

Research on Barriers to Employment/Attitudinal Changes within society towards Immigrants

Summary

I spoke to 3 job developers directly; two of who had consulted with their own network of job developers and the group suggested the following:

- The issue of Canadian experience is raised constantly from employers but when explored, the issue of experience really reflects a concern that the job seeker have demonstrated the ability to do the job technically and have skills, qualifications, degrees that are compatible to Canadian equivalents
 - A more often unstated resistance is the applicant's soft skills or the perception of their ability to fit in to the Canadian workplace. The issues falls into several related areas
 1. Will the applicant fit in
 - Accent
 - Language skills including non verbal skills
 - Social skills
 - Dress
 - Physical appearance
 - It also reflects complex issues of racism, sexism and discrimination not limited to the Canadian context but along a much larger multicultural paradigm.
 - the job developers report issues of Canadian experience are used in a multicultural sense insofar as that employers from various cultural groups practice discrimination particularly cross culturally that is with applicants not from their home culture. There is some evidence that long standing attitudes around other cultures, races and groups influence hiring managers who are immigrants themselves
- I also spoke to the operations manager of a national warehouse and product demonstration firm and my notes are as follows:

1. Canadian Experience –

- **Real Issue or Not?**

Not an issue of working skills so much as attitude, social skills, credentials, language all relative to Canadian context. Often excuse for attitudes of racism, sexism and ageism

- **Define what Canadian Experience means to your company**

The issue for our company is the language – can the applicant clearly listen, understand and reply in conversations with customers and coworkers. Secondary is the workplace “social skills” in terms of working as part of the team, interacting with our client companies and basically fitting into the culture of the workplace

2. Some of the specific Sub - Issues identified are:

- **Language/ Accent/ Pronunciation**

The absolute most important language skills for our product demonstrators is listening and replying to questions about the product, to use positive terms to promote the product being demonstrated

- **Appearance**

We supply uniforms so the appearance factors are more about personal hygiene, grooming etc

- **Social Skills**

Really important skill set - our entry level jobs require demonstrators be very friendly , able to switch communication styles to respond to customer , In our office the ability to not only work as a team on work tasks but to know how to engage on a social level with coworkers

- **Cross Cultural Discrimination**

Have seen this in my industry, especially from Canadian born managers with limited exposure to different cultures - we are a national company and attitudes differ across the country especially in areas with limited immigrants. In terms of Immigrants who have become managers I have experience attitudes toward new immigrants that seem to display an attitude that says I made it the hard way and I don't want to make it any easier for you. It is safer to hire Canadian lest I be accused of favoring other immigrants . I have also observed long standing attitudes toward specific cultures, ethnic groups or genders which originate in the immigrant manager's own culture.

3. Validity of Experience / Credentials/ Qualifications

- **How useful are the credential evaluation services**

It depends on the job category - IT degrees are easy to have recognized and in my industry are not usually assessed . Other credentials such as accounting are more complicated and usually include some further training.

The issue of resumes - My experience and in discussing with other HR and management people that we believe that experience and skills are often exaggerated on resumes and that people have resumes built for them by employment experts and do not know how to discuss their skills or experiences as given on the resume.

It is becoming more important for the applicant to be able to "prove" their skills , to demonstrate soft skills

- **How much do you recognize short term training courses**

My company does their own training for demonstrators and support people but training in computer applications, accounting or general business is helpful provided the course has given them the appropriate skills and knowledge that we would use. We prefer training that comes from a recognized organization and have had poor results with people trained at some of the private colleges

4. How valuable are:

- **Volunteering**

We really like to see that newcomers looking for work are doing volunteering, especially if they are learning or using skills that we would want them to have for the job. We see volunteering as real work experience and an example of motivation, work ethic and ability to commit to a job

- **Bridging programs**

Mixed results from this - they often don't get enough experience to enhance our interest in them - good if the program offers ongoing mentoring

- **Non related Canadian work experiences**

Better than no experience for all the same reasons volunteering is good but if someone is looking for a higher level job they may be better getting more Canadian training / education

- **Computerized / technical skills**

Absolutely important to have computer skills and technical skills are the easiest for us to assess

5. **Any value added of hiring newcomers -**

Yes if they have done all the things required to have good language skills, soft skills that fit the job, and willingness to take additional training

- **Potential for innovation**

Yes especially in departments such as marketing

- **Appeal to a cultural market**

A big factor for us because a majority of our customer group is multicultural so we are always looking for people who can comfortably serve customers from different culture/language groups

- **Other value**

My company sees hiring newcomers as a social investment - that immigration is a necessary piece of the workforce and we have a responsibility to employ

6. **What advice would you give a newcomer applying in your industry**

Learn and acquire the skills, knowledge, attitudes and cultural competencies that make it easier for an employer to see you as a good fit for the job

Focus on promoting not only your learned hard skills but your soft skills especially communication, social and attitude based skills. Demonstrate a willingness to learn, be flexible and hard working will overcome a lot!

- Learn to speak English to the maximum of your ability
- Go into an interview knowing your resume thoroughly and being able to discuss how you fit for the job
- Display confidence in yourself
- Leave family members, friends etc at home

The manager suggested to me that the issue of confirming technical skills, related experience and the "will the applicant fit in" factors do affect the hiring of newcomers. She also notes that she has seen recently that many companies are actively attempting to change these ideas but it is not just an attitudinal issue.

I also did some searching for research projects and found a number of projects on related topics such as :

1. **The Value Of Volunteering -Does It Related Directly To Increased Access To The Job Market Can Volunteer Work Help Me Get A Job In My Field?": On Learning, Immigration And Labour Markets**

Daniel Schugurensky, Bonnie Slade and Yang Luo

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education / University of Toronto

The author reports that subjects all volunteered to improve access to the labour market. Specific reasons reported by participants included "to gain Canadian work experience" (47%); to improve

understanding and use of English, especially work related language (36%); to learn about “Canadian culture” (22%); to get a job (20%), to network (18%); to be in a “real” Canadian workplace (16%); to meet people (11%), to have something to do (9%); and to get involved in Canadian society (7%). Those who indicated that “it was something to do” had arrived in Canada as refugees and had not yet been granted a work permit. In the quotes below names were changed to protect anonymity.

1. **Data from the National Survey of Learning and Work (Livingstone et al., 2004)**, a national survey conducted with over 10,000 people (1,713 immigrants and 8,929 Canadian-born) documented that there was substantial learning obtained through volunteer work placements. Table 1 details the questions asked about specific learning areas and the responses of three groups of respondents: immigrants who had been in Canada less than five years, immigrants who had been in Canada for six to ten years and an average of all Canadian-born respondents

Table 1: National Survey of Learning and Work: Learning in Volunteer Placements Learning Area	Immigrants 0-5 years in Canada	Immigrants 6-10 years in Canada	Canadian-born average
Computers	47.7%	45.8%	24.9%
Organizational or managerial skills	52.4%	45.0%	35.4%
Budgeting or financial management	34.6%	23.7%	23.9%
Teamwork, problem solving or communication skills	72.4%	72.9%	58.6%
Interpersonal skills	59.6%	81.4%	56.1%
Health and well being	40.4%	55.9%	45.0%
Learning about new equipment	58.1%	57.6%	29.6%
Language skills	59.0%	55.0%	16.6%
Increased knowledge about social, political or environmental issues	47.1%	49.2%	41.7%

2. **Omidvar, Ratna and Richmond, Ted (2003). Immigrant settlement and social inclusion in Canada. October 3, 2007.** <http://www.maytree.com/PDF_Files/OmidvarRichmond.pdf>.

A study of the General Social Attitudes toward immigrants that are demonstrated in the hiring process
3. **A study, by Munk School of Global Affairs and published by the Institute for Research on Public Policy**

Recent immigrants and visible minorities are less likely to support immigration than mainstream Canadians,

“When you have a lot of immigrants in one area, people may get turned off by the sheer numbers and think they’ve got enough and do not need as many,” Reitz explained
4. **Galabuzi, Grace-Edward and Teelucksingh, Cheryl (2005). Working Precariously: The impact of race and immigrants status on employment opportunities and outcomes in Canada. October 3, 2007.** <<http://www.socialjustice.org/uploads/pubs/WorkingPrecariously.pdf>>

This research draws attention to racial discrimination in employment in Canada, and also

discusses the impact on the status of racialized groups in the Canadian labour market. Racial discrimination occurs in Canada in at least two forms, economic discrimination, (when employers make generalized assumptions about the worth of racialized employees),

5. A study by the Canada Conference Board

The study, which reviewed existing research from various sources but also included interviews with executives, found that immigrants were associated with increased innovation in Canada.

The board said the interview sample was not large enough to be representative of all Canadian business, but found a number of measures that suggest employers benefit from hiring and integrating immigrants. Immigrants punch above their weight when it comes to increasing the rate of innovation in Canada, the Conference Board of Canada said in a report released Friday.

The ambition that leads them to move to a new country tends to predispose immigrants to the kind of risk-taking that leads to innovation, Michelle Downie, the report's author, told CBC News.

But it also determined that immigrants face obstacles that limit their ability to contribute as innovators, including inadequate recognition of their experience and qualifications, and the failure of employers to use their knowledge of foreign languages in tapping into international markets.

Also found an interesting video which describes how Steamship Brewery is addressing the issue of Canadian experience