



A Descriptive Study of Employers' Attitudes and Practices in Hiring Newcomer Job Seekers

By Eric Liu

The Study in Brief

Issue

Access to employment for newcomer job seekers – employer perspectives and the hiring process

Overview

This paper provides a detailed description and analysis of employers' attitudes and practices in hiring newcomer job seekers in an attempt to examine newcomer access to employment in Canada. Four key areas are examined:

- 1) the conceptual gap;
- 2) social practices and hiring strategies;

- 3) technological usage; and
- 4) cultural barriers.

The study examines the various stages of the hiring process showing how new immigrants come to be disadvantaged and excluded in the labour market.

Key Findings

Some key findings in this paper include:

- 1) the identification of a disconnect between employer perceptions of the human capital assets held by new immigrants and the high levels of skills and education assets that they actually possess. Consequently, newcomers are often passed over in hiring, resulting in their labour market exclusion and lost opportunities for employers in valuable skill acquisition;
- 2) employers' preferred hiring strategies and technologies are constructed on existing social networks and therefore largely exclude newcomer job seekers; and
- 3) employers too often interpret personal attributes based on mainstream social and corporate cultural norms, in which newcomer job seekers are disproportionately disadvantaged.

Methods/Approach

This is a deep descriptive study based on a comprehensive literature review of research on immigrant labour market performance. In particular it taps into literature often ignored when dealing with employer

perspectives regarding the hiring of newcomers. Social inclusion theory is used to provide a framework for interpreting the literature survey findings.

Policy Implications

This paper sheds light on employer perspectives of newcomer job seekers and the hiring process in Canada, identifying structured employment barriers. It concludes that government policy support is needed to provide employers with the incentives and tools necessary to overcome cultural narrowness in their organizations that block access to newcomer job seekers. Employers need to be made more aware of Canadian immigration policy and the strategic advantages of increasing the ethnic diversity of their labour force for enhanced competitiveness in a global marketplace.

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The Study in Detail

Introduction

The emergence of [a] knowledge economy was perhaps the most important dimension of institutional change affecting newly arriving immigrants, including the dramatic expansion of education and the increased importance of education in the labour market (Reitz 2000, p. 580).

In the tide of globalization throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the Canadian economy underwent a transformation from a traditional industrial economy to a post-industrial knowledge-based economy represented by service and information technology industries.

Such evolution in the global economy has prompted corresponding changes in Canada's immigration policy, which has shifted its primary target to people with high human capital. Today 70 percent of the net new entrants to the labour force are such immigrants. And by 2011, when the bulk of baby boomers enter retirement age, immigrants will account for 100 percent of Canada's labour force growth (Shields 2003: p. 22). This human capital-focused immigration policy has brought in people from a wide range of

non-traditional source countries. The common characteristics of these people are high educational attainment, strong professional background and country of origin experience.

The influx of highly educated professionals and trades people, however, stands in stark contrast to the fact that recent immigrants are worse off than earlier immigrant cohorts. Teelucksingh and Galabuzi (2005) demonstrate the declining labour force participation rates for recent immigrants in the twenty-year span, from 75.7 percent in 1981, to 68.6 percent in 1991, and to the 65.8 percent in 2001 (p. 14).

Recent immigrants have not been able to effectively translate their educational attainment and work experience into commensurate occupational status or income (Statistics Canada 2007). As a result, low income rates among recent immigrants have increased. By 2004 low income rates of newcomers were 3.2 times the Canadian born average, a higher rate than at any time during the 1990s (Picot, Hou and Coulombe 2007). The decline of immigrant home ownership as well as rising self-employment rates in recent immigrant populations further illustrate this precarious situation (RBC Financial Group 2005: p. 17).

The rising poverty numbers tell

us that integration is becoming more difficult for new arrivals. My research also shows that newcomers face a myriad of barriers in their initial settlement process, of which the most prominent is access to employment. This "transition penalty" clearly points to an initial lack of access to appropriate employment, which has a long lasting negative impact on immigrants' labour market performance.

The top three labour market barriers cited by immigrants are a lack of Canadian work experience, problems around the transferability of foreign qualifications, as well as language barriers (Baklid, Cowan, MacBride-King, and Mallett 2005: p. 24). Additionally, evidence points to other systemic problems that exist in the host society.

One of the most disturbing findings is that the increasing poverty rates are evident for newcomers in all age groups, at all education levels, of all language backgrounds, and in all family types (Lochhead 2003a & 2003b).

Occupational barriers, formal and informal, are defined as entry requirements that control access to employment in different occupations (Ahamad, Roberts, Sobkow, and Boothby 2003: p. 8). Formal barriers are well documented and widely known. However, newcomer

job seekers may only encounter informal barriers when they apply for a job. Current public discourse seems to be predominantly centred around formal occupational barriers faced by immigrants.

Since employers are the key stakeholder in the hiring process, they play a critical role in imposing informal occupational barriers to employment. Currently in Ontario, there are 34 regulated professions, 20 mandatory trades and 34 voluntary trades. The fact is, regulated professions and trades, like medicine and engineering, only account for 15 percent of the job market. The other 85 percent is made up of unregulated professions and trades, the hiring for which is solely dependent on employers' criteria and judgment. Even for regulated professions, it is at the employer's discretion whether or not they will accept foreign trained immigrant job seekers who have managed to acquire licenses to practice in their fields. For a great number of skilled immigrants, the only

thing standing between them and a job is the employer.

Mostly, the employers' hiring attitudes and practices have been reflected in literature focusing on attitudes of immigrant job seekers. Very few studies have been done from the employers' perspective. There are two reasons for this research gap. First, the employers' behaviours, attitudes and practices are informal, not often specified or documented, hence they cannot easily be identified. Also employers are resistant to change and strongly determined to maintain their privilege in hiring practices. In this process it is easy to rationalize all hiring decisions as purely merit based. Such employer practices may also have been validated by a policy discourse entrenched in market values, competitiveness, and individualism (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002: p. 132).

Key Findings and Policy Relevance of the Study

This paper makes an attempt to tap into the issue of newcomers' access to employment, in part, by critically considering and assessing hiring from an employers perspective. It raises three key questions: Whom do employers hire and why? What are the current recruiting and selection practices in the labour market that are generated by employers? And how do such hiring practices disadvantage

newcomer job seekers, deliberately or inadvertently? The intent of this analysis is to capture the hiring attitudes and practices of employers that disproportionately disadvantage newcomers.

... I deem that there is no possibility of resolving issues around access to employment without pinning down employers' attitudes and practices in hiring newcomer job seekers.

Author

The key findings can be organized along four main themes.

- The *Conceptual Gap* points to a disconnect between the perception of employers and hiring managers regarding newcomer populations and the capacity of these groups to fill labour market needs. This conceptual divergence often results in employers maintaining the status quo in their hiring practices.
- Built on this conceptual gap, *Social Practices and Hiring Strategies* captures the employers' preferred approaches in the hiring process, which heavily rely on informal contact, recruiters and internal referral. Such practices constructed on existing networks and social norms largely work to exclude newcomer job seekers.

Informal barriers in the labour market, which are oftentimes hidden and further obscured by other more obvious factors, have been largely examined on an ad-hoc basis with a lack of guidance for systematic policy-making.

Author

- *Technological Usage* refers to a major shift in the use of technology with respect to screening and soliciting potential employees, such as Human Resources Information System (HRIS), OCR, Listservs, etc. These new technologies, built on locally pre-established social connections and professional achievements, disproportionately disadvantage newcomer job seekers.

... employers are still underrepresented in the development of strategies to help immigrants into the workforce
 Author

- Perhaps most important of all is the role that *Cultural Barriers* play in the immigrant employment process. Cultural barriers involve how employers interpret newcomer job seekers' personal attributes based on mainstream social and corporate cultural norms. Often the attributions involve an undervaluing by employers of immigrant skills, experience and work habits. A focus on cultural barriers allows for an examination of the dynamic relationship that exists between job seekers and employers, a relationship that invariably

favours employers. This power imbalance between employers and job seekers reinforces the cultural gauges in evaluating job seekers, to the detriment of newcomers.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

In public discourse, there are three levels used in conceptualizing the issue of immigrant labour market integration: micro, meso, and macro levels. However, the research that arises out of each of these levels of analysis often arrives at fundamentally different ideas about discrimination and the barriers to immigrants' labour market integration. Consequently the implications for policymaking and the delivery of related services often vary.

Micro Level

On a micro level, human capital theory, originated by economists Jacob Mincer (1958) and Gary Becker (1964), emphasizes that education and experience largely account for differences in individual income. This theory has been widely applied in constructing Canada's immigration system, which favours immigrants equipped with this type of human capital who are able to contribute more to Canada's knowledge-based economy.

A modification of this paradigm suggests that education obtained outside of Canada does not necessarily provide the same knowledge, skills and training acquisition as provided by Canadian educational institutions. Therefore whether newcomers are able to translate the human capital achieved in their home country to the Canadian context is a significant issue. Education and experience obtained abroad must be translated into meaningful Canadian equivalencies.

Human capital theory is able to identify the gaps in the current settlement services affecting the successful transference of immigrants' human capital. However, constructs from this model direct attention to the characteristics of individuals, rather than the supply of jobs and practices and preferences of employers.
 Author

Meso Level

At the meso level, two theories have emerged to conceptualize immigrants' declining labour market performance.

Social capital theory begins with ideas of human capital, but focuses on variations in immigrants' human capital and the contingencies of settlement. Following this theory, community networks are

essential for newcomers to adapt to their new country (Reitz 2000). This adaptation process may take a longer time and involve more difficulties for ethnic communities with a relatively short history in the host society, as their community networks are weaker than for groups with longer histories. Hence, integration difficulties are often seen in terms of the exclusion of immigrants from networks that provide critical local knowledge and job information.

[The social capital] model does not tell us what social phenomena in broader context account for the penalty paid by new immigrants and cannot provide substantial evidence on why the penalty declines in recent period compared with the earlier immigrant cohorts of similar social capital background.

Author

Social capital theory recognizes the key role social networks play in newcomers' labour market success. And it captures patterns of how this plays out in human resources management and the disadvantages newcomer job seekers find.

Two-tier system theory (Sadiq 2005), combined with the effects of neoliberal restructuring (Evans and Shields 2005; Shields 2003), examines the changing structure in the settlement service sector

and how that influences the newcomers' position in the labour market.

We are seeing growing monopolization within the not-for-profit immigrant services sector and the loss of diversity of alternative services (Richmond and Shields 2004: p. 4).

Two-tier system theory captures the structural changes in settlement service provision. Problems with locating adequate housing, medical, social and cultural services have negative impacts on newcomers' abilities to integrate into the local labour market. The theory, however, can not in itself explain why recent immigrants' from more diverse racial, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds have found economic integration to be even more difficult than earlier waves of immigrants.

The dismantling of social support programs and the fostering of highly bifurcated labour markets undermine immigrants' ability to successfully integrate into their host society (Man 2004: p. 137).

Macro Level

On macro level, racialization theory argues that race is not an inherent characteristic of

individuals, but is socially constructed. Consequently attention should be directed to the characteristics of mainstream institutions. Galabuzi (2001) contends that race has been and continues to be a major factor in determining access to economic opportunity in Canada because of the inherent biases built into labour market institutions.

Racialization theory emphasizes the social creation of difference by the majority population, and its role in social exclusion of "visible minority" groups (Ornstein 2006: p. 87).

Such theory puts a much clearer responsibility on mainstream society and the institutions in it for more contemporary immigrant labour market integration challenges. However, racially-biased behaviours, attitudes, and practices of mainstream institutions in the labour market have yet to be explored in depth by this approach.

Social Inclusion Theory

This analysis seeks to investigate the interaction between the individual and the macrostructure, and to examine how socially constructed opportunities and limitations rooted in institutional and organizational processes shape newcomer labour market success. The social inclusion

approach developed by Omidvar and Richmond (2003) on the basis of traditional social inclusion/exclusion theories is adopted to better conceptualize the issues.

Social inclusion involves the basic notions of belonging, acceptance and recognition. For immigrants and refugees, social inclusion would be represented by the realization of full and equal participation in the economic, social, cultural and political dimensions of life in their new country. In a simple but useful sense, therefore, social inclusion for immigrants and refugees can be seen as the dismantling of barriers that lead to exclusion in all these domains (Omidvar and Richmond 2003: p. 1).

Under the social inclusion framework, a *deficit model* of newcomer job seekers is deconstructed by examining the divergence between national interest and employers' interest. The intent is to promote a higher degree of understanding among policymakers and employers toward newcomer job seekers, based on their lived experiences.

Conceptual Gap

The Canadian labour market is facing significant challenges in order to maintain its competitive edge in the fast-growing global economy.

Demographic trends combined with anticipated growth in demands for skills increasingly point to skill shortages as a serious issue to be faced by business, labour, governments, and the educational community (CLBC 2002: p. 3).

In the Canadian context, employers are increasingly concerned about issues of recruitment, retention and knowledge transfer in dealing with skills acquisition and retention. Despite the fact that Canadian employers are in desperate need of skilled professionals and trades people, the immigrant workforce is still facing extreme difficulties finding suitable employment.

The majority of employers do not view the hiring of foreign trained workers as an essential strategy to mitigate labour shortages. The idea of hiring recent immigrants is contextualized as a peripheral hiring channel by most employers (CLBC 2004: p. 1).

Survey findings suggest that, typically, employers only look at immigrants if they are unable to find the right candidates among other groups (See: CFIB 2002; and Lochhead 2003a). In this initial conceptual stage, immigrant job seekers are deemed non-Canadian, construed as a burden to the local labour market structure

and consequently they are relegated to the bottom of the hiring hierarchy. The *deficit model* strongly contradicts the *cream of the crop model* reflected in Canada's immigrant selection system, which serves as the key public policy for Canada's labour force growth. This conceptual gap among employers leads to their neglect of the immigrant workforce as a key resource pool for addressing their labour needs.

Several factors may have contributed to this conceptual gap. First and foremost, the deficit model contributes to the pathologization of immigrants. A typical image of immigrant newcomers is that they are people who are in need of help and struggling to be integrated into the mainstream society – a deficit to society rather than an asset.

Many employers, even those experiencing skill shortages in regions with traditionally high levels of immigration, do not see immigration as a way to fill current or future skill shortages (CLBC 2004: p. 1).

Second, employers generally lack information about the current trend of immigration and immigrant composition. For example, this can be seen in the Certified Human Resources Professional (CHRP) exam system. The current curriculum for the CHRP exam, which is

the most creditable testing system for human resources professionals, contains zero components related to the current immigration policy or the immigrant workforce.

Despite the drastic changes in the make-up of recent immigrant cohorts, the connotation of “immigrants” has not fundamentally changed.

Author

Social Practices and Hiring Strategies

As the contemporary labour market becomes more fast-paced and competitive, there is a trend to use recruiters to handle the hiring process, which is lengthy, time consuming and requiring a high level of both technical and human resource knowledge. The top priority for recruiters is to fill job vacancies quickly with a high retention rate, and not necessarily to find the best qualified applicant.

As a result, organizational fit becomes imperative in selecting those with the right skills and personalities. Although these jobs are normally advertised to the general population, recruiting agencies will typically only focus their efforts on candidates who are already working in the field to ensure high success rates. Unfortunately, newcomer job seekers are usually

automatically deemed disqualified because they lack local work experience and references (Harvey 2001).

In this high-stakes career matching business, the candidate’s retention rate is closely linked to the headhunter’s economic interest and reputation. Recruiters choose to reduce the risk to a minimum in order to make ‘the most effective match’. Newcomer job seekers are generally considered a high risk factor due to the degree of unfamiliarity with their education background, work experience and cultural fit (Ployhart, et.al., 2006).

One of the large IT recruiting firms, CNC Global, receives over 20,000 applications a month and selects one to three best candidates from these. Ajilon, another large recruiter in the Toronto area receives 8,000 applications for 500 jobs (Harvey 2001: p. 17)

Other than formal hiring processes dependent on recruiting agencies and headhunters, the majority of hiring strategies have become centred around informal candidate searches. Here internal referral systems are widely utilized (Saks 1994).

These informal networks, built on existing, locally structured social networks, largely exclude newcomer job seekers. First, in

order to access these job opportunities, the job seeker must establish communication with people who already have access to these hidden jobs. This can be difficult for newcomer job seekers, who suffer from low social capital as a result of their limited residential period and low degree of engagement in mainstream society (Tyrrell 1995).

Informal processes are less expensive than formal processes and dovetailed nicely with the emphasis on networking in the new job-search practices. (Bolles 2004)

In order to establish networks, the job seeker must present themselves as a potential member of these communities. However, newcomer job seekers are often deemed a potential risk factor that may need substantial further investment. As a result, newcomer job seekers face major barriers in establishing these forms of informal social networks.

Internal promotion is another favourite informal means of filling company vacancies. This is especially true when it comes to high-ranking management and professional positions. As a result, entry-level positions actually are the ones most likely to be filled from the outside. Newcomer job seekers often

make an attempt to obtain their first employment in Canada by applying for these entry-level positions. Employers often fear, however, that newcomers are only taking this opportunity as a springboard to some better-paid job, considering them to be overqualified. Ironically the qualifications of newcomer job seekers, which are so often considered irrelevant by employers for higher level positions, are deemed negatively relevant in this context.

... the job seeker must be: a) someone who they will want to help with information, and b) someone who they will remember favourably (Tyrrell 1995: p. 9).

Job seekers use different job search strategies. Newcomer job seekers are heavily reliant on print media, and electronic job postings, which are not the main avenue used by employers in their recruitment strategies (Chatterton 2002).

This mismatch between hiring strategies and job search strategies reveal the fact that most employers look for job seekers in the reverse order of how newcomer job seekers hunt for them (Tyrrell 1995; and Bolles 2004).

The social practices carried out by employers in their hiring strategies are primarily informal

contact and referrals that maintain homogeneity at the organizational level. This process is tied into organizational cultures that strengthen the power of dominant social groups. This hiring paradigm reinforces the presumption that the hiring of newcomer job seekers is a risk factor that may greatly reduce the return on investment.

According to the organizational justice theory model developed by Gilliland (1993), employers' hiring strategies and practices have not taken into account who needs the job most, leading to employment inequities. This approach complements social inclusion theory by Omidvar and Richmond (2003). One of the dimensions herein is proximity, which is about sharing not just physical but also social spaces to provide opportunities for interactions, and to reduce social distances between employers and newcomers.

Employment Management Association's 2000 "Cost per Hire and Staffing Metrics Survey" discovered that only 8 percent of employers' "new hires" were derived from the Internet (Bolles 2004: p. 32).

HR management has been transformed from an administrative cost centre to a value-adding strategic business opportunity. However, narrowly

defined hiring practices continue to dominate access to employment and newcomers' life chances are lost in the name of cost and risk reduction. A more integrated and holistic approach to employment recruitment guided by the individual organization's business rationale but which also recognizes newcomers' needs should be adopted. Targeting ethnic media and establishing partnerships with ethnic communities can be effective in connecting newcomer job seekers with prospective employers.

Employers must be mindful that, in light of the new trends leading the current and future global economy, they are taking a much bigger risk when avoiding the current "risk" [in hiring practices].

Author

Technological Usage

In the 1980s and early 1990s, radical job search strategies and informal networking techniques emerged, leading to the bulletin board system (BBS). BBS was the precursor of the current list-serves, which are now used both by HR professionals and job seekers as ways to collect information and obtain job leads. However, both BBS and the current list-serves are established on various forms of existent social networks, which require recognized social status

which is difficult for newcomers to tap into.

Newcomer job seekers' social status in the larger society is further replicated into their position in the HR cyber space.

Author

Due to the changes in the labour market structure and intensification of radical job search strategies, the sheer number of job applicants grew beyond the capacity of web-based staffing and recruitment. As a result, newer technologies were introduced into human resource information systems to mitigate this situation.

One such development is Optical Character Recognition scanning software, which searches for key words in the applicant's profile to locate the best job fits. In order to enhance 'efficiency', more 'rigorous competency requirements' have been put in place to filter candidates.

Keywords are frequently used to scan out any potentially "unfit" candidates. For example, professional titles such as "P. Eng" (Professional Engineer) are often required in the screening process. Newcomers with engineer backgrounds from outside Canada, however, are required to complete one year of work under another professional

engineer's supervision in order to obtain their P. Eng title in Canada. This catch-22 situation has barred many professional engineers from entry into the occupation.

Some newcomers also have difficulties interpreting some culturally-defined attributes such as "sound judgment" in job postings. They often choose to avoid using these terms in their cover letters or resumes, as is expected by employers. Oftentimes, newcomer job seekers become victims in this process, their resumes filtered out before being seen by a hiring manager. Overall, the role of technological usage in recruitment serves and perpetuates the mainstream social practices and hiring strategies of employers (Walker and Perrin 2001).

Human capital has become an important competitive advantage in global business. Employers ought to realign their hiring preferences and HR technologies, which are currently based on pre-established local networks and professional achievement, with the realities of the emerging global skills framework. This would be of significant strategic advantage for Canadian employers.

Cultural Barriers

According to employers, the most pressing problems they

face in hiring new immigrants are language barriers, lack of Canadian work experience, and unfamiliarity with foreign credentials (Canadian HR Reporter 2005: p. 8). In contrast, a 2002 Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (2002) study of internationally trained professionals arriving after 1994 found that 73.2 percent of them who had had their credentials assessed after immigrating obtained equivalent academic qualifications to those granted by Ontario universities (p. 19). And most participants assessed their language ability as good or excellent (pp. 14-17).

In the 2005 Canadian HR Reporter Survey, one employer said that most often new Canadians have trouble communicating verbally and in written form. That poses some concern but our experience is that the learning curve is quite rapid and in a matter of months this is no longer an issue (p. 11).

Employers generally assess job seekers' language abilities during the interview process. Harvey (2001) points out that many recruiters express their concern with the immigrant job seekers' basic ability to comprehend. Others expressed concern with accents but it was not clear how this reduced newcomers' productivity. The ability to engage in social chat in the workplace was also

identified. These findings indicate that judgment on language abilities is heavily constructed on prevalent social and cultural norms (See: Harvey 2001).

Additionally, Canadian experience is actually used as a cultural parameter in the evaluation process and equated with proof of required language and communication skills and ability to function in the Canadian business culture. Similarly, it has been discovered that Canadian credentials are also valued as easy proof of the applicant's soft skills and whether they can fit into the new workplace.

This underscores a persistent theme in the hiring process, which is that language abilities, Canadian credentials and work experience serve as the key indicators of not just technical skills but more importantly communication skills and adaptability to Canadian workplace culture. The rationale behind this is that "being culturally fit" implies "being immediately productive". This can create a systemic barrier

Canadian experience means more than having worked for a Canadian company; it means knowledge of culture on a broad level as well as of the industry and specific organizations (Harvey 2001: p. 24).

for entrance into the labour market as Canadian work experience, accent requirements and culture-specific communication skills often place unreasonable expectations on newer immigrants.

The term 'Canadian experience' is a retroactive condition placed on newcomers, impossible to fulfil without first being part of the workforce (The Public Policy Forum 2004: p. 27).

Tyrrell (1995) contextualizes the labour market as reciprocity and market exchange systems centred around both socio-cultural resources (e.g. roles, values, ideologies, obligations, etc.), and more formally, economic resources (including land, labour, and skill based commodities). In this resource distribution system, employment occurs when a set of reciprocal obligations are exchanged between the employer and the employee. Therefore, a job is not solely an economic relationship in the formal sense of the term, but also a social relationship. Consistently, in the hiring process it is normally not enough for an applicant to have necessary technical skills for the job, but they must also possess culturally oriented social skills with the right organizational ideology and attitudes.

Many standardized skills testing

undertaken by employers is not related to the skills for the job. They demand language skills that are not required in the position and are culturally biased (The Public Policy Forum 2004).

Clearly newcomers need to become familiar with Canadian culture and values through their work environment. New immigrants, as we have seen however, have a difficult time getting in the employment door. Moreover, following the deficit model, employers expect newcomers to unlearn things that are obvious to them and relearn things that make sense in the Canadian context as a reciprocal condition for employment. Employers appear to be reluctant to step out of their traditional cultural framework and better understand the cultural context of the emerging workforce.

The recruitment process reflects [a] dual search criteria, both skills and cultural fit, in accordance with politically and socially constructed limits (Tyrrell 1995: p. 4).

Culture-specific testing is also problematic in that it neglects cultural differences among racial subgroups. Given the fact that recent immigrants to Canada are predominantly from racial minority groups, the use of such hiring measures may have significant negative

impacts on them. The economic and labour market integration of newcomers cannot be seen in isolation from their social and cultural integration.

Organizational culture includes the written and unwritten rules that both shape and reflect how an organization operates. It is the way in which decisions are made, conflicts are resolved and goals are achieved. Organizational culture is, in short "the way things are done around here." (Baklid, Cowan, MacBride-King, and Mallette 2005: p. 53)

Attention also needs to be drawn to distinguish between different cultural norms. In fact, the definition of culture discussed in this context is twofold: societal culture and corporate or organizational culture.

Societal culture refers to a set of rules commonly accepted by members of a society that dominate their thinking, behaviours and social relationships. In spite of the changing demographics of Canadian society, some mainstream cultural norms continue to prevail and appear resilient to new ideas. Corporate or organizational culture, on the other hand, is interpreted by small cliques in power who enforce and reinforce dominant values within their organizations. It represents

some of the core values of the mainstream society and is dominated by what is often called the "old boys club".

Tyrrell (1999a; Also see Tyrrell 1999b) has examined the change in labour market social relationships for the past two centuries. A trend during this period is that individuals have tended to define themselves by their employment situation and status (p. 1).

Social bonds connected by cultural norms are paramount and the workplace becomes the most important environment for individuals to interact with one another and integrate into the larger society. It also becomes an essential place for fostering one's identity.

An individual's job has provided not only much of their self image, but also access to many of the resources that allow them to define themselves as part of a community and, hence, part of a distinct culture (Trice 1993; Trice and Beyer 1992; Bridges 1994).

For most newcomers, however, the bond with local communities is their only access to social and employment resources. New immigrants are often compelled to retreat into ethnic economies, which are still largely structured on the basis of these ethnic communities and their value systems.

Also due to this social change, characteristic organizational cultures have been produced based on a specific social contract through which loyalty to and conformity with the values of the organization are exchanged in return for security (Bennet 1990; Grossman 1988; Kalleberg, Knoke and Marsden 1995; Morin 1991; Tyrrell 1994; Whyte 1956).

The employer use of performance predictors such as organizational fit and personal suitability in hiring are subjective and normative. They uphold the dominance of corporate values in the hiring process marginalizing newcomer values.

The tendency to foster cultural sameness is most visible in the job interview, which is used as one of the important candidate assessment tools. In this process the suitability check comes down to whether the candidate fits the profile preconceived by the interviewer. Newcomer job seekers, particularly visible minorities, often find it difficult to build a good rapport with the interviewer due to their different cultural programming. This leads to cultural stereotyping based on perceived physical attributes and behaviours (See: Equity Officer 2006).

People in hiring positions may unconsciously look for someone who mirrors his or her own experience, personality, education, and particularly ethnocultural background, which is called the “cloning effect” (Baklid, Cowan, MacBride-King, and Mallette 2005: p. 37).

Traditional hiring practices are a product of recruiting relatively homogeneous workforce in the past. Therefore, we must first challenge the very definition differentiating *us* from *them* and recognize the importance of difference and diversity.

Social inclusion theory (Omidvar and Richmond 2003) goes one step further: it calls for a validation of diversity as well as recognition of the commonality of lived experiences. So it is not just about eliminating boundaries or barriers, but about closing physical, social and cultural distances that arbitrarily separate people.

Two critical dimensions of social inclusion theory can be applied to guide public policy and support corporate strategies. The first dimension is to confer recognition and respect to individuals and groups, and not to pathologize different cultures and equate them with perceived deficits.

The second dimension is human development, which involves nurturing the talents, skills, capacities and choices of individuals to live a valuable life and contribute their full worth in employment. Following the social inclusion paradigm, employers need to better equip themselves with cross-cultural communication competencies, enhance hiring equity and in the process augment their human capital which could greatly improve their global competitiveness.

Creating a diverse and inclusive corporate culture is challenging and requires fundamental changes in management mindsets. Employers must purposefully cultivate a new structure of corporate culture, find a niche for inclusion in their values and promote a meaningful diversity strategy. This also draws attention to public policy support for cultural awareness training for employers.

Conclusion

This study is dedicated to a close examination of employment access for newcomers through a critical focus on employer perspectives. By exploring four different dimensions – conceptual gap, social practices and hiring strategies, technological usage, and cultural barriers – attention is drawn to employers’ attitudes

and hiring practices. This descriptive study discloses the interconnectedness of employers’ behaviours in different stages of the hiring process and how newcomer job seekers are disadvantaged and excluded in this tightly-knit hiring web.

The fact is, there is limited policy and program support available to prepare employers for integrating newcomers into the workplace. This is in part attributable to general employer suspicion around government intervention with respect to business activities. However, this research supports the proposition that access to employment is not just an economic issue but also an equity issue.

Many immigrant job seekers refer to the “sticky floor” that limits their opportunities for initial advancement and the “glass (or cement) ceiling” that stops them from attaining top positions in organizations (Baklid, Cowan, MacBride-King, and Mallette 2005: p. 87).

In a knowledge economy, the future prosperity of nations depends on the quality and engagement of its people (Baklid, Cowan, MacBride-King, and Mallette 2005: p. 1). This requires a new conceptual orientation that social inclusion theory offers; one where both employers and newcomer job

seekers share their common experiences and identify their mutual obligations and benefits. The participation of employers in this process is essential to its success.

Government policy support, as opposed to government policy intervention, is instrumental in providing employers with the necessary incentives and tools to understand newcomers' lived experiences, their cultural backgrounds and their employment needs. The current policies and programs targeting employers are largely centred around promoting the more narrow idea of hiring recent immigrants, rather than also advancing the strategic advantages to employers of immigrant recruitment. Cultural sensitivity and intelligence must be cultivated among employers based on a broader understanding of Canadian immigration policy.

This study also attempts to deconstruct some of the prevalent social norms in the mainstream hiring process and shed light on possible incremental measures aimed at building more equitable processes and outcomes in employment recruitment.

Work is one of the most fundamental aspects in a person's life, providing an individual with a means of financial support and, as importantly, a contributory role in society. A person's employment is an essential component of his or her sense of identity, self worth and emotional well-being.
(Supreme Court of Canada)

NOTE:

For the full version of this paper see Liu, Eric Nan. 2006. "Access to Employment or Access to Employers: A Descriptive Study of Employers' Attitudes and Practices in Hiring Newcomer Job Seekers". CERIS Virtual Library, http://www.ceris.metropolis.net/frameset_e.html

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