

Job Developers' Training and Employer Education for Integration of Internationally Educated Professionals in the Canadian Labour Market

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Abstract

Job developers promote job seekers including internationally educated professionals to local employers. In order to excel in doing this; they need to be appropriately trained so that they can educate employers about the benefits of hiring internationally educated professionals. In absence of adequate professional training for job developers, government-funded employment agencies need to provide structured on-the-job-training so that job developers become skilled in promoting their clients to employers. This article explores different organizational development ideas, attempts to relate them to a job development framework and suggests that these trainings need to address how to use a sector specific approach. Referring to organizational learning and organizational development concepts, this article establishes that job developers' trainings also need to apply a data driven, empowering and systems thinking approach as training tools. Denoting the theory of knowledge creation, this article also posits the application of converting tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge and use of research-challenge resistance, resources-rewards approach for educating employers about the benefits of hiring internationally educated professionals.

Immigration is an increasingly important component of population growth in Canada, with over 200, 000 immigrants arriving in

Canada each year (Plante, 2011, p.11). The majority of the immigrants come to Canada as skilled workers. Canada, because of its declining birth rate, is a country which depends heavily on immigration. Different government-funded agencies extend services to help immigrants integrate into the Canadian labour market. However, a large immigrant population remains unemployed or underemployed, primarily because employers are not properly educated about the benefits of hiring them. A strategic approach to educating employers about the value of hiring internationally educated professionals (IEPs) and to building stronger community relations between employment service providers and employers can reduce this systemic problem.

Problem of Practice

Many skilled professionals like engineers, medical doctors, economists, and teachers end up working in call centers, retail industries and factories. Some of them choose to drive cabs or become security guards for meeting family expenses. According to the 2006 Census, taxi driving has become an occupation highly concentrated with immigrants in Canada (Xu, 2012, p.1). Despite coming to Canada armed with higher-than-average educational attainment, newcomers have recorded worsening relative labour market outcomes compared to the non-immigrant population (Alexander, C., Burleton, D., Fong, F., 2012, p.5). According to Xue

(2007), the role of government agencies in helping newcomers enter the labour market appeared more important as time went by. Through job developers (JDs), employment service providers promote these immigrants and offer various benefits to employers, which include free pre-screening service and training-reimbursement/wage-subsidies to qualified employers who hire immigrants and other job seekers facing different types of barriers. Available professional literature sheds light on various issues that immigrants face in Canada when they try to secure meaningful employment. It is often challenging for many of these immigrants to find professional jobs in the Canadian labour market because of various barriers including cultural shock, language, lack of labour market information, inability to promote marketable skills, unrecognized foreign-credentials etc. (Ullah, 2013). So, it is challenging for employment service providers to educate employers about the benefits of hiring internationally educated professionals. Another challenge is to educate JDs, who promote and place internationally educated professionals in meaningful jobs. There are not too many formal training available for job developers. Conestoga College offers a part time job developers' certificate and JVS (Jewish Vocational Services) offers a certificate for job developers in collaboration with George Brown College. Other than these two programs, Life Strategies Ltd offers a 40 hour online certificate program for prospective job developers. So, employment service

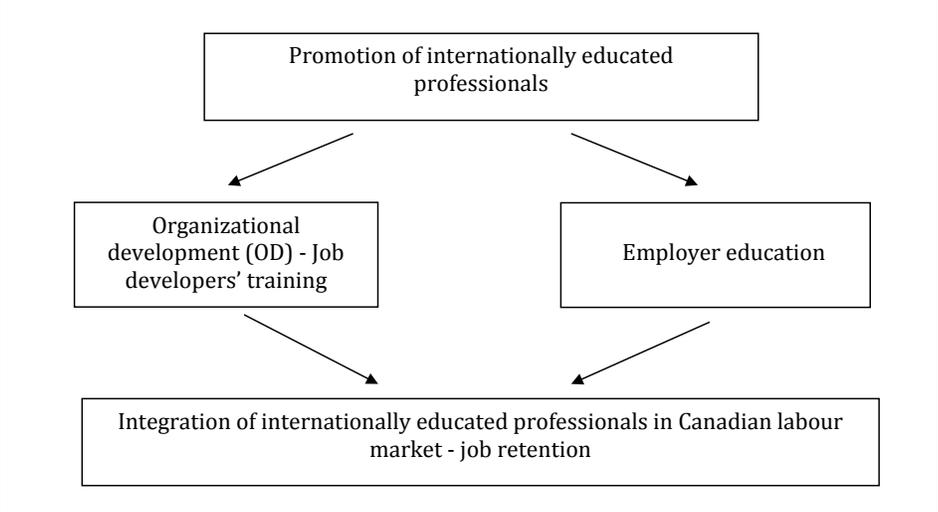


providers need to arrange on-the-job training for JDs so that they become skilled in educating employers about the benefits of hiring internationally educated professionals.

Major Arguments/Points

Whether they are in sports or health care, in education or management, or in the public or private sector, for a team of people to have a positive experience together they must have shared goals that provide a specific reason for being together (Kouzes & Posner, 20012). In order to bring changes among the hiring culture of different organizations and motivate employers to hire internationally educated professionals, employment service providers need to educate JDs about the specific skills and expertise that internationally educated professionals bring to this country so that it becomes easier to promote them to local employers. They should also be trained on the broader aspect of job development, its impact on the lives of immigrants and clients with multiple barriers etc. Once trained, the JDs can focus on the employer education piece. At this stage they should promote clients to employers focusing on the benefits that employers can get by hiring internationally educated professionals. Job developers are continuously promoting their clients as well as their services to the local employers – which often results in helping internationally educated professionals find jobs in specific sectors (Ullah, 2013). JDs also need to make sure that clients are able to retain their jobs as part of the integration process, and according to Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Institute's (MTCU) guideline. This process is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The process of promoting internationally educated professionals and their integration in the Canadian labour market via organizational development and employer education



Job Developer's Training Through OD

According to Xue (2007), the role of government agencies in helping newcomers enter the labour market appeared more important as time went by. JDs promote these immigrants and also offer various benefits. These benefits include free pre-screening and sometimes training reimbursement, which is funded by the government, to the employers who hire immigrants and candidates with barriers to employment. A job developer's job is complex and demanding. It's a balancing act, one that must satisfy the organization, the employers, and job seekers (Wyckoff & Clymer,). Because of today's complexity in the labour-market and specificity of job requirements, the task of job developers is getting more complicated (Ullah, 2013). Following approaches to JD training can enhance their ability to promote IEPs to employers:

Sector-specific approach.

JDs need to broaden the scope of employer education and use sector-specific approach to better serve the needs of immigrant job seekers. For example – in order to promote inter-

nationally educated engineers in the Canadian labour market, they need to first understand the nature of the labour market for engineers. This includes understanding the job requirements, necessary qualifications, relevant technical terms, particular software and their uses, professional designations and certifications. Once they are able to understand the basic occupational requirements, they start understanding the employers' language and also speaking their language. At this stage, they would be more competent in promoting their clients to the employers. For instance, if they realize that an employer is looking for a mechanical engineer with experience in mining and expertise in P&ID (Piping and Industrial Design), they can promote an IEP (Internationally Educated Professional) who obtained necessary experience and software skills by working in a Middle Eastern country although the candidate does not have any Canadian experience at all. In order to promote IEPs to employers, JDs need to focus on their employability skills, which the employers would be interested in.

Progressive education. JDs can benefit by using progressive education, which, according to Barak, Morad and Ragonis (2014) empha-



sizes learning by doing, exploratory learning, personalized learning, and students' social skills. They need to learn by doing, which implies that they have to promote IEPs to local employers in order to master this skill. They also need to explore different ways of promoting IEPs to local employers. The trainer needs to make sure that JDs' training is aligned with their personality and background. For example, for an aggressive person, training has to be focused on teaching them how to slow down while promoting clients to employers, and for people who are shy – the training should stress on persuasive and assertive promotion. In many situations, the needs analysis work is skipped and the solution is developed to fit the immediate need of an executive's request. This typically results in a temporarily happy executive but the learning solution generally does not have the lasting effect the organization really needs (Church, Haime & Johnson, 2012).

Three tenets of OD. The three tenets of OD for successful learning, as suggested by Church, Haime and Johnson (2012) can be applied to JD training. Tenet one suggests starting a data-driven process. Organization surveys, multisource feedback, focus groups, interviews and process observation can be used to gather necessary data for assessing JD's needs. For example, the needs analysis has to be conducted in order to decide what particular training is needed. Similarly post-training evaluations should also be done.

Tenet two points to a very important aspect of JD training, i.e., take a total systems approach to organization-wide issues. For instance, the JDs need to understand the impact of their work on the overall success of the organization. Collins (2005) stated that in the social sec-

tors, the critical question is not "How much money do we make per dollar of invested capital?" but "How effectively do we deliver on our mission and make a distinctive impact, relative to our resources?"

Tenet three states that the learning agenda must align with employee values and serve as an enabling tool to empower the associate. JDs often have to work independently taking the responsibility of promoting and placing job seekers in meaningful employment. So, JD training should focus on making them feel empowered. Besides, JDs can also play important leadership role by bringing harmony among staff for helping clients find jobs. Leadership is rarely viewed as a form of managerial behaviour toward subordinates, but more often as a relationship reflecting harmony and a convergence of interest, and involving, therefore, little or no power or coercion (Evans, Hassard, & Hyde 2013).

Understanding clients and systems thinking: Job developers should also be able to visualize how different people and teams are playing their roles for reaching the organizational goals. For example, JD has to realize how her/his roles are connected and tied up to those of an employment consultant. Typically employment consultants offer employment preparation to job seeker clients through employment counselling, one on one coaching and group facilitation and workshop and job developers promote these clients and end up placing them in meaningful employment. JDs need to understand what types of clients the employment consultants have, what skills they have and what barriers they face. Accordingly they can formulate strategies to promote these clients to the employers. Job developers have to understand systems thinking, which, according to Senge (2006), is a discipline for seeing the

"structures" that underlie complex situations, and for discerning high from low leverage change (p. 69).

Employer Education

Generally employers want job seekers to have Canadian experience, even when the jobs are technical. For example – engineers, information technology (IT) professionals, accountants and project managers face this issue. The knowledge, skills and education of immigrants can be used for improvement of various sectors in Canada. For example, internationally educated telecom professionals usually have solid experience working in a much advanced telecom system in various Asian countries. Canadian telecom companies can benefit by hiring these professionals who can share their experience and skills. Similarly, engineers with experience with roads and highways and transportation are in demand in Canada; however, a large number of Canadian employers show apathy towards hiring internationally educated transportation engineers because they do not have any Canadian experience. Besides technical expertise, immigrants also bring along other qualities that can add value to the Canadian labour market. For example, immigrants usually bring great work ethics and commitment. Many of them bring team spirits and positive group dynamics to the Canadian workplace. Some immigrants are very collaborative while working in groups because of their cultural practices. These facts are support the idea that Canadian employers need to be educated about the benefits of hiring internationally educated professionals.

Tacit to explicit knowledge. A JD needs applying the theory of knowledge creation, which has been described by



Alipour, Idris and Karimi (2011) as a process of converting the tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge. Weiner (2008) showed that employers' requirement for applicants to have Canadian experience is one of the major barriers for immigrants to integrate into the Canadian labour market. Therefore, the JDs should convert this tacit knowledge about the advantages of hiring internationally educated professionals into explicit knowledge by describing the benefits of hiring internationally trained professionals. With the words we speak we must inform, educate, inspire, communicate value, express enthusiasm and demonstrate good judgment (Bissonnette, 1994, p. 165). JDs can show examples of how internationally educated professionals bring valuable education, training and technical skills to Canadian employers by sharing some of the success stories of immigrants/IEPs. Shani and Docherty (2008) stated that a lack of learning integration and mindset is a major cause of most failed organizational development and change interventions over the last few decades.

Research, challenge resistance, resources and rewards. JDs can follow the four major steps mentioned by Gardner (2004): research, resistance, resources and rewards, and representational re-description for changing the mindset of employers regarding the competence of internationally educated professionals. First the JD needs to thoroughly research the hiring trend of the employer. At the same time the JD may also conduct research to obtain information on which employers benefited by hiring internationally educated professionals in the past. At the second stage the JD has to challenge the prevailing resistance of the employers to hiring internationally educated pro-

fessionals. For example, when an employer wants a candidate for a book-keeping position to have Canadian experience, the JD should challenge this idea and argue that a foreign-trained book-keeper can work as effectively as a locally born book-keeper. Gardner suggested the use of resources a leader has available, such as an appropriate reward system, to initiate new policies and practices. A JD can use various resources to attract an employer to hire from a pool of job seekers. For example, the JD can point out that screening and job matching services are offered free of cost. Some of the government-funded programs also provide financial incentives in the form of training-reimbursement. If available, the JD should inform the employer about such incentives as well. Finally, the JD has to try to take nonthreatening opportunities for convincing employers to try on her/his new vision for the organization. A JD can share narrative stories of success, refer to different possibilities, and offer all available supports to help the employer hire and retain internationally educated professionals.

Integration of Internationally Educated Professionals in the Canadian Labour Market

After JDs receive proper training on understanding the labour market trends and are also able to understand the skills sets of their clients – they are considered ready for promoting job seekers to local employers. Internationally educated immigrants in the core working-age group of age 25 to 64 are highly educated. In fact, as shown by 2006 census, about seven in ten internationally-educated paid workers reported having completed a university education. This is substantially more than what was observed for their Canadian educated

counter parts (50%) or Canadian-born workers (40%). Once JDs are able to convince employers to hire clients, the integration of internationally educated professionals in the Canadian labour market begins (Plante, 2011). In fact the duty of career professionals and JDs do not cease right after the internationally educated professionals find meaningful jobs. Their next step towards integration is to ensure that IEPs are able to retain their jobs. Organizations across Canada have developed and implemented practices to attract, retain and integrate immigrants into their workforce. Examples include outreach, credential recognition, mentoring, professional upgrading, language training, and community partnerships (Allies, 2011). Among these activities – mentoring, professional upgrading and language training can help immigrants maintain their jobs.

Job retention can be a parameter for measuring the sustainability of employment programs offered by career professionals. Sustainability is the thing we think about when all the action has ended, when the good times are over and the money is all but spent (Hargreaves, Boyle & Harris, 2014). Career professionals need to think of the sustainability of their clients' careers when they formulate action/service plan. Career professionals are now including "job retention" in their action/service plan. They provide ongoing support to those clients who face job retention issues in their workplace, e.g., language, lack of understanding of the Canadian workplace culture, and health and safety. Job retention supports may include coaching, mentoring, and language training. Hargreaves, Boyle and Harris (2014) discussed three elements of sustainability, i.e., firm foundations, feasible growth, and connecting short-term gains to long-term suc-



cess. Career professionals need to make sure clients' foundation in terms of job readiness is strong. They must be well-groomed and able to write and customize resumes properly, succeed in interviewing for the positions and also perform according to standards when they find jobs. Another element of sustainability in employment is the sustainability of success in the workplace. After finding employment, the IEPs should make sure that they grow with the organization. They can seek help from career professionals through the job retention program.

Finally, employed IEPs should be able to connect short-term gains to long-term success. For example, although they need to achieve "quick wins", they should not be distracted from enduring goals and core purposes. For instance, if an internationally educated engineer finds a job at the technician level – she may continue with this job to obtain Canadian experience as well as to earn money to cover living expenses; however, she may also strive to prepare herself to write the test for qualifying as a Professional Engineer in Ontario (or another province) after obtaining one year's professional experience under the supervision of a P. Eng (Professional Engineer).

Conclusion

Internationally educated professionals are great assets to Canada. They can make significant contributions to the Canadian economy if they get meaningful employment in this country. According to BioTalent Canada (2011), there is a shortage of qualified people in Canada to fill out important positions, and hiring IEPs can fill vacant positions with skilled, experienced people who offer new perspectives and knowledge, and perhaps even bring potential new clients.

Mascarenhas (2011) stated that skilled immigrants have many valuable skills to offer Canadian business; however, employers often find understanding foreign education and work experience challenging, and so they may have difficulty determining whether individuals trained abroad have the specific skills or competence required to do particular jobs. If Canadian employers are adequately educated about the benefits of hiring internationally educated professionals, only then the proper utilization of our unused labour force can be ensured, and this can be done through JDs, who have to educate employers about those benefits. So, employment agencies need to build the process of training JDs continuously in their organizational development process. As Senge (2006) stated that to be a true teacher one must be a learner first, JDs need to continue to learn about various industries, their requirements and the skills sets that employers look for in job candidates. So, organizations providing employment services need to integrate such education into their organizational development system. Before JDs start to educate employers about the benefits of hiring internationally educated professionals, they need to have the skills sets of sales and marketing professionals as well as of adult educators. Then a properly trained JD can start educating employers about the benefits of hiring internationally educated professionals.

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