	Flexible working framed as unattainable	"It's a fantasy... not real for me"
13	Time poverty	Long commute wasting life hours	"7.5 hours a week just travelling"
14	Lost development time	Inability to study due to exhaustion	"Too tired after work to study"
15	Bodily deterioration	Weight gain, poor diet, physical collapse	"I've gained weight... collapse"
16	Cultural continuity	UK workplace feels same as Bangladesh	"It's actually very similar"
17	Expectation disappointment	UK not meeting imagined progressiveness	"I thought the UK would be more modern"
18	Relative deprivation	Knowing others have flexibility makes it harder	"Knowing others have it makes it harder"
19	Control absence	No autonomy over work	"I do what I'm told. When I'm told."
20	Performative work	Looking busy when work is done	"Sit and look busy until 5:30"
21	Infantilisation	Treated like a child despite qualifications	"It's like being in school"

22	Identity dissonance	Mismatch between self-perception and treatment	"Like a child. Not like a professional"
23	Credential irrelevance	Qualifications hold no workplace value	"I have a Master's degree... treated like I can't be trusted"
24	Punished initiative	Taking initiative leads to manager anger	"My manager got angry"
25	Learned helplessness	Internalised lesson to not act without permission	"Don't do anything without permission"
26	Competence frustration	Feeling incompetent despite qualifications	"I don't feel competent at all"
27	Mechanical work	Going through motions without engagement	"Just going through the motions"
28	Stagnation	No progress, same tasks, no promotion	"I'm just existing. Not growing"
29	Exam postponement	Career qualifications delayed by exhaustion	"My exams keep getting postponed"
30	Surface relationships	Collegial but not friends	"Friendly, but not friends"
31	Workplace isolation	No community, no shared struggles	"Empty. There's no community"
32	Performative normalcy	Pretending to be fine when not	"We all pretend we're fine. But I know we're not."
33	Rejected belonging	Attempts to connect fail	"No one came... I stopped trying"
34	Family separation distress	Being far from family compounds isolation	"Being far from my family"
35	Invisibility	Unnoticed unless needed	"No one notices me"
36	Extreme neglect metaphor	Hyperbolic expression of being unseen	"I could be on fire and no one would look up"
37	Recognition absence	No acknowledgement of good work	"No 'good job.' No 'thank you.' Just 'okay.'"
38	Meaninglessness	Work feels pointless	"Like nothing I do matters"
39	Owner ideology barrier	Owner's beliefs block organisational change	"He thinks the old way is the best way"
40	Mistrust as principle	Assumption that employees are stealing time	"He thinks if he can't see you, you're stealing his time"
41	High turnover evidence	Organisational symptom of dysfunction	"People come, stay a year or two, then leave"
42	Practical solution awareness	Knows what would help	"One work-from-home day a week"
43	Trust deficit	Owner's fear-based management	"He's too scared"
44	Powerlessness	No negotiation power as junior	"We have no power"
45	Trapped feeling	Cannot leave due to lack of experience	"We're trapped"
46	60-day terror	Visa termination window as existential threat	"If I lose it, I have 60 days"
47	Hypervigilance	Constant fear of being fired	"Just keep my head down and hope"

48	Survival commitment	Loyalty to visa, not employer	"Committed to my visa. To surviving."
49	Exit strategy planned	Already planning departure	"As soon as I qualify, I'm gone"
50	Choice illusion exposed	Outsiders assume choices he doesn't have	"People assume we have choices. We don't."
51	Exhaustion of survival	Just surviving is itself tiring	"You just survive. And that's exhausting."
52	Advocacy message	Direct advice to employers	"Understand the power imbalance"
53	Call for psychological safety	What would enable speaking up	"You need to create safety"
54	Cultural conditioning of silence	Bangladeshi deference to authority	"In Bangladesh, we never question authority"
55	Embodied silence	Physical block preventing speech	"I freeze... my body doesn't know"
56	Freeze response	Somatic reaction to authority	"My mouth doesn't know"
57	Cognitive-bodily split	Knowing differs from being able to act	"I know it's different here, but my body doesn't know"
58	Desire for permission	Needs explicit invitation to speak	"Someone needs to teach me it's okay to ask"
59	Fear of punishment for speaking	Anticipated negative consequence of voice	"That I won't be punished for speaking up"
60	Chronic lack of being heard	No one usually listens	"No one usually does"

PHASE 3: PROVISIONAL GROUPINGS (SEARCHING FOR THEMES) (for all 6 participants)
Grouping codes into candidate categories. This demonstrates movement toward candidate themes before any colour-coding.
Candidate Categories (n=10)

Category No.	Category Name	Codes Included	Brief Definition
C01	Visa-constituted precarity	03, 10, 46, 47, 48, 50	Immigration status creates vulnerability that shapes all workplace behaviour
C02	Credential devaluation	05, 06, 22, 23, 26	Qualifications rendered meaningless in current workplace
C03	Constrained agency	09, 19, 24, 25, 44, 45, 51	Inability to act, speak up, or negotiate due to structural barriers
C04	Presenteeism as control mechanism	07, 08, 11, 20, 21, 39, 40	Organisational ideology equating visibility with productivity
C05	Embodied exhaustion	01, 13, 14, 15, 27, 29	Physical manifestations of workplace stress
C06	Erasure and invisibility	35, 36, 37, 38	Systematic denial of recognition and visibility
C07	Identity renegotiation	17, 18, 28, 42, 49, 52	Shifting professional self-concept and future aspirations
C08	Cultural conditioning of silence	54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59	Prior socialisation that inhibits help-seeking behaviour

C09	Absence of relational belonging	30, 31, 32, 33, 34	Lack of meaningful workplace relationships and community
C10	Expectation-reality gap	16, 17	Disappointment between imagined UK and experienced reality

How Codes Group into Categories (Evidence Table)

Code No.	Code Name	Belongs to Category	Justification
3	Visa desperation	C01 Visa-constituted precarity	Job acceptance driven by visa expiry, not choice
10	Visa vulnerability	C01 Visa-constituted precarity	Fear of firing due to visa status
46	60-day terror	C01 Visa-constituted precarity	Explicit fear of visa termination window
47	Hypervigilance	C01 Visa-constituted precarity	Constant head-down behaviour
48	Survival commitment	C01 Visa-constituted precarity	Loyalty to visa, not employer
50	Choice illusion	C01 Visa-constituted precarity	Outsiders assume choices he doesn't have
5	Skill mismatch	C02 Credential devaluation	Bangladesh experience "not relevant"
22	Identity dissonance	C02 Credential devaluation	"Like a child, not a professional"
23	Credential irrelevance	C02 Credential devaluation	Master's degree treated as meaningless
26	Competence frustration	C02 Credential devaluation	"I don't feel competent at all"
9	Fear-based self-silencing	C03 Constrained agency	"I would never dare"
19	Control absence	C03 Constrained agency	"I do what I'm told"
24	Punished initiative	C03 Constrained agency	Manager anger after correcting error
25	Learned helplessness	C03 Constrained agency	"Don't do anything without permission"
44	Powerlessness	C03 Constrained agency	"We have no power"
45	Trapped feeling	C03 Constrained agency	"We're trapped"
7	Policy absence	C04 Presenteeism as control	No formal flexible working policy
8	Presenteeism ideology	C04 Presenteeism as control	"If I can't see you, you're not working"
20	Performative work	C04 Presenteeism as control	"Sit and look busy"
21	Infantilisation	C04 Presenteeism as control	"Like being in school"

1	Exhaustion	C05 Embodied exhaustion	"A bit tired... long week"
13	Time poverty	C05 Embodied exhaustion	7.5 hours commuting weekly
14	Lost development time	C05 Embodied exhaustion	Too tired to study for exams
15	Bodily deterioration	C05 Embodied exhaustion	Weight gain, collapse
35	Invisibility	C06 Erasure and invisibility	"No one notices me"
36	Extreme neglect metaphor	C06 Erasure and invisibility	"Could be on fire"
37	Recognition absence	C06 Erasure and invisibility	"No 'good job.' Just 'okay.'"
38	Meaninglessness	C06 Erasure and invisibility	"Like nothing I do matters"
17	Expectation disappointment	C07 Identity renegotiation	"I thought the UK would be more modern"
18	Relative deprivation	C07 Identity renegotiation	Knowing others have flexibility
28	Stagnation	C07 Identity renegotiation	"I'm just existing"
49	Exit strategy	C07 Identity renegotiation	"As soon as I qualify, I'm gone"
54	Cultural conditioning	C08 Cultural silence	"Never question authority"
55	Embodied silence	C08 Cultural silence	"I freeze"
56	Freeze response	C08 Cultural silence	"My mouth doesn't know"
57	Cognitive-bodily split	C08 Cultural silence	"My body doesn't know"
30	Surface relationships	C09 Absence of belonging	"Friendly, but not friends"
31	Workplace isolation	C09 Absence of belonging	"Empty. No community"
33	Rejected belonging	C09 Absence of belonging	"No one came"

PHASE 4: REVIEWING THEMES (ACROSS ALL SIX PARTICIPANTS)

4.1 Review Within Themes

Each candidate theme was checked against all coded extracts from the full dataset (n=6). I re-read every extract assigned to each theme to ensure internal coherence and distinctness.

Theme 1: The Visa as an Invisible Cage

· Coherence check: All extracts related to immigration status as a psychological and behavioural

constraint. Codes such as visa vulnerability, self-silencing, 60-day terror, hypervigilance appeared exclusively in participants with active visa precarity (P1, P3). Participants with settled status (P2, P4, P3, P6) did not mention visa fear.

· Refinement: Keep as a distinct theme, but note that it applies only to visa-dependent participants. It remains analytically important because it explains differential access to flexibility.

Theme 2: The Performance of Presence

· Coherence check: Extracts focused on organisational ideology equating physical visibility with productivity. Codes: presenteeism ideology, performative work, infantilisation, equal misery, strict core hours, surveillance. Strongly present in P1, P3, and P3. Absent in P2, P6, and P4 (who have trusting cultures).

· Refinement: Keep as a distinct theme. It contrasts directly with trust-based cultures.

Theme 3: The Erased Professional

· Coherence check: Extracts captured systematic denial of professional identity, competence, and growth. Codes: credential devaluation, identity dissonance, punished initiative, recognition absence, stagnation, invisibility. Present across all participants to varying degrees, but most acute for P1 & P3. Even participants in positive environments (P2, P6) reported occasional invisibility.

· Refinement: Keep as a core theme. Renamed slightly to “The Erased Professional” (analytic) – retains original.

Theme 4: Trust as the Missing Ingredient

· Coherence check: Extracts across all six participants consistently showed that trust (or its absence) determined whether flexible working enhanced wellbeing or produced anxiety. Codes: trust as foundation, trust produces effort, reciprocity, distrust as surveillance, psychological safety, proactive communication. P2, P6, and P4 explicitly linked trust to positive outcomes; P1, P3, and P3 explicitly linked distrust to negative outcomes.

· Refinement: Keep as the central integrative theme. Renamed to “Trust as the Decisive Factor” for clarity.

Unexpected Finding: Embodied Silence

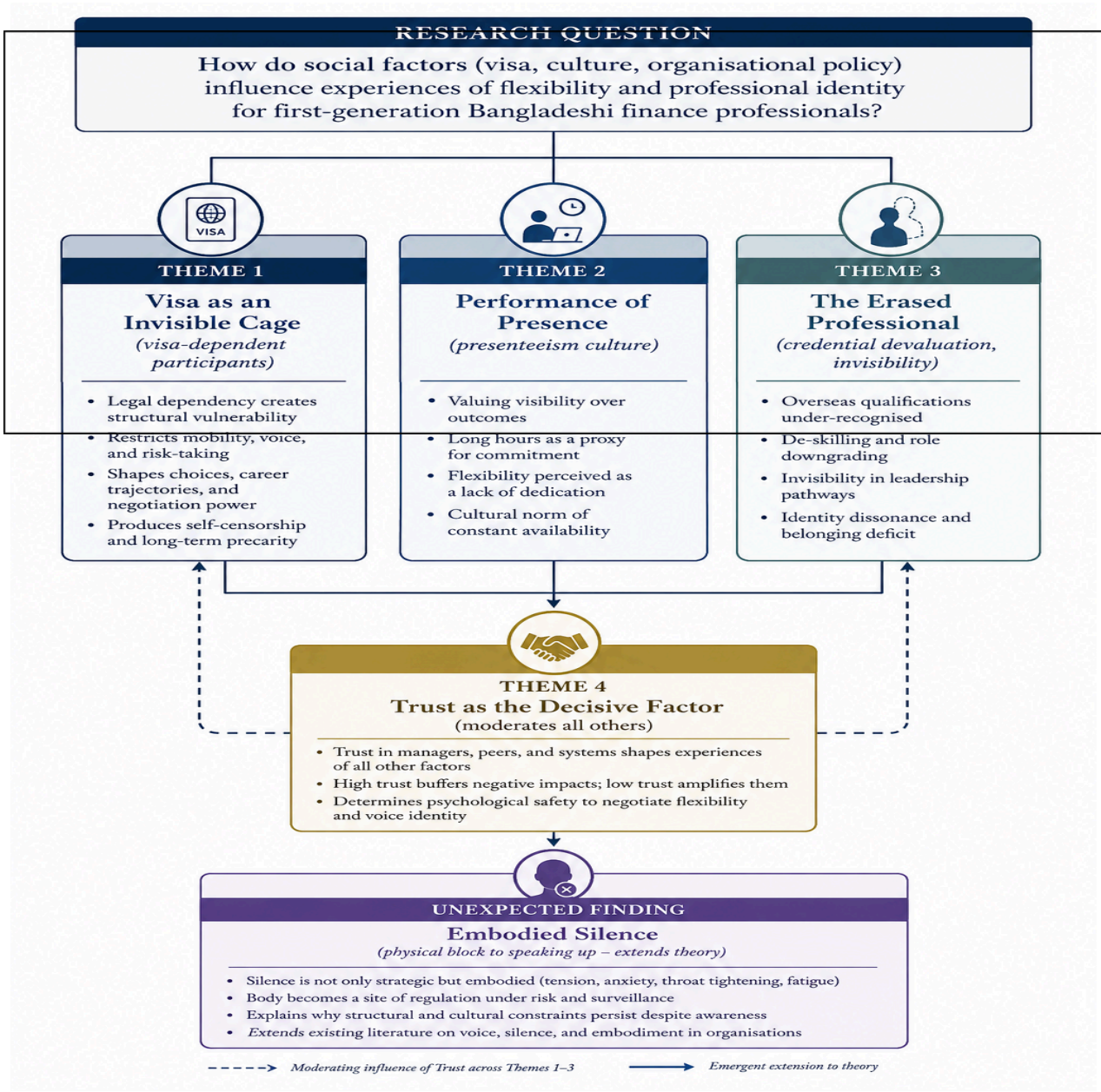
· Coherence check: Extracts describing physical blocks to speaking up (embodied silence, freeze response, cognitive-bodily split). Present in P1 (strongest)& P3 Not reported by P2, P6, P4. This finding does not fit neatly into the four themes above; it extends acculturation theory.

· Refinement: Retain as a separate unexpected finding to be reported after the main themes.

4.2 Review Across the Entire Dataset

The thematic map was checked against all six transcripts. No data were forced into themes that did not fit. The four themes and the unexpected finding collectively answer the research questions.

Final thematic map



PHASE 5: DEFINING AND NAMING FINAL THEMES

Theme 1: The Visa as an Invisible Cage

Definition: Immigration status functions not merely as an administrative category but as a psychological and behavioural cage. For visa-dependent participants, the constant threat of termination (e.g., 60-day window to find a new job) silences requests for flexibility, suppresses negotiation, and forces acceptance of unfavourable conditions. This cage is invisible to

outsiders who assume choice and agency.

Analytic name rationale: “Invisible” because the cage is not physical; “cage” because it traps, limits movement, and dictates behaviour through fear.

Sub-themes:

· Visa vulnerability (60-day terror, fireable at will)
· Self-silencing as survival strategy (“I would never dare”)
· Cultural conditioning layered onto legal precarity
Representative data extracts (across participants):
“I'm on a visa. I can't risk being seen as difficult. They could fire me for any reason, really.” (Al Amin, P1)
“My visa was ticking. I was scared. So when I got this offer, I said yes immediately. I didn't negotiate anything.” (P3, P3)
“When you hire someone on a visa, they are scared. They will say yes to everything.” (P4, P4 – manager perspective)

Theme 2: The Performance of Presence
Definition: Organisational cultures that equate physical visibility with productivity create a theatre of busyness. Employees must look busy even when work is complete. This theme was strongest
in rigid, low-trust organisations (P1, P5, P3) but absent in trusting environments
(P2, P6, P4’s team).
Analytic name rationale: “Performance” signals that work is acted (looking busy) rather than done; “Presence” is the metric – not output, learning, or wellbeing.
Sub-themes:
· Presenteeism as ownership / managerial ideology
· No formal policy = no possibility (or policy so restrictive it is unusable)
· Equal misery as false fairness
· Surveillance as a substitute for trust (e.g., hourly check-ins)
Representative data extracts:
“If I can't see you, you're not working.” (P1, P1 – owner ideology)
“If you miss a call or don't respond to an email within 15 minutes, they might ask you to come in the next day.” (P3, P5 – restrictive policy)
“Everyone suffers equally. In a way, it's fair.” (P1, P1 – resignation, not endorsement)
“It's a source of tension, not a benefit. People who want flexibility feel frustrated. People who don't care think WFH people are lazy.” (P3, P5)

Theme 3: The Erased Professional
Definition: Systematic denial of professional identity, competence, and growth. This theme captures the gap between participants’ qualifications (Master’s degrees, professional exams) and how they are treated – as untrustworthy, invisible, or childlike. Erasure is active: initiative

punished, recognition withheld, development stalled.
Analytic name rationale: “Erased” is stronger than “invisible” – invisibility can be passive; erasure is an active process where contributions are dismissed, recognition withheld, and professional selfhood denied.

Sub-themes:
· Identity dissonance (“like a child, not a professional”)
· Punished initiative (correcting an error → manager anger)
· No recognition (“okay” as ceiling of feedback)
· Stagnation as structural (“existing, not growing”)
· Expectation-reality gap (“I thought the UK would be more modern”)
Representative data extracts:
“Like a child. Not like a professional. I have a Master's degree… treated like someone who can't be trusted.” (P1)
“No ‘good job.’ No ‘thank you.’ Just ‘okay.’ … Like nothing I do matters.” (P1)
“I feel invisible. Like I'm just a pair of hands doing tasks.” (P3, P3)
“I'm just existing. Not growing.” (P1)
“I thought the UK would be more modern… I was disappointed, honestly.” (P1)

Theme 4: Trust as the Decisive Factor
Definition: The presence or absence of trust is the single most powerful predictor of whether flexible working enhances wellbeing or produces anxiety. Where trust exists (P2, P6, P4’s team), flexibility enables autonomy, competence, and commitment. Where trust is absent (P1, P5, P3), even formal policies become sources of surveillance, resentment, and self-silencing.
Analytic name rationale: “Decisive factor” because trust mediates all other themes – it determines whether the visa cage is reinforced or loosened, whether presence is performed or outcomes matter, and whether professional identity is erased or affirmed.
Sub-themes:
· Trust as foundation of genuine flexibility
· Reciprocity effect: trust → effort → loyalty
· Distrust as surveillance: hourly check-ins, written requests, guilt
· Manager-level variation: flexibility depends on individual manager, not policy
· Need for institutional trust, not manager-dependent
Representative data extracts (positive cases):
“Flexible working means trust. My manager trusts me… and because I feel trusted, I work harder. I don't want to let them down.” (P2, P2)
“In my first week, my manager said, ‘You can work from home on Friday if you want.’ I thought, is this a test? It took me months to believe it was real.” (P4, P6)
“When I told my team, ‘You don't need to ask permission…’ people relaxed. They started performing better. One team member said, ‘No one has ever trusted me like this before.’” (P4, P4)
Representative data extracts (negative cases):

“Having to request WFH a week in advance, having to justify it – that's not control. That's surveillance.” (P3, P5)
“My manager approved, but then asked me to send a list of what I would accomplish that day, broken down by hour. I felt humiliated.” (P3, P5)
“I don't feel secure at all… I'm committed to surviving. As soon as I qualify, I'm gone.” (P1)

Unexpected Finding: Embodied Silence

Definition: Prior cultural conditioning (e.g., “never question authority”) is not merely cognitive but somatic. Several participants described physical blocks to speaking up – freezing, inability to make words come out, a feeling that the body does not know what the mind knows.

Analytic name rationale: “Embodied silence” captures the physiological dimension of acculturation, extending Berry’s (1997) theory beyond cognitive and behavioural adaptation.

Representative data extracts:

“I freeze. I literally cannot make the words come out. Even though I know it's different here, my body doesn't know. My mouth doesn't know. It's like a physical block.” (P1, P3)
“Why can't I just speak up? But I can't. I'm too afraid.” (P1, P3)
“In Bangladesh, we're not taught to ask for things. We're taught to follow rules, not question them.” (P3, P5)

Implication: Employers cannot simply wait for migrant employees to ask for flexibility. They must proactively offer it and normalise it, because for many, asking is not just uncomfortable – it feels physically impossible.

Summary of Findings Across Six Participants

Analysis of six first-generation Bangladeshi finance professionals revealed that flexible working is not a universally positive or neutral practice. Its effects are entirely mediated by three intersecting factors: visa status, organisational culture (presenteeism vs trust), and prior cultural conditioning.

Theme 1 – The Visa as an Invisible Cage applied only to visa-dependent participants (P1, P3). For them, immigration status created constant precarity that silenced any request for flexibility. They accepted unfavourable conditions without negotiation and engaged in self-silencing as a survival strategy.

Theme 2 – The Performance of Presence characterised organisations where physical visibility was equated with productivity. In such cultures (P1, P3, P5), employees performed busyness, endured surveillance (e.g., 15-minute email response rules), and experienced flexibility as a test rather than a right. In contrast, trusting organisations (P2, P6, P4’s team) judged employees by output, not hours.

Theme 3 – The Erased Professional was present across all participants but most acute in low-trust settings. Participants with Master’s degrees and professional exam aspirations were treated as untrustworthy, childlike, or invisible. Initiative was punished, recognition was absent, and professional development stalled.

Theme 4 – Trust as the Decisive Factor emerged as the central mechanism. Where managers trusted employees, flexibility produced autonomy, competence, relatedness (though strained), and strong commitment. Where trust was absent, even formal policies became instruments of surveillance, creating anxiety, resentment, and intention to leave.

Unexpected finding – Embodied Silence: Several participants described physical blocks to speaking up (“I freeze”, “my mouth doesn't know”). This extends acculturation theory by highlighting the somatic dimension of cultural conditioning. Employers must be proactive in offering flexibility, as waiting for migrant employees to ask may be ineffective.
Cross-case continuum:

Participant	Visa-fear	Presenteeism-culture	Trust	Wellbeing-outcome
P1	High	High	None	Very-low
P3	High	Medium	None	Low
P5	Low	High	None	Low
P2	Low	Low	High	High
P4	Low	Low	Low	High
P6	Low	Low	High	High

The findings demonstrate that trust is the decisive factor. Policy alone is insufficient; culture determines whether flexibility is experienced as empowering or oppressive.

B2:coded Transcript

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2022) of
Participant 2

PHASE 1: FAMILIARISATION NARRATIVE
Written before any coding began, after reading the transcript four times.
What struck me on repeated reading:
P2's experience is almost the mirror image of P1's. Where P1 felt trapped and invisible, P2 feels trusted and empowered. He uses words like "trust," "liberating," "grateful," "committed," "ownership." There is a strong sense of psychological safety and reciprocity: because his manager trusts him, he works harder. This is not naivety – he knows what the opposite feels like ("In Bangladesh, everything was fixed"). His appreciation is conscious and comparative.
Tensions I noticed:
Despite the positive picture, P2 acknowledges real costs. He feels "less connected" to colleagues and sometimes "invisible" when decisions are made on office days he works from home. He has learned to compensate by being intentional – scheduling one-on-ones, coming in for important discussions. There is also a structural vulnerability: his flexibility depends on his current manager. If she leaves, the next manager might be different. So even in a good situation, security is not fully institutionalised.
What the data evoked in me:
Relief – finally a participant who has what others desperately want. But also a quiet concern: P2's positive experience is fragile, tied to a single supportive manager. His advice to employers ("be proactive, don't wait for Bangladeshi employees to ask") is wise, but it also highlights that many employers are not proactive. His story shows what is possible, but also what is precarious.
What surprised me:
The strength of the reciprocity effect. P2 says, "Because I feel trusted, I work harder. I don't want to let them down." This is not just about wellbeing – it is about performance. Trust produces commitment and effort. Also surprising: his explicit awareness that culture matters more than policy. He says, "You can have no formal policy but a trusting culture, and flexibility will still exist informally." That is a sophisticated insight from a participant.
What is absent from the data:
No mention of visa precarity (unlike P1). No mention of family pressure from Bangladesh. No sense of being trapped. The absence of fear is as notable as its presence in other transcripts. P2's Bangladeshi background is referenced positively – as a source of empathy and understanding, not as a barrier.
Reflexive note on my positionality:
As a Bangladeshi researcher, I was initially surprised by P2's positive experience because my own expectations were shaped by P1's difficult story. I had to check myself: was I looking

for problems that weren't there? P2's account is genuinely positive, and I must honour that. At the same time, his warnings about manager dependency and invisibility are real. I bracketed my assumption that "migrant professionals always struggle" and let the data speak.

PHASE 2: INITIAL CODES (DISCRETE CODE LIST)

Line-by-line coding producing a numbered code list. This is a required discrete output at this phase.

Complete Code List (56 codes with definitions)

Code No.	Code Name	Definition	Data Example
1	Trust as foundation	Flexible working is experienced primarily as trust from manager	"Flexible working means trust. My manager trusts me to manage my own time."
2	Reciprocity effect	Trust leads to increased effort and loyalty	"Because I feel trusted, I work harder. I take more ownership. I don't want to let them down."
3	Genuine hybrid policy	Policy that is actually usable without permission-seeking	"We have a genuine hybrid policy. Three days in the office, two days at home."
4	No permission needed	Flexibility is automatic, not requested	"I don't have to ask permission every week. I just put my schedule on the team calendar."
5	Core hours structure	Organisation provides predictable meeting times	"We have core hours between 10am and 3pm. That's when most meetings happen."
6	Flexible start/end times	Ability to adjust daily schedule around core hours	"Outside that, I can start early or late. Sometimes I start at 7:30am and finish at 4pm."
7	Deep work at home	Home days used for focused, complex tasks	"Mondays and Fridays are my deep work days – no commute, fewer interruptions."
8	Office for collaboration	Office days used for meetings and team support	"On office days, I focus on meetings, collaboration, and supporting my team."
9	Appreciation of flexibility	Conscious gratitude derived from prior rigid experience	"Because I know what it's like to have no flexibility, I appreciate it more."
10	Comparison with Bangladesh	Explicit contrast with fixed, hierarchical work culture	"In Bangladesh, everything was fixed. Fixed hours, fixed desk, fixed lunch time."
11	Output over hours	Judged by work quality, not presence	"Here, I'm judged by output, not by hours. That's liberating."
12	Informality as surprise	Initial shock at lack of hierarchy and titles	"I call my manager by her first name. That was strange at first."
13	Informality builds trust	Egalitarian culture fosters psychological safety	"It makes communication easier. And I think it builds trust."
14	Grateful commitment	Gratitude translates to organisational loyalty	"That makes me grateful. It also makes me more committed to this company."
15	Trust-based culture as export	Desire to bring flexibility mindset to Bangladesh	"The trust-based culture. In Bangladesh, the assumption is that employees will take advantage."

16	Return only as senior	Would only go back to Bangladesh in influential role	“Only in a senior role where I could influence policy. I wouldn't go back as a junior.”
17	Cannot go back to zero	Flexibility has become non-negotiable	“I've tasted flexibility now. I can't go back to zero.”
18	Autonomy through schedule control	Ability to adjust work around personal life	“Last month, my daughter had a school event… I just adjusted my schedule.”
19	No guilt for personal needs	Using flexibility without shame or fear	“I didn't lose any holiday time. I didn't feel guilty.”
20	Feeling respected	Autonomy signals respect for whole person	“I felt like my employer saw me as a whole person, not just a worker.”
21	Loyalty from respect	Respect produces long-term commitment	“That feeling… makes you loyal.”
22	Productivity gain at home	Fewer distractions lead to higher quality work	“When I work from home, I have fewer distractions. I produce higher quality work.”
23	Developed time management	Flexibility forced better organisational skills	“You can't be chaotic and work from home. So I've developed better time management skills.”
24	Energy for learning	Reduced commuting frees mental capacity	“Because I have more energy. I'm not exhausted. So I have mental space to learn.”
25	CIMA study enabled	Professional exams possible due to flexibility	“I've started studying for my CIMA exams. I couldn't have done that if I was in the office 9 to 6.”
26	Informal learning loss	Misses spontaneous knowledge from office	“Sometimes I miss the informal learning. In the office, you overhear conversations.”
27	Intentional learning required	Must actively seek knowledge when remote	“At home, you have to be intentional.”
28	Relatedness strain	Feeling less connected to colleagues	“I feel less connected to my colleagues than I would like.”
29	Virtual connection inadequate	Teams meetings not same as coffee chat	“We have team meetings on Teams, but it's not the same as chatting over coffee.”
30	Effort to maintain connection	Schedules one-on-ones and office days	“I've had to make an effort. I schedule one-on-one catch-ups.”
31	Intermittent isolation	Disconnection after multiple home days	“On days when I work from home two days in a row, I start to feel a bit disconnected.”
32	Balancing strategy	Learns to attend office on key days	“I go into the office on days when I know my team will be there.”
33	Manager-created connection days	Team rule to ensure in-person time	“Tuesdays and Wednesdays, everyone in finance is in the office. Those are our connection days.”
34	Trust expressed explicitly	Manager verbalised trust as policy	“My manager told me, ‘I don't care where you work, just get the job done.’”
35	Trust as performance driver	Trust leads to meeting deadlines	“Because of that trust, I've never missed a deadline. I've never let her down.”

36	Desire to prove trustworthiness	Reciprocity in action	“I want to prove that her trust is well-placed.”
37	Invisibility risk	Being absent can mean being overlooked	“A project I was interested in was discussed on an office day when I was working from home. I wasn't included.”
38	Felt invisible	Emotional consequence of exclusion	“I felt invisible.”
39	Adaptation to invisibility	Now attends office for important discussions	“I make sure to be in the office for important discussions.”
40	Managerial inclusion practice	As manager, includes remote people	“As a manager, I now explicitly include remote people in decisions. I learned from that experience.”
41	Retention as strategic intent	Company uses flexibility to keep staff	“For retention. We're a marketing agency. The industry is competitive.”
42	Authentic leadership	CEO uses flexibility herself	“Our CEO genuinely believes in work-life balance. She has young children. She uses flexibility herself.”
43	Policy + culture alignment	Both formal policy and supportive managers	“It's both strategic and authentic.”
44	Authenticity matters	Leadership modelling is powerful	“Because our leaders use flexibility themselves, it sends a message: ‘This is for everyone.’”
45	Communication challenges	Remote work requires more effort	“Communication requires more effort.”
46	New employee integration slower	Harder to onboard remotely	“Newer employees take longer to integrate.”
47	Training need for managers	Some managers not skilled in remote leadership	“More training for managers on how to lead remote teams.”
48	Win-win outcome	Both employee and company benefit	“Both. I have better wellbeing. The company has better retention and productivity.”
49	Mutual effort required	Both sides must be responsible/trusting	“Employees have to be responsible. Employers have to be trusting.”
50	Policy exists but culture matters	Written policy not enough	“We have a formal policy written down. But the culture is what matters.”
51	Manager dependency risk	Flexibility depends on current manager	“I know that if she left, the next manager might be different. That's a risk.”
52	Need for institutional flexibility	Should not depend on individual managers	“Companies need to make flexibility institutional, not dependent on individual managers.”
53	Strong commitment	Feels valued and wants to stay	“I'm very committed. I want to stay here. I see a future here.”
54	Advice to migrants: ask	Encourages proactive requests	“Don't be afraid to ask for flexibility.”
55	Advice to employers: be proactive	Don't wait for migrant employees to ask	“Be proactive. Don't wait for your Bangladeshi employees to ask for flexibility. Offer it.”

56	Empathy from Bangladeshi background	Personal experience informs management	“It makes me more empathetic. I know what it's like to be in a rigid culture.”

PHASE 3: PROVISIONAL GROUPINGS (SEARCHING FOR THEMES)

Grouping codes into candidate categories. This demonstrates movement toward candidate themes before any colour-coding.

Candidate Categories (n=9)

Category No.	Category Name	Codes Included	Brief Definition
C01	Trust-enabled autonomy	01, 02, 04, 06, 18, 19, 20, 21, 34, 35, 36	Trust from manager enables genuine control over schedule without fear
C02	Genuine hybrid infrastructure	03, 05, 07, 08, 33	Organisational structures that make hybrid work practical
C03	Cultural appreciation	09, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 56	Positive comparison with Bangladesh; gratitude and empathy
C04	Competence enhancement	22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27	Flexibility improves productivity, time management, and learning
C05	Relatedness strain and management	28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 37, 38, 39, 40	Reduced connection with colleagues; strategies to compensate
C06	Authentic strategic intent	41, 42, 43, 44	Flexible working as genuine retention tool, modelled by leaders
C07	Residual challenges	45, 46, 47, 51, 52	Communication, onboarding, manager dependency
C08	Reciprocity and commitment	02, 14, 21, 35, 48, 49, 53	Trust produces loyalty, effort, and win-win outcomes
C09	Proactive advice	54, 55	Recommendations for migrants and employers

How Codes Group into Categories (Evidence Table)

Code No.	Code Name	Belongs to Category	Justification
1	Trust as foundation	C01 Trust-enabled autonomy	Central to P2’s experience
18	Autonomy through schedule control	C01 Trust-enabled autonomy	Example of using trust
34	Trust expressed explicitly	C01 Trust-enabled autonomy	Manager verbalised trust
3	Genuine hybrid policy	C02 Genuine hybrid infrastructure	Policy is usable
5	Core hours structure	C02 Genuine hybrid infrastructure	Provides predictability
7	Deep work at home	C02 Genuine hybrid infrastructure	Practical use of home days
9	Appreciation of flexibility	C03 Cultural appreciation	Gratitude from prior rigidity

10	Comparison with Bangladesh	C03 Cultural appreciation	Explicit contrast
11	Output over hours	C03 Cultural appreciation	Liberating difference
56	Empathy from Bangladeshi background	C03 Cultural appreciation	Positive use of background
22	Productivity gain at home	C04 Competence enhancement	Quality improvement
24	Energy for learning	C04 Competence enhancement	Mental capacity freed
25	CIMA study enabled	C04 Competence enhancement	Professional development
28	Relatedness strain	C05 Relatedness strain and management	Feels less connected
30	Effort to maintain connection	C05 Relatedness strain and management	Compensatory strategy
37	Invisibility risk	C05 Relatedness strain and management	Being overlooked
40	Managerial inclusion practice	C05 Relatedness strain and management	Learns to include others
41	Retention as strategic intent	C06 Authentic strategic intent	Company reason
42	Authentic leadership	C06 Authentic strategic intent	CEO uses flexibility
44	Authenticity matters	C06 Authentic strategic intent	Leadership modelling
45	Communication challenges	C07 Residual challenges	Remote work difficulty
51	Manager dependency risk	C07 Residual challenges	Fragile if manager leaves
14	Grateful commitment	C08 Reciprocity and commitment	Loyalty from flexibility
35	Trust as performance driver	C08 Reciprocity and commitment	Never misses deadline
48	Win-win outcome	C08 Reciprocity and commitment	Both benefit
54	Advice to migrants: ask	C09 Proactive advice	Speak up
55	Advice to employers: be proactive	C09 Proactive advice	Don't wait for requests

PHASE: 4,5 & 6 in B1

B3:coded Transcript
Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2022) of
Participant 3

PHASE 1: FAMILIARISATION NARRATIVE

Written before any coding began, after reading the transcript four times.

What struck me on repeated reading:
P3 is trapped between a policy that exists on paper and a culture that makes it unusable. She uses words like “afraid,” “guilty,” “scared,” “invisible,” “exhausted.” Unlike P1 who has no policy at all, P3 has a policy – but it is performative. The gap between what HR promises and what her manager delivers creates frustration, not relief. She says, “If there was no policy, I would just accept it. But knowing that others have it – that hurts.”

Tensions I noticed:
She knows flexibility would help her (shorter commute, study time, GP appointment without using leave). But she cannot ask. The fear is layered: fear of being seen as lazy, fear of not being committed, fear of losing her job because she is still new and on a visa. There is also a painful self-awareness – she knows she should speak up, but she cannot. Her Bangladeshi background (“juniors don’t speak”) is not just a memory; it is an active, embodied constraint.

What the data evoked in me:
Frustration on her behalf. The policy is a lie. Her manager’s response to her one request (“We’ll see” followed by extra work) is passive-aggressive. She is being punished for even asking. No wonder she stays silent. I also felt sadness at her self-blame (“Why can’t I just speak up?”). She is angry at herself for something that is not her fault.

What surprised me:
The visibility paradox. She is in the office almost every day, yet she feels invisible. Her colleagues do not really talk to her. Senior Bangladeshi colleagues ignore her. She is “just a pair of hands.” Presence does not guarantee belonging. Also surprising: her manager asked the team what flexibility they wanted – but P3 still could not answer honestly. The opportunity was there, but the psychological safety was not.

What is absent from the data:
No evidence of any manager proactively offering flexibility. No mentor. No one checking on her

wellbeing. The silence from senior Bangladeshi colleagues is particularly striking – they could help her navigate, but they do not.

Reflexive note on my positionality:
As a Bangladeshi researcher, I recognised her description of “juniors don’t speak” immediately. I have felt that myself. But I had to be careful not to project my own experience onto hers. Her fear is amplified by visa precarity (which I have not experienced in the same way) and by being a young woman in a male-dominated field (which I have). I bracketed assumptions by focusing on her exact words and not assuming that all Bangladeshi juniors feel the same. ---

PHASE 2: INITIAL CODES (DISCRETE CODE LIST)
Line-by-line coding producing a numbered code list. This is a required discrete output at this phase.
Complete Code List (52 codes with definitions)

Code No.	Code Name	Definition	Data Example
1	Probation stress	Anxiety about passing initial employment period	“Just passed my probation last month… I wasn't sure if they would keep me.”
2	Junior marginalisation	Given low-level tasks, not meaningful work	“Mostly data entry… I feel like I'm still learning everything.”
3	Visa desperation during job search	Job acceptance driven by visa expiry	“My visa was ticking. I was scared. So I said yes immediately.”
4	No negotiation at hiring	Accepted first offer without bargaining	“I didn't negotiate anything. I was just relieved.”
5	Gender + junior dismissal in Bangladesh	Not taken seriously due to age and gender	“People didn't take me seriously because I was young and female.”
6	Policy on paper only	HR policy exists but is not usable	“In theory, we have flexible working… but I don't feel able to use it.”
7	Request punished with extra work	Asking for flexibility led to increased workload	“I asked to work from home… She gave me extra work… I ended up coming in anyway.”
8	Guilt about using flexibility	Emotional barrier to accessing policy	“If I use it, I feel guilty. Or I worry they'll think I'm lazy.”
9	Easier to just come in	Avoids stress of requesting	“So I just come in every day. It's easier. Less stress.”
10	Flexibility as empty concept	Policy has no lived meaning	“It means nothing right now… not something I experience.”
11	Fear as constant state	Generalised anxiety about job security	“I'm always afraid. Afraid of making mistakes. Afraid of being seen as not committed.”
12	Real flexibility = managing day without fear	Defines genuine flexibility by psychological safety	“Real flexibility would mean I can manage my day without fear.”
13	Long commute wasted	Commuting time without benefit of flexibility	“My commute is one hour each way. That's two hours a day.”

14	Lost study time	Could use commute time for exams	“I could use that time for studying for my professional exams.”
15	Too new to ask	Junior status as barrier to requesting flexibility	“I'm still new. I'm still proving myself.”
16	Continuity of pressure	UK feels similar to Bangladesh despite policy	“The policy is different but the pressure feels the same.”
17	Presence equals commitment	Belief that visibility demonstrates dedication	“I still have to be seen. I still feel like presence equals commitment.”
18	Senior colleagues work from home	Two-tier system observed	“My senior colleagues sometimes work from home… They have proven themselves.”
19	Cannot do what seniors do	Perceived lack of right to flexibility	“I haven't. So I can't do what they do.”
20	Cultural conditioning of silence	Bangladeshi deference persists	“In Bangladesh, you never question your boss… That mindset stuck with me.”
21	Asking feels disrespectful	Internalised barrier from upbringing	“It feels wrong. Like I'm being disrespectful.”
22	Trust as ideal to bring to Bangladesh	Aspiration for different culture	“The idea that you can trust employees.”
23	Return only after confidence built	Would not go back now	“Not now. Not until I have more experience and more confidence.”
24	Barely keeping head above water	Overwhelmed in current role	“Right now, I feel like I'm barely keeping my head above water here.”
25	Policy existence without access causes frustration	Having a policy but being unable to use it is worse than no policy	“Because the policy exists but I can't use it, it makes me feel frustrated.”
26	Relative deprivation	Knowing others have flexibility makes it harder	“Knowing that others have it and I don't – that hurts.”
27	Used annual leave for GP appointment	Could have used flexibility if accessible	“I had to take half a day of annual leave. For a doctor's appointment.”
28	Too afraid to ask for adjustment	Fear prevents even reasonable requests	“No. I was too afraid to ask. I didn't want to seem difficult.”
29	Visibility over learning	Spends energy on being seen rather than developing	“I spend more time on visibility than on learning.”
30	Presenteeism behaviours	Comes early, stays late, says yes to everything	“I stay late even when my work is done. I come in early. I say yes to everything.”
31	Exhaustion from performative work	Tired from pretending to be busy	“I'm exhausted.”
32	No energy for learning	Too tired to study or network	“I don't have energy to study for my exams. I don't have energy to network.”
33	Stuck in role without growth	Doing work but not progressing	“I'm doing the work but I'm not growing.”
34	Flexibility would enable learning	Believes WFH day would allow focused study	“If I could work from home one day a week, I could use that day to focus on learning.”
35	Shallow workplace relationships	Colleagues do not share personal lives	“The relationships are shallow. We don't really know each other.”

36	Everyone stressed	Collective anxiety	“I think everyone is stressed.”
37	Loneliness despite presence	In office but not connected	“Not isolated, but lonely.”
38	Senior Bangladeshi colleagues ignore her	No mentorship from co-ethnics	“There are other Bangladeshi people… but they're all senior. They don't really talk to me.”
39	Feeling invisible	Unseen and unvalued	“I feel like I'm invisible. Like I'm just a pair of hands.”
40	Self-silencing in team meeting	Could not express true preference	“I said, ‘Whatever the team needs.’ I was too scared to say what I actually wanted.”
41	Hidden desire for Wednesday WFH	Unspoken need	“I wanted to work from home on Wednesdays… I didn't say it.”
42	Anger at self for not speaking up	Internalised blame	“Invisible. And angry at myself. Why can't I just speak up?”
43	Rare moment of trust	Isolated positive instance	“One time, my manager gave me a small report to do on my own… She said, ‘Good work.’”
44	Usually feels watched	Constant surveillance	“Most days, I feel like I'm being watched.”
45	Performative policy intent	Policy exists for attraction, not genuine support	“Because they have to. To attract people. But I don't think they actually believe in it.”
46	Culture set by traditional leader	Senior leader’s behaviour overrides HR policy	“The finance director… expects everyone to do the same. So whatever HR says, the culture is set by him.”
47	Two-tier system	Seniors get flexibility, juniors do not	“It creates a two-tier system. Senior people work from home… Junior people feel like we can't.”
48	Resentment from inequity	Unfairness damages morale	“It's creating resentment.”
49	Manager dependency	Flexibility depends on individual manager	“What matters is your manager. My manager is not supportive. So for me, flexibility doesn't exist.”
50	No security, survival commitment	Loyalty to visa, not employer	“I don't feel secure at all… I'm committed to surviving. As soon as I get more experience… I will leave.”
51	Trust would make her stay	Identifies what is missing	“Trust. If my manager trusted me, I would stay.”
52	Advice to employers: ask juniors	Proactive communication needed	“Talk to your junior employees. Ask them what they need. Don't assume they will ask.”

PHASE 3: PROVISIONAL GROUPINGS (SEARCHING FOR THEMES)
Grouping codes into candidate categories. This demonstrates movement toward candidate themes before any colour-coding.

Candidate Categories (n=9)

Category No.	Category Name	Codes Included	Brief Definition
C01	Performative policy	06, 07, 08, 09, 10, 25, 45, 46	Policy exists on paper but is not accessible in practice; creates frustration
C02	Visa-driven precarity	03, 04, 11, 50	Job acceptance and silence driven by visa fear
C03	Cultural conditioning of silence	20, 21, 40, 41, 42	Bangladeshi deference inhibits help-seeking
C04	Constrained agency	15, 19, 27, 28, 29, 30, 44, 49	Unable to act, ask, or negotiate due to junior status, fear, and unsupportive manager
C05	Embodied exhaustion	13, 14, 31, 32, 33	Physical and mental tiredness from commuting and performative work
C06	Two-tier inequity	17, 18, 47, 48	Flexibility available to seniors but not juniors; creates resentment
C07	Erasure and invisibility	35, 36, 37, 38, 39	Shallow relationships, loneliness, feeling unseen despite presence
C08	Identity renegotiation	22, 23, 24, 52	Aspirations to bring trust to Bangladesh; advice to employers
C09	Trust deficit	43, 51	Rare trust experienced; trust named as what would make her stay

How Codes Group into Categories (Evidence Table)

Code No.	Code Name	Belongs to Category	Justification
6	Policy on paper only	C01 Performative policy	HR policy exists but not usable
7	Request punished with extra work	C01 Performative policy	Asking led to negative consequence
25	Policy existence without access causes frustration	C01 Performative policy	Worse than no policy
3	Visa desperation	C02 Visa-driven precarity	Accepted job due to visa ticking
11	Fear as constant state	C02 Visa-driven precarity	Generalised anxiety
20	Cultural conditioning of silence	C03 Cultural silence	“That mindset stuck with me”
21	Asking feels disrespectful	C03 Cultural silence	Internalised barrier

15	Too new to ask	C04 Constrained agency	Junior status as barrier
28	Too afraid to ask for adjustment	C04 Constrained agency	Fear prevents action
13	Long commute wasted	C05 Embodied exhaustion	Two hours daily
31	Exhaustion from performative work	C05 Embodied exhaustion	Tired from pretending
17	Presence equals commitment	C06 Two-tier inequity	Belief driving behaviour
18	Seniors work from home	C06 Two-tier inequity	Observed inequality
35	Shallow relationships	C07 Erasure and invisibility	No real connection
39	Feeling invisible	C07 Erasure and invisibility	“Just a pair of hands”
22	Trust as ideal to bring to Bangladesh	C08 Identity renegotiation	Aspiration
52	Advice to employers: ask juniors	C08 Identity renegotiation	Proactive recommendation
51	Trust would make her stay	C09 Trust deficit	Names missing element

PHASE: 4,5 & 6 in B1

B4:coded Transcript

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2022) of Participant 4

PHASE 1: FAMILIARISATION NARRATIVE

Written before any coding began, after reading the transcript four times.

What struck me on repeated reading:
P4 occupies a unique position – he is both a beneficiary and a designer of flexible working. Unlike other participants who are at the receiving end of policies, he creates them. He uses words like “trust,” “strategic tool,” “output matters more than hours,” “autonomy,” “intentionality.” His perspective is managerial but also empathetic. He explicitly recognises that migrant employees (especially Bangladeshi) may not ask for flexibility because of cultural conditioning.

Tensions I noticed:
He is caught between competing pressures. As a manager, he wants to trust his team; as a director, he must convince a traditional CEO who “believes in office presence.” He acknowledges fairness issues between office workers (who get flexibility) and warehouse staff (who cannot). He also admits that flexibility is not perfect – relatedness suffers, informal learning is lost, and manager dependency remains a risk. His solution (“institutionalise flexibility, don’t depend on individual managers”) is wise, but his own organisation has not fully achieved it.

What the data evoked in me:
Respect for his self-awareness. He admits he was nervous about trust when he first became a manager. He learned that trust produces effort. He also admits his own privilege (“I’m committed because I have influence”). He is not defensive. His advice to employers (“be proactive, don’t wait for Bangladeshi employees to ask”) shows genuine insight from lived experience.

What surprised me:
The explicit recognition that flexibility is not one-size-fits-all. Some employees thrive with flexibility; others need office structure. That nuance is often missing in research. Also surprising: his honesty about the fairness tension between office and operational staff – most managers avoid this topic. His willingness to say “some resentment exists” is refreshing.

What is absent from the data:
He does not mention visa precarity – presumably because he is settled. His own experience of moving from Bangladesh to the UK is mentioned but not as a source of ongoing fear. He is now in a position of power, not precarity.

Reflexive note on my positionality:
As a Bangladeshi researcher, I found his description of cultural bridging very resonant. He explains to British colleagues why Bangladeshi employees are quiet (respect for hierarchy) and to Bangladeshi employees why speaking up is expected. That dual perspective is exactly what I have experienced. I had to be careful not to over-identify, but his insights are valuable for my analysis.

PHASE 2: INITIAL CODES (DISCRETE CODE LIST)
Line-by-line coding producing a numbered code list. This is a required discrete output at this

phase.
Complete Code List (49 codes with definitions)

Code No.	Code Name	Definition	Data Example
1	Managerial role in policy design	As director, decides flexibility policy for team	“As a director, I also decide the policy for my team.”
2	Hybrid personal setup	Works 3 days office, 2 days home	“I personally work hybrid. I'm in the office three days a week, home two days.”
3	Pro-approval instruction	Told managers to approve unless specific reason not to	“I've told my managers to approve unless there's a specific reason not to.”
4	Probationary period more office	New employees expected in office first 3 months	“New employees – first three months – are expected to be in the office more.”
5	Compromise between flexibility and integration	Balances flexibility with relationship building	“That's my compromise between flexibility and integration.”
6	Flexibility = trust	Defines flexibility as synonymous with trust	“For me, flexibility is synonymous with trust.”
7	Evolution from perk to strategic tool	Understanding of flexibility matured over time	“My definition has evolved from ‘flexibility as a perk’ to ‘flexibility as a strategic tool.’”
8	Output > hours	Believes productivity matters more than presence	“I learned that output matters more than hours.”
9	Trust produces effort	Reciprocity effect observed	“When you trust people, they work harder to earn that trust.”
10	Fixed vs flexible contrast	Comparison with rigid Bangladeshi culture	“In Bangladesh, everything was fixed. Fixed hours, fixed desk.”
11	Acknowledges benefits of structure	Some value in face-to-face availability	“Some of that structure in Bangladesh had benefits. People were always available.”
12	Informality as surprise	Initial shock at lack of hierarchy	“A junior person can call me by my first name and challenge my opinion.”
13	Cultural awareness as manager	Bangladeshi background informs management style	“It makes me more aware of cultural differences.”
14	Proactive communication with Bangladeshi employees	Explicitly tells them they don’t need permission	“I explicitly tell them, ‘You can work from home. You don't need to ask permission. Just tell me.’”
15	Understanding cultural conditioning	Recognises that asking feels disrespectful	“They're used to hierarchy. They wait to be told what to do.”
16	Trust-based culture as export	Would bring trust to Bangladesh	“I would want to bring the trust-based culture.”
17	Infrastructure barriers in Bangladesh	Internet, electricity, legal framework underdeveloped	“Infrastructure isn't there – reliable internet, electricity – and the legal framework is underdeveloped.”
18	Return only to change culture	Would only go back as change agent	“I would want to go as someone who can change the culture.”

19	Autonomy increased by flexibility	Even as director, flexibility helps	“Flexible working has increased my autonomy.”
20	Ability to attend family events	Can manage school events without leave	“I can attend my child's school event in the middle of the day and work later.”
21	Breaks reduce stress	Working from home allows restorative breaks	“I can take a break when I'm tired and come back refreshed.”
22	Flexibility improved output	Specific example of budget review	“Working from home that week allowed me to take breaks, go for walks, think clearly… produced better work.”
23	Strategic thinking improved	Fewer interruptions at home	“I have more time to think strategically. At home, I can focus.”
24	Informal learning loss	Misses peer learning in office	“I miss some informal learning from peers.”
25	Concern for team’s learning	Worries team misses opportunities	“I worry that my team is missing learning opportunities when they're not together.”
26	Mixed competence outcomes	Some thrive, some struggle with flexibility	“Some people thrive… Others struggle. They need the structure of an office.”
27	Managerial adaptation required	Not one-size-fits-all	“As a manager, I've had to adapt. Not everyone works the same way.”
28	Relatedness biggest challenge	Virtual connection not same as in-person	“This is the biggest challenge. Virtual connection is not the same as in-person.”
29	Never had lunch with some team members	Lack of personal connection	“I have team members I've never had lunch with. I don't know their families.”
30	Mandatory in-office days for connection	Uses policy to force interaction	“We have mandatory in-office days twice a week. Not for surveillance – for connection.”
31	Team lunches and social events	Attempts to build community	“We have team lunches. We do occasional social events.”
32	Professionally connected but not personally	Relational gap persists	“I feel connected professionally, but not personally.”
33	Trust works when given explicitly	Example of telling team no permission needed	“When I told my team, ‘You don't need to ask permission…’ People relaxed. They started performing better.”
34	One team member’s feedback	Direct evidence of trust impact	“One team member told me, ‘No one has ever trusted me like this before.’”
35	Invisibility risk for manager	Even director can be overlooked when remote	“There was a time when a major decision was made in the office on a day I was working from home. My opinion wasn't sought.”
36	Out of sight, out of mind	Recognises visibility bias	“Out of sight can mean out of mind.”
37	Intentionality required	Must consciously attend important meetings	“Now I make sure to be in the office for important meetings. Flexible working requires intentionality.”
38	Retention as strategic driver	Company offers flexibility to keep staff	“We lost good people during COVID because other companies offered more flexibility. So we had to adapt.”
39	Productivity as evidence	Data shows output increases with flexibility	“Data shows our team produces more output when they have flexibility.”

40	CEO traditional but tolerates	Senior leadership not fully convinced	“The CEO is traditional. He believes in office presence… He tolerates it.”
41	Manager’s role to convince	Ongoing advocacy needed	“My job is to convince him that flexibility is not just tolerated – it's advantageous.”
42	Fairness issue with operational staff	Warehouse staff cannot work from home	“For the warehouse staff, no – they have to be on-site. So there's a fairness issue.”
43	Resentment acknowledged	Some tension between office and operational	“Some resentment exists. We're honest about it.”
44	Win-win when done well	Both employee and company benefit	“It clearly benefits both when done well. Employees get wellbeing. The company gets productivity and retention.”
45	Flexibility requires investment	Not free; needs systems, trust, communication	“It has to be designed intentionally. You can't just say ‘work from home’ and expect magic.”
46	Formal policy but generous interpretation	Policy exists, but practice is informal	“We have a formal policy, but I've told my managers to interpret it generously. So in practice, it's informal.”
47	Manager dependency risk	Team feels secure with him, but fragile	“They know if I leave, the next director might be different. That's a flaw.”
48	Need for institutional flexibility	Should not depend on individual managers	“Ideally, flexibility should be institutional, not dependent on individual managers.”
49	Dual cultural perspective valuable	Bridges Bangladeshi and British cultures	“I understand both cultures. I can bridge the gap.”

PHASE 3: PROVISIONAL GROUPINGS (SEARCHING FOR THEMES)
Grouping codes into candidate categories. This demonstrates movement toward candidate themes before any colour-coding.
Candidate Categories (n=9)

Category No.	Category Name	Codes Included	Brief Definition
C01	Trust-enabled autonomy	06, 07, 08, 09, 19, 20, 21, 22, 33, 34	Trust is the foundation; produces effort and wellbeing
C02	Managerial policy design	01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 46	Designs policy to be generous and trusting
C03	Cultural bridging	13, 14, 15, 49	Uses Bangladeshi background to understand and manage culturally diverse team
C04	Competence mixed outcomes	23, 24, 25, 26, 27	Flexibility improves strategic thinking but reduces informal learning; varies by individual
C05	Relatedness challenge	28, 29, 30, 31, 32	Virtual connection insufficient; uses mandatory office days to compensate
C06	Invisibility risk	35, 36, 37	Even managers can be overlooked when remote; requires intentionality
C07	Strategic intent	38, 39, 40, 41, 44	Flexibility offered for retention and productivity; CEO not fully convinced
C08	Fairness tension	42, 43	Inequality between office and operational staff; resentment exists

C09	Institutionalisation need	47, 48	Manager dependency is a flaw; flexibility should be institutional

How Codes Group into Categories (Evidence Table)

Code No.	Code Name	Belongs to Category	Justification
6	Flexibility = trust	C01 Trust-enabled autonomy	Core definition
9	Trust produces effort	C01 Trust-enabled autonomy	Reciprocity effect
33	Trust works when given explicitly	C01 Trust-enabled autonomy	Example of telling team
1	Managerial role in policy design	C02 Managerial policy design	Designs policy
3	Pro-approval instruction	C02 Managerial policy design	Tells managers to approve
13	Cultural awareness as manager	C03 Cultural bridging	Bangladeshi background informs management
14	Proactive communication with Bangladeshi employees	C03 Cultural bridging	Explicitly tells them no permission needed
23	Strategic thinking improved	C04 Competence mixed outcomes	Benefit of home working
24	Informal learning loss	C04 Competence mixed outcomes	Downside
26	Mixed competence outcomes	C04 Competence mixed outcomes	Some thrive, some struggle
28	Relatedness biggest challenge	C05 Relatedness challenge	Virtual connection inadequate
30	Mandatory in-office days for connection	C05 Relatedness challenge	Compensatory strategy
35	Invisibility risk for manager	C06 Invisibility risk	Even director overlooked
37	Intentionality required	C06 Invisibility risk	Must consciously attend meetings
38	Retention as strategic driver	C07 Strategic intent	Why company offers flexibility
41	Manager’s role to convince	C07 Strategic intent	Advocacy needed
42	Fairness issue with operational staff	C08 Fairness tension	Warehouse staff cannot WFH
43	Resentment acknowledged	C08 Fairness tension	Honest about tension
47	Manager dependency risk	C09 Institutionalisation need	Fragile if he leaves
48	Need for institutional flexibility	C09 Institutionalisation need	Should not depend on individuals

PHASE: 4,5 & 6 in B1

B5:coded Transcript
Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2022)
Participant 5

PHASE 1: FAMILIARISATION NARRATIVE

Written before any coding began, after reading the transcript four times.

What struck me on repeated reading:
P3 occupies a painful middle ground. She has experienced genuine flexibility in a previous UK job (London, retail SME) but now works in a rigid, family-owned manufacturing firm where flexibility is performative. She uses words like “anxiety,” “surveillance,” “humiliated,” “exhausting,” “lose-lose.” Unlike P1 who has no policy, or P3 who has a policy but no access, P3 has a restrictive policy that is actively punitive – requesting WFH requires written approval a week in advance, and on the day she must be online 9-5 without interruption, responding to emails within 15 minutes.

Tensions I noticed:
She knows what good flexibility looks like (her London job) and therefore experiences the contrast as acute loss. She says, “My expectations have changed because of my UK experience. So in a strange way, my time in Bangladesh made me accepting, but my time in London made me demanding.” There is also a tension between her need for flexibility (sick child, delivery) and the punitive conditions that make using it worse than not using it. She eventually decides it is easier to take annual leave than to endure surveillance.

What the data evoked in me:
Anger on her behalf. The hourly schedule request – “broken down by hour” – is infantilising and humiliating. Her manager’s behaviour is not just unsupportive; it is actively destructive. Yet she cannot leave easily (family reasons moved her to Cardiff). The phrase “flexibility is just a slogan on the HR website, not a reality” captures the performative policy perfectly.

What surprised me:
Her explicit comparison that she had more control in her office-only job in Bangladesh because “at least there was no pretence.” That is a devastating critique: a bad policy is worse than no policy. Also surprising: the division among colleagues – those who WFH are viewed with suspicion by those who never do. Flexibility creates a two-tier system even among peers.

What is absent from the data:
No mention of visa precarity – she may have settled status. But she does mention moving to Cardiff for family reasons, which may have limited her job options. No mentor or advocate at her current workplace.

Reflexive note on my positionality:
As a Bangladeshi researcher, I recognised her description of being taught “to follow rules, not question them.” That cultural conditioning is real. However, I had to check my own assumption that all rigid workplaces are Bangladeshi – her current employer is a traditional British family firm. Rigidity is not only a Bangladeshi problem; it is a managerial culture problem. ---

PHASE 2: INITIAL CODES (DISCRETE CODE LIST)

Line-by-line coding producing a numbered code list. This is a required discrete output at this phase.
Complete Code List (48 codes with definitions)

Code No.	Code Name	Definition	Data Example
1	Traditional family-owned firm	Organisational culture described	“It's quite traditional, family-owned.”
2	Previous flexible job experience	Had genuine flexibility in London	“Before this, I worked at a retail SME in London… more modern, more flexible.”
3	Restrictive policy conditions	WFH allowed but with punitive rules	“You have to request it in writing the week before… be online 9 to 5 without interruption.”
4	15-minute email response rule	Extreme surveillance metric	“If you miss a call or don't respond to an email within 15 minutes, they might ask you to come in the next day.”
5	Hassle deters use	Administrative burden makes policy unusable	“It's so much hassle to request and get approval that I often don't bother.”
6	Working twice as hard to prove	Surveillance produces performative overwork	“Even when I do work from home, I feel like I have to work twice as hard to prove I'm actually working.”
7	Flexibility feels like a test	Not genuine; conditional	“It doesn't feel like flexibility. It feels like a test.”
8	Strict core hours	No flexibility in start/end times	“We have strict core hours from 9 to 5. No flexibility.”
9	Old-school finance director	Senior leader’s ideology drives rigidity	“The finance director is old school – he believes if you're not at your desk, you're not working.”
10	Flexibility as empty phrase	Policy has no meaning	“In my current job, flexible working doesn't mean much. It's an empty phrase.”
11	Real flexibility = trust	Defines genuine flexibility	“To me, real flexible working means trust. It means being judged by outcomes, not by hours or location.”
12	Not trusted	Core experience	“Here, I don't feel trusted.”
13	Flexibility as slogan	Performative HR	“Flexibility is just a slogan on the HR website, not a reality.”
14	Similar rigidity to Bangladesh	Fixed hours, no WFH	“In some ways, it's similar. In Bangladesh… very fixed hours too.”
15	Community in Bangladesh	Despite rigidity, social connection existed	“There was a sense of community. We worked hard together, ate lunch together. There was camaraderie.”
16	UK rigidity surprising	Expected UK to be more progressive	“I was surprised that a company in the UK could be so rigid.”
17	Step backward from London job	Contrast with previous positive experience	“It felt like a step backward.”
18	Asking permission for dentist	Infantilisation	“I had to ask permission to leave early for a dentist appointment. It felt like being in school.”

19	Expectations changed by UK experience	Prior flexibility raises standards	“After experiencing flexibility in my London job, I realised what I was missing.”
20	Bangladesh made accepting, London made demanding	Key insight on expectation shift	“My time in Bangladesh made me accepting, but my time in London made me demanding.”
21	Would bring WFH concept to Bangladesh	Aspiration	“I would want to bring the concept that it's okay to work from home sometimes.”
22	Infrastructure and mindset barriers	Reasons hard to implement	“Hard to implement because of infrastructure – internet reliability, power cuts – and cultural mindset.”
23	Cannot go back to zero	Flexibility now non-negotiable	“I've tasted flexibility… I can't go back to zero.”
24	Flexibility gave anxiety, not control	Negative outcome	“It's given me more anxiety.”
25	Requesting WFH as surveillance	Process feels like monitoring	“Having to request WFH a week in advance, having to justify it – that's not control. That's surveillance.”
26	More control in Bangladesh office job	No pretence was better	“I actually had more control in my office-only job in Bangladesh because at least there was no pretence.”
27	Sick child example	WFH requested but monitored	“My manager said okay, but then kept messaging me every hour.”
28	Constant checking during WFH	Hourly messages	“Did you finish that report? Did you check those numbers?”
29	WFH worse than annual leave	Chooses leave to avoid stress	“Next time I'll just take annual leave. That's easier.”
30	Manager distrust damages competence	Feels doubted	“It hurts my sense of competence… I feel like no matter how hard I work, my manager doesn't trust me.”
31	Self-doubt from lack of trust	Questions own performance	“Am I not performing well? Is that why they're watching me?”
32	Informal learning loss	Misses office knowledge sharing	“Most informal learning happens in the office… On the rare day I work from home, I miss all of that.”
33	Learning slower than colleagues	Perceived disadvantage	“I feel like I'm learning slower than my colleagues who are always in the office.”
34	Division among colleagues	WFH viewed with suspicion	“The people who never work from home are seen as more committed. Those of us who occasionally WFH are viewed with suspicion.”
35	Walking on eggshells	Hypervigilance about being seen as lazy	“I don't talk about WFH days. I don't mention it.”
36	Hourly schedule request	Humiliating surveillance	“My manager asked me to send a list of what I would accomplish that day, broken down by hour.”
37	Felt humiliated	Emotional consequence	“I felt humiliated.”
38	Previous manager trusted	Contrast with current	“In my previous job in London… my manager would say, ‘I don't care where you work, just get the job done.’”

39	Performative policy intent	Policy exists for attraction, not genuine	“The HR team knows they need to offer something to compete for talent. But the finance director doesn't believe in it.”
40	Restrictive policy discourages use	Designed so almost no one uses it	“They made the policy so restrictive that almost no one uses it.”
41	Policy as source of tension	Divides rather than benefits	“It's a source of tension, not a benefit.”
42	Scrap or embrace	Clear recommendation	“Scrap it or embrace it. Don't do this half thing.”
43	Policy worse than no policy	Strong critique	“This policy is worse than having no policy at all.”
44	Lose-lose outcome	Neither employee nor company benefits	“Right now? Neither… It's a lose-lose.”
45	Manager dependency	Flexibility depends on individual manager	“Some managers approve easily. Mine makes it painful. So the written policy is meaningless.”
46	No security, no commitment	Will leave for better opportunity	“I don't feel committed to this company… If a better opportunity comes along, I will leave.”
47	Advice: know your worth	To other migrants	“Know your worth. Don't accept a job that doesn't respect your time just because you're grateful.”
48	Advice to employers: trust employees	Proactive trust	“Trust your employees. Stop checking hours. Focus on outcomes.”

PHASE 3: PROVISIONAL GROUPINGS (SEARCHING FOR THEMES)

Grouping codes into candidate categories. This demonstrates movement toward candidate themes before any colour-coding.

Candidate Categories (n=9)

Category No.	Category Name	Codes Included	Brief Definition
C01	Performative restrictive policy	03, 04, 05, 07, 10, 13, 39, 40, 41, 43	Policy exists but with punitive conditions that make it unusable or worse than no policy
C02	Surveillance culture	06, 25, 27, 28, 29, 36, 37	Constant monitoring during WFH; hourly check-ins; humiliation
C03	Contrast with previous positive experience	02, 16, 17, 19, 20, 38	Had genuine flexibility in London; knows what is possible
C04	Rigidity similar to Bangladesh	09, 14, 15, 18, 26	Fixed hours, no autonomy; but Bangladesh had community
C05	Competence undermined	30, 31, 32, 33	Distrust damages self-worth; informal learning lost
C06	Relatedness division	34, 35	WFH employees viewed with suspicion; walking on eggshells
C07	Manager dependency	45, 46	Flexibility depends on individual manager; no institutional security
C08	Trust deficit	11, 12, 44	Trust is missing; outcome is lose-lose
C09	Advice and aspiration	21, 22, 23, 42, 47, 48	Would bring flexibility to Bangladesh; advises migrants and employers

How Codes Group into Categories (Evidence Table)

Code No.	Code Name	Belongs to Category	Justification
3	Restrictive policy conditions	C01 Performative restrictive policy	Written approval, week in advance
4	15-minute email response rule	C01 Performative restrictive policy	Extreme surveillance
5	Hassle deters use	C01 Performative restrictive policy	Administrative burden
43	Policy worse than no policy	C01 Performative restrictive policy	Strong critique
6	Working twice as hard to prove	C02 Surveillance culture	Performative overwork
25	Requesting WFH as surveillance	C02 Surveillance culture	“That's surveillance”
36	Hourly schedule request	C02 Surveillance culture	Humiliating
2	Previous flexible job experience	C03 Contrast with positive experience	London retail SME
20	Bangladesh made accepting, London made demanding	C03 Contrast with positive experience	Expectation shift
9	Old-school finance director	C04 Rigidity similar to Bangladesh	Ideology drives rigidity
15	Community in Bangladesh	C04 Rigidity similar to Bangladesh	Despite rigidity, camaraderie
30	Manager distrust damages competence	C05 Competence undermined	Self-doubt
32	Informal learning loss	C05 Competence undermined	Misses office learning
34	Division among colleagues	C06 Relatedness division	WFH viewed with suspicion
35	Walking on eggshells	C06 Relatedness division	Hypervigilance
45	Manager dependency	C07 Manager dependency	Policy meaningless without supportive manager
46	No security, no commitment	C07 Manager dependency	Will leave
11	Real flexibility = trust	C08 Trust deficit	Definition
44	Lose-lose outcome	C08 Trust deficit	Neither benefits
23	Cannot go back to zero	C09 Advice and aspiration	Flexibility now essential
47	Advice: know your worth	C09 Advice and aspiration	To migrants

PHASE: 4,5 & 6 in B1

B6:coded Transcript
Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2022) of
Participant 6

PHASE 1: FAMILIARISATION NARRATIVE
Written before any coding began, after reading the transcript four times.

What struck me on repeated reading:
P6's experience is very positive and closely resembles P2's (Participant 2). He works in a fintech SME with a genuinely trusting manager, a clear hybrid policy (2 office / 3 home), and core hours (10-3) that enable flexibility. He uses words like "trust," "control," "focused," "better quality work," "reduces stress." He explicitly contrasts his current job with his previous rigid job in the UK (Birmingham) and his even more rigid experience in Bangladesh.

Tensions I noticed:
Despite the positive experience, P6 acknowledges real costs. He feels "less connected" to colleagues and sometimes "invisible" when decisions are made on office days he works from home. He worries that people who go in more often get more visibility and better opportunities. He also notes that newer employees struggle more without informal mentorship. Like P2, he has learned to compensate by being intentional, but the trade-off is real.

What the data evoked in me:
Relief – another participant who has found a genuinely trusting workplace. P6's story shows that flexibility can work well when culture supports it. But also concern – his flexibility depends on his current manager. If that manager leaves, the next might be different. This echoes the manager-dependency risk seen in P2 and P4.

What surprised me:
His explicit awareness that migrants need flexibility even more because they often lack family support networks in the UK. "We might not have family support here. We need to manage things alone. Flexibility makes that possible." That insight is both practical and empathetic. Also striking: his description of initial disbelief – "I thought, is this a test? It took me months to believe it was real." Trust is so unfamiliar that it feels suspicious.

What is absent from the data:
No mention of visa precarity. No mention of family pressure from Bangladesh. No sense of being trapped. P6 has had a previous UK job (Birmingham) that was rigid, so he has a basis for comparison. He has moved from rigid to flexible and appreciates the difference.

Reflexive note on my positionality:
As a Bangladeshi researcher, I recognised his description of hierarchical culture in Bangladesh ("manager would walk around to see who was at their desk"). I also recognised the initial suspicion of trust – that feeling of "is this a test?" I had to be careful not to assume that all positive experiences are identical to P2's. P6's fintech context is different from P2's marketing agency, but the underlying mechanisms (trust, core hours, manager support) are similar.

PHASE 2: INITIAL CODES (DISCRETE CODE LIST)
Line-by-line coding producing a numbered code list. This is a required discrete output at this

phase.
Complete Code List (44 codes with definitions

Code No.	Code Name	Definition	Data Example
1	Fintech SME context	Young, modern company	“Small fintech company in Cardiff”
2	Hybrid policy 2/3	2 days office, 3 days home	“I go to the office on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, and work from home the rest of the week.”
3	Relaxed manager	No surveillance	“My manager is quite relaxed about it, honestly.”
4	Output not hours	Judged by work completion	“As long as I get my work done and attend the important meetings, nobody is really checking if I log in exactly at 9.”
5	Core hours 10-3	Structured flexibility	“We have core hours between 10 and 3. That's when most meetings happen.”
6	Flexible start/end	Can adjust schedule	“Outside that, I can start early or late. Sometimes I start at 8, sometimes 9.30.”
7	Trust as meaning	Defines flexibility	“To me, it means trust. And control over my own time.”
8	Previous rigid UK job	Contrast with current	“In my previous job, I had to be at my desk from 9 to 6 every day. Even if I finished my work early, I couldn't leave.”
9	Life management enabled	Can attend to personal needs	“I can manage life better – like going to the bank, picking up my child from nursery sometimes.”
10	Fixed hierarchy in Bangladesh	Manager walked around	“In Bangladesh, everything was fixed. Fixed time, fixed desk, fixed lunch time. The manager would walk around to see who was at their desk.”
11	Output-based judgement	Liberating	“Here, nobody is watching me. I'm judged by my output, not by how many hours I sit in a chair.”
12	Initial disbelief of trust	Suspicion of genuine flexibility	“I thought, is this a test? Are they checking if I will take advantage? It took me months to believe it was real.”
13	Trust-based culture as export	Would bring to Bangladesh	“I would love to bring the trust-based culture.”
14	Infrastructure barriers	Internet, mindset	“Internet is not always reliable outside big cities… Managers want to see you at your desk.”
15	Output-based evaluation ideal	Judge by quality, not attendance	“Judge me by my work quality, not by my attendance. That would change everything.”
16	Autonomy example: family emergency	Adjusted schedule without permission	“I had to take my mother to a doctor's appointment… I just worked later that evening. I didn't even need to ask permission.”
17	Stress reduction	Control reduces anxiety	“That feeling of control reduces so much stress.”
18	Focus improvement at home	Fewer distractions	“When I work from home, there are fewer distractions. No colleagues stopping by my desk for small talk.”

19	Better quality work	Perceived competence gain	“I can concentrate on complex analysis. I feel I'm doing better quality work.”
20	Informal learning loss	Misses overheard conversations	“I also sometimes feel like I'm missing out on learning. In the office, I used to overhear conversations, learn things casually.”
21	Need for proactive learning	Must schedule knowledge sharing	“Now I have to schedule everything. So it's both easier and harder.”
22	Learning to be intentional	Developing new skill	“I have to be more proactive. I ask more questions on Teams. I schedule quick calls… I'm learning to be more intentional.”
23	Relatedness strain	Less connected to colleagues	“I feel less connected. In the office, we used to have lunch together, chat about weekend plans. Now, those moments are gone.”
24	Virtual coffee breaks inadequate	Not the same	“We have virtual coffee breaks, but it's not the same.”
25	Invisibility risk	Missing out on decisions	“Sometimes I feel invisible, especially when decisions are made quickly and I'm not in the office that day.”
26	Visibility for career progression	Worries about opportunity	“I worry that people who go in more often get more visibility and maybe better opportunities.”
27	Intermittent isolation	After multiple home days	“Sometimes, yes. Especially on days when I work from home three days in a row. I start feeling like I'm working in a silo.”
28	Balancing strategy	Office days reconnect	“But then when I go to the office, I feel reconnected. So I try to balance it.”
29	Trust demonstrated by manager	Example of being trusted	“I messaged my manager saying I need to step away for two hours. He just replied, ‘No problem, just update me later.’ That felt amazing.”
30	Felt respected	Emotional outcome	“Like he respected me as a person.”
31	Invisibility example: project exclusion	Missed opportunity	“Last quarter, there was a project I really wanted to be on. I found out later that the team had discussed it during an in-office day when I was working from home.”
32	Felt invisible	Negative emotion	“I felt invisible. Like I missed the boat just because I wasn't physically there.”
33	Strategic intent: retention and productivity	Why company offers flexibility	Not explicitly asked, but implied positive
34	Overall positive but imperfect	Balanced view	“For the most part, yes. Productivity is good. People seem happier. But I think communication suffers sometimes.”
35	New employee struggle	Lack of informal mentorship	“Newer employees struggle more. They don't have the informal mentorship that happens naturally in an office.”
36	Improvement: inclusive communication	Record meetings, ask remote opinions	“Make sure that all important decisions are discussed on a channel that everyone can access… Managers should actively ask remote people for their opinions.”

37	Win-win outcome	Both employee and company benefit	“Both, honestly. I benefit because I have better work-life balance… The company benefits because I'm more productive and less likely to leave.”
38	Trade-off: visibility vs flexibility	Sacrifice career progression	“I might sacrifice some visibility and career progression. So it's a trade-off.”
39	Formal policy but manager dependent	Implementation varies	“We have a formal hybrid policy written down. But in practice, it really depends on your manager.”
40	Commitment to manager, not organisation	Would follow manager	“It makes me less committed to the organisation and more committed to my specific manager. If he leaves, I might leave too.”
41	Cannot go back to rigid	Flexibility now essential	“I don't think I could go back to a strict 9-to-5 office job.”
42	Migrants need flexibility more	Lack of family support	“For people like us – migrants – flexible working is even more important. We might not have family support here. We need to manage things alone.”
43	Employers should be proactive	Don't wait for migrants to ask	“Employers should proactively offer it, not wait for us to ask.”
44	Build trust first	Foundation for flexibility	“Build trust first, then flexibility works naturally.”

PHASE 3: PROVISIONAL GROUPINGS (SEARCHING FOR THEMES)
Grouping codes into candidate categories. This demonstrates movement toward candidate themes before any colour-coding.
Candidate Categories (n=8)

Category No.	Category Name	Codes Included	Brief Definition
C01	Trust-enabled autonomy	03, 04, 06, 07, 16, 17, 29, 30	Manager trust enables control over schedule without fear
C02	Genuine hybrid infrastructure	02, 05, 08, 11	Clear policy, core hours, output focus
C03	Competence enhancement & trade-offs	18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 38	Flexibility improves focus and quality but reduces informal learning; visibility trade-off
C04	Relatedness strain & compensation	23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 32	Reduced connection; uses office days to compensate; invisibility risk
C05	Cultural appreciation & contrast	10, 12, 13, 14, 15	Positive contrast with Bangladesh; initial disbelief in trust
C06	Manager dependency risk	39, 40, 41	Commitment to manager, not organisation; would leave if manager changes
C07	Win-win but imperfect	34, 35, 36, 37	Overall positive; communication challenges; new employee struggle
C08	Proactive advice	42, 43, 44	Employers should be proactive; migrants need flexibility; build trust first

How Codes Group into Categories (Evidence Table)

Code No.	Code Name	Belongs to Category	Justification
3	Relaxed manager	C01 Trust-enabled autonomy	No surveillance
7	Trust as meaning	C01 Trust-enabled autonomy	Definition
16	Autonomy example	C01 Trust-enabled autonomy	Family emergency without permission
2	Hybrid policy 2/3	C02 Genuine hybrid infrastructure	Clear structure
11	Output-based judgement	C02 Genuine hybrid infrastructure	Liberating
18	Focus improvement at home	C03 Competence enhancement	Fewer distractions
20	Informal learning loss	C03 Competence enhancement	Misses overheard conversations
38	Trade-off visibility vs flexibility	C03 Competence enhancement	Career progression concern
23	Relatedness strain	C04 Relatedness strain	Less connected
25	Invisibility risk	C04 Relatedness strain	Missing decisions
31	Invisibility example	C04 Relatedness strain	Project exclusion
10	Fixed hierarchy in Bangladesh	C05 Cultural appreciation	Contrast
12	Initial disbelief of trust	C05 Cultural appreciation	“Is this a test?”
39	Formal policy but manager dependent	C06 Manager dependency risk	Implementation varies
40	Commitment to manager	C06 Manager dependency risk	Would follow manager
34	Overall positive but imperfect	C07 Win-win but imperfect	Balanced view
36	Improvement suggestions	C07 Win-win but imperfect	Inclusive communication
42	Migrants need flexibility more	C08 Proactive advice	Lack of family support
44	Build trust first	C08 Proactive advice	Foundation

PHASE: 4,5 & 6 in B1