

Employers need to adjust to foreign-trained workers

Too many firms 'don't get it' and old HR methods won't cut it anymore

BY LESLEY YOUNG

MOST EMPLOYERS have figured out "cultural intelligence" is an essential skill when it comes to the recruitment and training of internationally educated professionals (IEPs). A survey of 124 organizations in the Greater Toronto Area found 96 per cent noted the importance of cultural intelligence. That's the good news.

The bad news is the majority of organizations surveyed — 60 per cent — said they were relatively neutral to the cultural challenges posed by IEP behaviours not in sync with Canadian recruitment norms, according to Rhonda Singer, president of the Toronto-based Progress Career Planning Institute (PCPI), the organization behind the survey *Strategic Workforce Planning and Internationally Educated Professionals: An Employer Perspective*. The survey findings were presented at the fifth annual IEP conference hosted by PCPI last month.

"They didn't agree or disagree. Which means, to me, they don't get it," said Singer.

Not getting it is a luxury employers won't have for long. According to Statistics Canada, 100 per cent of labour-market growth will come from new immigrants by 2011.

Not understanding cultural variations could make all the difference in an interview or on-the-job evaluation, said Singer. IEPs from hierarchical societies, such as China and India, may not make eye contact because it's considered impolite. Other IEPs may not emphasize their accomplishments because their

native countries don't value initiative as much as North Americans.

"We think, 'Gee, this person doesn't have any spunk or attitude,'" she said. "It happens all the time. Our old diversity ways aren't working."

Claude Balthazard, director of HR excellence at the Human Resources Professionals Association of Ontario and a speaker at the IEP conference, agreed. He said most HR policies are designed for a slack labour market, something Canada has experienced for the past 30 years.

"So a lot of organizations now are absolutely scrambling for this new reality where there are more jobs than employees and the policies are not there," he said. "There's a real need to adjust. This is not difficult. HR will figure out quickly enough when they set their hearts to it. It's just that, so far, many HR folks just didn't think they needed to actually do it."

There are signs HR is starting to figure it out, as one-half of respondents believe their current IEP inclusion and integration practices are not successful or effective.

The field of diversity has focused on two areas to date: Compliance and accommodation, said Singer.

"What has not been tapped into is performance. Very few organizations understand the impact of culture on performance," she said. "At most they emphasize individual assessment tools like Myers-Briggs. And we talk about organizational cultures, but we don't talk about country culture."

Half the battle can be won simply by raising awareness, said Singer.

"You only need one 'ah-ha' moment before you start to give more attention to how culture could be playing a role in expectations of IEPs," she said.

Once managers are aware, they are also in a position to draw out contributions from IEPs who may, for example, not feel comfortable speaking out at meetings, said Singer.

The survey showed 80 per cent of employers felt previous cultural intelligence training of front-line managers was not successful. However, employers ranked attendance at formal learning workshops or sessions as the best way to train staff.

Balthazard said he expects cultural intelligence to become a key focus of HR in the next few months. Already there is increasing interest in immigration law and within the next year HR will begin cross-referencing areas of workforce planning to cultural differences; for example, how to motivate employees from South Asia, predicted Balthazard.

However, until there is a better understanding of cultural intelligence, recruitment of IEPs may be a challenge, based on the survey findings that competency-based interviews were the primary IEP interview technique of choice, said Singer.

This approach, with questions such as, "Tell me how you would..." hurts IEPs and ultimately organizations that don't end up hiring talented people, "because they don't shine they way we would like them to," she said.

What's holding companies back is the investment of time required to understand and train staff, said both Balthazard and Singer. But the benefits are tremendous, said Singer.

"The beauty of diversity is innovation, and I don't mean diversity in an international way. I mean diversity in thinking," she said. "That is essential for innovation."

Lesley Young is a Toronto-based freelance writer.

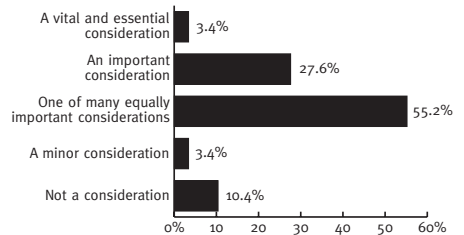
INTERNATIONALLY EDUCATED PROFESSIONALS

Challenges for recruiters

Are IEPs a critical consideration in workforce planning?

Of 124 organizations surveyed, 9.4 per cent said they don't conduct strategic workforce planning. Among those that do, almost one-third (31 per cent) said internationally educated professionals (IEPs) are a "vital" or "important" consideration.

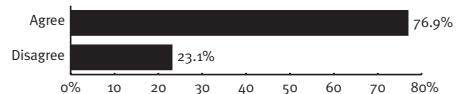
In workforce planning, IEPs are:



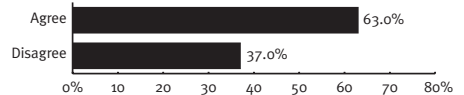
Recruitment of IEPs

Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statements when it comes to recruitment of IEPs.

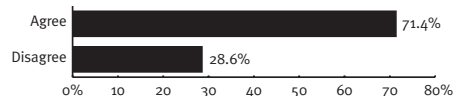
IEP language and accent are a pressing challenge to effective recruitment of IEPs.



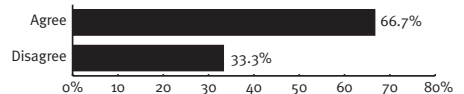
Recognition of IEP foreign credentials is a major challenge to our organization's efforts to recruit IEPs.



Canadian experience is a critical requirement in our recruitment programs, regardless of cultural considerations.



IEP behaviours not in accord with Canadian norms (such as lack of eye contact) are a challenge to effective recruitment.



Source: *Strategic Workforce Planning and Internationally Educated Professionals: An Employer Perspective*