



Welcome to Canada. Now what?

Unlocking the potential of
immigrants for business growth
and innovation

White paper summary of Deloitte's 2011 Dialogue on diversity
November 2011

“The Canadian system has to change because we are quite small globally and traditional industries are evaporating. What’s that next generation of innovation going to look like – how does diversity fit into that?”

Setting the stage

How do we successfully integrate newcomers to Canada into our workforce?

Immigration is essential to Canada's growth. Statistics show that Canadian companies will depend on foreign-born workers to sustain and increase the workforce that fuels our economy. At the same time, the global talent market is becoming increasingly competitive. To continue Canada's growth, we must be able to compete for top talent.

When we think about diversity, we think about differences to celebrate – race, sexual orientation, gender, ability and more. But we don't always connect how those differences can make our companies more innovative. Innovation comes from people and in order to understand innovation's role in economic growth, we have to focus on diversity¹.

taking calculated risks and being open to learning from the experiences of foreign-born workers, will Canadian companies fully capitalize on the potential for innovation and growth that comes with hiring foreign-born employees.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada forecasts that "immigrants are expected to account for all net labour force growth by 2011, and for all net population growth by 2031."² Statistics Canada reports that in 2010, more than 280,000 immigrants came to Canada with close to 50,000 skilled workers as principal applicants³. Very recent immigrants are more than twice as likely to possess a university degree and are four times more likely to have a graduate degree than native-born Canadians⁴.

"Many find that while it's easy to put diversity and inclusiveness into a mission statement, it's hard to put it into practice."

Diverse ideas and solutions come from people with different experiences and perspectives. This is key to innovation. Most employers know that diverse teams foster creativity and innovation, as well as improve decision-making. For Canada to remain globally competitive, we have to broaden our thinking and truly integrate skilled people who may not have Canadian experience, credentials or references. Only by

While the majority of people who immigrate to Canada come with dreams to succeed and contribute in their new home country, those dreams are being eroded by numerous roadblocks:

- credentials not being recognized
- disconnection from the job market or professional associations to support their networking efforts in a new country
- lack of Canadian experience
- lingering biases in recruitment

Things that those born in Canada take for granted – such as conducting a job search –

can be daunting for someone who is new to the country and has no connections. Statistics Canada reports that when new immigrants were asked about their biggest difficulties since arriving in Canada, most cited finding an adequate job as the biggest challenge (46%), followed by learning English or French (26%)⁵.

New immigrants rightly think, ‘if I’ve been admitted to Canada, I should be able to find a job in my field of expertise;’ but it’s not that simple. Often, organizations don’t see the systemic barriers to integration and acceptance that have been created within their workplaces. Considering Canada’s global reputation for welcoming immigrants, it doesn’t make sense that they exist. By erecting barriers to employment for foreign-born workers, we’re actually blocking our own potential for innovation and growth. Our customers and clients are becoming increasingly more global in their outlooks and expectations, and our talent pool reflects that diversity. Shouldn’t organizations be gaining a better advantage from the language and cultural insights of globally experienced employees?

While many employers are making a true effort to integrate foreign-born workers, companies are on different points of the spectrum.

We need immigrants to fuel our economic growth and they are eager to contribute their skills and experience to improve our economy, so why aren’t we fully and more effectively integrating

them into our workplaces? This is precisely the paradox debated among participants at Dialogue on diversity roundtables across Canada, hosted by Deloitte.

What we discovered is that the specific challenges and success stories differ from province to province, but the call to action was consistent: Canada needs to do a better job of integrating skilled, foreign-trained workers into our workforce by identifying the barriers to integration and breaking them down.

This year’s white paper – the second in our Dialogue on diversity series – is aimed at building on our roundtable discussions to share the insights, ideas and recommendations of various stakeholders. It brings together the perspectives of employers, community organizations, special interest groups, government agencies and ministries and immigrants. We hope it will spark action across Canada that will have a real impact.



Jane Allen
Partner and Chief Diversity Officer

‘At a standstill’

A case for change

Canada’s reputation on the global stage is one of openness to immigrants. While we do accept a large number of immigrants each year – we welcomed 280,000 in 2010 – highly skilled and foreign-trained workers often find themselves shut out of the skilled labour market.

The facts paint a clear picture: In 2006, very recent immigrants – those who have been in Canada less than five years – had an unemployment rate of 11.5%. That percentage drops to 7.3% for immigrants who have been in Canada more than five years, but less than 10 years. The unemployment rate for native-born Canadians is 4.9%⁶. The question is why?

Although Canada requires foreign-born workers to grow our economy, the statistics clearly illustrate that a disproportionate number of them are underemployed and/or struggling. As one Vancouver Dialogue on diversity participant said, “Canada does have one of the best immigration processes globally – but there is a broken promise because we tell people that their skill-set is going to be recognized and then they can’t get a job and they end up driving taxis.”



“I’ve been in the workforce for about 20 years and 20 years ago we were having the same conversation... in the workplace we are at a standstill and yet Canada and society is moving forward. When are we eventually going to get it?”

The Conference Board of Canada estimates that we need 375,000 new immigrants annually to stabilize the workforce and ensure economic growth⁷. “Finding and attracting them is the first challenge facing this country. A second major challenge is improving Canada’s poor record in recent years at matching immigrants with the jobs that their skills warrant⁸,” notes the Conference Board.

If we don’t tap into the skills of foreign-born workers on our doorstep, Canada is essentially shutting the door on opportunities for economic growth. If skilled workers don’t see opportunities or benefits in a particular province or in Canada, they will go somewhere else. Canadian employers, governments and professional regulatory bodies must realize that hiring people with diverse backgrounds and leveraging that diversity is a business imperative.

The immigration policies of the past no longer serve the needs of employers or prospective immigrants. In Canada, we need a more global perspective and a greater understanding of international experience. There is a need to tap into the skills of this group of workers to open the doors to a wealth of potential.

As one Edmonton Dialogue on diversity participant said, “The war for talent isn’t lost – it just requires a shift in perspective. To continuously develop talent within Canada and to compete on the global stage, we need to look beyond our borders and tap into skilled talent markets around the world.”

“Canadians need to stop looking at our employment market situation as a ‘shortage’ – we need to look at the world of foreign-trained professionals as an ‘advantage’. If we can learn to tap into that advantage, Canada could be on top of the world.”

The business perspective

What labour shortage?

New markets, new talent pipelines

Gautam Rao, President & CEO, Castle Rock Research Corporation, specializes in recruiting and placing IT professionals. In Edmonton, there are approximately 800 local IT grads a year – but many leave Edmonton to follow the allure of the San Francisco Bay area’s Silicon Valley or Silicon Valley North in Ottawa.

To fill local recruiting needs, hiring foreign-born workers is a business imperative. In his company, recognizing that professionals from leading IT markets like India tend to be attracted to Silicon Valley, they looked beyond traditional IT recruiting locations. The company has now established talent pipelines in Mexico and Cuba. In doing so, they’re not just hiring individuals – they’re building broader connections in new markets.

“Individual connections can be turned into international connections,” says Gautam. “It comes out of one simple commitment to hiring one person.”

We’ve been hearing about future labour shortages for several years. With many people struggling to find employment, it may be hard to picture a time when the problem isn’t a lack of jobs, but the challenge of finding people to fill the jobs that are available.

But is there truly a looming labour shortage?

Each year, Canada admits thousands of experienced, foreign-born workers, but employers are still searching for skilled candidates. Could it be that the sought-after skills and experience employers need are right before us – we just don’t acknowledge or value them because they are not ‘made-in-Canada’?

Many of our Dialogue on diversity participants believe it’s not necessarily that there aren’t enough skilled people to fill gaps in the Canadian job market – it’s that employers are failing to look at foreign-born workers to fill those gaps. Our roundtable participants suggested that reasons for this include:

- the risk-averse nature of employers
- lack of familiarity with foreign credentials
- insensitivity to cultural nuances
- varying expectations from any foreign-born workers hired

“It is necessary for companies to see past just North America. Hiring and fully integrating skilled immigrants will be a benefit as we see more globalization,” said a Winnipeg Dialogue on diversity participant. “Skilled immigrants can be the bridge between the companies they work for and the rest of the world. They bring understanding of different cultures and perspectives.”

Taking a risk

A large number of new immigrants to Canada are either underemployed in so-called ‘survivor jobs’ or are unemployed. Statistics show that recent immigrants tend to be better educated, but native-born Canadians earn higher average annual incomes: \$64,239 compared to \$48,488 for immigrants⁹. Unemployment for immigrants was 6.6% in 2009 – nearly twice what it was for native-born Canadians (3.5%)¹⁰.

Canadian employers are still averse to hiring even well-educated foreign-born workers because they are wary of perceived risks. According to a survey by the Public Policy Forum, many employers are stubbornly holding on to perceptions that delay integrating immigrants successfully into the workforce. Half of the 2,000 respondents to their survey said that Canadian work experience is either a requirement for employment in their organization or that foreign work experience is not necessarily considered equal to Canadian experience.¹¹ In a country that serves global markets, does this make sense?

Labour Market Opinion: Worth the wait?

Remaining competitive on a global stage requires that Canadian companies act fast on business opportunities. For example, what if an information technology company has a massive contract offer that hinges on staffing a project with highly skilled and specialized IT professionals – and they need just one or two qualified professionals to complete their Canadian team? That’s exactly the situation described by one Ottawa Dialogue on diversity participant.

The company’s search for Canadian candidates came up dry, so they cast their net internationally. They found qualified candidates, but faced a major roadblock: to offer a position to a foreign professional requires a Labour Market Opinion (LMO) – basically, proof that the employer must hire outside of Canada because they can’t find the talent within Canada. The problem? An LMO can take up to six months to process, which simply isn’t realistic in a fast-paced industry.

Unable to prove they had immediately available staff to complete the work, the Ottawa IT company lost the contract. “Clients won’t wait six months – they’ll lose competitive advantage,” noted the Ottawa participant.

“Canadian experience is a huge factor in being employable in Canada,” said one Saskatoon roundtable participant. “In many cultures, if you’re in school, especially university or college, you don’t work at the same time. Foreign students, however, are increasingly seeing the value of the ‘McJob’ to gain Canadian work experience and are more open to working while in school.”

Canadian experience – or lack thereof – is one of the most prevalent barriers facing highly skilled foreign-born workers; the other two most common barriers, according to Statistics Canada¹², are:

- lack of connections in the job market
- foreign credentials not being recognized

A number of our roundtable participants don’t believe that settling immigrants or developing professional networks were the main issues – lack of Canadian experience is the core challenge.

Recruiters may be key to overcoming this challenge. In our roundtables, we heard that many recruiters don’t place value on non-Canadian experience for two reasons: perceived cultural fit and pressure to fill positions as quickly as possible.

In terms of fit, many recruiters perceive – based on past experience or intuition – that hiring decisions will be based on how well a candidate fits with the organization’s culture. Candidates

with Canadian experience are considered to be less risky, as they have a better understanding of the Canadian workplace, from processes to personal interactions. In terms of the time crunch, the business case is fairly cut-and-dried: for many recruiters, the longer they take to fill a position, the higher the chances are that the organization will miss out on market or growth opportunities. The fact is, it’s easier to process paperwork for a Canadian employee than for an international employee who may require more immigration support. The time factor is a valid concern, but one that can only be addressed by changing government policies and processes.

It isn’t always a perception issue. Accrediting foreign certifications and qualifications is a complex process. Across the country, there are more than 440 regulatory bodies governing 55 industries. In many professions, staying on top of trends and technologies is crucial. When skilled, foreign-born workers with foreign credentials come to Canada and are required to go through a lengthy licensing or re-qualification process, they are being disconnected from their profession, their potential networks and further development of their skills.

Lack of acceptance and understanding of cultural nuance

The lack of ‘fit’ or acceptance of foreign-born workers and their culture was another consistent issue cited by Dialogue on diversity participants. “If you have a bit of an accent or a different last

name, people may think it's going to take more time to train you; but corporations have to break through that and focus on people's skills and qualifications," said a Halifax Dialogue on diversity participant.

Some immigrants say they have been advised to change their name on their resume or refrain from bringing 'different' or 'smelly' foods for lunch to fit in. There is a need for more cultural sensitivity as well as a greater understanding of what diversity means. "Accepting diversity is a two-way street," explains a Saskatoon participant. "Sometimes it's the little things that do the most damage to an employer's or Canada's reputation."

An anecdote that came out of our Edmonton Dialogue on diversity roundtable highlighted the importance of stepping back and challenging a company's assumptions on what's expected from foreign-trained employees. In the economic downturn, one Alberta company leader noticed that 85% of the people on a list for layoffs were highly educated, competent, ambitious professionals – and they were foreign-born workers. Rather than just going ahead with the layoffs, the company stopped the process and went to managers and supervisors in charge of the layoffs to ask about their criteria for selecting workers for the list. They discovered that there were misunderstandings and misinformation about layoff criteria, tainted by cultural nuances.

For example, some competent and highly educated employees showed no interest in promotion, which managers construed to mean they lacked initiative. The reality was that in some cultures, it's seen as very forward to seek promotion. In the end, the company re-assessed their layoff criteria to 'change the lens' through which they were evaluating people.

"There is a difference between presenting slides and holding 'lunch and learns' and really learning about each other and our own biases and why we think the way we think and judge the way we judge."

The grass is always greener...

Another challenge to integrating recent immigrants into the workforce is where they choose to settle once they move to Canada. Most new immigrants migrate to larger urban centres such as Toronto, Vancouver or Montreal. Larger cities are more attractive because they often have existing immigrant communities. Smaller cities need to find innovative ways to make new immigrants feel as welcome.

Front-line, customer service-focused businesses – like banks and retail stores, for example – can broaden their customer base simply by hiring people who reflect the cultural or ethnic

backgrounds within their community. “It can be a very welcoming thing for our customers to have somebody who speaks their language – even someone who knows the latest news and sports results back home,” noted one Saskatoon Dialogue on diversity participant.

Of the 1.1 million immigrants who landed in Canada between 2001 and 2006, about 70% settled in Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver and about 28% headed for other urban areas. Only 3 % chose to settle in a rural area, the 2006 census found¹³. But the trend is changing. In 1996, 73.4% of new immigrants lived in Toronto, Vancouver or Montreal; a decade later, the proportion has dropped to 68.9%¹⁴.

This, according to our Halifax Dialogue on diversity participants, is thanks to advertising and pitching the benefits of a smaller city. “We’ve gone to trade shows – we show a map of Nova Scotia and relate it to Canada. We try to sell our province on lifestyle, less people and being a cheaper place to live. It’s really about jobs. Outside of Canada, people don’t know about Nova Scotia,” said a Halifax participant. “Nova Scotia hasn’t been in the immigration business for long and we have a long way to go. We have to attract international talent and get them to stay – as well as get native Nova Scotians to stay in the province.”

A Statistics Canada report says that recently arrived immigrants may be more likely to

move around within Canada to respond to job opportunities. For example, immigrants in Canada for five years or less have noticeably higher migration rates to booming Alberta than non-immigrants. Immigrants who have been in Canada for 10 to 15 years are less likely to move to Alberta¹⁵.

The business challenge

Employers across the country need to embrace the inclusion of immigrants into the workforce. It’s human nature to surround yourself with people who are similar – people with similar backgrounds, who have gone to Canadian schools, have Canadian experience and perspectives. But by giving foreign-born workers the opportunity to build successful careers in Canada, employers will ultimately benefit from diversity as it will fuel growth. “We need to move people from just being an immigrant to being a colleague who did business in another part of the world,” stated a Toronto roundtable participant.

Innovation is implicit in discussions of diversity – even if it’s not blatantly discussed – from giving companies access to diverse groups of potential clients or talent, to offering clients a variety of solutions to their challenges. Competition is fierce and to be successful companies have to innovate. Why is diversity part of the answer? Similar people tend to conceive similar ideas or solutions. Innovation is a by-product of diversity: people from varying backgrounds see problems differently and develop different solutions.

A recent Forbes' report read: "Organizations' diversity goals and priorities won't change significantly over the next three years – but the impact of diversity on innovation may be coming into sharper focus as executives increasingly try to harness the power of this issue for driving business goals¹⁶."

From their perspective, foreign-born workers say their biggest complaint is misinformation. They're told that Canada is a land of opportunity;

but there are multiple barriers in their way when they arrive – from lack of recognition of foreign credentials, to unrealistic Canadian work experience requirements. "If we can't change the system, we need to do a better job of setting realistic expectations. Otherwise, we risk losing foreign-born workers to Australia, the U.K. and other emerging markets," said an Ottawa participant.

The strength of innovation

Part of 'selling' the benefits of foreign trained Canadians is to demonstrate return on investment of their different perspectives and experiences. For example, Poet's Cove Resort & Spa in Pender Island, B.C. has hired 45 foreign-born hospitality professionals (and counting). The resort has become the premier luxury resort in B.C.'s Gulf Islands. Their secret? Variety in perspectives brings innovation. The resort's management gets ideas from all staff. "People feel like they're getting a cultural experience when they visit Poet's Cove," says Karen Link, Director, Critical Link Management Group, Edmonton.

Toronto's Steam Whistle Brewing has built a reputation for being the 'United Nations of breweries' by strategically hiring internationally trained professionals for two reasons: 1) to bring new and innovative ideas to the brewery's culture and operations, and 2) to tap into new markets through their employees. Regularly, the Steam Whistle team challenges themselves through creative brainstorming. Through ideas generated, they've not only added state-of-the-art technologies and sustainable practices, but they've come up with some engaging and unusual marketing strategies to appeal to different demographics – like sponsoring cultural organizations and events, launching podcasts and branding vintage vehicles that they take to events. Now, their award-winning Pilsner is among the top 10 selling craft-brewed beers in Ontario, and they've been named among Canada's 50 Best Managed Companies, Canada's Greenest Employers and Canada's Top Employers for Young People.

The foreign-born worker's perspective

A part of the community; a part of the team



“Sometimes the immigrant question gets lost within diversity discussion. We are doing a lot in terms of diversity, but no one is measuring how immigrants are doing. Let’s not confuse the challenges of new immigrants and people of colour. The immigrant perspective is unique.”

Immigrants come to Canada for different reasons: some see it as a good place to raise their family, others are fulfilling a quest for adventure and some are here to escape strife or trauma in their home country. Regardless of their reasons, the challenges they face are very similar.

Before they immigrate, skilled newcomers are assessed based on a Canadian point system covering six selection factors: education, proficiency in English or French, experience, age, arranged employment and adaptability. Points are given for each factor; a pass mark is 67 points. This point system does not apply to refugees who apply for protection within Canada due to fear of persecution in their home country.

When new immigrants pass the assessment and move to Canada, they believe they will find work in their field right away. But this isn’t the case. There are gaps that few immigrants know about: foreign credentials not being recognized, unreasonably high language or education expectations, or inherent biases in the recruitment process.

“One thing that is important is social integration in the workplace. I had some very rude awakenings. Foreign-born workers want to feel like it’s not just about them contributing to the economy by working and paying taxes. If you want to get the best out of somebody, you need to make them feel they’re part of the community and part of the team.”

Dialogue on diversity participants agreed that there is a disconnect between the immigrants’ expectations and the expectations of prospective employers. Canada invites foreign-born professionals into the country, but doesn’t always have the infrastructure or the mechanisms in place to connect them with the relevant employment opportunities. “If there was a bridge to match internationally trained professionals with employers, it would be an easier world for the employee,” said an Edmonton participant.

Getting a foot in the door

For many foreign-born workers, starting a career in their field in Canada is difficult. The first issue is finding out where the opportunities are. The well-known, more traditional ways of accessing the job market in Canada – job boards, networking and career fairs – are completely foreign concepts to many immigrants. When opportunities for jobs are found, many times they still face a number of barriers and challenges, leading to a significant group of overqualified foreign-born workers in entry level roles.

The difficulties faced by foreign-born workers have been attributed to several factors such as the issue of non-recognition of their credentials. This is partly reflected in the large number with university degrees being underemployed in jobs with low educational requirements, such as retail sales clerks, truck drivers, office clerks, cashiers and taxi drivers .

How do we end up with so many overqualified professionals in entry level roles? Ottawa participants suggested that many highly experienced and educated foreign-trained professionals are sending out hundreds of resumes and receiving no response. Desperate to get a job simply to support their family, they’re stripping their resume down to the lowest level of experience, in the hopes of landing an entry-level position. This means we’re failing to tap into a huge pool of knowledge and experience.

“To develop a truly diverse workforce in Canada, and remain competitive on the world stage, we need to go back to HR basics in our recruiting processes. Know what you need and know where you’ll find people with the best fit in terms of language, cultural compatibility, skills and industry experience. The ‘warm body concept’ simply won’t cut it. If you’re only retaining 25% of the ‘warm bodies’ you hire – because you’re focused on filling a need, not finding a fit – you’re not hiring strategically.”

Language or ‘mother tongue’ also plays a large role in how successful foreign-born workers are in the job market. Even when foreign-born workers do have strong language skills, they still run into problems accessing the job market. “The standards that employers put in place when recruiting are often the biggest barriers to employment for this group. For example, many employers require that recruits have ‘level 10’ English language proficiency – when most born-and-bred Canadians don’t even reach that level.

It’s a bit like killing a mosquito with an anvil,” said an Ottawa participant.

Language, country of origin and visible minority status are difficult to separate from one another, but they generally account for a significant portion of the observed difference between the labour market outcomes of native-born Canadians and foreign-born workers¹⁸.

One would assume then that as these workers settled into the country, learned the language and became more ‘Canadianized’ that this would change. Statistics show this isn’t the case. Even after 15 years, immigrants with a university degree are still more likely than a native-born Canadian to be in low-skill jobs¹⁹.

The challenge of foreign qualifications

As discussed earlier, immigrants to Canada are assessed on a point system that measures a number of factors, including education. Applicants are scored higher if they are skilled professionals. However, foreign qualifications and credentials are often not recognized, for a number of reasons. “It’s a complex problem,” said a Halifax participant. “There are many small gaps and employers, foreign-trained workers and regulators don’t know how to deal with the situation. We want change, but change doesn’t always happen at the pace we’d like it to.”

Many occupations for which foreign-born workers have trained are regulated ones,

such as engineering, medicine, nursing and teaching. For those expecting to find work in a regulated occupation, practicing outside Canada is not considered sufficient and they must prove that their foreign credentials meet Canadian standards²⁰. For example, foreign-trained chartered accountants must complete a reciprocity exam to work in Canada, but only certain countries have established equivalencies that can be used to measure their skills in Canada.

According to a Statistics Canada report, immigrants with degrees in regulated fields of study who studied outside Canada had an unemployment rate that was much higher than that for Canadian-educated workers with similar degrees. In 2006, foreign-educated immigrants from regulated fields of study had an unemployment rate of 7.0%, while immigrants with Canadian degrees in regulated fields of study had an unemployment rate of 4.2%, a gap of 2.8 percentage points.²¹

Many recruiters want to connect with foreign-trained professionals, as they understand the need to expand their candidate pool; often, recruiters under pressure to fill a position quickly, will immediately disqualify skilled foreign-trained professionals. Many employers just don't feel they have time to get foreign-born and trained professionals 'up to speed' – which means they're missing out on ideas and talent. Our roundtable participants believe that this is a systemic problem. It is not a simple case of changing employers'

Still a stigma?

Self-identification of foreign-born workers in the workforce is low, as is self-identification of all minority groups. People are reluctant to identify because they are unsure of how the information will be used.

"If I identify that I need help that makes me vulnerable in the workplace."

mindsets; it is about making the credentialing process more realistic, clearly defined and streamlined, which is a role for government.

According to Dialogue on diversity participants, getting foreign credentials recognized is one of the biggest challenges for both sides of the recruiting/hiring process. They suggest that beginning the process of recognizing foreign credentials in the new immigrant's home country – before the professional moves to Canada – goes a long way in smoothing the transition and opening up opportunities.

Making the situation 'less scary'

Once foreign-born workers find suitable employment, some challenges can remain – like helping them integrate into the workplace successfully.

In 2008, an Abacus poll showed that Canadians have strong opinions on the question of integrating immigrants. A majority of those born in Canada (71%) and those born outside of the country (65%) agree with the statement: “Too many recent immigrants don’t want to fit into Canadian society.”²² Attitudes like these can frequently take root in the workplace and in the minds of colleagues.

We often say that people should bring their ‘whole selves’ to work, but as with many other minority groups, it is almost impossible when there is a lack of inclusivity in the workplace. A Winnipeg participant said, “When companies aren’t supportive, it turns inclusivity into a nice word with no real meaning behind it. The company loses because they don’t get all that the foreign-born worker has to offer and the individual feels pressure to not be him or herself.”

A major problem that foreign-born workers face is the question of ‘fit.’ “I hear a lot of ‘we can’t use that particular person for reasons of accent or because she’s a woman or a single mom’. Have you asked this person if they want to be involved? Often we hear that someone doesn’t have the

right ‘fit’. Well, what does that mean? If they are good enough to be on a file and at a firm, they are good enough to be recognized. Arbitrary decisions are made on people’s careers by using ‘fit,’” said a Toronto participant. “Foreign-trained professionals can bring important contributions. It’s not just that someone spoke Mandarin and I have a Chinese client so I’ll staff them. Staff your team with the best people possible for that project – foreign-trained or Canadian-trained.”

A major problem that foreign-born workers face is the question of ‘fit.’

To fit in, foreign-born workers can feel pressure to ‘Canadianize’, but what happened to the diverse workforce? While new foreign-born workers need to understand the Canadian workforce – including its culture and traditions – foreign-born workers shouldn’t be expected to become clones of Canadian-born employees. If our foreign-trained professionals lose their cultural identity, our companies and our country will miss out on the experience, skill and flavour this person could bring to the work environment.

To address the issue of fit head-on, employers need to look at the way they manage talent and assess whether they’re being fair, realistic and clear about their expectations for both foreign-trained professionals and Canadian employees.

Setting expectations goes both ways, though. Some companies looking to recruit foreign-born workers go out of their way to prepare them for the realities of life in Canada – from the weather, to the representation of their culture within the community, to the foreign credentialing process. Turning the tables, one Alberta-based international recruitment firm has even introduced “working vacations.” The concept is to take recruiters, hiring managers or other relevant stakeholders in the hiring process to the countries they recruit from for a week or two, and immerse them in the culture and business environment. Such anticipatory approaches mean there are less surprises – on both sides.

And for foreign-trained professionals, it gives them a much stronger foundation of information on which to build their lives in a new country.

Lost in translation

When management at one Canadian company brought in employees from the Philippines, English-speaking workers complained that their Filipino colleagues couldn’t speak the language and were sticking together and that they should be fired.

The company provided the Filipino workers with an English-in-the Workplace (EWP) consultant to improve their language skills. Rather than being satisfied that the Filipino workers could now communicate with their English-speaking colleagues, the employees complained that the Filipino employees just didn’t fit in.

To address the issue, the company re-assessed its management and leadership competencies to be more inclusive and integrated intra-cultural training into orientation and training programs.

This helped the employees – from both sides – better understand what was expected and gain insights into different perspectives.



What's next?

Taking action

Helping foreign-born workers settle into life in Canada is about much more than addressing basic needs like housing and healthcare. Recognizing that moving to a new country is stressful, various provinces offer welcome programs through community organizations and government ministries to help newcomers adapt. These programs – and others shared by Dialogue on diversity participants – can provide a solid base of best practices for employers across Canada.

To reap the benefits of business growth and innovation generated by foreign-born employees, Canadian organizations must focus more attention in the areas of talent acquisition and improved integration of foreign-born workers in the workplace. The recommendations below provide more detailed information.

Talent acquisition strategies

Policies and practices. HR professionals and business leaders should review their policies and practices through a diversity lens. How new hires are recruited can place barriers in front of highly skilled, foreign-born workers. These policies and procedures must be reviewed not just from a Canadian point-of-view, but from that of a new immigrant. By doing that, employers ensure equal opportunities for all people and give themselves a better chance of recruiting and retaining skilled professionals – foreign-trained or Canadian-trained – best suited for the job.

Recruitment activities. Recruiters or other relevant stakeholders in the hiring process should go to the countries they recruit from and immerse themselves in the culture and business environment. One of the Alberta participants noted that this approach led to fewer surprises later and increased the recruiters' comfort level when assessing foreign-trained workers. Recruiters need opportunities to develop a broader understanding of global qualifications and how they connect to Canadian qualifications. Often they lack information – or the time required to learn more – and that forces them to disqualify a foreign-trained resource unnecessarily.

Internships. Many employers believe that hiring foreign-born workers presents a risk. Dialogue on diversity participants suggested internships as a way to mitigate these risks. Sometimes, all a foreign-born professional needs to find relevant employment in this country is Canadian experience or training. Foreign-born workers need a clear picture on the practical education or experience they may be lacking – and internships are a perfect way to gain that crucial knowledge. It gives employers and employees an opportunity to test-drive skill sets and relationships.

Helping foreign-trained lawyers

Foreign-born workers with law degrees from institutions outside Canada must re-qualify to practice in this country. The Internationally Trained Lawyer Program (ITLP) introduced by the University of Toronto in 2010, is helping to make that process a little easier.

The program helps foreign-born lawyers gain experience with the Canadian legal environment and assists them with their qualifying exams. The ten-month program consists of courses and a five-month unpaid internship with one of the sponsoring organizations.

Deloitte is a sponsor of the program; last year, the firm hired a civil litigator from Israel to intern at the firm. Her internship ran from October 2010 to March 2011, and she has been hired back to work with the Deloitte litigation team on a project basis while she continues to complete her requalification requirements.

Helping to interview candidates for Deloitte's ITLP internship was Olga Ziman Sabbagh, a lawyer with the firm, who received her formal training in the U.K. Olga herself had to write 11 exams before her previous qualifications were recognized – despite the Canadian and English legal systems both using common law.

Fortunately, the process has since been streamlined and now has four core exams with others added as needed. However, following successful exam completion, internationally trained lawyers are on the same footing as their Canadian-educated peers just out of law school – they must still write the bar exams and do their articling.

For example, the National Capital Region YMCA-YWCA has paired with several trades to help foreign-trained professionals get their skills, experience and credentials recognized. By establishing these formal relationships, they're helping to provide these professionals with clear guidelines and steps to finding employment in their field in Canada – while providing them with hands-on Canadian work experience and an opportunity to expand their professional networks. Another example is the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers' six- to eight-week internship placements that help to build connections with newcomers and employers.

Develop cultural connections. Ultimately, the goal is to help foreign-trained workers go from being seen simply as immigrants, to being recognized as globally experienced colleagues who have studied and lived in another country. To do that, we must develop cultural connections and see our commonalities. Some participants at our Edmonton Dialogue on diversity suggested that company leaders can volunteer as ESL coaches to foreign-born workers who need language help. "It puts a face to the issue, builds compassion and helps them to see that many Canadians hold identical values to themselves – they just happen to speak a different language and see the world from a different cultural perspective."

Inclusion strategies

Employee resource groups. From coast to coast, Dialogue on diversity participants highlighted the importance of employee resource groups (ERGs) or affinity groups to integrate new employees into the workforce. Made up of like-minded people from similar backgrounds, ERGs can help to both attract and retain new foreign-born workers by offering an environment where they can connect and interact with people who share a language, culture, faith and more in the work setting.

Multiple connection points can be established through ERGs:

- they're an internal channel for foreign-born professionals to potentially access other workforce opportunities
- they're a conduit to build formal and informal networks with external organizations with similar ERGs
- they give employers a conduit to a group of highly-skilled, foreign-born workers who may not know about opportunities or how to connect with people in an organization.

Deloitte, for example, has several People Networks within their organization made up of groups of employees who have similar interests and/or affinities. “The goal is to help like-minded people join together to build a sense of community, network with one another, share their experiences of working at the firm, mentor others and reach out to the community,” says Jane Allen, Deloitte’s Chief Diversity Officer. These groups also provide opportunities for allies to learn more about a different culture, in a non-threatening environment.

Mentoring. Numerous organizations across Canada – including the Edmonton Region Immigrant Employment Council (ERIEC), Career Bridge, YMCA/YWCA and ALLIES – have mentoring programs that assist foreign-born workers as they try to integrate into the workforce. For these programs to work, it is key for employers to step up and connect with these groups, providing a potential networking conduit. ERIEC’s Mentor program is their marquee program, with a network of approximately 50 intermediate and senior level Canadian employers, including Excel, Royal Bank of Canada, Enbridge and Telus, who work one-on-one with foreign-born employees to help them succeed in Canada. As of May 2011, they had 200 mentee applicants, 35 successful pairings, and 90% of mentees had found employment in their field of training – not in survivor jobs.

Education. Educating employers, colleagues and foreign-born workers is key to creating a more inclusive, welcoming workplace. These workers, as well as their colleagues and employers, need to participate in both teaching and learning. Assuming that people in the workplace know how to approach each other is not going to help integrate skilled foreign-born workers. For businesses to create environments that are welcoming and functional, all people need to work together to reap the benefits.

“Canada needs to be strategic about recruiting foreign-trained professionals. It’s not just about filling immediate needs and shortages – it’s about projecting the demand for future skill requirements and building up that workforce before another country beats us to it. Being anticipatory and strategic is crucial to establishing Canada’s future pipeline for international talent.”

Why Dialogue on diversity?

At Deloitte, we believe that the business community must play a lead role in ensuring the talents and experiences of our entire workforce are utilized to their fullest potential. Each year, our firm holds a series of roundtable discussions in select cities across Canada on critical diversity issues affecting the workforce.

Our goal is to bring together representatives from the business community, special interest groups, government agencies, employees and those directly affected by diversity issues. Beyond discussing topical issues and challenges, we hope to generate recommendations that will be shared with the broader business community in a variety of ways, including white papers like this one. This year, we focused on how and why Canadian companies can use the global knowledge and experiences of foreign-born employees to gain a competitive advantage through innovation.

Research is showing that organizations' diversity goals and priorities aren't going to change significantly over the next three years—but the impact of diversity on innovation may be coming into sharper focus as executives increasingly try to harness the power of this issue for driving business goals. As diversity becomes increasingly a part of our workforces, we will begin – if we are willing – to see the benefits of a diverse workforce which creates more innovation. A diverse workforce can only serve to strengthen our businesses and our country.

The roundtables began on April 1 in Vancouver and traveled to eight other cities: Halifax, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Kitchener, Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg and concluded in Ottawa on June 2. Each session included representatives of business, community-based diversity and immigrant organizations, and Deloitte professionals. Many of these individuals brought firsthand perspectives, as immigrants to Canada themselves. See a complete list of attendees below.

Dialogue on diversity participants

Vancouver

Michele Coleman

Human Resources – BC, RBC Royal Bank

Monica Kay

Equal Employment Opportunity Program,
City of Vancouver

Philip Lehn

Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce

Jonathan Lowe

Immigrant Services Society of BC

Kelly Pollack

Immigrant Employment Council of BC

Andrea Raso Amer

Fraser Milner Casgrain LLP

Davis Yung

Fresh Direct Produce Ltd.

Edmonton

Catherine Anley

University of Alberta

Katy Campbell

University of Alberta

Lori Campbell

Enbridge Pipelines

Jill Chesley

Edmonton Region Immigrant

Employment Council (ERIEC)

Stephanie Duncan

Canada Safeway Limited

Paula Fortune

ISTEP, Immigrants Services Program,

Bredin Institute

Candy Khan

City of Edmonton

Karen Link

Director, Critical Link Management Group

Jennifer MacPhee

CoSyn Technology

Darcy McDonald

NorQuest College

Doug Piquette

ERIEC

Gautam Rao

Castle Rock Research Corporation

Matthew Smallacombe

West Edmonton Mall

Sharon Voghell

Canada Safeway Limited

Kathy Yamniuk

Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers

Saskatoon

Lori Adams

Affinity Credit Union

Peter Alphonse

Human Resources, Cameco Corporation

Ayesha Baig

Newcomer Information Centre

Cheryl Gantefoer

Innovation Credit Union

Dale Grant

Sheraton Cavalier Hotel

Bev Lafond

Government of Saskatchewan

Maria Santos

Federated Co-operatives Ltd

Ijeoma Udembga

International Women of Saskatchewan

Dawn Weber

Information Services Corporation

Linda West

Actyl Group Inc

Winnipeg

Linda Broda

RBC Royal Bank

Nancy Carroll

Civil Service Commission

Margaret Hunter

Western Canada Lottery Corporation

Bruce Joyce

The Conference Board of Canada

Scott Martyniuk

Eastman Feeds

Raj Patel

Bank of Montreal

Javier Schwersensky

The Manitoba Museum

Leslie Stanier

Cargill

Graham Starmer

Manitoba Chambers of Commerce

Pat Travers

Bank of Montreal

Kitchener-Waterloo

Bev Aikenhead

Region of Waterloo

Marilena Benak

KW YMCA

Victoria Campbell

The Walter Fedy Partnership

Kitchener-Waterloo cont'd

Satnam Chana

Union Gas

Mitali De

Wilfrid Laurier

Peter McFadden

WRIEN

Teresa McGill

Gandy Associates

Sheila McIntosh

Region of Waterloo

Carol Simpson

Workforce Planning Board of
Waterloo Wellington Dufferin

Sylvia St. Onge

Challenger Motor Freight Inc

Rebekah Steele

RIM

Toronto

Cecilia Acquaye

Loblaw Companies Ltd.

Pinoo Bindhani

Ryerson University

Chia-Yi Chua

McCarthy Tetrault

Nancy Inberg

CGI

Elizabeth McIsaac

TRIEC

Peter Paul

Maytree

Jessica Scarbeau

Scotiabank

Ottawa

Linda Dawson

Canadian Centre for Diversity

Elwira Felczak

Ottawa Community Immigrant Services
Organization (OCISO)

Marie-Eve Gendron

YMCA/YWCA

Danielle Gravel

La Cité Collégiale

Kenny Leon

Ottawa Chamber of Commerce

Christina Rossetti

Canada Post

Bruce Switzer

Immigration Resources Canada

Montreal

Claude Bégin

Centre de Recherche d'Emploi de l'Est (CREE)

Sema Burney

Burney Conseil

Mireille Castonguay

CGI

Gabrielle Deschamps

Sanifo-Aventis

Guillaume Forget

Allies Montréal

Dimitri Girier

National Bank Financial Group

Karine Gorecki

BNP Paribas

Anne-Marie Marcotte

Allies Montréal

Diane Norbert

STM

Karine Pilon

CGI

Saul Polo

Latin-American Chamber of Commerce

Halifax

Katie Bernard

Citco (Canada) Inc.

Carol Boudreau

The Shaw Group Inc.

Ayse Dai-Gammon

Immigration Settlement
and Integration Services (ISIS)

Carol Dayment

Nova Scotia Power

Halifax cont'd

Cindy Dean

Greater Halifax Partnership

Ritu Ganju

Immigration Settlement
and Integration Services (ISIS)

Rany Ibrahim

NS Office of Immigration

Carol Johnson

Nova Scotia Community College

Michael Johnson

NS Office of Immigration

Jane Little

Cherubini Group of Companies

Georgia Lloyd

Always Home Homecare

Ruth Meagher

Citco (Canada) Inc.

Lynn Meloney

Emera Inc.

Kirk Muise

RBC Royal Bank

Jan Sheppard Kutcher

Immigration Settlement
and Integration Services (ISIS)

June Spindloe

Relocation Nova Scotia Inc.

Mark Spindloe

Relocation Nova Scotia Inc.

Candace Thomas

Stewart McKelvey

Resources

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