Challenges Facing Immigrant Professionals Entering the Canadian Workplace

Leslie Levant
Bow Valley College
Calgary, Alberta

Presentation for Summer Institute 2009
June 25 – 27, 2009
Objective: an integrated training program for internationally trained/educated immigrants with prior experience and education from their home countries who want to re-enter their field in Canada

Funding Sources: Alberta Employment and Immigration; Federal Government (through EI)

Funding Amount: $7950 per student, paid to institution; living expenses based on financial need

Who is Served: immigrant professionals including engineers, accountants, banking and finance, IT, office management, H.R., architects;

Length of Program: 16 weeks (ten weeks classroom instruction and 6 weeks unpaid work experience; follow up at 90 and 180 days. Support with job club and all the facilities of Bow Valley College
Length of Program: 16 weeks (ten weeks classroom instruction and 6 weeks unpaid work experience; follow up at 90 and 180 days. Support with job club and all the facilities of Bow Valley College

Number of Intakes per Year: three. This is the 10th year of the program

Goal: help students bridge into entry level job in their field

Results: in good economy, 90% find a job in their field within 180 days of completing our program; current economy stats are in the 65-70% range

Contact: Leslie Levant, Instructor, Corporate Readiness Training Program, Bow Valley College. Calgary, AB llevant@bowvalleycollege.ca
Topics To Be Addressed

1. Essential Skills as our curriculum base; gaps in Immigrant Professional skills
2. The role of culture in adaptation to the workplace
3. Successes
4. Challenges and Initiatives
Immigrant Professionals: Some Essential Skills Gaps

- Lower language skills including speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary in their field
- Test lower on TOWES pretest for Reading Text, Document Use and Numeracy
- Need work on critical thinking, problem solving, decision making
- Lower computer skills
Winter 2008 CRTP results showed improved TOWES scores
What is Culture
### Values across Cultures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power Distance:</th>
<th>Individualism:</th>
<th>Collectivism:</th>
<th>Quality &amp; Quantity of life:</th>
<th>Uncertainty Avoidance:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• the extent to which a society</td>
<td>• loosely knit social framework in</td>
<td>• a tight social framework in which</td>
<td>• emphasizes relationships and concern for others</td>
<td>• degree to which a society feels threatened by uncertain and ambiguous situations and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accepts that power in institutions</td>
<td>which people emphasize only the care of</td>
<td>the group continues protecting</td>
<td>characterizes by assertiveness and materialism.</td>
<td>tries to avoid them. Prefer structured over unstructured situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and organizations is distributed</td>
<td>themselves and their immediate family</td>
<td>members in exchange for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unequally</td>
<td></td>
<td>unquestioning loyalty.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[www.geert-hofstede.com](http://www.geert-hofstede.com)
The Visible and Invisible Parts of Culture

Résumé content & style, dress, accent, body language, greetings

Building rapport, persuasion
Accomplishment, self-promotion
Emotional engagement
Concept and use of time
Relationships between men and women
Manager/employee relations, respect, initiative
Teamwork, individualism, risk tolerance
Career management
and many more....

A multicultural society
A diverse workforce
A conforming business culture
Corporate Readiness Training Program
New Initiatives Arising from Program Experience

- Proposed civics and civics engagement applied research project within program
- Success in the Workplace: funding employed workers who are not reaching their potential (OLES funded)
- Mentoring Program in cooperation with United Way
Policy Implications

Continue government funding of bridging programs. They offer a high rate of return on investment in terms of social and economic results.

Extend length of language programs for immigrants.

Expand scope: include employed who are not reaching their potential (OLES funding of our “post grad” program, Success in the Workplace)

Need for incentives for collaborative programming with education and business partnerships
Conclusion

Essential skills are a useful framework to reference and teach workplace skills.

Culture is an important aspect of the workplace that requires explicit instruction. Essential Skills does not address the role of culture directly.

The workplace has its own unique culture which immigrant professionals need help in decoding.

Government funding of immigrant bridging programs has a high rate of return for society and the economy.
Thank you.