

EMPLOYERS IN ACTION

From Recruitment
to Retention



hire | embauche
immigrants ottawa

www.hireimmigrantsottawa.ca

60% of Canadian Executives consider hiring skilled immigrants as a significant solution to their skills shortage needs.

- *Compass*

FUNDED BY



Funded by the Government of Ontario



Citizenship and
Immigration Canada

Citoyenneté et
Immigration Canada

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	1
INTRODUCTION	2
BARRIERS	4
Workplace Readiness	4
Cultural Differences	5
Language.	5
Qualifications and Work Experience	5
Credential Recognition	6
EMPLOYERS IN ACTION: RECRUITMENT TO RETENTION	7
Preparing the Workplace	7
<i>Policies and Practices</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>Developing Cross-Cultural Competencies</i>	<i>7</i>
Finding Immigrant Candidates	9
<i>Job Posting</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Advertising</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Attend Relevant Events</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Participate in Mentoring.</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Take Advantage of Internship and Co-Op Opportunities</i>	<i>10</i>
Assessing Applications.	12
<i>Resumés</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Language</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Academic Qualifications and Credentials.</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Checking References</i>	<i>13</i>
Interviewing	14
<i>Assessing Competencies.</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Verbal Communications</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Non-Verbal Communications</i>	<i>16</i>
Orientation	17
<i>Workplace Orientation.</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>On-the-Job Mentoring.</i>	<i>18</i>

Retention and Talent Management	19
<i>Compensation</i>	19
<i>Diversity</i>	19
<i>Performance Management</i>	20
<i>Professional Development</i>	20
<i>Advancement and Succession Planning</i>	21
APPENDIX A: CELEBRATING DIVERSITY	23
APPENDIX B: ACTION PLAN IMPLEMENTATION TEMPLATE	24

FOREWORD

Hire Immigrants Ottawa (HIO)¹ is a community-based initiative that brings together employers, immigrant agencies and stakeholders to enhance employers' ability to access the talents of skilled immigrants in the Ottawa area. HIO's mandate is to increase the capacity of employers in the Ottawa region to effectively integrate skilled immigrants into the local workforce. This is being achieved through a multi-pronged approach that includes:

- The Employer Council of Champions (ECC), a cross-sector council including leading Ottawa public and private sector employers and influential business associations. The ECC gives Ottawa's employers a collective voice to champion integration of skilled immigrants into the workforce at skills-appropriate levels;
- A set of sectoral Working Groups whose members include HR professionals from Ottawa-area employers, as well as representatives from immigrant agencies, unions, government, educational institutions, and professional associations. With a focus on the health care, information technology, finance, bio-technology, and public sectors, they work to address systemic barriers to the effective workforce integration of skilled immigrants; and
- A local awareness campaign to promote greater understanding of the social and economic value that immigrants bring to Ottawa.

In May 2008 the Working Groups produced an Action Plan² that highlighted the main barriers that hinder the effective hiring of skilled immigrants into the workplace. The Action Plan also included proposed actions to address the barriers.



¹ See <http://www.hireimmigrantsottawa.ca>

² Download the Action Plan at <http://www.hireimmigrantsottawa.ca/English/For%20Employers/tools-resources.php>

INTRODUCTION

83% of immigrants in
Ottawa's labour force
have a university degree.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada

Since producing the Action Plan in 2008, employers in the Working Groups have been implementing many of the planned actions as they very actively include an untapped pool of skilled immigrants in the Ottawa region as employment candidates. Together they have developed and refined a wide variety of effective strategies for integrating immigrants into their workplaces.

This updated document builds on the original Action Plan. It presents strategies developed for employers interested in learning about effective hiring and workplace integration practices for skilled immigrants.

By implementing these strategies, employers can take advantage of the many benefits offered by a culturally diverse workplace. These include:

- an improved understanding of an increasingly diverse customer base,
- enhanced productivity and innovation in the workplace, and
- additional opportunities for employee growth and succession planning in an increasingly competitive labour market.

The strategies and tactics are presented in a process-based approach for easy reference as employers move through the hiring process, from recruitment to integration and retention. Effective approaches are presented to address immigrant-specific considerations for each step in the process, followed by some of the benefits that can be realized. Lists of relevant resources are also provided.

This document is intended to complement information found in other resources, and where appropriate it includes references to other resources. There are a few particularly relevant resources that readers are encouraged to explore for additional comprehensive information:

- *The Employer's Guide to Integrating Immigrants into the Workplace*³, produced by HIO, uses a topic-based approach to present many of the themes discussed in this document. It presents different perspectives and contains additional useful information on the business case for hiring immigrants, as well as much more detailed information about working with cultural differences.
- *An Employer's Roadmap*⁴, produced by Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the Alliance of Sector Councils, offers ideas for hiring and retaining internationally trained workers. It also uses a process-based approach, beginning with the business case.
- *hireimmigrants.ca*⁵ provides businesses with tools and resources to better recruit, retain and promote skilled immigrants.

The resources listed above are henceforth referred to in this document as the Employer's Guide, Employer's Roadmap, and hireimmigrants.ca respectively.



³ Download the Employer's Guide at <http://www.hireimmigrantsottawa.ca/English/For%20Employers/tools-resources.php>

⁴ Download the Employer's Roadmap at <http://www.hireimmigrantsottawa.ca/English/For%20Employers/tools-resources.php>

⁵ See www.hireimmigrants.ca

BARRIERS



The HIO Working Groups have identified the main barriers to the effective hiring of skilled immigrants into the workplace. The barriers include workplace readiness; cultural issues; language—including bilingualism and non-verbal language; qualifications and work experience; and credential recognition. This updated review of barriers provides useful context for the strategies presented in the remainder of this document.

WORKPLACE READINESS

Every organization has policies, practices, knowledge, perceptions, and attitudes related to hiring new employees. All of these contribute to an organization's culture and represent its “readiness” to effectively recruit, hire, and integrate a new employee into its workplace. Some of these elements are implicit, and may not be documented, articulated, or even recognized. Often, these elements are only expressed indirectly as organizations seek to “find the right fit” when considering prospective employees. These well-intentioned efforts may result in very qualified and capable immigrants being screened out at some point in the hiring process.

Even for organizations with well-documented policies and procedures, there is often a distinction between policy and practice. While policy may be inclusive with respect to immigrant candidates, it may break down in practice. There may be uninformed negative attitudes and biases among existing employees (e.g., the “taking our jobs” myth). In some cases, well-qualified immigrant candidates may be presented to hiring decision-makers who may be unfamiliar with candidates' backgrounds and experiences (e.g., their academic credentials). They may also anticipate that perceived differences with respect to candidates' cultural background might affect their ability to “fit in” with the team. As a result, the decision-maker may not reach an adequate comfort level and may perceive a higher degree of risk with immigrant candidates. With frequently tight hiring timelines, decision-makers sometimes screen out immigrant candidates due to fear, uncertainty, and doubt: the FUD Factor.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Employer concerns about cultural differences in the workplace can be a strong barrier when considering immigrant job applicants. In fact, many employers suggest that cultural differences may underlie a clear preference for “Canadian work experience”. Existing employees in an organization may lack awareness about different cultures, and can become uncomfortable when they encounter unfamiliar cultural practices, behaviours, or appearances. The organization might also find itself struggling to make reasonable workplace accommodations for different practices and communication styles.

On the other hand, recent immigrants may lack awareness about organizational cultural tendencies in Canadian workplaces. For example, someone from a culture that discourages speaking confidently and positively about personal abilities and accomplishments can have great difficulty presenting and marketing themselves in the hiring process. Other small but important differences often result in poor first impressions with prospective employers (e.g., eye contact or handshakes). On the job, immigrants may be inundated with many new and unfamiliar requirements and attitudes, which can make the workplace adaptation process more challenging (e.g., socializing with colleagues or male/female roles).

LANGUAGE

Verbal and written communication skills are very important in most workplaces. Verbal skills can be more challenging than reading or writing when the speaker has a heavy accent, especially in roles that involve front-line customer service. Immigrants may be unfamiliar with workplace-specific terminology and jargon as well as with slang, idioms, and colloquial language.

In Ottawa, and especially in the public service, a requirement for bilingualism—English and French—is a unique and significant barrier. Many immigrants are multilingual, but often not in both of Canada’s official languages.

QUALIFICATIONS AND WORK EXPERIENCE

Employers may face an additional time/cost factor in assessing international qualifications and experience. While affordable services are available for assessment of academic qualifications, it may be more difficult to assess international work experience, and to contact/communicate with references from the source country.

To circumvent these assessments, many employers prefer Canadian work experience as evidence of equivalent skills and knowledge, as well as successful cultural adaptation. This screens out many qualified candidates, and diminishes the labour pool as immigrants’ skills atrophy from under-utilization.



Employers in some sectors, particularly finance and information technology, often require bonding and security clearance, which can take immigrants years to obtain.

CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION

In regulated professions it is frequently very difficult and time-consuming for immigrants to obtain recognition for their foreign credentials and to receive the required certification or licensure. Employers will be unable to hire them for regulated positions until the required certificate or license is obtained.



EMPLOYERS IN ACTION: RECRUITMENT TO RETENTION

The remainder of this document discusses the steps employers are taking in hiring and integrating immigrants into their workplaces.

PREPARING THE WORKPLACE

Every organization has its own culture—including a set of perceptions, knowledge, attitudes, policies, and practices. This culture exists whether or not these elements are documented.

“Is my organization ready to effectively recruit, hire, and integrate skilled immigrants into our workplace?”

Here are some strategies to help you prepare your workplace for cultural diversity.

Policies and Practices

Canadian demographics are changing. Cultural diversity is increasingly being reflected in the local workforce and in the consumer base. If your organization has not recently reviewed its HR policies and practices, they are likely in need of adjustment. You may unknowingly and unintentionally be screening out skilled immigrants, or failing to identify and successfully integrate them.

Review and Document Your Policies and Practices

You may be able to improve your ability to identify skilled immigrants who could be valuable employees by reviewing how you recruit, hire, and integrate new employees. If these policies and practices are not already documented, consider doing so.

Communicate Your Policies and Practices

After the review, you may find that relevant policies exist, but are not being fully implemented. Communicate and reinforce these policies throughout the organization, and ensure that managers and executives are accountable for implementing the policies.

Developing Cross-Cultural Competencies

Workplaces that are successful in hiring and retaining a diverse workforce provide ongoing education to all staff about cross-cultural considerations in the workplace.

Contact LASI WorldSkills
to find a cultural informant:
T: (613) 721-5135
Nancy@ottawa-worldskills.org

HIO routinely offers cross-cultural competency training for employers. Check the HIO website for the current workshop schedule.

Educating and Informing

You can create an inclusive work environment by educating existing employees about different cultural norms, values, and behaviours. A person who is able to provide cultural information, including workplace information, is often called a “cultural informant”. Invite employees from different cultural backgrounds to be cultural informants for other employees: you will likely find them very eager to do so. Many employers use informal “Lunchtime Learning” sessions for this purpose.

Encourage Diverse Problem Solving Strategies

A culturally-diverse approach to solving business issues can bring much innovation, satisfaction, and productivity to the workplace. Accommodating a variety of opinions and being open to new ideas will open the door to such benefits.

Workshops and Seminars

Arrange for employees to participate in cross-cultural competency development workshops and seminars. Contact experts from local immigrant service agencies and cross-cultural development organizations to arrange topical workshops. In many cases these workshops can be delivered in your workplace.

Employer Benefits

By reviewing, adjusting, and communicating your HR policies and practices to reflect changing demographics, and by working towards establishing an inclusive workplace, you will:

- expand your candidate pool by identifying more skilled immigrants as employment candidates,
- increase your organizational capacity to successfully integrate immigrants as new employees in your workplace, and
- improve cross-cultural awareness, understanding, and competencies of all employees.

Other Resources

For more information:

- The Employer’s Guide discusses preparing the workplace.
- The Government of Manitoba Immigration website has produced a guide to hiring immigrants for employers⁶. Strategies to assess company readiness are discussed.
- Graybridge Malkam⁷ and LASI WorldSkills⁸ are local suppliers of a comprehensive range of products and services that specialize in cross-cultural competencies.
- Hireimmigrants.ca provides a number of downloadable tools and resources in their Roadmap⁹.

⁶ See http://www2.immigratemanitoba.com/asset_library/en/work/pdf/emp_hireguide2009-05.pdf

⁷ See <http://www.malkam.com/>
or phone 613-761-7440

⁸ See <http://www.ottawa-worldskills.org/>
or phone 613-233-0453

⁹ See <http://www.hireimmigrants.ca/Roadmap/>

FINDING IMMIGRANT CANDIDATES

There is an untapped pool of skilled immigrants who are ready to contribute to your workplace, but your traditional methods of recruiting may not be reaching them. Here are some strategies that employers have found helpful in attracting job applications from skilled immigrants.

Job Posting

A job posting can unintentionally “screen out” otherwise qualified immigrants based on stated minimum requirements. To address this, specify only requirements that are truly necessary in order to carry out the responsibilities of the job. For example, make sure a unilingual applicant really could not do the job before you specify the need for English/French bilingualism.

Advertising

Advertising strategies that specifically reach into immigrant communities will attract a wide audience of skilled immigrant job applicants. Here are some approaches that employers are successfully using to reach immigrant candidates:

Access the Ottawa Job Match Network

The Ottawa Job Match Network (OJMN) is a partnership between Algonquin College, LASI WorldSkills, and the Ottawa YMCA-YWCA. Their no-cost, one-stop service provides employers with coordinated and comprehensive access to Ottawa’s highest quality new international talent. Their recruitment specialists can effectively match specific staffing requirements with pre-screened, qualified, and experienced internationally trained individuals. The OJMN has access to the candidate databases of all its partners, including the many immigrant serving agencies represented by LASI WorldSkills.

Advertise with Immigrant Serving Agencies

There are several agencies and organizations in Ottawa that provide settlement and often employment services to new employees. These organizations welcome employers with job opportunities, and are happy to advertise job postings within their community and encourage qualified candidates to apply. Some publish community-based newspapers that are ideal for such advertisements.

Use Word of Mouth Advertising

Many employers use word-of-mouth advertising and referral. Some even encourage this practice by establishing internal referral programs that recognize and/or reward existing employees for making a referral that results in a successful new hire. Employers can also encourage employees to explore the availability of candidates in immigrant communities with which they have contact.

“How do I find skilled immigrant candidates to hire?”

Contact OJMN:
T: (613) 233-0453
Magdalene@ottawa-worldskills.org

Some HIO Working Group employers visit OJMN to deliver information sessions about opportunities available in their organizations, provide interview tips, and feedback on resumé.

Use Current Technologies

Most employers with a website already post job opportunities online, which can be augmented with newer social networking technologies (e.g., LinkedIn¹⁰). Some employers include information on their website that helps applicants understand the employer's recruitment process and prepare themselves for it (e.g., resume tips, what to expect in an interview).

Attend Relevant Events*Networking and Coaching Events*

HIO and its Working Group employers regularly host networking and coaching events, which bring employers and skilled immigrants together to meet in an informal setting. Through such events, immigrants and employers can gain exposure to each other outside the context of a specific job interview, and can begin to break down cultural and workplace barriers. Immigrants gain valuable networking experience, develop new skills, and become better prepared to seek employment. Employers gain insight into the potential of skilled immigrants. These events can lead directly to a successful hiring. Contact HIO to find out how you can participate in these events.

Contact HIO for information about upcoming events and local mentoring opportunities:
T: (613) 683-3370
info@hireimmigrantsottawa.ca

Career Fairs

Periodically hosted by local agencies serving immigrants, career fairs are good opportunities for direct recruitment of qualified immigrants, as well as for existing employees to learn about the significant skills and experience immigrants offer.

Participate in Mentoring

There are currently several mentoring programs for immigrants operating in the Ottawa region. These provide opportunities for employed professionals—current employees in your organization—to mentor immigrants who are seeking employment and who have skills and qualifications in a relevant field. These programs should not be considered primarily as a recruitment activity for your organization, although the mentoring relationships can sometimes lead directly to employment. These mentoring programs can provide opportunities for employees in your organization to network with skilled immigrants, and to broaden their cultural competency.

Take Advantage of Internship and Co-Op Opportunities*Provide a Temporary Placement*

Providing a temporary placement within your organization for skilled immigrants is an excellent way to gain familiarity with different cultures in the workplace and to assess a particular candidate's employment suitability. Local community colleges offer bridge training programs that include work placements.

¹⁰ See <http://talent.linkedin.com/?pin=tr02>

Create Your Own Internship Program

As short-term employment programs, paid internships are an effective way for employers to overcome the FUD barrier, while providing interns with skills-appropriate Canadian experience and references, labour market contacts, as well as an opportunity to demonstrate their “value proposition”. Effective programs typically run at least three months, but are most beneficial when they last a year. Immigrant internships can also generate organizational learning/experience with respect to workforce diversity.

Employer Benefits

By developing a good job posting, using the right advertising channels, attending events, and engaging in mentoring and internship opportunities, you will:

- attract a larger number of qualified immigrant job applicants,
- improve your linkages with local immigrant serving agencies and make use of associated recruitment channels,
- gain an improved understanding of the skills and qualifications of internationally trained immigrants and their potential within your organization,
- improve your skills and knowledge regarding hiring immigrants,
- gain exposure to different cultures in your workplace, and
- develop new cross-cultural competencies within your organization and among your existing employees.

Other Resources

For more information:

- The Employer’s Guide discusses some strategies for finding qualified immigrants.
- The Employer’s Roadmap includes a discussion of recruitment strategies.
- Ottawa has many services and agencies that support cultural communities and provide assistance with local settlement and employment¹¹.
- The HIO website includes many relevant resources for employers¹².



¹¹ See http://www.ottawa.ca/residents/immigration/first_days/cultural_en.html

¹² See <http://www.hireimmigrantsottawa.ca/English/For%20Employers/wby-hire.php>

“I’m really not sure that someone from a different culture is going to fit into my workplace. How can I get more comfortable with the idea first, and avoid making a hiring mistake?”



HIO Working Group employers who remove the name of the educational institution before circulating the resumé to hiring managers have noticed an increase in the quality of candidates being considered.

ASSESSING APPLICATIONS

A job application from an immigrant may contain elements that are unfamiliar to employers. Research shows that something as basic as a foreign-sounding name can cause some applicants to be screened out.

Here are some strategies that employers have found useful in assessing job applications from immigrants.

Resumés

The resumé of an immigrant applicant may look different. It might include information that you don’t usually see. It could also be missing some information you might expect to see. These are indicators that an applicant may simply be unfamiliar with the Canadian employment market and job application norms. This does not mean that the candidate is unsuitable for the job, and the resumé should not be disregarded solely on this basis.

Here are some factors that employers consider when reviewing resumés.

Name

While a person’s name may appear unusual and you may be unsure about its pronunciation, there’s no correlation between a person’s name or ethnicity and his or her ability to do the job.

Personal Information

Some resumés will include personal information such as age, gender, marital status, or even a photo. Ignore this information.

Canadian Work Experience

Be aware that an underlying preference for candidates with Canadian work experience can screen out well-qualified candidates and can cause employers to miss out on hiring some excellent employees. Focus on relevant work experience, wherever it was obtained.

Personal Strengths and Accomplishments

In some cultures it is considered inappropriate to highlight personal strengths and accomplishments. Individuals are considered part of a collective, and it is the collective that achieves results. Consequently, even if a candidate has made significant contributions, personal professional achievements may not be clearly stated in the resumé.

Educational Institution

Employers may have a bias that favours candidates from certain educational institutions. For that reason, some employers choose to ignore the educational institution—but not the credential or qualification.

Language

While effective communication in the language of the workplace is important, keep in mind that individuals’ proficiency will improve with time and experience.

Here are several language assessment strategies you can use:

Make an Informal Assessment

The resumé and cover letter by themselves are insufficient to assess an applicant's overall language skills. Every contact with the applicant prior to a formal interview—phone, email, face-to-face—provides another opportunity to assess language skills, particularly if you have considered language requirements in your written job posting.

We All Have Accents

Be careful not to confuse accent with fluency or command of the language. While a strong accent can be challenging for the listener, it does not affect the candidate's reading or writing abilities. In most workplace situations, colleagues will quite quickly become familiar with an accent.

Arrange a pre-interview

Some employers arrange a pre-interview to help them better assess an applicant's fluency prior to inviting him or her to an on-site interview. Although this is often done by telephone, be aware that telephone communication can be extremely challenging because it excludes visual cues. A meeting in a neutral location such as a local coffee shop is most beneficial because it helps to minimize any anxiety or intimidation the applicant may feel.

Academic Qualifications and Credentials

Job applications from immigrants usually include academic and professional qualifications that specify degrees, diplomas, certificates and other credentials from international institutions that are probably unfamiliar to you. Most employers who are engaged with HIO take these credentials at face value.

For a better understanding of foreign qualifications in more familiar terms, you can obtain an assessment from World Education Services Canada (WES),¹³ which provides evaluation reports with clear and consistent analysis, and equates foreign academic qualifications to degrees, diplomas, or certificates from Canadian institutions.

Checking References

Most immigrants don't have any related Canadian work experience when they arrive in Canada, so it's sometimes impossible to obtain local work references. The only references provided may be located in another country. Employers find that email is a convenient way to check these references. Telephone calls can also be effective although cost and time zone differences can be factors. Some local employers use an external supplier, BackCheck¹⁴, which specializes in international reference checking.



¹³ See <http://www.wes.org/cal>
or phone 866-343-0070

¹⁴ See <http://www.backcheck.ca>
or phone 877-308-4663

Employer Benefits

By effectively assessing an immigrant's language skills, qualifications and credentials, and by checking their references you will:

- be better able to assess a skilled immigrant's suitability for a particular position, and
- develop broader assessment skills and knowledge among employees with recruitment responsibilities.

Other Resources

There is more information on assessing skilled immigrant employment candidates in the following resources:

- The Employer's Guide provides information on language and credential assessment, and the FUD Factor (Fear, Uncertainty and Doubt) as it applies to Canadian work experience.



INTERVIEWING

A personal interview with a job applicant is the most significant step in the recruitment process. An effective interview process ensures that interviewers are aware of and prepared for potential cultural differences when interviewing immigrants. This can avoid misinterpretations of language and behaviour that might otherwise cause an interviewer to disqualify excellent immigrant candidates.

Here are some strategies to consider when preparing for and interviewing immigrant candidates.

Assessing Competencies

Immigrant candidates' answers to many questions during interviews may be influenced by their culture. Focusing on competencies allows you to recognize an applicant's ability to succeed at the job.

Perform Competency-Based Testing

A competency-based test can be a very effective and culturally neutral way to assess many skills, especially hard technical skills. Rather than simply asking a job applicant if they possess a particular skill required for the job, provide him or her with an opportunity to demonstrate it. The more realistic the test environment, and the more specific the skills being tested, the more accurately performance potential can be assessed with minimal possibility of cultural influence. Competency-based testing can be included in an interview process in the workplace, or can be conducted separately.

Remain Flexible

There is no perfect interviewing tool. Try to remain flexible in your use of tools, and incorporate cultural considerations. For instance, both

competency-based and behavioural-based interviewing techniques can be effective to assess soft skills when adapted to include cultural considerations.

Verbal Communications

Effective verbal communication can be challenging in an interview. Here are some strategies that can help you avoid misinterpretations based on cultural differences.

Opening Small-Talk

Learning to engage in appropriate small-talk discussions can be a challenge for immigrants. Not all cultures discuss weather and hockey as an ice-breaker to a formal business discussion. Some immigrant applicants may not yet have been acculturated to expect this sort of casual conversation at the beginning of an interview. If a job applicant responds in an unexpected way to an opening question such as “How is the weather out there?,” an effective interviewer will recognize the response for what it is—a simple cultural difference, rather than rudeness or a lack of interpersonal skills—and will simply move right into the formal interview.

Rephrasing Questions

Rephrasing interview questions can make a difference when dealing with people for whom English or French is a second language. It allows them more time to understand the question, and gives them more context—and perhaps a different perspective—on the question. If you think the candidate has mis-understood, you might suggest that he or she paraphrase the question to verify understanding. You might also add follow-up questions to help crystallize the meaning.

Interpreting Silence

People differ in their levels of comfort regarding silence during a conversation. Some people expect an almost immediate response to a question, even if just a preliminary comment such as “That’s a good question. Let me think about that.” People from some cultures often won’t fill the silence while preparing their response. This doesn’t always mean that they didn’t understand the question; in fact, it’s sometimes a sign of respect to the questioners—indicating that the question is being seriously considered, rather than quickly answered without careful thought. An effective interviewer will allow the silence to continue longer than they usually would, and will not interpret the silence in any negative way.

Individual Accomplishments

In many cultures it is considered inappropriate to speak highly of one’s own accomplishments. This remains true even in an interview setting. Questions that are intended to give individuals opportunities to describe their strengths and accomplishments can lead to answers that seem to minimize their contributions. When given such a response, an effective





interviewer will acknowledge the respondent's potential discomfort, and try again to get at the underlying competency by:

- repeating the question and asking for a more personal reply,
- rephrasing the question, or
- asking a different sort of question.

Non-Verbal Communications

Non-verbal communication accounts for a great deal of our messaging. Understanding some common cultural differences in this area allows interviewers to conduct more effective interviews and avoid misinterpretations.

Some of the most common cultural differences that are evident in non-verbal communications—and ones that should not be interpreted negatively—include the following:

Eye Contact

Some immigrants are reluctant to make eye contact during an interview. In their culture, frequent or prolonged eye contact could be seen as disrespectful to someone in authority.

Handshaking

In some cultures, a weak handshake is considered polite. Some people are not comfortable shaking hands at all, and their attempt at the gesture may appear awkward as well as weak.

Gestures, Posture, and Personal Space

Some cultural expressions can be incorrectly interpreted as personality traits. People from some cultures use hand gestures extensively while speaking, and people from other cultures use their hands very little. Similarly, there may be differences in posture: from a forward-leaning, edge-of-the-seat body position to a demure, melt-into-the-background stance. Cultural differences can also be expressed in terms of “personal space”. Some people can be uncomfortable when another person, even unintentionally, gets too close physically.

Employer Benefits

By incorporating cultural considerations into your interviewing process, and by properly interpreting cultural differences exhibited in verbal and non-verbal communications, you will

- be better able to assess all applicants,
- improve your organization's ability to recognize skilled immigrants as excellent potential employees,
- improve interviewing skills, and
- encourage greater cross-cultural understanding and the development of broader cross-cultural competencies among employees with interviewing responsibilities.

Other Resources

For more information on conducting effective interviews with skilled immigrants, see the following resources:

- The Employer's Guide includes a discussion on interviewing immigrants.
- Learn more about Competency-based interviews.¹⁵
- Learn more about Rephrasing Questions.¹⁶
- Learn more about Cross-Cultural Interviewing.¹⁷

ORIENTATION

An effective employee orientation program lays the foundation for a productive employment relationship.

Workplace Orientation

Most workplace orientation includes a written document that provides basic information and answers many anticipated questions. It also serves as a good reference that can be used frequently during the orientation process.

Here are some strategies to provide effective workplace orientation in an increasingly diverse workplace.

Accommodation

People from some cultures participate in religious practices from time to time during the workday. Ideally, you will be able to designate an appropriate location in the workplace for these practices and inform all employees of this location. While cultural dress will generally not interfere with true business or safety requirements, the orientation session is a good opportunity to highlight any necessary dress restrictions. Similarly, if your workplace uses a cultural calendar the orientation session is a good time to inform new employees about this.

Timeliness

Cultures with a more relaxed approach to time and deadlines often have different views about when to be exact in timelines as opposed to seeing a designated time as a flexible guideline. The orientation session is a good opportunity to make your expectations clear as they relate to working hours, submitting reports on time, and meeting explicit deadlines.

Workplace Jargon and Lingo

Employees in many workplaces frequently use sector-specific terminology and jargon as well as slang, idioms, and colloquial language. These terms can be unfamiliar to immigrants, and are usually only learned over time and through experience. Anticipate that new employees will encounter unfamiliar terminology and encourage them to ask questions

“How can I ensure that a new immigrant employee becomes productive quickly, with minimal disruption to the workplace?”

¹⁵ See <http://www.interview-skills.co.uk/competency-based-interviews.aspx>

¹⁶ See http://www.hireimmigrantsottawa.ca/downloads/RephrasingQuestions%20_HRfinal%20200207%20-AnneHI.pdf

¹⁷ See <http://www.hireimmigrants.ca/resources/?resource=trainingtool>



for clarification. If you have a glossary of such jargon, include it in the orientation package.

On-the-Job Mentoring

A number of employers have found it very effective to assign a mentor to work with and be available to a new employee. Designating a mentor helps reduce the learning curve for a new employee and increases overall productivity. It also helps the mentor broaden his or her leadership and coaching skills.

As a cultural informant, a mentor should be a knowledgeable and experienced employee – someone who helps the new employee learn about the organization’s culture. The mentor should not be the newcomer’s direct manager or supervisor, or anyone in the direct management line.

Mentoring can be used very flexibly in the workplace. Some organizations use an informal “buddy” system in which the designated mentor is available to answer questions or provide guidance in an ad-hoc manner. There may be little structure or formality in the relationship and the buddy may receive no specific training or preparation for the role. Nonetheless the simple buddy system can be very effective.

In other organizations both mentor and mentee receive specific training and preparation to begin their relationship, and the mentor may have a more proactive role. Organizations might consider establishing a more formal in-house mentoring program, and perhaps working with external mentoring experts to deliver specialized programs and services.

Employer Benefits

By offering an effective workplace orientation program that includes on-the-job mentoring you will

- reduce time-to-productivity for new employees,
- develop new skills among existing staff, and
- develop cross-cultural awareness and understanding in your workplace.

Other Resources

For more information on workplace orientation and on-the-job mentoring see the following resources:

- The Employer’s Guide discusses orientation and mentoring.
- The HIO website includes an article on accommodating different faiths in the workplace.¹⁸

¹⁸ See <http://www.hireimmigrantsottawa.ca/downloads/Religious%20Accommodation-ENG.pdf>

RETENTION AND TALENT MANAGEMENT

Finding the right employees for your organization can be time-consuming and expensive. By effectively integrating new employees into your workplace, you are more likely to retain them and avoid having to repeat the recruitment and hiring process.

Compensation

Retention begins with a competitive compensation package. When you ask an immigrant applicant about salary expectations, you may discover that the expectation is below what you know would be competitive. Once on the job, however, new employees will quickly come to understand how their compensation packages compare with their coworkers. If the packages are not competitive, they may respond by taking their skills and newly acquired Canadian experience to another employer for fair compensation. The marginal financial benefit you might gain in the interim will be more than offset by negative morale in the workplace, and the likelihood that you will have to repeat a costly hiring process to replace a skilled and valuable employee.

Diversity

Workplaces in which employees feel that diversity is supported have higher employee satisfaction ratings and better retention. Diverse workplaces also experience increased productivity, creativity, and innovation.

Here are some strategies to help you maximize the benefits of diversity:

Encourage Cross-Cultural Information Sharing

Encourage employees to share information about cultural practices as well as upcoming seasonal and religious events. This can be done in brief and informal settings such as “Lunchtime Learning” sessions. An employee from a particular culture can explain to co-workers the cultural significance of a practice or event.

Encourage Multicultural Celebration

Recognize significant seasonal and religious events by including celebratory practices from different cultures. Appendix A provides ten ways to celebrate diversity in the workplace. You can do this anytime – and especially on Canadian Multiculturalism Day.

Develop Multilingualism

Encourage all employees to teach, learn, and use simple greetings and phrases (e.g., thank you, good morning) in the native languages of their colleagues. Take opportunities to expand this vocabulary and knowledge as seasonal and religious events occur.

“What can I do to make sure a new immigrant employee is successfully and fully integrated into the workplace?”

Hiring and retaining a qualified employee should be considered a long-term investment.

“Does your workplace celebrate Canadian Multiculturalism Day, June 27?”



Performance Management

Managing the job performance of an employee from a different cultural background sometimes requires an adaptive approach. Be aware of cultural differences that may express themselves in the following ways.

Leadership Styles

In a homogeneous workplace, the golden rule might be “Treat others as I want to be treated.” In a culturally diverse workplace, an expanded golden rule would be “Find out how people want to be treated, and treat them accordingly.”

For instance, some cultures have a very hierarchical approach to management and leadership. Employees with this background may expect management to provide very tactical and prescriptive instructions regarding task performance. They may be unfamiliar with the expectation that they work more independently – in their experience, independence could be seen by their superiors as insubordinate and perhaps threatening behaviour.

Communication Styles

Communication styles can vary along many dimensions. Direct and indirect communicators can come away from the same discussion with quite different interpretations and expectations. Similarly, linear and circular communicators can misunderstand, or become frustrated with each other quite easily.

Communication styles can also affect the effectiveness of performance feedback. Performance discussions in a Canadian workplace often begin with positive feedback and close on an optimistic note. The middle portion of the discussion is often the most important, because this is where performance issues and requirements for improvement are discussed. As this format is not used in all cultures, some immigrant employees may conclude that there is no serious performance issue since the discussion began and ended positively.

Professional Development

In some work cultures, professional development needs are left to supervisors to manage. As a result, some immigrants might not be familiar or comfortable with the expectation, common in the Canadian workplace, that employees take the initiative with respect to their own professional development.

Even for organizations that strive to provide professional development equitably, immigrants may not be taking advantage of these opportunities at the same rate, or with the same frequency, as non-immigrants. Being unaware that they have any role in their own professional development, immigrant employees may end up stranded in positions below their potential, and may actually be perceived to lack potential or ambition.

Here are some strategies to ensure that all employees take advantage of professional development opportunities in the workplace.

Encourage Training

Be aware that suggestions to participate in training can be interpreted as criticism of job performance. Reluctance to pursue training opportunities can also be based on a cultural difference in that such a request might be perceived as an admission of a skill deficiency. To address such reluctance, provide encouragement along with overt clarification of organizational expectations about training.

Include Professional Development in Performance Review

An effective way to make sure that every employee has a professional development plan is to include this activity as a formal part of every employee's performance review

Suggest Mentoring

Assigning a mentor can also be effective in helping new immigrant employees to understand organizational expectations regarding professional development.

Advancement and Succession Planning

Canadian demographics point to a developing shortage of senior and experienced workers—skilled immigrants can help to address this shortage.

Here are some strategies to help you develop the high potential of immigrants in your organization.

Proactive Management

Successful and progressive companies proactively help employees advance along a career path that benefits the employee as well as the organization. Recent immigrants may not be considered for promotions and advancement at the same rate or to the same level as non-immigrants. Using the tools of a professional development plan for each employee, discussed regularly in performance reviews, management can be proactive in identifying high potential performers. These individuals can then be provided with increasing challenges and responsibilities, which leads to a long term career path within the organization.

Promotions and Salaries

Employees from different cultural backgrounds may need encouragement to apply when opportunities for promotion arise. Equitable compensation packages for immigrants at all levels of the organization will also encourage them to apply for advancement.



Employer Benefits

By supporting a diverse workplace that effectively handles performance management, professional development, and advancement for all employees, you will:

- develop a high-performing, productive and innovative workforce,
- reduce attrition and turnover among staff,
- develop top talent for succession planning,
- develop new skills among existing staff (e.g., leadership, cross-cultural competencies),
- establish an equitable workplace, and
- increase cross-cultural competencies in the workplace.



Other Resources

For more information on employee retention and talent management, see the following resources:

- The Employer's Guide discusses working with cross-cultural differences. It also discusses integration and cross-cultural awareness.
- The Employer's Roadmap discusses integration and retention. It also discusses creating an inclusive workplace.
- A free online learning tool called TalentNet¹⁹ helps businesses maximize the skills and talents of their employees, and better identify future business leaders.

¹⁹ See <http://www.leadershipdiversity.ca/>

APPENDIX A:

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY

Opportunities abound for us to create a more inclusive workplace. Research supports the concept that the benchmark multicultural workplace is one that can play together. Below are ten tips for celebrating diversity. Remember that honouring other faiths, beliefs and religions also allows those different from us to move closer to us...trust is built when respect is felt.

1. Hang a world map in your Main Office/Hallway and have each staff member pinpoint their place of birth.
2. Organize an Intercultural Pot Luck – Have everyone write a short description of the food they contributed so that others learn about more than the flavour!
3. Create a Learn at Lunch Day/Series where those who wish can share an aspect of their culture not usually known...this includes Canadian-born staff as well!
4. Honour religious differences---- learn some aspect of the religion of each member of your staff. Acknowledge major religious holidays/ celebrations...perhaps combining with learn at lunch.
5. Count the number of languages spoken in your office/department. Post next to world map.
6. Invite your diverse staff to a focus group on how they have adapted to the work culture in your organization. Then use their feedback to assure that new immigrant staff are well integrated.
7. Organize a Book Group or Movie Day where either a book or film from another country is shown/discussed.
8. Remember in your interactions that immigrants and refugees have an invisible backpack of history that we do not see. Invite one of your diverse staff to share their story in your newsletter.
9. Ask if diverse staff would like to have a cooking demo at lunch preparing a traditional or common food.
10. Include intercultural elements into our coursework or other office experiences. I.E., if you work in the counselling centre, organize a day where diverse staff share how counselling is practiced in their country of birth. This experience also helps understand other diverse clients.

CONTACT US

HIRE IMMIGRANTS OTTAWA

363 Coventry Road
Ottawa ON K1K 2C5

T: (613) 228-6700

F: (613) 228-6730

info@hireimmigrantsottawa.ca



Visit the HIO website at www.hireimmigrantsottawa.ca.
The site provides access to resources and information
for employers
