University of Southern Queensland

Meaning-making as a dialectical systems process: A scoping review

A Thesis submitted by

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GradDip Couns

For the award of

Master of Counselling

2025

ABSTRACT

Meaning-making is widely recognised across psychology, systems theory, relational neuroscience, and complexity science as central to human adaptation, yet current conceptualisations remain fragmented across levels of mind, relationship, self, and system. This scoping review synthesised how meaning-making is conceptualised from a systems perspective and examined the structural patterns through which meaning emerges, stabilises, destabilises, and reorganises. Following JBI methodology (Peters et al., 2020) and PRISMA-ScR (Tricco et al., 2018) guidelines, searches across PubMed, Scopus, PsycINFO, and ProQuest identified 2,019 records, with 33 meeting eligibility criteria. Data extraction focused on relational mechanisms, differentiation–integration processes, multi-level emergence, and dialectical oppositions, producing a 10-category dialectical matrix. Across the literature, meaning-making consistently emerged as a dynamic, interdependent process organised around a bi-polar relational structure anchored in a static orienting pole of meaning. Five recurrent dialectical patterns, differentiation–integration, independence–interdependence, implicit–explicit, chaos–order, and stability–change were identified across the literature. Although articulated using different conceptual vocabularies, these oppositions consistently reflected the same underlying relational structure: a static, independent orienting pole (Group A) and a dynamic, interdependent meaning-making pole (Group A–B). Across domains, these paired constructs were regulated through mechanisms such as co-regulation, feedback loops, and synchrony, indicating that they represent structurally equivalent expressions of a common systemic dynamic rather than discrete or unrelated processes.

Together, these findings provide the empirical foundation for the development of a proposed Relational Coherence Model (RCM). The RCM is conceptualised as a preliminary theoretical framework in which meaning-making emerges through the regulated interplay of stability and transformation across relational systems, expressed through the relational architecture of the Self.

The review offers conceptual clarity relevant to counselling, systems psychology, interdisciplinary research, and consciousness studies, demonstrating that coherence and novel forms of meaning emerge not through the removal of tension, but through its iterative and productive regulation.

CERTIFICATION OF THESIS

I Peta McCullagh declare that the Thesis entitled *Meaning-making as a dialectical systems process: a scoping review* is not more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references, and footnotes. The thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

Date: December 12th 2025

Endorsed by:

Dr Paul McQuillan
Principal Supervisor

Student and supervisors' signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Paul McQuillan, for introducing me to Viktor Frankl's work on meaning-making and logotherapy. For his guidance, encouragement, and intellectual support throughout the development of this thesis. I am also very grateful to Senior Research Librarian Tracy Bruce, whose expertise and generous assistance were invaluable in designing and refining the search strategy and navigating database systems, including Ovid, JBI SUMARI and EndNote.

My thanks extend to the supportive academic community within the Master of Counselling program, particularly Dr Elisa Agostinelli and Dr Nathan Beel, whose teaching, guidance, and encouragement significantly shaped my development as both a researcher and a counselling practitioner. Their insights and mentorship enriched the conceptual and ethical foundations of this work.

I would also like to acknowledge my Buddhist friend and teacher, Pema Düddal, whose introduction to Buddhist philosophy helped cultivate my curiosity about consciousness, and the true nature of Self.

Finally, I extend my deepest gratitude to my wonderful friends and family for their unwavering support and belief in my capacity to complete this thesis. In particular, I thank my father David, my mother Jenny, and my children Sadie and Hector, whose humour, patience, and love helped me through each stage of this work.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all who seek truth, and to the compassionate evolution of humanity as we each unfold into our fullest becoming.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background and Rationale

Meaning-making is widely recognised as foundational across psychology and related fields, yet it remains theoretically fragmented and lacks an integrative, multi-level framework. Psychological traditions variously emphasise coherence, purpose, cognitive interpretation, developmental restructuring, or relational negotiation (Baumeister, 1991; Frankl, 1959/2006; Kegan, 1982; Park, 2010). Constructivist and relational perspectives foreground the interpersonal, narrative, and symbolic processes through which meaning emerges (Bruner, 1990; Neimeyer, 2001), while organisational research conceptualises sensemaking as a collective process that coordinates shared understanding under conditions of complexity and uncertainty (Weick, 1995). Despite this breadth, these approaches tend to address discrete dimensions of meaning-making rather than its systemic coherence.

A systems and complexity perspective offers a conceptual bridge across fragmented accounts of meaning-making by demonstrating that meaning is not produced solely within the individual mind, but arises through relational, embodied, and self-organising processes embedded within larger systems. Classical and contemporary systems theorists emphasise that psychological processes participate in broader patterns of organisation extending across biological, interpersonal, organisational, and ecological domains (von Bertalanffy, 1968; Capra & Luisi, 2014). Embodied and enactive accounts further show that meaning is enacted through lived experience and organism–environment interaction, rather than constructed abstractly or internally (Merleau-Ponty, 2012; Varela et al., 1991). Taken together, these perspectives indicate that meaning-making is inherently multi-level, relational, and emergent.

Importantly, the systems perspective adopted in this thesis does not treat the organising pattern underlying meaning-making as confined to psychological or biologically living systems. The same iterative structure—characterised by differentiation and integration, boundary formation, and dynamic regulation between stability and change—appears across non-living domains such as mathematics, computation, engineered systems, and cosmological models of emergence. While these domains differ fundamentally in substrate and phenomenological expression, they instantiate the same underlying organisational pattern. Meaning-making is therefore understood here not as a property exclusive to living systems, but as a general organising dynamic through which coherent forms emerge, stabilise, and transform across levels of reality.

Within this framework, organisation is understood to operate sequentially, such that unobservable orientation, ordering, or movement functions as an a priori organising foundation for observable emergent form. The pattern does not begin with observable structure or interaction, but with a non-physicalised, implicit ordering that precedes and conditions manifestation. Observable forms, whether psychological, biological, computational, or cosmological, are thus treated as emergent expressions of prior organisation, rather than as primary origins of order. This sequencing reflects a structural precedence of inner organisation over outer form, without implying temporal determinism or reduction to mental causation.

Responding to this conceptual fragmentation, this thesis undertakes a scoping review to map how meaning-making is conceptualised across diverse literatures and to clarify its underlying systemic structure. The philosophical orientation adopted in this thesis is best described as **organisational idealism**. This position treats meaning and consciousness as ontologically primary, while understanding their expression through self-organising relational structures rather than through static substances (Hegel, 1977/2018). Reality is approached as an organised process in which coherent forms emerge through patterned differentiation and integration, rather than as an aggregation of fundamentally inert or unrelated components.

Within organisational idealism, meaning and consciousness are not confined to individual minds or biologically living systems, but are expressed wherever relational organisation gives rise to coherent structure across scales. Organisation therefore functions as the primary explanatory principle of emergence. This orientation is informed by idealist traditions that emphasise the primacy of meaning and by panpsychist perspectives that recognise the pervasiveness of experiential organisation, while placing primary emphasis on organisational structure and systemic coherence rather than on metaphysical substance claims (Goff, 2017; Ramm, 2021). This orientation is not advanced as a metaphysical preference, but as a structural requirement arising from the observed directionality of meaning-making processes in the reviewed literature.

Across domains, coherent and sustainable emergence consistently follows a sequence in which internally organised meaning **(A)** precedes and regulates relational expansion and interaction **(A → A–B)**. In this thesis, *a priori* denotes a primary organising reference (A) from which relational processes (A–B) unfold, indicating structural precedence rather than cognitive or metaphysical priority. This ordering aligns with perspectives that treat meaning, experience, or consciousness as organising conditions rather than as derivative by-products (Gordon, 2021).

By contrast, physicalist ontologies commonly presume an inverse sequencing, in which externally constituted relational or material processes (A–B) are treated as primary and internal meaning or subjectivity is subsequently derived (A–B → A). Within the framework developed in this review, this reversal corresponds to patterns of incoherence, fragmentation, or compensatory integration, identified here as unsustainable emergence. The adoption of organisational idealism therefore reflects alignment with the directional logic observed in the literature, rather than an a priori metaphysical commitment.

Within this perspective, meaning-making and the Self are structured by the same relational dialectic. Internally stabilised meaning aligns with a differentiated and independent organising state (A), while dynamic meaning-making unfolds through a relationally integrated and interdependent process (A–B). The Self expresses this same pattern, exercising agency through its capacity to regulate the direction and degree of movement between stability and relational engagement. Agency thus emerges not as absolute autonomy or relational dissolution, but as a structured, self-organising capacity to navigate coherence within complex systems.

In the context of meaning-making, coherence is understood as the capacity to hold singular meaning and relational plurality together, allowing stability and transformation to co-evolve without collapse into either. This organising logic is formalised later in the thesis as the equal–opposite–same principle, developed in Chapters 5 and 6 to describe how coherence is sustained through the simultaneous regulation of opposing but non-cancelling processes.

Together, these perspectives provide a coherent philosophical and systems-based foundation for the exploration undertaken in this thesis. To support clarity throughout the document, key terms used to describe meaning, meaning-making, and their systemic organisation are defined below, with full elaborations provided in Appendix B.

1.2. Key Terms Glossary

Meaning refers to the closed, inward, stabilising orientation through which coherence, identity, and interpretive continuity are maintained. It reflects the static pole of experience upon which the Self organises and orients.

Meaning-making refers to the open, dynamic, bi-polar, relational, and adaptive process through which meaning shifts over time. It involves interaction with internal states, interpersonal relationships, cultural contexts, and broader systemic environments.

Independent meaning pole describes the static, closed-system, and self-originating dimension of meaning, providing structure, boundaries, and internal coherence.

Interdependent meaning-making poles describes the open-system, bi-polar, relational process in which meaning emerges between perspectives or systems through reciprocal influence and feedback.

Dialectic division and union describe the complementary movements of differentiation and integration that shape how meaning stabilises, destabilises, and reorganises.

Systems approach conceptualises meaning-making as emerging from patterns of interaction rather than isolated mental processes. It highlights feedback loops, nested hierarchies, non-linearity, interconnection, and emergent order (Adcock et al., 2024).

Self refers to the *centre* of conscious experience that moves between independent meaning (A) and interdependent meaning-making (A–B). It is both a stable reference point and an adaptive participant in ongoing relational change. *In this thesis, the Self is not treated as a discrete entity located within a system, but as the organising reference through which system boundaries, relational distinctions, and dialectical movement are constituted.*

These terms form the conceptual vocabulary of the scoping review and the integrative model that follows.

1.3. Dialectical Systems Framework

The key theoretical position of this thesis is that meaning-making functions as a relational and dialectical system in which coherence emerges through the dynamic balance of complementary opposites. Meaning (static, closed, orienting) and meaning-making (dynamic, open, adaptive) operate as interdependent poles that together structure experience (Hegel, 1977/2018). Comparable dialectical pairings recur across developmental psychology, systems theory, relational psychotherapy, and complexity science, including independence and interdependence, stability and transformation, and differentiation and integration (Bateson, 1972; Kegan, 1982; Prigogine & Stengers, 1984). Contemporary relational accounts of consciousness similarly suggest that the contents and levels of experience arise through ongoing systemic interaction (Tsuchiya & Saigo, 2021).

These oppositional dynamics act as regulatory forces: when held in productive balance they support sustainable emergence, and when imbalanced they generate fragmentation, collapse, fusion, or other forms of incoherence. Within a systems perspective, stability and adaptability are not competing outcomes but mutually enabling capacities that depend on the navigation of relational tension (Capra & Luisi, 2014). This dialectical

functioning forms the methodological and analytical scaffolding for the scoping review, guiding how meaning-making processes are identified, compared, and synthesised across the literature.

From this framing, a recurring systemic pattern becomes visible: meaning establishes itself (A), enters relational movement (A–B), and returns inward for integration (B–A), generating an iterative cycle through which coherence is maintained or reorganised (A_1). This rhythmic alternation between static stasis and dynamic transformation provides a unifying structure that later informs the development of the Relational Coherence Model in Chapter 6.

Table 1.1 below summarises how static meaning (A), linear meaning-making (A – B), and non-linear meaning + meaning-making (A+A ↔ B) are used throughout the thesis. The full dynamic and layered structure is too complex to fully articulate here; however, this simplified version, illustrating [1] independent (A), [2] interdependent (A–B), and [3] independent–interdependent (A↔B), forms the basis for understanding the relational dynamics used throughout the thesis.”.

Table 1..1– Directional and Dimensional Modes of Meaning and Meaning-Making Used in This Thesis

Type	**0**	**0+1**	**0+1+2**
Code	**(A)**	**(A→A–B)**	**(A + A↔B)**
Ontological–Epistemic State	**Static** *(undifferentiated potential)*	**Dynamic (Linear)** (*differentiating linearity*)	**Dynamic (Reciprocal)** *(differentiated–integrative)*
Ontological Mode	**Static non-duality** (undifferentiated unity)	**Dynamic duality** (differentiated opposites)	**Integrated plurality** (unity-in-difference)
Form Status	**Formless (undifferentiated) *a priori*** **Formed (differentiated) *a priori***	**Form emerging through boundary formation** **Transformation into new boundary formation**	**Form stabilised while remaining open to further transformation or emergent new form**
Movement	**Stasis**	**Sequential movement**	**Simultaneous reciprocal movement**
Orientation	**Inner**	**Inner→Outer**	**Inner↔Outer**
Time–space organisation	**Pre-spatiotemporal** (time=undifferentiated field of potential directionality and dimensionality)	**Temporal organisation (differentiated)** Potential time → emerging timespace in now sequentially moving forward	**Time–space temporal–spatial organisation (integrated)** Simultaneous time ↔ space
Self Organisation (Centrality & Distribution)	**A priori Integrated Self** Non-physicalised, centralised organising reference Invariable (structural stability) **Independent**	**Differentiating Self** A priori organising centre giving rise to a posteriori differentiation Transitional (invariable → variable) **Independent → Interdependent**	**A posteriori Integrated–Differentiated Selves** Physicalised, decentralised relational expression Variable expression regulated around a non-physical invariable centre **Independent ↔ Interdependent**
Global–Local Organising System of Self (Mind–Body)	**Invariant Global Self / Mind** Non-physicalised, undifferentiated organising field Centralised, inner, independent	**Differentiating Self / Mind–Body Interface** Decentralised organising centres giving rise to a posteriori differentiation Boundary formation through sequential	**Integrated Global–Local Self / Mind–Body System** Invariant centre with decentralised, physicalised expression Differentiated bodies/selves regulated

	Formless thought as a priori reference **(A)**	inner→outer movement Independent → interdependent **(A → A–B)**	around a non-physical invariant reference Independent ↔ interdependent (A + A↔B)
A Priori Organising Reference	**Stable A (true a priori)** Invariant self-construct	**A → A–B** *(if Stable A)* Invariant →variant	**A → A–B → A_1** *(sustainable)* Coherent integration
	Unstable Ã (false a priori) A posteriori variant self-construct misidentified as primary	**Ã→ A–B** *(if Unstable* Ã*)* Variant→ variant	**Ã→ A–B → A'** *(unsustainable)* Relational imbalance between variant integration and variant differentiation cannot be sustained
Self-Scale & Alignment	**Global Integrated Self** Invariant, system-wide organising reference Expresses the global coherence pattern **A**	**Local Differentiated Self (Sequencing)** Local organising expression entering relational expansion Sequential alignment with the global pattern **A → A–B**	**Local Differentiated Self (Outcome)** Local organising expression either synchronised or asynchronous relative to the global pattern, resulting in **A_1** (coherent) or **A'** (incoherent)
System Status	**Undifferentiated** internal Pre-relational organising condition **(closed)**	**Differentiated** internal→ external location, linear dynamic division **(open)**	**Integrated** internal↔external location non-linear division↔union **(closed↔open)**
Emergence Phase	**Pre-emergent potential (internal)**	**Weak Emergence (internal, sequential)**	**Strong Emergence (internal↔external, threshold event)**
Biological Analogue	Zygotic potential	Cell division / differentiation	Birth of independent organism
Meaning	Meaning *Independent meaning*	Meaning→Meaning-making *Interdependent meaning-making*	Meaning + Meaning-making *Independent–interdependent meaning-making*
Relational Mode	Independent (inner location)	Independent→Interdependent (inner→outer internal location)	Independent ↔Interdependent (inner↔outer/internal↔**external location)**
Organisation	Differentiated–integrated	Differentiated	Differentiated + Integrated

Dialectic Activity	Dialectic Dormancy	Dialectic Division	Dialectic Division + Dialectic Union
Stability	**Invariant a priori stability** Internal-first grounding (A) **Derived unstable foundation** External-first grounding (A–B treated as primary)	**Stability → Variability** Internal grounding regulating change **Instability → Compensatory change** External grounding driving regulation	**Regulated Stability + Change** *(sustainable)* Internal-first sequencing (A → A–B → A) **Amplified Instability** *(unsustainable)* External-first sequencing (A–B → A')
Expression	Implicit	Implicit→Explicit	Implicit + Explicit
Complexity	Simple	Simple→Complex	Simple + Complex

Note: Each column represents a state that is defined relationally relative to prior organisational levels. “Undifferentiated,” “differentiating,” and “differentiated” refer to internal organisation rather than absolute form. The notation 0, 0+1, and 0+1+2 denotes cumulative organisation. Each successive mode retains all prior dynamics (e.g., stasis and sequential movement) while introducing an additional organising capacity, such that simultaneity presupposes and integrates earlier phases rather than replacing them. Time and space are treated here as organisational expressions of meaning-making dynamics rather than as primary ontological containers, with sequential time preceding and regulating the emergence of spatial extension. The present is conceptualised as an undifferentiated field of potential directionality and dimensionality, within which no direction or extension is yet actualised. Directional sequence emerges through linear differentiation, while dimensional form arises only when reciprocal movement stabilises relational structure. Undifferentiated field of multidirectional and multidimensional potential anchoring experienced timespace.

The instability of the a posteriori ego-mediated self arises from alignment with a reversed organisational sequence (A–B → A), in which relational engagement or external conditions are treated as the primary organising reference rather than being regulated by an underlying a priori centre. Within this framework, such instability is not a moral failing or psychological defect, but a directional and organisational outcome. When interdependence is positioned as primary and independence is subsequently derived, regulation becomes compensatory and uneven, producing imbalanced results regardless of intent or effort.

1.4. Core Finding of Reverse-order sequencing

Reverse-order sequencing (A–B → A) arises when interdependence is treated as the primary organising reference rather than as a relational extension of independence. In this configuration, meaning-making is sought through externally mediated, interdependent processes in order to regulate inner disturbance, resulting in relational engagement (A–B) preceding the establishment of an independent organising reference (A).

Within this framework, gravitation toward the reverse organisational sequence (A–B → A) is driven by a phenomenological reliance on *interdependence as a primary organising condition*. When independent meaning (A) is not functioning as an invariant internal reference, relational and sensory engagement (A–B) is recruited to stabilise inner disturbance. Meaning-making is therefore sought externally through interdependent processes, causing relational engagement to precede and condition subsequent meaning formation. While this

configuration may offer short-term experiential coherence, it remains structurally asynchronous relative to the global organising sequence in which independence precedes interdependence.

For clarity, the A / A–B coding used throughout this thesis maps onto established distinctions within systems and developmental theory, here expressed in terms of inner and outer orientation rather than thermodynamic closure.

Category A corresponds to an inner-oriented organising condition, characterised by internal coherence, boundary integrity, and relative stasis. At this stage, meaning functions as a stable orienting reference rather than as an adaptive or relational process.

Category A–B corresponds to a linear, sequential movement from inner to outer orientation, in which meaning-making unfolds through relational engagement beyond the internal reference point. Here, meaning-making proceeds directionally (inner → outer), enabling differentiation, interaction, and expansion into relational and contextual domains.

The integrated configuration (A + A–B) corresponds to a simultaneous inner ↔ outer orientation, in which internal coherence is preserved while relational engagement is actively regulated. At this level, meaning-making involves both linear sequencing and non-linear, reciprocal integration, allowing outward engagement (A–B) and inward integration (B–A) to occur dynamically rather than reactively. Importantly, this configuration represents a formed state that may be either resolved or unresolved, depending on the quality of integration achieved.

Throughout the thesis, A–B denotes outward relational engagement, B–A denotes inward integrative return, and A ↔ B is used when reciprocal, non-linear interaction between inner and outer orientations is emphasised. These distinctions are employed heuristically to support interpretation of the reviewed literature, rather than as fixed ontological classifications.

Notation Key

A = static, independent, inner organising reference (orienting condition)

A–B = dynamic, interdependent meaning-making process (linear inner → outer engagement)

B–A = inward integration of relational experience (reflective return)

A ↔ B = reciprocal, non-linear, simultaneous regulation between inner and outer orientations

A → A–B = sustainable sequencing in which relational engagement unfolds from an internally coherent organising reference

A–B → A = potentially destabilising sequencing when interdependence is treated as the primary organising reference rather than integrated with A

1.5. Problem Statement

Despite the centrality of meaning-making to human adaptation, identity formation, psychotherapy, learning, and social coordination, the construct remains theoretically fragmented, inconsistently defined, and conceptually under-specified across psychological, philosophical, and transdisciplinary literatures (Baumeister, 1991; Bruner, 1990; Montuori, 2013; Park, 2010). No scoping or systematic review has yet mapped how systems-theoretic frameworks (e.g., autopoietic, enactive, dynamical, ecological, and second-order cybernetic approaches) have been used to reconceptualise meaning-making as an emergent, relational, and multi-scale process (Park, 2010; Steger, 2012). This absence hinders the development of integrative models capable of bridging individual, interpersonal, organisational, and socio-ecological domains, limiting both theoretical coherence and practical application in fields such as psychotherapy, education, organisational resilience, and planetary sense-making (Rogers et al., 2013).

1.6. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this scoping review is to examine how meaning-making is defined, theorised, and applied across transdisciplinary scholarship relevant to counselling and systems-oriented practice. Specifically, the review seeks to:

1. Map how meaning-making is conceptualised across fields;
2. Identify shared relational, dialectical, and systemic patterns;
3. Synthesise these patterns into a coherent cross-disciplinary framework;
4. Develop an integrative model, the Relational Coherence Model (RCM); and
5. Clarify meaning-making as an adaptive mechanism within individual, relational, and wider systemic contexts.

These aims align with the exploratory and theory-building orientation of scoping review methodology (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Peters et al., 2020).

1.7. Research Question

The overarching research question guiding this scoping review is:

How is meaning-making conceptualised within and across transdisciplinary scholarship, encompassing psychological, relational, philosophical, developmental, and

systems-oriented perspectives, and what recurrent relational, dialectical, and emergent patterns underpin these conceptualisations?

To facilitate a structured and comprehensive exploration, this primary question is operationalised through the following subsidiary questions:

1. Mapping Diversity: In what ways, and through what core constructs, is meaning-making theorised and operationalised across diverse fields relevant to counselling and human development (e.g., cognitive neuroscience, cultural psychology, relational psychotherapy, complex systems theory, and dialectical philosophy)?
2. Identifying Patterns: What patterns of relationality (e.g., independence–interdependence), dialectical tension (e.g., stability–transformation, differentiation–integration), and systemic/emergent organisation consistently appear in these conceptualisations?
3. Implications for Practice: In what ways do the identified conceptualisations and patterns illuminate meaning-making as an adaptive mechanism supporting psychological coherence, relational attunement, and systemic resilience in therapeutic contexts?

These questions align with the exploratory, mapping, and theory-building objectives of scoping review methodology (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Levac et al., 2010; Peters et al., 2020) while permitting an interpretive synthesis that extends toward original theoretical contribution, appropriate for a Master's-level thesis in Counselling. The findings presented in Chapters 4 and 5 directly address each subsidiary question, culminating in the proposed dialectical–systemic model of meaning-making.

1.8. Objectives

The objectives of this scoping review are to examine how meaning-making is defined, conceptualised, and applied across diverse disciplinary contexts; to identify recurrent dialectical patterns, such as independence and interdependence, or differentiation and integration, that underpin meaning-making processes; and to extract, analyse, and synthesise the conceptual features that constitute meaning-making within systemic and relational frameworks. This review also seeks to map how these features connect to broader constructs such as consciousness, self, and systemic organisation, with the aim of constructing a Relational Coherence Model that unifies the findings into a coherent theoretical framework. The study offers significant theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions by revealing an underlying iterative pattern of self-organised consciousness in which independence (A) emerges first, followed by the higher-order relational configuration of

interdependence (A–B), and in which sustainable emergence is achieved only when these complementary opposites remain dynamically balanced. This pattern extends beyond psychological or social processes and appears to reflect a universal organising principle that is observable across biological, cognitive, relational, and even cosmological systems, thereby positioning the review's findings as a meaningful contribution to cross-disciplinary understandings of coherence and emergence.

The significance of this study lies in its identification of a cross-disciplinary organising pattern that illuminates how meaning-making emerges, stabilises, and evolves across systems. By revealing that independence and interdependence form a dynamic and iterative structure through which consciousness, identity, and relational coherence develop, this review demonstrates that meaning-making is not confined to psychological processes but reflects a universal principle governing biological organisation, cognitive development, social–relational dynamics, and cosmological models of emergence. This insight offers a unifying conceptual foundation that advances theoretical integration across disciplines, strengthens methodological approaches for examining complex relational processes, and provides practical relevance for counselling, organisational development, and systems-based interventions. In highlighting this fundamental pattern of balanced differentiation and integration between [1] independent *meaning* (A) and [2] interdependent *meaning-making* (A–B), the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how systems maintain coherence, adapt to change, and support sustainable forms of emergence.

1.9. Theoretical Significance

1.9.1. A Unifying Dialectical Pattern

The study identifies a recurrent dialectical structure, independent differentiation → relational integration → emergent coherence, across 33 diverse publications. This pattern appears to be a transdisciplinary invariant, bridging psychology, systems theory, cognitive science, relational sciences, complexity theory, and philosophy.

1.9.2. Advancing Theories of Consciousness

By positioning consciousness as the *a priori* organising field from which meaning structures emerge, the study offers a coherent systems-based account that contributes to ongoing debates surrounding:

- the hard problem of consciousness
- the mind–body problem
- the nature of perception and intentionality
- the relationship between individual and relational consciousness

1.9.3. A Framework for Solving Foundational Scientific–Philosophical Problems

The iterative pattern identified in this review, self-organised emergence from independence into interdependence, provides a conceptual lens through which several foundational scientific and philosophical problems can be reconsidered. This relational structure resonates with longstanding theoretical debates concerning the emergence of life from non-life (Deamer, 2019; Kauffman, 1995) and the emergence of consciousness from fundamental processes (Chalmers, 1996; Goff, 2017), the relational dynamics of the Big Bang and cosmogenesis (Prigogine & Stengers, 1984), the origin and nature of free will (Strawson, 2010), and the integration of mind and matter within a coherent ontology (Chalmers, 1996; Strawson, 2006). While this thesis does not claim to resolve these complex issues, it demonstrates that a shared organising mechanism is present across systems: a cyclic progression between differentiation and integration that generates novel forms of order. By framing meaning and meaning-making as the singular expression of this universal systemic dynamic, the review positions psychological processes within a broader cosmological pattern, suggesting that meaning (A) and its relational unfolding (A–B/A↔B) together constitute the fundamental organising principle of emergence woven through the structure of reality itself.

1.10. Integration Across Disciplines

This study bridges long-standing disciplinary silos by demonstrating that meaning-making is not the proprietary construct of any single field but a shared relational dynamic expressed across psychology, philosophy, cognitive science, developmental theory, social and relational sciences, systems and complexity theory, neuroscience, and broader transdisciplinary inquiry (Kegan, 1982; Kegan, 1994; Varela et al., 1991; Capra & Luisi, 2014). By mapping these intersections and tracing the recurrent patterns that appear within them, the review highlights the cross-disciplinary coherence of meaning-making as a systemic process (von Bertalanffy, 1968; Capra & Luisi, 2014).

This integrative synthesis supports the development of a unified Relational Coherence Model capable of informing research across multiple domains and contributing to more comprehensive understandings of consciousness, development, organisation, and systemic emergence

1.11. Methodological Significance

Methodologically, this study presents a ten-category dialectical coding matrix, developed through iterative text-tagging and cross-disciplinary synthesis, to organise and interpret patterns within the scoping review. The matrix supported the systematic extraction and organisation of complex relational constructs in predominantly theoretical literature,

enabling patterns to be traced across psychological, systems-oriented, philosophical, and conceptual sources.

By working within Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) scoping review guidance while adapting extraction and synthesis procedures for non-empirical material, the review illustrates how scoping methodologies can be applied to conceptual domains where evidence is not primarily clinical. The dialectical synthesis approach employed here provides one structured way of organising and comparing relational patterns in complex, transdisciplinary literatures, and may offer a useful reference point for future scoping reviews engaging with theoretical or systems-based research (Arksey & O'Malley, 2020).

1.12. Practical and Applied Significance

The findings of this review hold substantial practical relevance for psychotherapy and counselling, education and learning sciences, organisational development, interdisciplinary collaboration, social–ecological system design, and processes of conflict mediation and relational repair (Capra & Luisi, 2014; Folke et al., 2016). By conceptualising meaning-making as a dynamic balance between differentiation and integration, the study offers a framework for supporting psychological resilience, relational coherence, and collective adaptability across diverse applied settings (Siegel, 2012; Capra & Luisi, 2014). This systems-based understanding provides practitioners, educators, leaders, and change facilitators with a guiding principle for identifying imbalance, fostering constructive relational dynamics, and enabling new forms of insight and coordinated action to emerge within individuals, groups, and wider communities (Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2017; Folke, 2006).

1.13. Meta-Significance: Meaning-Making as a Universal Systemic Process

At the broadest level, this research indicates that meaning-making may reflect a universal evolutionary dynamic in which independent differentiation (A) gives rise to dynamic relational interdependence (A–B), culminating in emergent forms of coherence. This iterative structure is not limited to human cognition but can be observed across neural networks, ecosystems, social systems, identity development, cultural evolution, and even cosmological models of emergence (Capra & Luisi, 2014; Kauffman, 1995; Prigogine & Stengers, 1984). Such continuity suggests that meaning-making is not merely a psychological phenomenon but an expression of a deeper organising logic that shapes life, consciousness, and the unfolding structure of the universe. By situating meaning-making within this universal systemic process, the study highlights its relevance for understanding both individual development and the broader patterns through which complex systems evolve and maintain coherence across scales (Capra & Luisi, 2014; Heylighen, 2016).

1.14. Thesis Structure

The thesis is organised to build a coherent account of meaning-making as a relational, dialectical, and systemic process. Chapter 1 outlines the conceptual foundations and research aims. Chapter 2 presents the preliminary literature that informed the development of the review. Chapter 3 details the scoping review methodology and dialectical coding process. Chapter 4 presents the characteristics and synthesised findings of the included sources. Chapter 5 develops the Relational Coherence Model and dialectic matrix. Chapter 6 discusses theoretical and practical implications. Chapter 7 concludes with reflexivity, limitations, and future directions.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

Meaning-making is a foundational psychological process through which individuals interpret experience, construct self-understanding, and navigate complex social and ecological contexts. Although widely referenced across psychology, cognitive science, philosophy, and systems theory, the concept is defined and operationalised in markedly different ways across disciplines (Baumeister, 1991; Park, 2010; Weick, 1995; Varela et al., 1991). This has resulted in fragmented theoretical traditions that highlight particular dimensions of meaning-making while offering limited integration across levels of analysis (Heine et al., 2006; Park, 2010).

Despite this conceptual dispersion, a consistent pattern emerges when these literatures are examined in relation to one another. Across psychology, relational theory, cognitive science, complexity science, and systems philosophy, meaning-making is repeatedly framed as a relational, dialectical, and systemically organised process. Meaning is understood to arise through ongoing interactions between individuals and their contexts rather than through isolated cognitive activity, with coherence maintained through the dynamic balancing of complementary opposites such as differentiation and integration, autonomy and connectedness, and stability and change (Bateson, 1972; Kegan, 1982; Kelso, 1995; Laszlo, 1996/2002; Siegel, 2020).

At broader scales, similar organising dynamics are observed in complex adaptive systems, which undergo recurrent cycles of stability, disruption, and reorganisation to sustain coherence under changing conditions (Holling, 2001; Thelen & Smith, 1994; Kauffman, 1995; Prigogine & Stengers, 1984). Together, these convergent insights suggest that meaning-making follows a recurrent structural logic that operates across individual, relational, and systemic contexts. This chapter traces these patterns to establish the conceptual foundation for the scoping review and to support the later development of the Relational Coherence Model (RCM).

2.2. Meaning and Meaning-Making in Psychological Science

Across psychological disciplines, meaning-making is widely recognised as a central process through which individuals interpret experience, regulate emotion, sustain identity, and adapt to challenge. Existential and humanistic traditions emphasise meaning as the basis of coherence, purpose, and identity formation (Frankl, 1959/2006; Baumeister, 1991). Cognitive and developmental perspectives describe meaning-making as an interpretive and

organisational activity that shapes thought, behaviour, and self-understanding across the lifespan (Kegan, 1982; Piaget, 1971). Relational and constructivist approaches similarly highlight that meaning emerges through interpersonal, cultural, and symbolic exchanges, taking shape through narrative, dialogue, and ongoing interpretation (Bruner, 1990; Neimeyer, 2001).

Within research on stress, coping, and trauma, meaning-making is often examined in the context of disruption, where individuals are required to revise existing interpretive frameworks to restore coherence following experiences that challenge core beliefs or identity structures (Park & Folkman, 1997; Davis et al., 1998). Work in this area commonly distinguishes between relatively stable orienting structures and more situational, experience-specific interpretations, capturing the tension between continuity and change that characterises adaptive meaning-making (Park, 2010, 2017). Similar dynamics are also reflected across broader psychological theories that emphasise the interplay between enduring identity structures and ongoing interpretive revision in response to developmental or contextual demands.

Despite this extensive body of work, psychological accounts of meaning-making remain conceptually segmented. Different traditions foreground cognition, emotion, identity, narrative, or coherence, often without an integrative framework capable of situating these dimensions within a shared structure. This fragmentation limits the ability to conceptualise meaning-making as a multi-level process that operates across intrapersonal, relational, and contextual domains. Addressing this gap provides a central motivation for the present review.

2.3. Meaning-Making as a Relational, Systemic, and Embodied Process

Systems-oriented and embodied approaches extend meaning-making beyond individual cognition by emphasising its emergence through dynamic organism–environment interaction. Phenomenological, enactive, and ecological perspectives describe meaning as arising through relational coupling, embodied experience, and context-sensitive feedback processes (Varela et al., 1991; Thompson, 2007; Merleau-Ponty, 2012). Within these frameworks, meaning is not a fixed internal representation but an ongoing adaptive negotiation between the individual and the surrounding world.

Coherence develops through feedback loops, experiential attunement, and the person's active participation in shaping and responding to relational contexts. This understanding aligns closely with counselling practice, where meaning-making unfolds through relational attunement, dialogical engagement, and embodied presence within the therapeutic relationship.

2.4. Systems and Complexity Perspectives

Systems and complexity theorists describe how living and social systems sustain coherence through ongoing cycles of differentiation, integration, and emergent reorganisation (von Bertalanffy, 1968; Capra & Luisi, 2014). From this perspective, systems are understood as *non-linear*, such that small shifts may generate disproportionate effects; they are regulated through *feedback loops* that stabilise patterns while also enabling transformation; and they operate across *nested hierarchies* in which processes at one level both influence and are influenced by processes at other levels. Coherence is further maintained through *self-organisation*, whereby systems generate order without centralised control, and through *emergence*, in which novel structures or meanings arise that cannot be reduced to their individual components. Together, these dynamics illustrate how meaning-making can be conceptualised as a multi-level systemic process unfolding across personal, relational, organisational, ecological, and cultural contexts.

2.5. Dialectical Structures of Meaning-Making

A recurring insight across the reviewed literature is the central role of dialectical tension, the interplay of complementary opposites such as independence and interdependence, stability and transformation, differentiation and integration, or autonomy and relational embeddedness. Rather than viewing these tensions as contradictions, dialectical theorists (Hegel, 1977/2018; Bateson, 1972; Kegan, 1994) interpret them as generative dynamics that support adaptation and growth.

This understanding resonates with relational psychotherapy, developmental theory, and enactive cognitive science, all of which describe psychological development as emerging through the integration of opposing forces. Within these perspectives, dialectical movement becomes the mechanism through which meaning-making shifts between static organisation and dynamic transformation, reinforcing the view that coherence emerges through tension, not despite it.

2.6. The Need for an Integrative Framework

The central need driving this review is the absence of a cohesive framework that brings together the relational, dialectical, and systemic patterns identified across multiple disciplines. Although psychology, systems theory, philosophy, cognitive science, and organisational studies describe similar processes, these insights remain dispersed within their respective domains, resulting in meaning-making being addressed as a collection of isolated fragments rather than as a unified phenomenon.

An integrative synthesis is therefore required to clarify how these perspectives intersect, where they converge, and what core processes they collectively illuminate. This scoping review responds to that need by mapping how meaning-making is conceptualised across 33 diverse publications and by synthesising these recurring patterns into the Relational Coherence Model (RCM), providing a clearer and more coherent account of how meaning emerges and evolves within complex systems.

2.7. Preliminary Dialectic and Systems Framework

The preliminary framework guiding the review was informed by three assumptions. First, meaning and meaning-making form a complementary pair: meaning provides a static orienting structure or global framework (Baumeister, 1991; Frankl, 1963; Park, 2010), while meaning-making refers to the dynamic interpretive process through which individuals revise, extend, or transform those structures in response to lived experience (Neimeyer, 2001; Park, 2010; Steger, 2012). Second, systems evolve through non-linear cycles of differentiation and integration, reflecting universal patterns of emergence observed across biological, cognitive, and socio-ecological systems (Bateson, 1979; Varela et al., 1991; Capra & Luisi, 2014; Haken, 1983). Third, coherence is not a fixed state but a relational achievement shaped through ongoing feedback between internal and external phenomenal worlds (Thompson, 2007; Siegel, 2012; Varela et al., 1991). This framework informed the development of the coding matrix and guided the identification of patterned relationships across the included literature.

2.8. Summary

This chapter outlined the conceptual foundations that inform the scoping review. Across psychological, relational, and systems-oriented literatures, meaning-making consistently appears as a dynamic, relational, and emergent process shaped by dialectical tension and systemic organisation. Despite these convergences, no integrative framework currently synthesises these insights.

In addressing this gap, Chapters 3–5 present the scoping review by systematically mapping conceptualisations of meaning-making and identifying the recurrent patterns through which meaning stabilises (A), undergoes relational transformation (A–B/B–A), and re-establishes coherence. These identified patterns explicitly serve as the foundation for the Relational Coherence Model, which is developed in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

3.1. Introduction

The purpose of this scoping review is to map and synthesise how meaning-making is conceptualised across psychological, relational, and systems-oriented literatures. This chapter outlines the methodological approach used to identify, extract, and synthesise these conceptualisations using a dialectical, systems-informed scoping review design. The review follows Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) guidance for scoping reviews, including the development of Population Concept Context (PCC) (Peters et al., 2020) criteria, an iterative search strategy, systematic screening, and structured synthesis. Given the conceptual and transdisciplinary nature of the topic, the methodology was adapted to map non-empirical and theoretical sources while remaining consistent with JBI principles.

The scoping review was informed by a preliminary literature review undertaken during the initial research phase. This formative review explored the conceptual terrain of meaning-making, identified recurring theoretical tensions, and contributed to the refinement of the research question and PCC framework. While not included as part of the formal scoping review, this early stage provided essential conceptual grounding for subsequent methodological decisions.

The approach prioritised transparency, reflexivity, and methodological rigour. All analytic decisions were documented. Generative AI (ChatGPT; OpenAI, 2024) was used only to assist in locating relevant textual segments during data preparation (e.g., identifying repeated phrasing or keyword patterns) but did not conduct any coding, analysis, or interpretation. All thematic decisions, dialectical mapping, and theoretical synthesis were completed manually to ensure scholarly integrity and conceptual coherence.

3.2. Scoping Review Framework

Scoping reviews are designed to map the breadth and character of existing theoretic and empirical work, clarify conceptual boundaries, identify how research has been conducted, and locate gaps where further inquiry is needed (Peters et al., 2020; Munn et al., 2018). Because meaning-making is a dispersed construct that appears across psychology, cognitive science, relational theory, philosophy, and systems-oriented fields, it cannot be adequately examined through a single methodological tradition or narrow evidence base. A scoping review therefore offers an appropriate methodological platform, enabling the inclusion of varied materials, conceptual papers, theoretical models, empirical studies with strong conceptual content, and systems-based analyses.

The approach used in this thesis follows the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) methodology for scoping reviews, which provides a structured, yet flexible framework suited to conceptual, interdisciplinary topics. According to JBI guidance, scoping reviews proceed through five stages: identifying the review question, locating relevant studies, selecting studies using an explicit eligibility framework, charting the extracted data, and synthesising and reporting the findings. Each stage was implemented systematically and adapted where necessary to accommodate the predominantly conceptual nature of the included literature.

In this review, the JBI structure supported a rigorous and transparent workflow while allowing for the interpretive breadth required to map meaning-making as a relational and systemic phenomenon. The method was particularly suited to identifying patterned relationships, such as dialectical tensions and iterative systems processes, which might remain invisible in more traditional, empirically restricted review designs.

3.3. Reflexivity Statement

The conceptual orientation of this thesis was informed by the researcher's prior theoretical work, which identified a recurring relational pattern between A (non-dual, differentiated state) and A–B (dual, integrated process). This organising distinction, independently reflected in complexity science (e.g., differentiation–integration, order–chaos), philosophical debates on duality and non-duality, and psychological systems theory (self–other, stability–change), functioned as a sensitising framework for the present review.

Rather than predetermining findings, this prior insight shaped the formulation of the research question and the choice to examine meaning-making at the intersection of **systems, consciousness, and the self**. It oriented attention to relational patterns of connection and disconnection, unity and division, and stability and transformation, which appeared across literatures and within disciplines that are typically treated as separate. The scoping review was therefore designed as an exploratory synthesis to examine how these structurally simple but widely distributed patterns manifest within diverse theoretical accounts of meaning-making. In this way, prior conceptual insight provided the coherence necessary for inquiry, while the review itself evaluated the explanatory scope and limitations of that framework.

3.4. Review Objective and Research Questions

The objective of the scoping review was to map and synthesise how meaning-making is conceptualised within psychological, relational, philosophical, and systems-oriented theory and practice, with particular focus on identifying recurrent dialectical structures such as differentiation–integration and independence–interdependence. The aim was not to discover whether dialectical structures exist, but to examine how established dialectical principles are

expressed, adapted, and integrated across meaning-making literatures. This objective aligns with the overarching purpose of scoping reviews: to clarify conceptual diversity, identify patterns, and provide a foundation for theoretical integration.

To maintain consistency with the research framing established in Chapter 1, the review was guided by one primary research question and three subsidiary questions:

3.4.1. Primary Research Question

How is meaning-making conceptualised within psychological and systems-based literature, and what recurrent relational, dialectical, and emergent patterns underpin these conceptualisations?

3.4.2. Subsidiary Questions

1. What dialectical structures (e.g., differentiation–integration, order–chaos, independence–interdependence) appear across these conceptualisations?
2. How do these dialectical patterns inform an integrated, systems-based understanding of meaning-making?
3. Implications for Practice: In what ways do the identified conceptualisations and patterns illuminate meaning-making as an adaptive mechanism supporting psychological coherence, relational attunement, and systemic resilience in therapeutic contexts?

This formulation provides continuity with Chapter 1 while ensuring that Chapter 3 clearly distinguishes between the overarching inquiry and its guiding analytical sub-questions.

3.5. PCC Framework Development

3.5.1. Purpose of the PCC Framework

The Population–Concept–Context (PCC) framework was used to guide the development of eligibility criteria for this scoping review, in line with Joanna Briggs Institute guidance (Peters et al., 2020) providing the structural foundation for defining the scope of the review and shaping the search strategy. Because “meaning-making” appears across multiple disciplines with varied terminology and conceptual boundaries, the framework required careful refinement to ensure conceptual clarity without losing necessary breadth. The aim throughout development was to hold the dual requirements of a scoping review: inclusivity in identifying potentially relevant literature and precision in defining the phenomenon of interest. The PCC structure therefore evolved iteratively as the conceptual focus sharpened, eventually supporting a search strategy that could operate consistently across multiple

indexing systems and disciplinary contexts. Full PCC templates used for building the search strategy can be found in Appendix A.1.2.

3.5.2. Early Conceptualisation (13 March 2025)

The initial PCC framework was intentionally broad and exploratory and was developed in conjunction with the UniSQ Senior Research Librarian. It incorporated constructs from philosophy of mind, consciousness studies, psychology, relational theory, and systems thinking, and served as an early mapping of the conceptual terrain surrounding meaning-making. PCC templates were introduced at this stage, and exploratory searches were undertaken to assess the scope and accessibility of relevant literature.

These pilot searches revealed several limitations associated with the initial breadth of the framework, including conceptual overreach, inconsistent terminology across disciplines, and reduced compatibility with database indexing structures. In particular, transdisciplinary terms such as “meaning” and “knowledge” proved difficult to operationalise for search purposes. These findings indicated the need for a more focused and methodologically workable PCC configuration.

3.5.3. Intermediate Structuring (8 May 2025)

In response to the limitations identified in the early searches, the PCC framework underwent iterative refinement into a more structured and conceptually coherent form. Terminology was organised into a four-block Boolean framework integrating:

(1) controlled vocabulary (e.g., MeSH headings),

(2) free-text synonyms,

(3) relational and dialectical language, and

(4) systems and complexity-related terms.

This restructuring improved conceptual clarity and search sensitivity, enabling meaning-making to be operationalised as a relational, systemic, and dialectical process while remaining compatible with database requirements. The resulting framework provided a stable basis for database translation and final refinement.

3.5.4. Final Refinement (22 May 2025)

The final PCC refinement consolidated the outcomes of this iterative and collaborative process. Attention was directed toward clarifying conceptual boundaries, balancing the use of controlled vocabulary and keywords, and ensuring consistency with the indexing conventions of major databases.

The final framework translated effectively into database-ready search blocks and ensured alignment across platforms including PubMed, Scopus, PsycINFO, and ProQuest.

This collaboratively developed strategy formed the basis for the advanced PubMed search and all subsequent database translations (Appendix A.1).

3.6. Search Strategy

The search strategy followed JBI's recommended three-step process and was designed to balance conceptual sensitivity with methodological transparency. Because meaning-making is a multi-disciplinary construct characterised by diverse terminology and theoretical orientations, the development of a robust, reproducible search strategy required iterative refinement. The final strategy integrated controlled vocabulary, free-text terms, and systems-oriented conceptual language in order to capture the breadth of the literature while remaining anchored to the review's focus on psychological and systemic meaning-making. These stages of search development and execution were documented to ensure replicability, validity, and alignment with the PCC framework.

3.6.1. Step 1: Preliminary Exploratory Search

A preliminary exploratory search of MEDLINE (PubMed) and Google Scholar was undertaken to gain an initial sense of terminology, conceptual diversity, and indexing patterns within the field. This stage helped clarify how meaning-making was referenced across disciplines, revealed the heterogeneous vocabulary used to describe relational or systems-oriented concepts, and assisted in identifying potential inconsistencies in indexing. Early search strings (Appendix A.1) proved overly narrow or conceptually diffuse, returning limited and uneven results. The variability observed in meaning-making terminology confirmed the need for a more structured and theoretically anchored approach to search development.

3.6.2. Step 2: Development of the Final Search Strategy

Building on insights from the exploratory phase, title and abstract text words and index terms were systematically analysed and integrated into a structured PubMed search strategy using the refined PCC framework. Controlled vocabulary (MeSH) was combined with free-text terminology across four conceptual domains: systems theory, relational–dialectical processes, meaning-making constructs, and psychological contexts. This ensured sensitivity to both established and emerging terminology in theoretical and conceptual scholarship. Once finalised, the PubMed search strategy was translated to Scopus (Elsevier), PsycINFO (EBSCOhost), and ProQuest Central using the SR-Accelerator Polyglot Search Translator (Clark et al., 2020). Manual checking ensured structural equivalence across platforms, enabling consistent retrieval of conceptually relevant literature.***Step 3: Adaptation and Execution***

Each strategy was adapted to the indexing system and subject headings of the corresponding database. PubMed required alignment with Medical Subject Headings (MeSH); Scopus was mapped to the Emtree thesaurus; and PsycINFO required translations into the APA Thesaurus of Psychological Index Terms. Following these adaptations, date limits (2015–2025) were applied to ensure contemporary relevance. No restrictions were placed on publication type at this stage to maintain broad conceptual sensitivity. Searches were executed on 22 May 2025. Complete strings for PubMed, Scopus, PsycINFO, and ProQuest are provided in Appendices A.1.

3.7. Theoretical Orientation for the Coding Framework

The coding framework for this review was grounded in a relational–dialectical systems orientation, reflecting the conceptual foundations established in Chapters 1 and 2. Drawing on systems theory, complexity science, and dialectical models of psychological and relational development, this orientation assumes that meaning-making emerges through the dynamic interplay of complementary opposites, most notably independence and interdependence, differentiation and integration, and stability and transformation. These structures formed the analytic lens through which the included literature was examined.

This theoretical grounding emphasises several core systems principles identified consistently across the reviewed theoretic and empirical work: non-linearity, recursive feedback, nested hierarchy, relational coupling, and self-organisation. These principles provided the conceptual framework for identifying how meaning-making processes unfold across psychological, relational, organisational, and socio-ecological scales. Within this framework, meaning (A) was treated as a stabilising orientation, and meaning-making (A–B/B–A) as an inherently relational and adaptive process.

Guided by this systems dialectical perspective, the coding framework was designed to trace how authors conceptualised relational movement, generative tension, and iterative transformation within meaning-making systems. Codes were therefore developed to capture patterned relationships rather than isolated constructs, enabling the synthesis to reflect how meaning evolves through dynamic interplay rather than through static categories.

While generative AI tools were used solely to assist with locating relevant textual segments during data preparation, all decisions regarding the identification, refinement, and interpretation of codes were undertaken manually by the researcher. AI assistance was limited to rule-based, mechanical tasks to support consistency and reduce the influence of attentional or expectation-based bias during repetitive extraction processes, particularly within a single-researcher review. Interpretive judgement, theoretical integration, and analytic

direction remained fully researcher-led. This ensured that the analytical structure of the coding framework was grounded in the researcher's conceptual reasoning and methodological judgement. The resulting framework supported a coherent, transparent, and theoretically consistent synthesis of diverse conceptual sources, culminating in the iterative relational pattern that informed the development of the Relational Coherence Model (RCM).

3.8. Data Sources and Search Strategy

A comprehensive search was undertaken across five electronic databases, PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, PsycINFO, and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global on 22 May 2025. Search strings combined controlled vocabulary (where available) with free-text terms spanning three conceptual domains: (i) systems and complexity science (e.g., "systems theory," "holistic," "integrative," "emergent," "complex adaptive systems," "nested hierarchies"), (ii) meaning-making and related conceptual processes (e.g., "meaning making," "sensemaking," meaning*, cognition, adaptation, coherence), and (iii) psychological or relational–dialectical constructs (e.g., psycholog*, therap*, dialectic*, interdependence, relational, reconciliation). Full search syntax for each database is provided in Appendix A.1. All retrieved records were exported to EndNote 21.5 for duplicate removal and citation management. Automatic and manual deduplication removed 535 records from the initial 2,019 search results, leaving 1,484 unique records for screening. This process was managed in accordance with JBI guidance to ensure transparency, reproducibility, and accuracy in record handling.

3.9. Study Selection

Study selection adhered to JBI scoping review methodology (Peters et al., 2020) and was conducted in JBI SUMARI (Johanna Briggs Institute, 2020). A two-stage process was used, guided by the refined post-hoc PCC framework (Table 3.2), which reflects how the eligibility criteria were operationalised during iterative screening.

Table 3.2 Title and Abstract Screening Tool (PCC-Aligned) Used in JBI SUMARI

PCC Element	Inclusion Criteria (as operationalised)	Exclusion Criteria
Population / Phenomena of Interest	Human psychological processes (individual to socio-ecological levels) in which meaning, sense-making, or meaning-making is explicitly or implicitly addressed through constructs such as learning, cognition, adaptation, identity, resilience, or psychopathology	Non-human systems with no link to psychological meaning-making; purely physical/computational systems

PCC Element	Inclusion Criteria (as operationalised)	Exclusion Criteria
Concept	Works discussing meaning-making that contain systems-oriented language (systems theory/approach/thinking, holistic, integrative, emergent, dynamic, complex adaptive systems, nested hierarchies, feedback, constraints, attractors) and/or relational-dialectical language (dialectic*, reconciliation, interdependence, relational, adaptation, integration–differentiation tension). Presence of either domain was sufficient for initial inclusion.	Purely linguistic/semantic meaning; fixed-trait or isolated representational accounts with no systemic or relational-dynamic element
Context	Predominantly psychological contexts (clinical, cognitive, developmental, social, organisational, cultural, neuroscientific, psychotherapeutic) with explicit extensions into nested domains (organisational, socio-ecological, global mental health, leadership, forensic settings, transdisciplinary collaboration)	Disciplines with no connection to psychological meaning-making (e.g., technical engineering, pure economics)
Additional Limits	Articles, theoretical/conceptual reviews, book chapters, and seminal monographs; no language restriction; 2015–2025 publication date	Grey literature (except seminal works), conference abstracts, editorials, empirical studies with no theoretical discussion of meaning-making/systems concepts

3.10. Title and Abstract Screening

A total of 1,484 unique titles and abstracts were screened in JBI SUMARI using a structured Yes/No decision tool aligned with the PCC framework. Records were excluded primarily for lacking any psychological, systemic, or dialectical conceptualisation of meaning-making. In total, 1,441 records were excluded at this stage, leaving 43 articles for full-text retrieval.

Where the SUMARI interface provided reasons for exclusion (e.g., incorrect context, absence of meaning-making concepts, no systems orientation), these were exported and included in Digital Appendix A. Records that met the preliminary PCC criteria advanced to detailed full-text screening.

3.11. Full-Text Screening

Full texts were retrieved for 43 publications. Four could not be included: one due to language inaccessibility and three due to unavailability despite institutional and interlibrary

requests. The remaining 39 texts were assessed in detail using the PCC-aligned full-text tool within JBI SUMARI.

Six publications were excluded because they did not meet one or more core PCC criteria, for example, they lacked a systems orientation, did not address meaning-making as a dynamic process, or were situated in domains deemed out of scope (e.g., biomedical, educational, or AI-technical without psychological relevance). Full exclusion justifications and SUMARI decision records are documented in Digital Appendix A.1.2.

Thirty-three publications met all inclusion criteria and proceeded to data extraction. This final corpus formed the evidentiary base for the synthesis presented in Chapters 4–6. Table 3.3 outlines the full-text screening instrument used to operationalise the PCC criteria. To ensure unsuitable literature was excluded early in the screening process, any article that received a **"Yes"** response to one of the four exclusionary PCC questions was removed. Conversely, all subsequent inclusion criteria required a **"Yes"** response for a study to qualify for inclusion in the review.

The flow of records through the identification, screening, and inclusion stages is summarised in **Figure 4.1 (PRISMA-ScR Flow Diagram)** (Page et al., 2021).

Table 3.3 PCC-aligned Full-text Screening Tool

Screening Dimension	Screening Question	Inclusion Guidance
1. PCC Exclusion Check	The study be excluded here if it: 1. Does not study, present or examine a theory, concept or system of meaning. 2. Does not utilise a systems approach. 3. Has no concept of meaning-making as a dynamic, system-driven, process. 4. Primarily concerns **medical, educational, AI/technological**, or other **non-psychological contexts** where meaning-making is peripheral? *(Mark "Yes" for exclusion here.)*	Exclude if *any* criteria are met.

Screening Dimension	Screening Question	Inclusion Guidance
2. Population: Theoretical Models or Systems of Change	Does the study present or examine a **theoretical model**, **conceptual framework**, or **system** (human, collective, or ecological) that explores **meaning-making, change, adaptation, or knowledge creation**? Is the population or system **psychological in nature**, engaging with cognition, emotion, reflection, or self-organisation (rather than biological or technical mechanisms)? Is the study **non-AI-based**, excluding computational, machine-learning, or algorithmic simulations of meaning?	Include if *all* apply.
3. Concept: Two-Fold Construct of Meaning-Making	**Systems Approach (Static Framework):** Does the study conceptualise **meaning** as a structural or organising principle within **self-organising, nested hierarchies** (e.g., individual, relational, organisational, or ecological systems)? **Relational Dialectic (Dynamic Process):** Does the study examine meaning-making as a **dynamic relational process** expressed through the **dialectic of division (differentiation)** and **union (integration)**? Does the text explore **interdependence, adaptation, coherence, or transformation** as part of the psychological system?	Include if the two-fold construct is addressed.
4. Methodological Orientation	Does the study use **psychological, theoretical, conceptual, empirical, or systems-based methods** to explore structure or process in meaning-making? Is the methodology grounded in **psychological theory or systems thinking**, rather than physiological, computational, or purely technical analysis?	Include if method aligns.

Screening Dimension	Screening Question	Inclusion Guidance
5. Context / Application Setting	Is the study situated within a **theoretical/scientific**, **organisational**, or **ecological/social-ecological** context? Does the context involve the **investigation or application of meaning, adaptation, or relational change** within human or collective systems?	Include if context aligns.

3.12. Critical Appraisal of Included Sources

While critical appraisal is not required in scoping reviews, it was undertaken in this study to enhance interpretive transparency. All 33 included conceptual, theoretical, and empirical publications were appraised using the JBI Critical Appraisal Checklist for Text and Opinion (Aromataris et al., 2024).

The aim of appraisal was contextual rather than exclusionary: no publication was removed on the basis of appraisal scores. Instead, the process deepened understanding of how confidently each source's claims could be interpreted and contributed to a clearer synthesis. Full appraisal summaries are provided in Digital Appendix A.4.

3.13. Data Extraction

Data extraction proceeded in two complementary stages designed to capture both standard descriptive characteristics of the literature and the specific dialectical–systems focus of the review.

3.13.1. Stage 1 – Standard JBI SUMARI Extraction

Standardised extraction was conducted using JBI SUMARI with a customised form aligned to the aims of the review. For each source, extracted data included author details, publication type, disciplinary context, stated aims, theoretical orientation, and explicit or implicit definitions of meaning-making. Methodological characteristics were documented where applicable, alongside key findings relevant to relationality, systems organisation, or dialectical processes.

The full extraction dataset for all 33 included publications is provided in digital Appendix A.3.1.

3.13.2. Stage 2 – Dialectical–Systems Coding Extraction

A second extraction stage focused on identifying dialectical and systemic patterns relevant to meaning-making. This stage used a bespoke Excel-based framework developed to

capture complementary relational structures, particularly differentiation–integration, independence–interdependence, autonomy–connection, and order–chaos (See Table 3.4).

Each publication was systematically reviewed for descriptions of relational tension, dynamic interaction, systemic organisation, and processes of emergent coherence or incoherence. Coding was guided by the dialectical orientation outlined in Chapter 1 and the theoretical foundations detailed in Section 3.6. Outputs from this stage included:

1. a ten-category dialectical coding matrix populated with verbatim excerpts and analytic notes;
2. an aggregated relational map illustrating conceptual convergence across disciplines;
3. analytic memos tracing how dialectical structures appeared across individual, relational, organisational, and ecological levels.

Generative AI tools (ChatGPT-4o) were used solely as a technical aid to locate relevant textual segments within long documents during extraction. All interpretive decisions, coding, categorisation, and theoretical synthesis were conducted manually by the researcher. All extracted material was reviewed for contextual accuracy prior to inclusion, in accordance with university guidance on AI use.

3.14. Researcher Positionality and Pre-understanding

Meaning-making is inherently interpretive and relational; accordingly, the researcher's prior theoretical work informed the analytic orientation of the review. Independent research conducted between 2020 and 2025 on dialectical organisation, complexity, and systems theory sensitised the researcher to complementary relational structures, particularly patterns of differentiation–integration and independence–interdependence.

This pre-understanding shaped the initial analytic lens but did not function as a fixed coding scheme. While early interpretive hypotheses were informed by this background, final categories were derived from direct textual evidence within the included publications. Analysis proceeded through an abductive process, involving iterative movement between theoretically informed expectations and patterns emerging through engagement with the literature.

3.15. Data Analysis and Synthesis

Data analysis was guided by established dialectical principles from complexity science, systems theory, and psychological theory. These principles were applied as orienting

frameworks for examining how meaning and meaning-making were conceptualised across disciplines, rather than as predetermined analytic categories.

Within this framework the static–dynamic dialectic was linked with meaning and meaning-making. Static meaning aligned with category A, reflecting a differentiated, independent, and non-dual orientation, while dynamic meaning-making aligned with A–B, reflecting an integrated, interdependent, and relational orientation. The foundational distinction between A (static) and A–B (dynamic) originated from the researcher's prior theoretical work and functioned as a sensitising concept throughout analysis (See Appendix B.2). This distinction was retained only where it demonstrated explanatory coherence with patterns evident in the reviewed literature.

Guided by these lenses, more than 400 conceptual references were selectively extracted and examined through iterative comparison. Concepts were grouped pragmatically to manage conceptual breadth and to observe how relational structures, such as independence and interdependence, stability and transformation, and dialectic division and union, were articulated across psychological, relational, developmental, sociocultural, and philosophical contexts. Key dialectical relations were text-tagged to support systematic comparison across sources (see Appendix A.5).

This analytic phase organised and refined the domain-specific dialectical pairs underpinning the review, including meaning versus meaning-making, differentiated versus integrated self, disciplinary differentiation versus integration, and sustainable versus unsustainable emergence. The purpose was not to generate new dialectics inductively, but to examine how established relational structures manifested, interacted, and diversified across disciplinary boundaries.

3.16. Integrated Theoretical Synthesis

The dialectical matrix informed a three-level synthesis:

i. A narrative account tracing disciplinary developments in meaning-making.

ii. A dialectical relational framework modelling the interplay of oppositional states and processes.

iii. A systems-informed process model, culminating in the Relational Coherence Model (RCM).

This multi-level synthesis enabled the transition from mapping to theory-building while remaining grounded in the included literature.

Table 3.4 Ten-Category Dialectic Matrix Summary

Category	First Author / Title / Page	Coded Finding	Illustration / Example	Synonyms / Descriptor Used for Search	Explicit / Implicit	Definition	Indicators / Keywords	Analytical Notes
Independent Meaning	**Badcock**, P.B. (2019) – The hierarchically mechanistic mind: An evolutionary systems theory of the human brain, cognition, and behaviour. pp. 1326 – 1330.	Cognition operates through hierarchical mechanisms that stabilize perception and behaviour around invariant attractors.	"A hierarchy rests upon conditional independencies … This structure can be understood in terms of the hierarchy of temporal scales at which representations evolve."	"hierarchical organization," "conditional independence," "nested attractors," "invariant structure," "stability," "lawful regularities"	Explicit	Stable, reductive, or invariant source of meaning providing coherence and structure.	Mentions of fixed truths, static frameworks, self-contained systems, foundational principles.	Use when meaning or "self" is defined as unchanging or grounding dynamic processes.
interdependent Meaning-Making	**Cheon**, B. K. (2018) – The Cultural Neuroscience of Holistic Thinking. pp. 185–190	Meaning-making is culturally embedded, arising from relational interdependence between self and context.	"Holistic thinking reflects interdependent cognition embedded within sociocultural systems that shape perception and reasoning."	"holistic thinking," "interdependent cognition," "context dependence," "mutual influence," "cultural embedding"	Explicit	Dynamic relational process where meaning evolves through interaction, adaptation, or feedback.	Mentions of collaboration, emergence, relational exchange, context dependence, dynamic systems.	Use when focus is on meaning as created between entities or within systems.
Dialectic Division	**Dahlager**, L. C. (2024) – Algorithms of the Heart: A Fugue About Consciousness. pp. 178–183	Differentiation between self and artificial systems exposes the boundaries of consciousness and human meaning.	"Artificial systems reflect but cannot replicate the self's lived contradiction between division and union."	"AI contrast," "self vs machine," "boundary," "division," "contrastive consciousness," "human–machine differentiation"	Explicit	Differentiation or analytical separation generating contrast and discovery.	Mentions of separation, distinction, fragmentation, opposition, tension, analysis, polarity.	Code where separation of elements generates insight or innovation.
Dialectic Union	**Hess**, Y. D. (2018) – A Construal Level Approach to Understanding Interpersonal Processes. pp. 3–6	Abstraction and concreteness integrate as complementary poles in adaptive social cognition.	"Effective communication requires a synthesis of near and distant construals."	"integration," "abstract–concrete balance," "construal synthesis," "dialectical complementarity"	Explicit	Integration or synthesis of opposites creating coherence or unity.	Mentions of integration, synthesis, convergence, reconciliation, coordination, coherence.	Code when union resolves previous fragmentation or fosters systemic wholeness.
Sustainable Emergence	**Kaplan**, A. (2017) – A Complex Dynamic Systems Perspective on Identity and Its Development. pp. 2045–2049	Sustainable identity develops through iterative balance between role differentiation and integration.	"Stability of selfhood depends on maintaining dynamic equilibrium."	"dynamic equilibrium," "identity stability," "homeostatic balance," "adaptive iteration"	Explicit	Balanced transformation maintaining differentiation and integration over time.	Mentions of harmony, adaptability, resilience, coherence, homeostasis, balance.	Code when outcomes reflect ongoing coherence, adaptability, or regenerative transformation.

Unsustainable Emergence	**Jayasinghe**, S. (2020) – Conceptualising Mind Wandering Using a Systems Approach: A Preliminary Exploration. pp. 749–752	Unregulated mental wandering leads to fragmentation of attention and meaning.	"Without meta-awareness, self-generated thought becomes maladaptive."	"unregulated," "fragmented attention," "maladaptive," "self-generated thought," "dysregulation"	Explicit	Imbalance or incoherence causing fragmentation, fusion, or collapse.	Mentions of instability, rigidity, breakdown, incoherence, disconnection, maladaptation.	Code where imbalance leads to relational or systemic failure.
Differenitated Self as Agent	**Wiltshire**, C., et al. (2015). Prospects for Direct Social Perception. p.3–6	The individual (self) is conceptualised as possessing multiple, distinct internal mechanisms for understanding others—higher-order inferential systems (Theory Theory, Simulation Theory) versus directly embodied perceptual systems—each functioning at separate psychological levels.	"A key point of contention… whether perception can be direct or must necessarily be indirect… TT posits inferential theories; ST argues for internal simulation; embodied accounts emphasise direct perception."	Internal fragmentation; multi-mechanism self; separated cognitive systems	Explicit	Differentiated Self is represented as the division of the individual's meaning-making processes into distinct mechanisms—Type 1 vs Type 2 processing, inferential vs embodied, representational vs direct—each offering separate pathways for perceiving others.	"two types of cognitive processes"; "automatic vs. controlled"; "theorizing vs. simulation vs. direct perception"; "multiple mechanisms"	Distinct internal capacities, autonomous orientation, inward coherence prior to relational integration.
Integrated Self as Agent	**Magid**, B. (2021) – The Emerging Paradigm of Relational Self Psychology. pp. 45–49	The self evolves through dialogical interaction integrating autonomy and relatedness.	"Relational selfhood generates transformation through mutual recognition."	"dialogical self," "mutual recognition," "transformative agency," "relational self"	Explicit	The reflexive, active participant mediating system transformation.	Mentions of self-awareness, agency, reflexivity, adaptability, intentional action.	Use where the Self mediates between stability and change, independence and interdependence.
Differentiated Discipline	**Wickramasekera**, 2015 — The Quantum Model of the Observing Self — pp. 1–17	The chapter positions the quantum model of the Observing Self in explicit contrast to behaviourist conditioning theory, biomedical mechanistic models, cognitive neuroscience, and psychodynamic approaches, illustrating disciplinary fragmentation in explanations of consciousness and the nature of self.	The text argues that the Observing Self "cannot be reduced to neural activity or behaviourist conditioning," challenging behavioural and mechanistic views that treat consciousness as a by-product of learned reactions or neural computation. Psychodynamic and neuroscientific models are also contrasted with the quantum account, each offering incompatible explanations of consciousness.	behaviourist vs quantum; mechanistic neuroscience; psychodynamic contrast; competing consciousness models; disciplinary divergence	Explicit	Behaviourism explains behaviour through conditioning; neuroscience through neural computation; psychodynamic theory through unconscious conflict; quantum consciousness models through non-local witnessing awareness. These are treated as incompatible theoretical traditions.	quantum model; behaviourist conditioning; mechanistic paradigm; psychodynamic theory; competing frameworks	Distinct theoretical boundaries, methodological autonomy, specialised contribution prior to interdisciplinary synthesis.

3.17. Ethical Considerations

As the review analysed only publicly available, peer-reviewed published works with no human or animal participants, formal ethical approval was not required under the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2018) or UniSQ policy. Nonetheless, the project adhered rigorously to the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2018) and the Authorship and Dissemination of Research Findings guidelines.

Specific measures included:

- Accurate representation and contextualisation of original authors' intentions
- Comprehensive citation and avoidance of secondary quoting
- Secure encrypted storage of the EndNote library and analysis files
- Transparent declaration of generative AI use (Chat GPT employed extensively for literature screening assistance, pattern detection, code verification, and drafting of non-substantive prose; all substantive theoretical decisions remained under candidate control.

No conflicts of interest were identified.

3.18. Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented a transparent, reproducible, and rigorously documented methodological framework, developed in accordance with JBI scoping review guidance and tailored to the ontological and epistemological demands of mapping meaning-making scholarship. The hybrid dialectical, comparative synthesis approach, executed primarily through manual Excel-based coding and critically supported by generative AI, extends conventional scoping review methodology by enabling theory-generative synthesis from conceptual gaps and relational tensions in the literature. Chapters 4 and 5 now present the outcomes of this process: first, a descriptive mapping of the evidence base and the empirically derived dialectical matrix, and second, the original theoretical contribution, a systems-informed dialectical model of meaning-making within a world of globalisation.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

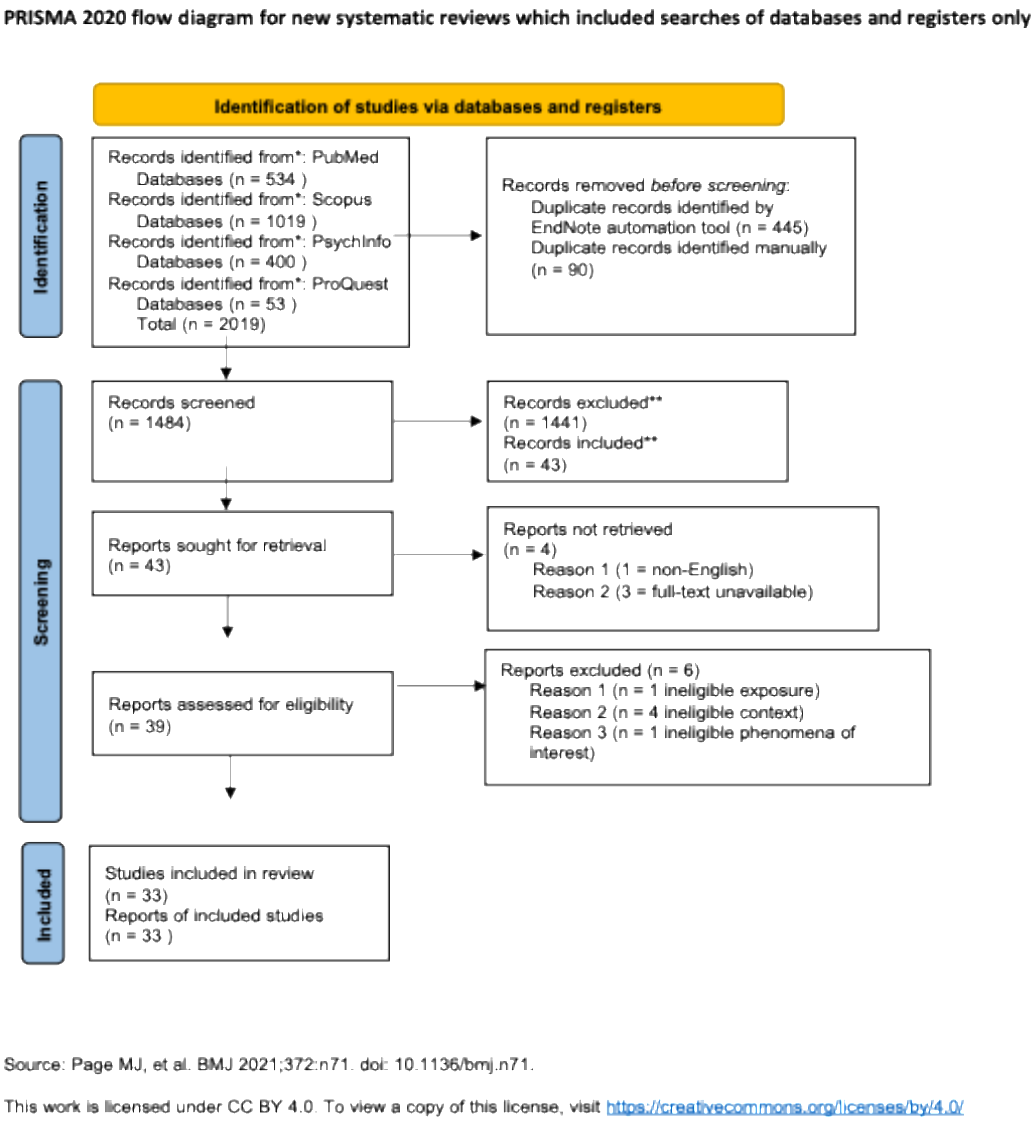
4.1. Search and Selection Results

The purpose of this scoping review is to identify recurrent relational and dialectical structures underlying conceptualisations of meaning-making. This chapter presents the meta-aggregated findings of the included studies, organised into five dialectical pairs that capture how meaning-making processes are described across disciplinary contexts.

From a total number of 2,019 records, the selection process identified 33 publications that met the final PCC-aligned conceptual criteria. These criteria were refined iteratively during screening to ensure that all included publications demonstrated explicit relevance to psychological and systems-oriented meaning-making. The PRISMA-ScR flow diagram Figure 4.1, documents each stage of the review process, including duplicate removal, title/abstract screening, and full-text assessment.

Across the 33 included publications, approximately one-third originated in psychology and developmental sciences ($n \approx 11$), followed by systems theory and complex adaptive systems research ($n \approx 7$), cognitive and neuroscientific perspectives ($n \approx 6$), relational or psychotherapeutic models ($n \approx 5$), and interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary meaning-making studies spanning cultural psychology, organisational science, and active inference ($n \approx 4$). This distribution reflects a broad but coherent cross-section of theoretical domains relevant to psychological and systems-oriented meaning-making.

Figure 4.1 – PRISMA-ScR Diagram for the Scoping Review Process



Source: Page MJ, et al. BMJ 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71.

Figure 4.1. PRISMA-ScR flow diagram illustrating the identification, screening, and inclusion of studies. The initial broad and sensitive search strategy was deliberately employed to capture transdisciplinary literature; iterative application of conceptual criteria during full-text review yielded a final set of 33 theoretically rich publications (Tricco et al., 2018; Peters et al., 2020).

Reporting of this scoping review follows the PRISMA 2020 guidelines and the PRISMA extension for scoping reviews (PRISMA-ScR), with the completed checklist provided in the digital appendix (Appendix A.4).

4.2. Characteristics of Included Studies

The 33 included publications (2015–2025) spanned psychology, cognitive science, developmental theory, systems thinking, relational psychotherapy, cultural neuroscience, and

transdisciplinary systems theoretic and empirical work. Of these, 73% (n=24) were indexed in Scopus, 18% (n=6) in PsycINFO, 6% (n=2) in PubMed, and 3% (n=1) in ProQuest. This strong Scopus predominance reflects the interdisciplinary and explicitly systemic orientation of contemporary meaning-making research, which is most comprehensively represented in journals with broad social-science, relational, family-systems, and transdisciplinary scope, precisely the coverage strength of Scopus (see below Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 – Database Contribution to Included Sources (n=33)

Database / Search Engine	Number of Included Sources	Percentage of Total (N=33
Scopus	24	73%
PsycINFO	6	18%
PubMed	2	6%
ProQuest	1	3%

To map conceptualisations of meaning-making across this heterogeneous evidence base, each source was coded for the presence of the ten dialectical categories derived from the analytic framework. This yielded 197 category instances in total (mean = 5.97 categories per study, SD = 2.1), indicating that the majority of publications engaged with more than half of the identified dialectical structures. Such an overlap demonstrates that meaning-making is rarely construed as a single-domain or isolated phenomenon; rather, even across diverse theoretical languages, it consistently emerges as a multi-dimensional, relational, and multi-level systemic process involving cognitive, developmental, interpersonal, and sociocultural dynamics.

Detailed characteristics of all included sources are presented in the JBI SUMARI table (Appendix A.3.1), with an illustrative subset of nine studies in Table 4.2.

4.3. How Dialectical Opposites Appeared Across Literature

Across the 33 publications, dialectical structures consistently appeared as organising motifs. Many studies implicitly described meaning-making through paired relational tensions, such as coherence–disruption, stability–change, autonomy–relationality, differentiation–integration, or order–uncertainty. These pairs closely align with the foundational dialectical opposites outlined in Chapter 1. Notably, several sources depicted meaning-making as a system that both differentiates and connects: meaning arises through the interplay between an

internally oriented interpretive stance and outward relational engagement. This pattern reflects the directional sequencing identified in the analytic framework, whereby some studies conceptualised meaning as emerging from a coherent internal basis outward (A → A–B), while others emphasised meaning formed through external pressures, social demands, or contextual tensions that subsequently required internal reorganisation (A–B → A). Both directional patterns were present in the dataset and appeared as complementary modes of adaptive sense-making rather than mutually exclusive processes.

Table 4.2 Illustrative Examples of Key Studies Mapped to the Dialectic Coding Framework (n=33)

Author (Year)	**Discipline / Focus**	**Illustrative Finding or Definition**	**Relevant Category**	**Interpretive Summary**
Mascolo (2016)	Developmental Psychology	Development reorganizes through differentiation and integration.	Dialectic Division & Union; Sustainable Emergence	Shows differentiation–integration as core developmental mechanism.
Badcock (2019)	Cognitive Neuroscience	The brain functions as a hierarchically organized, bidirectional system.	Independent–Interdependent; Hierarchical Integration	Links stable structure with dynamic feedback in meaning-making.
Cheon (2018)	Cultural Psychology	Analytic vs holistic cognition expresses cultural variability in meaning.	Independent–Interdependent Meaning-Making	Meaning shifts through relational, contextual processes.
Jayasinghe (2020)	Cognitive Science	System constraints define boundaries of spontaneous vs deliberate thought.	Dialectic Division & Union	Reveals interplay between control and spontaneity.
Kaplan (2017)	Identity / Complex Dynamic Systems	Identity is both stable and malleable, personal and socially shaped.	Independent–Interdependent; Sustainable Emergence	Integration of stability and change supports adaptive identity.
Myers (2018)	Organisational Learning Science	Interactive vicarious learning emerges through microprocesses of interaction.	Interdependent Meaning-Making; Dialectic Union	Meaning co-constructed in relational learning.
Pineda (2018)	Neuroscience / Social Cognition	Differentiation enables individuation; integration restores coherence.	Dialectic Division & Union	Articulates dual drives of self-organization.
Teixeira-de-Melo (2023)	Transdisciplinary Systems Theory	TD processes operate through multilevel, bidirectional interactions.	Transdisciplinary Integrative Innovation	Integration across disciplines reflects relational systems.
Veissière (2020)	Cultural Neuroscience / Active Inference	Implicit cultural learning integrates mind reading and shared intentionality.	Interdependent Meaning-Making	Meaning arises through intersubjective inference.

4.4. Data Extraction and Charting

The total of 197 category instances reflects the sum of all binary presences ("category demonstrated = 1") across the 33 studies. This number does not represent coded excerpts or frequency within a paper; rather, it indicates how many times each dialectical category appeared at least once within a study. Table 4.2 illustrates how the ten categories were operationalised during the dialectic coding extraction process.

Table 4.3 Dialectic Coding Framework Applied to Included Sources (n=33)

Category	Definition (Concise)	Purpose in Review
1. Independent Meaning	Stable, self-referential structures of meaning; coherence grounded in internal organisation rather than relational input.	To identify texts describing meaning as fixed, structural, autonomous, or internally anchored.
2. Interdependent Meaning-Making	Dynamic, relational, and context-responsive processes through which meaning is co-constructed.	To capture texts emphasising relational, systemic, or participatory meaning formation.
3. Dialectic Division	Processes of differentiation, separation, analysis, or boundary-setting within systems.	To locate descriptions of structural tension, distinct roles, or divergence within meaning systems.
4. Dialectic Union	Processes of synthesis, reconciliation, or integrative movement across differences.	To identify integration, coordination, and coherence-building mechanisms.
5. Sustainable Emergence	Balanced, stable, adaptive development of new coherence over time.	To detect instances of constructive, capacity-enhancing, or generative systemic evolution.
6. Unsustainable Emergence	Imbalanced, unstable, or maladaptive developmental trajectories leading toward rigid states and collapsed form.	To highlight destabilisation, overload, fragmentation, or loss of systemic coherence.
7. Differentiated Self (as Agent)	The Self as autonomous, boundary-maintaining, specialised, or distinct within a system.	To identify psychological viewpoints emphasising autonomy, identity separation, or individuation.
8. Integrated Self (as Agent)	The Self as relationally embedded, co-regulated, and synthesised within broader systems.	To capture accounts of relational identity, coherence, or participatory agency.
9. Differentiated Discipline	A field or discipline acting in specialised, expert-driven, or siloed form.	To mark instances where knowledge creation or theory-building is treated as domain-specific.

Category	Definition (Concise)	Purpose in Review
10. Integrated Disciplines	Disciplines interacting collaboratively, transcendently, or transdisciplinarily.	To identify systemic integration across knowledge domains and to track innovation at disciplinary boundaries.

4.4.1. Interpretive Summary of Included Sources

A small subset of publications showed notably high saturation across the ten dialectical categories (See Table 4.3). Nine sources demonstrated eight or nine category instances, representing near-complete expression of the full dialectical pattern identified in this review. These highly saturated publications included Badcock et al. (2019), Cheon et al. (2018), Jayasinghe (2020), Kaplan and Garner (2017), Mascolo et al. (2016), Myers (2018), Teixeira de Melo (2023), Veissière et al. (2020), and Wiltshire et al. (2015). The concentration of categories within these studies suggests that they engage explicitly within a nested hierarchy of relational, and systems-informed accounts of meaning, cognition, or adaptation. Their breadth of coverage may indicate a stronger conceptual alignment with the integrative aims of this review, particularly their attention to both structural (A) and dynamic relational (A–B/B–A) processes. This pattern also helps the reader identify which publications contributed most extensively to the synthesis, offering a clearer sense of the conceptual "anchor points" within the dataset. These are discussed as paradigmatic exemplars in Section 5.4.

Table 4.4 – Dialectic Category Summary Across Included Sources (n=33)

SOURCE TEXT	Independent Meaning	Interdependent Meaning	Dialectic Division	Dialectic Union	Sustainable Emergence	Unsustainable Emergence	Differentiated Self as an Agent	Integrated Self as an Agent	Differentiated Discipline	Integrated Disciplines	TOTAL
Badcock 2019	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	9
Cheon 2018		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	9
Jayasinghe 2020		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	9
Kaplan 2017	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	9
Mascolo 2016	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	9
Myers 2018		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	8
Teixeira 2023		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	8
Veissière 2020		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	8
Wiltshire 2015		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	8
Hess 2018			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	7
McGorry 2018		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	7
Papero 2018			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	7
Pineda 2018		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	7
Santos 2025		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	7
Dahlager 2025			✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	6
daSilva 2025				✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	6
de Oliveira 2017	✓		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	6
Kaiser 2025		✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	6
Magid 2021	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓	✓	6
Narvaez 2018		✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	6
Van Hoeck 2015		✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	6
Weber 2023		✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	6
Khabbache 2020		✓		✓				✓	✓	✓	5
Majer 2021				✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	5
Wickramasekera 2015		✓	✓				✓		✓	✓	5
McLean 2016	✓	✓							✓	✓	4
Vanaken 2022		✓			✓				✓	✓	4
Moss Brender 2017						✓			✓	✓	3
Needs 2017		✓							✓	✓	3
Guisinger 2022							✓			✓	2
Jordans 2024									✓	✓	2
Olivier 2023									✓	✓	2
Onnis 2016									✓	✓	2
TOTAL	6	20	17	22	19	16	13	23	28	33	197

4.5. Data Extraction and Charting

Data were extracted and charted using the 10-category dialectical matrix developed iteratively during analysis (Section 3.15). Each source was coded for presence of the categories, resulting in 197 total category instances (average 6 per source).

Table 4.5 – Dialectical Category Frequency Across Included Sources (n=33)

Category	Number of Sources	Percentage
Independent Meaning	6	18%
Interdependent Meaning-Making	20	61%
Dialectic Division	17	52%
Dialectic Union	22	67%
Sustainable Emergence	19	58%
Unsustainable Emergence	16	48%
Differentiated Self as Agent of Change	13	39%
Integrated Self as Agent of Change	23	70%
Differentiated Discipline	28	85%
Integrated Disciplines	33	100%
Total category instances	197	

4.6. Interpretation on Category Frequencies

The results shown in Table 4.4 indicate a pattern of absence and presence between the independent categories (Group A: meaning, division, Differentiated Self, differentiated discipline) and the interdependent categories (Group A–B/B–A: meaning-making, union, Integrated Self, integrated discipline). Because the sustainability pair (sustainable vs. unsustainable emergence) reflects coherence rather than differentiation–integration, its 35 instances were removed from the calculation, leaving a total of 162 relevant category instances. Within this subset, Group A accounts for 64 instances (**39.5%)** and Group A–B/B–A accounts for 98 instances (**60.5%).**

This distribution is consistent with the review's systems-oriented scope, which foregrounds relational, interactive, and integrative processes characteristic of meaning-making. Importantly, the discrepancy should not be interpreted as evidence of theoretical privileging; rather, it raises an open question for future research: whether systems-focused scholarship tends to emphasise integration over differentiation, whether this pattern simply

reflects the conceptual emphasis of the review itself, or whether recursive layering renders its foundational pole (A) increasingly difficult to observe?

4.7. Meta-Aggregation and Synthesised Findings

The charted data were meta-aggregated following JBI principles into five dialectical pairs. The synthesised findings for each pair are presented below. The 10-category matrix was abductively derived through iterative coding informed by both inductive pattern recognition and theoretical sensitisation (as documented in Section 3.15).

This chapter presents the meta-aggregative results of the 33 included publications. Through the extraction process, each source was coded into ten dialectic categories, organised as five complementary pairs that reflect relational mechanisms of meaning-making within and across psychological, developmental, cognitive, systems, and interdisciplinary domains.

The synthesis was conducted in accordance with JBI meta-aggregation principles, whereby individual coded findings were grouped into category-level statements and then aggregated into comprehensive synthesised findings. The ten categories formed the structure for each of the five dialectic pairs:

1. Independent Meaning + Interdependent Meaning-Making
2. Dialectic Division + Dialectic Union
3. Sustainable Emergence + Unsustainable Emergence
4. Differentiated Self + Integrated Self
5. Differentiated Discipline + Integrated Discipline

The initial coding revealed a recurrent linear movement between stabilising orientations (A) and relational expansion (A–B/B–A). As analysis progressed, this pattern displayed non-linear characteristics, feedback cycles, mirrored oppositions, and iterative returns, which laid the groundwork for recognising a more complex developmental structure.

Together, these dialectical pairs describe recurring relational patterns through which meaning-making is structured and transformed across contexts. The synthesised findings for each pair are presented in the following sections.

4.8. Synthesised Dialectic Pair 1: Independent Meaning → Interdependent Meaning-Making

4.8.1. Independent Meaning (A)

The key pattern across the included studies is that independent meaning functions as a foundational organising centre, a stable, inward-oriented structure that anchors coherence before relational meaning-making can occur. This internal reference point provides continuity, enabling individuals or systems to interpret experience against a stable backdrop of identity, values, or organising principles. Several studies explicitly framed this as a structural centre of orientation: Badcock (2019) described hierarchical self-organisation as essential for establishing an internal locus of meaning, while Kaplan and Garner (2017) emphasised that identity-based coherence supports stable interpretive frameworks in the midst of complexity. Magid (2021) similarly identified subjective grounding as a prerequisite for orienting cognitive and emotional processes, noting that individuals rely on internal meaning structures before entering relational exchanges. Together, these findings demonstrate that independent meaning operates as a static, coherence-generating mode (A) that precedes and enables the dynamic, relational movements of meaning-making.

4.8.2. Interdependent Meaning-Making (A–B)

Across the included studies, the defining feature of interdependent meaning-making is its emergence through dynamic relational engagement, where meaning is generated, reshaped, and expanded through interaction rather than isolation. This mode reflects the system's movement outward from a stable centre (A) into relational exchange (A–B), enabling meaning to become more adaptive, responsive, and contextually situated. Multiple studies illustrated this process of co-active emergence: da Silva and Wood (2025) described meaning-making as synchronised relational activity that produces novel interpretive possibilities, while Myers (2018) highlighted the co-constructed nature of meaning within learning systems where knowledge develops through shared participation. Mascolo (2016) similarly emphasised reciprocal regulation and relational coordination, demonstrating that interpretive activity becomes increasingly adaptive as it incorporates feedback from interpersonal, environmental, and systemic contexts. Collectively, these findings depict interdependent meaning-making (A–B) as a dynamic, interactive, and processual mode through which meaning unfolds in response to relational complexity.

4.9. Synthesised Dialectic Pair: Dialectic Division → Dialectic Union

4.9.1. Dialectic Division (A)

Collectively, the reviewed publications showed that division appeared as a necessary and productive process through which systems, individuals, and concepts differentiate into distinct parts, roles, or functions. Division was not presented as fragmentation, but rather as a structural mechanism that allows complexity to be organised and meaning to be clarified. Kaplan and Garner (2017) described differentiation as essential for identity and conceptual separation, enabling individuals to distinguish internal states, perspectives, and contextual demands. Similarly, Badcock (2019) emphasised hierarchical differentiation within cognitive and neural architectures as a prerequisite for coherent functioning, showing that systems must first establish discrete components before coordinating them. Mascolo (2016) likewise demonstrated that meaning processes begin with distinctions, between self and other, emotion and action, or internal and external signals, before these elements can be integrated. These findings collectively show that division functions as a static, analytic movement (A) that enables complexity by allowing parts to become recognisable, functional, and internally organised.

4.9.2. Dialectic Union (A–B)

Union was consistently represented as a dynamic relational movement in which differentiated elements are brought into coordination or synthesis. Rather than eliminating differences, union involves relating parts in ways that generate new patterns of coherence. Mascolo (2016) described this as a higher-order integration in which previously separated elements collaborate to produce emergent meaning. Myers (2018) also emphasised the necessity of relational coordination for adaptive learning and co-regulation, illustrating how meaning emerges from the interplay of differentiated perspectives. Magid (2021) highlighted the role of relational joining in therapeutic and interpersonal processes, showing that individuals integrate cognitive–emotional elements through responsive interaction. Taken together, these studies present union as a dynamic, processual movement (A–B) through which systems achieve coherence by coordinating differentiated components.

4.9.3. Synthesis: Differentiation and Integration in a Directional Dialectic (A → A–B → A + A–B)

The combined findings indicate a consistent directional pattern: meaning-making systems tend to move from differentiation (A) toward integration (A–B), with division laying the structural groundwork for union. This A → A–B sequence was repeatedly associated with coherent functioning across psychological, developmental, and systemic contexts. The studies

also suggested that *meaning-making is most adaptive when differentiation and integration operate simultaneously*, allowing systems to maintain distinct parts while generating coherent relational wholes (A + A–B). Further elaboration of this integrated, simultaneous structure is provided in Chapter 5.

4.10. Synthesised Dialectic Pair 3: Sustainable Emergence → Unsustainable Emergence

4.10.1. Sustainable Emergence (A → A–B)

A consistent pattern observed in the literature is that sustainable emergence was associated with coherent developmental or systemic processes in which internal organisation precedes relational expansion. Studies emphasised that systems operate most adaptively when stable internal patterns guide outward interaction. For example, Badcock (2019) described hierarchical self-organisation as enabling coherent outward engagement, while Kaplan and Garner (2017) highlighted how stable conceptual frameworks allow individuals to integrate new information meaningfully. Mascolo (2016) similarly identified coordinated, reciprocal relational processes that depend on a clear internal sense of identity before entering dynamic co-regulation. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that sustainable emergence reflects a synchronous sequence in which internal grounding (A) supports adaptive participation in interdependent processes (A–B), enabling systems to maintain coherence while engaging dynamically with their environments.

4.10.2. Unsustainable Emergence ((A–B → A)

Unsustainable emergence was represented in the included studies as a breakdown in coherence resulting from relational or environmental pressures overriding internal organisation. This asynchronous sequence appears when systems begin from externally driven or prematurely interdependent conditions (A–B) and subsequently attempt to retreat into reactivity or defensive separation (A). Several studies provided examples of destabilisation when relational demands exceed internal coherence. Magid (2021) described patterns of emotional or cognitive dysregulation arising when individuals are over-embedded in relational contexts without a stable internal grounding. Myers (2018) noted that learning processes become maladaptive when coordination is imposed before internal differentiation is established. Mascolo (2016) similarly observed that systems can become destabilised when relational demands force premature integration, resulting in reactive withdrawal or compensatory over-engagement. **The findings indicate that unsustainable emergence arises not from differentiation or integration alone, but from the reversal of the coherent sequence identified in sustainable emergence.**

Importantly, evidence from several studies suggests that unsustainable patterns tend to manifest in two polarised forms: fragmentation, where systems become overly divided or incoherent (e.g., Kaplan & Garner, 2017; Mascolo, 2016), and fusion, where systems become overly merged or undifferentiated (e.g., Magid, 2021; Myers, 2018). These polarities reflect hyper- or hypo-activation of division or union, consistent with broader dialectical dynamics observed across the dataset.

Synthesis: Directional Coherence and Polarity Outcomes (A → A–B vs A–B → A → A + A–B)

Taken together, the findings from the included studies indicate that emergence processes follow a consistent directional pattern. Coherent, sustainable emergence occurs when internal differentiation provides the basis for coordinated relational integration (A → A–B). In contrast, when relational or environmental pressures precede internal organisation (A–B → A), systems tend to shift into polarised states characterised by either fragmentation or fusion. While several studies implied that optimal functioning involves the simultaneous maintenance of internal stability and relational adaptability (A + A–B), this integrative configuration was most evident in developmental systems, relational, and learning-oriented accounts (e.g., Mascolo, 2016; Kaplan & Garner, 2017; Myers, 2018). This integrated state is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 5.

4.11. Synthesised Dialectic Pair 4: Differentiated Self as Agent → Integrated Self as Agent

4.11.1. Differentiated Self as an Agent of Change (A)

Across the included studies, the was described as an agentive centre capable of initiating meaning-making through autonomous action, self-reflection, or the enactment of distinct roles within relational or systemic contexts. Several authors highlighted the necessity of a clearly bounded sense of self for adaptive functioning. Kaplan and Garner (2017) emphasised that identity differentiation enables individuals to recognise their own intentions, perspectives, and internal states as distinct from external influences. Similarly, Badcock (2019) described hierarchical self-organisation as a form of differentiated agency, wherein component processes contribute uniquely to overall system functioning. Mascolo (2016) also noted that adaptive development requires the capacity to separate one's own regulatory activity from that of others, allowing the self to serve as a coherent locus of action. Collectively, these studies indicate that differentiated self-agency represents a static, internally anchored mode of change initiation (A), rooted in a clearly defined and organised self-structure.

4.11.2. Integrated Self as an Agent of Change (A–B)

The Integrated Self was represented in the included studies as a dynamic agent whose functioning emerges through coordinated relational processes. Rather than acting in isolation, the Integrated Self participates in reciprocal exchanges that support shared regulation, co-construction of meaning, and adaptive collaboration. Mascolo (2016) described this as a relationally coordinated agency, in which individuals regulate their actions through mutual responsiveness. Myers (2018) emphasised how learning and adaptive self-organisation occur through integration of multiple perspectives within a shared activity system. Magid (2021) similarly highlighted how therapeutic change often emerges when individuals integrate emotional, cognitive, and relational information through responsive engagement with others. These findings show that integrated self-agency reflects a dynamic, processual mode (A–B), grounded in the coordination of differentiated parts within broader relational contexts.

4.11.3. Synthesis: Relational Agency Through Differentiation and Integration (A → A–B → A + A–B)

Together, the findings indicate a coherent directional pattern: a differentiated sense of self (A) provides the structural foundation for integrated, relational forms of agency (A–B). Adaptive change appears most robust when individuals can maintain a distinct sense of identity while simultaneously coordinating their actions within broader relational systems. Several studies implied that optimal agency involves the *simultaneous operation of both modes, internal differentiation and relational integration* (A + A–B), allowing the self to act coherently while remaining responsive to contextual demands. This integrated configuration is further elaborated in Chapter 5.

4.12. Synthesised Dialectic Pair 5: Differentiated Discipline → Integrated Disciplines

4.12.1. Differentiated Discipline (A)

Across the included studies, disciplinary differentiation was described as essential for generating specialised forms of knowledge, methods, and conceptual clarity. Several authors emphasised that distinct disciplines develop unique lenses, terminologies, and analytic frameworks that allow them to investigate meaning-making from focused vantage points. For example, Kaplan and Garner (2017) demonstrated how developmental psychology provides fine-grained accounts of cognitive and identity processes, while Badcock (2019) outlined how evolutionary psychiatry contributes specialised structural models of hierarchical self-organisation. Similarly, Mascolo (2016) highlighted that developmental systems theory offers precise tools for examining reciprocal regulation and interpersonal coordination. These

findings show that differentiated disciplines function as static, internally coherent knowledge systems (A), each contributing distinct insights that cannot be reduced to or collapsed into one another.

4.12.2. Integrated Disciplines (A–B)

Integration across disciplines was consistently described as a dynamic process in which disparate fields are brought into conversation to produce expanded, more holistic understandings of meaning-making. Several included studies explicitly employed interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary approaches to examine complex relational phenomena. Myers (2018) illustrated how learning sciences integrate cognitive, social, and cultural perspectives to account for emergent meaning in activity systems. Magid (2021) demonstrated how psychotherapy draws from affective science, relational theory, and cognitive frameworks to explain change processes. Mascolo (2016) similarly advocated bridging psychology, development, and systems theory to understand meaning as co-regulated and emergent. The included literature therefore portrays integrated disciplines (A–B) as dynamic relational processes that coordinate differentiated knowledge domains to address complex questions more comprehensively.

4.12.3. Synthesis: Transdisciplinary Coherence Through Differentiation and Integration (A → A–B → A + A–B)

The combined findings indicate that disciplinary differentiation (A) provides the stable conceptual structures necessary for effective interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary integration (A–B). Meaning-making appears to be best understood when the strengths of specialised disciplines are preserved while being brought into coordinated relational exchange. Several studies suggested that the most comprehensive explanations emerge when *disciplinary depth and relational integration operate simultaneously* (A + A–B), producing a coherent, multi-perspectival understanding that neither fragmentation nor disciplinary fusion alone can achieve. This simultaneous differentiated–integrated configuration is further examined in Chapter 5.

4.13. Cross-Dialectic Patterns Across All Five Pairs

Cross-synthesis reveals a stable relational cycle:

1. Differentiation
2. Relational tension
3. Integration
4. Emergence

This cycle repeats across self, cognition, systems, disciplines, and meaning-making processes.

4.14. The Meaning-Making System (Proposed Model)

Across all findings, a unified relational model emerges:

- Independent → Interdependent
- Division → Union
- Order/Chaos → Emergence
- Differentiated Self → Integrated Self
- Differentiated Discipline → Integrated Discipline

Meaning-making is shown to be a recursive, multi-level dialectic system with fractal properties and cross-domain coherence.

4.15. Summary of Results

This chapter presented the results of the scoping review, including search outcomes, study characteristics, data charting via the 10-category matrix, and meta-aggregated synthesised findings across five dialectical pairs. The findings reveal meaning-making as a relational, dialectical, and emergent process operating consistently across individual, interpersonal, systemic, and disciplinary scales. Chapter 5 discusses these results in relation to existing theory and presents the original integrative model.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1. Introduction

Chapter 4 presented the results of the scoping review, detailing five dialectical pairs derived through meta-aggregation of the included literature. The purpose of the present chapter is not to introduce new empirical findings, but to synthesise and interpret the patterns identified in Chapter 4 into an integrated conceptual structure. The analysis that follows represents the author's interpretive synthesis of the review findings, informed directly by the results reported in Chapter 4, and aims to bring coherence to the recurring relational patterns observed across the reviewed studies.

The synthesis undertaken in this chapter reveals that the identified dialectical patterns together form a non-linear and recursive structure of meaning-making to clarify how meaning-making operates as a relational and systemic process across psychological and theoretical contexts. The central interpretive finding that emerged from the coding process is that meaning-making evolves into a non-linear, dialectical pattern, a progression from the earlier defined linear developmental sequence. What initially appeared to be straightforward shifts, such as moving from internal reflection to relational engagement, or from stability to transformation, became more complex upon iterative comparison. Across the data, these movements consistently folded back on themselves, revealing recursive exchanges between opposing poles. This discovery aligns with patterns commonly observed in complex adaptive systems, where surface-level regularities mask deeper cycles of tension, differentiation, and re-integration (von Bertalanffy, 1968; Kauffman, 1995; Capra & Luisi, 2014).

Another key interpretive insight is that meaning-making operates simultaneously across multiple levels of organisation, individual, relational, systemic, and ecological. Rather than being confined to intrapsychic processes, the included studies repeatedly demonstrated how meaning-making is shaped by interactions among nested hierarchies, including personal histories, interpersonal contexts, cultural frameworks, and broader social–ecological dynamics (von Bertalanffy, 1968; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Capra & Luisi, 2014). This nested hierarchical functioning suggests that meaning-making should be conceptualised not as a single process but as a distributed relational phenomenon whose coherence emerges only when these levels are viewed in interaction.

A third central finding is that the dialectical pairs identified in Chapter 4 are not discrete categories but dynamically co-constituting forces that structure meaning-making across contexts. Across the reviewed literature, stability and change, independence and

interdependence, differentiation and integration, and internal and external organisation did not appear as separate or sequential themes, but as relationally entangled processes (Mascolo, 2016; von Bertalanffy, 1968). Each pole gained significance only in relation to its opposite, with meaning-making emerging through the tension and movement between them rather than from either pole in isolation (Varela et al., 1991). This relational interdependence reflects a broader systemic principle of emergent organisation, whereby coherence arises from patterned interaction rather than unilateral dominance (von Bertalanffy, 1968).

The analysis also revealed that these dialectical movements function as regulatory mechanisms that support adaptive meaning-making. Across the included studies, individuals and systems navigated these tensions to maintain both continuity and flexibility. For example, differentiation enabled clarity and boundary formation, while integration supported connection and shared understanding. Meaning-making progressed not by eliminating tension but by working productively with it, allowing systems to reorganise in response to developmental, relational, or environmental challenges. This reflects the broader systemic logic found in self-organising processes across biological and relational domains.

Finally, the interdisciplinary spread of the included studies underscored that this dialectical structure of meaning-making is not limited to psychology but appears across diverse fields. Whether described in cognitive, developmental, relational, organisational, or ecological terms, the same underlying pattern, a movement between poles that generates emergent coherence, was *consistently identifiable*. This convergence across disciplines strengthens the argument that meaning-making may reflect a general organisational principle rather than a domain-specific construct. The sections that follow draw these patterns together into a coherent relational structure that informs the interpretive framework developed in this chapter.

5.2. Cross-Pair Synthesis: Meaning-Making as a System of Dialectical Coordination

When the five dialectical pairs are considered together, a shared structural pattern becomes visible. Meaning-making develops through the ongoing coordination of static and dynamic processes that operate in reciprocal tension. Each pair offers a different view of this relationship:

1. Independent meaning provides a static inner orientation from which interdependent meaning-making can unfold.
2. Dialectic division allows functional distinctions to be drawn; dialectic union brings those distinctions back into relational alignment.

3. Sustainable emergence reflects an orderly movement from [1] internal grounding to [2] relational expansion, while unsustainable emergence marks breakdown when this sequence is disrupted or reversed.
4. The Differentiated Self provides a coherent centre of agency; the Integrated Self coordinates that agency with others.
5. Differentiated disciplines protect conceptual clarity; integrated disciplines enable productive synthesis across fields.

Taken together, these pairings suggest that meaning-making functions as a system of dialectical coordination. Stability and adaptability are not opposing camps to be chosen between; they are complementary operations that need to be held in dynamic balance. Differentiation creates clarity. Integration creates coherence. Internal meaning establishes orientation. Relational meaning-making allows expansion. Agency is configured both within individuals and between them, and knowledge develops through the interaction of depth and breadth.

Across the included studies, meaning-making was most coherent when static and dynamic processes operated simultaneously, an integration of sequential linearity and isolated parts. Read through a systems lens, these movements reflect shifts between closed, open, and regulated closed–open configurations, consistent with principles of self-organisation in complex systems.

This insight underpins the integrated configuration A + A–B, explored in Section 5.3. By contrast, meaning-making became unstable where these processes were decoupled or reversed, producing either fragmentation or fusion, patterns further explored in Section 5.4.

5.3. The Three-Tier Emergence Pattern (A → A–B → A + A–B)

Across the five dialectical pairs, a consistent sequence emerged in which meaning-making moves from internal grounding (A), to relational expansion (A–B), and, in more integrated cases, to a configuration that holds both modes together (A + A–B). No single study explicitly stated this formulation; however, multiple studies described developmental, relational, and systemic processes that implied such a progression (Mascolo, 2016; Kaplan & Garner, 2017; Badcock, 2019; Myers, 2018; Magid, 2021).: first, stabilising structures; second, relational engagement; and third, an integrated state in which stability and responsiveness co-exist. This three-tier pattern offers a unifying lens through which to interpret the broader dynamics of meaning-making.

5.3.1. Tier One: Internal Grounding (A)

The first tier corresponds to independent meaning, dialectic division, sustainable emergence, the Differentiated Self, and differentiated disciplines. It reflects the stable, internally organised structures from which meaning-making begins. Included studies highlighted the importance of coherence, boundary formation, internal differentiation, and self-referential organisation as foundations for further relational work. This tier supports orientation, identity formation, conceptual clarity, and the capacity to interpret experience. Internal grounding functions as the static pole of the dialectic, the reference point that allows systems to participate meaningfully in wider relational networks.

5.3.2. Tier Two: Relational Expansion (A–B)

The second tier aligns with interdependent meaning-making, dialectic union, aspects of the Integrated Self, integrated disciplines, and the outward-facing elements of sustainable emergence. It reflects the dynamic processes through which meaning develops in interaction with others and with broader contexts. Across the sources, coordination, co-regulation, reciprocity, learning exchanges, interdisciplinary collaboration, and other relational processes were consistently identified as drivers of adaptive meaning-making. This tier marks the movement from stable grounding (independence) into active interdependence, where systems test, revise, and extend their meanings in relation to the world.

5.3.3. Tier Three: Integrated Coherence (A + A–B)

The third tier emerges when internal grounding and relational engagement operate together. Although none of the studies described this tier using the notation A + A–B, many pointed toward conditions in which the most adaptive meaning-making occurred: identity that retained coherence while remaining open to relational influence (Kaplan & Garner, 2017); coordination that preserved inner organisation while enabling collaborative flexibility (Mascolo, 2016); or cross-disciplinary syntheses that held disciplinary depth alongside transdisciplinary breadth (Myers, 2018). These examples describe a state in which *static and dynamic processes neither collapse into one another nor pull apart, but function in tandem*. Meaning remains anchored while also being adaptive, relational, and responsive to complexity.

5.4. Directionality and the Emergence of Coherence

One of the clearest insights from the synthesis is that the boundary between sustainable and unsustainable emergence does not lie in surface behaviour, whether expansion is “hyper” or “hypo”, outward or inward, but in the *underlying self-evaluation of self and other*. Sustainable emergence is associated with an experience of fundamental

equality: self and other are recognised as separate-and-equal, a basis for connection. Under those conditions, differentiation and integration can operate in balanced tension (Mascolo, 2016; Kaplan & Garner, 2017; Badcock, 2019).

Unsustainable emergence arises when the Self, functioning as an a priori organising reference, is implicitly experienced as unequal, either superior or inferior, to others or its relational context. This perception of inequality disrupts the balanced unfolding of the A → A–B → A + A–B sequence, giving rise to the compensatory hyper- or hypo-activation patterns identified in Chapter 4. From this perspective, the diverse expressions of unsustainable emergence can be traced to a simple organising condition: coherent meaning-making depends on equal valuation of Self and relational context, whereas perceived inequality generates incoherence.

The three-tier pattern also clarifies the *directionality* of sustainable emergence. Across the included studies, coherence was most often associated with progression from internal grounding (A), through relational expansion (A–B), and only then toward integrated simultaneity (A + A–B). This direction echoes developmental and systemic accounts in which stable structures form the basis for adaptive interaction, and integrated coherence emerges when differentiation and connection are held in proportion. When relational demands precede internal grounding, or when systems attempt to stabilise prematurely, unsustainable patterns are more likely to appear, a theme developed further below.

This directionality reflects the broader relational symmetry underpinning, what the review terms as the equal–opposite–same rule: complementary movements retain equal generative potential as long as they remain tethered to a shared internal synchrony. When that synchrony is lost, symmetry collapses into unsustainable forms of emergence (the equal-opposite-same rule is further explained in section 6.3).

5.5. Interpreting Directional Sequencing and Free Will Within Meaning-Making

The review showed that meaning-making is often structured through degrees of tension between the inner and outer processes, of differentiation and integration, and chaos and order. Viewed through the lens of directional sequencing [1] independent (A) preceding [2] interdependent (A–B), the literature indicates that systems tend to organise meaning along two equal–opposite pathways.

The first (A →A-B) describes movement in which coherently organised inner meanings are extended outward into relational or contextual engagement. The second (A-B →A) describes movement in which external phenomenological information is drawn inward for reinterpretation, stabilisation, or reorganisation. Importantly, both pathways appear in the

literature as neutral modes of adaptive change, rather than inherently coherent or incoherent sequences (Mascolo, 2016; Kaplan & Garner, 2017; Myers, 2018). A paradox nonetheless remains: although directional movement in meaning-making is neutral, coherence depends not on whether meaning unfolds inward or outward, but on whether the Self (A) remains the a priori organising reference from which relational engagement proceeds. Interdependence (A–B), by contrast, is structurally polar and therefore unstable as an a priori organising reference, insofar as it prioritises relational engagement in the absence of a stabilising internal orientation (A).

In Chapter 1, free will was described as the Self's capacity to direct its interpretive orientation. In this context, free will can be understood as the capacity of individuals and systems to intentionally attend to, interpret, and respond to emergent tensions. Rather than functioning as an abstract metaphysical property, free will is framed here as a practical regulatory process shaping whether meaning-making unfolds through expanding coherence, compensatory rebalancing, or entrenched polarisation (Frankl, 1959/2006; Varela et al., 1991; Park, 2010).

Foregrounding directionality in this way clarifies how agency operates within systemic constraints. While systems cannot choose their starting conditions, they can influence how they move between grounding and expansion. These movements shape whether relational tensions support sustainable integration or give rise to fragmentation or fusion (Badcock, 2019; Mascolo, 2016).

Within this framework, coherence is not determined by the direction of meaning-making, but by the presence or absence of *neutralised judgment*. When the Self relates to both its internal meanings (A) and its relational contexts (A-B) without preferential valuation, directional movement, whether outward or inward, supports adaptive integration. In contrast, when meaning-making is shaped by implicit preference (A) and enacted through explicit judgment (A-B), privileging either the internal Self or the external world, the same directional processes become distortive and polarising. Free will, in this view, is expressed through the capacity to regulate or suspend judgment arising from internal preference, allowing meaning-making to unfold through coherent regulation rather than hyper- or hypo-reactive polarity (Varela et al., 1991; Neimeyer, 2001; Magid, 2021).

5.6. The

5.7. as a Foundation for Further Interpretation

This three-tier emergence pattern provides a conceptual foundation for understanding the polarity dynamics described in Section 5.4 and the breakdown–breakthrough cycles

elaborated in Section 5.5. It also forms the structural basis for the broader implications for psychotherapy, meaning-making, interdisciplinary integration, and systemic coherence. As such, this pattern represents a core contribution of the present review: the demonstration that meaning-making unfolds through a recurrent structural logic observed across diverse systems.

5.8. Polarity Dynamics: Fragmentation, Fusion, Breakdown, and Breakthrough

Across the included studies, polarity emerged as a defining feature of meaning-making processes, reflected most clearly in the oscillation between fragmentation and fusion during periods of systemic disruption. These polarities capture two distinct expressions of unsustainable emergence, in which the balance between internal organisation and relational engagement becomes destabilised. Fragmentation occurred when systems became overly divided or incoherent due to excessive differentiation, while fusion occurred when systems became overly merged or undifferentiated due to excessive integration (Mascolo, 2016; Magid, 2021). Although these patterns appear opposite, they represent parallel expressions of the same underlying instability: both arise when relational demands exceed internal coherence or when meaning structures are insufficiently grounded to support adaptive engagement.

A key insight emerging from the synthesis is that this destabilisation functions as a form of breakdown, which appears not merely as dysfunction but as a precursor to systemic reorganisation. Several included studies suggested that temporary incoherence, whether expressed as emotional dysregulation, conceptual dissonance, relational rupture, or developmental imbalance, creates the conditions through which new meaning structures can form. Kaplan and Garner (2017) noted that identity dissonance prompts meaning reconstruction, while Badcock (2019) described how destabilisation within hierarchical systems initiates compensatory reorganisation. Magid (2021) framed therapeutic rupture as a necessary stage in the emergence of new relational patterns, and Myers (2018) demonstrated how cognitive destabilisation supports the acquisition of more complex learning structures. In each case, breakdown serves a functional role: it clears or destabilises existing structures in ways that make new coherence possible.

This pattern positions breakdown as the dialectical complement of breakthrough. Sustainable emergence, characterised by the coherent sequence from internal grounding (A) to relational expansion (A–B) and ultimately to simultaneous integration (A + A–B), represents the breakthrough side of this dialectic. In contrast, unsustainable emergence reflects the reversal of this sequence (A–B → A), resulting in the breakdown configurations

of fragmentation or fusion. Yet the findings also suggest that breakdown is not an endpoint. Rather, it initiates a corrective realignment, prompting systems to reorganise toward more sustainable coherence. This cyclical movement of destabilisation and reorganisation mirrors broader developmental and systemic processes in which complexity evolves through alternating phases of differentiation, disruption, and renewed integration.

Understanding breakdown and breakthrough as complementary movements within a single dialectical rhythm provides an interpretive key to the cross-disciplinary patterns identified in this review. It frames meaning-making not as a linear ascent toward coherence but as an iterative process in which instability plays a necessary role in driving adaptation. This insight also aligns closely with therapeutic perspectives that view rupture as integral to healing, developmental theories that recognise disequilibrium as a driver of growth, and systemic accounts in which temporary disorder enables higher-order emergence. These connections are elaborated further in Sections 5.5 and 5.6.

5.9. Breakdown → Breakthrough Cycles: Realignment and Reorganisation

Across the included studies, several authors described meaning-making as an iterative process in which periods of instability, disruption, or diminished coherence serve as catalysts for subsequent reorganisation. This pattern reflects a broader cycle in which breakdown, expressed through fragmentation, fusion, dissonance, or dysregulation, creates conditions for breakthrough, in which new or more coherent meaning structures emerge (Mascolo, 2016; Kaplan & Garner, 2017; Myers, 2018; Magid, 2021). Although the included studies did not explicitly frame this as a breakdown–breakthrough dialectic, their descriptions of destabilisation followed by reorganisation consistently implied such a process.

5.9.1. Breakdown as Functional Destabilisation

Breakdown, in this context, refers not to failure but to the temporary dissolution of existing meaning structures. Multiple studies illustrated how internal or relational disruptions signal that previous modes of meaning-making are no longer adequate. Kaplan and Garner (2017) described identity dissonance as a necessary precursor to meaning reconstruction, while Badcock (2019) noted that hierarchical disruptions within cognitive systems initiate compensatory reorganisation. Magid (2021) framed therapeutic rupture as a mechanism through which maladaptive patterns lose their coherence, creating openings for new relational configurations. Mascolo (2016) and Myers (2018) likewise demonstrated that imbalance, disequilibrium, or destabilisation in interpersonal or learning systems creates the conditions for growth. These findings indicate that breakdown operates as a functional destabilisation, clearing space for new forms of coherence.

5.9.2. The Transition Phase: Realignment and Reorientation

Between breakdown and breakthrough lies a transitional phase characterised by reorientation, recalibration, and the renegotiation of meaning. Although not always explicitly discussed, this phase was implied in descriptions of individuals and systems navigating uncertainty, experimenting with new relational patterns, or integrating previously incompatible perspectives. This transitional work aligns with developmental accounts in which periods of disequilibrium or asymmetry precede higher-order integration, as well as therapeutic processes in which clients explore new interpretations or relational responses following rupture (Piaget, 1971; Kegan, 1982; Neimeyer, 2001). The evidence suggests that the ability to tolerate and navigate this transitional space is a key determinant of adaptive meaning-making.

5.9.3. Breakthrough as Reintegrated Coherence

Breakthrough occurs when new meaning structures emerge from the resolution of breakdown. This reintegrated coherence corresponds with the A + A–B configuration outlined in Section 5.3, in which systems regain stability while enhancing their capacity for relational engagement. Several studies illustrated processes in which new, more adaptive configurations arise following periods of disruption. For example, Magid (2021) described renewed relational coherence following therapeutic repair, while Myers (2018) demonstrated how learners integrate new perspectives after confronting cognitive challenges. Badcock (2019) similarly showed how systems reorganise into more stable configurations after periods of instability. These examples illustrate that breakthrough represents not a return to previous equilibrium but the emergence of new coherence through integrated meaning-making.

5.9.4. The Dialectical Rhythm of Emergence

Taken together, the breakdown–breakthrough cycle reflects a deeper dialectical rhythm within meaning-making systems. Stability (A) moves into relational expansion (A–B), which may lead to instability if the sequence is reversed or overwhelmed (A–B → A), resulting in breakdown. Yet breakdown often proves necessary for the emergence of more coherent patterns that integrate stability and relationality simultaneously (A + A–B). This rhythm parallels cycles observed across developmental theories, therapeutic change models, and systems frameworks in which disruption precedes reorganisation. Rather than viewing breakdown as a failure of meaning-making, the findings suggest it is a structural component of growth.

5.10. Implications for Meaning-Making Processes

Recognising breakdown and breakthrough as complementary phases offers a valuable lens for understanding how meaning transforms across contexts. It situates instability not as an aberration but as a functional stage in the iterative construction of coherence. This insight carries significant implications for counselling and psychotherapy, where rupture is a recognised pathway to depth-oriented change (Neimeyer, 2001; Safran & Muran, 2000); for developmental theory, where periods of disequilibrium support the emergence of more complex forms of organisation (Piaget, 1971; Kegan, 1982); and for transdisciplinary inquiry, where sustained conceptual tension enables integrative synthesis (Bateson, 1972). These implications are elaborated in Sections 5.6 and 5.7.

5.11. Implications for Counselling and Psychotherapy

The findings of this review have significant implications for counselling and psychotherapy, particularly in understanding how clients construct, transform, and sustain meaning across changing psychological and relational contexts. Across the included studies, meaning-making emerged as a dynamic, dialectical process that depends on the interplay between internal grounding and relational engagement, an insight that closely aligns with therapeutic change processes. The three-tier emergence pattern identified in Section 5.3 provides a useful framework for conceptualising how clients move from stability, to relational exploration, and ultimately to integrative coherence, while Section 5.5 demonstrates how breakdown processes often serve as necessary catalysts for growth. These findings reinforce the view that meaning-making is not a linear or purely cognitive task but an embodied, relational, and emergent activity.

5.11.1. Therapeutic Rupture, Regulation, and Realignment

Many therapeutic models recognise the importance of rupture and repair, viewing relational or emotional destabilisation as a precursor to deeper integration (Safran & Muran, 2000; Tronick, 2007). The breakdown–breakthrough cycle identified in this review provides a conceptual lens for understanding these processes within a broader systemic framework. Moments of fragmentation, disorientation, or emotional overwhelm, often interpreted as clinical regression, may instead represent the breakdown phase through which rigid or outdated meaning structures dissolve. Consistent with findings by Magid (2021) and Mascolo (2016), these ruptures create openings for clients to reorganise meaning in more adaptive configurations. Counsellors can therefore view destabilisation not as a failure of treatment but as an expected and potentially necessary stage in the emergence of new coherence.

5.11.2. Supporting Movement from Internal Grounding to Relational Expansion

The review highlighted that sustainable meaning-making begins with internal grounding (A) and moves toward relational expansion (A–B). Therapeutically, this suggests that clients benefit from first developing a clear and coherent sense of self, through self-awareness, emotional regulation, and narrative articulation, before being asked to engage in complex relational meaning-making. Approaches such as person-centred therapy, emotion-focused work, and narrative meaning reconstruction all *support this sequencing* by helping clients establish stable internal reference points from which they can safely explore relationships, roles, and external demands. This aligns with Badcock's (2019) emphasis on hierarchical self-organisation and Kaplan and Garner's (2017) focus on *identity coherence* as foundations for adaptive relational functioning.

5.11.3. Integrating Stability and Relational Adaptability

The integrative tier (A + A–B) suggests that optimal therapeutic change involves helping clients maintain internal stability while simultaneously engaging in dynamic relational processes. This balance resonates strongly with the aims of contemporary psychotherapies, including mindfulness-based approaches, interpersonal therapies, and integrative or pluralistic modalities, all of which seek to cultivate a self that is both grounded and relationally responsive. The review's finding that meaning-making is most coherent when *stability and adaptability operate together* provides an empirical rationale for interventions that support oscillation between inward reflection and outward relational practice. This also mirrors Frankl's emphasis on the ability to find meaning through both internal attitude and relational contact with the world.

5.11.4. Working with Fragmentation and Fusion

The polarity dynamics described in Section 5.4 offer important insights for counselling practice. Fragmentation (hyper/hypo division) and fusion (hyper/hypo integration) reflect two opposite but related expressions of unsustainable emergence. Clients experiencing fragmentation may present with confusion, emotional dysregulation, or loss of narrative coherence, whereas those experiencing fusion may demonstrate enmeshment, over-identification, or loss of autonomy. Recognising these patterns as dialectical polarities helps counsellors tailor interventions that restore balance, guiding clients toward the directionality associated with sustainable emergence. Therapeutic strategies may therefore focus on either strengthening boundaries (in cases of fusion) or deepening relational anchoring (in cases of fragmentation), depending on where the imbalance lies.

5.11.5. Meaning Reconstruction and Therapeutic Growth

Finally, the review's synthesis aligns strongly with logotherapeutic perspectives on meaning reconstruction. Frankl (1963) emphasised that meaning often emerges in response to suffering, dissonance, or existential disruption, precisely the breakdown conditions identified in this review. The dialectical model developed here provides a structural explanation for this process: breakdown destabilises prior meaning structures, enabling clients to reconstruct meaning through a shift from internal grounding toward relational expansion and ultimately toward an integrated, coherent stance. This connection provides a theoretically robust bridge between systems-based accounts of emergent meaning-making and Frankl's existential understanding of how meaning is generated in the midst of difficulty.

5.12. Transdisciplinary Implications

The patterns identified in this review have significant implications beyond counselling and psychotherapy, extending to a wide range of disciplines concerned with development, cognition, relational systems, and emergent processes. Although each included study approached meaning-making from its own disciplinary commitments, the convergence of findings across psychology, cognitive science, systems theory, and relational development indicates the presence of a shared structural logic. This logic, the movement from internal grounding (A), to relational expansion (A–B), to integrated coherence (A + A–B), with corresponding polarity dynamics, offers a transdisciplinary framework capable of linking theoretical insights across diverse domains without reducing them to a single perspective.

5.12.1. A Shared Structural Logic Across Disciplines

Across psychology, the dialectical coordination of differentiation and integration was repeatedly described as central to cognitive, emotional, and identity development. Developmental theorists emphasised that coherent functioning depends on the formation of differentiated internal structures that are subsequently integrated through relational processes (Kaplan & Garner, 2017; Mascolo, 2016). Similar patterns emerged within cognitive science, where learning and adaptation were shown to depend on oscillations between periods of stability and destabilisation (Myers, 2018). Systems theory and evolutionary psychiatry likewise described hierarchical organisation, feedback-driven adaptation, and emergent coordination as products of internal–external relational tension (Badcock, 2019). These parallels suggest that meaning-making processes reflect a fundamental organisational principle observable across multiple levels of analysis.

These directional pathways also reflect the deeper ontological rule governing the model: oppositional movements retain equal generative potential so long as they remain

tethered to internal synchrony. When this balance is lost, the equal–opposite symmetry collapses into unsustainable forms of emergence (order) or entropy (chaos).

5.12.2. Implications for Systems and Complexity Theory

The three-tier emergence pattern articulated in this review resonates strongly with systems and complexity theories, which have long argued that coherent order emerges through oscillations between stability and change (Kelso, 1995; Thelen & Smith, 1994; Prigogine & Stengers, 1984; Kauffman, 1995). The review's findings support this view by demonstrating that sustainable emergence follows a directional sequence (A → A–B → A + A–B), and that unsustainable patterns reflect reversals or collapses of this sequence. The identification of breakdown as a precursor to reorganisation aligns with established systems principles such as disequilibrium-driven adaptation, phase transitions, and self-organised criticality (Lewis, 2000; Kelso, 1995; Bak et al., 1989; Prigogine & Stengers, 1984). This suggests that meaning-making may be understood as a particular instance of a broader emergent phenomenon that governs adaptive systems across natural, biological, and relational contexts (Park, 2010; Baumeister, 1991; Steger, 2012).

5.12.3. Implications for Interdisciplinary Research and Integration

The dialectical pairing of differentiated discipline and integrated disciplines (Pair 5) offers a conceptual rationale for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary inquiry. The findings indicate that disciplinary depth and relational integration operate most effectively when treated as complementary processes rather than competing orientations. Preserving the clarity and precision of disciplinary specialisation (A) enables more productive synthesis across fields (A–B), while the integrated configuration (A + A–B) supports transdisciplinary perspectives capable of addressing complex, multi-layered phenomena such as meaning-making, consciousness, and relational development (Montuori, 2013; Nicolescu, 2014). This suggests that the framework developed in this thesis could serve as a meta-analytic tool for organising knowledge across domains.

5.13. Relevance for Social–Ecological and Relational Sciences

Across social–ecological systems, the polarity dynamics of fragmentation and fusion, as well as the breakdown–breakthrough cycle, map closely onto processes of collective adaptation (Holling, 2001). For example, relational rupture, systemic instability, or environmental stress often precede reorganisation into new patterns of coherence, echoing the findings identified in Section 5.5. This alignment suggests that the structural logic of meaning-making may extend to broader relational systems, including communities, organisations, and ecological networks (Berkes et al., 2003). Understanding these dynamics

as manifestations of a shared dialectical structure provides a foundation for integrating psychological insights with ecological and organisational models of change (Morin, 2008).

5.14. Toward a Transdisciplinary Model of Consciousness and Meaning

By demonstrating that meaning-making follows a recurrent structural pattern across diverse disciplines, this review contributes to growing interest in integrative approaches to consciousness, cognition, and relational systems (Capra & Luisi, 2014; Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991). While the thesis does not claim to resolve philosophical debates, it does show that meaning-making, whether psychological, relational, cognitive, or systemic, exhibits a structural coherence that is compatible with broader theories of emergent organisation (Park, 2010). This insight positions the dialectical framework developed here as a potential foundation for future transdisciplinary work exploring the relationship between consciousness, systems organisation, and meaning.

5.15. Frankl and Meaning Reconstruction

The findings sit in close dialogue with Viktor Frankl's logotherapeutic claim that meaning is discovered and reconstructed in response to challenge, instability, and existential tension (Frankl, 1959/2006, 1963). Frankl emphasised that meaning arises through the individual's orientation within suffering, conditions that mirror the breakdown phase described earlier.

The synthesis in this thesis shows that destabilisation often precedes reorganisation, and that meaning reconstruction unfolds through directional movement from inner grounding to relational expansion and then to integrated coherence (Park, 2010). Frankl's notion of an inner attitudinal freedom aligns with Tier One (A) as a stabilising centre. The interdisciplinary evidence extends this view by emphasising that reconstruction is inherently relational: people reorganise meaning through engagement with others, with contexts, and with future possibilities (A–B), eventually arriving at forms of coherence that are both personally grounded and relationally embedded (A + A–B).

Frankl's emphasis on suffering as a catalyst for meaning is also supported. Fragmentation, fusion, and other forms of rupture appear when prior frameworks can no longer contain experience. The dialectical model suggests that such breakdowns dissolve rigid structures and create space for new, more integrated patterns. Meaning thus emerges not in spite of disruption, but through it, a point Frankl emphasised and which the present framework situates within a wider understanding of systemic emergence.

Finally, Frankl's description of meaning as directional and future-oriented resonates with the movement from grounding to expansion. Orientation toward values, responsibilities,

and possibilities beyond the self closely resembles the A–B movement into relational engagement. The integrated tier (A + A–B) can be read as an expanded account of Frankl's attitudinal values, where meaning is enacted through both inner stance and coherent participation in the world.

5.16. The Relational Coherence Model (RCM)

The Relational Coherence Model (RCM), proposed in this thesis**,** synthesises the findings of this scoping review into a unified theoretical framework for understanding meaning-making as a dialectical, emergent, and systemic process. Developed through the integration of the ten-category matrix, the five dialectical pairs, and the three-tier emergence pattern identified in this review, the RCM provides a structural account of how meaning arises, destabilises, reorganises, and coheres within and across psychological, relational, developmental, disciplinary, and systemic contexts. While the model is informed by prior conceptual work undertaken by the candidate, it is grounded in and validated by the cross-disciplinary patterns revealed in the included studies.

5.16.1. Core Structure of the RCM: A → A–B → A + A–B

At the heart of the RCM is the sequential and integrative movement from A (internal grounding) to A–B (relational expansion), to A + A–B (integrated coherence). This pattern, identified consistently across the five dialectical pairs, reflects a dynamic interplay between stability and adaptability. Internal grounding (A) provides the stable reference points, meaning, identity, differentiation, self-agency, and disciplinary clarity, necessary for coherent functioning. Relational expansion (A–B) represents the dynamic processes through which systems engage, co-regulate, coordinate, and integrate with wider relational networks. The integrated tier (A + A–B) emerges when both modes operate simultaneously, enabling systems to maintain stability while remaining attuned and responsive to relational demands.

5.16.2. Dialectical Foundations: The Ten-Category Matrix

The ten categories identified through coding are illustrated in Table 5.1 below:

Table 5.1 – 10 Categories Defined in Dialectic Pairs

Domain	Independent Pole (A)	Interdependent Pole (A–B)
Meaning	1.Independent Meaning	2.Interdependent Meaning-Making
Process	3.Dialectic Division	4.Dialectic Union
Emergence	5.Unsustainable Emergence (A–B → A)	6.Sustainable Emergence (A → A–B)
Agency	7.Differentiated Self as Agent	8.Integrated Self as Agent
Discipline	9.Differentiated Discipline	10.Integrated Disciplines

These five dialectical pairs map precisely onto the A and A–B modes, with each pair expressing a complementary relationship between differentiation and integration. Their recurrence across disparate fields demonstrates that meaning-making is governed by a common relational logic rather than domain-specific mechanisms.

5.16.3. Polarity Dynamics and Unsustainable Emergence

The RCM incorporates the polarity dynamics identified in Section 5.4, recognising that unsustainable emergence manifests in two opposite but structurally related forms: fragmentation and fusion. Fragmentation arises when systems become overly divided, losing coherence; fusion arises when they become overly merged, losing differentiation. Both represent deviations from the sustainable A → A–B sequence, typically emerging from the reversed or overloaded pattern of A–B → A. By incorporating these oppositional outcomes, the RCM accounts for the destabilising forces that impact meaning-making, identity, relational functioning, and disciplinary development.

5.16.4. Breakdown → Breakthrough Cycles

A key contribution of the RCM is its integration of the breakdown–breakthrough rhythm described in Section 5.5. This cycle reflects the observation that destabilisation is often a necessary precursor to reorganisation (Holling, 2001). Breakdown clears outdated or rigid meaning structures, creating the conditions for relational expansion and new integration. Breakthrough emerges when systems successfully move from internal grounding through relational engagement and into integrative coherence. This cycle aligns with developmental theory, relational repair models, learning sciences, systems theory, and Frankl's account of meaning reconstruction.

5.16.5. A Transdisciplinary Model of Meaning and Coherence

By integrating the sequential, dialectical, polarity, and cyclical dynamics identified in this review, the RCM offers a robust transdisciplinary account of meaning-making. It provides a framework capable of linking psychological meaning-making with systems organisation, developmental regulation, relational dynamics, and interdisciplinary synthesis. The model does not replace existing theories but provides a meta-structure that explains why stable and dynamic processes must be coordinated for sustainable functioning across domains.

5.17. Relevance for Counselling, Development, and Systems Work

Within counselling and psychotherapy, the RCM provides a theoretical lens for understanding rupture and repair, emotional dysregulation, meaning reconstruction, and

relational change (Safran & Muran, 2000; Siegel, 2012; Neimeyer, 2001; Papero, 2018). Within developmental and learning sciences, it supports the view that disequilibrium precedes higher-order equilibrium and integration (Piaget, 1971; Kegan, 1982; Mascolo et al., 2016). Within systems theory and transdisciplinary inquiry, it clarifies how coherence arises from iterative cycles of differentiation and integration (von Bertalanffy, 1968; Holling, 2001; Kelso, 1995; Capra & Luisi, 2014; Nicolescu, 2014).

5.18. Summary of Key Contributions

This scoping review makes several important theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions to the study of meaning-making. First, it identifies a recurrent structural pattern underpinning meaning-making across diverse disciplines, demonstrating that meaning arises through a dialectical movement from internal grounding (A), to relational expansion (A–B), and finally to an integrated configuration in which *stability and adaptability operate simultaneously* (A + A–B).

This three-tier emergence pattern synthesises insights from psychology, cognitive science, systems theory, relational development, and interdisciplinary inquiry, reflecting longstanding proposals that diverse domains share underlying organisational logics (Capra & Luisi, 2014; Kelso, 1995; Laszlo, 2002; Morin, 2008; Montuori, 2013; Thompson, 2007). To date, however, these insights have not been articulated within a unified framework, a gap the present model seeks to address.

Second, the review establishes the significance of polarity dynamics in meaning-making, showing that unsustainable emergence manifests in two structurally related forms, fragmentation and fusion, and that these patterns are consistent with established accounts of dysregulation across psychological and systemic models (Bowen, 1978/2018; Kegan, 1982; Linehan, 1993; Safran & Muran, 2000; Siegel, 2012). These dynamics arise when the coherent sequence of emergence is disrupted or reversed. Integrating these findings with evidence from multiple domains, the review proposes the breakdown–breakthrough cycle as a necessary component of meaning-making, positioning destabilisation as a functional precursor to reorganisation and renewed coherence.

Third, the Relational Coherence Model (RCM) developed in this thesis represents a major conceptual contribution. Drawing from the ten-category matrix and five dialectical pairs, the model provides a transdisciplinary account of meaning-making that explains how stability, relational engagement, polarity dynamics, and emergent coherence interrelate. The RCM offers a meta-structural framework capable of linking psychological, developmental,

systemic, ecological, and interdisciplinary perspectives without reducing them to a single disciplinary viewpoint.

Fourth, the review contributes meaningfully to counselling and psychotherapy by offering a structural rationale for rupture and repair, meaning reconstruction, emotional regulation, and relational change. The RCM clarifies how therapeutic progress often depends on movement through destabilisation toward integrated coherence, providing a theoretical bridge between systemic accounts of emergence and Frankl's logotherapeutic emphasis on reconstructing meaning through suffering, orientation, and responsibility.

Finally, the review expands the methodological reach of scoping reviews by demonstrating the feasibility of synthesising conceptual, theoretical, and systems-based evidence using a ten-category dialectical coding matrix. This methodological innovation supports future research in fields where conceptual complexity is high and empirical data are heterogeneous, offering a replicable framework for identifying structural patterns across diverse bodies of literature (Aromataris & Munn, 2020).

Collectively, these contributions establish meaning-making as a nested hierarchy, dialectically governed, and emergent process that operates across disciplinary boundaries. The review provides a foundation for future work exploring how coherence arises within individuals, relationships, and systems, and offers a transdisciplinary framework capable of informing counselling practice, developmental theory, and broader systemic inquiry.

CHAPTER 6: THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION – THE RELATIONAL COHERENCE MODEL: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

6.1. Introduction

Chapter 6 builds on the synthesised findings and interpretive analysis developed in Chapters 4 and 5. Its purpose is to integrate these patterns into a conceptual framework proposed by the author as the Relational Coherence Model (RCM). While the structure and terminology of the RCM are the author's, the model is grounded throughout in the recurrent relational, dialectical, and systemic patterns identified across the 33 included publications.

The aim of the scoping review was not only to map conceptualisations of meaning-making but also to examine whether the recurring patterns observed across disciplines could be brought together into a coherent explanatory structure. The RCM is offered as an interpretive synthesis rather than a universal theory: it reflects the structures that consistently appeared in the reviewed literature, interpreted through the researcher's prior sensitivity to dialectical and systemic organisation (see Section 3.14). The model provides a way of understanding how meaning stabilises, destabilises, and reorganises within and across systems, and forms a conceptual foundation that may inform counselling and allied therapeutic practices. It responds directly to the central review question by clarifying how meaning-making is conceptualised across disciplines and what relational, dialectical, and emergent processes underpin these conceptualisations.

6.2. Overview of the Relational Coherence Model

Across the reviewed literature, three themes appeared with striking regularity. First, meaning-making consistently involved movement between a stabilising orientation (independent meaning, A) and a relationally responsive orientation (interdependent meaning-making, A–B). These appeared in various disciplinary languages: stability and transformation, autonomy and mutuality, differentiation and integration, or part and whole. Second, coherence arose not from eliminating tension between these orientations but from maintaining a functional and adaptive relationship between them. Third, the reviewed fields positioned relational tension as generative rather than problematic; contrast, opposition, and complementarity were understood as drivers of adaptation, insight, and reorganisation.

To illustrate this pattern clearly, the RCM first introduces meaning-making in its simplest linear form, A → A–B → A + A–B, before elaborating its inherently non-linear

dynamics. This staged presentation reflects the developmental logic of complex systems: linear descriptions provide accessible entry points, while deeper analysis reveals a non-linear, cyclical, and recursive structure that more accurately reflects lived meaning-making processes.

6.2.1. Iterative Progression: Linear →Non-Linear

Although the linear sequence provides conceptual clarity, synthesis across disciplines indicates that meaning-making does not unfold as a purely one-directional progression. Rather, it develops through an iterative, non-linear process layered upon an initial linear, and prior to that, static, orientation. Several studies described meaning-making as involving repeated cycles of differentiation, engagement, and subsequent re-organisation (Mascolo, 2016; Kaplan & Garner, 2017; Myers, 2018).

The mirrored movements of inner-to-outer engagement (A–B) and outer-to-inner return (B–A) were consistently characterised as complementary, forming a recursive dialectical exchange. This dynamic is consistent with patterns observed in complex adaptive systems, where stability and change emerge through iterative feedback loops (Kauffman, 1995; Capra & Luisi, 2014). Meaning-making is therefore more accurately captured by the relation A → A–B → B–A → A′, in which experience does not simply advance forward but returns to its point of orientation in a transformed state.

In this configuration, the linear grounding of independent meaning (A → A–B) remains foundational, while non-linear recursion enables increasing complexity through reflective reintegration. Meaning-making thus unfolds through recurrent cycles of differentiation, engagement, and re-stabilisation, allowing coherence to be repeatedly re-established across changing contexts rather than achieved once and held permanently. This progression also reflects increasing dimensional organisation, through which linear directionality is preserved rather than displaced.

6.2.2. Integrated Refinement

This iterative progression may also be understood as a directional and dimensional transition from simplicity to complexity. At its most basic level, meaning is grounded in a static a priori orientation (A), an internal point of reference associated with independent self-organisation. From this grounding, meaning-making extends linearly into relational engagement (A → A–B), introducing movement in a single direction from self toward context, other, or system.

As complexity increases, meaning-making becomes non-linear, operating through reciprocal movements between independence and interdependence (A–B / B–A). This phase

introduces bidirectional dynamics in which meaning is continually renegotiated through feedback, recursion, and mutual influence. Importantly, the non-linear pattern does not replace the earlier stages but builds upon them: static orientation provides stability, linear movement establishes direction, and non-linear recursion enables adaptive complexity across increasing scales.

Within this framework, sustainable emergence reflects a progression in which non-linear dynamics are scaffolded by prior grounding and directional coherence (A → A–B → A–B / B–A), whereas unsustainable emergence reflects the inversion of this sequence, whereby recursive dynamics unfold without sufficient internal anchoring (A–B → A). The findings therefore suggest that complexity itself is neutral; it is the order through which systems enter complexity that shapes whether meaning-making supports coherence or incoherence.

6.3. The Equal–Opposite–Same Rule Underpinning the RCM

The Relational Coherence Model (RCM) is grounded in a relational principle referred to as the equal–opposite–same rule, a conceptual structure widely recognised across systems theory, dialectical philosophy, and complexity science. Across these fields, coherence is understood to emerge not from uniformity or the dominance of a single pole, but from the dynamic interplay of complementary opposites (Bateson, 1972; Hegel, 1977/2018; Laszlo, 1996/2002; Capra & Luisi, 2014). Information-theoretic analyses of self-organisation further demonstrate how complex interdependencies emerge from simple relational interactions, reinforcing the centrality of dynamic balancing processes in coherent system evolution (Rosas et al., 2018). This principle can be clarified through a simple analogy: inhaling and exhaling are opposite movements, yet both are required for the coherent function of breathing. In the same way, independent meaning and interdependent meaning-making operate as opposing but complementary poles that, together, support the organisation and evolution of psychological coherence.

Within this relational architecture, the independent pole (A) provides a static orienting function, offering structure, interpretive anchoring, and a sense of identity, while the interdependent poles (A–B and B–A) represent dynamic relational movement, expressed in outward engagement and inward integration, respectively. Systems theorists and relational scholars have long recognised this patterned alternation between stability and change as a necessary condition for adaptive functioning (von Bertalanffy, 1968; Bruner, 1990; Thompson, 2007). Such shifts reflect broader developmental dynamics in which stability, instability, and emergence operate as interdependent features of system organisation

(Schöner, 2009). Laszlo's work on evolutionary systems reinforces this insight, emphasising that coherence across living, social, and cosmological systems emerges through a balanced tension between contrastive forces rather than their elimination (Laszlo, 1996/2002).

Although these poles differ in direction, function, and orientation, they are equal in structural significance, opposite in dynamic orientation, and expressions of the same underlying relational system. This equal–opposite–same rule aligns closely with foundational systems principles: feedback loops, non-linearity, nested hierarchies, recursive adaptation, and self-organisation. Coherence arises when cycles of expansion and contraction are held in productive tension; fragmentation or fusion emerges when these dynamics become rigid (static), extreme (expanded), or collapsed (contracted). These expanded, contracted, and static dynamics reflect well-established system patterns described across disciplines, including Siegel's (2020) distinction between rigidity and chaos as loss-of-integration states, Kelso's (1995) demonstration of convergent, divergent, and metastable dynamics in coordination systems, and Holling's (2001) account of rigidity, release, and reorganisation cycles in adaptive systems.

Illustrative examples show how this pattern manifests across scales:

Organisational example: A workplace team may fragment when members over-invest in individual roles (A) and under-engage in collaborative negotiation or shared coordination (A–B/B–A). The absence of relational feedback leads to siloing, misalignment, and weakened collective coherence, an unsustainable configuration.

Individual example: A person who maintains rigid self-sufficiency (A) and withdraws from relational engagement (A–B/B–A) may experience diminished adaptive capacity, weakened connection, or fragmentation in meaning structures.

The iterative relational sequence of the RCM can therefore be represented as:

A_0 → A–B / B–A → A_1 → (balanced or imbalanced iteration)

This reflects a system that moves from an initial meaning orientation (A_0), through relational engagement and integrative feedback (A–B/B–A), toward an emergent configuration of coherence (A_1), which then becomes the foundation for subsequent cycles (see Table 6.1). Crucially, imbalance is not interpreted as pathology but serves as an adaptive signal for recalibration within the system.

Table 6.1 – Dialectical Stages in the Iterative Meaning-Making Cycle

Symbol / Stage	Definition	Role in Meaning / Meaning-Making System	Systems Process Reflected	Possible Outcomes
A_0	Initial independent pole. Represents the Self's starting orientation of meaning (static, closed, non-dual). This may be stable *or* unstable depending on prior experience.	Anchors identity and coherence; provides the reference point from which meaning-making begins.	Stability, boundary-setting, invariance, self-organisation.	If imbalanced, it predisposes the meaning-making cycle toward compensatory patterns.
A–B	Interdependent pole (dynamic, open, dual; inner → outer). Meaning-making expressed through outward-directed relational flow (e.g., expression, communication, behaviour, projection).	Engages with environment, others, and contexts to generate new meaning.	Interconnection, outward feedback, relational coupling, open-system adaptation.	May over-expand (+) or under-expand (–) depending on imbalance.
B–A	Interdependent pole (dynamic, open, dual; outer → inner). Meaning-making expressed through inward-directed integration (e.g., reflection, interpretation, internalisation, awareness).	Draws relational experience back into the Self for integration.	Inner feedback, non-linearity, learning loops, nested internalisation.	May over-contract (+) or under-contract (–) if the system destabilises.
A_1	The transformed independent pole. A new state of meaning that incorporates the iterative learning from A–B / B–A.	Represents updated identity, coherence, and meaning structure following relational processing.	Self-organisation, phase-shift in holarchy, emergent stability.	Becomes: **balanced** (=) if integrated, or **imbalanced** (+/–) if unresolved.
Balanced (=)	Sustainable emergence: differentiation and integration are in dynamic equilibrium.	Meaning-making supports growth, complexity, and relational coherence.	Coherent feedback, stable attractor, adaptive non-linearity.	Cycle returns smoothly to A_0 as a new stable foundation.
Imbalanced (+ / –)	Unsustainable emergence: hyper- or hypo-expansion/contraction leads to fragmentation or fusion.	Meaning-making becomes distorted, collapsed, or rigid.	Maladaptive feedback, destabilised attractor, entropy.	Cycle repeats until coherence is restored; repetition is adaptive, not failure.

6.4. Structure of the RCM: A_0 → A–B/B–A → A

The RCM models meaning-making as a patterned movement between single-pole independent meaning and bi-pole relational meaning-making, culminating in a renewed coherence. Each phase contributes a distinct function within the system and was evident across multiple fields in the review.

6.4.1. Phase A: Independent Meaning (Static)

The initial phase represents the system's stabilising orientation, providing coherence, boundaries, and interpretive grounding. Across the literature, this phase functioned as the anchor for identity, self-organisation, and orientation. Independent meaning is not static in a fixed sense but serves as the necessary structural platform from which relational engagement becomes possible.

6.4.2. Phase A–B / B–A: Interdependent Meaning-Making (Dynamic)

This dynamic phase captures the open, relational, and context-responsive movements through which meaning shifts, is relationally negotiated, and reorganised. Across psychology, systems theory, relational models, and cognitive science, this phase includes interpersonal attunement, feedback processes, the integration of new information, and iterative adjustments to internal and external tensions (Kaplan & Garner, 2017; Mascolo et al., 2016; Varela et al., 1991; Thompson, 2007). Through these reciprocal movements, systems encounter complexity, uncertainty, and relational influence, enabling adaptive change (Kelso, 1995; Thelen & Smith, 1994; Veissière et al., 2020).

6.4.3. Phase A_1: Emergent Coherence (Integrated)

The third phase reflects the reintegration of meaning following relational engagement. A_1 is not a simple return to A_0 but a transformed orientation that incorporates learning, adaptation, and new coherence. Literature across developmental theory, relational science, and systems thinking described this phase in terms of insight, reorganisation, identity expansion, and the emergence of new coherent patterns. A_1 becomes the foundation for the next iteration of A_0.

6.5. Dialectical Tensions in the RCM

Across the review, certain dialectical tensions consistently shaped meaning-making. These tensions are not oppositions to be resolved but fundamental structures that support adaptive functioning. Early psychological theories also anticipated these non-linear relational dynamics. Jung's notion of synchronicity framed meaning as emerging through acausal yet coherent relational patterns, highlighting that coherence can arise through systemic alignment rather than linear causality (Jung, 1960).

6.5.1. Independent Meaning ↔ Interdependent Meaning-Making

This tension provides the structural and relational dimensions of coherence. Stability allows orientation; relational movement allows transformation. Both are required for adaptive meaning-making.

6.5.2. Dialectic Division ↔ Dialectic Union

Division enables differentiation and clarity; union enables integration and coherence. Systems across the literature illustrated how development, cognition, and relational processes rely on the interplay of these movements.

6.5.3. Sustainable Emergence ↔ Unsustainable Emergence

When relational movements remain in functional tension, systems adapt coherently. When movements become asynchronous or extreme, fragmentation or fusion occurs. These patterns were reflected across psychological, relational, organisational, and ecological contexts (Bertalanffy, 1968; Haken, 1983; Mascolo, 2016; Weick, 1995).

6.5.4. Differentiated Self ↔ Integrated Self

The literature consistently described the Self as both differentiated and integrative. Differentiation allows agency, perspective, and structural clarity; integration allows attunement, relational coordination, and contextual coherence. The RCM shows how meaning-making helps balance these orientations through iterative cycles of expression and reflection. This dynamic mirrors long-standing findings in social psychology, where identity coherence emerges from the balance of differentiation and inclusion, allowing individuals to remain both distinct and connected within relational systems (Brewer, 1991).

6.5.5. Differentiated Discipline ↔ Integrated Discipline

Just as individuals require both differentiation and integration, disciplines benefit from depth as well as synthesis. The RCM frames transdisciplinary coherence as emerging from dialectical movement between specialised knowledge and integrative frameworks, consistent with longstanding systems and interdisciplinarity scholarship (von Bertalanffy, 1968; Klein, 1990; Nicolescu, 2010). This framing aligns with the methodological stance of the review itself.

6.5.6. Sustainable and Unsustainable Emergence in the RCM

The scoping review showed that meaning-making systems naturally pass through both coherent and incoherent phases. Rather than pathologizing disruption, the literature viewed disequilibrium as part of adaptive change (Capra & Luisi, 2014). In the RCM, expansion and contraction describe directional movements within meaning-making, while hyper- and hypo- refer to degrees of activation. Thus, expanded and contracted states can each occur in either

hyper- or hypo- form. Imbalances emerge when these movements become either excessively amplified or insufficiently engaged (Kelso, 1995; Thelen & Smith, 1994)

6.5.7. Unsustainable Emergence

Periods of imbalance, whether psychological fragmentation, relational rupture, organisational breakdown, or ecological destabilisation, reflect hyper- or hypo-forms of differentiation and integration. These states signal a need for recalibration rather than representing failure (Mascolo, 2016; Magid, 2021; Myers, 2018; Badcock, 2019).

6.5.8. Sustainable Emergence

Coherence arises when systems maintain a dynamic balance across the A–B/B–A sequence. Sustainable emergence involves reflective capacity, attunement, integration of new information, and adaptive reorganisation, forming the structural foundation for A_1 (Mascolo, 2016; Kaplan & Garner, 2017; Myers, 2018; Badcock, 2019).

6.6. Application Across Systemic Scales

The same relational pattern—A_0 → A–B/B–A → A_1—appeared across levels of analysis. Whether describing individual cognition, interpersonal processes, organisational sensemaking, social–ecological systems, or disciplinary evolution, the reviewed literature demonstrated consistent structural parallels (Mascolo, 2016; Myers, 2018; Magid, 2021; Badcock, 2019; Kaplan & Garner, 2017). This cross-level convergence reflects a principle long noted in systems theory, that similar relational dynamics recur across nested biological, psychological, and social systems (von Bertalanffy, 1968; Capra & Luisi, 2014). Accordingly, the RCM is offered as a transdisciplinary heuristic grounded in relational and systemic principles rather than domain-specific mechanisms.

6.7. Integrative Summary

The Relational Coherence Model (RCM) synthesises the review's findings into a coherent relational framework grounded in dialectical structures, systems principles, and iterative complex emergence. It clarifies how meaning-making develops through alternating movements of stability and transformation, independence and interdependence, and differentiation and integration across increasing scales of complexity. Within this framework, meaning-making progresses from a static *a priori* orientation, through one-directional linear relational engagement, into two-directional non-linear recursive dynamics in which independence and interdependence are continuously renegotiated.

Crucially, the RCM highlights that complexity itself is neutral; it is the sequence through which systems enter complexity that shapes whether coherence is sustained or eroded. Systems theory and complexity research consistently demonstrate that non-linear

dynamics are not inherently adaptive or pathological, but depend on how they are organised and regulated (Kauffman, 1995; Capra & Luisi, 2014). When non-linear processes are scaffolded by prior internal organisation and directional coherence (A → A–B), meaning-making supports adaptive emergence and increasing complexity. By contrast, when recursive dynamics precede or override internal organisation (A–B → A), systems tend toward fragmentation, instability, or entropic drift (Haken, 1983). The RCM therefore does not prescribe outcomes but provides a conceptual map for understanding how coherence is maintained or lost through the order, direction, and regulation of relational movement within meaning-making processes.

6.8. Conclusion

This chapter has presented the Relational Coherence Model as a conceptual synthesis grounded in the 33 reviewed publications and the iterative, dialectical patterns they collectively demonstrated. By framing meaning-making as a systemic, relational process shaped by complementary opposites, the RCM contributes conceptual clarity to the study of coherence, fragmentation, reorganisation, and the evolving architecture of Selfhood. It also prepares the ground for Chapter 7, where the implications of this model for counselling, research, and interdisciplinary understanding are explored.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

7.1. Introduction

This chapter summarises the theoretical, methodological, and practical implications of the Relational Coherence Model (RCM) that emerged from the scoping review. Although Chapters 6 and 7 were not formally required, their inclusion strengthens the thesis by clarifying how the review's findings contribute to transdisciplinary understandings of meaning-making. The intention is not to propose a definitive or universal theory, but to present an integrative framework that offers conceptual coherence, supports applied practice, and identifies areas for future research.

7.2. Theoretical Implications

7.2.1. Meaning and Meaning-Making as Relational Systems Processes

This chapter returns to the original purpose of the scoping review to clarify how meaning-making is conceptualised across disciplines and summarises the contributions, implications, and limits of the synthesis developed in this thesis. The review consistently showed that meaning-making is best understood as a relational and systemic process rather than a purely intrapsychic or cognitive activity. While this aligns with established systems theories that emphasise interdependence, feedback, and self-organisation (e.g., von Bertalanffy, 1968; Capra & Luisi, 2014), the RCM extends this tradition by formalising the dynamic interaction between independent meaning (A) and interdependent meaning-making (A–B/B–A). The model clarifies how coherence emerges through iterative cycles in which meaning stabilises identity, enters reciprocal relational movement, and is reintegrated as a transformed coherence state (A_1) (Park, 2017). By articulating this process through a defined relational sequence ($A_0 \rightarrow$ A–B/B–A $\rightarrow A_1$), the RCM provides a concise analytical structure that makes explicit the functional mechanisms underlying meaning-making across individual, relational, organisational, and broader systemic contexts. This structural clarity distinguishes the RCM from existing approaches while simultaneously offering a framework through which they can be more deeply integrated.

7.3. Clarifying Dialectic Structures Across Disciplines

Dialectical movement is widely referenced in developmental theory, relational psychology, systems theory, and philosophy, yet it is seldom articulated in a clear structural form. The RCM contributes the equal–opposite–same rule as a way of describing how complementary opposites generate coherence rather than conflict. This rule illuminates how autonomy and connection, differentiation and integration, or stability and transformation *co-*

exist within a shared relational architecture. The RCM does not replace disciplinary theories; instead, it provides a common pattern that helps interpret and connect them.

7.4. Methodological Implications for Meaning-Making Research

7.4.1. A Structured Lens for Future Conceptual Review Work

The relational pattern underpinning the RCM offers a practical analytic tool for future research. Scholars examining meaning-making across fields may use the $A_0 \rightarrow A–B/B–A \rightarrow A_1$ structure to identify stabilising and relational phases, track cycles of coherence and breakdown, or compare how disciplines conceptualise meaning-making. This structure contributes methodological clarity for conceptual reviews, meta-syntheses, and theoretical analyses in transdisciplinary contexts.

7.4.2. Reflexivity and Theoretical Transparency

Because meaning-making is inherently relational, researchers inevitably participate in the interpretive process. The RCM makes this explicit by framing synthesis itself as a form of iterative movement between differentiation and integration. This positions interpretation as part of the relational system rather than a neutral external act, supporting reflexive and transparent inquiry consistent with counselling and systems research traditions.

7.5. Practical Implications

7.5.1. Counselling and Psychotherapy

Within counselling practice, the RCM offers a clear way to conceptualise the movement between stable identity structures (A), relational or emotional processing (A–B/B–A), and the emergence of integrated understanding (A_1). The model helps practitioners identify whether a client's thoughts and behaviour are hyper- structured and controlled (order) or hypo- unstructured and uncontrolled (chaos), and frames ruptures or disruptions as part of a normal systemic cycle rather than as pathology. This supports a more compassionate and process-oriented therapeutic stance.

7.6. Organisational and Collective Sensemaking

The RCM applies equally to collective and organisational contexts, where systems move between internal coherence, relational interaction, and coordinated integration. The model provides a language for interpreting leadership processes, group dynamics, and organisational change, and may assist teams in identifying where imbalance or incoherence is emerging. This pattern aligns closely with organisational theories of knowledge creation, where cycles of externalisation, interaction, and internalisation generate emergent organisational coherence (Nonaka, 1994).

7.7. Transdisciplinary Dialogue

The equal–opposite–same rule also offers a conceptual bridge for transdisciplinary work. It provides a shared language for relational tension, supports translation between disciplinary perspectives, and helps frame integration without erasing the value of differentiated expertise.

7.8. Contribution to Knowledge

1. **Synthesis:** It brings together relational, dialectical, and systems perspectives into a coherent conceptual model.
2. **Integration:** It unifies diverse theoretical traditions under a shared relational architecture.
3. **Clarification:** It offers a structural description of meaning-making grounded in identifiable patterns across the literature.
4. **Practicality**: It articulates a simple but transferable relational equation that can be adapted across fields.

These contributions are explorative and aligns with scoping review methodology.

7.9. Limitations

A central limitation of the Relational Coherence Model (RCM) arises from its basis in conceptual synthesis rather than systematic empirical investigation. While interpretive synthesis enables integration across diverse theoretical traditions, it necessarily limits the capacity to validate propositions or establish causal relationships through direct observation or measurement. As a result, the robustness and applicability of the model cannot be empirically confirmed within the present scope.

In addition, the review was conducted by a single researcher. Although this allowed for depth, coherence, and sustained reflexive engagement with the literature, it also introduces the possibility of interpretive bias and limits inter-coder validation. This constraint was addressed through transparent documentation, iterative comparison, and adherence to JBI scoping review procedures; however, alternative analytical perspectives may yield different emphases or refinements.

Finally, the uneven disciplinary distribution of the 33 included sources, together with the necessary exclusion of medical, educational, and AI-focused literatures, narrows the range of perspectives informing the model. Accordingly, the RCM should be understood as an exploratory conceptual framework whose propositions invite future empirical testing, multi-researcher replication, and interdisciplinary extension.

7.10. Future Directions

Future research may extend the RCM by exploring its applicability across developmental or cultural contexts, examining the equal–opposite–same principle within therapeutic practice, or testing the model in organisational, ecological, or community settings. The relational equation could also be adapted for work in collective systems or expanded into a multi-agent or multi-level framework. The RCM may also offer a foundation for new qualitative or dialogical methodologies.

Future research could also explore how the Relational Coherence Model applies to domains focused on innovation and creative problem solving, where achieving a coherent balance between oppositional poles may facilitate moments of insight or breakthrough.

7.11. Integrated Four-pillar Synthesis

This thesis advances an integrative framework grounded in four domains, Systems, Meaning-Making, Consciousness, and the Self, each functioning through both independent (differentiated) and interdependent (integrated) processes. Drawing on complexity science, meaning-making is situated within linear, unidirectional dynamics as well as non-linear, bidirectional dynamics, nested within hierarchical systems characterised by self-organisation, interconnectivity, feedback loops, and emergent patterns of order and disorder. Within this systemic context, meaning-making unfolds as an iterative movement between equal and opposite poles, oscillating between coherence and incoherence, order and chaos, and breakdown and breakthrough. These movements are shaped by degrees of connection and disconnection and may be influenced by intentional regulatory processes (free will) or by more automatic, deterministic tendencies.

At the level of consciousness, these processes are structured through dialectical organisation, expressed as equal–opposite–same relations between differentiation and integration, stability and transformation. Consciousness is thus understood as an organising field rather than a localised state, within which meaning continually takes form through oscillation between stabilising simplicity and generative complexity. The Self functions as the agentive locus of this organisation: a self-organising, subject–object relational system capable of initiating change, negotiating independence and interdependence, and directing meaning-making across contexts and scales.

Together, these four pillars form a coherent explanatory framework in which sustainable emergence arises through the ordered regulation of relational movement, anchored in static orientation yet enabling increasing complexity. The RCM synthesises these domains into a unified account of how meaning, consciousness, and selfhood co-evolve

within complex systems, providing a structurally grounded perspective on coherence, adaptation, and transformation.

7.12. Concluding Statement

This thesis demonstrates that meaning-making functions as the dynamic counterpart to static meaning, together forming a dialectical system through which coherence is established, challenged, and reorganised. Static meaning provides an orienting *a priori*, while dynamic meaning-making unfolds both sequentially and simultaneously in layered complexity as a relational process emerging through the tension and regulation of complementary opposites. Through a rigorous scoping review and integrative synthesis, the study developed the Relational Coherence Model (RCM), a conceptual framework that explains how meaning arises, stabilises, destabilises, and reorganises across psychological, relational, disciplinary, and systemic contexts.

By integrating insights from psychology, systems theory, and consciousness studies, the RCM clarifies the dialectical architecture underpinning coherence, fragmentation, and emergent transformation. It situates meaning-making within a relational organisation of selfhood in which differentiated and integrated expressions of the Self dynamically interact to generate coherence across scales of experience. In doing so, the model establishes conceptual bridges between disciplinary knowledge systems while remaining grounded in empirical patterns identified within the reviewed literature.

Although exploratory, the RCM offers a novel theoretical contribution to the study of meaning-making. It suggests that coherence does not emerge from the elimination of tension, but from the capacity to navigate relational complexity through balance, directionality, and adaptive integration, providing a foundation for future theoretical development, empirical investigation, and applied practice.

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APPENDIX A

This digital appendix contains all supplementary materials generated during the conduct of the scoping review. Files are organised chronologically to reflect the workflow from search to synthesis. Materials are provided digitally due to file size, format, and the need to retain fidelity of JBI SUMARI, Excel, EndNote, and PRISMA exports.

Digital Supplementary Materials

A.1 Search Strategy Files

These files document the full search methods as implemented across PubMed, Scopus, PsycINFO, and ProQuest:

Database Search Strings (PDF)

PCC Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria (Word)

PCC Search Templates (PDF)

PCC Evolution Table (Word)

JBI TiAb/Full-Text Screening Files (Word)

A.2 EndNote Library (33 Included Sources)

Contains the reference management files used for the review:

EndNote Library (.enl)

EndNote Export Summary (TXT)

A.3 JBI Extraction Files

Includes the screening tools and JBI SUMARI decision logs for both screening stages:

JBI Extraction Spreadsheet (Word)

JBI Appraisal File (Word)

****A.3.2 **Synthesis Files — Meta-Aggregative Flowchart Outputs**

JBI Synthesis Files (PNG)

Each ZIP file contains all flowchart diagrams generated in JBI SUMARI during synthesis.

Pair 1 – Independent + Interdependent Meaning-Making

ZIP: *"1. Independent + Interdependent.zip"*

Pair 2 – Dialectic Division + Dialectic Union

ZIP: *"2. Dialectic Division + Dialectic Union.zip"*

Pair 3 – Sustainable + Unsustainable Emergence

ZIP: *"3. Sustainable + Unsustainable Emergence.zip"*

Pair 4 – Differentiated Self + Integrated Self

ZIP: *"4. Differentiated Self + Integrated Self.zip"*

Pair 5 – Differentiated Discipline + Integrated Discipline

ZIP: *"5. Differentiated Discipline + Integrated Discipline.zip"*

A.4 PRISMA-ScR Materials

Includes all PRISMA-ScR documentation:

PRISMA-ScR Flow Diagram (Word/PDF)

PRISMA-ScR Checklist (Word)

A.5 Coding Matrix Files

These files contain the complete coding structure used for synthesis:

8-Category Dialectical Matrix (PDF)

10-Category Dialectical Matrix (Excel)

Saturation-Shading Visual Matrix (Excel/PDF)

A → A–B Term Definitions Summary (PDF)

A.6 Supplementary Documents

These supplementary files provide transparency and methodological depth:

Pre-review Literature Review (Word)

Preliminary Concept Maps and Diagrams (PDF)

APPENDIX B

Appendix B.1

Foundational Constructs Underpinning the Scoping Review

The following foundational constructs informed the conceptual framing, dialectical coding matrix, and interpretation of findings in this scoping review. These constructs were chosen because they converge across psychology, philosophy, and systems/complexity science to describe how meaning emerges through **dynamic interplay between stable structures and transformative processes**. Together, they form the theoretical foundation for identifying the dialectical patterns that characterised the included literature.

1. Self (Personal–Universal Dual Structure)

The *Self* is understood as both a **personal centre of experience** (independent pole) and a **relational–universal field of participation** (interdependent pole).

At the **personal** level, the Self provides continuity, agency, boundary formation, and autonomous functioning (Erikson, 1968; James, 1890; Levin, 2019).

At the **universal–relational** level, the Self functions as an open, co-evolving participant in wider ecological, social, and conscious systems (Hegel, 1977/2018; Whitehead, 1929/1978).

This dual nature situates the Self as the fundamental locus through which **differentiation and integration**, **separation and connection**, and **independence and interdependence** are enacted. It is therefore the *organising centre* of meaning-making processes.

2. Meaning (Static Organising Principle)

- Meaning is defined as the stable, structural coherence that allows individuals and systems to interpret experience, recognise patterns, and maintain identity.
- Psychological work positions meaning as essential to adaptation, coherence, and existential orientation (Frankl, 1959/2006; Park, 2010).

Systems theory emphasises organising principles that hold complex systems together (von Bertalanffy, 1968).

Meaning serves as the **static pole** within the dialectical architecture: a background structure against which transformation becomes possible.

3. Meaning-Making (Dynamic Emergent Process)

Meaning-making refers to the **dynamic, context-responsive process** through which individuals and systems reconfigure understanding in response to novelty, contradiction, or change.

In psychology: negotiation between global meaning and situational meaning (Park, 2010; Park & Folkman, 1997).

In systems and organisational science: interpretive processes that sustain adaptation (Weick, 1995).

Meaning-making corresponds to the **dynamic pole**, driving emergence, transformation, and integration of the new.

4. Systems Approach (Nested Stability Framework)

A systems approach conceptualises individuals and collectives as **open, self-organising systems** embedded within nested layers of context (von Bertalanffy, 1968; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Capra & Luisi, 2014).

This provides the structural scaffolding for mapping how meaning emerges across:

psychological
relational
organisational
ecological
disciplinary
levels.

It also anchors the dialectic between **local (independent) and global (interdependent)** levels of analysis.

5. Relational Dialectic (Dynamic Tension Between Opposites)

Relational dialectic refers to the **productive tension between complementary opposites** (e.g., independence–interdependence; stability–change; order–chaos).

Philosophically rooted in Hegelian dialectics and unity-in-difference traditions.

Applied empirically in relational and communication theory (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

This is the engine of **transformative meaning-making** within complex systems.

6. Differentiation (Autonomy-Building Process)

Differentiation describes how a system or self forms **distinct components, roles, identities, or functions**.

Essential in developmental and relational psychology (Bowen, 1978).

Foundational in systems theory as a generator of complexity and novelty (von Bertalanffy, 1968).

It corresponds to the **independence pole** and supports the capacity for coherent individuality.

7. Integration (Coherence-Building Process)

Integration is the synthesis of differentiated elements into a **coherent, harmonious whole**.

Considered a core marker of psychological health and neural well-being (Siegel, 2012).

Central in systems science as a mechanism enabling adaptive coherence (Capra & Luisi, 2014).

Integration corresponds to the **interdependence pole**, balancing autonomy with relational embeddedness.

8. Independence (Autonomous Functioning)

Independence denotes the system's capacity for **self-regulation, boundary maintenance, and autonomous identity**.

It provides stability, self-definition, and the integrity required for healthy relationality.

Independence and interdependence act as **dialectical complements**, not opposites in conflict.

9. Interdependence (Mutual Embeddedness)

Interdependence refers to **reciprocal influence, co-regulation, and mutual shaping** within systems.

Foundational in ecological, social, cognitive, and enactive models (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Varela et al., 1991).

Interdependence captures how meaning-making emerges *between* individuals and contexts rather than within them alone.

10. Relational Coherence (Emergent Harmony of Opposites)

Relational coherence is defined in this thesis as the **harmonious integration of stability and change, individuality and relationality, and differentiation and integration**. It represents the *emergent outcome* of successful meaning-making within complex systems. This construct arose **inductively** through synthesis of the dialectical patterns identified in the scoping review.

11. Consciousness (Foundational Capacity for Experience and Meaning)

Consciousness is defined as the foundational organising capacity through which experience, awareness, and meaning are structured and expressed. Within this thesis, consciousness is understood as ontologically primary and as operating through self-organising relational structures rather than as a derivative by-product of material processes. Consistent with an organisational idealist orientation, consciousness is not confined to individual minds or biological systems but is expressed wherever coherent organisation gives rise to structured experience across scales (Bohm, 1980; Goff, 2019). This understanding supports the treatment of meaning-making as a universal organising dynamic through which coherent forms emerge, stabilise, and transform within and across systems.

12. Nested Hierarchies (Multi-Level Structure)

Nested hierarchies refer to **multi-level system organisation**, where each level constrains and enables the others.

Used to map meaning-making processes across:

micro (individual)

meso (social/organisational)

macro (ecological/disciplinary)

meta (philosophical/consciousness)

scales.

13. Static Pole / Dynamic Pole (Dual System Architecture)

This dual framework distinguishes:

Static pole → stability, structure, coherence, meaning

Dynamic pole → transformation, variation, change, meaning-making

Drawn from dialectical philosophy and complexity science, this distinction underpins the review's **entire coding system** and the emergence of the RCM.

14. Symmetry, Asymmetry, Emergence, and Dissolution (Neutral Dialectical Conditions Shaped by Conscious Direction)

Symmetry and asymmetry are conceptualised as neutral organisational conditions that describe how systems maintain coherence, adapt to novelty, or undergo reconfiguration. They do not indicate balance or imbalance by themselves but instead express the structural configuration through which processes of independence and interdependence unfold. Emergence and dissolution are likewise treated as neutral systemic outcomes—secondary expressions of these organising conditions. Emergence refers to the development of new forms of coherence, whereas dissolution involves the release, simplification, or disintegration of existing structure.

Across the literature in systems theory, dialectics, and complexity science, none of these processes are inherently constructive or destructive; their functional value depends on the relational and temporal context in which they occur. Within this thesis, these four concepts operate as a unified dialectical structure whose expression is shaped by the **directionality of conscious self-organisation over time**. When meaning-making unfolds through an integrative trajectory (A → A–B), symmetry and asymmetry support *sustainable emergence*—the balanced differentiation and integration of parts within a coherent whole. When directional processes invert (A–B → A), these same neutral conditions may foster *unsustainable collapse or premature reintegration*, producing forms of dissolution that undermine systemic coherence.

This construct highlights that emergence and dissolution are not opposite forces but complementary phases within a broader dialectical architecture, each capable of supporting adaptive or maladaptive outcomes depending on how conscious organisation directs the interplay between stability and transformation.

Term (A)	Combined (A–B)	Definition	Synonyms / Related Terms	Category	Citational Anchors	Brief Rationale
Meaning	Meaning–Meaning-making	Meaning is the coherent structure of significance that precedes interpretation; meaning-making is the relational, interpretive elaboration of meaning across linear time.	Significance; Sense; Value	Ontology / Process	Veissière 2020; Kaplan 2017	Captures shift from foundational significance (A) to contextually elaborated significance through active interpretation (A–B).
Independent pole	Independent–Interdependent pole	The independent pole is intrinsic, stable organisation of meaning; combined form reflects dynamic relational extension within meaning-making systems.	Autonomy; Self-containment	Ontology	Kaplan 2017; Cheon 2018	Shows how stable meaning structures (A) evolve by relating to other systems and contexts (A–B).
Unified Self	Unified–Differentiated Self	The Self is a stable centre of consciousness; combined form sustains unity while differentiating across roles and contexts.	Selfhood; Identity core	Ontology	Mascolo 2016; Cicchetti 2010	Identity preserves continuity (A) while diversifying expression and contextual integration (A–B).
Integration	Integration–Differentiation	Integration is synthesis into coherence; paired form reflects co-organisation of unity and multiplicity.	Coherence; Synthesis	Process	Pineda 2018	Unity (A) is enriched by complementary differentiation (A–B).
Higher-order system	Higher–Lower-order system	Higher-order systems organise and contextualise lower-order subsystems; paired form expresses nested hierarchy.	Global system; Macro-organisation	Structure	Badcock 2019	Global patterns (A) elaborate within local relational activity (A–B).

Subjective	Subjective - Objective	Subjectivity refers to first-person experience; paired form integrates personal perspective with shared sense-making.	First-person; Lived experience	Epistemology	Veissière 2020	Meaning begins as subjective experience (A) and expands into intersubjective meaning-making (A–B).
Mind	Mind–Body	Mind denotes intrinsic experiential process; paired form reflects embodied, enacted meaning-making.	Enactive mind; Embodied cognition	Ontology / Process	Wiltshire 2015	Cognitive meaning (A) enacted through bodily participation in context (A–B).
Synchronous	Synchronous–Asynchronous	Synchronous refers to simultaneous coordination; paired form cycles between shared synchrony and differentiated asynchrony.	Simultaneous; Co-temporal	Process	da Silva 2024	Coordinated meaning states (A) evolve through alternation with differentiated activity (A–B).
Implicit	Implicit–Explicit	Implicit structures are tacit embodied meaning; paired form reflects development toward articulated knowledge.	Tacit; Pre-reflective	Epistemology	Veissière 2020	Tacit meaning (A) expands through explicit expression (A–B).
Being	Being–Becoming	Being denotes foundational ontological presence; paired form reflects elaboration through recursive change.	Essence; Existence	Ontology / Development	Kaplan 2017	Ontological stability (A) evolves through transformation and unfolding (A–B).

Appendix B.2

Legend

Appendix B.2 provides a glossary of key terminology used in this review. Terms are presented in two forms: a foundational expression (A) and an expanded paired expression (A–B). The foundational form represents the core construct as it is commonly defined in the literature, whereas the paired form reflects how that construct is extended, elaborated, or expressed in relation to complementary dimensions reported across included sources.

This paired presentation is used for conceptual clarification only and does not reflect criteria used for study selection, appraisal, or primary data extraction. Rather, it provides an organisational scaffold to assist readers in understanding how meaning-related constructs are discussed within the included literature. Brief definitions, related terms, source anchors, and rationale statements are provided to improve transparency, support interpretability, and ensure that usage is consistently aligned with the terminology adopted by included authors.

Appendix B.3

Preliminary Literature Review Summary Table

This table summarises the exploratory literature scan conducted prior to the formal JBI scoping review. Its purpose was to identify key theoretical sources, clarify how meaning-making was conceptualised across disciplines, and support the early development of the dialectical framework used later in the thesis. As this material predates the registered scoping review protocol, it is included here for transparency and contextualisation rather than as part of the final analytic dataset.

Table B.2 – Summary of Preliminary Literature Review of Contributions to Dialectic Framework Development

Author (Year)	Key Idea / Contribution	Relevance to Meaning-Making	How It Informed Dialectic Framework Development
Park (2010)	Integrative review of meaning-making; distinguishes global vs. situational meaning; reconstruction after meaning violation.	Demonstrates meaning-making as a dynamic process that reconciles incongruence.	Supported early dialectics of incongruence–congruence and violation–reorganisation.
Apostolopoulos (2023)	Hegel–Merleau-Ponty analysis of dialectic intentionality; contradiction, negation, and becoming.	Positions consciousness as fundamentally dialectical.	Reinforced use of complementary opposites such as self–other and division–union.
Cudworth & Hobden (2014)	Argues for complexity over classical dialectics to explain social change; non-linear emergence.	Highlights complexity, emergence, and adaptive systems.	Contributed to order–chaos and linear–non-linear polarity categories.
Lee (2023)	Compares enactivism with mechanistic models; focuses on co-constitution and embodied interaction.	Shows meaning arising through organism–environment interaction.	Strengthened interdependence, relational meaning-making, and integration poles.
Laszlo (1997)	Conceptualises evolution as systemic transformation; emphasises coherence, synergy, and bifurcation.	Frames emergence as system-level transformation.	Supported sustainable vs. unsustainable emergence and differentiation–integration.
Rezaei (2022)	Defines transdisciplinarity; integrative, relational knowledge practices beyond disciplinary boundaries.	Meaning-making as boundary-crossing and integrative.	Underpinned discipline ↔ transdiscipline dialectic.
Kislev (2024)	Explores complexity science in the philosophy–art alliance; knowledge ecology and creative synthesis.	Shows knowledge as relational, ecological, and emergent.	Informed nested hierarchies, relational tension, and holistic integration.

Author (Year)	Key Idea / Contribution	Relevance to Meaning-Making	How It Informed Dialectic Framework Development
Chin et al. (2025)	Yin–Yang dialectical systems model of knowledge creation; complementary opposites in dynamic balance.	Frames knowledge creation as dual and co-emergent.	Supported all dialectic pairs and the balance–imbalance emergence model.
Lombard (2017)	Psychosynthesis model; integration of subpersonalities into higher-order unity.	Meaning as integrative, developmental synthesis.	Reinforced part–whole, fragmentation–integration, and self-system coherence.
Turtz (2020)	Psychoanalytic process through chaos, complexity, emergence; non-linear change dynamics.	Meaning emerges through destabilisation and reorganisation.	Contributed to chaos ↔ order and tension-based emergence.
Herzovich & Govrin (2021)	Integration of psychoanalysis and CBT; tension between differing epistemologies.	Meaning arises by integrating contrasting frameworks.	Added to subjective–objective, analytic–dialectic, and psychotherapy-based relational dialectics.

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Thesis DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.22516.31367